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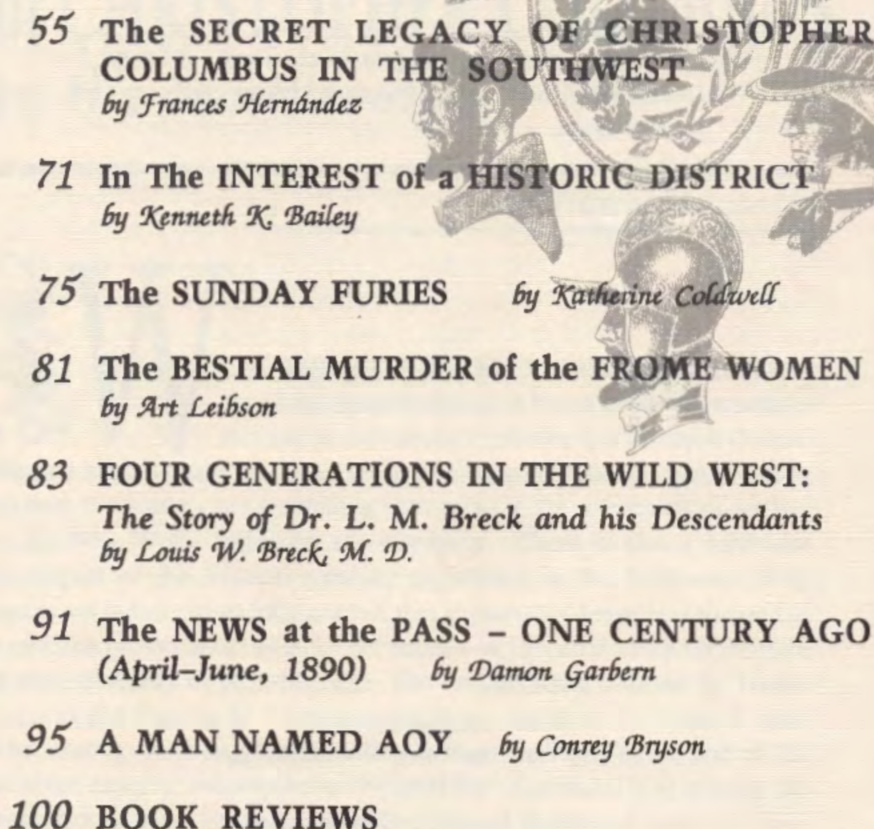

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The SECRET LEGACY of CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS *in the Southwest*

by Frances Hernández

WITH THE APPROACH OF THE QUINCENTENARY of the Spanish arrival in North America, scholarly interest in the various mysteries that surround Columbus and his associates has quickened. At the same time, Hispanic groups all over the country are examining their roots in the movement of settlers to the New World following the discovery. There is also a particular contingent of the Spanish-speaking population in the Southwest, long suspected but as yet undocumented, that is currently being investigated in a research project undertaken by the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute at the University of New Mexico. The investigators, directed by Tomás Atencio and Stanley M. Hordes, are seeking traces of the Spanish Jews who, among those expelled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century, inconspicuously joined the expeditions that entered the territories of New Spain. Under the guise of *conversos*, many of them inevitably moved northward into present-day New Mexico, putting as much distance as possible between themselves and the long arm of the Inquisition, which was actively pursuing victims in Mexico City.

Who were the Sephardim?

Most of us in the Río Grande Valley are somewhat familiar with the major ethnic groups of the Rocky Mountain West: the Hispanics, the Indians, and that large, heterogeneous mass of latecomers lumped under the term *Anglos*. But there is another local group that is even less well known than the strains of the Basques, French, Chinese, Czechs, and Jugoslavs who also joined the melting pots of the region. This group, once extremely cohesive and protective of its ancient culture, is now so completely assimilated that most of its members who are yet distinguishable are no longer aware of their background. They came from Europe in secret four hundred years ago and–in spite of being initially the most literate of the settlers–have left no known documentary evidence of their existence. Their only heritage is in the folk customs and remembered attitudes, recognizable only to the discerning researcher. They are the Sephardim: the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who came to the Southwest with the *conquistadores* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, hiding their origin and fleeing the savage persecution by the Church in their homeland. They occupied professional positions as physicians or navigators; they spoke Ladino, a Spanish-Hebrew dialect; they left only surnames and given names, dietary and hygienic customs, and family observances to indicate their faith.

When we undertake to find remnants of the hidden Jews in New Mexico, we are moving between two poles of information: the known departure of more than a million Sephardim from the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries and the suspected remnants of their descendants in the northern Río Grande Valley. Today we hear the designation *Sephardim* applied to all who are not Ashkenazim, or Yiddish-speaking Jews. However, neither of these categories includes non-European Jews–those from Egypt, Madagascar, China, Ethiopia, Yemen, Iran, or India. There are actually few true Sephardim left in the world–less than 10% of global Jewry. Some estimate the total number to be about 500,000 recognizable Sephardim now, mostly in such enclaves as Istanbul, Salonika, Amsterdam, and the Isle of Rhodes, as well as the some 6,000 Ladino speakers who have returned to Spain since the death

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Dr. Frances Hernández, *Professor of English at The University of Texas at El Paso and a member of that faculty since 1967, concentrates on world literature, fiction, and translation. She has taught in Chile, Turkey, Malaysia, and Puerto Rico abroad, as well as at Purdue University, St. John's College of Annapolis, and the Universities of Maryland at College Park and New Mexico. She has served as national president of the College English Association, and is currently translating Ramón Sender's last novel,* Chronus and the Lady with a Tail.

of Franco. That tally does not include any crypto Jews in New Mexico.

The word *Sephard* comes from the single mention of a country in *Obadiah*, one of the shortest books in the Scriptures. In the King James translation, it contains only twenty-one verses. An ancient essay of prophecy, dated by contemporary scholars at some time before the destruction of Jerusalem in 588 B.C., *Obadiah* foretells several events, such as the establishment of Israel as a nation. Its twentieth verse contains the only known reference to the place from which the Sephardim take their name:

> And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.

