
The Secret Jews of the Southwest

Frances Hernández

The Holy Office spread its inquisitional activities into the New World along with the Catholic faith. King Ferdinand of Spain decreed its establishment soon after the first colonists were settled, appointing Juan Quevedo, the bishop, as inquisitor general, with discretionary powers, in 1516. Charles V, the Holy Roman emperor, heard stories of the harassment of the natives in New Spain, decided that the Holy Office had been committing excesses in its zeal, and decreed, on October 15, 1538, that only European colonists would be subject to the examinations of the Inquisition. But Philip II, stringently pious, increased its powers in Spanish territory only three years later, designating the new provinces of Lima, Mexico, and Cartagena as strong centers.

One curious, though typical case of the friars' dealings with the indigenous people is described by Rabbi Floyd S. Fierman from documents of the Holy Office in the National Archives of Mexico City.¹ The trial of an Indian, Martin of Coyoncán, on November 18, 1539, is recorded. Through an interpreter who speaks his own language, Suchmitl, the offender is asked to affirm that he is a Christian; he avers that he was baptized some ten years earlier. Then he is questioned about his sexual relations with four sisters, which he understands is against both Catholic law and his tribal custom. After he explains that the first two sisters had died before he became a Christian and married the third one in the church, he then confesses that he has lain with the fourth sister. His punishment is to be publicly beaten and shaved in his village—and admonished against any further relationship with either his wife or her sister on threat of burning at the stake.

In another case history, possibly the first New Christian in Mexico was Hernando Alonso, a blacksmith who arrived from Cuba with Pánfilo de Narváez in 1520, after previous service with Hernán Cortés. Alonso's name turns up as a witness or defendant in various actions from 1529 to March 9, 1558. On one occasion he was called to

give evidence against Cortés, who was being charged with failure to make a fair distribution of the spoils of war among his men. Later Alonso was accused of selling beef and pork from his own ranch located about sixty miles north of Mexico City at prices cheaper than those of his competitors. Finally, it is reported that he has been imprisoned because he had twice baptized a child, the second time according to the law of Moses.

Naturally, these decades of oppression by the Holy Office, involving spies and informers in all sectors of the Spanish-dominated society, caused increasing unease among conversos and anyone else who might be—for any reason—fingered for suspicious practices. In 1570 Philip II grew concerned about stories he was hearing from his clergy in New Spain of witchcraft, Lutheranism, recalcitrant Indians, and, most painful, heretics—especially those New Christians who were suspected of backsliding into Jewish observances. Although he had authorized priests to take whatever action they deemed necessary to combat these evils, a charge many of them accepted enthusiastically, he decided to establish strengthened headquarters for the Inquisition in Mexico City and in Lima that same year.

The first full *auto-da-fé* was celebrated in Mexico four years later—the same year Hernán Cortés died. This event increased the reign of terror that reached its climax on April 11, 1649, when thirteen Spaniards, all accused of judaizing, were burned at the stake at the *auto-general* in the city. In 1821 this activity was formally ended, although one more victim died in the flames five years later, the good fathers being unwilling to let their years of patient investigation on the case go for naught. The Holy Office was not legally closed down until 1834, by which time more than a hundred persons had been barbarously executed, with thousands more tortured, mutilated, deprived of property, and intimidated.

One of the most famous cases of the Inquisition in the New World was completed during that frenetic initial sixteenth century: that of the Carvajal family of Nuevo León.² Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva had first sought his fortune in New Spain as a merchant and then cattle rancher in Pánuco in 1567. He earned such a reputation as an Indian fighter and skillful colonizer that he won an appointment from the crown as governor of a vast territory in northern New Spain, to be

called the New Kingdom of Nuevo León. He also received the unusual dispensation to bring a boatload of relatives and employees with him without any documents attesting to their Catholic orthodoxy. In New Spain his nephew, whom he had designated as his successor, became a fervent judaizer and something of a mystic in the classic Spanish tradition. Because of Luis the Younger's open devotion to his ancestral faith, he was tortured and burned alive in the great *auto* of 1596.

An appreciable number of New Christians settled in remote areas of New Spain. Those who could not survive on the rugged frontier burrowed into anonymity. North into the desolate mountain fastnesses of what is now New Mexico was a forbidding destination. Several expeditions started up from Mexico in the 1580s and 1590s, looking for silver mines like those that had been discovered in Zacatecas half a century earlier, but their organizers found it difficult to recruit colonists. Too many stories had filtered down about the marauding Comanches and Utes, the high mountain blizzards, the distances between water sources.³

Fray Marcos de Niza made the rugged journey north in 1539, looking for the fabled cities of Cibola; he found nothing like the splendid centers he saw in his mind's eye, only a far glimpse of Hawikuh, now known as Zuñi Pueblo. His guide, the gigantic black slave Estevanico, brought him into Apache territory, but was himself killed by the Indians before the two explorers could return. Estevanico remains a figure in the songs and folk drama of New Mexican villages.

In 1598, when Juan de Oñate took the first colonists north to make a permanent settlement, his band of 135 soldiers, farmers, and their families were reluctant travelers. But some of them were under investigation by the Inquisition, making removal to even so unpromising a destination advisable. Indication is strong that several of those on the muster roll of January 8 were conversos who had been recruited because they were already on the lists of the Holy Office. Juan, Miguel, and Antonio Rodríguez and Francisco Hernández had, in fact, already been burned in effigy two years before. Their families and friends could only have wished to follow them into the wilderness to find freedom, however limited and tenuous, to preserve the traditions of their ancestors. Many did in the subsequent decades.

Most of the judaizers came after the Oñate expedition, seeking refuge in New Mexico in the seventeenth century. The first arrivals struggled up the Río Grande to the Española Valley, where they took over a pueblo called Okeh, near present-day San Juan Pueblo, renaming it San Juan de los Caballeros. Some moved into another Indian town, Yuquegunque, on the other side of the river, near where the Chama joins it. This was the first Spanish capital: San Gabriel.

In spite of the rigorous conditions, there were distinct advantages for the secret Jews. Primarily, there were very few priests around. As late as 1827, there were only seventeen clergymen in the entire territory.⁴ No one was around to inquire about strange-sounding prayers, comment on overfrequent bathing in a land where there was usually a water shortage, or observe a suspicious repugnance for pork in communities where any kind of meat was rare. The few missionaries who came confined themselves to their estates and concentrated on the Pueblo Indians, who turned out to be particularly recalcitrant about forced labor on the white men's lands. The Franciscans committed numerous atrocities in their attempts to repress the indigenous religion, destroying kivas, burning the sacred kachinas, and beating or killing religious leaders. The gross oppression led to the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, when the tribes attacked Santa Fé, which had been the capital and the location of most church activity for seventy years.

Not only were there few priests, but there were also few Europeans of any kind. Before the rebellion, the Spanish population never exceeded 3,000 in a vast area. The government of New Spain tried repeatedly to collect settlers into defensible towns, but they resisted all such efforts, remaining in widely distributed family groupings. They found that they were safer from raids by the plains Indians, who preferred more profitable attacks on larger communities with bigger stores of grain and other commodities. The colonists could pursue illegal trade without interference from the viceroy's officers; they shared labor and defense in communal arrangements led by headmen to whom they were related, known as *tatas*, rather than the *patrones* who treated their neighbors as bound servants. They could also work out understandings with nearby pueblos when the Indians were not threatened by the ministrations of priests.



Tombstones from Catholic cemeteries in the American Southwest with Jewish symbols
(Courtesy Frances Hernández)

The early colonists who had come with Oñate had received *encomiendas* from the government in Mexico—land grants complete with rights to force the natives to work on them. Two generations later, the scattered, isolated communities had taken on a social leveling; by the eighteenth century there were no more hereditary aristocrats nor paupers. With fewer than 2,500 Spaniards and some 24,000 Pueblo Indians on the Río Grande, Chama, El Rito, and Nutrias rivers, there was inevitable mixing of the gene pools. Local folk applied the name *coyotes* to those among them who were part-Spanish, or Spanish and some other European blood, such as that of the French trappers who occasionally followed the muskrat and beaver down from Canada. The nomadic Indians from the eastern plains were *gentiles*, and the rare crosses of Indian and black parents—all those who claimed to be descendants of Estevanico—were known as *zambos*.

After the Pueblo Revolt, when Spaniards from the larger towns fled back to El Paso del Norte, Diego de Vargas returned from exile with fewer than forty families who were willing to try the risks of colonization again. In 1693–94, de Vargas was able to recruit sixty-seven more families from central Mexico, followed the next year by another twenty-seven. To the already established residents, these newcomers were known as *españoles mexicanos*, since most were Mexican-born and part-Indian. Another group formed in northern New Mexico by the eighteenth century was the *genízaros*, Pueblo Indians who had been separated from their tribes by capture by plains Indians or by forced military service for the Spaniards. These displaced persons received communal land grants in exchange for acting as a reserve military force to be called up if needed. Their town grants comprised one square league with water rights, all held in common. Some of these exist today, such as Tortugas in the south and Abiquíu on the Chama River; the Indian inhabitants must speak Spanish, since they have no common tongue, and their tribal customs are a pastiche of borrowed or remembered practices. While all these population movements were taking place, the secret Jews persevered unmolested in their isolated groups, completely out of touch with coreligionists anywhere in the world, but applying what they could recall of the law of Moses from generation to generation.

The Secret Jews of New Mexico

Four hundred years after the New Christian judaizers began to arrive in the upper Río Grande Valley and its tributaries, there may be some 1,500 families within the wider Hispanic population who have legitimate claim to be their descendants. Their cognizance of this heritage ranges from the rare few who have a full understanding of their history and what it means, to those who have vague family references and realize that there are customs, taboos, and attitudes among their relatives that are unusual or unexplained, to those who have no comprehension of Judaism and their possible connection to it at all.

But there are clues. To the alert observer, unusual customs and attitudes among members of the native Hispanic population reveal much about their ancestors. In some families candles are lit on Friday

nights, sometimes in the bottom of deep jars; approved marriage partners are limited to a few known and often related groups; active sports are discouraged on Saturdays; regular bathing is insisted upon, even in cold weather; and a pride in reading and general educational attainments is fostered.

