



HALAPID

SOCIETY FOR
CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES



VOL. 66 / 67 • SPRING / SUMMER • 2025 / 5785 • ISSUES 47 / 48





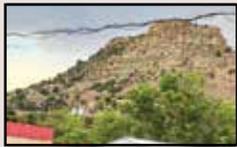
SPRING / SUMMER • 2025 / 5785



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SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES
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SCJS 35TH CONFERENCE • AUG. 10-12 • PREVIEW — PAGE 25

Identities and Experiences: Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Fostering research of
the worldwide history
of the crypto-Judaic
experience and
the emergence of
hidden descendants from
the Iberian Peninsula.

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www.cryptojew.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Corinne Joy Brown • corinnejb@aol.com

POETRY EDITOR

M. Miriam Herrera • herrera.miriam@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Rabbi Barbara Aiello
Andrée Aelion Brooks
Corinne Joy Brown
Lena S. Kestlin
Seth Kunin, PhD
Carlos Montalvo Larralde
Donna Medina
Douglas Schar, PhD

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Corinne Brown • Lena S. Kestlin
Carlos Montalvo Larralde
Donna Medina • Douglas Schar, PhD
Peter Svarzbein

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Jacqueline Hirsch • jrh@hirmon.com

PRINTER

Update Printing • www.updateprinting.com
Colorado Springs, Colorado.

EDITORIAL POLICY OF HALAPID

Contributions from writers all over the world are edited for grammar, spelling, typographical errors, and length. Content embedded in family memories may or may not be historically accurate; we reserve the right to edit material and correct obvious misstatements or historical errors. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of SCJS or *HaLapid*. Articles from *HaLapid* may be reprinted with permission only.

HaLapid usually mails twice annually in the Spring and Autumn. Please send submissions to the editor-in-chief by March 1 and September 1, corinnejb@aol.com

It is with great excitement that I write this message. As you know, we've been busy collaborating for the 35th annual (in-person) conference in Los Angeles, August 10-12, 2025. Back in 2023, when we held the conference in El Paso and announced: "Los Angeles in 2025!" and passed the chairmanship to our talented member Dr. Elisheva Irma Diaz, I knew we were going to be in good hands. Fast forward to today and, as you read this issue of our beloved magazine, you will delight at what Elisheva and co-chairs Corinne Brown and myself have lined up for all of us!



BLANCA CARRASCO
El Paso, Texas
epjf.bcarrasco@gmail.com

This issue of *HaLapid* offers details of the conference: Temple Tifereth Israel hosting us again as they once did back in 1999; the kosher food that will be prepared for us to enjoy by La Gondola Catering; where to stay – Kimpton Hotel Palomar Los Angeles Beverly Hills; but most important, recognition of the people who graciously and generously support these efforts.

I want to express our gratitude on behalf of SCJS to our sponsors: the Institute for Tolerance Studies, Andrée Brooks, the Sage Foundation, the Stratton-Petit Foundation, Jewish Life TV, Dr. Stanley Hordes, Art Benveniste, and Isaac Artenstein; to our amazing past SCJS president, author and now film producer, Genie Milgrom, who is allowing us to show her highly-lauded and awarded film, *Between The Stone and The Flower*; renowned composer Dr. Michelle Green Willner for what will be a one-of-a-kind experience – highlights from *La Señora* – an opera based on the life of Doña Gracia Nasi. Of course, we could not host a conference in LA without representatives of the Kol Sephardic Choir who will serenade us with their popular songs in Ladino.

Finally, we would not be able to bring you this historic experience without the efforts of Dr. Seth Ward who has worked diligently to engage with our presenters, Corinne Brown who helps guide the ship in the right direction, and our financial steward Diane Mock.

The SCJS in-person conferences allow members and friends to come together as family, to connect with one another, renew and strengthen friendships, make new ones, even identify long-lost "cousins," and continue unfolding the history we so passionately share year after year.

Looking forward to seeing you in LA to give you a huge hug, Blanca-style!

Esperando verlos en LA para seguir compartiendo nuestra pasión por esta historia que nos une como una gran familia.

Blanca Carrasco

Blanca Carrasco, President

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, an international academic and secular association, fosters research, networking of people and ideas, and the dissemination of information regarding the historical and contemporary developments involving crypto-Jews of Iberian origins and other hidden Jewish communities around the world. Membership dues fund the programs and publications of this non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, open to any and all individuals interested in learning more about this cultural phenomenon.



Embracing the Wider View

As time goes on, the wider story of the crypto-Judaic experience continues to emerge as we find descendants of Iberian Jews all over the world thereby forming ties with communities we never thought possible. The collective “we” changes in meaning with every passing year.



CORINNE JOY BROWN
Englewood, Colorado
corinnejb@aol.com

In this edition, I am proud to highlight key stories: in particular, the continuing saga of the crypto-Jews of early Texas and their descendants by Carlos Larraldes, a legacy this historian does not want forgotten. In addition, SCJS board member and genealogist Doug Schar has unearthed amazing work researching Romani or “Gypsy Jews” and their Sephardi ancestors. Who were they really?

Feast your eyes on the beautiful photography of Lena S. Keslin and her story about the cemeteries in Venice, Italy where Jews who fled Iberia once established a great culture. Today, few are aware of the one-time flourishing Jewish presence in the area. Many thanks to the *New Mexico Jewish Journal* and publisher Diane Schmidt for this special feature.

This issue also previews our 35th annual conference in Los Angeles, August 10-12, 2025, something you do not want to miss. The conference details are astounding – it may be the best in-person gathering yet. The chance to see Genie Milgrom’s biographical film *Between the Stone and the Flower* in person and hear the remarkable concert by Dr. Michelle Green Wilner based on the life of Doña Gracia Nasi are reason enough to come! Early registration is over but you can still sign up at the regular rate until the end of July. The hotel closes its discount offer on July 11 at \$249 per person. Rush to www.cryptojews.com today!

Never forgetting this organization’s roots, we also feature an article about crypto-Jews in New Mexico by the distinguished author, professor and historian, Dr. Seth Kunin. It may refresh your memory or offer some new, vital information. In addition, board member Donna Medina takes us to Southern Colorado as she searches for a clearer picture of her past. All this and more as you browse our 22nd edition under my editorship with designer Jacqueline Hirsch. It has been a privilege. Thanks for reading.

Corinne J. Brown
Corinne Joy Brown, Editor



Artist unknown

Sephard. For some — a memory, for others — a dream. For all — a homeland gone, or perhaps, yet to be remembered. These rooftops could be houses lived in by Jews anywhere in the Mediterranean, the Spanish coast or mainland; in Portugal, or in the far-off lands of the Levant. Home for the Jews of the history-making Expulsion was wherever their heart led them.

In remembrance and with honor.

*Warmest thanks for their
generous gifts in 2024-2025*

- THE STRATTON-PETIT FOUNDATION, CALIFORNIA
-
- THE LAWRENCE & KATHY KANTER PHILANTHROPIC
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- STANLEY AND HELEN HORDES
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- ANDRÉE AELION BROOKS • BLANCA CARRASCO
- ELISHEVA IRMA DIAZ • DEBBIE WOHL-ISARD
-
- PROFOUND THANKS FOR ALL THE MANY OTHER
GENEROUS INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

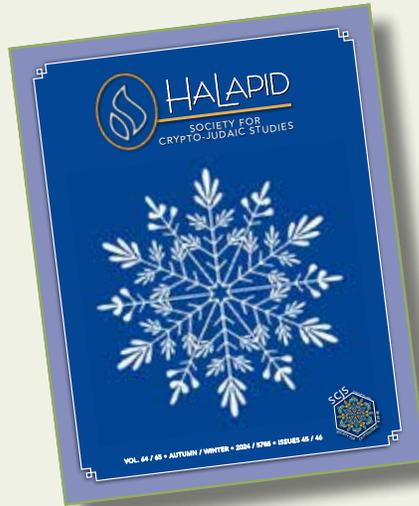
READERS' FEEDBACK

Your hard work shows!

I have been meaning to write to you to tell you that the latest issue of *HaLapid* is, in my opinion, the best ever. So much good material, so interestingly presented. The hard work you and everyone involved with this magazine has done certainly shows. How lucky we are to have such dedicated people working on the magazine. Keep up the good work.

Kudos to you all!

Harry A. Ezzraty, Esquire
Baltimore, Maryland • haelaw@verizon.net



Quality yields insights

Wow! SCJS has blossomed into a higher level thanks to our new leadership whose courage welcomed the insight to see positive change. It's as if your leadership and expertise has attracted these qualified individuals. The puzzle to complete our assignment has revealed the dark corners to you. Kudos!

Donna Medina
Greenwood Village, Colorado.0

Order Back Issues of *HaLapid*

Own beautiful back issues of *HaLapid*! If you are a new member and would like to see what you missed, we still have copies of some past issues (in the current format) and will happily send them. Email your request and address to the editor - CorinneJB@aol.com; Payment instructions will be sent to you. \$9 each plus shipping.

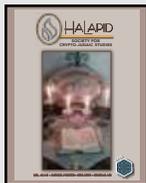
All back issues are now available ONLINE. Current issue posted after next publication. Just one more benefit of membership - so join or renew now! www.cryptojews.com



Autumn/Winter 2024



Spring/Summer 2024



Autumn/Winter 2023



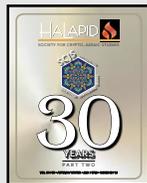
Spring/Summer 2023



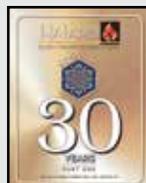
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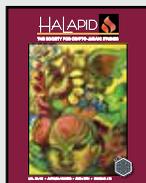
Spring/Summer 2022



Autumn/Winter 2021



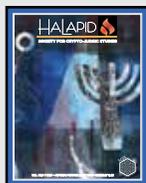
Spring/Summer 2021



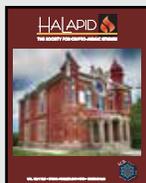
Autumn/Winter 2020



Spring/Summer 2020



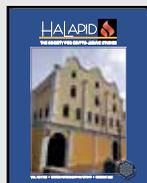
Autumn/Winter 2019



Spring/Summer 2019



Autumn/Winter 2018



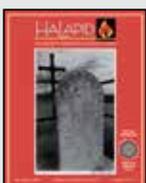
Winter/Spring 2017-18



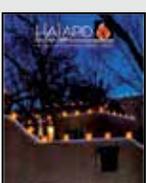
Spring/Summer 2017



Autumn/Winter 2016



Spring/Summer 2016



Autumn/Winter 2015



Spring/Summer 2015



Autumn/Winter 2014



Spring/Summer 2014



HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Jewish
Cemetery
on the Lido,
one of the
many islands
of Venice,
Italy

.....
LENA S. KESLIN
STORY AND PHOTOS

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.....
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It is interesting how some memories can stay with us for many years. In 1984 I came across a deserted Jewish cemetery on the Lido. The old stones inscribed with Italian and Hebrew were leaning over and partially submerged in the murky water of the lagoon. One name caught my attention, Argenti, similar to Argento, the name I used while living in Florence, Italy a decade earlier. It was not until 27 years later that I learned this intriguing place was a deserted section of the Old Jewish Cemetery.

It was the end of November 2011 on a beautiful autumn day when my husband Michael and I went in search of the Jewish cemetery on the Lido. It turns out that there are two. The New Jewish Cemetery which began in 1774 is still in use. It is situated on a hilly, grassy area where there are large trees and pathways that lead to the burial grounds. The cemetery is organized by century and near the entrance there are a some very old gravestones that caught my attention. It was fortunate that we met the caretaker, Artemio Tagliapietra, who suggested we also see the Old Jewish Cemetery, *Beit HaChaim*. Founded in 1386, it is one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in Europe. It is open by appointment only so we immediately called Aldo Izzo, the guardian of the ancient cemetery who, at the designated time met us in front of the locked iron gates.

Aldo arrived on his old bicycle, a strong-looking man in his early 80s. I immediately liked this stylish, masculine-looking gentleman dressed in his Italian black leather jacket and cap. There was an intensity in his expression and when he spoke he captivated us with his intelligence and knowledge. At the time I did not realize the importance of the person we were meeting. I had not understood his full commitment and passion, that he, along with a group of people have spent many years restoring and organizing the ancient cemetery. In the 40 years since he retired from serving as captain of merchant ships, Aldo was now

navigating the deceased on their final voyage by water from Venice to the Lido. His work at both cemeteries honors the nameless as well as the known Jewish individuals who made the Lido their last voyage. As a sea captain he was used to keeping records and logs as he traveled the world. He used the same discipline to organize the graves and stones of his fellow Venetians. He cataloged the names of the deceased so that they are remembered and his work has made their ancient burial holy again.