Generations of rabbinical scholars have identified Sepharad with Spain.

It was not until the Jews of Spain and Portugal left Iberia–to settle in France, Italy, Holland, England, Denmark, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Turkey, Asia Minor, North Africa, and North and South America–that they came to be called the Sephardim. In other languages they were also known as the Spagnoli or Spaniols and sometimes the Franconians. Many of them who had been forced into baptism were called *marranos*, or swine, first by their co-religionists after the great mass conversions in Spain in 1412-1415 and then by others, indicating the official attitude in the country toward this group of citizens that the Church and government continued to harass and persecute generations after they had gone on the census rolls as New Christians.

Large-scale migrations of the Sephardim actually began in 1391 following a wave of massacres and torment. The first groups moved into nearby regions: across Gibraltar into Morocco; westward to Portugal; north and east to Provence and Italy; and into various areas of the Ottoman Empire. Large communities gathered in the cities of Istanbul, Salonika, Edirne, Izmir, Damascus, Nicopolis, Cairo, and Amsterdam, and in smaller towns of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria–most of which still survive and preserve the Spanish language in its medieval form. Many of these emigrés, both Jews and *conversos*, had held prominent positions in their homeland. Their thinkers had made major contributions in theology, philosophy, pedagogy, and mathematics. Their writers preserved the heritage of romances, songs, melodies, proverbs, and drama, such as the children's play *El castillo*, from ancient Spain. In medicine they became consultants, such as Amatus Lusitanus, to the courts of the Mediterranean world. As statesmen, they had advised the royal heads of Europe, and they were often employed as

competent ambassadors, envoys, and agents by the kings and sultans of the Renaissance period. The Sephardim were regarded as the nobility of Jewry because of their aristocratic manners and dress. They would not haggle or engage in usury in business; they founded schools that taught in Spanish everywhere they went. Even the poorest among them, such as street vendors of *pan de España* in Izmir, comported themselves with the dignity of the old Spanish *grandeza*.

The presence of Jews in the Iberian Peninsula predates the Christian era. After the fall of their nation in the Holy Land more than five centuries before the birth of Jesus, they were dispersed gradually throughout the known world in the Great Diaspora. For many generations they were mainly Oriental peasants, but eventually they became urban dwellers in Europe, found everywhere in the Roman Empire. Though no written records survive as proof, communities were established in Spain by the first century, as described in the legends collected by Hisdai ibn Shaprut, the tenth-century scholar. They were there long before the Visigoths swept down from the Germanic regions of the north in the fourth century; by that time a certain bishop of Magona or Mahon on the Balearic Islands boasted that he had converted the entire Jewish community there.

Their life under the Arian Visigothic kings was fairly favorable, since the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* of 506 repeated the Roman and canon laws concerning them and was leniently enforced for many years. But then King Recared became a Christian and began to apply rigorous regulations to religious activity; Sisebut, who followed him, ordered the first forced baptism of all Jews in 612. The Church deplored his violent persuasion, but declined to annul the results. These reluctant New Christians were either prosperous independent landowners or leasors from the nobility. They were also reported to be well versed in Haggadic literature–the stories and legends of the rabbis–and even undertook to write polemics against some aspects of their acquired faith. But it was probably their financial activities that prompted King Egica to appear before the state council at Toledo in 694 to accuse the Jews, "converted" or not, of conspiring with the "Hebrews on the other side of the sea" to undermine Visigoths in government and church. They were all condemned to confiscation of their property and personal slavery to the court. They did not regain their freedom completely until the Arab invasions began in 711.

While the Judeo-Spaniards shared the rigors of Visigothic rule with their compatriots, their co-religionists were settling into the societies of western Europe, though not in great numbers. It was during this period that the cultural difference between the Ashkenazim, or German-speaking

Jews, and the Sephardim, or Spanish-speakers, developed. Most of the former lived in northern France and the Rhineland, gradually achieving their expertise in legal studies, while the Spanish Jews were better known for their mastery of philosophy and the arts.

The era of the Arabs in Spain lasted more than seven hundred years, during most of which time the Jews were protected from their Christian neighbors. The waves of invasion of Islam from Morocco lasted from 711 to 828 and were actively assisted by the Spanish Jews, who had suffered severely under the last Visigoths. The modern historian Méndez Bejarano documents the help the Jews gave the Arab armies, referring to contemporary reports that the Moslems left cities in the hands of Jewish garrisons after the Moslems had moved on. Seville, which had been settled largely by Jews at the beginning, became an Islamic stronghold, but both of the Semitic groups were later massacred in a Christian uprising. Other Arab contingents recaptured the great southern city–and went on to master the entire peninsula within three years. Meanwhile, the Jewish population was augmented by new settlers from Asia and Africa who came in with the Arab invaders.

In Toledo, where King Egica had reduced the Jews to slaves, they rose up against their Gothic oppressors, took the fortress, and opened the city gates to the Arabs. Jewish Berber tribesmen from the Moroccan mountains conquered part of the provinces of Castile. Autonomous Jewish communities were chartered within Granada, Córdova, Toledo, and Seville under the Arab rule. A generation after Spain became Arab, Abd-ar-Rahman came to power at Córdova. He reigned as independent caliph from 757 to 787 and was acknowledged as their ruler by the Jews. Hisham I, successor to Abd-ar-Rahman, permitted the Jews to attend the state schools, where they soon learned Arabic and were able to make valuable contributions to Islamic science and literature. But the Jews of Andalusía rebelled against their caliph in 818, resulting in the forced emigration of most of them to North Africa. Ten years later the same ruler inspired another uprising in Tulaitula. That effort was followed by massacres of the Jews in many places, especially Toledo. The initial mutual-benefit situation between the two Semitic groups was eroding.