One avenue for investigation is through the records of the Inquisition with their detailed lists of suspicious behavior that may indicate the New Christians' involvement in judaizing. The tribunal in Mexico City was alerted by any observed reluctance to eat pork or shellfish; the rumor of a secret room, especially interior or underground, that might be used for proscribed prayers; an evident concern for the burial of deceased relatives in shrouds of new linen without using coffins; the discovered possession of copies of the Bible, especially the Old Testament; or a noticed avoidance of lighting fires for cooking on Saturday, even in the chill mountains of New Mexico. Sometimes conversos displayed an exaggerated piety among their Christian neighbors; others evaded contact with the church whenever possible, submitting to confession only when required.

Initially, the fear of the Inquisition was fundamental. The first colonists arriving in the sixteenth century carried with them stories of relatives and acquaintances who had fallen victim to the Holy Office in Spain or Portugal. The institution, which had been formed as recently as 1480, did not function under the authority and control of the pope, but received its administrators by direct appointment of the monarchs. Almost a hundred years after its appearance in Spain, the Inquisition was established in Lima and Mexico City by King Philip II to "free the land, which has become contaminated with Jews and heretics."

The threat of the Inquisition did not disappear until 1821, and it rarely penetrated into the upper reaches of the Río Grande Valley. There were, however, some highly visible prosecutions well into the seventeenth century. For example, the friars pursued Bernardo López de Mendizábel, the Spanish governor of New Mexico from 1659 to 1661, and his wife with charges of judaizing. López died before the case was brought before the judges, who ultimately decided that there had been no real evidence against the couple after all and

announced a postmortem exoneration. Though infrequent, such events could not have been encouraging to the secret Jews.

Even though the Inquisition was always a distant threat to those above the Paso del Norte, there were real enough dangers nearby. If a family were exposed as judaizers, they could lose title to their land, no matter how long they had occupied it, since Spanish land grants could be held only by bona fide Christians. If settlers who used land that they did not own came under suspicion, they could be denied their water rights—a sentence of extinction in the arid Southwest. Even years after these rights were stabilized by secular government, inhabitants who were denounced by their neighbors faced formal banning from the local pulpit and ostracism that could make social interaction uncomfortable and earning a living unlikely. In the necessarily communal villages of the Rocky Mountains, where survival depended on a barter economic system, exclusion by one's neighbors had to result in departure and loss of property.

To this day, revelation of their background is strongly resisted by those who still live in ancestral villages or in enclaves within what have become urban areas. Most of the information about them that has emerged comes from individual members who have left their communities, moving out for education, jobs, marriage. Clemente Carmona, for example, who comes from the largest remaining Sephardic enclave in New Mexico, located in the Atrisco Grant south of Albuquerque, reports the anger of his relatives when he described to an interviewer some of their traditional observances. Dennis Durn encountered strong resistance from family members when he publicly converted to Judaism after his genealogical research through fourteen generations in New Mexico disclosed an unbroken line of New Christian judaizers. Daniel Yocum, a south valley engineering student, recalls how irate his grandmother became when her husband carved a menorah and displayed it in a window where it could be seen by passersby, even though she was rigorous herself in her clandestine religious observance. For persons who have guarded their secret through so many generations, this final probing of their private practices is still perceived as dangerous. Many of them are also members of Catholic parishes, an association that they value and regard as protective. Local ostracism and the disdain of their neigh-

bors continue to be feared, even in this era of multiculturalism and ethnic pride.

In spite of the centuries of hiding, some awareness of the presence of the crypto-Jews has always existed among the Hispanic populace. William Day, director of city services for senior citizens in El Paso, recalls a schoolyard situation when he was growing up in southeastern New Mexico in the 1920s. Raised on an isolated ranch in Sierra County, he was sent by his parents to live with relatives in order to attend school in the village of San Antonio on the Río Grande some twenty miles south of Socorro. The only school there then, as in all the rural counties of the state before the Second World War, was parochial. There the new boy noticed that the Hispanic children seemed to divide themselves into two groups, one much smaller than the other. Occasionally, teasing and fights broke out between them, at which point the nuns would rush into the larger crowd, dispersing them with cries of, "Now, you leave those little hebreos alone!" Day did not realize until many years later what the term meant and believes that none of the children did at the time.⁵

Suspect Names

One of the first clues that the Dominican and Franciscan officers of the Inquisition pursued was the names, both surname and given, of suspected conversos. When Jews submitted to conversion in Spain, they often adopted the names of their religious sponsors: López, Gómez, Domínguez, Rodríguez, Sánchez, Ramírez, García, Hurtado, Varela (also spelled Barela locally), all common in the Southwest. José Estrudo lists, in an essay titled "Nombres Apellidos Sefarditas," the most frequently used Jewish names during and after the Inquisition: Marcos, Vidal, Mercado, León, Andrade, Arias, Benavides, Castro, Henríquez (or Enríquez), Ferro, Hernández, (or Hernández), Franco, Medina, Méndez, Mendoza, Pérez, Rodríguez, and Salazar.⁶

Alfonso Toro, in *La familia Carvajal*, records the names of families persecuted by the Inquisition in Mexico during the sixteenth century: Almeida, Alvarez, Andrada, Carmona, Carvajal (or Carbajal or Carabajal), de la Cueva, de León, Delgado, de Nava, Duarte, Enríquez, Espejo, Espinoza (or Espinosa), Ferro, Hernández, Herrera,

López, Martínez, Morales, Muñoz, Núñez, Pérez, Rivera, Rodríguez, Salado, Sánchez, Saucedo (or Saucedos or Salcido). All of these names, except Ferro and de Nava, appear in the early records of New Mexico settlements. Among the original settlers of San Gabriel, the village that became Oñate's capital, are the following names that were recognized as usually Jewish: Cáceres, Carrasco, Castro, Durán, Espinosa, Fernández, García, Gómez, Griego, Hernández, Herrera, Ledesma, León, López, Morales, Pérez, Ramírez, Rivera, Robledo, Rodríguez, Romero, Sánchez, and Varela.

The most common names today in northern New Mexico (Taos, San Juan, Río Arriba, Bernalillo, San Miguel, and Mora counties), many of which have previously been cited as of Sephardic connection, include Abeyta, Alarid, Alire, Aragón, Archuleta, Armijo, Atencio, Baca, Barreiro (one of the few clearly Portuguese names) Benavides, Bustos, Candelaria, Casías (Casillas), Cerda, Chaves (and Chávez), Cisneros, Cordova, Corrales, Enríquez, Espinosa, Gallegos, Gamboa, García, Girón (also spelled Jirón), Gómez, González, Griego, Gurulé, Gutiérrez, Hernández, Herrera, Jacques (also Jáquez), Jaramillo, León, Lobato (Lovato), López, Lucero, Maez (Maes), Maestas, Manzanaras, Marques, Martín (which became Martínez in the eighteenth century and now belongs to 20 percent of the population), Medina, Miranda, Montoya, Muñiz, Olivares, Ortega, Ortiz, Pacheco, Pérez, Pino, Quintana, Rivas, Rodríguez, Romero, Saes (apparently lost in the current generation), Salazar, Sánchez, Sandoval, Santiestevan, Serna, Serrano, Silva, Sotelo, Suazo (Jewish in Portugal), Tafoya, Telles, Tenorio, Torres, Trujillo, Ulibarri (almost the only Basque surname in the region), Valdez, Velarde, Velásquez, Vigil, and Zamora.

Of these names and some that appear in other parts of the state, there are interesting backgrounds. Loggie Carrasco of Albuquerque claims that her family name has a Hebrew root, meaning "oak tree," and that the surnames Pino, Jaramillo, Ramírez, and Durán are similarly derived.⁷ Some names indicate national origin: Griego means "Greek"; Frésquez means "Flemish"; Gallegos refers to the Spanish province of Galicia. Two surnames are evolutions from the French: Archebeque comes from L'Archeveque, and Gurulé from Grollet.⁸ The name Rael is believed to have been originally Israel (spelled Ysrael in preceding centuries), and Cobos was once Jacobo. Bena-

vides (often spelled Benavíez in analogous form to the other *ez*-ending names) probably began as Ben David. Lucila Benavíez, a native of Tierra Amarilla near the Colorado border, told me of a surprising incident involving her family name. After her parents both died before she was five, she was raised in a Catholic orphanage in California, knowing little of her family background. As a middle-aged woman in 1989, she walked into a small crafts shop in Los Angeles, where she paid for her purchase with a check. The shopkeeper looked at her name and commented, "Oh, you are a Sephardic Jew." She had no idea what that meant, but has since researched her family tree five generations back to find the names Sánchez, Velasques, Chávez, Manzanares, Delgado, Martínez, and López among the Benavíezes.

One family that is certain of Jewish connection are the Cocas of Taos and Las Vegas; their name is Portuguese in origin, as are most of the surnames that are spelled with the *es*, instead of the *ez*, ending, which in both cases means "son of." The actual surname Sefardita did not turn up in New Mexico to our knowledge, but it is in the family of Cecilia Concha of El Paso. Her great-aunt, who was also the aunt of the famous Mexican painter Diego Rivera, was Emilia Rivera y Sefardita. She had emigrated in the nineteenth century from Galicia in Spain to Guanajuato, Mexico. Another local surname of particular interest is that of the Amézquitas of Doña Ana County. Having emigrated from central Mexico four generations ago, they are aware that their name is of Arabic derivation from a phrase that means "to the mosque." Perhaps their ancestors were among the *mozarabes*, or forced converts, in the Muslim population of Spain.

In regard to the given names of certain families, favored ones for girls are Sara, Ester, Judit, Raquel, Rebeca, Susana, Josefina, Betsabé, and Rosa. In fact, my first cognizance of the remnants of Sephardic culture in New Mexico involved a girl's first name. Some thirty years ago a little girl in Santa Fé named Ester García told me excitedly that her parents were planning a party for her name day. It is the custom of Hispanics in northern New Mexico to celebrate the official days of the saints for whom their children are named, whether or not they were born on those days. Since there is no Saint Esther on the Catholic calendar, I was puzzled. After asking her the date, I consulted the Hebrew calendar for the month of Adar and discovered that

her date was Purim that year—the Feast of Esther. I knew that her parents were educated persons who must have known what they were about. But what was going on here? In the years since then, I have learned that *el día de Ester* has been observed in many mountain villages as long as anyone can remember.

