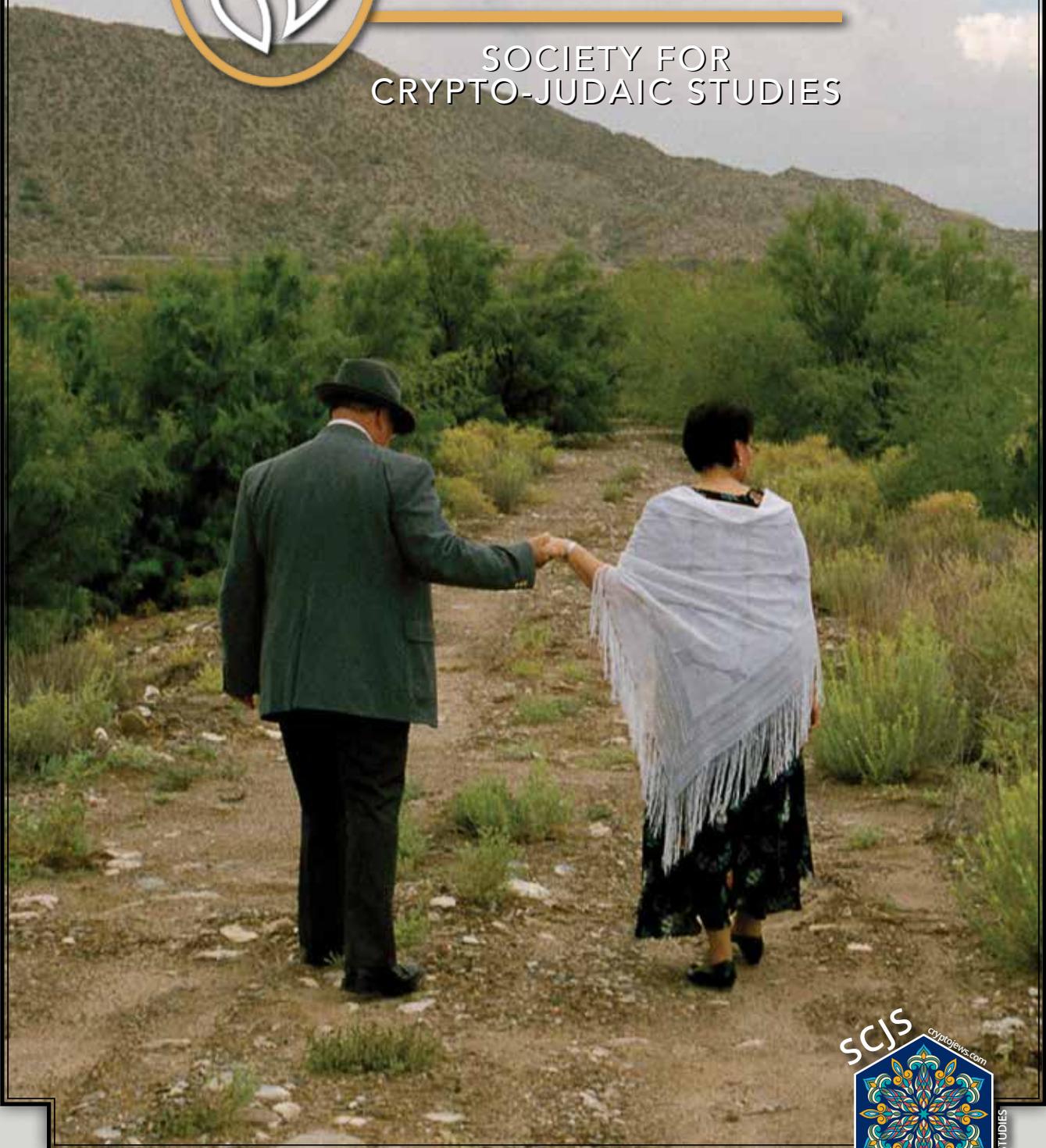




# HALAPID

SOCIETY FOR  
CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES



VOL. 60 / 61 • SPRING / SUMMER • 2023 / 5783 • ISSUES 41 / 42



SPRING / SUMMER • 2023 / 5783

### SCJS



Welcome Social Media Administrator Georgina Garza De León and Secretary Elisheva Irma Diaz, and Farewell to Isabelle Medina Sandoval  
**page 4**



Famous Jews of Sephardic or Portuguese Descent  
**Jonathan Gavrielov**  
**page 5**

Aristede de Sousa Mendes Given Honor  
**page 8**



Weaving Jewish Beliefs — *Shaar Hashamaim* — Guarding Jewish Traditions in Guatemala  
**Rifka Cook**  
**page 10**



Saint Augustine Jewish Historical Society Celebrates 10 Years of "Sleuthing!"  
**Rabbi Merrill Shapiro**  
**page 14**



What About the Grandfathers in My Lineage? The Tale of Don Juan Sigler De Espinosa of Cordoba  
**Genie Milgrom**  
**page 16**



Crypto-Jewish Confederates Along the Lower Rio Grande  
**Carlos Montalvo Larralde**  
**page 18**



### BOOKS / FILM - page 38

- *The Judaizer Rafael Gil Rodríguez and the Decline of the Inquisition: New Spain, 18th Century* By Silvia Hamui Sutton, PhD plus Spanish translation
- *Kantika* By Elizabeth Graver
- *Luis de Torres Sails to Freedom* By Tami Lehman-Wilzig
- *The Boston Chocolate Party* By Rabbi Deborah R. Prinz
- *Remember My Soul* Film by Jillian Glantz



### FOOD & FOLKLORE

Capirotada (Mexican Bread Pudding)  
**Corinne Brown and Isabel O. Moore**  
**page 42**



### NEW!

### WIT & WISDOM

Wise, whimsical sayings in Ladino  
**page 48**

**NEW ADDRESS**

**Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies**  
**18555 E Smoky Hill Rd.**  
**PO Box 46044**  
**Aurora, CO 80046**

## Exploring the Crypto-Judaic History of the Borderlands

Early Registration Bonus

A Secret in El Paso by Rabbi Stephen Leon  
Welcome by Blanca Carrasco, Conference Chair  
Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture  
Silvia Hamui Sutton, PhD

Martin Sosin-Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts  
Jillian Glantz

The David M. Gitlitz Emerging Scholar Award  
To be announced at conference

Judy Frankel Memorial Concert  
Robyn Helzner



**SOCIETY FOR  
CRYPTO-JUDAIC  
STUDIES**

**2023 Conference  
August 13-15**



**El Paso**  
HOTEL PASO DEL NORTE

### PRE-CONFERENCE

Peter Svarzbein Photography Exhibition  
Genealogy Workshop  
Genie Milgrom & Arturo Cuellar  
Tour — Camino Real Mission Trail and Portales Museum in Elizario

### Silent Auction

Proposed Conference Schedule  
Honored Guests  
International Dignitaries  
Sample of Speakers' Abstracts

*Conference Preview*  
Starts on page 23

**REGISTER BY JULY 25**  
[www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com)

### IN EACH ISSUE

President's Letter **page 1**

Editor's Letter .....**page 2**

Readers' Feedback.....**page 3**

Carrying the Torch .....**page 44**

Among Ourselves.....**page 46**

Order Back Issues.....**page 48**

How to Join SCJS.....**page 49**

# FROM OUR PRESIDENT

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

**HALAPID** is the biannual publication of  
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#### 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](mailto:corinnejb@aol.com)



**ROSA MARINA SIEGEL**  
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[marina\\_ardon.siegel@yahoo.com](mailto:marina_ardon.siegel@yahoo.com)

As we announced in November 2022 during our webinar, the long awaited, in-person 33rd Annual Conference of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies will be held August 13-15 in El Paso, Texas! Themed “Exploring the Crypto-Judaic History of the Borderlands,” it is my pleasure and honor to announce that registration is well underway — the **July 25 deadline** is fast approaching. Hotel Paso del Norte has a block of discounted rooms on hold; make reservations by **July 15**. Go to [www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com) to register and make reservations.

During our November webinar, we had the opportunity to hear distinguished speakers from El Paso: Rabbi Stephen Leon, The Anusim Center; Mark Jurado, University of Texas–El Paso (UTEP); and historian and filmmaker Jillian Glantz, Texas A&M University. Also contributing were Dr. Josiah Heyman, the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies at UTEP; and our dear board member Blanca Carrasco, conference chair and host.

We got a great taste of El Paso, rich with history and connections to our people who endured centuries of oppression and persecution; Sephardic Jews forced to convert to Catholicism who came to the Americas in different waves and by varied routes. They created communities that tried to revert to Judaism, but the implacable Inquisition followed them and tried to extinguish their faith. Mexico was one of the centers for crypto-Jews who ultimately traveled south and north to isolated places hoping to preserve their heritage. We will hear the stories of the founders of these Borderland communities during the establishment of New Spain colonies in the 1500s, and of their long journey and also, surprisingly, of a Judaizer who defied the Inquisition right before the War of Independence from Spain in the early 1800s.

The pre-conference program expands with a genealogy workshop by our dear Genie Milgrom and special guest Arturo Cuellar from Mexico on behalf of Family Search, and we have the opportunity to hear from academics, educators, artists, historians, and individuals from all over the world.

At this time I want to say *Kol Hakavod* to Blanca Carrasco for her arduous work as the SCJS conference chair, and to all board members who have contributed to planning this unique and wonderful event.

We are here in these times of awakening, returning to our Sephardic roots, and as the long, four-year wait for an in-person conference is over, this August we can finally say *Todos Los Caminos Nos Llevan a El Paso!* (All Roads Lead Us to El Paso!).

*Rosa Marina Siegel*  
Rosa Marina Siegel • SCJS President, 2022-2024



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.

## The intersection of traditions and culture



**CORINNE J. BROWN**  
Englewood, CO  
corinnejb@aol.com

*By 1600, the Spanish Borderlands extended west from Florida across present-day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Over time, the United States and Mexico have continued to shape each other's borders, identities, and cultures. The US/Mexico dividing line is often portrayed today as a site of sharp political and ethnic divisions, yet a shared history, commerce and labor contribute to a rich and dynamic culture along the nearly 2000-mile border.*

— National Museum of American History

As the 2023 conference approaches, you may ask, “Why focus on the theme of the Texas/Mexico Borderlands?” For many, this term is without significance; a geographic area joining two worlds. But to citizens of South Texas and more, the history of this border is being analyzed with new eyes, looking at the intersection of traditions and culture.

Current research builds upon the previous understanding of Borderlands history. Several early academic pioneers explored the connection between Anglo and Spanish America. Later, Mexican American writers such as Carlos E. Castañeda, Manuel Gamio and

Américo Paredes sought to widen the scope, documenting histories and narratives of ethnic Mexican culture and identity in Texas, the Southwest and northern Mexico, highlighting experiences of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. That said, behind the current focus on Mexican identity and diversification is the untold story of a hidden minority, assimilated, yet at the same time, separate and intact; the descendants of Spanish Colonial settlers throughout the area — crypto-Jews. Traditions and folkways do not lie, hinting clearly at Spanish or Portuguese Jewish origins and established ways of living. Through this lens, it is possible that the real understanding of the Borderlands may have just begun.

In this special issue, I invite you to enjoy a banquet of original thought by a rich mix of contributors. We also bring you highlights of our upcoming conference, destined to be one of the best. Thanks to the hard work of Conference Chair Blanca Carrasco, Program Chair Seth Ward, Treasurer Diane Mock, and the entire committee, you will be very pleased. We hope you will join us in El Paso.

Register by July 25 • [www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com).

  
Corinne Joy Brown, Editor

## ABOUT THE COVER

### “A Minyan to a Million”

The cover for this issue of *HaLapid* features a close-up of an original photograph by El Paso artist, Peter Svarzbein. *The Chavez Family, El Paso, Texas, 2006* is part of his exhibition, “‘A Minyan to a Million’ The Work of Artist Peter Svarzbein and the Story of the Returning Anusim,” on display at the El Paso Museum of History, August–September 2023. See page 30 for more about the exhibition and this compassionate photographer and his stunning eye for the story of Borderland crypto-Jews.



### Something's New

Yes, it was time for a change. We hope you noticed — our *HaLapid* logo has undergone a transformation. It is close to our original but much more open, cleaner and versatile. Said our talented designer, Jacqueline Hirsch, “The original logo seemed so dark and heavy. Given the world today, I thought it was time to lighten things up.” We hope you continue to enjoy it on many covers to come.



Also new — the SCJS business mailing address:

**Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies**  
18555 East Smoky Hill Road  
PO Box 460448  
Aurora, CO 80046



Art Benveniste

Previously based in Marina Del Rey, California, our office was tended by founding board member Art Benveniste for over 20 years. We are grateful for his many volunteer hours, given in loving commitment to the organization — always with a smile. Art helped create what SCJS is today, holding many positions of responsibility. Art, we hope you will be available for future special projects.



# READERS' FEEDBACK

## Great reading

Just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed the current issue of *HaLapid*. As usual, excellent articles. Great reading for the weekend!

**Norma Libman, Albuquerque, New Mexico**

## Thank you

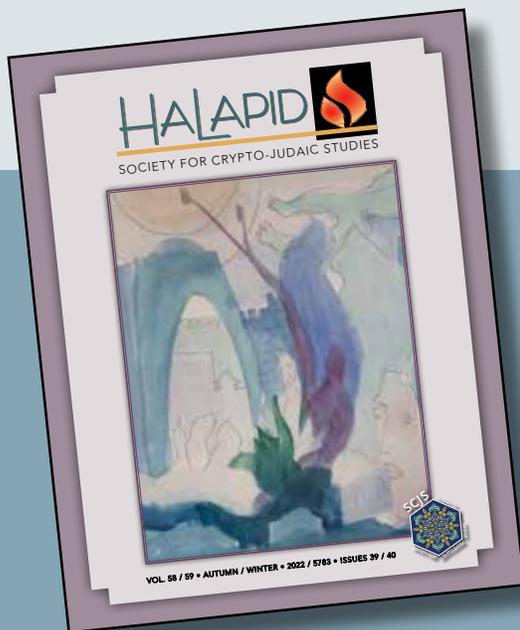
Thank you so much for the glowing review - I'm so happy you feel the book is worthy of your recommendation to the readership of this beautiful magazine.

I will add the book review to my website. Will read the magazine from cover to cover!

**Joyce Yarrow, Seattle, Washington**

Many, many thanks for the wonderful page you devoted to my work in the latest *HaLapid*. I understand that the space in journals like this one is a precious commodity - I greatly appreciate what you did.

**Irene Shaland, Cleveland, Ohio**



## Such diversity

A beautiful, hefty issue. Love that there is such diversity of contributors!

**Debbie Wohl Isard, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

## So beautiful

Thanks so much for *HaLapid*! Each issue is so beautiful. I tell people about the magazine you call a newsletter.

**Dianne Layden, Albuquerque, New Mexico**

## Fills the gap

Your latest issue of *HaLapid*, Autumn/Winter 2022/5783 has arrived safely. I so enjoy reading the articles and the book announcements before I send it on for check-in. *HaLapid* fills the gap of information on the topic of crypto-Jews and educates the entire community in addition to bringing the communities together. Wonderful work! Thanks so much.

**Gail Shiraz, Washington, DC**

**Library of Congress, Middle East Division-Judaica**

“*HaLapid* fills the gap of information on the topic of crypto-Jews and educates the entire community in addition to bringing the communities together.”

**Gail Shiraz, Washington, DC**  
**Library of Congress, Middle East Division-Judaica**



# A Hearty Welcome and A Fond Farewell

## Georgina Garza De León SOCIAL MEDIA ADMINISTRATOR



**GEORGINA "ESTHER" GARZA DE LEÓN**  
Grand Prairie, Texas  
[www.facebook.com/SoySefarad](http://www.facebook.com/SoySefarad)

**G**eorgina Garza De León (also called Esther) is originally from Monterrey Nuevo León, Mexico and is a Sephardic Jew. She is a direct descendant of Marcos Alonso de La Garza Y Falcón and Hiyya Al Daudi, a prominent rabbi, composer and poet of Andalusia.

By researching her lineage for over 15 years, Esther is now a volunteer genealogist

and certified paleographer. Spain and Portugal recently granted her the right of return and the Jewish Federation of Spain has accepted all of her genealogies.

She currently assists several Jewish organizations and individuals, such as Reconnectar, ASF Institute of Jewish Experience, and Genie Milgrom. She has a DNA project in Colombia and helps with other DNA projects in Mexico, Iraq, Spain, and Morocco.

Esther earned an Associates degree from Mountain View College and a bachelor's degree in rehabilitation studies from the University of North Texas. She has a master's in Spanish culture and language from the University of Salamanca, Spain, and a master's in reading and literacy from Walden University. She also received a post-master's Educational Diagnostician designation from Lamar University.

## Elisheva Irma Diaz SECRETARY



**ELISHEVA IRMA DIAZ**  
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**R**aised in part in Mexico with a grandmother who lit Shabbat candles and had a rosary in her sewing room, Elisheva felt a yearning for an unknown past. She searched and researched until she came across family members that knew the stories, names, grave sites, and confirmations. Her mother's family was from a line of crypto-Jews from Andalusia and the Canary Islands, knowledge that

changed her life forever. Honoring the part of her family that made them different, she became who she is today. Elisheva has since organized and held a variety of successful events in Los Angeles with an effort to educate the Jewish community and to equip others like herself. Further education led her to rabbinic ordination and the founding of Ayekah, a Jewish interfaith study center. She is also vice president and co founder of the Coalition for Sephardic Hispanic Ladino Legacy. Elisheva currently works as the health and mental health liaison representing Congresswoman Grace Napolitano, 32nd Congressional District, California.

## Many thanks and a fond farewell to Isabelle Medina Sandoval

**T**he board of SCJS thanks author/historian Isabelle Medina Sandoval for her service over the last year. Circumstances require her to vacate her position as board secretary. We wish her well and hope to see her back on the board soon.



**ISABELLE MEDINA SANDOVAL**  
Santa Fe, New Mexico  
[isantadoval@msn.com](mailto:isantadoval@msn.com)



## PART ONE

# Famous Jews of Sephardic or Portuguese Descent

.....