Nevertheless, the tenth and eleventh centuries were the golden age for the Sephardim in Spain. Major accomplishments by scholars and men of affairs added many names to the legends of this fertile time. Moses ben Enoch of Sura, who had been brought to Córdova with his children as slaves of a Visigothic master, founded the first Jewish academies after his freedom was purchased by the local Jewish community. In those insti-

tutions Menachem ben Saruk worked from 910 to 970 codifying Hebrew and Arabic grammar and lexicography; Enoch ben Moses and Jospeh ben Abitur carried on the Talmudic studies of their master, Moses ben Enoch; Hisdai ibn Shaprut became the spiritual leader of the Sephardim and the favorite advisor of the caliph as well. Medicine and astronomy were advanced under this group, and Dunash ben Labrat introduced the use of rhyme, versification, and stanza to Hebrew poetry. In 1020, Jewish Berbers of the Senhajas tribe from Morocco founded the kingdoms of Malaga and Granada. One of them, Samuel Hanagid, was appointed royal secretary five years later; then he became minister of state and directed the military affairs of the country for the next thirty years. When King Habus died in 1037, Samuel and a small group of other Berbers backed the succession of Habus's older son, Badis, whose long reign was generally a favorable time for the Jews of Spain, though he sometimes confiscated their property to meet the expenses of his government.

During the reign of King Ali (1106-1143), many Jews were appointed to high office. In Seville, the poet Soloman ben Almualem became the royal physician and vizier; in Zaragosa, Abraham ben Kamnial served in the same capacity. On the whole–and in spite of recurrent harassment by some Moslem rulers–the Spanish Jews were the most secure in Europe. In 1290 King Edward I of England expelled all of his Jewish subjects en masse. Sixteen years later Philippe the Fair did the same in France. The most savage massacres, however, occurred in Germany around the time of the outbreaks of bubonic plague, known as the Black Death.

The long history of the Jews of the Western world is marked by cataclysmic events: the Exodus, when Moses led them out of Egypt toward their promised land; the Diaspora, when invading powers drove them out of that land to every corner of the known world; and, in our century, the Holocaust, when Hitler's attempt at genocide sent many of them back to uneasy tenure in that land. For the Spanish Jews, a cataclysmic event was the Expulsion, which forced them out of the homeland they had come to after the Diaspora. And the institution of terror associated with this decree–unequalled in human history until the Germans established their agencies of the Final Solution–was the Inquisition.

The Holy Office, as it was called by the Roman Catholic Church, was not a sudden inspiration of the fifteenth century. The attitudes and techniques that formed it had originated in the struggles of the earlier inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula to unite in the effort to win back their land from the Moslem invaders. Since these inhabitants came from widely

mixed cultural and racial strains, their only rallying base was Christianity. The Counts of Barcelona, who evolved into the House of Aragon-Catalonia, were leaders in these movements to combine against the caliphs. The founder of that House, King Pedro II the Great of Aragon, was the first medieval ruler to decree the stake for heretics (in 1197). His son, King Jaime I the Conqueror, applied his measures against dissenters–religious or otherwise–even more rigorously, finally establishing the Inquisition, an agency to combat all heresy or other threats to the Church. It did not become very active, however, until the fourteenth century. In the meantime, the fathers of the faith officially authorized the use of torture against heretics in the Papal Bull of 1252. Popular support for such methods was often fomented by priests beyond the policy of Pope or king. The first major massacre occurred on Ash Wednesday, March 15, 1391, when a friar, Ferrán Martínez, stirred up a mob to attack the *judería* of Seville. As unrest swept through the whole peninsula, 50,000 Jews were killed before the end of the year.

So began the long ordeal of the Sephardim that culminated in their expulsion. After the great massacre, the pressure was on for the conversion of Jews, purification of *marranos* and other New Christians, and punishment of heretics. The Church entrusted this effort to the Inquisition, which was staffed largely by priests of the Dominican Order and supported by confiscated property of its arrested victims. It was the only time in the history of the Jews that a significant number of them chose apostasy over impoverishment, exile, or death. A few were sincere, but most remained Jews at heart. They married only other *conversos* and were known to each other as the *Anusim*, or coerced ones.

For those who persisted in the faith of their fathers, many pointed indignities were applied. The Sephardim were not allowed to ride horses, the mark of the gentleman or *caballero*; they could not own real estate, even if their families had held title for generations; they were not to be addressed as *don*, the common title of respect. They were required to go unshaven, so that they could always be recognizable as adherents to the Mosaic Law. They were forbidden any kind of sexual relationships with Christians. The *marranos* were free of all these restrictions, though still singled out as "New Christians."

By the opening of the fifteenth century, most of the Sephardim had migrated to other countries or had converted to Christianity. For the Sephardim who remained in Spain, life became increasingly hazardous with the growing power of the Inquisition. Its officials turned their attention more and more to the *marranos*, who were accused of secretly

practicing Judiasm–and usually did. Since the Holy Office confiscated the possessions of its suspects, few were ever acquitted. Then Isabel I ascended the throne of Castile in 1465, and united with Fernando I of Aragon in what must be one of the most famous marriages of convenience in history. Known as the Catholic Kings, for their formal endorsement of the Inquisition in 1480, as well as for other political activism, they were determined to rid their realms of antagonistic elements. In *Tree of Hate: Propaganda and Prejudices Affecting United States Relations with the Hispanic World* (London: Basic Books, 1971), Philip Wayne Powell describes the climate of opinion in fifteenth-century Spain from the point of view of the Old Christians:

> Spanish monarchs up to and including Ferdinand and Isabella, and even some later kings, consistently showed favortism toward Jews and Conversos, even when the latter's Christianity was suspect. But the majority of the Spanish people, witnessing this and other evidence of Jewish-Converso influence–their posts as tax-collectors; notable ostentation by wealthy Jews; blasphemy and ridicule of Christian practices; the insulting epithet "Marrano" hurled by foreigners at Spain and Spaniards; the ineradicable historical memory that it was Jews who had significantly contributed to the success of Moslem invasion...; the bitter anti-Jewish writing and oratory of some Conversos themselves; and simply the numbers of Jews daily discernible in the population–could, and did, view the situation with antagonism.... If there was anything uniquely Spanish in all this, it was not intolerance or bigotry, but rather a notable forbearance in comparison to the ways the Jewish problem was handled elsewhere in Europe.