The names for men that recur in some areas are often from the Old Testament: Arón, Abrán, Adán, Benjamin, David, Daniel, Efrán, Emanuel or Manuel, Eliu, Eliseo, Esequías, Ezequael, Gedeón, Isac, Isidro, Jacobo, José, Jeramías, Jons, Josías, Josué, Moisés, Natán, Noé, Rubén, Salomón, Sansón, Zacarias or Zecarias. Names for boys were sometimes chosen by the *rezador*, or prayer leader, of the community, a sort of circuit-riding rabbi among the isolated settlements who consulted his prayer book or Bible for suitable selections. The custom of naming children after dead relatives can be observed, as newborns carried forward the given name from a departed great-uncle or grandmother.

It is instructive occasionally to note the name choices listed for family members in obituaries. Thus, when Raquel Orona died on May 29, 1991, in Mesquite at the age of ninety-four, it was reported that she had been preceded in death by her husband, Manuel; her brothers, Eliseo and Marcos; and two sisters, Ester and Rosa. Her nine sons include Moisés, Benjamin, Salomón, Elías, Daniel, Eliseo, David, and Issac. The family is, incidentally, Protestant: members of the Church of God of Prophecy.

Similarly, when Abraham Daniel Gonzales died in Pueblo, Colorado, on October, 1990, also at ninety-four years, his sons included Leví, Daniel, and Benjamin. He did not belong to a church, but was buried with a graveside service at the Old Fort Garland Cemetery, under the direction of the Romero Funeral Home. Another old-timer from the village of La Madera in Río Arriba County was Manuel Rafael Griego, who died in the fall of 1991 at the age of ninety-eight. His wife and his sister shared the same first name: Siria Trujillo and Siria Gallegos. He was buried in the “nondenominational” cemetery at La Madera by Lujan’s Funeral Home.

The absence of affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church in three small communities that are almost entirely Catholic, as well as the presence of so many Old Testament names in the family trees, sug-

gests an adherence, at some level, to their ancient Judaic heritage. One family that Dr. Stanley Hordes studied in the village of Questa, west of Taos, has been prominent in the civic affairs of the region for several generations: the Raels of the homestead at El Valle del Oso on the upper Río Colorado. From father to son, the names Moisés, Salomon, and Jacobo have alternated through the years. Although there are several other indications of a Jewish connection, the family resists the identification.

The Sacred Sabbath

Of all the suggestions of a Jewish presence in the native population, the persistent observance of the Sabbath is most often mentioned. I have heard many reports of lamps lit at Friday sunset, left burning all night with a long linen wick, and the explanation that the light was an offering for the repose of the souls of dead relatives. Sometimes the wick was placed in a bowl of pure olive oil, which might continue to glow for a week. Women lighted candles for the Friday-evening meal, presumably in honor of the Catholic saints, but they did not say which ones. Daniel Yocum of the Atrisco enclave remembers the Friday-night candles in his home, around which the Old Testament stories were retold. Ana Rael Delay, a forty-five-year-old Santa Fe woman, recalls her grandmother's Friday candles;⁹ so does Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez, an anthropologist at the University of Arizona. Berta Trillo, using an assumed name, reports that all draperies at the windows of her home in Las Cruces have always been drawn before the lighting of the Sabbath candles, a custom that her grandmother told her had been in the family for five hundred years.¹⁰ There were Sabbath candles and Hebrew prayers in the home of Dr. Efrén Martínez, a dentist in Denver, whose mother continued the practices of Judaism, even though she was married to a Catholic.

Women of these families did their shopping and food preparation early on Fridays, rushing home as soon as possible to arrange the festive meal of the week. Some fathers or grandfathers returned home from their week of labor bearing loaves of freshly baked bread, often formed by rolls of dough braided together before going into the oven in some unidentified kitchen. Several residents of Old Town in Albu-

querque remember a certain Italian priest named Father Libertini who was posted in this old Spanish-speaking neighborhood during the first quarter of our century; known as a Jew-baiter in this community with many converso families, he was fond of dropping in on certain households on Friday evenings to ascertain if more candles than usual were aflame or had just been doused.

On Saturdays the judaizers devoted themselves to diligent bathing and trimming of their finger and toe nails, with gentle attention to the elders for whom these tasks of personal care were difficult. The bed linens were changed, and everyone acquired clean underwear, over which they donned their best attire. Dennis Durán remembers his family getting all cleaned up and staying home, except to make short visits to relatives in the neighborhood, especially if anyone had been reported sick during the week. While the fathers of other children usually worked on Saturdays and lounged around the local cafés on Sundays after mass, his father worked on Sunday. The approved occupations on Saturday were prayer, study, and quiet games. In Daniel Yocum's family, the youngsters were chastised if they became



Tombstones from Catholic cemeteries in the American Southwest with Jewish symbols
(Courtesy Frances Hernández)

too active or noisy. The Yocums attended mass, but on Saturdays, when that option was available in their parish; at church they were warned by their mother to concentrate on God and not to digress with prayers to the saints.

In the Carrasco family of Atrisco, the prayers were the standard Catholic petitions, but without any reference to the Trinity. Loggie Carrasco remembers that when the Virgin Mary was mentioned, her grandmother reminded her to think of the other Mary—Miriam, the sister of Moses. Michael Atlas-Acuna says that his great-great-grandmother taught her descendants not to pray to Jesus, usually delivering her instructions while lighting the Friday night candles. Study of religious materials, after they became more available in the nineteenth century, was an important duty on the Sabbath. Josephine García of Albuquerque claims that she had heard the stories of the Old Testament read aloud to her so often that she was able to recite many of them verbatim before she entered school. On the other hand, she never saw a copy of the New Testament until she was in high school. Ramón Salas, who is employed as a materials analyst at Digital Equipment Company in Albuquerque, recalls that it was his task to write out the family prayers, which usually ended with the words, *Que Dios y la ley de Moisés nos protegen!* ("May God and the law of Moses protect us!").²¹

One of the most intriguing stories of Sabbath observance I have heard involves an old Hispanic Catholic family of Albuquerque. The account was given to me by Laura Stacy, a Las Cruces girl who was attending a temple in that city, where the Cosdens were a new couple recently arrived from the East. They told her about a strange experience they had as newcomers to the community. One Friday evening they were invited to dinner at the home of friends who are members of a family that has been prominent in the area for generations. They all sat down to a lovely candle-lit table, but before she joined them, the hostess turned to the wall of the dining room on which hung a picture of Jesus of the style that is standard in Roman Catholic homes. She twisted the cord from which the portrait was suspended until the image faced the wall. The she sat down at her end of the table without comment on her action. The Cosdens were embarrassed, assuring her that she need not have made that gesture to

acknowledge the fact that they were Jews on their Sabbath. The lady of the house expressed surprise, declared that she had not realized that they were Jewish, and explained that her action was merely a custom that had always been observed in her family on Friday evenings.¹²

The Holidays

As with the persistent observance of the Sabbath, various judaizing customs also coincide with some of the traditional holy days of the Hebrew calendar. As in the case of little Ester Garcia of Santa Fé, the *día de Ester* in March has been a regular festival in many northern New Mexico communities and in such now-urban enclaves as Atrisco. Clemente Carmona remembers that it was primarily a women's festival, during which mothers explained domestic tasks to their girl children. They fried *empanadas*, small pastries filled with beef, pumpkin, or whatever dried, spiced vegetables were left from the winter hoard. Sometimes the triangular pies were referred to as *hamantashin* ("Haman's hat"). These pies were consumed with much drinking and singing by neighbors dressed up in their new spring clothes. Women lit candles to Saint Esther and other favorite personas, always including the *Gran Santo*—Moses. The oldest person present for the occasion—man or woman—was asked to say the blessing over the wine.¹³ On February 12, 1964, a new archbishop arrived in Santa Fé: James Peter Davis, an Anglo unfamiliar with local ways and indisposed to be tolerant of them. He soon announced *ex cathedra* that Esther was not a Catholic saint and should no longer be so venerated.

In April, when the Spanish villages were busy with their passionate celebration of Easter, some families were repeating their own ancient customs related to the season. Dennis Durán recalls that his people baked unleavened bread for several spring days, which the children looked forward to because of its surprising crispness. Other special foods marked that week or two: *sopa*, a bread pudding with cinnamon and raisins; *capirotada*, layers of bread, dried fruit, cheese, and syrup baked together as a festive dessert; and the *lentajas*, or lentils, cooked with venison. The Saturday before Easter, the men pre-

pared a large salad, featuring the earliest vegetables in the spring garden—and that was all that the families ate until sundown. On Good Friday, *tortas de huevo* were the only food served: thick slices of potato dipped in egg batter and fried in hot chile sauce. To celebrate the holy Sunday, all groups, both Catholic and suspect Catholic, baked or roasted whole kids, *cabritos*, in underground ember pits. But certain families drained blood from the slaughtered animals and used it to mark unobtrusive signs on their doors. Inside those houses some ferocious spring cleaning had been going on in preparation for this event, too.

At the end of May, about the time that the Americans had introduced their Memorial Day in the nineteenth century, Ana Rodríguez and Silvia Carmona-Durán remember that their aunt used to read to them the story of Ruth from the Bible. I know of no other vestigial observance of Shavuot in the month of Sivan. But in June all the villages up and down the Chama, Pecos, Río Grande, and even the smaller streams celebrated San Juan's Day by taking their first summer plunge into the icy mountain rivers. Some particular families bathed together in the fast-running *acequias*, or irrigation ditches, which served as a communal mikveh.

The most solemn observances of the year were the High Holy Days of the early fall. Rosh Hashanah, was known as *el Día Grande*. Young people realized that it was an important day for their elders, with their grandfathers praying in the cellars, but they did not often comprehend that it marked a "new year," different from the one they had learned on the common calendar. Soon afterward came an even more awe-striking day, when the Carmonas and their neighbors from Atrisco would vanish into the fields along the irrigation ditches from dawn until sunset. Although they appeared from a distance to be picking spinach, they spent the hours reciting prayers and singing mournful songs.¹⁴ At Abiquiú, Truchas, and other villages in Río Arriba and Taos Counties, some families had the custom of walking from house to house on a certain fall day, forgiving any offenses that they might have suffered from their neighbors and asking absolution for any unkindness or oversight they might have committed during the year. Some women were reported to have tucked peas or wheat

grains into their shoes so that the discomfort during the day would remind them of any forgotten transgressions.