JONATHAN GAVRIELOV

## The Iberian Diaspora

Over 500 years have passed since the Spanish and Portuguese Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th century. Remarkably, the Spanish Expulsion occurred only three months before the Spanish conquistadors discovered America. After discovering the new continent, Spanish and Portuguese sailors figured out how to circumnavigate the world, sketching the various continents on clear maps.

At the time of the Expulsion, Jews in Spain and Portugal numbered about 200,000. Ejected from their homes, they migrated from place to place in an attempt to find Jewish communities to settle into. In the process, they spread across vast territories from Morocco to India, Yemen to Britain, including Poland, Iran, Uzbekistan (Bukhara), Ukraine, Iraq, and more.

With the dawning of the Age of Discovery in 1492, many Spanish and Portuguese Jews began to migrate towards the Americas. They had great financial means and extensive trading connections. Among them were Spanish *conversos* who were searching for a safe haven and arrived in places like Mexico, Jamaica, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, Argentina, North America, and much of Western Europe. Over time, the Sephardic Jews assimilated in the countries where they arrived and became successful traders, authors, economists, philosophers, businesspeople, architects, and even wise and resourceful rabbis. Herein is a select list of famous descendants of Sephardic Jews who are worth remembering. List to be continued Autumn 2023. >>>

According to Israel Prize recipient Professor Yirmiyahu Yovel, “Sephardic Jews and their descendants are responsible for a long line of impactful global events, such as secularism, the modern Western identity, the development of the Western novel, globalization, capitalism and even the bourgeoisie.” Following are biographies of famous Jews of Sephardic or Portuguese descent from countries throughout the world who have greatly affected the countries where they lived in the past, and even continue to influence us in our day.

Jonathan Gavriellov, formerly with the law firm of Cohen, Decker, Pex and Brosh, is a writer, translator and legal assistant. Jonathan specializes in obtaining Portuguese passports for descendants of deportees from Spain, obtaining an Austrian passport for Holocaust survivors and their descendants, as well as various other Eastern European citizenships.

The law office in Israel specializes in the field of immigration, relocation and obtaining foreign citizenship. They assist clients in the process of obtaining Portuguese citizenship for descendants of Spanish expellees, currently living in Israel or in other countries. They can determine whether you are eligible for Portuguese citizenship due to family ties to Portuguese/Spanish *conversos* by working with a genealogist.



**JONATHAN GAVRIELOV**  
Jerusalem, Israel  
[www.lawoffice.org.il/en](http://www.lawoffice.org.il/en)



## Teresa de Cartagena (1425-1470)



A Spanish author, a Christian nun, and the daughter of a famous *converso* family (the most distinguished and influential one in Spain). It is known

that she was the granddaughter of Pablo

De Santa Maria, the first *converso* in the family (known as Rabbi Solomon Ha-Levi, who served as the mayor of Burgos). As a woman, she is considered the first female Spanish poet, and also as the first Spanish feminist. In her writings, she emphasized that women must be taught to read and write, just like men were taught. In addition, she argued that women are more spiritual than men and that they have a higher inner power than men, who are busy fighting each other. She also disagreed with the reigning opinion at that time, that women are inferior or weak, and explained that this argument is derived solely from defective traditions. Her feminist ideas seeped into the European aristocracy in the years after her death.

## Amatus Lusitanus (1511-1568)



A notable Portuguese physician and descendant of a *converso* family. He may be considered the greatest doctor from the 16th century, particularly thanks to his discoveries about

the heart valves and their functions, which later led him to discover the circulatory

system. Lusitanus was known as a polyglot who knew many languages including Portuguese, Spanish, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Italian, French, and German. He was summoned to serve the kings of Venice and Poland, nobles of the Ottoman Empire, counts of the Low Countries, the Pope, and more.

## The Mendes Benbenishti Family

A famous Sephardic family over a thousand years old. The pedigree of the family goes back to the heads of the Babylonian diaspora such as Rabbi Sheshet and Rabbi Chisda. It is said that the patriarchs of the family decided about 1000 years ago to immigrate from the Provence region to Barcelona. In Barcelona, thanks to their connections and high status, they assisted in the foundation of the Aragon principality at the beginning of the 11th century and the Barcelona principality at the end of the same century. Among the descendants of the family were the famous bankers Francisco and Diogo Mendes Benbenishti. They were the directors of a powerful trading company and a world-renowned bank whose agents operated in Europe and in the Middle East. After the death of the brother Francisco, his wife Doña Gracia replaced him in the business. It is said that in her time she was considered the wealthiest woman in the world.

## Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677)

A Dutch philosopher of Portuguese descent. He is one of the early thinkers who brought forth the idea of the Age of Enlightenment, and one of the first critics in the field of modern



Biblical criticism. He is considered the cornerstone of the Dutch Golden Age, thanks to his deep and revolutionary ideas about the world and the concept of God. His ideas were affected by the rationalist movement that was popular in Europe at the time, and indicated a holistic, unified world-view, composed of God's intelligence which is discovered through natural phenomena and processes.

## Moses Montefiore (1784-1885)



A British financier, banker, and philanthropist. He served as the sheriff of London and donated large sums of money to develop the industry, education, and health of the Jews in

the Middle East. In addition, he built the first Jewish neighborhood, Mishkenot Sha'ananim, outside the walls of the old city of Jerusalem.

## David Ricardo (1772-1823)

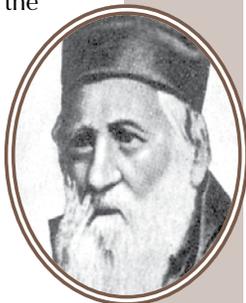


A British economist of Portuguese descent. He is known as one of the four most influential classical economists, along with Adam Smith, Thomas

Malthus and James Mill.

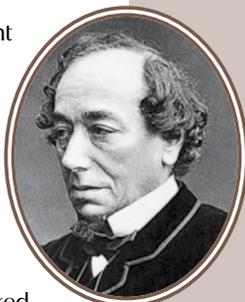
## Judah Alkalai (1798-1878)

A native of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. He is considered one of the visionaries of Zionism, along with Herzl. While serving as the educator and cantor of the Jewish community Semlin (known today Zemun), in Serbia, he began writing his essay *Minchat Yehudah (The Offering of Judah)*. The book deals with the connection to the founding texts of the religious Zionist movement. Shimon Leib Herzl, a Hungarian Jew who served as a temporary beadle in the synagogue in Semlin, was greatly affected by Alkalai's theories, which discuss the process of the salvation of the Jewish people through philanthropy in the Holy Land. He asked his son Jakob Herzl, a Hungarian businessman, to print Judah Alkalai's book. Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl, Jakob Herzl's son, was greatly affected by the ideas in the book, and they spurred him to his vision of the Jewish state, which was a reflection of Alkalai's ideas.



## Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1884)

A British politician of Sephardic descent who twice served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. He wrote novels and fiction during that time which are still read today. He worked to establish the modern conservative party which exists to this day and serves as the oldest political party in the UK.



## Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl (1860-1904)

A Hungarian journalist, political activist and writer, considered the founder of the modern Zionist movement. Herzl founded the World Zionist Organization and worked to promote Jewish immigration to the land of Israel in an attempt to create a Jewish state. He is considered the visionary of the state of Israel.



## Daniel Mendoza (1764-1836)

A legendary British boxer of Sephardic origin. He held the position of the British Island champion for four consecutive years between 1792-1795. He was considered a boxing artist of his time and became known as an intelligent man who developed a defense strategy that greatly surpassed his generation. He was among the pioneers who helped develop the "self-defense" method which he described in his book *The Art of Boxing*. It is said that when Mendoza became an admired London hero at the end of the 18th century, he managed to raise the status of London Jews who were suffering from severe antisemitism at the time.



## Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)

A Frenchman, the son of a Sephardic *converso* mother. He is considered one of the most prominent and influential philosophers of the French Renaissance period, and served as a jurist, politician, humanist, and writer of many essays. Even though he was not a scientist, he habitually conducted observations in the realm of psychology. His thoughts and ideas covered such topics as the reasons behind human fear, motivation, happiness, experience, and activating and educating children. His ideas are considered modern and enlightened in that he refused to recognize the old books as an authority for educating children. Instead, he argued in his writings that children should be educated according to the educators' knowledge about them and familiarity with them.



## Rabbi Isaac Luria- Ha'Ari (1534-1572)

Considered the father of Jewish mysticism as we know it, which is also known as "Lurianic Kabbalah." He shaped the world of Kabbalah when he lived in Safed in the 16th century, along with his students who were known as *Gurei Ha'Ari* (cubs of the lion). He viewed the world as a gnostic — meaning, a godly identity is hidden in an impure material world. According to him, people must



study the secrets of the Torah and thus recognize the reality of the Creator and elevate themselves spiritually to His supreme world. Moreover, he believed that only by a life of asceticism can people achieve eternal life and purity.

## Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) (1138-1204)

Perhaps the most magnificent and revered Jewish scholar of the last millennium and beyond. He is known among non-Jews as a great polymath and philosopher who espoused a rationalistic Aristotelian philosophy, in addition to being a tireless researcher interested



in astronomy, theology, mathematics, and science. A relief in his image is carved in the United States House of Representatives, marking him as one of the 23 greatest lawmakers in history.

## Haym Salomon (1740-1785)

A Polish businessman of Sephardic origin who is known as “the financier of the American Revolution.” He gained renown as the chief broker who financed the Continental Army, headed by George Washington, the first US president, during the American Revolutionary War against the British between the years 1775–1783.



## Other Famous Descendants of Note

**Luis de Torres**, Christopher Columbus’ interpreter on his trip to America.

**Mustafa Kemal Atatürk**, the father of the modern Turkish nation.

**Maurice Gaguine**; the doctor and rabbi of the Sephardic community in Manchester.

**Rodrigo Lopez**, the personal doctor of Queen Elizabeth I.

**Primo Levi**, author.

**David Guetta**, musician and composer.

**Simon Sebag Montefiore**, author.

... And many others.

---

*Just a taste of greatness. More entries to be continued in the Autumn/Winter 2023 HaLapid ...and the list goes on.* 🇮🇱

## Aristede de Sousa Mendes Given Honor



A plaza in Jerusalem’s Kiryat Havel neighborhood has been named after the famed Portuguese diplomat who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust. Named a true hero posthumously following his ignominious death as a social outcast, justice has finally been done in his honor. Sousa Mendes was the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux, France in 1940 who created a safe haven and forged false visas to an estimated 10,000 Jewish refugees who tried to flee France as the Nazis closed in. Risking all and going without sleep for days, his courage saved generations.

Mendes was already recognized with a monument erected in Lisbon in 2020. The new monument in Israel with a sculpted bust can serve as a reminder to many that their families survived because of him. Read the entire article about his life and tribute at the *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, “Square Named for Diplomat Who Saved Jewish Lives.” [www.jta.org/2022/11/16/israel/portuguese](http://www.jta.org/2022/11/16/israel/portuguese). 🇮🇱

## OF INTEREST

# Jewish Population Loss Due to The Expulsion

SCJS board member Beth Chernoff recently went on a 2022 Jewish Heritage Alliance tour of Portugal. She asked a question at the very end:

“So, how many Jews did we lose due to the Expulsion?”

The traveling scholar, Rabbi Dr. Peter Tarlow replied that the Knesset in Israel actually did a study. They estimated there would be between 20-80 million additional Jews today if not for the Sephardic Expulsion experience. Tarlow himself, puts the number at 40 million.

Thank you Beth, for posing this question!

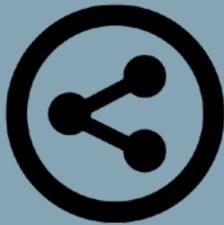
Warmest thanks for their generous gifts  
ROBIN AND BENNETT GREENSPAN FUND  
at the HOUSTON JEWISH COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

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THE MARTIN SOSIN-STRATTON-PETIT  
FOUNDATION, CALIFORNIA

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ANDREÉ BROOKS CHARITABLE GIFT FUND

.....  
ART BENVENISTE

.....  
AND MANY THANKS FOR ALL THE  
ANONYMOUS CONTRIBUTIONS



## We've Entered the Media Age (Better Late Than Never!)

Since the addition of our new social media administrator, SCJS member Georgina (Esther) Garza de Leon, our traffic on Facebook increased by 711% — *in the first week* — thanks to fresh and steady posts!



Another spellbinding story from Claudia Hagadus Long.

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*El Paso*

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# Weaving Jewish Beliefs

— *Shaar Hashamaim* —

## Guarding Jewish Traditions in Guatemala

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RIFKA COOK

I went to Guatemala on July 3, 2022. Organizing a trip requires a lot of preparation and planning, starting with deciding where and when to go, where to stay, where to eat, whom to meet, and contacting people at your destination. For this trip, I planned to do some touring but also to chat informally with members of the *Shaar Hashamaim* community to learn more about how they built their own Jewish congregation.



The Shaar Hashamaim Community Synagogue  
small-but-mighty membership posed in front of the Aron Hakodesh.

Guatemala is home to the Jewish congregation *Shaar Hashamaim* (Gate of Heaven) whose members had not been fully aware of their Jewish roots.

The journey of the community *Shaar Hashamaim* started approximately 10 to 15 years ago when a group of men gathered together and recognized that they all shared the same instinctual feeling that something critical was missing in their life. They were being inexorably drawn in a specific spiritual direction. By 2014, these men started a Jewish study group which in 2018 developed into an actual religious community.

At the beginning, this group was led by Juan Rodas. An emissary of Shavei Israel, Rabbi Shimon, with the cooperation of Rabbi Birimbaum, designated the role of community leader to the hands of Fernando Flores, now the current president of the community. All members are originally from Guatemala. When I asked Fernando whose idea it was to build this community, he answered,



“It was *Hashem’s*. We are just servants doing what *Hashem* shows us. The Jewish soul (*neshama*) that we share, is responding to the still, small voice encouraging our return to the traditions and ways of our forefathers and mothers.” Rabbi Shimon proposed a name for the community in March 2018. This name, *Shaar Hashamaim*, was chosen and embraced immediately and enthusiastically by the entire community.

The members of this community grew up in Christian families but always felt that something was missing from their religious life. During their journey to find this missing piece, they exposed themselves to different religious denominations such as the Evangelical Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Messianic Church. They stayed in each of these religious groups for a few years, then decided it was not for them. Each person told me a similar story when I first met them online in June 2020 while teaching Hebrew classes on Zoom. They did not feel they belonged in any of those communities. When they went to a synagogue for the first time or spoke to someone Jewish, they felt they had finally found the missing piece in their

religious puzzle. They did everything that was required to become members of the Jewish people.

I arrived in Guatemala City on the afternoon of July 3. The president of *Shaar Hashamaim*, Fernando, took me to the house where I would stay. A few members of the community gave me a welcoming party. It was exciting to actually embrace the people with whom I had been communicating and teaching Hebrew online for over two years. That night, Fernando told me about the first tour I would attend the next morning with a group of 15 additional community members. We would be touring the San Juan de la Laguna village and would need to board a boat to get there.

We left the house around 5:30 a.m. During our boat trip on Lake Atitlan, we saw many volcanoes. We also passed by the mountain which inspired the character of the elephant from the book *The Little Prince*. This amazed everyone on the tour because no one knew. The lake was surrounded by many towns; I was told that in one town, San Pedro, all the street signs were written in Spanish and Hebrew!

After we arrived at San Juan de la Laguna, we went up the mountain to a viewpoint – 1,400 meters (about 4,600 feet) above sea level – and saw the entire lake and town below. The view was magnificent. It took us at least 30 minutes to climb up the mountain. Two of us got altitude



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**B**orn and raised in Venezuela, Rifka currently teaches Spanish at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

She is a 2020-2021 Fulbright US Scholar alternate candidate. Her research interests include: the Judeo-Español language and literature; Sephardi culture; crypto-Jewish cuisine; descendants of crypto-Jews within Latino-America; teaching with technology and learning styles. In addition, she is a Faculty in Residence (2017-present) and Faculty Fellow at Shepard Residence College (2009-present). She has presented and published in the United States and abroad.

Rifka agrees with Simon Silnek, who wrote:

“Working hard for something we do not care about is called stress; working hard for something we love is called passion.”

“I love teaching,” Rifka says. “I love to be with students, chat with them and work with them. This is my passion!”

**E**ach person told me a similar story...  
When they went to a synagogue for the first time... they felt they had finally found the missing piece in their religious puzzle.

sickness on the way so we only stayed at the overlook for a few minutes to take pictures. We went down the mountain quickly because we did not want anyone else on the tour to have to wait for us. Next, Fernando took us on three different brief tours of San Juan de la Laguna.

First, we went to see how local artisans dye cotton and weave cloth using looms, to create shirts, pants, dresses, and more. >>>





Second, we saw how workers convert cacao seeds into chocolate by grinding them on a stone. Finally, we went to see how they harvest honey from bees and learned about the different types of honey the community makes. For each brief tour, a different young woman explained the processes to us.

After this tour, we returned to the dock around 3:35 p.m. to take a boat. This was a bad idea, because at exactly 3 p.m. every day, a phenomenon called the *Xocomil* begins. During this natural phenomenon, strong winds start and last about two hours, creating extreme turbulence on the lake. Fernando was already waiting for us on the boat before 3 p.m., loudly calling us to get on the boat. As we approached, I fell and the people on the tour thought I had sprained my ankle. One of the tour members carried me the rest of the way to the boat because I could not walk. Once we were on board, the waves became stronger, causing all the people to bounce up and down in their seats. Everyone was screaming and laughing at the same time, warning those next to me not to bump into my feet. We arrived at the

port and the same person who had carried me on board carried me off the boat and set me down on a nearby stone. Fernando called his friend, a traumatologist. The doctor wanted to see an x-ray of my ankle. After assessing the injury over the phone, the doctor prescribed pain killers and told Fernando to take me to the hospital immediately.

At the hospital, Fernando stayed with me to find out what would happen and how they would treat my injury. The rest of the tour members went home. At the hospital, a COVID test was obtained and x-rays were ordered. I fractured my fibula and tore two ligaments in my ankle; I would require surgery. The operation could not be performed that night because the doctor had two surgeries

pending. Due to religious law, I could not remain overnight in a private room with a male chaperone who is not my husband. So Fernando phoned Annie, a member of the community, to stay with me throughout the night. Fernando called the community to inform them of the surgery scheduled the next morning. He also organized a chain of prayers in which each member of the community read a different chapter from the Book of Psalms during my surgery. This would help the doctor in his efforts and result in a successful procedure. The surgery was scheduled for 5:00 a.m. Anesthesia scares me more than anything, but the anesthesiologist reassured me and quelled my worries. After the operation, I stayed in the hospital for several more hours. When I returned to the house in the late afternoon, a group of people from the community was waiting for me.