Though Isabel herself was apparently very reluctant to sign the edict of expulsion in 1492, she was strongly urged to do so by her religious advisor, Tomás de Torquemada. The Dominican friar, who was partly Jewish himself, moved bitterly against the *conversos*—becoming notorious for the torture and murder of thousands of compatriots in the relentless pursuit of his duties as Grand Inquisitor.

The "Jewish problem" now resolved, the Catholic Kings could turn their full attention to another pressing matter: the Crown's finances were in desperate condition following years of war against the Moors. At last, in 1492, Columbus's repeated proposal of a voyage of exploration to the west–with its possibilities of new sources of gold–seemed to be a viable undertaking.

Who was Columbus?

The official biography of Columbus has long been suspect to historians, though to his death he clung to the claim that he was an Italian

Christian of an obscure Genoese family, educated only by his sea experience from childhood. In an era when there was a great scramble for documents of *limpieza de sangre*–proof of pure Christian blood for seven generations–none exists for Cristóbal Colón, nor is there even any certainty about where he was born. He mentioned Genoa, and it is true that Columbo is a common name in that city. Recently one historian has pointed out that there is a village called Genova on the island of Mayorca, which is famous for cartographers–a Jewish monopoly in a field in which Columbus was notably accomplished. His claim to be Italian would have been an expedient evasion of the Inquisition. He did know the Italian language, as well as a few other Mediterranean tongues, but he always used Spanish, even when corresponding with Italians. Virgil I. Milani of the University of South Florida, in his thorough study *The Written Language of Columbus* reveals that the cosmoplitan seaman mixed words from several languages into his speech and correspondence, especially Portuguese and Italian. Milani's conclusion is that Columbus may not have been a native Spanish speaker.

The first name that he used, Cristophoro, which means "bearer of Christ," could hardly be more ostentatiously Christian. Since no birth certificate exists for him, and the name appears for the first time on a document in Portugal signed when he was twenty-five, it may be that the name was his own choice for protective reasons. As far as his surname goes, it originated with the medieval French city of Çologne in the Rhineland. It happens that there were a great many Jews in that location in the Middle ages; as they moved through Europe, they bore along the city of their birth as a family name, a common custom everywhere. The name became Columb or Collum in English, Colombo in Italian, Colón in Spanish. Columbus was always known as Cristóbal Colón in his dealings with the court at Madrid, and his two sons, Diego and Fernando, used that surname.

The strongest indication that Columbus was of Jewish blood is his marriage in 1479 to the daughter of a rich Jewish mercantile family. He and Felipa Moniz were both at what was considered the advanced age of twenty-five for the first marriage. It is inconceivable that such a family would have given their daughter to a poor Italian Christian, experienced only as a seaman. The marriage did not last long, as Felipa died giving birth to their son, Diego. Columbus did not marry again, but did enter into a liaison with a Spanish Christian woman, from which his second son, Fernando, was born.

The most recent question that has agitated researchers is his degree

of commitment to Judaism. Since it has long been accepted that he was from a *marrano* line, the only remaining puzzle is his relationship to other Jews. The definitive work to date on that matter is by Simon Wiesenthal, the relentless pursuer of Nazi criminals. This formidable researcher has published the fruit of his skills in a volume called *Sails of Hope: The Secret Mission of Christopher Columbus*. The thesis, convincingly supported, is that Columbus's real motivation for the unprecedented voyage into uncharted waters was not to find gold for the Catholic Kings nor to demonstrate a quirky navigational theory, but to locate a distant haven for the dispossessed Jews. Until the day he died, he believed that he had indeed landed on an eastern shore of India. And, of course, he did find what has become the major refuge of the world's Jewry.

Some of Wiesenthal's facts are now familiar. The three ships sailed at midnight on August 2, 1492, and against the tide. The normal time for setting forth would have been at dawn or when the tide was beginning to move out, but all hands were on board at 11:00 as instructed. It could not have been a coincidence that the expulsion of the Jews went into effect at midnight on that date. Though one of the official purposes of all Spanish expeditions was to Christianize whatever heathens might be encountered, there was no priest among the 120 souls on board. There were, however, several passengers with obviously Jewish names–Alemán, Ledesma, Nuñez, Gómez, Bernal, Franco, Las Casas, López, García–and a rabbi, Luís de Torres, who had been forced to baptism the day before sailing. (Further, the Admiral and all his men were ritually baptized before the ships left port.) The rabbi was listed on the manifold as navigator and interpreter; the only language he knew that the others did not was Hebrew. Apparently Columbus was hoping to find to find co-religionists, perhaps from the lost ten tribes of Israel, on the other side of the Ocean Sea. It was known that there had long been Jewish settlements in India, and, of course, that is where he was headed.

The expensive enterprise of the journey was not in fact funded by Queen Isabel and King Fernando, who had an empty exchequer after finally discouraging the Moslem forces eight months earlier. Instead, the money was provided by two prominent Jews, Luís de Santangel and Juan Cabrera, who were protected from the Inquisition by the Crown, which relied on them as ministers and financial experts. What was their stake in the enterprise? They were probably seeking an escape route for the expelled Sephardim.

These facts are known and have been interpreted in various ways by historians. Wiesenthal, however, adds fascinating details from his scrutiny

of Columbus's letters to his son, Diego Colón, to which the researcher gained access in his position as archivist of Vienna. In one of these epistles Columbus refers to the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 70 A.D., calling the building the *Casa Segunda* or Second House, an expression used only by Jews. In one of his well-thumbed books, Columbus made a marginal note beside the date 1481. In ink he wrote 5241, which was the same year on the Hebrew calendar. On all of the letters to his first–and Jewish–son, he marked a strange cipher over the first word of the message, which Wiesenthal has decoded as the Hebrew blessing *Beit Hei* (for *B'egrat Hashem*–with God's help) written in Romance characters. In another letter to Diego de Deza, the tutor to Prince João of Portugal, Columbus makes the curious and revealing comment, "I am a servant of the same Lord who raised up David." Similar covert details assure Wiesenthal of Columbus's devotion to his ancestral faith. The only other shred of documentary proof is that in his will Columbus left money to an impoverished Jew in Lisbon.