A few citizens from the ranches near Bernal and Tecolotito in San Miguel County recall powerfully moving chants sung in someone's barn on the night before the sacred Day of Atonement, when they heard the claim that all personal vows that they might have made during the preceding year were now declared annulled before the majesty of the Lord: a *Kol Nidre* of the mountains. In a quite different kind of observance, along the lower Chama River of Río Arriba County, two communities, the Indian Pueblo of San Juan and the Hispanic village of Chamisa, have for many generations shared a new moon festival in the early fall. Old records indicate that at these annual joint gatherings, the Tewaed speakers and the Spanish-speaking neighbors renew ancient agreements involving some fairly elaborate codes of compensation payments in the event of injury to person or property, as well as the promise to honor the right of asylum for any fugitives. Some investigators have concluded that aspects of these covenants for peaceful negotiation appear to be based on Mosaic law. It is also significant that interpretations of the agreement, as well as administration of its provisions, were often left to members of the Penitentes, the secret religious brotherhood that frequently provided the leadership in isolated settlements.

One of the most memorable stories that has come to me about Yom Kippur was related by our great-aunt, Loyola Hernández, who spent her life as a nun in the convent of Loretto in Santa Fé. Sister Loyola described a close friend of hers in the 1920s, another elderly nun, who always went into seclusion one certain day in early October. When her sisters asked if she were fasting for a special intention, she explained that her own aunt, who had also been a member of the convent, had instructed her as a child to spend this annual day in prayer, asking for forgiveness of her sins against others. She believed that the observance had been imposed by some long-forgotten personal vow or dedication to a lost patron saint; neither of them had ever heard of Yom Kippur. Later in October the children of some families looked forward to the *día de los jacales*, when they helped their parents construct branch-roofed huts in their yards, where they ate jolly meals in the golden autumn weather and sang songs of thanksgiving for a

fruitful harvest. Clemente Carmona remembers his grandmother's stories of the temporary shelters they built at reaping time, where they ate festive meals of the bountiful valley crops before night frosts set in. He did not realize until middle age that the occasion was the Feast of Tabernacles. Bishop Davis, however, soon comprehended what was going on in the little booths and banned Sukkot as well.

The last of the year's major holidays was Hanukah, which seemed to come in conjunction with the Christmas festivities in which almost everyone was involved to some extent. Since the only school system in New Mexico, outside of the three or four larger towns, was Catholic until the middle of the century, all children took part in the Christmas pageants and parties. Most people set out *farolitos*, small paper bags half filled with sand into which candles were lodged. On Christmas Eve they also set ablaze *luminarias*, small bonfires in front of their homes, intended to light the Christ child's way to shelter. Ramón Salas and Daniel Yocum remember that the women of their families lit one candle in a sack the first night, two sacks on the second night, and so on, increasing the number for eight days, usually ending with nine flames at once around Christmas Eve.¹⁵ Others remember a week in midwinter that they called the *fiesta de Los Reyes*, during which eight or nine candles burned on the family altar. One memory connected with that holiday, which is shared by several informants, is that of playing with a special toy for that period: a *trompita*, or four-sided top, which resembles the traditional dreidel of European Hanukah games.¹⁶

One more custom is recalled, which occurred regularly in the homes of the secret Jews at the beginning of each month. As in the case of most ritualistic events, especially in the home, the women had charge of the ceremony. They placed two glasses on the household altar, one containing several stalks of grass, and the other, coins. Although the symbolism is apparently a wish for fertile crops and fiscal prosperity, the women refused to divulge to the men in the family what they were doing. Their secret incantations were often chanted in Ladino, the ancient Judeo-Spanish dialect—now remembered only in phrases and some pronunciation differences in New Mexico.

Foods

Most unusual foods among the secret Jews in New Mexico, Arizona, and southern Colorado were connected to their observance of the Sabbath or other holy days. But there were enough regular habits—especially those of which the Inquisition in Mexico City took particular notice—to set them apart in matters of diet. Even in these remote outposts of the New World, they tended to adhere to the age-old prescriptions. They could not eat bacon or other pork, which was not a temptation since pigs were not introduced into the region until the late eighteenth century. They had to eschew reptiles or fish without scales—not a problem in a land so far from the sea. They were forbidden animals that chew the cud but lack cloven hoofs, as well as bisulcate beasts that do not ruminate. But that allowed them to consume the common domestic animals: sheep, goats, and cattle, in addition to the rabbits, deer, elk, and antelope that were basic supplements. When they ate chickens, turkeys, or wild fowl, they were careful not to choke or suffocate the creatures, decapitating them cleanly with sharp knives and draining out the blood. They remembered that they were not to eat the fat or blood of their victims. Ray Padilla heard of heated arguments between his great-uncles about the condition of a knife to be used in slaughter—whether it was adequately sharp and unblemished to conform to the humane laws of Leviticus.

Another more esoteric law regarding the preparation of meat involved the *landrecilla*, or small round tumor in the glandular tissue of the leg of a ritually clean animal. This *nervous ischiadicus* must be removed from any creature to be eaten, except from poultry. Since this deveining was a difficult task to accomplish without demolishing the haunch, many cooks simply did not serve the hindquarters, merely feeding the sections to the dogs or making a present of them to their less circumspect neighbors.¹⁷

Another infraction of Catholic custom was the eating of meat on Friday, as happened in many households. This aberration, however, was looked upon tolerantly because flesh was hard to come by at any time—and the New Mexican Catholics had enjoyed a dispensation from this injunction for many years. Table manners included the habit of women to serve their menfolk first, without seating them-

selves to eat until the others had finished their meals. Traditionally the mother of the family served the eldest son first, after which his father helped himself to the dishes. For the women, a period known as the *dieta* extended for forty days of rest and seclusion following childbirth. During this period, they were fed by relatives or *comadres*, the godmothers of their children, with strengthening food: *chaqueue*, or "blue-corn gruel" in the Tewa tongue, boiled lamb, chicken or rabbit stews with chile, the flesh of a male black goat, and as much goat's milk as could be garnered.

Some dishes were especially appropriate for holidays: sweet, gooey *fichuelas*, smeared with honey, appeared around Christmas time; *pastel* or *pastelico*, a popular meat pie, could be expected for weddings and fiestas; and *pan de León* or *de España* was a round, sweet loaf baked in the outdoor ovens (*hornos*) when distant relatives came to visit. Special treats were the candies: *leche quemada*, or "burned milk," was a caramel syrup served over bread pudding or *atole*, finely ground corn gruel. Certain other fudge-like confections were wrapped in little decorated squares of paper, which were carefully smoothed, pressed, and preserved between occasions for their use. Some of these three-inch fragments were printed with dim pictures of a crowned, patriarchally bearded head—*maguen Davids*.

Everyday menus always included some form of bread. In northern Mexico and upward into the Río Grande Valley, the usual grain was wheat rather than corn; the flour tortillas, flat, round, and as unleavened as matzos, were fried on grills or hot stones. *Pan de semita*, or "Semitic bread," was, on the other hand, baked in sun ovens. Yeast-raised loaves were usually purchased from a baker for special events, such as Friday evenings in some households, when the farmers would come in early from the fields bearing the fresh, fragrant loaf from some nearby kitchen.

Many families preserved old recipes and styles of cooking from their ancestors in Spain, adjusting the ingredients to what was available in the distant West. Some have always used much garlic and onion, fried in vegetable rather than animal fat, which probably gave their dishes a distinctive—and suspect—flavor. Eggs were served with tomatoes and/or onions; lamb chops, *avas frescas con carne*, were broiled with stewed fava beans; and the *costilla de ternera* was veal

cutlets with minced garlic. Hunks of lamb or venison were braised on skewers; *media de calabaza* was stuffed summer squash; and cookies or *biscochos* were flavored with anise, sesame seed, and piñon nuts—all in method very similar to the Sephardic dishes still served in Rhodes, Istanbul, Damascus, and Jerusalem. Josephine García remembers her mother's unconventional tamales, assembled only with chicken and bits of beef—never with the more common chunks of pork. These filling “Mexican sandwiches” were roiled up in a scrupulously clean kitchen, where dishes containing milk were kept strictly separate from those involving meat, though Señora García never offered any clear explanation for why this odd rule was imposed.

Songs and Narratives

In the northern communities some linguistic hints in pronunciation and word form, occasional alternative lyrics to popular *romances* and to the *alabados*, or hymns of praise, and unusual themes in a few traditional tales suggest a Ladino influence.

The archaic speech has a distinctive accent noted by contemporary Spanish speakers, as in *bendishimos* instead of *bendecimos*, *mos* and *muestro* in place of *nos* and *nuestro*, and such forms as *vide* and *guiso/guisa*, which are retained by Ladino speakers around the world. When asked if the term *marrano* had ever been applied to them, some older persons assured an investigator that it was an insult applied to all Spaniards by Italians. In addition, they commented that the Spaniards called the Italians *moros blancos*, or “white Moors.”¹⁸ Among the popular songs, John Morgan has heard alternative lyrics involving “the little Sefardita” to the well-known ballad, “Las Golondrinas.”

Extensive collections of songs and folklore have been assembled by Dean John Robb of the department of music and Professor Ruben Cobos of the department of modern and classical languages at the University of New Mexico, both compiled during the 1940s and 1950s. Today this material is being thoroughly analyzed and collated by Dr. Rowena Rivera of Albuquerque. Among the old narratives, one or two have as protagonist a rabbi who overcomes his tormentors, and there is one in which the hero searches for the true religion

and finally "returns." Rivera comments, "I have come across some songs that derive almost directly from Jewish prayers. The question is how did they get to New Mexico?"³⁹

Religious songs, graces, and laments reveal other details. Two prayers, usually offered after a meal, are reminiscent of the Jewish grace after meals. One has the refrain:

Siempre mejor,	May we always improve, never
nunca peor,	grow worse, never to lose our
nunca nos perdimos	table from our
la mesa del nuestro Criador.	Creator.

Another is:

El Padre Grande	Great father, who cares
que mande el chico,	for even the smallest,
asegun tenemos de menester	according to your law,
para muestra casa	we guide our house
y para nuestros hijos.	and our children.

Occasionally the Hebrew blessing *Hodu L'Adonai qui tov qui le'olam chasdo* was quietly added.