With Aldo as our captain, we navigated the perimeters of the cemetery. *Beit HaChaim* translates to the House of the Living, signifying that the soul never dies. Our journey through that revered space made me understand the significance of the eternity of the soul. He showed us different stones and symbols of the *Kohanim* and Levite, the tribe of my grandfather.

The autumn leaves were falling to the ground and onto the ancient graves inscribed with Hebrew. The late afternoon light streamed in through the treetops. Brown dried leaves covered the ground of this sacred place and softened our footsteps as we made our way through it.

Aldo was telling us how Goethe, the German poet and scientist, wrote about his experiences here in 1786. There were also the American writers James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville

The New Jewish Cemetery, avenue of trees



Headstones in the New Jewish Cemetery

who used their experiences on the Lido in their writing. The English romantic writer and poet, Lord Byron, might have been describing this cemetery when he wrote,

“There is pleasure in the pathless woods / There is a rapture on the lonely shore / There is society, where none intrudes / By the deep sea, and music in its roar: / I love not man the less, but Nature more.

Lord Byron, as well as Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats were all emotionally taken by their experiences of riding horseback in this desolate cemetery and used that inspiration in their writing. What was it that inspired them? Was it something like the light I experienced? What were they thinking as they callously rode horseback there in the early 1800s trampling on the graves of an outcast people. The only remnants of the Venetian Jews who once were the merchants and moneylenders, now just souls marooned forever on this strip of land surrounded by the sea.

Today very little remains of the original ancient cemetery. It is only one-seventh the size of what it was. There are 1400 tombstones in a half acre of land. Many of the buried bodies do not have their headstones as time has often misused this holy ground. As we walked the perimeters with Aldo we learned that a Jewish cemetery has the same sanctity as a synagogue. A sacred space where the soul is intertwined with the body so that the spirit and soul find eternal peace and rest.

Venice was built for defensive purposes on an archipelago, a group of 118 small sandy islands situated in the Venetian Lagoon, an enclosed bay between the mainland and the Adriatic sea.

The history of the Jews in Venice goes back to medieval times. Although Jews did not settle there until the 13th century, they



worked as moneylenders and merchants beginning in the 10th century. They were not allowed to live in the main part of the city and so they lived on the island of Guidecca. In 1290 they were still allowed to work in Venice but were charged a 5% tax on all of their business transactions. In 1385 they were finally granted permission to settle in Venice.

At the time cemeteries were always located outside the city centers. Jews were assigned by the Republic of Venice a desolate sandy strip of land on the Adriatic Sea, known as St. Nicholas of Lido, or just the Lido. A monastery located there claimed it as their own. Finally, in 1389 the monks came to an agreement and the Jews had their cemetery.

By 1516 the number of Jews had increased to 700 and the Republic ordered the Jews to live in the area where there were metal foundries. Metal in Venetian dialect was *getto* but when the German Jews arrived they changed the term to *ghetto*. The Jews were forced to live in the world's first ghetto. There were temporary quarters for visiting Jewish merchants in the Ghetto Vecchio and the permanent residents were housed in the Ghetto Nuovo. It was closed off at night from six in the evening to noon the following day. Guards surveyed the area by boat.

The Jews could practice their religion in relative freedom in one of the five synagogues. There was a German or Ashkenazi Synagogue, a Leventine Synagogue for Jews from the Middle East, an Italian Synagogue, the Canton Synagogue, and a Spanish Synagogue. The highest number of Jews in the Ghetto was in the year 1630 when they numbered 2868; 454 Jews died during the plague of 1630-1632. It was not until 1797 that Napoleon ended the enforced segregation of the Jews.

However in 1938, fascist racial laws took away their civil rights once again. In September 1943 Italy opposed Germany and the Nazis began an organized hunt for Jews in Venice. The number deported and killed is listed as 246; only seven returned. There is a monument to their memory in the New Ghetto.

I am not sure I will ever get to meet Aldo Izzo again. But meeting him and experiencing *Beit HaChaim* with him was something I will never forget. There are moments in our lives that stand out. Perhaps I too have become a keeper of memories.

I remember Aldo calling to me to listen as he had more stories to tell. I have never again experienced such a mystical feeling as that shaft of light falling upon ancient graves covered with autumn leaves. My photographs are a visual reminder of the places I have seen and the people I have met along the way. They captured that experience we had being in the ancient Old Jewish Cemetery on the Lido, hidden but in plain sight. 🌿



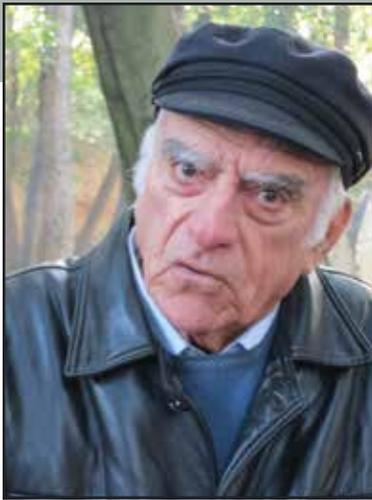
The Old Jewish Cemetery



The Old Jewish Cemetery



Old Cemetery, Beit HaChaim, the House of the Living



Guardian Aldo Izzo
at the Old Jewish Cemetery



Gondoliers cross the Venetian Lagoon towards Giudecca,
the Island of the Jews



DIANE JOY SCHMIDT
Publisher and Editor
editor@nmjewishjournal.com



Headstones



The New Mexico Jewish Journal launched in 2024 as an online, independent publication. To view on the web, enter *New Mexico Jewish Journal* into your search bar and subscribe for free or paid at a level of your choosing.

We have published over 100 articles, are reaching thousands online with regular and growing support from our subscribers who receive the regular newsletters, annual advertising commitments, and journalism grants as part of the vibrant movement to rebuild local news.

New Mexico had lost its sole statewide Jewish paper, the venerable *New Mexico Jewish Link*, when our federation dissolved in 2022. In our rural state, with an estimated 24,000 Jewish people, the loss of the paper was keenly felt, especially during these fraught times when we need connection more than ever.

Many in the community wanted to see a new publication happen. I was the senior writer for the *Link* for over a decade and finally, felt compelled to act. In late 2023, I gathered a group of Jewish journalists, editors, writers, professionals from across the state and a rabbi/chaplain, whose wisdom helped us bridge our differences in those first meetings.

We agreed that, yes! we want a new, independent paper, and to call it *The New Mexico Jewish Journal*; keeping us connected with news, arts, culture and spirituality. Our mission is to connect, inform, enrich and celebrate the vibrant and diverse Jewish communities of New Mexico and the region.



Old Cemetery, headstone closeup



Kohanim gravestone



M. Perco, View taken of the Israelite cemetery of the Lido disegno/drawing c. 1850



The Jewish Ghetto in Venice



Unraveling My Family's Past: A Journey into Trinidad, Colorado

.....

DONNA MEDINA

During a visit to Trinidad, Colorado in 2000 to do some research, I encountered a challenge. A local resident informed me that my aunt's recollections of towns and a farm near Trinidad previously used for wagon train roundups were inaccurate. This revelation prompted me to seek more information at the Trinidad library, where I was researching my family's presence during the Great Depression. While there, I discovered an article in a journal that mentioned the Depression. However the information was insufficient to meet my needs. One of the local residents, who was kind enough to assist me, copied the relevant details and inquired further about the existence of the towns my aunt had mentioned.

When I shared my family names, Aragon and Medina, and mentioned that we had a farm there, he expressed surprise. "Aragon and Medina!" he exclaimed, "Those two families did not have a favorable relationship. How did your parents manage to marry?" His words offered a glimmer of hope in my quest to find the truth.

DONNA MEDINA
holds the final documents telling her family history.



*Sangre De Cristo Mountains
near Trinidad, Colorado*



The resident shared some knowledge of the local history. He confirmed that Spanish families once owned farms in the area, and some of their descendants still reside there, although they are elderly. Their ages matched those of my aunt, who was still living at the time. I was hopeful about learning more. He also mentioned two cemeteries that I could visit, but noted that the local university had documented all the graves. Therefore, researching the data from the university would save me time. We also discussed the haciendas and Spanish plazas that were developed in the area. He acknowledged the presence of Native Americans in the region as well.

To find the historical documents I sought, the resident suggested the Denver Public Library might have information on Spanish history. He said the information available in Trinidad was primarily focused on four European families that established the town. With newfound determination, I embarked on a journey to the Denver Public Library where I hoped to find the elusive historical documents that would shed light on my family's past.

In Denver I conducted research on my family history in the Trinidad area, towns, and life during the Great Depression in the library's Colorado history department.

Among the resources, including the search engine called ERIC and microfiche archives, I discovered written documents about Trinidad and the San Luis Valley, as well as Spanish/Sephardic settlements in Colorado. A particularly significant finding was an old Santa Fe railroad map that revealed the names of the towns and the Gray's farm, which my aunt mentioned as the site of the roundup for traveling wagon trains. Another well-documented resource was the article, "History of Colorado. San Luis Valley," Colorado Encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org.

After I received copies of the relevant documents, I was directed to the Hall of Public Records, which were then located at the Denver Federal Center. I documented my family's marriage and death certificates, which included the places where they had resided. This information confirmed that my family had lived in Trinidad from 1850 to 1930. I traveled to my aunt's residence, where I presented her with the documents she requested. Her expressions of gratitude and the stories



Mural found in a restaurant that mentioned some of her family names. (Part of a follow-up trip to Albuquerque.)



Donna with Ron Rubin of Trinidad's historic Temple Aaron at the 2019 SCJS conference in Denver

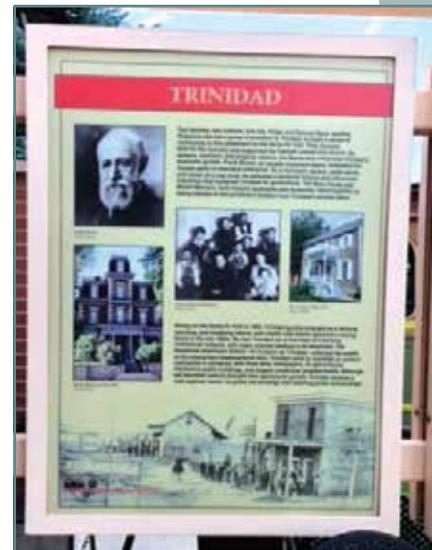
she shared about the towns she had lived in made the effort worthwhile. I documented her stories as her memory recalled so many details of her life there. My aunt passed away a year later, but I was pleased that she had a glimpse into her past.

My recommendation for anyone researching their own history is to trust the stories passed down through generations, as they often provide valuable insights into the lives of those who lived during a particular era. It is essential to supplement these stories with historical documents that can corroborate the information. In some cases, it may be necessary to explore multiple sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the past.

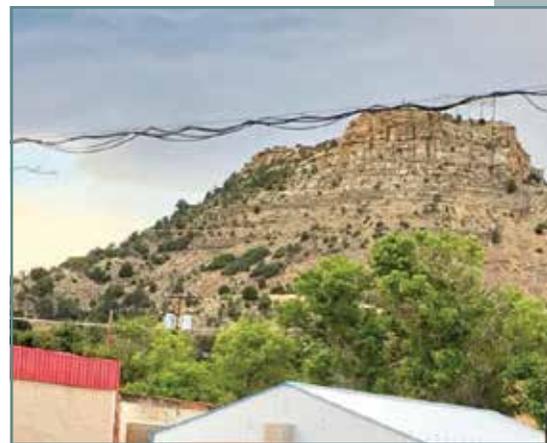
I documented the stories from the local residents about the towns and family life. They served as inspiration for their historical existence. While state documentation may be more reliable, it is important to recognize the knowledge and awareness of the local community. Our family members' stories can be lost over time, so it is crucial to document them while they are still able to share them. I was fortunate to have access to all my family members from Colorado, which provided me with a starting place for the relevant documents.

I would like to note that when I visited the Trinidad Historical Department in 2024, I discovered additional information about the area. The department mentioned the presence of Spanish and Indian communities, as well as the wagon train roundups. It also provided information about the Medina Cemetery. There are online courses for schools covering Trinidad population groups, and the community has created a series of classes for the schools.

A historian from the Denver Public Library once shared with me that your family history serves as the foundation for the documentation of the era you are researching. Therefore it is imperative that you preserve and diligently search for clues related to your family. Document your findings as soon as possible. This is your family history and a valuable investment of your time. Do not stop searching until you find your answers. 🌱



History of Trinidad found in the Trinidad Hospital



Fishers Peak, elevation 9,633 feet, located just southeast of Trinidad town center



Aerial view of Old Trinidad



Gypsy Crypto- Jews

.....
DR. DOUGLAS SCHAR
BA, DIPPHYT, MCPP, PHD

There was a time when the term crypto-Jew referred to Iberian Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity in the 15th century and maintained some degree of Jewish identity in Spain or in the Colonies. However, this is just one branch of the crypto-Jewish family tree.