Christopher Columbus, as his likeness was rendered in one of the some 80 portraits painted of the great mariner after his death. No portrait of him was made during his lifetime as far as is known. (*Courtesy Dr. Frances Hernández*)

Queen Isabel's concurrence with the persecution was evidently rooted in her own religious fervor. But her husband, who was himself one-fourth Jewish through his grandmother, Paloma of Toledo, had no such piety. For him the persecutions were simply a procedure for restocking the treasury with confiscated property. In spite of the campaign of terror, many, if not most of the *conversos* were in fact *marranos*, who were accurately accused of practicing Judaism in secret. Even after the expulsion of the Jews, as late as 1505, about one third of the urban population was *marranos*. And they were leaving in hordes for the New World. At last Fernando became concerned about the hemorrhage of intellectual and skilled artisans from the society and issued a decree on October 3, 1539, that forbade all converts to travel to the Indies. But by that time there were new settlements of Jews all over America.

Who are the secret Sephardim of New Mexico?

Four hundred years after they began to arrive in the Rio Grande Valley with other Spanish settlers, it is difficult to distinguish the descendants of a group that came rigorously hiding its identity–ultimately even from themselves. But there are clues. The only evidences of the existence of crypto-Jews in our Spanish-speaking communities that can be called documentary are fragmentary inscriptions in Hebrew characters on a pottery shard and on a large stone that could have been a door lintel, but folk customs and remembered family attitudes reveal much to the inquisitive observer. One can begin by applying the same questions favored by the rapacious Inquisitors about dietary and hygenic habits, as well as family feasts, observances, and taboos.

Eating habits were often cited in Spain and other countries where religious activities were under constant surveillance. Anyone who admitted a repugnance for pork or shellfish was in danger. Such a distinction seemed not to have occurred often in New Mexico, however, far from the sea, where pigs were not common until the late eighteenth century and indeed any kind of meat was rare in the native diet. The Catholics of New Spain were early granted a dispensation from the usual fasts because their priests recognized that they needed to eat whenever food was available and that the occasional rabbit, deer, chicken, or goat that flavored the chile, squash, and beans did not constitute a self-indulgent menu. If any habit pointed out the descendants of Sephardim in the kitchen, it was their scrupulous cleanliness. Traditional dishes that they enjoyed were shared by all from the Spanish homeland: the *pastel* or *pastelico*, a popular kind of meat pie, and *pan de España* or *de León*, a round, sweet loaf, rich with eggs, that was baked in the outdoor *hogares* for festive days. There were, however, *dulces* or candies, sometimes the cherished *leche quemado* confection that was wrapped in little decorated squares of paper, carefully smoothed and preserved between occasions for use. Some of these sheets were printed with the dim picture of a crowned, patriarchally bearded head called the *maguen Dauids* or stars of David, in honor of the legendary king of Israel. There were also the sweet and gooey *fichuelas* smeared with honey and served around Christmas–or perhaps Hanukkah–time. As in Spain, some northern New Mexico villagers have always used much garlic and onion fried in vegetable oil instead of animal fat, which probably gave them a distinctive and suspect flavor.

In any examination of food habits, we notice some vestigial observance of the Sabbath. Many New Mexicans remember that their grandfathers habitually brought home a fresh loaf of bread to the family table

on Friday nights; sometimes the women baked their dough for that day decorated with a traditional braided effect, unconsciously honoring the holy day that begins at sunset in their homes. Meat dishes were served on Friday in some households, in spite of the fasting observance of some Catholics. This oversight probably did not cause much comment because of the local freedom from the flesh taboo. But there were other unusual customs: lighting candles–always an expensive commodity–for the Friday-night supper; getting dressed up for the occasion; even taking baths during winter before that meal. We have been told about families that considered it unlucky to light a fire on Saturday. One old lady in Taos has assured me that it was a bad idea to cut out a garment for sewing on Friday, because things would happen to prevent the completion of the project. Others in Río Arriba County confirmed that opinion, explaining that other duties of the weekend would not allow one to proceed. Symeon Carmona in the San Jose neighboorhood of Albuquerque remembers that his mother was always in a rush to finish her weekend food preparation before sundown on Friday, when she lighted the candles on the table. Laura Stacy, a New Mexico girl who has converted to Judaism, told me about a couple who belong to her temple in Albuquerque. One Friday night the couple were invited to dinner in the home of friends who are members of an old Catholic family in the city. They sat down to a lovely candle-lit table, but before she joined them the hostess turned to a wall of the dining room on which hung a picture of Jesus of the sort that is standard in Roman Catholic homes. She twisted the cord from which the portrait was suspended until the image faced the wall. Then she sat down at the table without explanation of her action. The guests were embarrassed and assured her that she need not have done that to acknowledge the fact that they were Jews. But the hostess informed them that her gesture was not on their account; it was merely a custom that had always been observed in her family on Friday evenings.

Bathing was indulged in more often in some families, in spite of primitive living conditions and the usual scarcity of water. This obsession with soap and water was another personal eccentricity deplored by good Christians–and mentioned in the *Edict of Faith* (published by the Inquisition in 1519 for the purpose of enlisting the populace in the search for "Judaisers"). A preoccupation with bodily cleanliness has always been more characteristic of Oriental than Western civilizations. Christianity exalted the spiritual rather than the physical needs of man and regarded fastidiousness as vanity. "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" was a much later, Protestant-inspired maxim. In New Mexico water was precious,

privacy in small adobe homes limited, soap the product of a laborious process of scraping yucca tubers, and fuel wood hard to come by; bathing was a luxury. Those who indulged in it and changed their clothes frequently, especially the *ropa interior*, were, at the least, selfish. Persons who habitually put on fresh garments for the Saturday trips in from the ranchito to the village market, instead of waiting for a wedding dance or a saint's-day fiesta, were not only "uppity," but possibly responding to an ancestral rite in observance of the Sabbath. Women of some families seem excessively modest during their menstrual periods, staying away from the family for several days. After confinement for childbirth, most stayed apart from their husbands for three months. Many seemed to be observing the Levitic law that requires eighty days of separation after the arrival of a girl, but only forty if the child is a boy.