At funerals, the mourning wails, or *llantos*, accompanied the corpse without embalming or coffin (at least into the 1920s) to its rapid burial. Certain *alabados*, or hymns, were appropriate for these solemn occasions, which sound much like the grieving dirges, or *endechas*, of the Sephardim. The *cantor*, or song leader of the community, started the stanzas, often singing several lines before the rest of the group joined in responses. Most of the *alabados*, which were sung for vigils, wakes, Lenten and Holy Week observances, are suggestive of a Sephardic milieu.

The Book

No Hebrew writing has survived from the early period except for some fragmentary inscriptions on pottery shards and on a large stone that could have been a door lintel, found in San Miguel County. The Jews of New Spain suffered from a lack of Hebrew texts. One scriptural scroll has been found: the "Little Torah," with some sixteenth-

century Spanish comments inscribed inside its ark, now residing at Temple Albert. It was discovered in a tin box, buried somewhere near Los Lunas, a community south of Albuquerque on the Río Grande that was colonized by New Christians. The circumstances of its discovery and delivery are a secret guarded by the congregation. It is known to have been dated by the department of anthropology at the University of New Mexico as pertaining to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.

Obtaining Bibles was difficult in a Catholic country, where priests assured the faithful that the misinterpretation of Scripture was a dangerous sin to be scrupulously avoided. In fact, Andrés Palacio, the author of the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews in 1492, had urgently warned against trying to understand the subtleties of the word of God without ordained guidance. Colonists in New Spain arrived with admonitions ringing in their ears about refugees who had settled in northern European countries and been infected with Protestantism, even to the point of demanding translations of the sacred texts into their own tongues. Since those days, Spaniards in the New World have continued to associate the presence of a Bible in the home, especially a copy in Spanish, with Protestantism.

The secret Jews had to resort to radical strategies to obtain texts. The earliest and most common was to give a son to the church; not only was this sacrifice a protective cover, but with a priest in the family, a Bible in the house was justified. If he turned out to be scholar, he could even acquire Hebrew volumes for them without anyone looking askance. One of the last of the young men so dedicated was Clemente Carmona of Atrisco, now a man in his sixties. Although he learned from his grandfather that he was a Jew while he was still in his teens, Carmona was sent, as firstborn son, to begin training for the priesthood at the Aquinas Newman Center on the University of New Mexico campus. After that initial study, he entered the Dominican seminary in northern California. While he was a student there, he was seriously injured in an automobile accident. During the leisure of his convalescence, he rethought his religious commitment, concluding that he must abandon the Catholic masquerade and emerge openly as a Jew. This decision deeply upset his family, who had earnestly adhered to their Judaic faith over many generations in secret, because

it would estrange them from the Hispanic Catholic community in which they had always lived.

The first major opportunity for the crypto-Jews of New Mexico to acquire Bibles that they could all read occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the first Protestants filtered into this remote section of Mexican territory. Hardy Scottish Presbyterian missionaries rode up into the hidden valleys, six-shooters on their hips and saddlebags full of cheap Bibles printed in Spanish. Many a lonely shepherd and isolated ranch wife taught themselves to read with the aid of these rare books. Some villagers murmured about those who so readily reached out for the forbidden volumes, commenting that they were probably Jews anyway. And many of them were indeed judaizers.

Rites of Passage

The customs of birth, marriage, and death are probably the most tenacious in any culture. Among the secret Jews some attitudes about parturition, the choice of mates, and appropriate burial still survive. For some women, confinement meant staying apart from their husbands for three months after childbirth. A few appear to have been observing the Levitical law that requires forty days of separation after the delivery of a boy and eighty after a girl. The practice of circumcision for newborn boys was spotty, depending on how isolated a Jewish enclave was from the surrounding community. Revelation of the condition was immediate when village children swam in rivers or the *acequias*—and soon reported to the local priest, if there was one. Nevertheless, a few old itinerant mohels operated up and down the territory, covering great distances between remote ranches and settlements. Clemente Carmona remembers one such wizened elder who always appeared from somewhere within a week after the birth of a boy in Atrisco, demanding plenty of boiling water for the sterilization of his instruments. The father and grandfather of Nora García Herrera were both circumcised by the same old man in their community; when the elder died, her father carved a star of David on his gravestone. In the 1870s, when the Presbyterians began to open their

hospitals, where all male babies were routinely circumcised, most of the practitioners disappeared.

The customs of death began when a moribund person was gently removed from her bed and laid on the ground, so that the spirit actually left the body while it was in contact with the earth, resting on two large boards with candles at both ends. The body was turned on its side, facing a wall. At the moment of expiration, the attendants shouted the *llanto*, or death call, which echoed through the neighborhood. Some families throughout the region preferred quick burials for their dead—before sundown of the day of demise, if not obstructed by a coroner or other official. Their neighbors were often shocked by the deprivation of a night-long *velorio*, or wake. The preparation of the corpse was ritualistic, usually done by women relatives or sometimes by the men of the Penitente Brotherhood, who carefully bathed the body, trimming hair and nails. After the 1920s the work of the Penitentes, who were repeatedly in trouble with the bishop, was taken over in many places by the Unión Protectora, which also helped orphans, providing dowries for destitute girls.

I have heard stories from two or three generations back about the stitching of shrouds, described by some as long tunics, cut from new linen if the family could afford it. More recently the dead have been buried in their own clothing, with hems and pockets cut out of the garments. The body was lowered into the grave wrapped in a blanket but casketless—a custom to which the Inquisition always took particular exception. María Sánchez remembers that all her relatives threw handfuls of dirt into the grave, murmuring, "*Eretz Ysrael!*" On one such occasion she asked her grandmother, "Are we Jewish?" To which the older woman replied, "*Somos Israelitas.*"

After the *endechas* were chanted, the mourners returned to the family home for a ritual meal of eggs and cheese, during which a curious custom was sometimes followed. A fertilized egg in its shell was set aside to present to the first stranger who might call at the house, with the idea that he would carry away the sting of death and at the same time a potential new life. Then the immediate family observed a week of mourning in seclusion, with all mirrors in the building covered or turned to the wall. No music sounded until after the funeral. A year later the dead loved one would be remembered with lighted candles.

Burial usually took place in the local Catholic cemetery, generally the only ground available for that purpose. But areas of the *campo santo* were set aside for individual groups of relatives. In some of these sections the headstones all face east and are blank except for the names and dates of the deceased. In some locales, the northern village of La Madera, for example, there is a tiny, hidden “nondenominational” graveyard, and in the exclusive burial grounds of the Penitente Brotherhood at such places as Santa Rosa and Tecolotito, gravestones can be uncovered in the underbrush that have stars of David and menorahs carved on them. Beto Ponce knows where a private graveyard lies off the highway to Romeroville; in a photograph of a tombstone there, marked with two stars of David, he has covered the family name with masking tape. In many cemeteries, markers can be found with both Jewish and Christian symbols, or occasionally the Masonic symbol as well. Emilio and Trudi Coca of Santa Fé have produced an extensive photographic study of these revealing stones, comparing them to pictures of stones with similar designs in authentic Jewish cemeteries in other parts of the country. In the old Penitente cemetery at Santa Rosa, for example, where the latest stone uncovered is dated 1911, they found etched beneath the standard crosses clear outlines of stars of David, menorahs, six-petaled flowers, hands with fingers spread to form six groupings—all Judaic symbols recognizable to the initiated. Michael Atlas Acuna of Pueblo, Colorado, has found Hispanic Catholic cemeteries in that area where stones are decorated with stars of David, eternal lights, and six-point lilies. He also reports that in a 170-year-old rural church near Trinidad, one can see stars of David with “Adonai” inscribed in the centers, menorahs, and the Ten Commandments in Hebrew all worked into the stained-glass windows.²⁰

Endogamous marriage has probably been the most critical of the measures taken to maintain this culture in the hinterlands. Researchers are mapping the patterns of intermarriage, finding frequent connections through many generations of the Espinosas, Villanuevas, Castros, Atencios, Carrascos, Gómezes, Luceros, and Lópezes. Although Dennis Durán was not apprised of his Jewish heritage while he was growing up, his mother made clear to him that he must select his wife from a list of specific families. In certain closed

communities, such as the village northeast of the town of Roy, or the settlement southwest of Gallup, or the Atrisco enclave, the men are regarded as very clannish by their neighbors, who learn that they strongly—even violently—oppose any match contemplated by one of their women with a man outside of the clan. Symeon Carmona, who was told by his grandfather that the family were Jews, can identify some thirty-five families in and around the Atrisco community, some as far south as Tomé, with whom they could contract marriage. Members of this group make themselves known to each other with cryptic phrases or hand signals; the children's future alliances are often arranged by relatives.

This endogamous tradition can be traced in the Carmona family as exemplars of the tendency. To avoid inbreeding in the small gene pool, men of the line have occasionally traveled far south to Zacatecas in Mexico, where cousins settled during the seventeenth-century Mexican Exodus, to find wives. The parents of Clemente and Symeon are José Santano-Matrovio Carmona and Victoriana Consuelo Pérez. José's parents were Juan de Diós Carmona and Eponsea Ramírez; Juan de Diós's mother was Susana Espinosa, one of the Zacatecas brides, and his father, Clemente Carmona. Susana's parents were Rafael Espinosa and Leandra Arcuna; Rafael's parents were José Espinosa and Julia Arcuna, all from the Zacatecas enclave.²¹

The church frowned upon marriage between two single, unrelated persons who both happened to serve as godparents for the same child. Even today a man and woman linked in the responsibility of *compadrazgo*, or co-parenthood, can cause a scandal in New Mexico by marrying each other against the ingrained taboo. Such marriages were countenanced, however, in family groups where the pool of appropriate partners was limited. The church did occasionally allow dispensation for nuptials within the first and second degrees of cousinhood, especially if pregnancy was involved, but the injunction against matches between step-parent and step-child or between step-siblings was inviolate. Nevertheless, such connections did occur within the Sephardic group, and there were even a few rare cases of polygamy, usually a man who had taken to wife two sisters, one of whom might be tubercular or deformed. Such unorthodox alliances were often arranged to keep property intact—as was common in

Christian marriages, too—as well as to maintain blood lines, sometimes with the public justification of heredity. The secret Jews always regarded themselves as *hidalgos*, Spanish aristocrats of pure blood line.