Largely driven by testing by Ancestry DNA (and others), more and more communities are coming out as crypto-Jews. I have recently been working on a project that involves another overlooked group and a branch of my own family tree: crypto-Jewish gypsies.

The Anglo-Romani Crypto-Jews

Two years ago, Reverend Dean Shaw, a pastor from the north of England and member of the Anglo-Romani community contacted me. His ancestry test confirmed he was 13% Indian. In theory, Romani are northern Indians who migrated to western Europe in the 15th century. So this he expected, but his 7% Ashkenazi-Jewish ancestry was a surprise.



*Anglo-Romani Couple
Christopher Smith and Patience Lovell*

As far as he knew, he was 100% Anglo-Romani. His parents were Anglo-Romani. All four of his grandparents were Anglo-Romani. Indeed, his parents were cousins. His family tree reveals 400 years of documented Anglo-Romani ancestry — a family tree that is literally a who's who of famous Anglo-Romani families; the Lees,

the Boswells, the Smiths, the Herons (Young), the Buckleys, the Winters, and the Hearns. No Jews in sight!

To get to the bottom of this mysterious ancestry, seven other members of the Winter-Shaw family took an Ancestry DNA test. The result was the same. Reverend Shaw's mother, his father, his maternal uncle, his maternal cousin, his maternal cousin's wife who was a distant cousin, his paternal cousin and his sister's son, all had Ashkenazi-Jewish ancestry.

The question became, where did this Anglo-Romani family get their Jewish ancestry? There were no Jewish ancestors in the memory of the immediate or extended family or in the 400-year-old family tree.

To make matters even more mysterious, the Anglo-Romani do not really know what was home before England. Family trees, state and church records indicate they "appeared" in England in the 16th century with no country of origin listed.

Perhaps because as Jew or gypsy, they would not have been welcome when they



arrived. Jews were expelled from England in 1290 and were not permitted to enter England again until 1656. It was illegal to be a Jew in England for 266 years. Henry VIII's ministers passed the Egyptian Act of 1530 which prohibited Romani to live in England. Henry's daughter, Mary I, passed the Egyptian Act of 1554, also prohibiting Romani from residing there.

The first member of this Anglo-Romani family to appear in the written record was John Faa in 1520. Faia is a Sephardic Jewish name. When this family "appeared" in England, and ever after, 30% of their first names were Spanish. David and Esther appear repeatedly. The family's arrival in England lines up with the Spanish Jewish Expulsion of 1492 and the subsequent persecution of *conversos*. Thus, they could have come from Jewish Spain.

One important fact about England that should be remembered: Though Jews and gypsies were banned, England never had an Inquisition.

As happens with crypto-Jews, Jewish habits or customs can survive long beyond the people's knowledge of their Jewish ancestry, and this appears to be the case with this Anglo-Romani family. In the first instance, they have rules which are kept with the same intensity that the Orthodox Jew maintains the law. And some of the rules are Jewish rules. This includes hygiene and food preparation. Modesty — amongst men and women — is mandated. Menstruation makes women untouchable. Like Jewish women, gypsy women are off limits for 40 days after the birth of a child. In addition, more than half of these families long-used given names were and are Hebrew names (Ahaliah, Asher, Ital, Jabez, Kessiah, Lemuel, Moti, Norit, Rabbi, Sinit, Tamar, Zillah, etc.)

For much of Anglo-Romani history, this family had a home-based spiritual life, but not a religious life. According to Reverend Shaw, they were not church people. With one exception. They did something called "churching." Anglo-Romani lived a nomadic life, but when a child was born, wherever that was, the infant would be taken to the local chapel and "churched" or baptized. That might be his or her only appearance in a church. This may well date back to the Inquisition where it was important to maintain the appearance of Christianity.

DNA Does Not Lie

While history and genealogy do not offer much information about this Anglo-Romani family's Jewish past, modern science does.

As the noted genetic genealogist Dr. Donald Yates always says, "DNA does not lie." When Reverend Shaw contacted me, he was in receipt of a commercial DNA test revealing he had Ashkenazi-Jewish ancestry.



Route of the Cochin Jews from Kekala, India to London, England

Hoping to gain insight into their Jewish past, all eight family members' raw DNA files were uploaded onto the GedMatch.com platform. This platform gives you the opportunity to compare DNA samples to more specific populations, i.e., Georgian Jews, Uzbeki Jews, Moroccan Jews, etc. This in turn, gives you a more precise ancestry report. The more sophisticated calculators revealed Reverend Shaw had inherited 58% Jewish ancestry not the originally revealed 7%.



A Yemenite Jewish Bride

Breaking News

The commercial testing companies indicated all eight family members inherited Indian ancestry. The more sophisticated DNA testing tools revealed their Indian ancestry was Jewish Indian ancestry, Cochin Jewish, *Benei Menashe*, and *B'nai Israel*.

In addition, the family carried Central Asian Jewish ancestry (Uzbeki Jewish), Caucasian Jewish ancestry (Georgian Jewish, Azerbaijani Jewish, and Armenian Jewish), Western Asian Jewish ancestry (Iraqi Jewish and Iranian Jewish), Italian Jewish ancestry (Italim), Moroccan Jewish ancestry, Sephardic Jewish ancestry, and Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry. They are a crypto-Jewish family, but one of many different Jewish ethnicities.



More Evidence

Check and double check are what my science training taught me. I thought it would be good to have confirmation of this Anglo-Romani family's Jewish ancestry from other testing companies: DNA Consultants and FamilyTree DNA.

DNA Consultants is a genetic genealogy company that conducts ancestry testing in an entirely different way from other companies. They do forensic genetic genealogy testing connecting clients with real people who live or once lived. They check for four known Jewish DNA markers. Reverend Shaw was shown to carry all four of these markers.

The next step was to test Reverend Shaw with FamilyTree DNA. The result was the same: he had Jewish ancestry including Ashkenazi, Mizrahi and Yemenite. The Yemenite ancestry was astonishing.

Earlier results revealed Reverend Shaw carried Jewish Indian ancestry. The Indian Jewish story starts when Israelites began moving to Yemen in the 1st century BC. There they formed the very ancient Yemenite Jewish community. Between the 2nd and 4th centuries, Yemenite Jews made their way to the Kerala coast of India. Once there, the various Indian Jewish communities came into existence. Reverend Shaw inherited genes from a Yemenite-merchant Jew, who braved the Indian ocean and set up a new life in India 2,000 years ago!

The Longest Trek

This family's trek from Jewish villages in Kerala, India to England was 11,174 miles. It happened over the course of many lifetimes, long before railways and cars existed. This was a trek made by way of horse, camel and donkey.

The family's DNA suggests that they followed the Silk Road and along the way, married Jews from the places they passed through including Central Asian (Uzbeki Jewish), the Caucasus (Azerbaijani Jews, Armenian Jews, Georgian Jews), Western Asia (Iranian Jews and Iraqi Jews), Africa (Libyan Jews, Algerian Jews, Moroccan Jews), and Europe (Romaniote Jews, Italim Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardic Jews).

And then somewhere around the 16th century, this multi-ethnic Jewish family made their way to England. Between 1500 and present day, their Jewish past was forgotten and was traded in for an Anglo-Romani identity.

Relatives in Spain

Further research revealed this Anglo-Romani family had many close DNA matches to the Spanish gypsy community. Despite being



DOUGLAS SCHAR, PhD
Great Falls, Virginia
ddsindc@gmail.com

Or. Douglas Schar is a full time genetic genealogist. He founded the Institute of Jewish Genetic Genealogy in Washington, DC. His family tree includes crypto-Jewish gypsies. Doug received his undergraduate degree in Jewish history. He then earned a medical diploma and a PhD in medical botany. Upon retiring from medicine, he returned to his first love, Jewish history. He now works full-time researching the crypto-Judaic identity and currently focuses on the crypto-Jews of Northern Europe. His next project involves the crypto-Jews who lived illegally in England, 1502-1626. Doug publishes his research on his website, www.HiddenJewishAncestry.com.

separated by a body of water for at least 500 years, the Anglo-Romani family and Spanish gypsies still appeared as cousins.

The study of crypto-Jews is always filled with unexpected twists and turns. One of the English family's close DNA relatives was Lisardo Cano Montes. I contacted Señor Cano and was in for a big surprise. Not only did he know his Spanish gypsy family was really a Jewish family, but he had been doing research on the subject for 45 years. He is the pre-eminent scholar in the Jewish origins of Spanish gypsies and he has written four books on the subject. He maintains an extensive archive of historical, genetic and cultural records and books on the Jewish origins of the Spanish gypsy community! Following a DNA match brought me into contact with the world's foremost expert in the Jewish origins of the Spanish gypsies.

Lisardo Cano Montes: The Man Who Solved the Mystery

Señor Cano Montes was raised in a Spanish gypsy family. As stated, gypsy life is highly regulated by a series of rules. Much



Lisardo Cano



like Orthodox Jewish families, people adhere to the rules or face banishment. Señor Cano was raised strictly adhering to the gypsy rules. He knew them well.

Early in his life he was inspired to read the Bible and the Torah and began reading both with great intensity. In the 1980s, he realized that the rules that governed gypsy life could be found in the Torah. He began thinking that his Spanish gypsy family might really be a Spanish Jewish family. This persistent thought led to a lifetime of searching Spanish gypsy history and culture for proof of their Jewish origins.

From 1981 to the present, Mr. Cano has been researching and publishing his findings in books – 16 of them! These include *The Gypsies' Jewish Origin* (1981), *Gypsies, Lost Tribes of Israel* (2016), *Dictionary of Hebrew Words in Calo-Romani* (2021), *The DNA of Gypsies is Israelite* (2021), and many more.

When Ancestry DNA became accessible to the public, Señor Cano Montes began searching for genetic evidence connecting Spanish Gypsies and Jews. He focused on the study of male and female chromosomes (haplogroups). His research revealed that Spanish gypsy men shared the same male haplogroups as Jewish men: J1, j2, E, and G. His research revealed that 18% of Spanish gypsies shared a common female haplogroup (M5a1) with the Jews of Cochin. Even more astonishing, 31% of Spanish gypsies inherited the female haplogroup U3, which has been found in ancient remains in the Judean hills.

After much discussion, Lisardo Cano Montes, and I launched the Spanish Gypsy Israelite Research Project. We started by DNA testing 10 Spanish gypsies. The result? All participants were a minimum 75% Jewish in ancestry which included Indian Jewish (Cochin, *Benei Menashe*, *B'nai Israel*), Uzbeki, Georgian, Azerbaijani, Iraqi, Iranian, Italian, Moroccan and Algerian, Sephardic, and Ashkenazi Jewish.)

The research was such a success we decided to do more DNA testing and add genealogy.

We have now DNA tested over 75 Spanish gypsies from 14 provinces including Alicante, Almeria, Asturias, Badajoz, Burgos, Caceres, Cadiz, Cataluna, Cordoba, Huesca, Malaga, Sevilla, Toledo, and Valladolid. All have been shown to be primarily of Jewish descent. Genetic archeology reveals they have ancient Canaanite ancestry, and ancestors buried in both the Erfurt, Germany Jewish cemetery (11th-13th century) and Norwich, England Jewish cemetery (11th-13th century).

A careful analysis of common Spanish gypsy surnames reveals they can all be found in Genie Milgrom's Sephardic Database as Sephardic surnames. We are currently tracing four Spanish gypsy families with Sephardic surnames back to people tried in

the Inquisition. It is possible they are halachically Jewish (Jewish in accordance with Torah-law) as well as genetically Jewish!

We expect to finish and publish the project in 2025. Stay tuned as we publish more of our findings on this new group of crypto-Jews in *HaLapid!* 🌐



Yemenite Jews



Yemenite Jews travel to Kochi, India



Indian Jews

Estefana Cavazos

Icon of Resilience

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CARLOS MONTALVO LARRALDE, PHD

When people read about Texas history, sooner or later they will come across the name Estefana Cavazos with her land grant in the tip of South Texas, created at the end of the Mexican war in 1848. In reality, she triggered a civil rights struggle that continued long after her death on November 10, 1867. Dressed in brocaded silk hoop-skirt dresses that rustled, her elaborate hairdos required several tortoise shell combs. Careful to prevent a lined and weathered face, she wore dashing feather-trimmed hats. Her trilling, caring voice touched people in a personal way when she lifted them into action. No matter what the challenge was, Estefana knew that optimism enabled progress. This determined lady prevailed with her property case when she lost acreage to Anglo squatters who created community issues. They violated civil rights and intense political attempts to crush the Latino.