I stayed in the home of one community member's deceased parents. Even though the parents of this community member had passed a year earlier, the son continued to use the services of the same nurse and maid. Both were wonderful people and helped me during my recovery. In addition, one couple from the community stayed with me the whole time. Everyone felt sorry because my time in Guatemala was spent recovering in bed. I jokingly told them that I received a special tour that no one else gets: a tour of the emergency room, the operating room, the recovery room and the doctor's office. The members of the community came to visit me every opportunity they had. When they were not able to visit, they called. I received flowers, cookies, chocolate, and other handmade gifts.

Another special experience I had with this community was celebrating Shabbat, which the Torah describes as a day of rest starting on Friday at sunset and ending on Saturday at nightfall. Jewish Law (*Halacha*) states that you must have all your food ready

for Shabbat before sunset on Friday. Thus, for the first two weeks after my injuries, the women prepared the food for Shabbat in the house where I was staying and brought some of it from the Chabad House. Annie and Liza divided all of this work between them, "from soup to nuts." The main dishes included different kinds of meat, poultry and fish. They also prepared side dishes like rice, beans, salads, and two or three desserts. They brought the plates, silverware, and all the cooking equipment from the Chabad House. Sometimes they had to make several trips to bring all the equipment. It was as much work as moving to a different house. The food they prepared was for dinner Friday night, Saturday lunch, and the traditional third meal of Shabbat (referred to as *seudat shlishit*). Early Saturday



Proud group in front of the Community Center and Synagogue.



morning they also provided a small breakfast of cereal and fresh fruit before the services. After all the food was ready, the two women set up the table where we all would eat, and also set up a different table with flowers and candles for us to light before Shabbat started. While the women did this, one of the men brought warming trays, and another man brought a large thermos with hot water for the meal. One of the men plugged in the trays and the thermos on a different table which would keep all the food warm. The house smelled wonderful! The women then lit the candles, illuminating the spirit and holiness of the Shabbat.

After everything was ready, we gathered in the living room. One of the men, Juan Gutierrez, led the service. Each person had their own *siddur* (prayer book). We all sang the hymn to welcome Shabbat, known as *Lecha Dodi*. Juan did the evening reading in Hebrew in a booming voice. After the service ended, I asked him if he would read more slowly when he read the morning prayers. I told him the break-neck tempo of his

reading reminded me of many of the people where I come from who (in my opinion) pray too fast. After we finished praying, we all greeted each other with *Shabbat Shalom* and kissed each other on the cheek, as per Sephardic custom. We sat at the dining table and each man had a cup filled with wine for the *kiddush* (blessing over the wine). When Juan said the *kiddush*, he kept the other two men in mind because

**I experienced something that was worth more than anything you may find surfing the Internet: the Jewish soul of this community.**

otherwise each man must say the *kiddush* himself. Then, while facing their wives, all the men as a group read the hymn honoring the women, known as *Eshet Chayil* (Woman of Valor). This is a custom in Jewish tradition where the men honor their wives for all their preparations for the Shabbat. Afterward, we washed our hands with a special blessing. Since I could not get up from my wheelchair, two people brought me a bowl filled with water, a towel and cup to wash my hands. Then Juan recited *hamotzi* (blessing of the bread) and we started to eat. Annie kindly brought me the food. Following Kosher laws, we did not mix fish and meat on the same plate. If someone wanted to eat fish and then



*Worship space inside Shaar Hashamaim Community Synagogue.*

meat, they changed plates and dinnerware between the two servings.

The first two Shabbats were difficult because I was in a wheelchair and in pain. I had to be carried into the dining room in my wheelchair, and could not last for the entire dinner. For the third Shabbat, I was able to walk with two people helping me. I taught them the song *Yom zeh mechubad*. I added *Too Too* in the chorus to make the song more enjoyable. Everything about these celebrations reminded me why Shabbat is so special to me. In this world of disagreement, assimilation and uncertainty, the traditions and the sharing of the Shabbat with the community, made me proud to be a Jew.

I traveled to Guatemala to tour the country and learn how the *Shaar Hashamaim* community became who they are today. Although I was only able to tour for a single day, I experienced something that was worth more than anything you may find surfing the Internet: the Jewish soul of this community. The Torah commands us to “love thy neighbor as thyself;” you cannot think only about your own interests but must take care of those around you. When I think of this commandment, I recall the strong bonds that hold the *Shaar Hashamaim* community together. When I heard that the community came together and read Psalms for the success of my surgery, I felt spiritually connected to them.

It hurts me to learn that some Orthodox Jewish synagogues do not accept the members of this community. I do not understand why. These community members are Jewish; they live as Orthodox Jews. They follow Jewish law and embrace tradition. What kind of Jews are we if we reject another Jew? I thank the entire community of *Shaar Hashamaim* for their generous help through this difficult time. I will never forget this wonderful experience. 🙏



# Saint Augustine Jewish Historical Society Celebrates 10 Years of “Sleuthing!”

.....  
RABBI MERRILL SHAPIRO



**K**eepon sleuthing!” was how Jane Gerber, PhD, professor of Jewish history and director of the Institute for Sephardic Studies at the City University of New York shared her encouragement with the St. Augustine (Florida) Jewish Historical Society (SAJHS). Her comment was offered as a conclusion to her advice on the quest for the first Jew in what would become the United States of America. The Society, looking back as it prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary, with Dr. Gerber’s guidance and encouragement, has achieved one of its founding goals – ascertaining that Antonio Martinez Carvajal, descendant of Jews, was the chief harbor pilot in St. Augustine as early as the fall of 1565.

Antonio Martinez Carvajal of Alcantara, Spain, appears on a list recovered by Dr. Eugene Lyon from the *Archivo General de Indias*, “Justicia 817, No. 5.” The list is prefaced by the statement:

“St. Augustine, 15 October 1565; Hernando de Baeza, Notary, testifies as to the statement of Pedro Menendez de Aviles on the succor of 300 royal troops at 150 reales apiece: I, the Adelantado Pedro Menendez, certify that the 300 soldiers which, in June of ’65, came with me in my company to Florida for the account of His Majesty, and each of them... 150 reales from my funds, which I should be pre-paid, are the following and thus I swear to God on this cross:

“The 241st name on that list is “Antonio de Carvajal, citizen of Alcantara.”

Interestingly, Christobal de Carvajal, citizen of Lebrija Spain is listed in “The Company of Hernando de Uruna,” a company formed in Cadiz, Spain in 1566 as also being present at St. Augustine. Finally, Pedro de Carvajal, a soldier from Seville, Spain, is included in a muster of men who came on either the ship *Santiago Menor* or *Espiritu Santo* in September, 1578.

Copies of the correspondence of Antonio Martinez Carvajal are held by the University of Florida’s George Smathers Libraries’ Digital Collections. In one letter from Havana, Cuba dated November 3, 1579, Carvajal writes to King Philip II of Spain stating that “we set out for St. Augustine and by reason of a tempest, one of the two frigates we had was lost... the General and the rest of the people were saved

**P**resident of the St. Augustine

Jewish Historical Society, and former SCJS board member, Rabbi Shapiro studied electrical engineering at Cornell University and New Jersey Institute of Technology; then Jewish studies and education at the Jewish Theological

Seminary of America and Ohio State University. He served as a graduate research assistant at Melton Research Centre for Jewish Education in the Diaspora at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has also been a *Yad Vashem* scholar at Israel's Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. He was an instructor of Jewish history at the University of Central Florida, and a frequent Road Scholar and currently an OLLI Educator at the University of North Florida. Shapiro served congregations in Columbus, Ohio, Orlando, Florida and Richmond, Virginia. He is the immediate past national president of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He and his wife Robyn live in Palm Coast, Florida and have two daughters and five grandchildren.

"Research in St. Augustine on the first descendants of Jews to come to what would become the United States of America, led me to recognize that those first Jews could not be understood without understanding the nature of crypto-Judaism," said Rabbi Shapiro. "Dr. Abe Lavender's interest in our research here in St. Augustine only served to feed my interest and the interest of many of us associated with the St. Augustine Jewish Historical Society."



**RABBI MERRILL SHAPIRO**  
Palm Coast, Florida  
[www.sajhs.com](http://www.sajhs.com)

from the wreck of said frigate, whence he went by land to St. Augustine." Ultimately, Carvajal sought reimbursement of expenses from the king.

Roger Louis Martínez-Dávila is a professor of history at the University of Colorado and holds a PhD in medieval European history and global medieval history from the University of Texas at Austin and a master's of public policy from the University of California-Berkeley. His monograph, *Creating Conversos: The Carvajal-Santa María Family in Early Modern Spain* (2018), is published by the University of Notre Dame Press. Through his research, Dr. Martínez has assured the "sleuths" of the St. Augustine Jewish Historical Society that "by 1410, due to extensive intermarriage with the *converso* Santa María family," all Carvajals were themselves descendants of Jews – crypto-Jews, *anusim*.

Thus the St. Augustine Jewish Historical Society has achieved one of its earliest goals – to identify descendants of Jews in Florida – 42 years prior to the establishment of Jamestown, Virginia, 55 years prior to the arrival of the *Mayflower* at Plymouth Rock, and 89 years before Jews came to New Amsterdam!

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The mission of the St. Augustine Jewish Historical Society is to promote greater knowledge and understanding of the Jewish experience in St. Augustine, Florida within a broad cultural context from the founding of the city in 1565 to the present. Check out our website at [www.sajhs.com](http://www.sajhs.com).

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# What About the Grandfathers in My Lineage?

While most who know me are aware of my decades-long search for my maternal Jewish lineage, the biggest kept secret has been the Jewish ancestors from my paternal relatives. The whole time I was looking for my mother's side and going back and forth to Spain and Portugal, I was hyper-focused on finding one grandmother after another, yet my father kept telling me that to find the Jews on his side, I did not have to dig farther than his grandmother — who knew she was Jewish — and her last name was Sigler.

I continued to document my maternal side and make sure that for all time, it would be documented as a crypto-Jewish family and did not give much more thought to what my dad said — until I did a DNA test. The test on my dad, my mom and me was a pivotal point in my research. Mom had the expected high percentage of Sephardic markers, yet Dad had an unusually high percentage of Ashkenaz and this came as quite a shock. I know that my grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather were all born in Key West, Florida and the Canary Islands, and Cuba for centuries before that. I had researched their line and went back as far as the 1100s and the Guanche Indians. In fact, the last Guanche princess in the Canary Islands was in my paternal lineage as was one of the most famous kings.

Much study has been done on these original inhabitants of the Canary Islands. The most common belief is that they originated from North Africa and were a tall, warrior-like, aboriginal people who dominated the island. My father's roots on one of his lines clearly came through their first leader and on down to Maria Medina, the last princess. My last name is Medina as well, so much of this lineage fell

## The Tale of Don Juan Sigler De Espinosa of Cordoba

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GENIE MILGROM

into place. It was commonly known that when the Jews that were in hiding during the Inquisition fled to the Canary Islands they intermarried with the last remaining Guanche Indians. I was able to follow a lineage to those marriages but alas, they were not Ashkenaz and I clearly have that DNA as well.

I had researched my dad's maternal line back to the 1500s and Nancy, France. They had gone from France to Cartagena, Colombia and then to Costa Rica. In Cartagena they were caught in the Inquisition before they fled to Costa Rica where my grandmother was born; a strong French lineage — no Ashkenaz there;

some of my cousins tested and all were Sephardic. So the search was on for this high level of Ashkenaz DNA. My dad gave me huge legal files that he brought from Cuba and explained to me that there was an immense parcel of land on the sea wall of Cuba that had been given to the family by the king of Spain in the 1600s. It had been appropriated by Cuban national authorities since the 1700s and the Medina-Sigler family had been fighting for the land for centuries. The files I held included all the legal documentation spanning centuries.



*The Medina family crest, two peacocks facing one another, are found on many buildings in Cordoba, Spain.*

My father impressed upon me that I should take up the Medina family battle for these lands that sit in Cuba, now a communist country. I knew I was not going to tackle this, but read through the files and found the Sigler involvement. That led me to research the Sigler lineage of my great-grandmother, thinking perhaps that was my Ashkenaz link. I was able to research and discovered that a branch of the Siglers traveled from Spain to Jamaica while it was under Spanish rule. They lived there for several generations until the British took over in 1655 and then they left for Cuba. Upon arriving in Cuba, they had rights to the famous lands of the kings – which was what is today, practically the whole sea frontage of Cuba – and made their lives there. I opted to continue searching further back leading me to Cordoba, Spain and Juan Sigler de Espinosa.

It seems that Juan Sigler was the page to Leopold of the Hapsburgs from Austria who was ruling in Cordoba, Spain at the time (1541-1557), and further research shows that his past was a mystery. But because he was a page – and Leopold was known to mainly assign pages to his court that were his illegitimate sons or other family members – the research took me to an affair he had while still in Austria with a German woman named Elizabeth. My working theory is that

Leopold and Elizabeth were Juan’s parents and Elizabeth must have been a German Jewish woman. Leopold, himself a Hapsburg, was also an illegitimate son. Juan Sigler de Espinosa grew to be a wealthy and important gentleman in Cordoba at the time and had a myriad of buildings and castles that he emblazoned with the family emblem of two peacocks facing each other. These buildings today, and the palace where he lived, are a five-star hotel known as the *Casa de la Juderia* or the House of The Jewish Quarter. All of his buildings in Cordoba still bear these huge stone peacocks as the family emblem.

From this research, I understood that the lands given to my family probably came from these Hapsburg kings for services rendered. The Ashkenaz DNA is still a mystery, but there is a basis for the thesis that they were Jews because the homes are still today in what was then the Jewish Quarter.

In the end, my dad was right: the lineage from his side was very clear cut – with a few swerves – and the fact that he always told us we descended from royalty (which is a common description used by descendants of crypto-Jews). Today, I recreated this family crest in mosaic tiles over my front door as proof-positive of my paternal lineage and the last piece in my family puzzle. 🧩



Genie recreated her family crest in mosaic tiles over her front door as proof-positive of her paternal lineage and the last piece in her family puzzle.



**GENIE MILGROM**  
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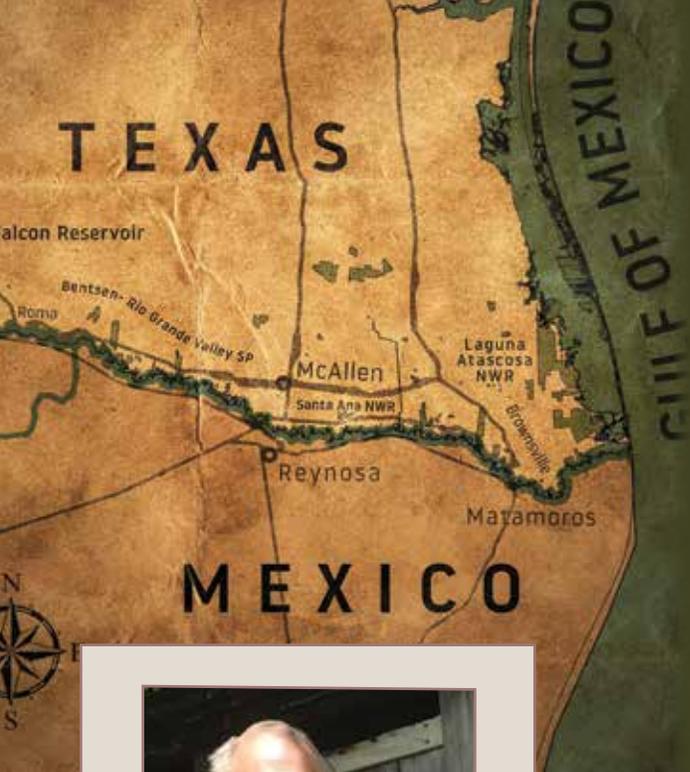
Genie Milgrom was born in Havana, Cuba into a Roman Catholic family of Spanish ancestry. In an unparalleled work of genealogy, she fully documented her unbroken maternal lineage 22 generations going back as far as 1405 to Pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal. She traveled extensively to Fermoselle, the village of her ancestors in the Zamora region of Spain while doing field research on the past Jews of the area. She is past president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Miami, president of Tarbut Sefarad-Fermoselle in Spain, and past president of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies.

She is the author of *My 15 Grandmothers*, *How I Found My 15 Grandmothers – A Step By Step Guide*, *Pyre to Fire*, and her latest book, *Recipes of My 15 Grandmothers*. The books have won the 2015 and 2018 Latino Author Book Awards. She also writes for several online sites including [www.esefarad.com](http://www.esefarad.com) and the *Journal of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian Crypto-Jewry*.

She has spoken at the Knesset in Israel and speaks around the world bringing awareness to the topic of Jews returning from the Inquisition.

Her work has been showcased in the *Jerusalem Post*, *The Miami Herald* and other publications around the world. She was awarded the State of Florida Genealogy Award for her outstanding achievements and advances in her pioneering work in genealogy. Most recently, she was awarded the Medal of the Four Sephardic Synagogues for her ongoing work in bringing this heritage to light.

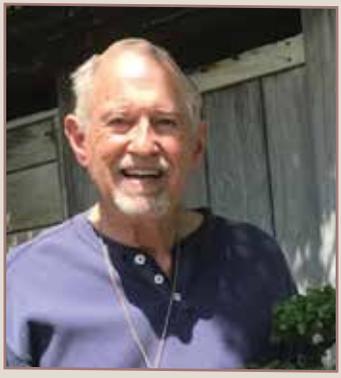




OUR FAMILIES  
OUR SECRETS

# Crypto-Jewish Confederates Along the Lower Rio Grande

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CARLOS MONTALVO LARRALDE



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**C**arlos 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*.