Other marriage customs included the expectation that the oldest son of the family would remain unmarried until the youngest son was adult. This restraint was imposed upon him because it was his duty to distribute the family estate upon the death or incapacity of the parents; it was felt that he would be more fair in dealing with his siblings if he did not yet have a family of his own to consider. On the other hand, the youngest boy or girl, known as the *socoyote*, had the charge of staying home to care for aging parents, often remaining unmarried until they died, or for life. When a child left home permanently for marriage or employment, he accepted his father's formal blessing with a kiss for the paternal hand. María Sánchez reports that in her family, following a nuptial mass, a private ceremony was held at home under a canopy.

Economic conditions of the family could postpone marriage, especially for the men. Even though the economy of the northern New Mexico–southern Colorado region was essentially based on *camblache*, or barter trade, with little money passing through any hands before the nineteenth century, it was possible to acquire some substance in property and goods. Those who were not prosperous by village standards postponed marriage. Steve Almond, a reporter for the *El Paso Times*, found an old electrician in a nondescript shop guarded by a Great Dane in downtown El Paso; he identified himself as a Jew who had left his northern New Mexico village when he was thirteen. He remembered that the elders of his clan had told stories about their ancestors all the way back to the first colonists of New Spain; that they wore prayer shawls for morning worship; that they ignored the Christian festivals and scrupulously followed Mosaic law. He stated that he had followed the way of his male relatives; if they could not find a Jewish bride, they did not marry.²²

Young persons of the current generation who are seeking their roots have discovered unknown relatives in distant locations, as a result of the constant effort to find suitable spouses. Dennis Durán, who has painstakingly reclaimed the family tree for fourteen genera-

tions in the Santa Fé area, has discovered that he is related to several families that he never heard of—and that some of them are still practicing Jews. George Martínez, who now lives in Montbello, Colorado, has sought out nine generations, finding relatives all over northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. Ramón Salas, on the same quest, discovered that he is related to Daniel Yocum. Salas has been able to document seventeen generations in the state, without finding any indication of official conversion to or from Judaism. In the process, he met an unknown third-cousin, María Sánchez, with connections at Romeroville, near Las Vegas, and at San Elizario, a far south village on the Río Grande below El Paso. He asked her if she was aware of their shared Jewish roots. She responded that if he had been using his good Jewish head, he would have become aware of his heritage long before.

One of the most charming stories I know is about a case of semi-exogamy, in which a New Mexico Sephardi married a New York Ashkenazic woman in the 1950s. Trudi Rattner came out to Santa Fé soon after the Second World War. There she met a handsome young native man, employed in nearby Española. When he asked her for a date, she replied primly that she was Jewish and did not go out with men of other faiths. Emilio Coca, however, informed her that one of her attractions for him was her background, since he was Jewish himself. Trudi, looking at a dark, dimpled Hispano, decided that the local fellows would go to any length to date an exotic New Yorker. But Emilio was finally able to convince her, with photographs of his grandmother wearing a star of David at her throat and with the recitation of Hebrew prayers, albeit in an odd accent, that he was indeed a Jew.

The Cocas of Taos and Las Vegas are descended from Miguel Coca de Vega, first recorded at the sixteenth-century fortified colony at Las Golondrinas near La Ciénaga, some twenty miles south of Santa Fé. His sons moved northward, probably when the capital was assigned priests. Emilio's branch settled in the Taos Valley; five Coca families are now listed in Las Vegas. One group, of which Miguel Coca y Lucero has now identified himself, reached and settled Guadalupita, north of Tecolote, one of the few settlements in the state that is still

too isolated to receive television signals. His distant cousin Emilio and Trudi Coca have now been married thirty-two years.

Christian Connections

The secret Jews of New Mexico overwhelmingly present themselves to the world as Catholics. The façade required of them as conversos remains largely intact today. Ben Shapiro, working on a research grant funded by the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities, spent two years interviewing Hispanics in Albuquerque, Santa Fé, and the small towns up and down the Río Grande Valley; all his respondents identified themselves as Catholics, even though they retain vestiges of judaizing rituals in their traditions and folklore.²³ The parents of Bertha Cobos Muskey, who now lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado, grew up in the lower-valley village of San Elizario, where they were Catholics, in spite of the fact that her father did not attend mass, but, instead, went to “meetings” with other men of the community on Saturday mornings, and that Mrs. Cobos, in her old age, has become more and more obsessed with the possibility of pork entering the house or meat and milk dishes being served at the same meal. There are a few, however, who have always avoided contact with the church, while, on the other hand, others have made connections with certain Christian organizations.

Four Gentile groups have had some influence among the Sephardim from the late sixteenth century through the nineteenth: the Jesuits, the Penitentes, the Protestants (Presbyterians and Seventh-Day Adventists), and the Masons. Each of these religious and social institutions seems to have offered some protection, initially, against the militant officers of the Inquisition, and at last, against isolation and ostracism resulting from nonparticipation in parochial activities.

The Society of Jesus offered sympathetic instruction and intellectual rigor in the Southwest, as well as in other parts of Latin America. Gabino Rendón, like many other northern New Mexican boys, had his first opportunity to begin learning English in the Jesuit school that opened in Las Vegas, New Mexico, in 1877. In those classrooms chil-

dren were allowed to read the Bible in Spanish and English, an experience totally forbidden by other priests.

Another Catholic connection was the Hermanos Penitentes, which some believe is a perverted remnant of the Third Order of St. Francis.²⁴ The fraternity had chapters, or *moradas*, in many isolated villages, even as far south as San Elizario, and conducted religious and social activities in communities that often did not see a priest from one year to the next. The groups did not proselytize, but simply brought in teenaged sons or nephews from one generation after another. The members undertook communal responsibility for each other, tending the sick, assisting the disabled, and helping to support widows. One Penitente family would address the members of another as *mano* from *hermano*, or "brother." The leader of the *morada*, or *hermano mayor*, usually came from the most prestigious family of the community. Far into the twentieth century, it has been difficult to be elected to any political post in the northern counties without membership in or at least support by the Penitentes.

The history of the Brotherhood is currently being studied by several researchers. It is not certain when the first *moradas* were established, but Bernardo Abeyta is credited with building the ancient church in the village of Chimayo, known as El Santuario, which may have been one of the first buildings of the Penitentes. This famous shrine, with a hole in its floor from which magic earth is scraped out to achieve miraculous cures, is very similar to one in Guatemala. And, in fact, the village was settled by the Ortegas, a clan of weavers that moved up from the Central American country in the late eighteenth century. Other old meeting houses are in the San Juan basin farther north; the chapter at Los Martínez moved to Cañada Bonita in 1920, apparently to avoid interference from the local church.

The services conducted in the chapter buildings—small, thick-walled, windowless adobe fortresses—were relentlessly secret, a situation that has always worried the church. Several New Mexican archbishops, especially Fathers Lamy and Salpointe, both of whom were French, did their best to eradicate the order. Its most renowned celebration was the annual re-enactment of the Crucifixion on Good Friday, or *Tinieblas*, with one of the members elected each spring to bear the cross at the head of a long, solemn procession of self-flagellants,

accompanied by groans, rattling chains, and the rhythmic beat of *matracas* made of dried gourds. Prayer leaders, or *rezadores*, were protected by the silence of their neighbors if any stranger came asking questions. In Chama, for instance, the *rezador* appeared to lead devotions at weddings and births, where he often had the honor of naming the child with a selection from his prayer book. Whether or not some *moradas* actually provided worshippers for judaizing enclaves is still debated. Dr. Rowena Rivera has found no direct evidence in their records, although many of their chants sound like prayers from old Sephardic communities in other parts of the world and their cemeteries contain gravestones with Jewish symbols.

The next Christian connections came much later in the history of the territory: the nineteenth century, when the first intrepid Protestant missionaries entered what was now part of the United States. Mexico had won its independence from Spain in 1821, but lost almost half of its land when General Kearny of the American army announced in 1846 at Las Vegas that he was annexing New Mexico, a claim that became official two years later with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Scotch and English Presbyterians rode in by the middle of the century, distributing tracts and selling Spanish Bibles for about forty cents. The Reverend Mr. Alexander Darley, called "the apostle of the Southwest," covered the sparsely populated territory of the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Among his first customers were the Penitente families, who were especially interested in the Old Testament. Many of them subsequently became Presbyterians.²⁵

One of the first Hispano ministers was Antonio José Rodríguez, who was invited by the Ute tribe in 1895 to found a school at Ignacio, Colorado. With the Indian leader, Julian Buck, as one of the first converts, Rodríguez's school continued into the 1920s, offering the Ute children their first exposure to education in English and Spanish. Prominent native preachers included John Whitlock y Lucero, the great-grandfather for whom my husband is named; Tomás Atencio; and Gabino Rendon. They founded mission schools and churches all over the northern reaches, creating a small but active Presbyterian community that has provided many educational and political leaders in the state over the past century. Rendón converted the entire vil-

lages of Trementina and Peñasco; Atencio helped found the English-speaking Allison-James School in Santa Fé and the Menaul School in Albuquerque; Whitlock's son-in-law, Benigno Hernández, both a Penitente and a Presbyterian, became the first congressman when New Mexico achieved statehood in 1912. One of Whitlock's grandsons became a regent of the University of New Mexico; another is a judge and former U.S. ambassador.

Becoming a Protestant was indeed a difficult decision in the area, requiring strong moral fiber to combat the threatening hostility of the community. Villagers recalled that one of the most suspect forms of behavior mentioned in the lengthy Edict of Faith published by the Inquisition in Valencia in 1519 was reading—anything, but especially the Bible. The purpose of the edict, read from all New Spain pulpits, was to enlist the populace in the search for judaizers. Those who indulged in the dubious habit of reading usually displayed a curiosity about the forbidden translations; and that frequently led right to the ardent little chapels of the Presbyterians. Almost everyone who could read was captivated by the books that the missionaries made available; those who could not often saw them as an opportunity to become literate. Relatives sometimes disowned these adventurous dissenters from the wisdom of Mother Church; others whispered that they were probably Jews anyway.