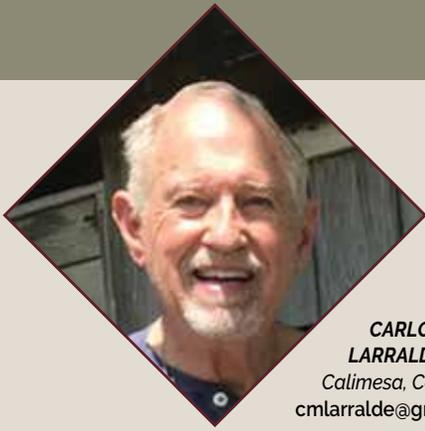


With nerves of iron, Estefana Cavazos was determined that her fellow Latinos would have civil rights, regardless of the Civil War, 1861-1865

Born in 1792, Estefana Cavazos' Jewish relatives settled with Luis de Carvajal in the 1500s in what is now Monterrey, Mexico. Scholars David M. Gitlitz and Seymour B. Liebman point out that Mexico's crypto-Jewish community remained close to each other. Liebman wrote, "almost everyone was related to everyone else." Family genealogies noted an oral tradition that when Estefana was baptized, her head was washed when the family returned home from the church. While living double lives with common surnames, these hidden Jews used common surnames to avoid Mexican Inquisition investigations in this oppressive atmosphere.

A 15-year-old Estefana practiced shooting by hunting wild game for her family's kosher table. Replacing pork, domestic goat meat dishes remained popular. The vigorous and serious Estefana married José Maria Francisco Cavazos in 1815 and she bore him a son. Then her husband died in 1823 from a wound infection. She later remarried an attorney, Trinidad Cortinas, and had three more children. Later when he died, Estefana received a note that was drafted to help a relative who failed to pay a debt. Responsible for the expense, this angry matron begged her husband not to sign it. She realized that





**CARLOS MONTALVO
LARRALDE, PhD**
Calimesa, California
cmlarralde@gmail.com

Carlos Larralde is a past-presenter at SCJS conferences and a retired professor of Chicano studies and Latino culture with a focus the Borderlands of Texas. His PhD dissertation was on Chicano Jews in South Texas. A former professor of ethnic studies and sociology at California Community College, he taught at Golden West College and Cal-State, as well as an instructor of Chicano and Latino studies, Mexican American studies and sociology of the Southwest at other universities. He is the author and widely published contributor of articles related to the Latino and crypto-Judaic communities of California and the Southwest, as well as Colonial Mexico. Published works include *McCarthyism: Memories of a Blacklisted Bert Corona*, with Michael Lynch, and *Judge J.T. Canales, Latino Civil Rights Leader: An Intimate Portrait*.

women had no voice in major business issues or politics. An exasperated Estefana moved her family from Camargo, Mexico to her family ranch that she named Rancho El Carmen, in what is now the Brownsville, Texas area.

A Broken Treaty

Along the Lower Rio Grande, the turbulent Mexican War from 1846 to 1848 started just a few miles from Estefana's area. She survived in a world fragmented into many pieces. She "would pull out her petticoat guns and shoot American strays trespassing on her ranch and then have her maids bury the soldiers," wrote Hiram Joel Jacques. To protect herself, she poisoned enemies at her home during hospitality hours.

After the war, Estefana confronted a nightmare of legal hurdles with her land that changed her life radically. She filed suit to uphold her title rights against Charles Stillman's real estate enterprises. On January 15, 1852, Judge J.C. Watrous ruled in favor of Estefana's land on which Brownsville was built. His judgment was ignored. She lost a valuable 1,500-acre portion of her land to Stillman. It was part of the Espiritu Santo Grant that

her ancestors received from the Spanish crown in the 1700s. The sorrowful Estefana realized that in California and in other parts of the Southwest, landholding Mexican families also found their titles in unceasing jeopardy. Historian J.C. Furnas pointed out that such justice rested on "some danger of losing our character as un-Anglo-Saxon land" and that "every Anglo-Saxon should hold the leadership of his race to be something which is bound up with the welfare of the world."

A keen Estefana discovered that Stillman's attorney Samuel Belden steered state authorities to deprive her of her land during the 1850s. She and most people suspected that Belden devised a series of clever legal maneuvers that eventually gave the land to Stillman. An exasperated Estefana delivered 4,428 acres to pay the attorney to secure her title to what property she could call her own. A continuous proof of her ownership created ceaseless legal costs. She battled to get confirmation of title to the other 58 leagues (334,000 acres) that made up the grant.

The sharp-tongued Estefana convinced other Latinos throughout the Lower Rio Grande to unite themselves since their assets were not shielded by the American government. Federal officials ignored the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that concluded the Mexican War in 1848 and guaranteed Latino property and civil rights. Estefana's legal catastrophe over her assets generated turmoil and hatred for Washington D.C. among Latinos throughout the Lower Rio Grande. Most shredded the American flag while Estefana's legal protests ignited a fierce civil rights crusade in 1859 under the leadership of her son "the brown haired, gray-green eyed and bearded" Juan N. Cortina.

She had a long difficult labor when she gave birth to her son; she never forgot that. The newborn baby Juan, known as Cortina, was unable to breathe and received mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. A frantic Estefana rushed the sick baby to Maria, a then *curandera* (health healer), with piercing eyes. In an oracular trance, the healer prophesied that the child was sent by God as a leader to protect his people from injustice. As the years passed, Estefana poured out her troubles to her son. She taught him to question everything with an eager eye and Cortina vowed to his mother that he would promote the rights of American Latinos. She taught him that he had an obligation to help his people if he wanted to give his soul to God. A grown Cortina became governor of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, and ended as a popular general in the army of the demanding Mexican President Benito Juarez (1858-1872).

As occurs with mothers and sons, Estefana and Cortina squabbled over daily petty issues. Judge J.T. Canales, his nephew, remarked, "They argued since they had the same personality."

Years later, Cortina confirmed that his mother “kept her back stiff while her head lifted proudly on her tense shoulders. She had nerves of steel and was never inhibited by fears or fazed by legal issues. She refused to be bitter.”

Entrepreneur Jews

During the American Civil War, 1861-1865, Confederate policymakers still assured Latinos of their civil rights and property assets. The Lower Rio Grande turned out to be a fierce hotbed of Latino Confederate support though they detested slavery which Mexico abolished in 1829. To please the abolitionists, Estefana and other vocal Latinos, Confederate officials declared that such problems would be resolved after the war.

Optimistic Latinos joined the Confederate army and wore colorful uniforms. Estefana was stunned that some European Jews — such as Frenchman Adolph Bollack — were Confederate soldiers. Bollack fought in the final battle of the Civil War outside Brownsville a month after the war ended in 1865. Estefana and Bollack resented the Jewish John Melvin Hirsch who lived in Matamoros due to his Union sympathies.

Embellished as a Confederate icon of the Lower Rio Grande, just like the elegant Lucy Holcombe Pickens in South Carolina, the gregarious Estefana became a socialite of the Confederacy with her municipal politics. These ladies stirred confidence for the South. The hardships and the death toll were ignored. Pickens’ image appeared on Confederate currency. About 1906, Canales saw a faded dignified image of Estefana on a big, old weathered advertising poster in a Brownsville hardware store.

To Estefana and Cortina’s amusement, the Civil War generated prosperity to the Lower Rio Grande when all the Confederate cotton came to Matamoros. The city was the only seaport for

Confederate commerce to export prized cotton to mills in Europe. The Union blockaded other Southern Confederate ports. Matamoros prospered due to diligent Sephardic and Jewish German and Polish merchants. Just like the Jews in the San Francisco region during the 1850s California Gold Rush, they had Torah issues. The scholar Brooks D. Simson wrote that General Ulysses S. Grant “was not alone in explicitly mentioning Jews in complaints about the cotton trade. What sparked Grant to act was his belief that Jewish cotton traders were more successful than were other ‘unprincipled’ traders.” The scholar Mary Gehman noted that even New Orleans Black merchants prospered from the commerce of Matamoros. Business flourished in the area. Saloons and hotels operated at full capacity with

stagecoaches running daily between Brownsville and Bagdad. Most laborers received \$5 to \$10 a day. Owners of skiffs and lighters had a daily income from \$20 to \$40.

As a politician, Cortina manipulated both the Yankees and Confederates to advance his cause. Both Estefana and Cortina knew well that fear and anxiety prevailed in Washington, D.C. and Richmond concerning the cotton trade. If Mexico was invaded by France, that could change the outcome of the Civil War, especially if France aided the Confederacy.

To survive, Matamoros avoided Confederate currency while the commerce along the Lower Rio Grande survived by using Mexico’s Maximilian government gold and silver coins. To control the area, Maximilian’s officials honored Estefana as a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Carlota while yearning to get Cortina’s support. Seeing that, Juarez threatened Cortina to stop his mother’s connection to Maximilian’s

court. By now, an elderly Estefana only dreamt what lavish gowns to wear, knowing too well her age and health were setbacks to attend the glamorous Imperial court. Still, she was eager to see Maximilian’s elaborately decorated Mexico City with its wide streets and impressive parks. >>>



A dignified Juan Cortina promised his mother, Estefana Cavazos, that he would enforce the civil rights of his fellow Latinos in South Texas. He kept that promise when the Mexican war ended in 1848 and South Texas became part of the United States. He continued the struggle until 1875. The exhausted and depleted Cortina was photographed about 1872. It was probably his last image.

A Zealous Confederate Officer

In the 1860s the tall and ruddy-faced Texas Ranger, John S. Ford wore a short beard with his officer's gray-uniform. He promoted guerrilla warfare against the Yankees. When political antagonists ceased, Ford visited Estefana. He penned, "She was a small woman, weighing not more than 100 pounds, being at the time over 70 years of age. She was good looking, had a pretty face, bright, black eyes, and very white skin. She was a lady of culture and indicated as much in her actions, and had all the politeness of a well-bred Mexican." Attentive to not overshadow politicians, Estefana restrained her views and persisted in the background as an advisor. As the 1860s dragged on, Estefana alerted her son Cortina to be mindful of the Confederate government that plunged the South into war with promises of a better future, while many lives perished.

Although Ford fought against Cortina, he associated with Estefana due to drastic diplomatic deviations. As early as 1859, Ford transcribed that he visited her and assured her that he and government officials would do all they could to protect her and her property. Canales observed, "It was all a courtesy gesture."

A Mournful Ending

Still promoting civil rights, Estefana died in 1867. Black-clad mourners wept, gathering along the Lower Rio Grande to share their grief. *The Brownsville Daily Ranchero*, November 13, 1867, noted, "Many are living who owe their lives to the noble exertions of Doña Estefana. Her sympathies were ever aroused on behalf of those whose lives were endangered, her philanthropy knew no bounds." Then this newspaper reported that there was not a "hamlet from the Nueces to the Sierra Madre in which the name of Doña Estefana is not a household word." *The Dallas Herald*, December 7, 1867, affirmed, "A woman of superior ability and great fortitude" was regarded by the "Americans as a faithful friend" and a lady who was "known the length and breadth of this extensive border."



Born in 1848, Praxedis Cavazos, grandson of Estefana, was appointed by the Mexican government to help enforce the law on the Mexican side of the lower Rio Grande out of respect for Estefana and her son Juan Cortina. Praxedis died in 1913.

My goal with each of these articles is to reveal how several Texas crypto-Jews in our present-day world have made contributions that are now valuable in the realm of American civil rights which is still a major concern in our current politics. I do not want a crypto-Jewish legacy only of the sorrow and tragedy of previous centuries in New Spain. I believe it is vital to show how the descendants of New Spain have contributed to the modern world. — CARLOS LARRALDE

Streaked with tears, Cortina was numb. He kept her corpse in a sealed glass case for several months, anticipating that she would respond to one of his visits. To him it was incredibly helpful because he spent time with her and for once could talk to her without getting into an argument. In the end, outraged relatives buried Estefana against his will. An inconsolable Cortina refused to leave his house for two weeks.

A beautiful tombstone was erected. As the years passed, vandalism and obstruction from the building of a levee diminished Estefana's burial ground. In 1955, Canales concluded, "My grandma Estefana left an indelible mark on the hearts of all of those who promoted civil rights to stop the struggling, suffering and vicious crimes." One of her descendants, Praxedis G. Cavazos, recorded in 2008, "Unfortunately, local historians continue to omit

her name." She is just remembered as "the mother of Juan N. Cortina." In 2010, Estefana's grave site was restored along with the rest of the cemetery.