*More about the crypto-Jewish legacy along the Lower Rio Grande.*

**D**uring the American Civil War 1861-1865, Sephardic Jews took a role in the turbulence that tore the country apart. A prominent lawyer, diplomat and Jewish activist, Simon Wolf estimated that some 8,400 Jews joined the Union and 10,000 Jews were in the Confederate forces. He documented Civil War Jewish soldiers in his 1895 book, *The American Jew as Patriot, Soldier and Citizen*, pointing out that Jews fought on both sides. Six Jewish Union soldiers received the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery. Today, the symbol of the Confederate Latinos struggle is the attractive tin-type ambrotype of Maximilian Cabanas, a boy from Texas. Enlisted in the Confederate army, he was captured by Union soldiers and died in a northern prison camp at the age of 16. Cabanas was typical of numerous boys who rushed into service on both sides of the war. Sadly, many perished.

Known as the “Brains of the Confederacy,” the Sephardic Jew Judah Benjamin was a United States senator from Louisiana before the war. As a wealthy plantation owner, he had a reputation as a humane slave-owner. At first he believed that freeing the slaves would lead to murder and rape. As the war prolonged, he advocated freeing slaves as Confederate soldiers. Prominent in the Confederate administration, Benjamin became the Attorney General in 1861, later Secretary of War, and then Secretary of State. His image was on the 1862 series of the Confederate \$2 bill.



*Ambrotype of Maximilian Cabanas.*

Along the Lower Rio Grande in Texas, three fierce Confederate officers, Refugio, Cristobal and Santos, all soldiers from the 33rd Texas Cavalry Regiment, were known as the Benavides brothers. When they could, Refugio and Cristobal hoped to impress people by being plain and down-to-earth. The popular Santos received a citation from the Confederate Texas Legislature for “vigilance, energy and gallantry.” By temperament, Santos envisioned enemies everywhere. Given his belligerent personality and character, he may have been right.

These officers dressed in attractive gray uniforms that turned tan or “butternut” with wear. Like other Confederate soldiers, they displayed a silver star on their hats that symbolized Texas. All along the river, most of their combat tactics consisted of hit-and-run operations: striking Federal outposts, destroying equipment, and capturing Union troops. A few Latino Confederate personnel carried their *sabanas*, or prayer capes, a habit traced back to crypto-Jews in Colonial Mexico.

The Confederacy retained support from resourceful Latinos who believed that American foreign policy violated the Treaty of Guadalupe, drafted in 1848 to end the Mexican War. It also guaranteed to protect Latino property and civil rights. In 1861, they gambled that the Confederate authority would see them as citizens with any form of discrimination. A portion of these Latinos had no interest in slavery and had no first-hand knowledge of the Deep South. Several got as far as New Orleans. Most Latinos concluded that the Confederacy must abolish slavery and recruit blacks as soldiers, which Southern authorities disapproved.

## My Connections

The Benavides officers are part of my crypto-Jewish family tree, descendants of Tomás Sanchez and a religious woman. As a crafty captain in New Spain, he established Laredo, Texas in 1755. The scholar Seymour Liebman wrote about the average crypto-Jew, “He withstood religious assimilation because of his inner dedication to the faith of his forefathers. Judaism was his religious tradition. And veneration for tradition was embedded in him.”

A Lower Rio Grande belief documented by the scholar David M. Gitlitz, a Texas army ate *empanadas*, a pastry filled with meat, cheese, vegetables and spices. Before going to war, they ate and prayed to the “great God of Israel.” To aid the deception, Christian prayers consisted of names such as Jesus and Mary. A variety of these prayers applied to Friday, with only whole candles lit before dark, while facing east toward Jerusalem. Gitlitz emphasized that these crypto-Jews used candles instead of oil lamps.

On this occasion, “like most Sephardic Jews, they highlighted the purity of their families and

descent from the Judean royalty of the times of King David,” as Liebman noted. A family oral history revealed that the Benavides soldiers cherished a prayer that consisted of touching the mouth, then the chest, then the forehead, and pointing to heaven. Gitlitz exclaimed that the prayer consisted of these words, “May the words of my heart rise from my mind to God.” The Benavides Confederate officers had a relative, Pedro de Esparza, a Catholic cleric, active in Lampasos, Nuevo Leon, during the 1830s. Liebman underlined that the rule of sending one son into the Church was common among New Spain Jewry. In rural areas, they applied a peculiar custom of smearing blood on their door posts at Passover, a precedent for numerous decades.

Cousins of the Benavides brothers, Carlos Esparza, a Confederate rancher, farmer and merchant from Brownsville, Texas, kept in touch with them. All of them associated with Roman Garcia, a native of the area. He owned steamboats that sailed up and down the Lower Rio Grande. As a tycoon active in the lucrative shipping and import-export business, he cherished his Confederate passport dated 1862 (which I now have) and which also was a license for his enterprise. I am a direct descendant of Esparza and Garcia.

These enterprising men wore wide-brimmed sombreros giving them the appearance of Southern farmers. They retained a discrete, quiet, understated set of manners and appearances in a world that required austerity and simplicity in all things due to the American Civil War and the French intervention in Mexico. These entrepreneurs lived in solid comfort in a world of daily risk. To enjoy it, they had to muddle through conditions that could easily dissolve their prized

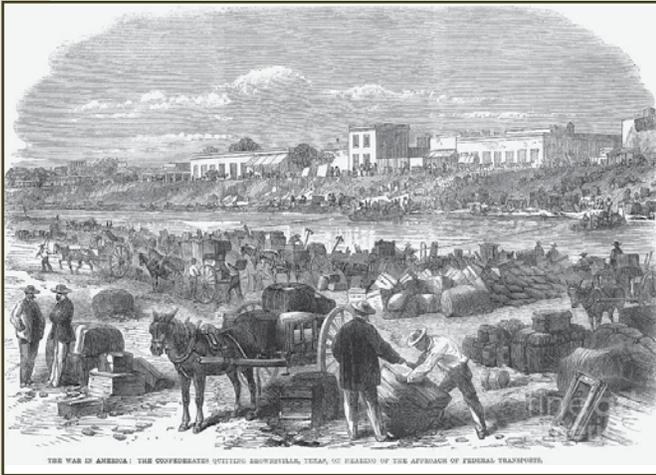
### THE HISPANIC CONFEDERACY OF THE RIO GRANDE DURING THE CIVIL WAR OF 1861-1865



**COLONEL SANTOS BENAVIDES, CAPTAIN REFUGIO BENAVIDES,  
AND CAPTAIN CRISTOBAL BENAVIDES**

*Photographs Courtesy of the J. T. Canales Collection*





*"The War in America: The Confederates quitting Brownsville, Texas on hearing of the approach of Federal troops."*

values of trustworthiness, predictability, thrift, calculation, and determination. Behaving like most capitalists of any age, they were attentive at all times to market values. Getting along with politicians and military officers was essential. They could never argue or complain. Instead, they flattered the egos of those whom they saw as assets to their commerce.

Other crypto-Jewish Latino Confederates made parts of Texas prosperous, protecting the region from the ravages of a poverty-stricken Confederate South. By April 1863, inflation in the bleak South faced raised bread prices that caused further agony. Most of Texas was spared from this upheaval. Then, in November 1863, the Federals captured Brownsville, cutting the vital route of the cotton trade to Matamoros, Mexico that kept the Confederacy alive. Writer Tom Lea called the city the "back door of the Confederacy."

In desperation, Confederate troops and Latinos took control of Brownsville again without causing defilement. The rest of the Confederacy eastern ports were systematically sealed by the Union Navy. Resourceful Latinos, mostly crypto-Jews, made certain that European and Mexican goods poured from Matamoros into a blighted South. As the scholars J. Lee and Lillian J. Stambaugh wrote, "Business conditions in both Bagdad (a small port near Brownsville that no longer exists) were especially good while owners of skills and lighters had a daily income of from \$20 to \$40." Even keen crypto-Jews had saloons and hotels that operated at full capacity, especially in Bagdad. Latino merchants and traveling salesmen had an advantage to avoid worthless Confederate money by only using Mexican silver and gold coins and Union "greenbacks" to protect and foster industry.

Esparza and Garcia aided Union and Confederate forces against each other. They upheld the crypto-Jew Juan N. Cortina, who was governor of the State of Tamaulipas, Mexico. These men realized

that as long as the Confederate war persisted, a wide-range of opportunities provided Latinos profitable markets. Cortina needed to dominate Tamaulipas to stabilize the area since Mexico was invaded by restless French troops. Esparza, Garcia and other politicians and merchants hired spies to understand what these military forces intended to do from day-to-day. Head of a political civil rights movements to stimulate the rights of Latinos and other minorities, Cortina lasted until 1876.

Esparza was also head of the spy network. The Texas Ranger Leander H. McNelly probably referred to Esparza when he said, "The chief man is owner of a ranch, or a superintendent... He is a civil officer... He sends an alarm to one ranch, and it is sent from ranch to ranch in every direction."

To supply accurate data on his implacable enemies to Cortina, Esparza engaged keen and charismatic women as spies. They were more effective than the feared, reckless, pompous and brutal male investigators. Cortina and Esparza had no use for women who were obedient housewives or social ornaments. Instead, talented ladies such as the famous Elena Villarreal de Farrer were successful agents. They stayed mysterious due to their spying skills, being small in stature and equipped with piercing eyes like Elsa, a crypto-Jew near Laredo. Because of their efficacy, Cortina was informed of any situation in less than 15 minutes. When they could, these sharp females gathered data for the Confederacy since it was of interest to Cortina and his supporters to keep the Confederacy alive.



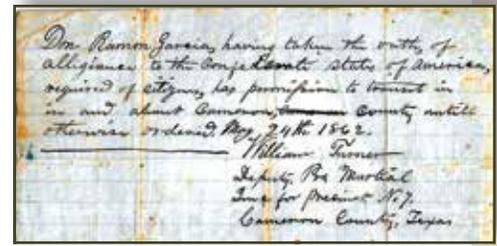
Elena, Elsa and other intelligent and informed spies knew that after the data was gathered, it had to be analyzed and interpreted which could be difficult. With caution, their task was tracking Union agents or sympathizers. At times they had difficulty verifying reports by scouting or by other methods. Especially in saloons, these women devised specific ways to make soldiers, politicians and diplomats talk. To their delight, they discovered some troublesome men who talked too much or had an inability to keep secrets.

These spies used Confederate currency minted by the Confederate leadership in Richmond, Virginia, and local currencies issued by Southern states and local banks. This money created inflation which kept it worthless. To Cortina and Esparza, the useless cash became coded messages to communicate with other Cortinistas and allies. A \$1 note revealed that all was well for the moment. A \$2 buck alerted to be aware of a dangerous politician. A \$5 bill affirmed that the current area was not safe from the enemy. A \$10 bill designated that ammunition was needed. A \$50 buck defined that the enemy lacked sufficient troops. A \$100 note termed that the enemy had numerous soldiers and were well-armed. If a \$100 bill came with one or two different Confederate \$100 bucks, it revealed that the enemy also had other back-troops in another area that could create grave danger. At some unusual events, these notes had exclusive codes.

A destructive Texas army required medical drugs to attend the wounded on the battle field. Smallpox, yellow fever, cholera, and measles remained a threat. Confederate officer Cristobal Benavides was afraid that the *curanderas* (female herbal healers) would be rejected by Confederate inspectors, or seen as witches by hostile Anglo-Saxon Christian churches in Texas. Instead, most Confederate officials in Richmond, capital of the Confederacy and leading manufacturing center, treasured women for their medical talents as the constant “systematic guerrilla warfare that soon forced the Federals to the Texas coast,” the Stambaugh affirmed.

The demoralizing war required most *curanderas* to dress in mannish clothing while carrying pistols for protection. They aided the wounded at the Battle of Palmito Ranch, regarded as the final conflict of the Civil War. The ferocious fighting took place on May 12 and 13, 1865 on the banks of the Rio Grande, east of Brownsville. The Confederate Army won and Santos Benavides took a major role in it. But the bloody clash took place a month after the Civil War ceased when the Confederate government signaled the inevitable end at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865.

Brimming with enthusiasm, Cristobal and his brothers appreciated that the Confederate administration befriended *curanderas* with their medical talents. These women reflected their rural background and appeared plain in drab dress. As the war persisted, Cristobal saw how desperate Confederate officials elevated medical females, such as Alabama’s Juliet Opie Hopkins, for attending to wounded



*“Don Ramon Garcia, having taken the oath of allegiance to the Confederate States of America, required of citizens, has permission to transit in and about Cameron County until otherwise ordered. May 24th 1862. William Turner Deputy By Martial Temp for President N.Y. Cameron County, Texas.”*

Alabama soldiers. State officials printed her image on the Confederate Alabama state currency in the 1863 series, such as the 25 cent note and on the 50 cent note. Cristobal hoped the *curanderas* would be honored the same way in Texas. But this state produced regional limited currency while the Confederate regime was quickly depleted and unable to produce coins. Even the dire Washington, DC leadership faced the same problem and was forced to print paper money.

An asset to the *curanderas*, the Lower Rio Grande was blessed that Mexico provided bundles of medicinal herbs, roots, leaves, bark, and berries that controlled most diseases. The effectiveness of these herbs were documented in the *Badianus Codex*, an Aztec reference book of herbal medicines created in 1552. At that moment, Cristobal saw that the many deaths caused by Lincoln’s extensive naval blockade to the South could have been prevented and much needed medicines could have been provided. He befriended numerous *curanderas* who had these medical bundles to reassure those in despair from pain and wounds.

Confederate officers like Refugio Benavides knew well that small battle wounds could create deadly conditions due to a serious lack of anti-infection

Did you know...?

El Paso ranks 5th in the nation with the largest proportion of the Hispanic population.



El Paso

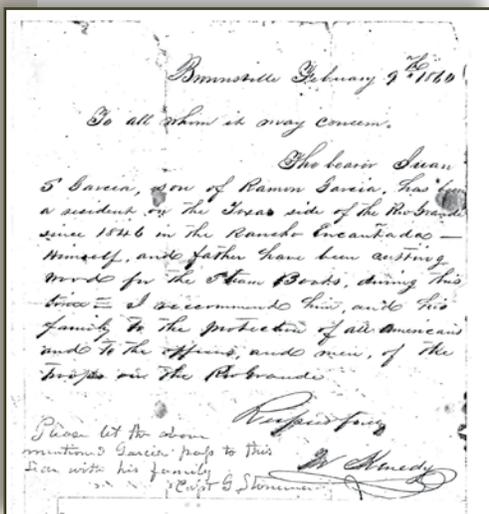
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remedies. He discovered from a *curandera* that honey and a paste of onions could prevent infections in wounds. Refugio never forgot that one of these *curanderas* saved him from a deadly fever with remedies handed down from generation-to-generation.

As the Civil War persisted, Refugio stumbled across vigorous *curanderas* who gathered medical supplies and lugged them to the battlefields. With their medicine chest strapped to their side, they rode on horseback to reach wounded soldiers, lying helplessly on the ground, moaning for water. They gave water and said prayers if asked. These women uttered chants and blessings, some from the Old Testament. At times, these *curanderas* saw the annoying buzzing of flies over the stench of decaying flesh. Some startling revelations came to light when a few wounded or deceased soldiers turned out to be females who concealed their gender. Some kept their secret as long as they could.

Casualties generated misery and Refugio had to be the bearer of news to families that they lost sons and fathers. Another grim situation arose when troops were crippled in battle. Either way, the toll on families was steeper, especially children whose eyes swelled with tears over the loss of their fathers or other relatives.

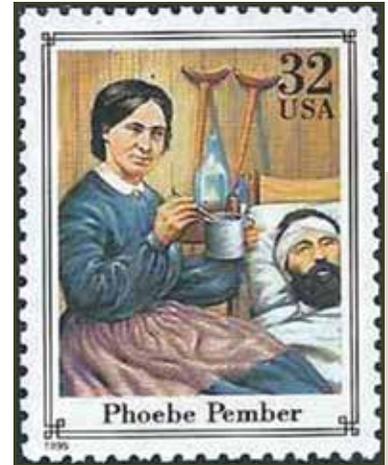
Refugio's brother Cristobal took every precaution to avoid spoiled food and unsanitary surroundings that made camps ripe for diarrhea or other diseases.



Permit issued to Ramon Garcia & Juan Garcia, (who owned land on both sides of the Rio Grande). Issued by Moffin Kennedy, partner of Richard King, who operated a steamship on the Rio Grand. Issued February 9, 1860.

To keep a steady supply of food and medicines for the Confederate cause, Roman Garcia's steamboats transported boxes of vegetables, fruit and bundles of herbs.

Confederate troops, some who were crypto-Jewish soldiers, were unknown even at that time. Along with the diligent *curanderas*, they never received credit for their war efforts. They disappeared in the shadows of history. Some of these individuals were remembered by Latino communities as local symbols of



1995 US Postage stamp honors Phoebe Levy Pember.

hope and tireless service. One medical provider, the matron Phoebe Levy Pember, who managed a huge Richmond hospital and appointed the staff, was the daughter of a distinguished Jewish family. Like the *curanderas*, Pember faced the same challenges with nerves of steel in a hostile world of combatant men.

Unlike *curanderas* who barely spoke English and had no writing skills, Pember too might have gone unnoticed. But this skillful writer penned a memorable account, *A Southern Woman's Story*, and recorded part of the suffering that occurred in the Civil War. Historians listed her in their chronicles. Since they never kept records, the *curanderas* and the Confederate Latino warriors coped with the grief and defeat and then slipped into obscurity. No one recorded their recollections and they were forgotten. Years later, a Confederate officer, John S. Ford, glorified himself in his narrative and omitted his fellow Confederate Latinos. His narrative became a foremost source for the Civil War concerning South Texas.

Note: Most of this information in this article came from my relative, Judge J.T. Canales who, as a young man, periodically visited his uncle Juan Cortina and knew numerous Cortinistas. — CML

## Early Registration Bonus!

Many thanks to SCJS board member and tireless volunteer Natalie Trujillo Gonzalez (ntrujilloster@gmail.com) for donating limited prints of her prized painting, "The Skulls" (acrylic on canvas, 2008). This painting represents her ancestors, the death of her family history and heritage, past and present, and pays homage to all the descendants who remember and honor their Sephardic Jewish past.

Natalie is graciously offering one signed 12x17 inch print, (encased in a protective cover for easy packing) to **the first 20 registrants** for the 2023 conference; awarded at check-in.

In addition, a large, full-size version (15x20) of the painting reproduced on canvas, will be available for bid at our conference Silent Auction!