The Reyes family moved into northern New Mexico from Mexico, escaping from the Revolution of 1910 and bringing along a prosperous trade in liquor, as well as a Jewish identity. They married into the local Madero and Gallegos families, who had already become Presbyterians in Gabino Rendón's congregation at Las Vegas. Dr. Tomás Atencio, son of the minister, is now a cultural historian at the University of New Mexico; he says that his family takes their Jewish roots for granted. Dr. Gabino Rendón, another minister's son, teaches sociology at Highlands University; he is also interested in pursuing the hints and connections of a perceived Jewish past within the small Protestant community of northern New Mexico. Another, more recent Protestant group that has attracted converts in the region is the Seventh-Day Adventists; they observe the Sabbath on Saturday and conform to the Levitical dietary laws.

A second non-Catholic connection that seems to have been a latter-day analogue to the Penitentes for some communities has been the Masonic lodges, the first chapter of which in New Mexico was organized about 1878 at Fort Union, near Las Vegas. The Catholic Church was almost as inimical to the Masons as to the Brotherhood, and for the same reason: they incorporated religious motifs into their ceremonies, which, because of their policy of strict secrecy, the church could not control. The Masons suffered the same threats as had the Presbyterians when they were bringing the Reformation to New Mexico three hundred years after it took place in Europe. Most of the Masonic founders were English-speaking Protestants, who encouraged education in their recruits and bestowed a status on them that was recognized in the wider community. Gravestones in the cemeteries at Monticello, Anton Chico, Bernal, San Marcial, and Tecolote feature Masonic symbols, sometimes along with disguised Jewish signs. On a few markers in the separate graveyards around Puerta de Luna, the Masonic symbols bear Hebrew inscriptions within them.

The Future of the Crypto-Jews

Dr. Stanley M. Hordes, the leading researcher in this field in New Mexico, believes that the Hispanic-Jewish culture is rapidly dying out, succumbing to the influences of radio, television, and public education available in every corner of the territory. Although some villages and enclaves cling stalwartly to their customs, most of their children are leaving for higher education, jobs, and an inevitable melding into the larger community

Nevertheless, certain families cling to their background. They keep in close touch with each other, and settle in cohesive family groups in small towns, like the Mirabals and the Olivareses southwest of Gallup. Their habits include a refusal to hang pictures on their walls, an avoidance of kneeling during prayer and of kindling fire on Saturdays, and insistence that their children stay in school, in spite of the general preference among Hispanics for going to work as soon as possible. For a long time to come, some women will object to cutting out garments on Fridays, explaining that things will surely happen to prevent the completion of the project; oppose their sons' purchase of

automobiles, even when they can afford a down payment, with the argument that they might be killed on the mountain roads; and refrain from sweeping dirt out their front doors, carefully pushing it out the back way or lifting it through a window instead. Although they defend this last practice as avoiding bad luck, the usual explanation for any odd habit, Dr. Jack E. Tomlins points out that the same precaution is taken by women in open Sephardic communities in Greece and Turkey in order to avoid dishonoring the mezuzahs attached to their doorposts.²⁶

Specifically religious observances have managed to persist, probably because there have always been few priests in the northern villages to correct these aberrations. Even today many churches open for mass by a traveling cleric no more than once a month—or even once a year for a general baptism of children. Before the annexation by the United States in 1846, most of the native-born priests married and produced offspring. The famous Padre Martínez of Taos did much for his people in the late nineteenth century, promoting their education by opening schools and founding a newspaper that is still printed, *El Crepúsculo* (“Evening”). Archbishop Lamy excommunicated him, but he defiantly continued to minister to his flock. The fact that a considerable percentage of the citizens of Taos and Río Arriba Counties are now surnamed Martínez is credited to him, since he gave his name to all the foundlings and homeless children whom he took into his orphanage.

In a crypto-Jewish village, the clandestine religious activities centered around the *rezadores* who served as “rabbis.” They supervised the laborious hand-copying of psalms and prayers in Ladino, which were handed down from father to son, and appointed the *levantadores*, who lifted the sacred texts during secret meetings in different houses, sometimes in underground prayer rooms or, apparently, in the *moradas* of the Penitentes. Though Ladino is now largely forgotten, there was always a *rezador* available somewhere who remembered the prayers, for which the men stood with their heads covered.²⁷ Ramón Salas has recorded one of the favorite prayers, translated from the Ladino as follows:

Holy Savior of the world,

I, Ramón, call on you this holy day.
They have eyes; may they not see me.
They have hands; may they not use them against me.
They have feet; may they not reach me,
By the angels of Number 43.

The most important line in this incantation is the last one, referring to the chapter in Isaiah in which God promises to rescue His people and bring them home to the Promised Land.²⁸ And then there is the unknown carver from among the many crypto-Jewish families around the plaza who decorated the Church of San Felipe de Neri in the center of Old Town in Albuquerque with a star of David above its altar.

Some treasured artifacts remain: silver amulets chiseled with one or two Hebrew characters, said to be protectors against disease; Daniel Yocum's photograph from the 1920s of his grandparents' wedding pose, with the young groom wearing a tallit over his shoulders; a Christ doll, handed down in a family that called it a representation of the Messiah still to come, claiming that the real Mary was the sister of Moses—*El Gran Santo*. More than twenty years ago, an elderly lady of the numerous Chaves clan in Santa Fe—herself a Chaves on both sides and married to a Chaves as well—showed me a leather phylactery of the sort manufactured in western Europe in the nineteenth century. She had found it among her dead grandfather's possessions; when I asked her what she thought it was, she guessed a charm against the evil eye. In spite of all this evidence, when Stanley Hordes interviews persons in Atrisco, he is told that they do not want to hear that they are Jews, since they have enough trouble just coping with being Hispanic.

In many families the tradition of judaizing seems to have been shepherded through the women. It has often been through mothers and grandmothers that adolescents learned of their background. Berta Trillo discovered, when she was in her thirties, a stenographer's pad left by her grandmother, in which were recorded strange prayers consisting of Hebrew phrases written in the Roman alphabet, plus a few Hebrew letters, and the confession: "*Judía. Tu eres judía. Somos judíos.*" This revelation explained to Berta the hidden worship,

dietary peculiarities, and distrust of Catholicism that were typical of her childhood. Teresa Fajardo, a Las Cruces woman now in her forties, who is related to the Cocas of Taos and Las Vegas, had a similar experience of finding a notebook in which her grandmother had written the word *Judía*. Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez, an professor in his fifties, learned of his heritage about thirty years ago at the funeral of his only sister. On that occasion, his mother leaned close to him and whispered, "I'm going to tell you a secret that has always been passed on through the women of our family. But now I must tell you. *Somos judíos*. We are Jews."²⁹ As he looked back on his childhood, the only indication of this news that he could recall was the family's strict aversion to pork.

As guardians of the secret, the women were also severe about disclosure. Daniel Yocum remembers that his grandmother made her husband hide his carved menorah in the garage. There is also a strong suggestion that in some families a choice was made about which members would be told of the heritage and which ones would be allowed to merge, unaware, into the mainstream. Inevitably, some members also made the choice for themselves. This situation had led to families in which one branch of the line continues its judaizing practice, while another does not. An example of this is reported by Ed Martínez of Albuquerque, who comes from a tightly knit clan in a village south of Las Vegas. His parents and siblings lived on one side of a small river; his father's sister and her family were ensconced on the other side. Martínez knew that his aunt lighted candles on Friday nights, in spite of their cost in this impoverished community. When he was thirteen, his grandfather told him that his cousins across the river were Jews, but that they were close kin and that their practices must never be exposed.

Elsewhere, in areas where the crypto-Jewish families felt more secure against the censure of their Catholic neighbors, the grandfathers undertook the training of children as they reached the age of puberty. They explained that Moses is the great saint, that God is the only focus of prayers, and that they must perform such niceties as carefully washing their hands before eating, after which ablutions they were each to fold a napkin and place it on his shoulder. Grandmothers taught the Friday-night rituals, sometimes commenting that

the men did not remember the prayers accurately, while the women could be counted on. Fathers taught their sons the values of respect, honesty, and family responsibility, often mentioning that a youth must not consider marriage until he is able to give his own future son a secure start in life. Mothers bestowed the most powerful blessings on their children, constituting the sign of family approval. They taught their daughters the scrupulous management of the home, with fervent housecleaning each spring around Easter, and attentive care of their own bodies, with regular bathing and special modesty during menstrual periods, sometimes requiring a separation from the family for a few days. Girls also learned their community duties to care for the sick, help the poor, and work through women's organizations, such as the Union Protectora, to provide dowries for orphan or indigent brides. Many of these family-centered concepts will continue to be instilled and cherished.

Since the publicizing of this research, many persons have contacted investigators with questions and confidences. Cecilia Concha of El Paso, whose brother is a local priest, asks for information and tells me that her family is sure of its Jewish or Moorish descent. Ana Nuñez of Houston understands more about her roots since she talked with an elderly man of the Old Town section of Albuquerque, who explained that his method of testing the sharpness of a knife to be used for slaughtering was to try scraping the ink off newspaper print. Rachel Soles of El Paso reports that her study of ancestors has netted Diego de Montoya, some Godoys (a Basque name), and a Gonzalez who worked on the cathedral in Santa Fé—all of whom are related to Felix Torres in Socorro, as well as to some clandestine Jews in the villages of Tomé and Tortugas. Melissa Amado, a twenty-six-year-old graduate student at the University of Arizona, learned of her heritage by seeking out among her progenitors the descendants of the first Amado family in America, which left Valencia around 1700, apparently to evade the later activities of the Inquisition. During her search, she located a distant relative who told her that he is a Jew and that Judaism was the faith of the Amados. Michael Atlas-Acuna began to look into his background after reading in a newspaper about Stanley Hordes's research. He had heard that several of the Acunas had been with New Mexico's first colonists, among those who had

hastily left Mexico, where they had been marked for death by the Holy Office. Although he is married to a Jewish woman himself and can remember his own great-grandmother lighting Friday-night candles and warning him not to pray to Jesus, Atlas-Acuna was unaware of his own background until he happened upon the article.

Others have met with the realization in unusual ways. Ruth Flores Reed, now retired as an administrative assistant from the Mexican-American Studies and Research Center at the University of Arizona, regularly wore at her throat a curious silver amulet that had been passed down to her through the women of her family. One day Dr. Abraham Chanin, who serves as director of the Southwest Jewish Archives, explained to her that the tiny marks on the little plate were the Ten Commandments in Hebrew. She then remembered that when she was growing up in Mexico, her family ate no pork, read the Old Testament, believed in one deity—the God of Israel, and told stories about a prominent forebear, Ruíz de Apodaca, who had been her great-grandfather's first cousin, Mexico's last viceroy from Spain, and a secret Jew.³⁰ Somehow she had not made the connection from these details.