About two miles away, near the Rio Grande, Estefana's stately brick home with carved rosewood furniture and extensive lavish gardens with splendid water fountains has vanished. This was the very place where, in 1859, Cortina proclaimed a militant crusade against injustices toward minorities. The bare ground is now part of the United States' massive international border zone. 🌐

DOÑA GRACIA NASI

.....
ANDRÉE AELION BROOKS

During the European Renaissance — the time of Isabella D’Este in Italy, Queen Elizabeth I in England and Catherine de Medici in France — a remarkable Jewish woman leader also came to the fore. Her name was Doña Gracia Nasi. Her mission was to develop an escape network that could save thousands of her fellow forcibly-converted Jews from the horrors of the Inquisition. She inherited an international bank known as the House of Mendes and was determined to use her fortune and her access to the royal courts of Europe for the benefit of her people.

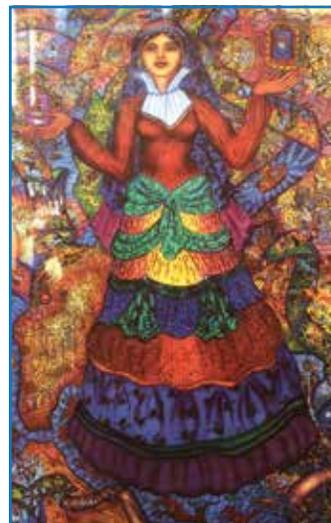


Born in Lisbon in 1510, Doña Gracia later moved to Antwerp, Venice and Ferrara, Italy where she constantly negotiated with kings and emperors. She helped lead a boycott of the Italian port of Ancona in retaliation for the burning of 23 of her fellow forcibly-converted Jews by the Inquisition — an outrageous act in an era when Jews were more accustomed to appeasement. Finally settling in Constantinople, she persuaded Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent to grant her a long-term lease on the Tiberias region of the Holy Land. The aim was to spearhead one of the earliest attempts to start an independent state for Jewish settlement in the region.



ANDRÉE AELION BROOKS
Bellevue, Washington
www.andreeaelionbrooks.com

Andrée Aelion Brooks is a journalist, author and lecturer specializing in Jewish history. Formerly a contributing columnist for the *New York Times*, she is an Associate Fellow, Yale University, and founder of the Women’s (political) Campaign School at Yale. Her award-winning books include *The Woman Who Defied Kings*, a comprehensive biography of Doña Gracia Nasi, a Jewish leader and *conversa* who was the richest woman in Renaissance Europe; *Russian Dance*, about a Jewish Bolshevik spy; *Out of Spain*, a children’s program in Sephardic history. And an illustrated booklet for the Gomez Mill House Museum in upper New York State. She was honored in 2013 by the Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame. (See page 30 for more about Brooks.)



Artist's rendition of Doña Gracia Nazi (Property of Art Benveniste)

Doña Gracia is important to history because she shatters the stereotype of how women conducted their lives during the Renaissance period. Her activities provide us with a unique window into the banking practices of the era. And in the realm of leadership, her life contains important lessons for today. Right now, Doña Gracia has an increasing number of ventures and groups named after her, including the Doña Gracia chapter of Hadassah in Philadelphia. Also, a museum dedicated to her memory opened several years ago in Tiberias, Israel.

Learn more about Doña Gracia at the SCJS Conference musical event, *La Señora*, in Los Angeles, August 10-12. See page 28. 🎵





No Snobs, No Slightings, No Snubs

Italy's *B'nai Anusim* are Joyfully Jewish

.....

RABBI BARBARA AIELLO
FIRST APPEARED IN THE THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

When she was told by a local rabbi that “the only real Jews are the dead ones,” *bat anusim* “Emma D.” was devastated. Having spent years carefully explaining her crypto-Jewish ancestry and begging synagogues to accept her, Emma was bitterly disappointed to learn that after having been forced under pain of death into Christian conversion, her ancestors’ preservation of Jewish traditions qualified them as apostates and nothing more.

Not long afterward, Emma made her way to Sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud, southern Italy’s first and only synagogue in 500 years since Inquisition times. There she was warmly welcomed, accepted as a legitimate Jew and now serves the synagogue as a member of the board.

As the synagogue approaches its 16th anniversary, the Calabrian congregation has moved from the basement cantina where my great-grandfather secretly led Hebrew prayers, to a stand-alone building that boasts a separate sanctuary, Judaica museum and library, as well as three Torah scrolls — one dating back to 1783.

“As rabbi of Sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud, I am constantly amazed at how our *b’nai anusim* congregation is truly the eternal light of southern Italy. Hundreds of emails, phone calls and requests to visit from Calabrians, Sicilians and descendants of Italian immigrants worldwide, inspire us to continue our mission which

is to extend the hand of Jewish welcome to all those who want to discover and embrace their Jewish roots.”

“During the war I was secretly baptized,” says Ernesto, one of our first congregants. “Because Mussolini had aligned with Hitler, my mother had the children baptized to save the family from deportation. When I tried to explain this to a rabbi, he scoffed at my story and accused me of trying to spy on his synagogue. I was humiliated and it was 40 years before I ever mentioned my Jewish heritage again.”

Sadly, Ernesto’s story is not unique. For centuries *b’nai anusim* Jews have been snubbed, slighted and, when attempting to make conversion, often asked to do the unthinkable.

Samuele recalls how, after years of conversion studies, he was asked by his supervising rabbi to do one last thing. Samuele was aghast when the rabbi demanded that he divorce his Christian wife of nearly 30 years! The rabbi explained that interfaith marriages are not accepted by traditional Judaism and since Samuele’s wife chose not to convert, he was obliged to divorce her. Situations like these propel Jews like Samuele into our congregation.

Nearly 500 years ago when my ancestors were expelled from Spain, they fled with nothing — holy books and Jewish documents

Above, Sinagoga Ner Tamid Del Sud in Calabria, Italy



had been burned or confiscated by Inquisition authorities. As a result, only word-of-mouth kept Jewish heritage alive. So it is not surprising that members of our congregation approach me with stories of lost traditions, such as the kosher practice of removing the blood spot from an egg, or the traditional Sephardic Jewish practice of sweeping the floor to the center of the room, never to the door where the *mezuzah* had once been placed. And how is it that to this day my Calabrian family describes bread crumbs as *chametz*? Could it be that because they never had the opportunity to learn that the word is Hebrew, they assumed it was just one more example of Calabrian dialect?

When these stories come to me, lovingly explained by *b'nai anusim* who tentatively but courageously share them, I feel honored to receive their testimony and literally feel as though I am in the presence of an eternal light that, although a tiny flame, was never extinguished.

Bentornata, I say. Welcome home. And welcome they are. With each *Kabbalat Shabbat* service around the dining table where we help *b'nai anusim* learn the prayers and songs to welcome Shabbat, to the *Shacharit* Saturday morning service where 80-year-olds haltingly read Torah, to the mystical *Havdalah* candle whose flame

is doused in dark red homemade wine, we acknowledge the blessings brought to our community by each and every secret Jew.

Many of our *b'nai anusim* choose our one-year study program that culminates in formal conversion. Our students appear before a rabbi-led *Bet Din* that is followed by their *mikveh* in the Mediterranean Sea. Others who have been secular all their lives request our Status Recognition Certificate that acknowledges their return to their Jewish roots.

Men, women and children whose Jewish heritage derives from their patrilineal line are accepted as “real” Jews, along with interfaith, and gay and lesbian families, and diverse Jews who represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Joyfully Jewish? When we rabbis open our doors and open our hearts to *b'nai anusim* and to all manner of Jewish diversity, joy abounds. Pluralistic in nature and recognized by Reconstructing Judaism, our synagogue embraces rituals and observance that are accessible, inclusive and sensible.

As Uncle Mario says when asked why, at 83-years of age, he goes to the synagogue, he responds, “I like to sing with the rabbi!” When asked how he came to know the melodies, Uncle Mario smiles, opens his hand and gently pats his chest. “In here,” he says. “The Jewish songs, they are in my heart.” 🕊️



RABBI BARBARA AIELLO
Calabria, Italy
www.rabbibarbara.com

Rabbi Barbara Aiello is the first woman and first non-orthodox rabbi in Italy. She opened the first active synagogue in Calabria since Inquisition times and is the founder of the *b'nai anusim* movement in Calabria and Sicily that helps Italians discover and embrace their Jewish roots.



Rabbi Barbara Aiello, the first woman rabbi in Italy, continues to serve Jews throughout Europe as a spokesperson for Pluralistic Judaism – a movement that deliberately blurs denominational lines and extends the hand of Jewish welcome to Jews of all backgrounds.





SETH D. KUNIN, PhD

ORIGINALLY POSTED DECEMBER 26, 2017

In small villages and hamlets in the mountains of New Mexico live communities of individuals claiming descent from Jewish ancestors from Spain and Portugal. These people, often called secret Jews or crypto-Jews, live within a complex set of identities. Often, externally they are part of churches of different denominations; the majority are Catholic, but some belong to Protestant churches. Internally however, they maintain a hidden Jewish identity with unique customs, practices and beliefs.

While crypto-Jewish communities are found in the mountainous region around Taos, crypto-Jews live in other parts of New Mexico and the wider Southwest. Indeed, they live in all areas settled by Spanish and Portuguese colonists, even along the New England coastline, where many individuals of Portuguese descent settled. These crypto-Jews share one thing in common: they trace their descent back to Iberian Jews.

Crypto-Judaism within the Christian world first emerged between 1390 and 1492. (A similar phenomenon existed with Jewish communities in the Islamic world during periods of religious persecution.) Starting in 1390, significant numbers of Jews living in Spain converted to Catholicism. While these



conversions were often forced, in many cases individuals chose to convert for economic or social reasons. These communities of new Christians, often called *conversos*, included a minority of individuals who chose to secretly maintain their Jewish identity, beliefs and practices. These individuals can be considered the first crypto-Jews.

The religion of the crypto-Jews diverged significantly from that of their Jewish compatriots. While traditional Judaism includes a wide range of public practices often led by men in synagogues, increasingly the religion of the crypto-Jews became a religion of the home, with women often taking a significant role in the practices and their transmission to the next generation. Over time, the practices became increasingly narrow, as memory and knowledge of traditional Judaism began to fade. This trend accelerated with the expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain in 1492. Up until that point, crypto-Jews could draw on the Jewish community for knowledge and even ritual items; this largely ceased after 1492.

While that year marks the beginning of a particularly sad point in Jewish history, with the destruction of one of the world's largest and most successful Jewish communities, it also heralded the opening up of the

Whispers of a Jewish Past in the Mountains of New Mexico

Crypto-Judaism
in the Christian World

Photograph above by Peter Svarzbein



Americas to colonial expansion and exploitation. A wide range of documentary evidence suggests that crypto-Jews played a part in the expansion, initially into Mexico and later into other parts of the Americas including the territory that became New Mexico. For unknown reasons, crypto-Judaism in America seems to have persisted in stronger forms than in Spain, although evidence suggests that it may have endured equally strongly in the mountainous regions of Portugal, particularly around the town of Belmonte.

New Mexico Manifestations

In New Mexico, crypto-Judaism was expressed in diverse ways. In the larger cities, particularly those that had a strong religious and military presence in Spanish Colonial times, crypto-Jews did not maintain communal structures. Only a small set of families who intermarried shared the tradition. Religious practices rarely moved outside the private space of the home, although a butcher might slaughter animals in a traditional way. My interviews suggest that one butcher in Albuquerque, Don Siverio Gomez, kept kosher meat away from pork and removed the blood.

The most common practices mentioned by crypto-Jews from all parts of New Mexico, particularly the cities, relate to observance of the Sabbath on Friday night and Saturday. Home rituals included variations on lighting candles on Friday evening at sundown, drinking of special wine — occasionally with a blessing in Spanish that was similar to that recited by traditional Jews — and customs related to cleaning, clothing and abstaining from work. Other individuals spoke of family practices associated with different festivals, particularly Passover. These included eating unleavened bread similar to matzo and the telling of stories related to the Jews' exodus from Egypt, often conflated with the story of exile from Spain.

Crypto-Jews in mountainous areas seem to have developed a more communal set of structures and observances. Many villages in Northern New Mexico were illegal settlements, not sanctioned by authorities; they were remote from both religious and military Colonial powers. This remoteness allowed these communities to develop unique rites and traditions, a strong communal identity and a degree of freedom to practice openly. Many interviews of individuals from this region suggest that crypto-Judaism was an open secret, well-known to the wider community. This view was never expressed in interviews with individuals from the larger centers of Colonial power.

Many individuals from the mountains speak of rituals that brought the crypto-Jewish community together. These practices centered on life-cycle events — birth, marriage and death. They also included some celebration of festivals. As in the cities, Passover



SETH KUNIN, PhD
Perth, Australia
seth.kunin@curtin.edu.au

Seth Kunin is a professor and deputy vice chancellor at Curtin University in Australia. He previously worked for 30 years in Scotland and England. He spent more than 10 years doing research in New Mexico and has written widely about crypto-Judaism in New Mexico and the American Southwest.

is the holiday most often mentioned. Rituals surrounding birth are some of the most indicative of crypto-Jewish culture. Since all crypto-Jews were publicly Christian — specifically Catholic in northern New Mexico — babies needed to be baptized soon after birth. To forgo this would be a public repudiation of the Catholic faith. But soon after the church baptism, crypto-Jewish children were taken to another location, where they were ritually washed with water or perfume. This practice was seen as washing off the baptism and emphasizing the Jewish origins of the baby.