**Register now to win! [www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com).**

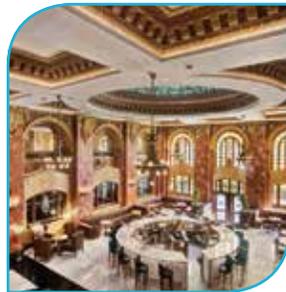
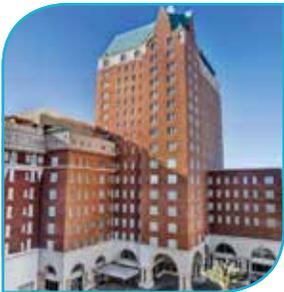


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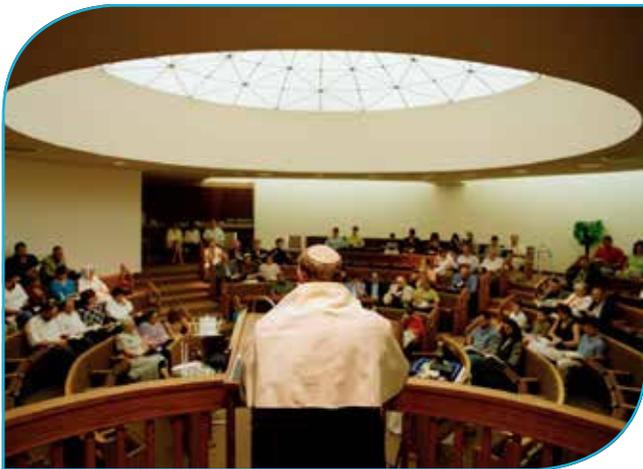
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# 2023 CONFERENCE AUGUST 13-15

## A Secret in El Paso

.....  
RABBI STEPHEN LEON



Rabbi Emeritus Stephen Leon at El Paso's Congregation B'nai Zion.



"The Ramos family before the beginning of Shabbat,"  
Canutillo, Texas, 2006.

(All photos by Peter Svarzbein. See page 30 for more.)

A huge secret lives in our unique city of El Paso. Most of our residents are unaware of it and yet this secret has had an impact on El Paso since its very existence. On the other hand, what is well known is that the overwhelming population of our incredible city is Hispanic. This wonderful ethnic group has brought marvelous contributions to our border town in the areas of culture, art, music, food, traditions, and values of our community, just to name a few. It is also known that most members of this large Hispanic population identify themselves as Catholic or Christian.

Here is where the secret is revealed. The Jewish population of El Paso is very small; approximately 5,000 people. In reality, according to new studies, DNA results, sociologists, and scholars, as much as 25% of the Hispanic population in America has Jewish roots. The largest number of those who have this identity live in the Southwest, in border towns, in New Mexico and yes, in El Paso.

This means that there is a possibility that if you add the populations of El Paso and Juarez, the number of those with a Jewish past could be almost 200,000 souls. The secret is even more significant because most of those who have Jewish roots do not even know about it. Among the names given to this unique population are *conversos* or *crypto-Jews*, which literally means "secret" Jews.

As a rabbi, I have been studying, teaching, welcoming, and have even written about the *crypto-Jews* of El Paso. My interest and involvement in this amazing group of people started when I moved here 35 years ago and continues to this day.

Attendees to the SCJS conference this summer will have a chance to see an interesting and inspiring film on this subject entitled *A Long Journey* on Saturday night, August 12, 2023 before the



**RABBI STEPHEN LEON**  
El Paso, Texas  
rabbisal@aol.com

conference begins. It includes the stories of *crypto-Jews* in El Paso and Juarez. The film explains how these *crypto-Jewish* traditions began and go back over 500 years. It reveals why so many descendants of the Spanish Inquisition settled in El Paso.

I urge you to see this important film, if not at the conference, then on PBS online. Please note, my book, *The Third Commandment and the Story of an Incredible People*, also tells the story of my rabbinic career and working with the *anusim*. (Available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).)

Adapted from the original article in *El Paso Matters*, Dec 2020.



# EXPLORING THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS

## Welcome TO THE 33<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL SCJS CONFERENCE *Exploring the Crypto-Judaic History of the Borderlands*



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

I am thrilled and honored to welcome you to El Paso, Texas, a place that I have called home since my family and I moved from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico over 30 years ago. It is a place where I have been able to grow professionally and have met important people who introduced me and my family to the *b'nai anusim*/crypto-Jews, inspiring us to look deeply into our family's genealogy to learn how connected we are with Jewish ancestry. It is a city that has also allowed me to create lasting connections with people passionate about this worldwide phenomenon. For that reason, I am here today as chair of the upcoming SCJS conference, excited to present to you an amazing program themed, "Exploring the Crypto-Judaic History of the Borderland," in collaboration with amazing people who have poured their hearts into this event to make it happen.

Did you know that El Paso is named the third safest city in the entire United States? Located at the crossroads of two countries

and three states: Texas and New Mexico in the US, and Chihuahua with our sister city, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, it is a very distinct Borderland whose people are intertwined through history, language, food, music, and culture; a place where people will make you feel welcome and at home; a place that is filled with history everywhere you look. It is here that we await with open arms your arrival this August.

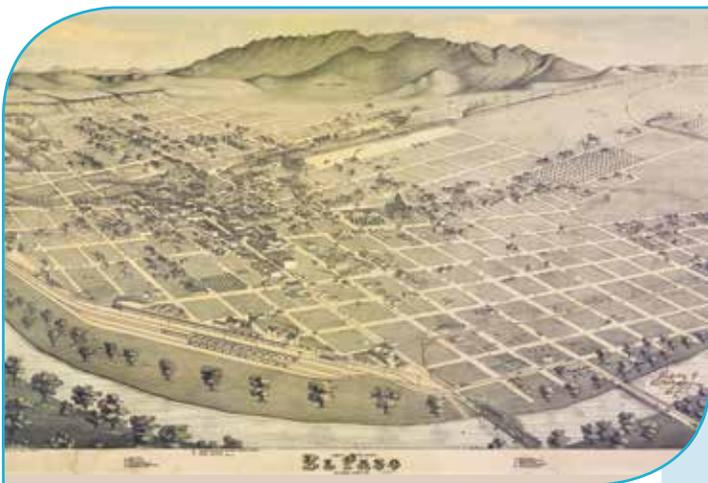
Get ready and be excited for a one-of-a-kind reception, program and immersion into El Paso del Norte; its rich history and amazing culture will mark your visit to our city for years to come, and we are honored to be a part of it.

*Sean bienvenidos,*  
**Blanca (Garza Enriquez) Carrasco**  
*33rd Annual SCJS Conference Chair*



*Left,*  
*Bird's eye view of*  
*El Paso, Texas*  
*in 1885.*

*Above,*  
*El Paso today.*



## Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture

### Silvia Hamui Sutton, PhD

#### KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Rafael Gil Rodríguez  
and the Decline of  
The Inquisition: New  
Spain, 18th Century

Sunday, August 13  
Evening



**SILVIA HAMUI SUTTON, PHD**  
Mexico City  
silviahamui@hotmail.com

For six years, Sutton has organized and chaired the “Interdisciplinary Art Seminar” at the UIA; she is also president of the academic committee of the Center for Jewish Documentation and Research of Mexico (CDIJUM). She is vice president of the Mexican Association of Aesthetic Studies (AMEST). In 2009, she was awarded the Rabbi Jacobo Goldberg Prize for the article: “Identifiers of the Judaizers and the Resignification of their Rituals in the Context of New Spain.” She obtained the 2019 University Merit Recognition for her outstanding professional career at the Universidad Iberoamericana. Also received the Ernesto Meneses Morales Medal (UIA-2020). Sutton is the representative of providers of professional teaching services on the academic committee of the Universidad Iberoamericana (June 8, 2021) and is a member of the CONACyT National System of Researchers (SN) from 2015 to date. In 2022, she was awarded the prize for the Best Discipline Teacher in Hispanic Language and Literature of the Fes Acatlán of the UNAM. 🌟

**B**orn in Mexico City, Dr. Silvia Hamui Sutton completed her undergraduate studies (1992-1997) at the Universidad Iberoamericana (UIA) obtaining the best average and an honorable mention. She earned a master’s in literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and in 2006, obtained a PhD, also in literature, at the same university (UNAM) with honorable mention.

She has been a professor at the UIA from 1997 to date, and at UNAM since 2007. She also collaborates in tutorials in the postgraduate program in the Master’s Degree in Teaching for Higher Secondary Education (MADEMS) at UNAM. She has participated in conferences and colloquiums in Mexico and abroad and has published articles in national and international magazines. Some of her published books are: *Literary interpretations as an Opening to the Universe of the “Other”* (2009-UIA/ 2nd edition, 2021); *The Hidden Meaning of the Words in the Inquisitorial Testimonies of the Riveras: Judaizers in New Spain* (2010-UNAM); *Broken Down Readings; Orality and Writing in the Mexican Narrative* (2018-UIA); and *The Judaizer Rafael Gil Rodríguez and the Decline of the Inquisition: New Spain, 18th Century* (UIA, 2021).

**T**he Stanley M Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture was established in 2019, a distinction and lecture awarded each year at our annual conference, bestowed upon a scholar whose contribution to advancing the field of crypto-Judaic studies has been exemplary.

Dr. Stanley Hordes is one of the founding members of SCJS and its passionate visionary. A former state historian for New Mexico and author of the pivotal work, *To The End of the Earth — New Mexico’s Crypto-Jews*, a book that is a major factor in shaping thought about the descendants of Spanish *conversos* or crypto-Jews in the American Southwest. His dedication to this field of research and to SCJS is inspiring.



**STANLEY M. HORDES**  
Albuquerque,  
New Mexico  
smhordes@aol.com

The recipient of many honors himself, Hordes has served as an adjunct research professor at the Latin American and Iberian Institute of the University of New Mexico and holds a PhD from Tulane University. His leadership of SCJS over the decades is immeasurable; he now serves on our SCJS Advisory Council. Thanks to this award, his enormous influence and accomplishments will be honored in perpetuity.

# EXPLORING THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS

## *Martin Sosin-Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts*

**Jillian Glantz**

Documentary  
Film

*Remember My Soul*

Monday August 14  
Afternoon

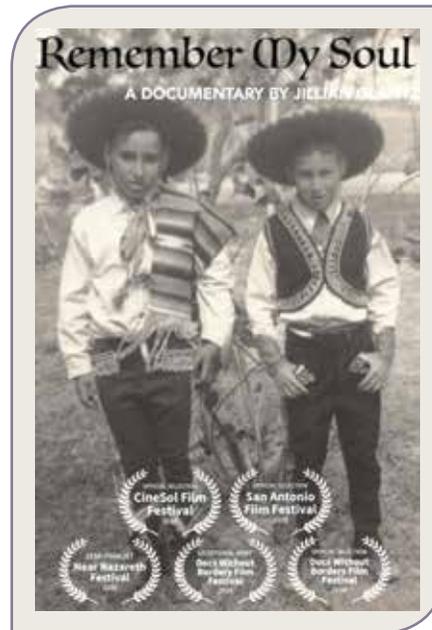


**JILLIAN GLANTZ**  
College Station, Texas  
jillian.freshink@gmail.com

At each of our annual conferences, SCJS awards a scholar who explores some aspect of crypto-Judaic history through the arts. These works help further the public understanding of the crypto-Judaic journey and might include sculpture, painting, the written word, printmaking, film, theater, music, or photography. The award was established years ago by Martin Sosin, founder of the Sosin-Stratton-Petit Foundation of California and consists of an honorarium awarded to the recipient.

This year it is with great pleasure that we recognize Jillian Glantz of Texas whose ground-breaking film she both produced and directed. *Remember My Soul* explores the untold story of the Sephardic Jews of the Lower Rio Grand Valley (LRGV) area known as the Borderlands.

It is a fine line indeed when documentary becomes art, and Glantz surely crosses that line in the elegant, determined way she collects stories, memories and testimonies from members of this community, young and old, piecing together a clear picture of a time forgotten but very much alive. She pays close attention to the significance of the



land, to the boundaries of community, and to the adherence to certain values and traditions that define the hidden aspect of the area's history.

A previous commentary by the Museum of South Texas states:

*"Remember My Soul* explores the history of Sephardic Jews in South Texas. Numerous clues suggest that

many Valley natives may be of Jewish descent to some degree. The film traces the Jewish Diaspora from the Spanish Inquisition to Mexico, with special emphasis on Nuevo Leon and the Borderlands. It was filmed entirely in the Rio Grand Valley (RGV) and investigates how Judaism reached the Borderlands of South Texas. The film covers the story of crypto-Judaism, the traditions that Jews gave the region, and how this story has affected the genealogy and identity of people there today."

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, a modern wave of Jewish immigration from Europe, Russia, and other parts of the US to the RGV contributed to many new businesses and large population growth in the region. Many Anglo-Jewish immigrants learned Spanish and assimilated into a Mexican society that existed long before they arrived. When the LRGV was being colonized by Anglo farmers in the early 1900s and the native people of the region were being discriminated against and exploited for cheap labor, the similarities between the discrimination and struggles that Mexican and Jewish people faced, both past and present, bridged the gap between two seemingly distant groups in the Valley. This is one of the main elements explored in the documentary. >>>

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# 2023 CONFERENCE AUGUST 13-15

*Remember My Soul* received a grant from the Texas Jewish Historical Society and the Engaged Scholar Award at UTRGV. It screened at the San Antonio Film Festival, CineSol Film Festival, and Docs Without Borders Film Festival, as well as the Museum of South Texas History. The film is currently archived at the Library of Congress.

## About Jillian Glantz

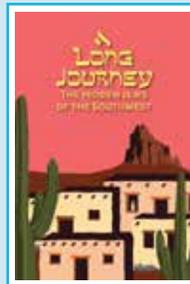
Jillian Glantz is a PhD student in the graduate history program at Texas A&M University. She received her bachelor's degree in political science

at the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley, with a double minor in Mexican American studies and criminal justice. In between completing her bachelor's degrees, Jillian developed a background in filmmaking and has worked on various film productions and directed seven short films.

Her research interests include Black history in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, with a focus on the intersections between inter-ethnic relations, racial violence, and labor. During her undergraduate studies, Jillian received the Engaged Scholar Award to direct her first feature-length film based upon her research on the Jewish history in the Rio Grande Valley and hopes to continue applying her film background to her academic research at A&M.

## Start Your Conference with Two Remarkable Films!

Film has become a significant vehicle for telling the crypto-Judaic story and each year the field is enriched with new expertise. We are honored to welcome Jillian Glantz, our 2023 Martin Sosin-Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts and to screen her film, *Remember My Soul*, exploring crypto-Judaic roots in the Borderlands.



Tasty treats are generously supplied by the Sisterhood of Temple Mount Sinai. Join us for this wonderful opportunity to learn, relax, and be with friends, new and old.

**Purchase tickets online  
for \$20 each at  
[www.cryptojews.com](http://www.cryptojews.com).**

**This pre-conference event is not included  
in general registration.**

In addition, we thank Los Angeles filmmaker Isaac Artenstein for his documentary film *A Long Journey*, filmed in New Mexico and Juarez, telling the story of crypto-Jews in these areas.

Jillian Glantz will be present at the screening. Not coming early to El Paso? Watch her film on YouTube three days prior to the conference. Registrants will be notified of online viewing access.

**Join us for this back-to-back film extravaganza!**

**Saturday, August 12  
7:00-10:00pm**

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## David M. Gitlitz Emerging Scholar Award

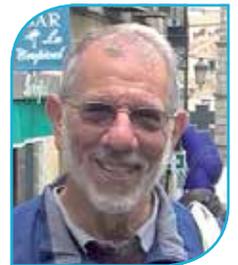
**Outstanding  
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To Be Announced  
at the Conference



**OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC  
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Join us in El Paso  
to honor the winner!

The late Dr. David Gitlitz, PhD was a preeminent scholar and author of crypto-Judaic studies. In 2021, SCJS established the David M. Gitlitz Emerging Scholar Award for significant studies in crypto-Judaic history. Only in its second year because of our hiatus due to COVID, we are proud to continue the tradition in El Paso at the upcoming conference. Several names of academics and graduate students have been submitted. The recipient will be announced at the conference. Stand by for the big reveal!



**THE LATE  
DAVID M. GITLITZ**



# EXPLORING THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS

## Judy Frankel Memorial Concert

**Robyn  
Helzner**

Monday August 14  
Evening

El Paso  
Convention Center



**ROBYN HELZNER**  
Washington, DC  
[www.helzner.com](http://www.helzner.com)



*Robyn in Granada, Spain.*

### About Robyn Helzner

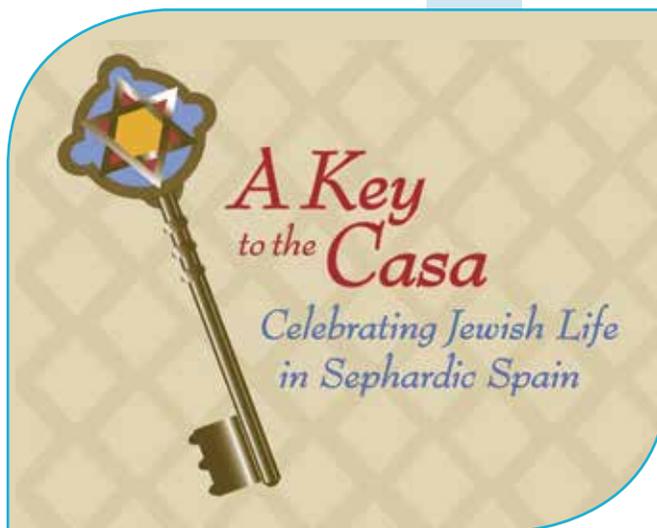
Robyn Helzner radiates a passion for Jewish music that captivates listeners. A leading interpreter of world Jewish music, Robyn has appeared in concerts throughout North

America and in Amsterdam, Hong Kong and Tokyo. The moving story of her underground performances in the Soviet Union, which led to sold-out concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg, was told on the PBS television program, "Chanukah—A Celebration of Freedom." Robyn served as cantor for the United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong and officiated at the first bar mitzvah celebrated in Beijing. She has released five recordings: "Hearts Awaken," "A Fire Burns," and "Signs & Wonders," feature the Robyn Helzner Trio. "Clap Your Hands" and "I Live in the City" are beloved by children worldwide. She currently serves as cantor at synagogues in Washington, DC, and leads Jewish Heritage Tours to China, Spain, the Balkans, Morocco and Portugal. 🌍

**R**obyn Helzner magically transports listeners back in time to the heart of Jewish Spain.

The once flourishing Jewish communities of Toledo, Córdoba and Seville come to life through captivating Ladino songs, animated stories, and vivid images. "A Key to the Casa" weaves a passionate tale of Sephardic courage and survival across the Old and New Worlds. Robyn's compelling presentation reveals the remarkable resilience of the Jewish people over the centuries.