In addition to the hygienic protection of the body, some families wore cherished silver amulets that were believed to be efficacious against disease. A similar relic was shown to me in Santa Fé about twenty years ago by a woman of the numerous Chaves clan. She brought out a small package swathed with many layers of tissue, which she said had been found among her grandfather's possessions after his death, but no one knew what it was. It turned out to be a leather phylactery of the sort manufactured in western Europe in the nineteenth century. I asked her what she thought it might be; she guessed it was a charm against the evil eye.

Dr. Jack Tomlins of the University of New Mexico reported his observations that women in several families in the Río Arriba-El Rito area, and later in Atrisco south of Albuquerque, have the custom of sweeping dirt out a back door or lifting it through a window, carefully avoiding its removal through the front door. They have no explanation for this practice except to avoid bad luck, but he believes it stems from honoring the mezzuzah attached to the frame of the front door of Jewish homes. Some Jewish celebrations have left fragmentary or distorted versions. At Abiquiu, some families designated a day near harvest time when they would go from house to house forgiving any insults given during the year and asking for like forgiveness for any unkindness or oversights, a custom corresponding to the Day of Atonement. Some villagers, especially near San Juan and Chamisa, shared new-moon festivals with nearby Pueblo Indian families, and there are records of some fairly elaborate codes of compensation payments, the honoring of the right of sanctuary, and the institution of asylum for a fugitive that seem based on Mosaic law, sometimes administered by the Penitente brotherhood. Some Hispanics light candles on the anniversaries of the death of loved ones or observe

a period of quiet retirement in mourning that is analogous to the seven-day *shibh'ah.* One old nun in a Santa Fé convent in the 1930s was known to go into seclusion for penitential prayer one certain day each September because her great aunt, Loyola, also of the sisterhood, had so directed her as a child. She had never heard of Yom Kippur, but supposed that her inherited Day of Meditation had been imposed by some long-forgotten personal vow or lost patron saint.

In the search for the hidden Sephardim, researchers are pursuing surnames that were often Jewish, such as Espinoza, Villanueva, Castro, Atencio, Romero, Carrasco, Gómez, López, and Lucero. They are following the records of marriages, to locate patterns between certain families. They investigate tight enclaves where intermarriage is common. One such is at Atrisco, where a few women in one area that is described as clannish by its neighbors reported that there is strong–even violent–opposition if any of them seeks to marry outside the clan. Stanley Hordes probed further into their customs, such as a refusal to have pictures in their homes, and has come to the conclusion that they are a Sephardic remnant. When questioned about the possibility, the leader told him that they knew they were different, but they did not want to hear that they are Jews because they "already have enough problems just being Hispanics." Other close communities that seem to preserve the ancient heritage exist near the northeastern town of Roy and southwest of Gallup. A few individuals and families have maintained the awareness of this background, such as the Mirabals and Olivareses. Clem Carmona in Albuquerque decided to convert to Judaism after discovering the basis of his grandmother's stories of the family building a little hut in the yard at fall harvest time: Sukkoth, the feast of the Tabernacles. Some years ago a little girl in Santa Fé told me excitedly that her family was preparing to celebrate her saint's day. Since her name was Ester García, I was puzzled about which saint she was named for. Then I learned that her March birthday was in fact in celebration of Purim, the Feast of Lots, the origin of which I am sure her educated family was aware. Ester's Day is actually observed in many communities in northern New Mexico.

Another avenue being followed by the researchers is the early Protestant movement in the nineteenth century, when missionaries came to the outposts of the territories from England and Scotland. Then the Hispano villagers remembered some of the suspect forms of behavior that had been mentioned in the *Edict of Faith.* One dubious habit was a devotion to reading or studying anything at all, but particulary the Bible. Priests assured the faithful that the misinterpretation of the scripture was a dan-

gerous sin to be avoided. Andrés de Palacio, the author of the *Edict*, urgently warned against trying to understand the subtleties of the word of God without ordained guidance. In fact there was some basis for this worry after refugees left Spain and settled in the northern European countries where Protestantism was gaining strength. There, especially in the Netherlands, interest was high in translating the holy texts into contemporary languages. Copies of the newly printed works filtered back to curious Spanish readers. In far away New Mexico, those who had indulged in reading the forbidden translations became the first converts to the Presbyterians, who rode into the Río Grande Valley over saddle bags crammed with cheap copies of the Bible in Spanish. Almost everyone who could read was captivated; others saw it as a chance to learn. Neighbors whispered that these adventurous dissenters from the wisdom of the Mother Church were probably secret Jews anyway. Some may have been. Dr. Tomás Atencio of the University of New Mexico and Dr. Gabino Rendón of Highlands University, both sons of Presbyterian ministers, are pursuing the hints and connections with a perceived Jewish past within the small Protestant community of northern New Mexico. Recently a camera team of researchers has photographed gravestones, the latest of which is dated 1911, in a cemetery in Santa Rosa, bearing beneath or behind the standard crosses clearly etched menorah, or candlesticks, stars of David, six-petalled flowers, and hands with fingers spread to form six groupings–all Judaic symbols recognizable to the initiated.