Stories are both an important mechanism of cultural transmission and a way of illustrating the complexity of crypto-Jewish identity. One family tradition, related by a friend in Albuquerque, serves as illustration.

She told me, “When my great-grandmother Isabelle was born, her family lived in the mountains. There was no church nearby, and they needed to come down to Santa Fe to get the baby baptized. On the way down, the wagon hit a bump and the baby flew from the wagon to the side of the road, but nobody noticed. They got to the church and could not find the baby. They had come so far, therefore the priest put her in the book anyway. They started back, and there on the side of the road was my great-grandmother, as happy as could be. So they went home.”

This memory highlights the conflict between the Jewish and Christian aspects of the family's identity. On one hand, to be good Catholics, a family had to have a baby baptized, and indeed Isabelle's name is in the baptismal register. On the other hand, to be a good Jew, one should not be baptized. In this story, the conflict is resolved by a trick or indeed, a trick of fate. >>>

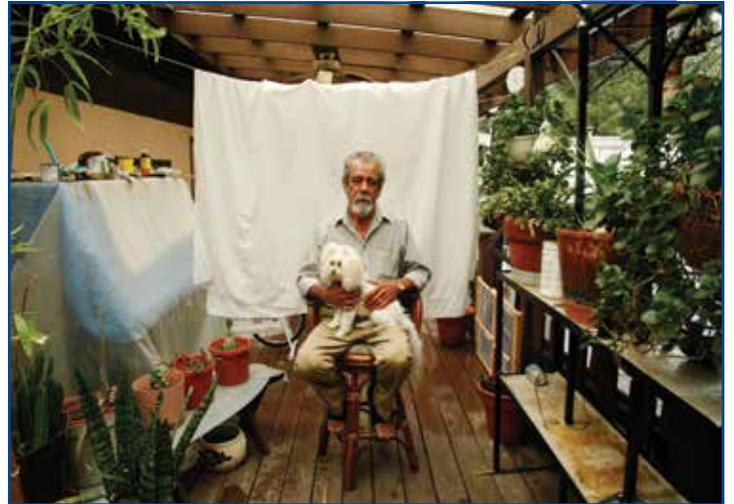


A Whispered Tradition

One might assume from such stories and from the popular depiction of crypto-Judaism that most crypto-Jews are aware of their identity and have practices and rituals that are well understood. This is far from the case. Crypto-Jewish identity is very complex. Most crypto-Jews are only vaguely aware of their Jewish heritage. For some it is merely a whispered awareness — *Somos Judíos* — with little additional content or meaning. For many others it emerges from an attempt to understand strange practices that make them different from their neighbors. Only a small minority have a strong familial tradition with a wide range of practices and beliefs.

The practices and rituals also diverge. Not only did the religion change substantially in Spain, moving from a public to a private setting, but it also became simplified and narrower due to the progressive loss of traditional knowledge. Many of the practices found today are shaped by these trends. But like all cultural traditions, crypto-Judaism continually evolves and takes on new interpretations. So some practices that have no historical Jewish connection were given new meaning to fit into a hidden Jewish identity. Others learned from neighbors or the Internet stem from worldwide Jewish rituals and beliefs. And increasingly, some crypto-Jews have an affinity for Zionism, which has also impacted their self-understanding.

Despite the persistence of practices and identity, crypto-Judaism is largely a culture of memory — a culture of stories and narratives passed down between generations. Like all such



"Rudy" by Peter Svarzbein

cultures, it is increasingly impacted by internal and external cultural forces which tend to pose challenges to its survival. The impact of Hispanic identity and even more, the pervasiveness of American cultural tropes, prevents the whispered messages from being clearly heard and remembered. While some crypto-Jews struggle to maintain their culture, it is possible that in the next generation, crypto-Judaism may become a distant memory, lost in the mountains of New Mexico. 🕊



Wheeler Peak near Taos, New Mexico

2025 • LOS ANGELES

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies announces our
35th Annual Conference • Los Angeles • August 10-12, 2025

Identities and Experiences: Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey



CHIEF CONFERENCE CHAIR*

DR. ELISHEVA IRMA DIAZ

Los Angeles, California
scjs.la2025@gmail.com

The 35th annual conference of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies titled “Identities and Experiences: Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey” offers a rich and diverse experience with a blend of academic presentations, cultural events, and networking opportunities, designed for both scholars and enthusiasts of crypto-Judaic history and traditions.

Conference sessions, meals and evening events will take place at the historic Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel. Accommodations for out-of-town registrants are offered at the nearby Kimpton Hotel Palomar Los Angeles-Beverly Hills; hotel reservations are available via the direct link on the SCJS website, www.cryptojews.com

Isaac Amon will once again serve as conference emcee. Event highlights include

an exclusive film presentation by past SCJS president, renowned genealogist, author, and researcher Genie Milgrom. The film *Between the Stone and the Flower* (her own life story) offers an immersive cultural experience illuminating the history and identity of crypto-Jews.

Optional **pre-conference events** include a Sunday morning film by Isaac Artenstein (*The Long Journey*) and a midday genealogical workshops with Genie Milgrom delving into research, preservation and archives.

Select members of the **Kol Sefaradic Choir (ROSA)** will kick off the Sunday night dinner with a short performance.

The annual **Martin Sosin Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts** takes place on Monday at noon and honors El Paso photographer and civic leader Peter Svarzbein whose documentary work focuses on crypto-Jews, as well as art, advocacy and community.

On Monday night, the **Judy Frankel Memorial Concert** features a debut preview of an original contemporary

folk-opera titled *La Señora*, based on the life of Doña Gracia Nasi, a leading 16th-century Sephardic Jewish businesswoman, philanthropist and savior of hundreds of *conversos*, composed and directed by noted LA composer Dr. Michelle Green Willner.

Dr. Seth D. Kunin, renowned professor Emeritus of Curtin University in Australia and author of *Juggling Identities: Identity and Authenticity Among the Crypto-Jews*, will give the **Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture**.

We will also announce the **David M. Gitlitz Emerging Scholar Award** winner.

The conference provides a meaningful educational platform deepening the understanding of the research and contributions in crypto-Judaic studies worldwide.

Join us for an unforgettable experience in Los Angeles, August 10-12, 2025. Visit www.cryptojews.com to register — deadline is August 5, 2025; cancellations for refunds will not be accepted after August 1, 2025.



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Identities and Experiences:
Navigating the Crypto-Jewish Journey

*After May 1st direct conference questions to co-chair Corinne Brown at jb.corinne@gmail.com.

LECTURES

MARTIN SOSIN STRATTON-PETIT ADDRESS TO ADVANCE SCHOLARSHIP IN THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC ARTS

Peter Svarzbein

Peter Svarzbein is a lens-based artist, curator and storyteller whose work explores identity, memory and the intersection of history and contemporary culture. His ongoing nearly 20 year project documenting crypto-Jews — Latinos who trace their ancestry to Jewish communities forced to convert during the Spanish Inquisition — examines the hidden narratives and evolving identities of these communities through photography, video and oral histories.

Svarzbein's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including at the Guggenheim Museum, the INBA Museum of Fine Art in Ciudad Juárez, and numerous gallery spaces across the U.S. and Mexico. He was awarded the City of El Paso's Artist Incubator Grant, supporting his research and visual storytelling on the crypto-Jewish experience. His collaborations extend to scholars and cultural historians, including Vanessa Paloma with whom he has documented Jewish voices in North Morocco, capturing oral traditions in Spanish, French, Hebrew and Arabic.



PETER SVARZBEIN
El Paso, Texas
pgsvarzbein@gmail.com



"Arm"



"Lupe"



"Anna"



"Israela"

The Martin Sosin Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts was inspired by a grant from Martin Sosin of Los Angeles in 2012. At each conference we recognize a scholar who expresses their research through the arts — photography, painting, sculpture, literature, poetry, drama, or music. The recipient artist shares a lecture about their process and intent, coupled with examples of their work and receives an honorarium. 🍷



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*Identities and Experiences:
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STANLEY M. HORDES DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR LECTURE

Seth Kunin, PhD



SETH KUNIN, PHD
Perth, Australia
seth.kunin@curtin.edu.au

Dr. Seth D. Kunin, Professor Emeritus, Curtin University, Perth, Australia, will deliver the Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture: “The Song of the Sparrow: Loggje Carrasco’s Poetic Exploration of Her Crypto-Jewish Identity.” Carrasco, a well-known crypto-Jew from Albuquerque, New Mexico, left an inspiring and fascinating legacy through her writing, including a wide range of folklore, memories, ritual

practices, genealogy, and most significantly, poetry and songs.

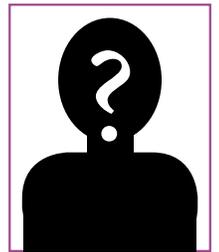
Seth led Curtin University’s international activities including strategic policy, international marketing strategy, and international partnerships. Earlier he was Vice Principal of Internationalisation at the University of Aberdeen and held senior roles at Durham University. A prominent anthropologist. Dr. Kunin has a BA from Columbia University in New York and a PhD from the University of Cambridge, U.K. His research focused on the application of structuralist theory and methodology to Jewish texts and culture.

A long-time SCJS member, Seth spent more than 10 years doing research in New Mexico and has written widely about crypto-Judaism in the state and the American Southwest.

Established in 2019, the Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture is a distinction awarded at each conference to a scholar making an exemplary contribution to advancing the field of crypto-Judaic studies. Dr. Hordes was one of the founding members of SCJS and is still its passionate visionary. Author of the pivotal work *To the End of the Earth; New Mexico’s Crypto-Jews*, he is himself the recipient of numerous awards. Now serving as an SCJS senior advisor, this award assures his vision will continue in perpetuity. 🕊

DAVID M. GITLITZ EMERGING SCHOLAR AWARD

Recipient Announced at Conference



The David Gitlitz Emerging Scholar Award was instituted to encourage future scholarship and emphasize excellence in the field. This recognition focuses on an emerging scholar: someone who is contributing new information and vital research to crypto-Judaic history. Awarded in 2023 to Leonard Stein, PhD and in 2021 to Hélène Jawhara Piñer, PhD. Join us in Los Angeles to meet this year’s recipient. 🕊

GENEALOGY WORKSHOP



GENIE MILGROM
Miami, Florida
www.geniemilgrom.com

Join Genie Milgrom for our pre-conference genealogy workshop, “Crypto-Jewish Genealogy—A Primer Plus Resources” and “Crypto-Jewish Genealogy — Physical Research in Archives and Navigating Complex Resources,” on Sunday afternoon, August 10.

Past member Arnold Trujillo created the first genealogy workshop held at an SCJS conference in the 1990s. He brought attention to the history of Hispanics in Southern Colorado who were living as Seventh Day Adventists.

This opportunity to look into crypto-Judaic roots continues today, inviting known genealogists to share updates in research and testing. 🕊

JUDY FRANKEL MEMORIAL CONCERT

La Señora

Dr. Michelle G. Willner will share select musical highlights from this work-in-progress, a full-blown folk-opera extolling the life of the Sephardic Jewish legend, Doña Gracia Nasi titled *La Señora*.

Highlights include lyrical arias based on folksongs found in the countries where Doña Gracia lived and traveled (Italy, Portugal, Greece, Spain, Israel) as a way to tell her remarkable story. The performers include a pianist, guitarist, a choir, vocalists, plus a narrator. Also part of the program is a recording of "The Letter That Fell From the Sky." Previously performed with a full orchestra this musical interpretation of the Edict of Expulsion and its effects on the Jews of Spain with vocals by Vanessa Paloma, is as inspiring as it is dramatic.

Upon conclusion, esteemed SCJS member Andrée Aelion Brooks, author of the definitive biography of Doña Gracia, will be part of a talk-back, followed by a coffee reception. Never before have we entertained such a tapestry of music, entertainment and Jewish history!



**MICHELLE GREEN WILLNER,
DMA (ASCAP)**
Los Angeles, California
www.michellegreenwillner.com

Michelle Green Willner, DMA (ASCAP)

An evocative award-winning composer, Michelle Green Willner's works have been commissioned and performed by world-renown ensembles such as the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, Hollywood Master Chorale, Society for New Music, Australia's Celebration of Women and Music, and Zimriya, Israel's International Choral Festival to name a few.

Supportive of artistic collaborations, she has been involved in an ongoing multi-disciplinary collaboration with other accomplished artists and has accepted commissions for various art, poetry and dance productions.