Returning to our conference by popular demand, all fully registered attendees will enjoy this year's Judy Frankel Memorial Concert: Robyn's multi-tiered, sensory experience that renews the soul of a vibrant culture. For those who heard Robyn in Philadelphia in 2017, you will be delighted with this special program featuring all new material. Ticket will be available to community members as well. Reviewers raved: "Illuminating and moving! Absolutely fabulous!"



**El Paso**

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[cryptojews.com](http://cryptojews.com)



*Photography Exhibition • El Paso Museum of History*

**Peter Svarzbein**

Pre-Conference  
“A Minyan to a Million”  
The Work of Artist  
Peter Svarzbein  
and the Story of the  
Returning Anusim

El Paso  
Museum of History



**PETER SVARZBEIN**  
El Paso, Texas  
pgsvarzbein@gmail.com



El Paso Museum of History  
510 N. Santa Fe St.  
El Paso, Texas 79901  
915-212-0320  
www.EPMuseumOfHistory.org

Over the past 30 years, there has been a resurgence in Jewish conversions of “crypto-Jews” or *anusim*. “A Minyan to a Million” constitutes a nearly 20-year exploration of returning crypto-Jewish communities of the Southwest and Latin America. This exhibition at the El Paso Museum of History will be on display August through September 2023.

This ongoing project utilizes different formats to document returning Latino families to normative Judaism. Of the different mediums, the most successful has been through an evolving food and art installation entitled “*Conversos y Tacos Kasher Gourmet Trucks est. 1492.*” Art is a universal language but food is the ultimate unifier. Food is love, care, connection and sustenance, holding a special meaning in both Jewish and



“Congregation B'nai Zion Detail”  
El Paso, Texas, 2006.



“Before the Shabbat Meal with my Father and New Friends,” Mexicali, Mexico, 2006.

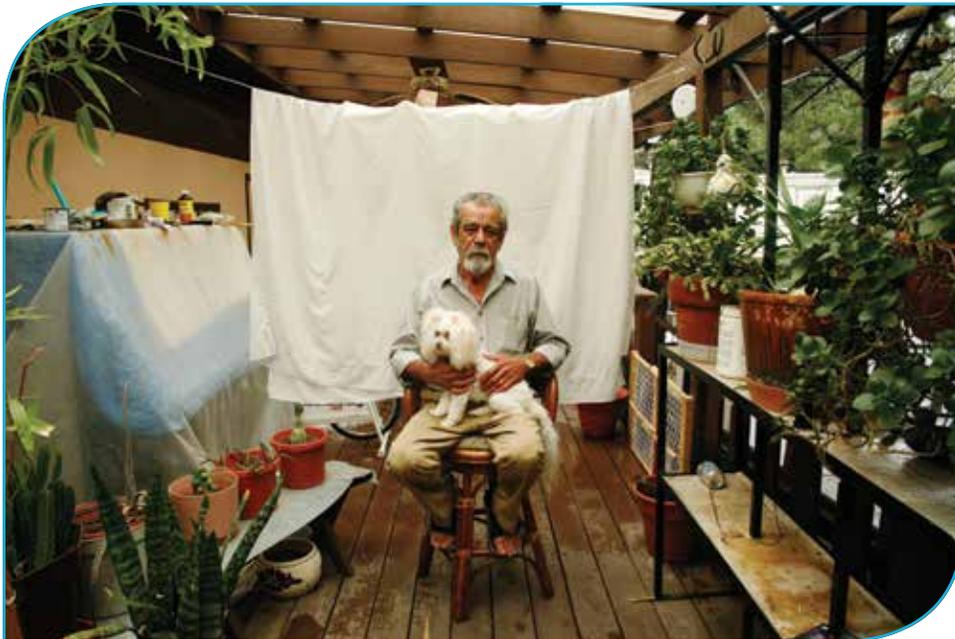
# EXPLORING THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS

Hispanic/Latino cultures. Peter's work aims to inspire and break down borders, whether cultural, aesthetic or geographic. His practice is focused on exploring notions of history and identity in *La Frontera* – the Border. Whether it is shedding light on emerging crypto-Jews to a larger Jewish or Latino community, or representing the unique relationship between Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas through the "El Paso Transnational Trolley Project," Peter believes art can function as a vehicle for dialog and change.

The El Paso Museum of History is open Wednesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm – and will be open Sunday, August 13 especially for SCJS conference attendees. Check for times upon arrival in your conference reception bag or call the museum at 915-212-0320. 📍



"Mexicali Church Detail no. 1"  
Mexicali, Mexico, 2006.



"Rudy Loya Sr. sits on his porch (in memory of)," Ruidoso, New Mexico, 2008.

## About Peter Svarzbein

Peter Svarzbein is a photographer, curator and disruptive media specialist. Graduate of the renowned Eddie Adams Photojournalism Workshop, Svarzbein earned his MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York. During graduate school at the SVA, Svarzbein created the "El Paso Transnational Trolley Project." This self-created activist/artist project is the impetus for Svarzbein's current public service. His work advocating with community leaders resulted in Texas Department of Transportation committing \$97 million to construct a trolley route and refurbish the original streetcars that ran between El Paso and Juarez. Svarzbein's art led him to a run for public office in 2015, where he completed two full terms on El Paso's City Council.

Svarzbein has exhibited work both nationally and internationally including a video installation in the Guggenheim's "Still-Spotting NYC" exhibition, at UTEP's Ruben Gallery in a bi-national exhibition "El Flow" and in the "Puro Border" exhibition at the INBA Museum of Fine Art in Cd. Juarez, Mex. His most recent installation "Conversos Y Tacos Kosher Gourmet Trucks est. 1492" was funded through a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts and featured on NPR's "Here and Now".

Partial client list includes: *Fortune Magazine, Wall Street Journal, Der Spiegel, Le Figaro, Cornell University, Jet Blue, Panasonic, New York Times, Heeb Magazine, People Magazine, and The Advocate.* He has taught at Texas Tech College of Architecture and has lectured at Harvard University, NMSU and UTEP.

www.mongovision.com • Twitter @PeterSvarzbein



*By Popular Demand – Genealogy Workshop*

**Genie Milgrom  
and  
Arturo Cuellar**

Pre-Conference  
Genealogy Workshop  
Sunday, August 13  
Afternoon



**GENIE MILGROM**  
Miami, Florida  
[www.geniemilgrom.com](http://www.geniemilgrom.com)  
[hatul72@aol.com](mailto:hatul72@aol.com)



**ARTURO CUELLAR**  
El Paso, Texas  
[www.genealogistamexico.com](http://www.genealogistamexico.com)

It has long been a tradition to start SCJS conferences with speakers who are experts in the fields of genetic research and genealogy — people who help others trace family histories back through the ages, especially families from Latin countries or with Spanish or Portuguese ancestry.

This workshop was started years ago by SCJS member Arnold Trujillo. Over time we have been fortunate to hear from individuals like Bennett Greenspan, founder and former CEO of FamilyTree DNA; from Adam Brown, founder of Avotaynu DNA; from Schelly Talalay Dardashti, a consultant with My Heritage DNA and founder of Tracing the Tribe; and others. From time-to-time we have also been fortunate to hear from Genie Milgrom of Miami, Florida, a past-president of SCJS.

Milgrom has enthralled audiences worldwide with her stunning story of self-discovery and return to Judaism, recorded in her book, *My 15 Grandmothers*, and other publications, all of which support her remarkable journey to Jewish life from her Cuban Catholic origins. Genie continues

**About Genie Milgrom**

Genie Milgrom was born in Havana, Cuba into a Roman Catholic family of Spanish ancestry. In an unparalleled work of genealogy, she was able to fully document her unbroken maternal lineage 22 generations going back as far as 1405 to Pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal. She has traveled extensively to Fermoselle, the village of her ancestors.

to raise the bar on family research and has inspired countless others to access records in Spain and Portugal to begin their own adventure. She is in the process of digitizing those records so that all may do the research on their own.

This year in El Paso, we welcome back Genie and a newcomer to our midst, genealogist Arturo Cuellar, originally from Mexico, a research professional with Family Search of Salt Lake City, Utah.

Be sure to attend this workshop. Scheduled for early afternoon Sunday, August 13 at the El Paso Convention Center, this workshop is included with full registration.

**About Arturo Cuellar**

Arturo Cuellar is a genealogical researcher and lecturer with over 30 years of research experience. He works in the Family Search History Library as a Latin America research specialist. He is an accredited genealogist specializing in Argentina, Mexico, Colombia-Panama, Peru, and Venezuela, and has researched over 20 archives and record repositories in Latin America and Spain. Holding a bachelor's degree in family history, Arturo is currently working toward a master's in Latin American studies.



# EXPLORING THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS

## *Camino Real Mission Trail and Portales Museum in Elizario*

### **San Elizario — Best Historic Small Town in America**

Pre-Conference  
Tours  
Sunday, August 13  
Morning

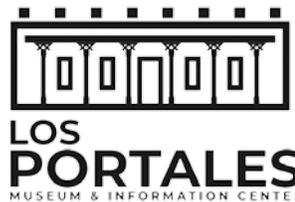


*Los Portales Museum, San Elizario, Texas.*

**N**amed Best Historic Small Town in America by USA TODAY's Readers' Choice Awards for 2023, the roots of this small Texas community go back hundreds of years. Beginning with a Spanish settlement and military base, San Elizario chose to maintain its historic integrity rather than move forward as the railroad became a more prominent means of transportation in the late 1800s. Today the community features historically significant buildings with the adobe construction and architectural features recognized in the Territorial and Pueblo Revival styles. Los Portales Casa Garcia, formerly a residence in the mid-19th-century, now serves as a museum and

highlights exhibits on the town's history through its many governmental periods.

San Elizario was founded April 20, 1598 when Juan de Oñate and his caravan stopped to give thanks along the banks of the Rio Grande. By 1789, the area was on its way to becoming an established agricultural community when the Spanish military moved its base — known as San Elceario, named for the patron saint of the military — from near present-day Fort Hancock to current San Elizario. The move was made to protect the new community from Apache attacks. Thus El Presidio de San Elceario



was established and the San Elceario Chapel was built. From 1821 through 1845, the community went through many changes, including a period of rotation under rule by Mexico, the Republic

of Texas, and finally United States. By 1850, San Elceario (Americanized to San Elizario) was the largest town in the area and became the first county seat of El Paso County. The first county jail still stands here today.

**For pre-conference attendees, our bus tour on Sunday morning, August 13 of the Camino Real Mission Trail will end at the Portales Museum in Elizario. Enjoy!** 🇺🇸



While attending the conference, be sure to visit the SCJS Silent Auction and help raise money for our Baca-Duran Fund to support conference attendance for individuals exploring and researching their potential Sephardic heritage.

To donate auction items, send photos, descriptions and retail price values to Corinne Brown at [corinnejb@aol.com](mailto:corinnejb@aol.com).



## *El Paso*

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# 2023 CONFERENCE AUGUST 13-15

## Proposed Conference Schedule (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

### PRE-CONFERENCE SPECIALS

*Saturday • August 12*

**7:30–9:30pm** — Double-Feature Film Night — *Remember My Soul* and *A Long Journey*. Full details to follow for all registrants.

*Sunday • August 13*

**8:30am–12:30 pm** — Guided bus tour of the Camino Real Mission Trail with lunch at Los Portales Museum in San Elizario.

**1:00–3:00pm** — Genealogy Workshop

**Time TBA** — Peter Svarzbein Photo Exhibit at El Paso Museum of History.

### CONFERENCE EVENTS

*Sunday • August 13*

**3:00–5:00pm** — Conference opens — welcome and Sunday panel; Silent Auction begins.

**5:00–6:00pm** — Cocktail reception and Mariachi Fiesta.

**6:30–8:30pm** — Plated dinner and *Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture* by keynote speaker **Silvia Hamui Sutton, PhD** — “Rafael Gil Rodríguez and the Decline of The Inquisition: New Spain, 18th Century.”



Conference Emcee  
**ISAAC AMON, PhD**  
Attorney at Law

## Welcome Reception and Mariachi Fiesta Mariachi Los Pasajeros de Oscar Vargas and Ballet Folklorico Orgullo de mi Tierra de Elena Vargas Sunday, August 13 • 5:30pm



**M**ariachi Los Pasajeros de Oscar Vargas brings the joy and sound of Mexican traditional music and dance as experienced by the local descendants of Spanish Colonial settlers. Experience the true heritage of El Paso with this rich cultural inheritance passed from one generation to another. Many thanks to Conference Chair Blanca Carrasco for generously underwriting this festive experience at our conference kick-off reception. [www.facebook.com/lospasajerosptx](http://www.facebook.com/lospasajerosptx).



**B**allet Folklorico Orgullo de mi Tierra, an award-winning dance academy in El Paso, performs traditional dances from different regions of Mexico. The dance academy is comprised of girls and boys 4-years-old and up. Ballet Folklorico Orgullo de Mi Tierra has performed in many festivals around El Paso and in New Mexico. The passion and pride these dancers exude is contagious and a testament to their hard work and dedication. [www.balletorgullodemitierra.com/mysite-1](http://www.balletorgullodemitierra.com/mysite-1)

# EXPLORING THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS

Monday • August 14

8:30am–12:30pm — Morning Panels

12:30–1:15pm — Buffet Lunch

1:15–2:15pm — *Martin Sosin-Stratton-Petit Address to Advance Scholarship in the Crypto-Judaic Arts by Filmmaker Jillian Glantz, “Remember My Soul.”*

2:15 –5:15pm — Afternoon Panels

6:00–7:00pm — Buffet Dinner

7:30–8:30pm — *Judy Frankel Memorial Concert with Robyn Helzner, “A Key to the Casa - Celebrating Jewish Life in Sephardic Spain.”*

Tuesday • August 15

8:30–9:00am — General Meeting

9:00am–12:30pm — Morning Panels

12:30–1:00pm — Box Lunch

1:00pm — Silent Auction bidding closes

1:00–2:30pm — Afternoon Panels

— Conference Close —

Thank You! See You Next Year!

## Honored Guests Diplomatic Dignitaries



**MAURICIO IBARRA  
PONCE DE LEÓN**  
Consul General of Mexico  
El Paso, Texas



**MARTHA VERA**  
Honorary Consul  
of Spain  
El Paso, Texas

In the Mexican Foreign Service since 1998, Ibarra was appointed Consul of Mexico in El Paso in March 2019. He previously held this position in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was head of the Office for Special Affairs at the Mexico Embassy in the US and was in charge of political affairs at the Mexico Embassy in Canada.

Martha Vera is a native of El Paso. Appointed Honorary Consul of Spain in El Paso for 20 counties in Texas in October 2015, Martha is an arbitrator and owner of The Vera Group, LLC. She works to promote business, education and the history of Spain in the New World, with special focus along the *Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*.

## Attending an SCJS Conference for the first time?

You might wonder what to expect at the SCJS Conference: another study of the story of exile and adaptation? A look into modern research methods? Possibly, but each year new topics are revealed that add depth and fascination to this amazing story. With over 30 submissions to our Call for Papers, we salute our program committee for narrowing down panels in which various topics support each other. Panel selections may yet change, but as of this time, the variety is nothing less than remarkable. See the next page for a few sample abstracts.



## Samples of Speakers' Abstracts

### The New Mexico Frontier: A Crypto-Jewish Haven or New World Hell?

Amy I. Aronson, PhD

aaronson@valdosta.edu

**Abstract:** Many scholars support the thesis that the northern frontier of the Spanish empire in the Americas served as a refuge for those fleeing the authority of the Mexican Inquisition. In the case of the crypto-Jews, who had fled their homes in Spain and Portugal and arrived to New Spain, the northern Mexican frontier provided these secret Jews a relatively safe haven and respite from persecution. The commonly held idea being that the further one was from the metropolis of central Mexico, the greater the sense of tolerance and safety. In fact, it appears that the distant outpost of New Mexico was considered “the zone of refuge from the zone of refuge,” as one crypto-Jew at the time is quoted as having stated. However evidence abounds to contradict this commonly held belief. This paper proposes that the northern frontier of New Spain was hardly a haven for crypto-Jews of the time but rather a living, western New World hell.

**Bio:** Amy I. Aronson teaches at Valdosta State University in Georgia. She received her PhD in Hispanic linguistics and Medieval Spanish literature from Temple University. Aronson is the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship to Chile and Argentina, and directs Valdosta’s Peru Study Abroad Program. Her publications include *Marginal Voices: Studies in Converso Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Brill, 2012).

### Doña Gracia and Don Luis de Carvajal in My Personal Journey

Rosalinda Méndez-Carrasco, PhD

mendez.rosal@gmail.com

**Abstract:** My childhood and youth were spent growing up in Ysleta, Texas with summers in Chihuahua, Mexico, the land of my parents. We were raised Roman Catholic, but with traditions that years later I came to learn were crypto-Judaic. In the mid-1960s we moved to California, where I was thrust into the growing Civil Rights Movement, Chicano Movement, anti-Vietnam War movement and became a radical and atheist in college. Years later, in searching to understand the roots of Mexican-American culture, I discovered that we were likely from Sephardic Jewish descent, from the *conversos*, and upon being lent a copy of *Doña Gracia of the House of Nasi* by Cecil Roth, I was deeply drawn to her and her life. In 1966, the San Diego Opera was preparing for the world premiere of *The Conquistador*, an opera

on the life of Don Luis de Carvajal. I was drawn into this endeavor and in the process of preparing a slide lecture on the life of Doña Gracia for the opera, my soul became deeply drawn toward the Torah and Judaism.

This is a presentation on the deep-seated inquietudes and unexplainable coincidences that brought me back to what I believe are my family’s roots.

**Bio:** Rosalinda Méndez-Carrasco is a professor emeritus of history. Born and raised in the El Paso Texas area, she earned her PhD at the University of California at Irvine. She has created a “Mini-Museum of Mexican American History” for Hispanic Heritage Month and organized conferences on “Searching for Our Roots: The Multi-Cultural Heritage of Mexican Americans.”