The search for this element of historical identity has fascinated ethnographers and sociologists of the region. Since the Inquisition condemned persons with the names of Rodríguez, Nieto, Carvajal, Díaz, Hernández, and Pérez to execution in Mexico City in the sixteenth century, the flight of practicing crypto Jews northward was inevitable. In 1598, after several years of preparation, Juan de Oñate led some 135 colonists and soldiers far up the arid valley into the mountains to establish the first permanent colony. Indication is strong that several of those on the muster roll of January 8 were *conversos* who had been recruited for the otherwise unenticing expedition because they were also listed on the records of the Inquisition: Juan Rodríguez, Francisco Hernández, Miguel Rodríguez, and Antonio Rodríguez. Three of them were burned in effigy in the Auto de Fé of 1596. Their relatives and friends can only have wished to follow them into the wilderness, no matter how rigorous, to find the freedom, however tenuous and limited, to preserve the traditions of their ancestors. ✩

In the INTEREST of a HISTORIC DISTRICT

A Letter to the El Paso Plan Commission

by Kenneth K. Bailey

Editor's Note: Password *is pleased to publish a letter written by Dr. Kenneth K. Bailey, Chairman, City of El Paso Historic Landmark Commission. Dated December 22, 1989, the letter was addressed to Ray Mancera, Chairman, City of El Paso Plan Commission. Copies were sent to the members of the El Paso Plan Commission and the El Paso Historic Landmark Commission, as well as to Armando Jimarez, Historic Preservation Coordinator; Jose M. Rubio, Executive Secretary, City Plan Commission; and City Council Representatives Tony Ponce and David Wellington Chew. The letter is offered here for its historical information on the El Paso neighborhood called Austin Terrace (often known as Government Hill) and also for the way it clarifies an important part of the procedure required for naming a Historic District.*

The recommendation which the letter makes was approved by the El Paso Plan Commission on March 8, 1990, by a vote of six to one and, on April 17, by the Mayor and the City Council unanimously. Thus, the Austin Terrace area is now officially a Historic District.

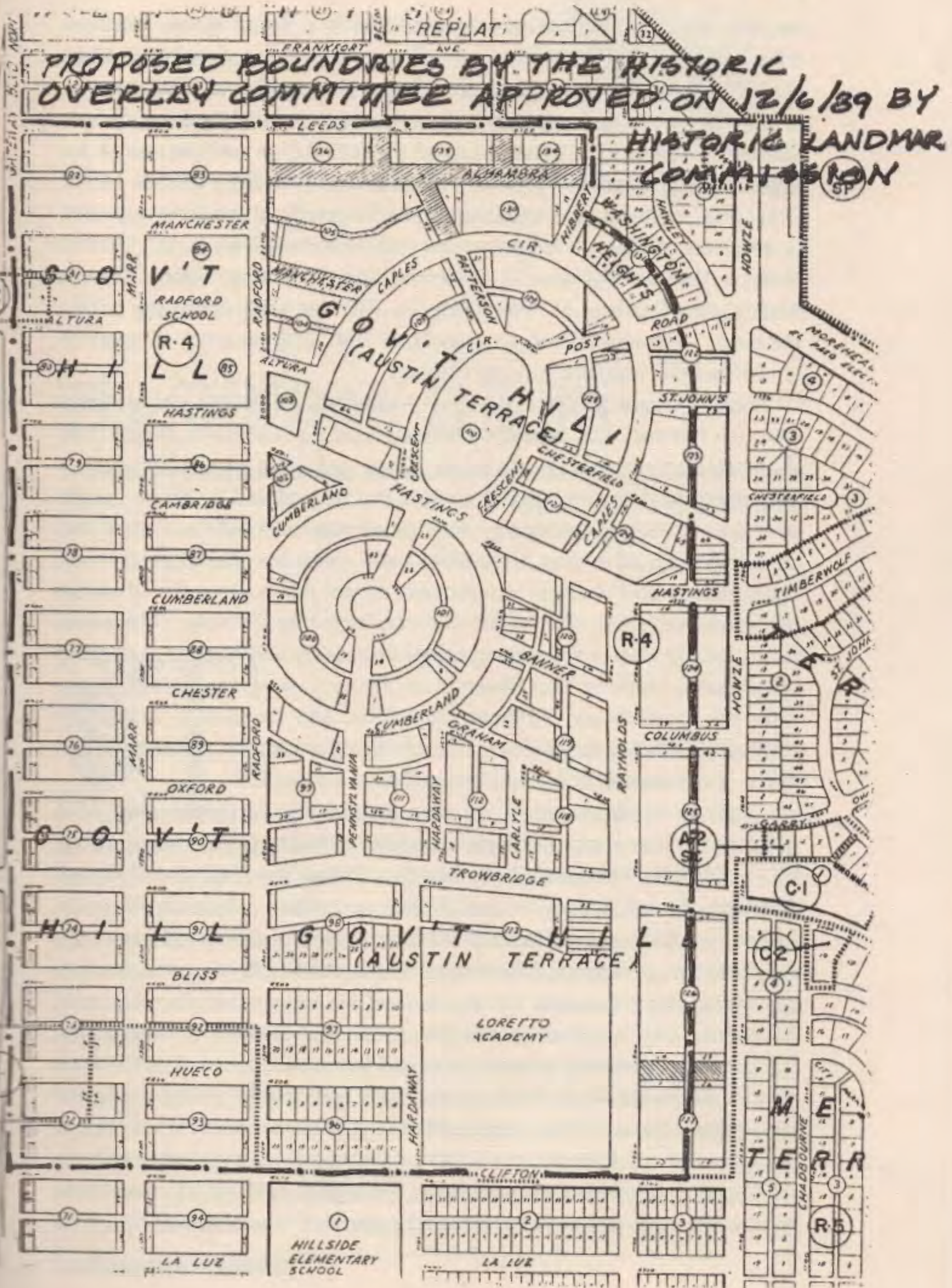
I AM HEREBY SUBMITTING A RECOMMENDATION of the El Paso Historic Landmark Commission for a Historic District in the Austin Terrace area, with boundaries identified on the attached map. This action came at a Special Meeting on

December 6, 1989, by margin of nine to two, following three well-attended public hearings. It is grounded on considerations described below, among others.