Dr. Green Willner's awards include II ASCAP PLUS Awards, two ASCAP Foundation Grants to Young Composers, a Community Relations Council Grant, Brian M. Israel Prize (Society for New Music), SOCAN's Serge Garant Award, Shalshélet's 6th International Festival of New Jewish Liturgical Music and



ANDRÉE AELION BROOKS
Bellevue, Washington
www.andreeaelionbrooks.com

SCJS welcomes one of our most distinguished members — author, lecturer and journalist Andrée Aelion Brooks who will lead a talk-back following the concert, *La Señora*, Monday night.

Brooks is a journalist, author and lecturer. She has won many awards for her writing; books and print articles, most notably over 1,000 articles in the *New York Times* alone. In 2012 she won first place in the Simon Rockower Awards for feature writing (magazines). In November 2013 she was honored by the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame for her lifetime achievements.

The Woman Who Defied Kings is a biography of Doña Gracia Nasi, a Renaissance banker who ran an escape network for crypto-Jews. It was selected as a finalist in the 2003 National Jewish Book Awards. Considered a classic reference for any Jewish scholar, the book is the consummate history of a one of the world's most fascinating women. Purchase or download a copy of this book from its dedicated (amazon.com) web page, or Facebook page at: facebook.com/donagraciaworldwide.

Brooks also presented a lecture at the Library of Congress and appeared at Google headquarters to tell the story of Doña Gracia Nasi as part of Google's authors@google series that included Tom Brokaw and Al Gore.



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the Bruce Geller Memorial Prize. Numerous renowned fellowships add to her recognition.

With a BM degree from the University of Toronto, Willner continued her studies at Columbia University. Many groups have performed her choral works internationally, as well as exclusively by the Tehila Choir, which she founded in Toronto, Canada, including the Michelle Green Willner Singers, which she currently directs

Dr. Green Willner lectures widely and is a respected music educator who has taught composition and theory at the University of California, Irvine, California State University at Long Beach, and American Jewish University.

Along with composing, Dr. Green Willner is the Artistic and Musical Director of the Los Angeles Jewish Community Children's Choir sponsored by the Schulweis Institute, and supported in part, by the LA County Arts and Culture Commission and the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles.

At each conference we seek a musical performance that keeps alive the legacy of Judy Frankel (1943-2008).

In the 1980s, singer Judy Frankel developed an interest in Sephardic culture and music after performing for a Ladino-speaking senior patient at Mount Zion Medical Center. She subsequently learned a number of Ladino songs, and embarked on research trips to Europe and Israel to study Ladino music and crypto-Jewish culture. In 1989, she visited Portugal to interview families of crypto-Jewish descent. She also volunteered with Americans of crypto-Jewish heritage, helping them reconnect to Jewish culture and community.

Frankel's singing was included on the soundtrack of the 1989 documentary *Trees Cry for Rain*, the biography of Rachel Bortnick by filmmaker Bonnie Burt.

Frankel performed in a number of countries, including Spain, Cuba, Canada, France, and China. In 1995 she sang a song in Lisbon in homage to Aristedes de Sousa Mendes, a Portuguese diplomat who saved the lives of thousands of Jews by giving them visas to escape from Nazi-occupied France.

In 1997 Frankel was included in Rounder Records, "Divine Divas: A World of Women's Voices." Frankel recorded several CDs in English and Ladino. 🌍

Kol Sephardic Choir (ROSE)

Select members of the Kol Sephardic Choir will join us as part of the Monday evening welcoming dinner, launching our 35th annual event with music!



Kol Sephardic Choir is a non-profit musical ensemble whose goal is to preserve and celebrate Ladino, the endangered language and culture of the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain during the Inquisition. Their history is both tragic and inspiring. Driven from their home, Spanish Jews resettled all over the world bringing with them their distinctive culture and language — Ladino — a beautiful mixture of Hebrew, Jewish and Spanish languages and traditions.

Today Ladino is spoken by minority communities in more than 30 countries yet it is at risk of extinction. Kol Sephardic Choir (ROSE) is the only artistic group in Los Angeles dedicated to preserving this unique musical tradition, and the only choir to perform with flamenco dancers, *Pasión Flamenca de Los Angeles*, highlighting Ladino's fascinating intersection of Hispanic and Jewish culture.

Choir members have ancestry from Israel, Eastern Europe, Uzbekistan, Libya, Turkey, Spain, Canada, Brazil, and Morocco, including choristers from Mexico who

discovered their connection to Sephardic Jewry when investigating family histories. The choir not only preserves Ladino music through performance but also by commissioning musical arrangements of Ladino folk tunes passed down orally and in secret for centuries, ever since Sephardic Jews were prohibited from practicing their traditions. 🌍



www.kolsephardicchoir.com



FILMS

Between the Stone and the Flower

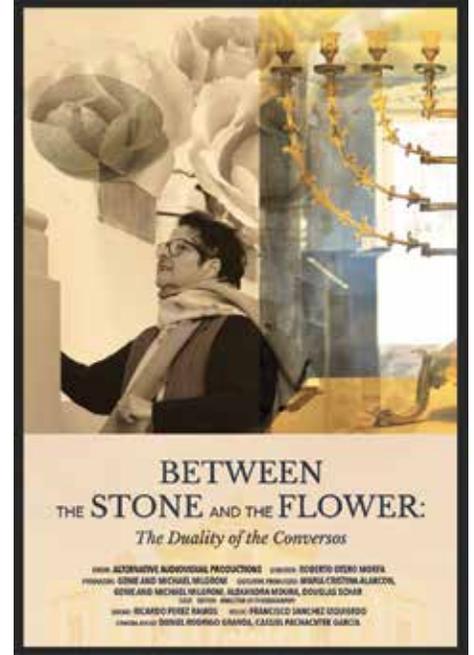
Genie Milgrom • Alternative Audiovisual Productions



Genie Milgrom

Coming to Los Angeles as part of the 35th annual SCJS conference, the film *Between the Stone and the Flower* is not to be missed. Shown at film festivals worldwide, it tells the story of past SCJS president Genie Milgrom's own duality and her search for her *converso* roots, the entire story of the crypto-Judaic experience unfolds. Follow her to Spain and Portugal and beyond, and even to her audience with the late Pope Francis whom she beseeches to assist in sharing significant but previously inaccessible historic records. Milgrom today is a sought-after speaker, genealogist,

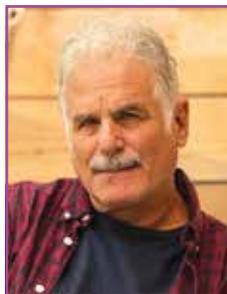
founder of an online historical crypto-Jewish archive, and a mentor to many. The film is included in the SCJS conference registration and will also be open to the public with ticket purchase via our website. Celebrate this brilliant documentary, professionally produced and beautifully made. 🌟



The Long Journey

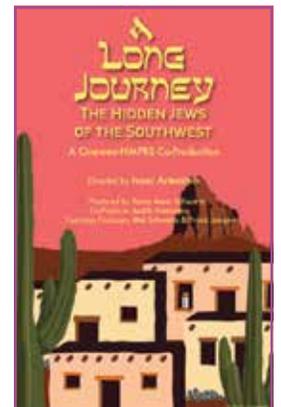
Isaac Artenstein • Cinewest Films

Treat yourself to a Sunday morning, pre-conference film starting at 10:30 at the Temple Tifereth Israel, complete with mid-morning refreshments. Produced in 2014, this beautiful film by Isaac Artenstein, tells the crypto-Judaic story on many



Isaac Artenstein

levels, tracing how the Spanish descendants of Iberian Jews came to be in rural New Mexico. Beautifully filmed with an evocative soundtrack, it profiles the lives of several memorable individuals who are keeping their ancestry alive. Free to all full conference registrants.



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**Identities and Experiences:
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VENUES

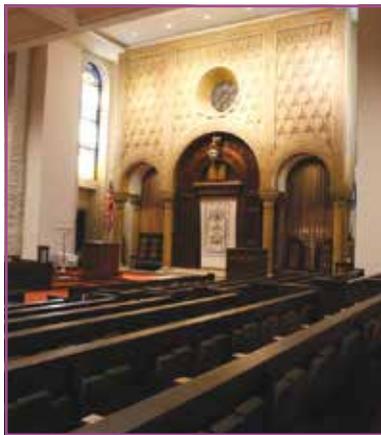
Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel

*Welcome back to Los Angeles’
Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel!*

Heading to LA this summer is *deja-vu*. We recently confirmed that SCJS held a conference in Los Angeles, August 8-10, 1999, also hosted by Temple Tifereth Israel! (Memory is short but our files hide no secrets.) It is exciting to think we are coming back to a welcoming and familiar host.

Embracing all who seek to connect with Sephardic traditions, Temple Tifereth Israel is an inclusive space where the beauty of the past meets the vibrancy of the present and the promise of the future. Balancing religious teaching with cultural experience, spiritual connection with personal relationships. It is a traditional Sephardic Jewish community in tune with the modern world.

A beautifully diverse community, they are unified by their love for Sephardic traditions. They define Sephardic traditions as encompassing both Sephardic Judaism (religious practices) and Sephardic culture (art, music, literature and food). They celebrate the long history of Sephardic Jews across the world and embrace traditions across generations and geographies. The congregation is made up of Jews of all cultural backgrounds and affiliations who are committed to carrying the rich Sephardic traditions of the past into the present and through the future.



*Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel
Sanctuary*



*Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel
set for our event.*

Kimpton Hotel Palomar Los Angeles Beverly Hills

*“One of U.S. News & World Report’s
2024 Best Boutique Hotels in the USA”*

Think of a modern boutique hotel that meshes the intimacy of a stylish private residence with the vibe of a social club. The Kimpton Hotel Palomar Los Angeles Beverly Hills is all that.



Kimpton Palomar Lobby

Imagine yourself in a posh enclave near Beverly Hills surrounded by luxury high-rise apartments that evoke a relaxed residential vibe. You are also on Wilshire Blvd., a sophisticated stretch of museums, restaurants, shopping

and an “impossible to get lost” way to the beach. Once you step into the hotel, you will find designer-selected materials imbued with a creative, rebellious spirit. Grab a drink or dine at our restaurant Double Take, complete with a sophisticated game room and elegant bar. When you add in our generously-sized guestrooms, fitness room and a zen-like outdoor pool, you have the ultimate stay. It’s LA baby, enjoy yourself at Kimpton Hotel Palomar Los Angeles Beverly Hills 🌴.



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EMCEE

What Exactly Does a Conference Emcee Do?

The term master of ceremonies has been used since at least the 1600s, originally referring to an official who presided over royal ceremonies. The first records of “emcee” come from 1930s U.S. The spelling emcee is based on what it sounds like when you say the abbreviation MC (for master of ceremonies).

In hip-hop, “emcee” (or MC) comes from the early days of rap when a master of ceremonies would talk to the crowd while the DJ played music. Some of them started rhyming over the beat. While emcee is often synonymous with rapper, some people make a distinction between the terms. A rapper considered an emcee is often one who is thought to elevate the level of artistry and skill, especially lyrically.



ISAAC AMON, PHD
St. Louis, Missouri
isaacamonlaw@gmail

A good emcee welcomes the audience, puts people at ease, introduces the event or next segment, keeps things moving and on schedule, and just might tell a joke or two. If the emcee is the brilliant attorney and SCJS board member Isaac Amon, a world renown lecturer and legal expert, he might even bridge the gap between the current panel topic and world history.

Isaac has traveled the globe as an invited speaker at Oxford, at the Hague, at meetings in Washington DC, and beyond, presenting at conferences related to his expertise in the areas of

freedom, justice, the Inquisition and the Sephardic Jewish legacy. A consultant for Jewish Heritage Alliance, Isaac has clearly raised the bar. We just might have to offer him a lifetime contract. (We will even write the jokes for him.)



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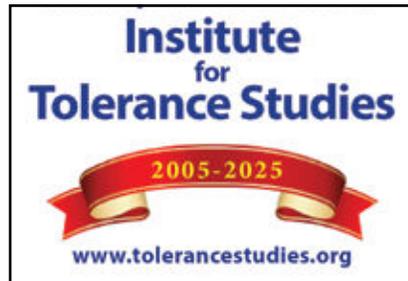
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Moroccan Chicken with Apricots and Olives (Kosher)

Editor's note: If you cannot find chicken breasts with the wing attached, use two split breasts as shown in this effort. Cut into smaller pieces, this dish easily serves four. The lemon is a must — adds a wonderful note!