### A Spotlight on the 1720s Persecution of Crypto-Judaism in Spain

Abraham Gross, PhD

agross@bgu.ac.il

**Abstract:** The frantic activity of the Spanish Inquisition 1720s, directed primarily against New Christians, constitutes, possibly, the fiercest attack against individuals and enclaves of Judaizing since its first decade of activity in the 1480s. Ordered and orchestrated by the *Suprema* in Madrid, it involved all of the



El Paso

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# EXPLORING THE CRYPTO-JUDAIC HISTORY OF THE BORDERLANDS

tribunals in Spain. Historians have termed it “The Final Suppression of Crypto-Judaism in Spain” (Jonathan Israel); “*La ultima ofensiva contra los Judios*” (Egido); “*La ultima gran persecucion inquisitorial contra criptojudaismo*” (Rafael de Lera Garcia).

Unlike the Portuguese Inquisitorial archives, most of the *processos* of the Spanish Tribunals did not survive. However, there remained short *relaciones* and *alegaciones fiscales* which hold basic information about the *autos da fé* and the victims. I have been working in collaboration with Michael Alpert of London on a database which will be easy to use for scholars and for laymen alike, allowing searches and statistics of all kinds. This lecture will show the possibilities that such a database will enable, namely more specific and more precise results, comparative possibilities, as well as going beyond previous scholarship on a wide range of issues.

**Bio:** Dr. Gross earned his PhD at Harvard University, and is emeritus at the department of Jewish history in the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. His research fields include the cultural history of Iberian Jewry and its Diaspora, history of New Christians, and the history of Jewish martyrdom.

## Mary, Esther, Deborah, Judith: Veneration of the Divine Feminine in Crypto-Judaism

Rebecca Wartell, PhD

Rebecca.Wartell@Colorado.edu

**Abstract:** Often described as a matrilineal religion, women have historically served as the keepers of crypto-Judaism as a private, domestic tradition. Whereas *conversos* participate in Catholic observance in overtly public arenas of faith and communal affiliation, the veneration of female saints can be understood as a mirror of the feminine underpinnings of hidden Jewish traditions. This paper explores the repeated invocation of the *Shekhinah*, the divine feminine, in Jewish texts and the parallel cultic veneration of female saints as expressions of the specifically matrilineal essence of crypto-Judaism. In broader terms, the experience of exile, physical and spiritual, takes on gendered layers of meaning in Jewish and Christian experience.

**Bio:** Rebecca Wartell, PhD is a teaching assistant professor at the University of Colorado Boulder in the program in Jewish studies. Her research focuses on Sephardic and *conversa* women of the early modern period, both in Mediterranean and cross-Atlantic colonial contexts. Her current book project draws primarily from Hebrew rabbinic texts that highlight the experiences of women as refugees and religious converts in the 16th century. 🌱

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Anusim Center  
[www.anusimcenterep.org](http://www.anusimcenterep.org)

Los Portales Museum  
[www.losportalesmuseum.org](http://www.losportalesmuseum.org)  
for helping with the  
tour visit and providing  
a place for lunch.



*An Inquisition-era Profile from the Stanley M. Hordes Distinguished Scholar Lecture Honoree and Conference Keynote Speaker*

## *The Judaizer Rafael Gil Rodríguez and the Decline of the Inquisition: New Spain, 18th Century*

By Silvia Hamui Sutton, PhD  
Universidad Iberoamericana A.C., 2021

**S**ilvia Hamui Sutton's book is a masterly investigation into the Inquisitorial case of Rafael Crisanto Gil Rodríguez, a descendant of crypto-Jews established in Guatemala, who, against all the status quo of the society of his time, in the middle of the 18th century, he openly declared himself a Jew. This Judaizer was tried and imprisoned in secret prisons by the Inquisition of the Viceroyalty of New Spain (territory that included the Southwestern United States, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean), right at the end of 1790 until the beginning of 1800, during the transition between the colonial era and that of the independence from Spain. Silvia Hamui Sutton describes the caste system, the authority of the Church in the colony and the influence of Enlightenment ideas on the identity of the colonial society, and how these aspects affected the Inquisitorial case of Rafael Gil. Her research is based on the writings about Rafael Gil, found in the Inquisitorial archives General Archive of the Nation (AGN), National Historical Archive (AHN), Archives Portal of Spain (PARES) and the Association for the Promotion of Historical Studies of Central America (AFEHC).

Rafael Gil Rodríguez was a proud New Spaniard nationalist, literate, and an erudite in various subjects: he spoke of the patriarchs, of the Torah, he knew about Kabbalah, he was familiar with the 613 *mizvot* and influenced by the Enlightenment movement of the time. He was a polyglot and, just before his priestly ordination, he was denounced for professing the Law of Moses. He had the opportunity to criticize the Church for its hypocrisy and its error in interpreting its "truth" as the only acceptable truth, both religiously and socially. Our subject, to strengthen his identity, underwent a circumcision; in addition, he proselytized in favor of Judaism, and did not hide his revulsion towards the images of Christ or the saints, he rejected the obligation to attend mass or celebrate Christian festivities.

He was sentenced in 1788 for being a Judaizer, his property was confiscated until 1790 and he was sentenced at the end of 1791.

It is known that in 1794 he was still imprisoned, after suffering mistreatment and arbitrariness by the inquisitors. In jail, he demanded paper to write notes and to communicate only with learned people who were at his intellectual level, refused to eat pork or bread with lard, kept the Sabbath, and lived in extreme prison conditions. He even tried to send a letter to the pope to expose his complaints and his plan for reconciliation between Christianity and Judaism, and reveal the corruption of the church: of how was it possible that he was not allowed to profess his religion freely as a right, since the Mosaic faith, "which was received and publicly taught," was accepted as a normative religion in other parts of the world. Probably his mental health was breaking down more and more and finally he called himself a type of messiah who, like "Jesus, suffered imprisonment, punished and was insulted." He was finally transported to the San Hipólito hospital, an institution for the mentally ill where he was confined through the early 1800s.

There are many questions about Rafael Gil: was he crazy? Was he Jewish? Was he wise? Alternatively, all of the above?

Did he get out dead or alive from the clutches of the Inquisition? It is for you, dear reader, to take on the task of discovering more about Rafael Gil and his Inquisitorial case.

— ROSA MARINA SIEGEL >>>



Spanish translation

## *El judaizante Rafael Gil Rodríguez y el declive de la Inquisición: Nueva España, siglo XVIII*

By Silvia Hamui Sutton, PhD

Universidad Iberoamericana A.C., 2021

**E**l libro de Silvia Hamui Sutton es una investigación magistral sobre el caso Inquisitorial de Rafael Crisanto Gil Rodríguez, un descendiente de Cripto-judíos establecido en Guatemala, quien, contra todo el statu quo de la sociedad de su tiempo, en pleno siglo XVIII, se declaró abiertamente judío. Este “judío” o judaizante, fue juzgado y encarcelado en las cárceles secretas por la Inquisición del Virreinato de Nueva España (territorio que comprendía Suroeste de Estados Unidos, México, Centro América y El Caribe), justo a finales de 1790 hasta inicios de 1800, durante la transición entre la época colonial y el de la independencia de España. Silvia Hamui Sutton describe los estratos sociales de la época, la autoridad de la Iglesia en la colonia y la influencia de las ideas de la Ilustración en la identidad de la sociedad colonial, y de cómo estos aspectos afectaron el caso Inquisitorial de Rafael Gil. Su investigación está basada en los escritos sobre nuestro personaje, hallados en los archivos Inquisitoriales Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), Portal de Archivos de España (PARES) y de la Asociación para el Fomento de Estudios Históricos de Centro América (AFEHC).

Rafael Gil Rodríguez fue un orgulloso nacionalista novohispano, letrado, erudito en varios temas: hablaba de los patriarcas, de la Tora, sabía de Cábala, estaba familiarizado con las 613 mizvot e influenciado por el movimiento de la Ilustración de la época, era poliglota y, justo antes de su ordenación sacerdotal, fue denunciado por profesar la Ley de Moisés. Tuvo la oportunidad de criticar a la Iglesia de su hipocresía y de su error en interpretar su “verdad” como la única verdad aceptable, tanto en lo religioso como en lo social. Nuestro personaje, para afianzar su identidad, se hizo la circuncisión; además, hacía proselitismo a favor del judaísmo, y no ocultaba su repulsión hacia las imágenes de Cristo o de los santos, rechazaba la obligación de asistir a misa o celebrar las festividades cristianas.

Fue condenado en 1788 por judaizante, pero hasta 1790 le confiscaron sus bienes y le dieron sentencia a finales de 1791. Se sabe que en 1794 todavía estaba encarcelado, después de sufrir maltratos y arbitrariedades por parte de los inquisidores. En la cárcel exigió papel para escribir notas y demandó comunicarse

solo con gente docta que estuviera a su mismo nivel intelectual, se negaba comer carne de cerdo o pan con manteca, guardaba el Sabbath, y vivió en condiciones carcelarias extremas. Intentó enviar una carta al mismo papa para exponer sus quejas y su plan de reconciliación entre el cristianismo y el judaísmo, y revelar la corrupción de la iglesia: de cómo era posible que no lo dejaran profesar su religión libremente como un derecho, puesto que la fe mosaica, “la cual era recibida y públicamente enseñada”, era aceptada como una religión normativa en otras partes del mundo. Probablemente su salud mental se fue quebrantando cada vez más y finalmente se llamó a sí mismo un tipo de “mesías” que, como “Jesús, sufrió preso, castigado y con afrenta” (p. 177). Finalmente fue transportado al hospital de San Hipólito, hospital destinado para enfermos mentales donde todavía se encontraba recluso a inicios de 1800.

Hay muchas preguntas sobre Rafael Gil: ¿fue loco?, ¿fue judío?, ¿fue un sabio? o ¿todo lo anterior?

¿Salió vivo o muerto de las garras de la Inquisición? Es para ti querido lector la tarea de descubrir más sobre Rafael Gil y su caso Inquisitorial.

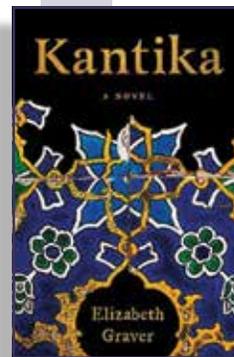
— ROSA MARINA SIEGEL



## *Kantika*

By Elizabeth Graver

Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2023



**T**he first thing a reader will notice when reading *Kantika* is the absolute lusciousness of the writing. Before we even know what the book is about, we are beguiled by the first words on the page. “This, the beautiful time, the time of wingspans, leaps and open doors, of the heedless, headlong flow from here to there.”

Further down, still in the first few pages, “...she sings. As on the street the lemon man sings lemons, the Bulgarian sings pudding, the vegetable man sings eggplant, squash and artichokes — ‘fresh, cheap, ladies, how I wait for you with my aubergines!’”

We are immersed into Constantinople in 1907, soon drawn into the rhythm of song, as the book is named, for *Kantika* in Spanyol, what we have come to call Ladino is, of course, “song.” >>>

The book is less a novel than a story. It is the story of Rebecca Camayor Cohen, daughter of wealthy textile industrialist Alberto Cohen and the sturdy, fertile, and infinitely patient Sultana Camayor. Rebecca grows from a seven-year-old petted, happy child in Constantinople, a comfortable Turkish Jew, to a woman abandoned by her husband, mother of two, living in a treacherous time in Barcelona. Her beloved Constantinople is now Istanbul, and the fascists are creeping into Spain. We watch her grow up, watch her father gamble away his fortune and his factory, see the changes in her status and her outlook.

We later will follow Rebecca from Spain to Cuba to New York, to her second husband, her sixth child, her own seamstress/clothing-design shop, and watch her children themselves grow up and adjust to their changing world. But the words of the book never let us down, the book is a song in itself, a long ballad, “let me tell you the story about the time when your father... your grandfather... your mother... and then...”

Birds and plants have roles in the story, and music, textiles, clothing all color the narrative with their textures and hues. Geography plays its part, as do war and economics. History writes the background. Ultimately though, Rebecca leads us through the life changes that loss of fortune, status, belonging and security, all forge in this courageous woman, in a story without an ounce of sentimentality to schmaltz up the narrative.

But what of the Sephardim, the Ladino, the *conversos*? Ladino, or Spanyol, is the language of the family for Rebecca, and the language of the *kal*, or temple, where she goes to services each Shabbat in Constantinople. The close-knit community of Turkish Jews prays together, socializes together, and eats together, but is emphatically part of Turkey’s society. Rebecca speaks French at school, Turkish on the street, Spanyol at home.

Once her father takes the family to Spain to avoid the frightening changes in what is becoming Istanbul, all that collapses. There is no school. Rebecca must work as a seamstress in a shop, at a job she can only get by calling herself by a non-Jewish name: she is now Marie Blanca Camayor. Blanca, she is told, is the name for “orphans,” code for *conversos*. She is tipped off by a kindly woman, who nonetheless declines to hire her, but lets her know that with her new name, and if she could please dress less fashionably, she could get employment at one of the more down-scale sewing shops.

Her father, the once-proud industrialist who sang at the synagogue on Shabbat, is now the *chamash* who sweeps the floors and scrubs the steps in a hidden room that is the temple, the *oratorio*, for them in Barcelona. When a bag of pigs’ bones is thrown into the courtyard, he has broken glass put up on the tops of the walls, and buys two puppies to raise as guard dogs. Spain has “welcomed back its Jews” but is far from welcoming.

Rebecca’s story once she moves to New York and remarries becomes the story of everywoman, the immigrant second wife who struggles with the language and customs, her new husband’s family, acclimating to a disabled stepdaughter, creating a new life. She becomes accustomed to Ashkenazi Jewish life in New York, where Sephardi are few and far between. But she keeps her spark and her spirit, while slowly losing her native Spanyol to English, Yiddish, America. But she never loses her song.

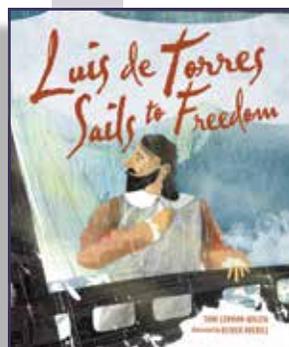
One greatly appealing aspect of this book is that it is not about the Inquisition. Granted, the Inquisition is the seminal historical event that created the *conversos*, the crypto-Jews that bring us today their semi-preserved Jewish practices and languages, and there are still many stories that need to be told about that time. But there are other stories, too. There are stories of love, of families, and of people of the Diaspora, in later times, with their own tapestries. Though their histories also harken back to the tortures, the destruction, and the Expulsion, they made their homes in many countries around the world, and have rich stories to tell of later times.

This is a book that everyone in the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies can get something from. Its lyricism will sing, its colors will glow, and though it is lightly fictionalized, it will shine a light on a people and a society whose contribution to our cannon of knowledge we cannot ignore. It is also a highly enjoyable read, one that will while away the cold days of winter with its warmth.

— CLAUDIA HAGADUS LONG

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Claudia Hagadus Long is a former SCJS board member and the author of several novels about *conversos*, crypto-Jews and later, the inherited trauma of the Holocaust. Her most recent book is *Nine Tenths of the Law*. [www.claudiahlong.com](http://www.claudiahlong.com)



## Luis de Torres Sails to Freedom

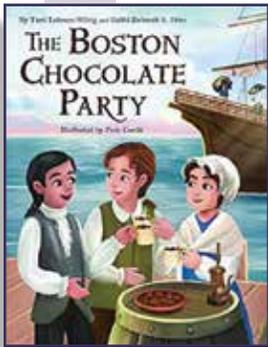
By Tami Lehman-Wilzig  
Kar-Ben Publishing, 2023

A Story of Faith and Hope in  
Inquisition-era Spain

Luis de Torres, a secret Jew, joins the crew of a Spanish ship headed to the Far East where he dreams of living in freedom and openly practicing his faith. The day the crew is to set sail falls on *Tisha B'Av*,

a somber day mourning the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, but fate intervenes and delays the voyage. Or is it because of *Tisha B'Av*?

*Luis de Torres Sails to Freedom* is the fictionalized account of the real Luis, who sailed with Christopher Columbus, another excellent story to help Jewish children understand the Sefardic past.



## The Boston Chocolate Party

By Rabbi Deborah R. Prinz  
Behrman House 2022

From a favorite author who has already regaled us with her journey into the heart of and the history of chocolate (*On the Chocolate Trail*, reviewed in *HaLapid* 2019),

Rabbi Deborah Prinz has now created a delightful picture book for children connecting Hanukkah and chocolate. *The Boston Chocolate Party* tells the tale.

One might ask: do today's Jewish children really need another book about Hanukkah? You bet they do when it is set in Colonial America and is filled with history, with lessons about chocolate making, and even contains a couple of recipes! On a deeper level, it makes a surprising connection between the Colonial uprising known as the Boston Tea Party and the famous rebellion by the biblical Maccabees, the basis of the Hanukkah story. Both the American colonists and the Maccabees wanted their freedom against an oppressor. The story further helps young readers understand that early Jews in this country were Sefardi from Spain or Portugal and had different Hanukkah customs than Askenazi Jews do today. Finally, it is a story that celebrates freedom, the importance of friendship, and a love of hot chocolate. The author summarizes it this way:

“Joshua Mendes and his family are proud American colonists who love their Sephardi roots. Hundreds of years ago their family fled Spain, taking their precious *Janucá* – Hanukkah – lamp with them. Like many Sephardim who were America's first Jews, they managed to bring their heirlooms to

## Remember My Soul

This film by Jillian Glantz, the SCJS 2023 award recipient (see page 27), explores the history of Sephardic Jews in South Texas. Numerous clues suggest that many Rio Grande Valley natives may be of Jewish descent to some degree. The film traces the Jewish Diaspora from the Spanish Inquisition to Mexico, with special emphasis on Nuevo Leon and the Borderlands. Filmed entirely in the Rio Grand Valley, it investigates how Judaism reached South Texas covering the history of crypto-Judaism, traditions that Jews gave the region, and how this story has affects the genealogy and identity of people there today.



One reviewer remarked, “There are untold stories all around us and mysteries to uncover in this world; Glantz does an excellent job digging deep and speaking with the people whose lineage tell the crypto-Judaic story.”