Ana Rael Delay of Santa Fé, who has been teaching school in Colorado since 1982, also read about the discoveries and was moved to recall unusual habits in her own family, which has traced its arrival in New Mexico to 1610. She can remember the days of *matanza*, or butchering, at her grandparents' rural homestead, when her grandfather repeatedly sharpened the *jifero*, or slaughtering knife, before cutting the throats of calves and goats, allowed the carcasses to drain their blood for a long time, and removed the sciatic nerve from the hindquarters, while repeating prayers through the whole process. Her grandmother went into a frenzy of activity around Easter time, baking a special yeastless bread that she called *gallecitas*, washing all the dishes in the cupboards, and lining all the shelves with fresh paper. Delay also recalls the stern warnings from her parents that she must never tell anyone about the family's habits.³¹ Since then she has learned that the family surname, Rael, is believed to have derived from Israel, and that she is connected to the Cocas of Taos, who know they are Jews.

Dr. Ray Padilla, the forty-seven-year-old director of the Hispanic Research Center at Arizona State University, emphasizes that he is a Catholic but, nevertheless, is fascinated by research into his Sephardic ancestry in Jalisco, three hundred miles north of Mexico City. He first became aware of the possibility when he read an essay by Dr. Raúl Padilla López, the rector of the University of Guadalajara, in which the educator describes his descent from judaizers in the Jalisco community. Subsequently, Ray Padilla and his brother made a journey to their parents' native village, where they noticed that the church had no crucifixes inside or out. They also saw that the men dressed with dignity, as their own father did habitually, always appearing in long-sleeved shirts and never leaving their homes without hats on their heads. The Padillas sought out neighbors who remembered their grandfather and his brothers, mentioning heated arguments among them on *día de matanza* over whether the butchering knife was sharp enough and completely free of nicks and whether the animal carcass had drained thoroughly before being taken down to divide.

The question remains now about what the future will hold. How are these Hispanos reacting to the unexpected knowledge—or revelation—of their Jewish connection? The range of responses is wide. Some villagers in isolated areas are still fearful, uneasy, and resentful that their secret is out. They are faced with the choice of denying the claims and continuing in their old unobtrusive ways, of joining the mainstream, or of deciding to practice Judaism openly, perhaps with some connection to an established Jewish community, even though the present-day cosmopolitan Ashkenazim seem more foreign to them than do the Spanish-speaking Catholics who have always surrounded them. Any of these routes requires courage for both the predictable and the unknown. A national debate goes on about how these long-separated, uneducated, often uncircumcised Jews should be accepted. Rabbi Marc D. Angel, leader of Shearith Israel, the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York City, and president of the Rabbinical Council of America, insists that they must prove matrilineal descent and/or go through valid halakhic conversion. In spite of a compassionate attitude toward these people who have endured so much in New Spain, Angel claims that “to eliminate these standards is to undermine the distinctiveness of the Jewish peo-

ple."³² Some local rabbis have assisted those seeking help into the assimilation process: in Albuquerque, Lynn Gottlieb, a Reform rabbi, has served as a discreet contact for the hidden Jews, and Isaac Chel-nick of a Conservative congregation, B'nai Israel, is assisting several in their formal adoption of Judaism.

Among persons outside the villages and enclaves who have recently learned of their background, there is also the range of responses, from staying with the Catholicism in which they were raised, to full conversion and participation. Marina Vaca, a fifty-two-year-old teacher's aide in Albuquerque, traces her descent from Leví Melendres, a trading-post proprietor who helped to establish Doña Ana County. Although she is not a practicing Jew, she plans to honor her ancestors by praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and walking the streets of the prophets in Israel.³³ Paul Márez, a twenty-four-year-old graduate student, belongs to a split family; some attend mass, while he goes to the temple with others. Dr. Efrén Martínez, the Denver dentist who is a native of Longmont, has recently seen his son through his bar mitzvah. Berta Trillo, who was called a Jew by her fellow Catholics in younger days, now sees her grandchildren being brought up as Jews and guarding the five-century-old rituals of her ancestors.³⁴ Ramón Salas has converted to Judaism after his family search, as has Dennis Durán, among his relatives. Durán, a contracts administrator at the Los Alamos laboratory, discovered that he is descended on both maternal and paternal sides from Gómez Robledo, who came to northern New Mexico with Oñate in 1598. This early settler is famous in colonial history as one of the few judaizers whom the Inquisition chased all the way from Mexico City into the upper Río Grande Valley; his was also an extremely rare case of acquittal, probably due to his strong armed guard. More than two hundred pages of the trial records of the Holy Office are devoted to this proceeding.

There are a few remarkable persons who have managed to maintain their Judaism more or less openly. One such is Loggie Carrasco, a woman in her eighties from Atrisco, who speaks Ladino fluently. She has charted her family tree back to the Iberian Peninsula, which her ancestors left, from Seville and Madrid, in the early 1600s. She holds a proprietary right in the Spanish land grant bestowed on Don Fernan-

do Durán y Chaves in 1692, now known as the Atrisco Grant. In the landmark Heirship Case of early in this century, her parents were awarded the claim interest No. 833174. She was brought up in a leading family of the Atrisco enclave, being told as a teenager by her mother that Catholicism was superstitious nonsense. She remembers an oft-told story about an ancestor named Manuel Carrasco who was tried by the Inquisition in Mexico City in 1648 for the unlikely crime of being apprehended, while traveling, with a matzo cake hidden beneath his hat. Although he tried to convince the Catholic authorities that unleavened bread was a popular remedy for headache, he was tried for Judaism and ended up with his sugar plantations confiscated and himself "disappeared." For many years, Loggie Carrasco has been a member of the congregation at Temple Albert, where she assists other crypto-Jews to embrace formal Judaism, and where she and her brother have long served as teachers in the Sunday school.

With the new openness and appreciation, the possibility of renewal may be at hand. I recently overheard this brief conversation after a lecture on the subject of the conversos. One man in the audience said quietly to another: "*Cuáles de nosotros son los judíos?*" (Which of us are the Jews?) The answer was, "*Los agudos*" (The smart ones).

Notes

1. Floyd S. Fierman, *Roots and Boots: From Crypto-Jew in New Spain to Community Leader in the American Southwest* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1987); Kathleen Teltsch, "Scholars and Descendants Uncover Hidden Legacy of Jews in the Southwest," *New York Times*, November 11, 1990, p. 16A.

2. Alfonso Toro, *La familia Carvajal: Estudio histórico sobre los judíos y la Inquisición de la Nueva España en el siglo XVI, basado en documentos originales y en su mayor parte inéditos que se conservan en el Archivo General de la Nación de la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Editorial Patria, 1944).

3. Frances Leon Swadesh, *Los Primeros Pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974); Richard C. Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969).

4. Swadesh, *Los Primeros Pobladores*, p. 74.

5. Described in conversation at the Unitarian church of El Paso on May 19, 1991.

6. Harry S. May, *Francisco Franco: The Jewish Connection* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), p. 97.

7. David Nidel, "Modern Descendants of Conversos in New Mexico: 500 Years of Faith" (unpublished essay), p. 34.

8. Teltsch, "Scholars and Descendants."

9. Patricia Ginger Snyder, "America's Secret Jews: Hispanic Marranos Emerge from Centuries of Hiding," *Jewish Monthly*, October 1991, pp. 26–38; Steve Almond, "Secret Faith: Did Jews Fleeing the Inquisition Hide Their Heritage in New Mexico?" *El Paso Times*, March 5, 1990, p. 1F.

10. Almond, "Secret Faith."

11. Snyder, "America's Secret Jews"; Henry J. Tobias, *A History of the Jews in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978).

12. Conversations with Laura Stacy on several occasions between July 1982 and September 1984. This custom has been confirmed by Nieves Bushell, a native of Barcelona who is now a professor in New Zealand; she reports that a painting of the Last Supper was turned to the wall in her home during certain family celebrations.

13. Nidel, "Modern Descendants of Conversos"; Swadesh, *Los Primeros Pobladores*.

14. Almond, "Secret Faith."

15. "Converso Descendants: The Long Road Back," *Hadassah Magazine*, January 1992, pp. 18–20; "Torn Between Two Faiths," *San Jose Mercury News*, May 11, 1991, p. 1B.

16. Elaine DeRosa, "Uncovering a Hidden Past: Descendants of Crypto-Jews Seek Answers," *Greater Phoenix Jewish News*, March 8, 1991, p. 11.

17. Fierman, *Roots and Boots*, pp. 12–13, mentions this action of removing the leg gland as a focus of prosecutions by the Inquisition. The Leibman index of trials lists eight cases based on this charge, including those of Mariana de Mirabel in 1602 and of Marta de San José in 1654.

18. Dr. Edgar Ruff has confirmed the usage, as reported in William Byron's *Cervantes*, p. 88. Guzmán de Alfarache says that the common Spanish epithet of *moros blancos* was particularly applied to the Genose.

19. "Hispanics Rediscover Jewish Identity," *New Mexico Magazine*, June 1991, p. 27.

20. In telephone conversations on November 12 and 14, 1990

21. Nidel, "Modern Descendants of Conversos," p. 26.

22. Almond, "Secret Faith," p. 27.

23. Shapiro, report on National Public Radio, April 28, 1988.

24. Gabino Rendón, *Hand on My Shoulder* (New York: Board of National Missions, Presbyterian Church in U.S.A., 1963), p. 65.

25. Swadesh, *Los Primeros Pobladores*, p. 77.

26. Reported in conversations in 1976–78.

27. Nidel, "Modern Descendants of Conversos," p. 26.

28. "Converso Descendants," p. 19.

29. "Torn Between Two Faiths," p. 1.

30. Snyder, "America's Secret Jew," p. 23.

31. "Converso Descendants," p. 19.

32. Marc D. Angel, "Crypto-Jews Should Meet Halachic Standards," *New York Jewish Week*, May 24, 1991, p. 25.

33. Almond, "Secret Faith," p. 1.

34. Virginia Culver, "Hispanics Discover Surprising Heritage," *Denver Post*, May 12, 1991, p. 6.