Chicken:

- 4 chicken breasts (bone-in, skin-on, first wing joint attached)
- Salt & freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp olive oil

Spice Mix (*Ras el Hanout*-style):

- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1/2 tsp turmeric
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground ginger
- Pinch of cayenne (optional)

Sauce and Add-ins:

- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1/2 cup dried apricots, halved
- 1/3 cup green or Castelvetrano olives, pitted and halved
- 1 tbsp tomato paste



- 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice (or preserved lemon, chopped, for deeper flavor)
- Chopped fresh cilantro or parsley (for garnish)

Instructions:

1. Season the chicken: Mix all the spices in a small bowl. Pat chicken dry and rub generously with the spice mix, salt and pepper. Let sit at room temp for 15–20 minutes (or marinate in the fridge up to a few hours).

2. Brown the chicken: Heat olive oil in a large oven-safe sauté pan over medium-high heat. Sear chicken skin-side down for 5–6 minutes until nicely browned. Flip and cook another 2–3 minutes. Remove chicken and set aside.

3. Build the sauce: In the same pan, reduce heat to medium. Add a touch more oil if needed. Sauté onion for 3–4 minutes until soft. Add garlic and cook 1 minute more. Stir in tomato paste and cook for 1 minute. Add chicken stock, apricots, olives, and lemon juice. Bring to a simmer.

4. Roast: Return the chicken to the pan, skin-side up. Spoon some of the sauce over the top. Transfer the whole pan to a preheated 375°F (190°C) oven. Roast uncovered for about 15–18 minutes, or until chicken reaches 165°F (74°C).

www.laGondola.com



Chef Nir
Weinblut

Born in Tel Aviv, Israel, Chef Nir Weinblut moved to the east coast of the U.S. with his family shortly thereafter. His family opened a pizza shop, and Nir began helping his parents run their business from a young age.

In the mid-1980s, Nir relocated to Los Angeles to study business and psychology. While working to support himself, he found himself drawn back into cooking, where he fell in love with high-end catering. He slowly but surely began to explore the culinary world and gained experience in the higher-end side of the industry.

Nir's training came from the many people he worked with during his catering days — from French maitres d' to back-of-house staff. Each person he met taught him something new and he eagerly absorbed all of their knowledge.

After gaining extensive experience and training, Nir established La Gondola Restaurant and Catering, which quickly became a frontrunner in the LA kosher world. Three decades later, the establishment is still going strong and continues to be a leader in the industry, thanks to Chef Nir's hard work, dedication and passion for culinary excellence.

In addition to his success with La Gondola, Chef Nir has taken his culinary skills to new heights, catering for royals in Dubai and even appearing as a judge on Kosher.com's Skill't competition.

He also shares his expertise through his cookbook, *Kosher Soul Food*, showcasing his unique take on traditional Jewish and soul food recipes. Chef Nir's passion for food and commitment to excellence have made him a respected figure in gastronomy, and his innovative approach to kosher cuisine continues to inspire others. 🍴

Isaac Amon Explores Echoes of Exodus: From the Inquisition to the American Promise

*How centuries of persecution shaped a radical vision of religious freedom
in the New World – and why that vision still matters today.*

Forced Worship Stinks in God's Nostrils: The Inquisition, Sepharad, and the American Experiment
(Touro Law Review, Vol. 40, Issue 1, Article)

I grew up hearing stories about the global Jewish diaspora, the Inquisition and the centuries-long search for safety, belonging and inclusion. Those stories stayed with me and over time, sparked a much deeper question: how did these histories shape the ideals we so often take for granted today? That probing question eventually became this article.

Forced Worship Stinks in God's Nostrils traces a thread rarely told in the founding story of the United States, for its origins do not begin

in Philadelphia, Boston or even London, but on the faraway Iberian Peninsula. I explore how the methods, history and abuses of the Inquisition – particularly in Spain and Portugal – and the visible presence of Jews in Colonial America, profoundly shaped the Founders' thinking about religious freedom in the late 18th century, creating a nation that enshrined liberty of conscience not just for Christians, but for non-Christians as well. 🧡

Corinne Brown discusses Stav Appel work



HaLapid editor
Corinne

Joy Brown proudly announces her article in the May 2025 digital version of the *New Mexico Jewish Journal* focused on the work of author Stav Appel and his new book *The Torah in the Tarot Deck and Booklet*, (Ayin Press) to be released

in October. The complete book, which contains a full set of the 22 Tarot cards originally produced by 15th-century Frenchman Jean Noblet, explains the hidden symbology in the brilliantly illustrated cards that contain the essential keys to Jewish cultural and traditional survival, as well as preserving the Hebrew alphabet. SCJS 2023 conference attendees might remember Stav's presentation in El Paso and his exuberant Kanter lecture that followed. Some of us just cannot get enough! 🧡

Congratulations, Dr. Cynthia Seton-Rogers!

Cynthia M. Seton-Rogers has earned her PhD at The University of Texas at Dallas in the History of Ideas program, integrating history, literature, and philosophy through interdisciplinary research. Her dissertation, "Beyond the Periphery: Reframing the Narrative of American Antisemitism," contributes to an understanding of antisemitism's role in American history while challenging conventional narratives about Jewish experiences in the U.S. In addition to her academic research, Dr. Seton-Rogers is dedicated to creating opportunities for dialogue combatting antisemitism as well as teaching about the history of the Holocaust and its broader implications. She currently serves as Academic and Outreach Events Manager at the Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies at UT Dallas, playing a pivotal role in fostering educational and community engagement. Dr. Seton-Rogers maintains a personal interest in crypto-Judaic studies and the history of the Sephardic diaspora, exploring the cultural and historical legacies of these communities.

Congratulations Dr. Seton-Rogers, we are so proud of your academic accomplishments and providing your continuous support to SCJS! 🧡





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Special thanks to Dr. Lawrence Kanter
for his ongoing support of this program.

Late 2024–early 2025 was a banner season for our Kanter lecturers. Coincidentally, they were all scholars who are also rabbis. Never doubt their diverse interests and individual knowledge of Jewish history. Here is what you missed and what is coming up.

NOVEMBER 2024

Rabbi Barbara Aiello



RABBI BARBARA AIELLO
Serrastretta, Italy
rabbi@rabbibarbara.com

Many thanks to Rabbi Barbara Aiello in Italy who brought us a moving history of the Southern Italian town where she lives, Serrastretta, in the region of Calabria and where she has established a Jewish synagogue, Ner Tamid del Sud. In “**The Secret Jews of Southern Italy**,” she dramatized some of the stories including even donning a blue scarf, a custom of Jewish women from the long-ago past. Rabbi Barbara has made it her life’s work

to uncover this area’s rich hidden Jewish background and bring those who suspect Italian-Jewish ancestry to her door. A mesmerizing and enjoyable slide-illustrated tour of past and present.

For a \$10 donation at www.cryptojews.com, we will send you the link to the recorded presentation.

JANUARY 2025

Rabbi David Kunin



RABBI DAVID KUNIN
Saratoga, California
rabbikunin@gmail.com

With “**The Jews Across Many Islands: The Jews of Indonesia: A Diverse Community Across Many Islands**,” Rabbi Kunin took an incredible dive into the diverse cultures that make up Indonesia with the remarkable film he produced about Jewish life in the many islands. Indonesia is huge, divided into two parts: Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. Various ethnicities are found in places like

Lapong, Jakarta, Manado, Ambon, Bali, and more. Rabbi Kunin has visited all these communities except Sumatra. Not surprisingly, the Jews he found descended from the Dutch, the Portuguese, from China, and even from Bagdad as well. Every possible version of identity is represented there. A giant menorah presides over a mountain in Menado – and the surprises go on and on. For permission to use this film for teaching purposes write to rabbikunin@beth-david.org. >>>



MARCH 2025

Rabbi Juan Gutierrez



**RABBI DR. JUAN MARCOS
BEJARANO GUTIERREZ**
Grand Prairie, Texas
rambam44@gmail.com

In his thought-provoking and stimulating talk, “**Crypto-Jews and Religious Change,**” author and rabbi Gutierrez pointed to the necessity of Jewish thought and practice to evolve with the times. Social and political situations forced Jews to behave and relate in different ways. These transformations allowed aspects of Jewish belief and practice to continue, albeit in radically different forms. Citing

actual histories of *conversos* and case studies, listeners understood the challenges of living under Inquisition restrictions and observing Jewish traditions.

This lecture can be linked with a \$10 donation to www.cryptojews.com.

MAY 2025

Ronnie Perelis, PhD



RONNIE PERELIS, PHD
New York, New York
perelis@yu.edu

This lecture, “**Promised Lands: New Christians and New Jews in the Americas,**” explored the parallel and intertwined histories of those *conversos* who came to the Americas and secretly held on to their Jewish faith, and the Jews who came to the Dutch and British colonies and founded a network of thriving Jewish communities.

Ronnie Perelis is the Chief Rabbi Dr. Isaac Abraham and Jelena (Rachel) Alcalay Associate Professor of Sephardic Studies at Yeshiva University and the Director of the Rabbi Arthur Schneier Program for International Affairs. Drawing on his passionate interest in Sephardic history and culture, his research traces the twisted paths of the Sephardim from Old Sepharad to across the Atlantic while exploring the dynamism and creativity at the heart of Sephardic culture.

COMING IN SEPTEMBER 2025

Rebecca Wartell, PhD



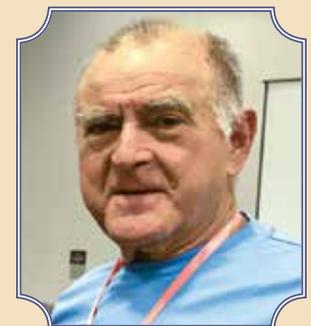
REBECCA WARTELL, PHD
Richmond, Indiana
wartere@earlham.edu

Crypto-Judaism is often described as a matriarchal religion, with *conversa* women as the keepers of Jewish ritual in the privacy of homes. This lecture, **Matriarchs and Memory: The Female Foundations of Crypto-Judaism,** considers the ways in which crypto-Judaism also focuses on feminine aspects of God through the veneration of women in the Bible including Esther, Judith, and even Mary. In the period after the Expulsion of Jews from Spain,

Jewish mysticism also became increasingly focused on the concept of the *Shekhinah*, the feminine Divine Presence, as the source of salvation for *conversos*. Dr. Wartell discusses the historical evolution of these themes in this 2025 Kanter lecture. 🕊

About Larry Kanter

Dr. Lawrence J. Kanter, a practicing physician in Jacksonville, Florida has been a long-time member of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, as well as the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. The story of the Sephardic Jews in America is close to his heart. He has been an active contributor to Jewish life in Jacksonville



LAWRENCE KANTER, MD
Miami, Florida
ljkanter@aol.com

where he has worked and lived for more than 30 years. His community support enables lectures and research grants, as well as the new Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in New Orleans and the Department of Jewish Studies at Tulane University, Larry's alma mater. His donation to help fund the SCJS Kanter Lecture series further proves his commitment to the future of Jewish scholarship and Jewish history in general.



YOU are part of a Mission!



Through your support of our studies of the history, cultures, arts and current status of crypto-Judaism in the United States and throughout the world, we continue our mission of nurturing a global organization for those researching the history of crypto-Judaic and hidden communities around the world.

Our first conference, held near Taos, New Mexico in 1991, was organized by a small, dedicated group of people who established SCJS to foster research and the exchange of information about *conversos* who settled in the outer regions of the Spanish Empire. The secret observance of Sephardic customs and traditions by many descendants continues still.

Today, SCJS is regarded as the primary body of scholars, artists, crypto-Jewish descendants and interested individuals investigating this phenomenon and inspiring new research directions. Although our roots are in the American Southwest, our horizons extend worldwide, with enriching conferences, exciting new media and affiliations.

Our website, www.cryptojews.com, has archival status; scholars and interested individuals may access hundreds of articles and papers from past issues of *HaLapid*. It also features stories and news of SCJS and related events.

Since 1991, we have attracted members from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Latin America, Spain, Portugal, Scotland, England, France, Italy, Israel, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Macao, Goa, Central America, the Spanish Caribbean Islands, and elsewhere.

Your continuing membership and donations make it possible for us to continue our mission. We welcome new and renewing members. We are all active participants in this important field of study.

In addition to membership, we welcome donations to our other funds. The Randy Baca/Dennis Duran Fund provides assistance for those researching possible Sephardic ancestry and wish to attend conferences. A donation to our Conference Fund ensures the participation of outstanding keynote speakers and supports special conference programming. In addition, your contributions supports our mailing and publication expenses.

With continuing assistance, we look forward to a long future of outreach, encouragement and discovery.

Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies

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- Avram Ben Rosh -

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“One of LA’s premiere names in kosher dining (and catering), La Gondola has been a staple of the kosher community for more than two decades.”

- Time Out Magazine

“La Gondola is Los Angeles’s largest kosher restaurant and a staple in the city.”

- LA Weekly

(See sample recipe on page 34)