**Enjoy a screening of this film at the  
SCJS Conference, August 13-15 in El Paso!  
(See pages 27-28)**

the New World. Now it is the first night of Hanukkah and Joshua is sad. He misses his friend Isaac whose mother has moved the family to Boston to find work. Even Mama's hot chocolate drink, made from the cocoa beans Papa is importing to the Colonies, does not cheer Joshua up. Now that the British tea tax had made tea too expensive to drink, Papa is showing café owners how to make hot chocolate. When Papa travels to Boston, Joshua begs to join him so he can celebrate the last nights of Hanukkah with Isaac. In Boston, Joshua comes up with an idea to help Isaac's family open a chocolate house. While they set the plan in motion, the people of Boston demonstrate against British tea taxation.”

Beautifully illustrated, *The Boston Chocolate Party* is destined to be a timeless book.

— CORINNE JOY BROWN



# Capirotada

.....  
CORINNE BROWN • ISABEL O. MOORE

Historians claim that *capirotada*, also known as *capirotada de vigilia*, is a traditional Mexican food; a kind of bread pudding usually eaten during the Lenten period. However it is has deep roots in Moorish cuisine and is mentioned in recipe books of 15th-century Spain. Supposedly this now-classic dish made of bread, spices, fruit, and cream or cheese was a way to make use of leftover or stale bread before Lent began. (Or one might suggest, Passover as well.)

Mentions of this dish in one form or another can be found in Inquisition records. The word *capirotada* comes from the Spanish word *capirote* which refers to the tall, conical hat worn in a religious



context. The ingredients are largely the same as those used during the 1640s to make breads and cakes. These ingredients and recipes have been recorded by the Office of the Inquisition and saved to this day in the archives.

The dish traveled to the New World along with Spanish *conquistadores*, who spread Spanish culture and Catholicism. In post-conquest Mexico, many indigenous peoples like the Aztecs used anise tea to soften stale bread and moisten dry meat, both of which were common problems on Spanish ships making the voyage across the Atlantic. Previously prepared as a more savory dish, *capirotada* progressively became sweeter after New World ingredients and indigenous traditions were combined with the existing Spanish version, leading to a large increase in the varieties

of *capirotada*. Despite originally being consumed before Lent, *capirotada* is now consumed during Lent, especially during Holy Week and on Good Friday.

Various preparations of the dish depend on locale, be it Mexico, Texas or New Mexico. It is generally composed of toasted *bolillos* (which are like French bread) soaked in a mulled sweet syrup made of cane brown sugar, known as *pilloncillo*, whole cloves and cinnamon sticks. Some of the typical ingredients include nuts, seeds and dried (and sometimes fresh) fruits, including apples, dates, raisins, apricots, peanuts, pecans, almonds, pine nuts, and walnuts. In addition, aged cheese is added, which might explain why some recipes call for milk. Modern day Jews can compare this dish to the Eastern European *kugels* made with noodles and a host of similar ingredients. Currently undergoing rediscovery, bread pudding is showing up in many American restaurants nationwide.

## Capirotes Today

The use of the *capirote* or *coroza* was prescribed in Spain by the Holy Office of the Inquisition. Men and women who were arrested had to wear a paper *capirote* in public as a sign of public humiliation. The *capirote* was worn during the



session of an *auto-da-fé*. The color was different, conforming to the judgment of the office. People who were condemned to be executed wore a red *coroza*. Other punishments used different colors.

When the Inquisition was abolished, the symbol of punishment and penitence was kept in the Catholic brotherhood. However today's

*capirotes* are different — they are covered in fine fabric, as prescribed by the brotherhood. To this day, they are still worn during Holy Week/Easter celebration, most notably in Andalusia by *Penitentes* (those who perform public penance for their sins) who walk through streets with *capirote*.

Printed with permission from [www.IsabelEats.com](http://www.IsabelEats.com). Isabel Orozco Moore started Isabel Eats in 2015 as a way to document her family's recipes and connect to her Mexican heritage.

# Capirotada (Mexican Bread Pudding)

*Capirotada* or Mexican Bread Pudding, consists of layers of crusty bread, raisins, bananas, almonds, and cheese all soaked in sweetened cinnamon milk.

Prep Time: 10 mins.  
Cook Time: 50 mins.  
Soaking time: 15 mins.  
Total Time: 1 hr.  
Servings: 10 servings  
Calories: 413 kcal

## INGREDIENTS

Oil or butter, for greasing  
4 large *bolillo* bread rolls,  
cut into 1-inch thick pieces  
(about 10-12 cups)  
5 cups nonfat milk  
1 8-oz cone *piloncillo* (or 1¼ cup dark brown sugar)  
3 cinnamon sticks  
2 whole cloves  
3 large bananas, sliced into rounds  
1 cup raisins  
½ cup sliced almonds  
2 cups shredded Oaxaca cheese (or any melty white cheese like Monterey Jack, Provolone or Mozzarella)

## INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish (or a dish that is slightly bigger) with oil or butter. Set aside.

Place cubed bread onto a large baking sheet. Bake for 5 minutes so that bread become a little toasted and dried out. Remove from oven and set aside.

Add milk, *piloncillo*, cinnamon sticks, and cloves to a large pot over medium-high heat. Whisk together; bring to a gentle boil.



Reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered for 10 minutes, whisking occasionally. Remove from heat and discard cinnamon sticks and cloves.

Assemble *capirotada* by spreading half the toasted bread in a single layer in prepared baking dish. Top with all banana slices, half of the raisins, half of the sliced almonds, and half of the shredded cheese. Repeat the process with remaining ingredients to make one more layer.

Carefully pour sweetened milk all over the *capirotada*, paying close attention to the bread at the edges.

Cover dish with aluminum foil and bake for 15 minutes, then remove the foil and bake uncovered for 15 more minutes.

Remove from oven, let it cool for 5 minutes, and serve warm. Or let cool completely, cover and refrigerate, and serve cold.

## TIPS FROM ISABEL

**Bread** - If you do not have *bolillo* bread, you can use French bread or any crusty loaf of bread.

**Cheese** - Use any melty cheese. Oaxaca, Monterey Jack, Provolone, Mozzarella, or even Cheddar will work.

**Sweetener** - If you do not have *piloncillo*, use 1¼ cups dark brown sugar.

**Sprinkles** - Totally optional, but my family always served it with round rainbow nonpareils sprinkles on top. It sounds a little strange, but it adds such a fun pop of color and a little crunch. Since we only make this dish once or twice a year, what better way to celebrate than with sprinkles! 🍬



# CARRYING THE TORCH

## Facebook Group Hosts “Story Hour”

**S**CJS member Corinne Brown thanks Facebook group “Sephardic Family,” especially director Mark Angel, for the opportunity to be the first author in their “Story Hour” series covering books on Sefardic and crypto-Jewish topics. She used the opportunity to showcase some of the fabric wall hangings she created to help illustrate her book *Hidden Star*, winner of the 2016 Historical Fiction category in the New Mexico/Arizona Book Awards. An attentive Zoom audience helped the hour fly by.



**Did you know...?**

The first Thanksgiving took place in the New World in 1598 in the town of San Elizario in El Paso County, way before the *Mayflower* pilgrim-landing in 1620.

**El Paso**  
Register by July 25 • [cryptojews.com](http://cryptojews.com)

## University of Texas Annual Scholars’ Conference

**S**CJS member and Jewish Heritage Alliance Director of Development Isaac Amon, and Cindy Seton-Rogers, SCJS past president, met at the University of Texas-Dallas, in March attending the annual Scholars’ Conference on “The Holocaust and the Churches.” Isaac’s presentation there was titled “From the Inquisition to Auschwitz: Thessaloniki and the Sephardic Jewish Experience.”

**Story Hour Series**  
Presented by Our Sephardic Family

Author Corinne Brown reads from “Hidden Star” and reveals the impetus and inspiration that led her into the heart of New Mexico and all the way back to Spain over five centuries ago.

Sunday, March 5th  
10am PST



Three fabric wall hangings (16x20) created by Corinne Brown to help illustrate her book *Hidden Star*.

Cindy Seton-Rogers and Isaac Amon at University of Texas-Dallas Scholars’ Conference.



Below, Isaac presents program..



## Jewish Heritage Alliance Tours to Morocco and Spain



**D**iscover magical, historical Morocco on a 10-day Jewish Heritage Tour visiting Rabat, Fes, Marrakech, Essaouira and Casablanca. The Academic Leader on this program is Dr. Vanessa Paloma, Senior Fulbright Scholar and musical artist in Morocco, an expert on Judeo-Spanish women's songs.

Email [info@JewishHeritageAlliance.com](mailto:info@JewishHeritageAlliance.com) for more information on both tours.



**D**iscover historical Spain on this 9-day Jewish Heritage Tour visiting Madrid, Avila, Segovia, Toledo, Cordoba, Antequera, Granada, Rock of Gibraltar, and Seville. Your Tour Leader is Rabbi Dr. Peter Tarlow, a renowned academic expert on the Jewish heritage of Spain and the Iberian peninsula.

## According to the New York Travel Guide...

**T**he Museum of Jewish Culture in the Al-Mellah district of Fez, Morocco, is complete and ready for visitors. The new art space covers nearly 13,000 square feet at a cost of \$1.32 million and is part of the rehabilitation and enhancement of the ancient city of Fez. The museum aims to preserve the architectural character of the ancient city as well as its cultural and spiritual heritage, including its Jewish history as a component of Moroccan identity.

Serge Berdugo, secretary-general of the Moroccan Jewish Council, said the Fez Museum of Jewish Culture is of major significance to the Moroccan Jewish community and embodies King Mohammed VI's determination to preserve Morocco's cultural diversity and plural identity. 🌐



## Novel in Portuguese



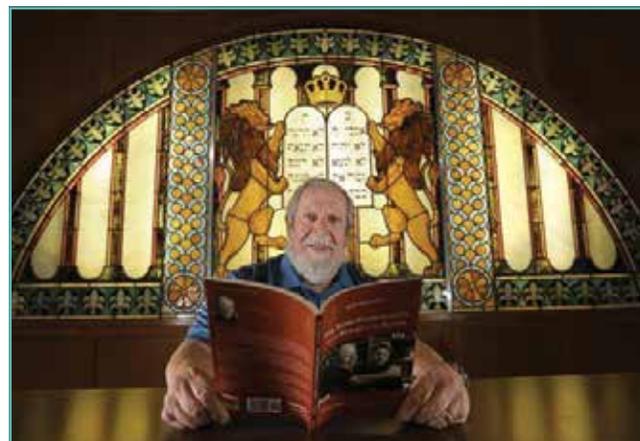
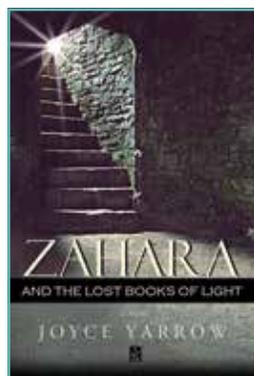
**JOYCE YARROW**  
Seattle, Washington  
[www.joyceyarrow.com](http://www.joyceyarrow.com)

New SCJS member and successful author Joyce Yarrow proudly released her novel *Zahara and the Lost Portal of Light* in Portuguese. It is already up for an award via All Bilingual Press. Brava!

If you missed the review in the Autumn/Winter 2022 *HaLapid*:

### Synopsis:

“Seattle journalist Alienor Crespo travels to Spain to claim the promise of citizenship offered to the descendants of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. As she relives history through her *vijitas* (visits) with her ancestors, Alienor also confronts modern-day extremism and commits herself to protecting an endangered ‘Library of Light’ – a hidden treasure trove of medieval Hebrew and Arabic books, saved from the fires of the Inquisition.”



Rabbi Stephen Leon

## “Rabbi Stephen Leon Day”

November 22, 2022 was declared “Rabbi Stephen Leon Day” in El Paso, Texas by a resolution presented by Councilman Peter Svarzbein and unanimously passed by the city council. The resolution recognizes Rabbi Leon’s work in educating, counseling, welcoming and performing return ceremonies of *b’nai anusim*. Teaching the people of El Paso about the descendants of the victims of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition has been his passion for over 36 years. He shares this day with the entire community.

“I hope and pray that the return of the *b’nai anusim* to their Jewish roots, and the recognition by the world that there are between 100 and 200 million people who are part of this incredible story will help create understanding and peace among all people,” said Leon. “I thank my wife Sharon, my daughters Shoshana and Rebekah, and my grandchildren Daniel, Jordyn and Emme for their support and encouragement.

“I thank Congregation B’nai Zion for allowing me to be your rabbi and rabbi emeritus for so many years. I thank The Anusim Center Synagogue for giving me the honor of continuing this important work. And I thank each and every one of you for your loyalty and inspiration. May you all have a wonderful ‘Rabbi Stephen Leon Day!’”



## An exciting new position

Congratulations to SCJS past president Roger Louis Martínez-Dávila for starting an exciting new position as co-director at the Center for Research Frontiers in the Digital Humanities at the University of Colorado–Colorado Springs.



**ROGER LOUIS  
MARTÍNEZ-DÁVILA**  
Colorado Springs, Colorado  
[www.rogerlouismartinez.com](http://www.rogerlouismartinez.com)  
[rmartin8@uccs.edu](mailto:rmartin8@uccs.edu)

## Ladino Day Program conducted in... Ladino!

**R**achel Bortnick, born in Izmir, Turkey and a native speaker of Ladino, was deeply honored to be invited to participate in the Ladino Day program in Istanbul in February 2023. It is the biggest celebration of Ladino Day in the world, and the only one conducted entirely in Ladino.

*Esto muy alegre i ororada de ser invitada a partisipar en el Dia de Ladino de Estambol. Es la mas grande selebrasion de Dia de Ladino en el mundo, i la unika ke es echa enteramente en ladino.*



**RACHEL AMADO BORTNICK**  
Dallas, Texas  
bortnickra@sbcglobal.net

Also, on May 5-7, she was an honored guest at the Festival Sefardi at Nahalat Shalom in Albuquerque.



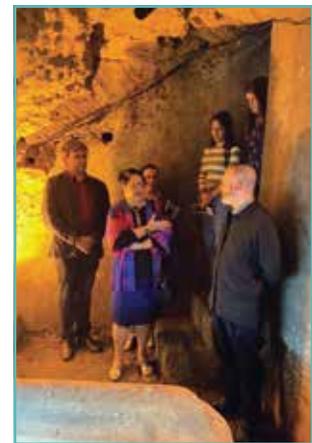
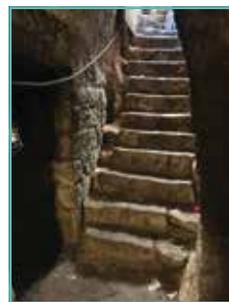
Rachel Bortnick is, among other things, the founder of "Ladinokomunita." Started in 1999 as a forum, it is a correspondence list that is still going strong. The first-ever online Ladino-only group, "Ladinokomunita" has about 1,500 members.

[www.ladinokomunita.groups.io/g/main](http://www.ladinokomunita.groups.io/g/main)

## Lights! Camera! Action!

**K**udos to Genie Milgrom for fulfilling another dream: to capture her history on film and (soon) share it with the world. Lucky are those of us who followed her from country to country on Facebook as she explored the Diaspora of Iberian Jews eventually ending up in Feroselle, the city of her ancestors, walking where they walked, reading their last testimonies.

"Heading home after three weeks of searching and reaching deep into ancestral and painful emotions, as well as exhilarating moments of discovery and facing my past head-on, I am truly exhausted but thrilled to have brought so many to the hope and understanding of who we are as descendants of the crypto-Jews. Thank you to all who followed along and became a part of my journey to truth and discovery. Thank you to the many that held my hand as I walked this path and brought me so much light when I was in the darkness." — Genie Milgrom



*A film in progress — Genie Milgrom explores the past on a personal journey.*

## Whimsical Ladino Proverbs

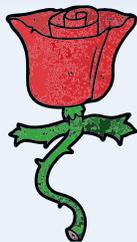


**A yawn travels from mouth to mouth, like wine from one wineskin to another**

*El bostezo va de boca en boca, como el vino de bota en bota*

**Eating is like scratching yourself: once you start, you can't stop.**

*El comer y el arrascar, es todo al empezar.*



**If you love a rose, you must ignore the thorns.**

*Quien quere á la rosa, non mire al espin*

**If the pitcher goes to the well often enough, it will break.**

*El cantaro va al agua, asta que non se rompe.*



**Walk with good people and you will become one of them.**

*Camina con buenos, te hareras uno de ellos.*

**Have a favorite quip, quote or saying? Send it to us! Please include your name and source, if applicable.**  
[corinnejb@aol.com](mailto:corinnejb@aol.com)

## Order Back Issues of HaLapid

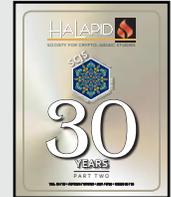
Own beautiful back issues of *HaLapid*! If you are a new member and would like to see what you missed, we still have copies of some past issues (in the current format) and will happily send them. Email your request and address to the editor - [Corinnejb@aol.com](mailto:Corinnejb@aol.com); Payment instructions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



Autumn/Winter 2022



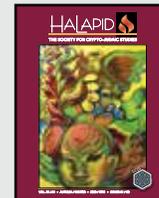
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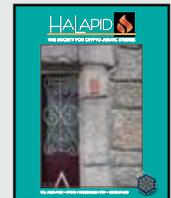
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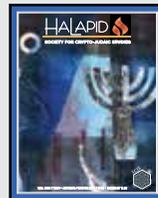
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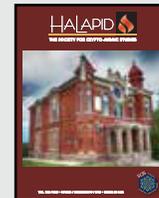
Autumn/Winter 2020



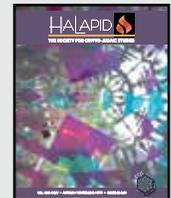
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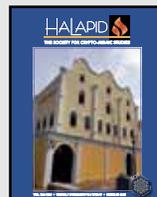
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Spring/Summer 2019



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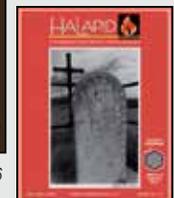
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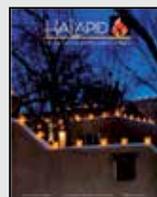
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