Beginning around World War I and continuing for more than a generation, a remarkable proportion of those El Pasoans with clear national distinction resided in Austin Terrace. The portrait of a Cumberland Circle housholder–Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen–appeared on the cover of an August 1943 *Time Magazine* wherein his battlefield exploits were narrated. A peacetime neighbor of Allen's, William R. Weaver, gained acknowledgment of similar magnitude for his contributions in the same military conflict, though in a noncombatant capacity. A low-priced, high-quality lens sight which he patented and which his El Paso company manufactured was on every United States government-issue, hand-carried firearm that offered telescopic-sighting capabilities during World War II. (A technological genius with dozens of patents in his name, Weaver easily qualifies as El Paso's all-time champion in the sphere of mechanical invention.)* Equivalent fame came also to a neighbor whose genius was in the spheres of writing and painting and whose career was well under way by World War II–El Paso's inimitable Tom Lea. Dr. Lucinda de Leftwich Templin, longtime principal of Radford School for Girls, built a national reputation for leadership in traditional preparatory education. Her program won acclaim far and wide, as did that of nearby Loretto Academy. And there was James Graham McNary, who exercised power almost surely unmatched by that exercised by any other civilian of this locality ever. An aggressive banker and entrepreneur, with tycoon-like involvements in timber and lumber production, McNary served as President of the National Lumber Manufacturers Association and was celebrated in the naming of McNary, Texas, McNary, Louisiana, and McNary, Arizona. More than one Presidential cabinet officer was entertained in his home, as were the governors of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and four northern Mexico states (the governors together, at one function). McNary had personal acquaintances with Theodore Roosevelt, Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover, and was a confidant of John J. Pershing. Occasionally during the Harding administration, he gathered with a handful of Presidential favorites for White House stag dinners; once

Editor's note: see Ralph H. Hellums, "The Scope of El Paso: A History of the W. R. Weaver Company...," *Password*, XXXII, 4 (Winter, 1987), 169.

Dr. Kenneth K. Bailey, *Professor of History at The University of Texas at El Paso., was a member of the El Paso Plan Commission from 1983 until January, 1988. Beginning in 1986, he served as Chairman of the Commission.*


PROPOSED BOUNDRIES BY THE HISTORIC
OVERLAY COMMITTEE APPROVED ON 12/6/89 BY
HISTORIC LANDMAR
COMMISSION
REPLAT
FRANKFORT
LEEDS
ALHAMBRA
MANCHESTER
RADFORD SCHOOL
ALTURA
HASTINGS
CAMBRIDGE
CUMBERLAND
CHESTER
OXFORD
BLISS
HUECO
LA LUZ
MARR
RADFORD
CAPLES
PATTERSON
CIR.
POST
HIBBERT
WASHINGTON HEIGHTS
HAWLEY
ROAD
HOWZE
ST. JOHN'S
CHESTERFIELD
CRESCENT
GOV'T HILL (AUSTIN TERRACE)
GOV'T HILL
BANNER
GRAHAM
PENNSYLVANIA
HARDAWAY
CARLYLE
RAYNOLDS
COLUMBUS
TROWBRIDGE
TIMBERWOLF
MOREHEAD
CHADBOURNE
LORETTO ACADEMY
HILLSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
CLIFTON
R-4
R-5
C-1
C2
A-2 SC
SP

his wife and four children accompanied him to a White House luncheon with President and Mrs. Harding. Fierce opposition developed when Harding named McNary to be United States Comptroller of the Currency, in which capacity he would have supervised the national banking system. Stalling tactics in the Senate blocked a confirmation and prevented his assumption of the office. (McNary resided in El Paso from 1906 to 1924.) Other area residents of whom listings and biographical synopses appeared or do appear in *Who's Who in America* include Joshua S. Raynolds, Charles Nebekar Bassett, Dorrance D. Roderick, Sam D. Young, George Garrett Matkin, and Harrison M. Daugherty, Jr. (the last after relocating within the city). A neighborhood so associated with such an array of notables is obviously a valuable historic resource.

But, of course, a vast majority of neighborhood residents at all times were not famous, rich, or shapers of events on a grand scale. Aside from the small clustering on Pennsylvania Circle, palatial homes in the vicinity are interspersed with modest structures that housed and do house people of ordinary means and standing. And indeed mansions and quasi-mansions are not to be found in most of the blocks now under consideration. Overall, the buildings and physical environment reveal much about the lifestyles of nonexecutive and blue collar workers, including servants. The juxtaposing of big houses and unpretentious domiciles, and of their dissimilar inhabitants, implies that there was an easy neighborliness among different social strata, different ethnicities, and persons of drastically contrasting means. In the view of the Historic Landmark Commission, this too is a circumstance worth celebrating.

Dozens of structures in the area are among the finest work of a generation of local architects and builders, including Gustavus and Henry Trost, Otto H. Thorman, R. E. McKee, Davis Mayfield, the Ponsford Brothers, Russell Ramey, Mabel Welch, and others. Spanish, Moorish, Italian, and California influences differentiate the neighborhood from what one observes in metropolises in East Texas, the South, New England, or the Midwest. Preeminent among the rest is the mansion that originally housed the McNary family (now St. Anthony's Seminary), sitting on a spherical lot measuring between three and four acres, bounded by Crescent Circle. The architect in this instance was a Los Angeles designer of great reputation, Myron C. Hunt, with landscaping under the direction of the Los Angeles firm of Howard and Smith. The two-story building originally contained twelve bedrooms with baths, a reception hall thirty feet wide and eighty feet long, and a dining room accommodating a table with space for

(Continued on page 80...)

The SUNDAY FURIES

by Katherine Coldwell

TO PAPA[1] SUNDAY MORNING WAS BITTER SWEET. Nudged by the shades of his ancestors, he carried on the life of his intellect by paying court to a witty lady–for purposes of a cup of coffee, a literary allusion and a little gallantry.

Mother was invited but knew enough never to come: expected however to ask details and to unmask a weekly pique. But when I was adolescent Papa, philoprogenitive, decided that I needed a manner of some sort and took me along; though listening, I cut the spice. Then he picked a cane from his collection behind the bookcase in the alcove and taking any hat, he led out into the sun-baked peace of our town–oh, mighty fine!

When he was pretty, we called on as many as four ladies in one morning. Sitting on the edge of his chair, Papa caught at whatever fleetingness of his youth he could. The first lady had been the raging belle and had seen only the ill-cut dancing suit and the inability to hire buggies; –but now, she fluffed reproachful hair and cut a rose for his lapel.

To look out toward the mesas and distant blue mountains of Mexico,

[1] Judge Ballard Coldwell

the second lady had a picture window as a frame of reference. Her rugs were soft, her sofas sibilant and her silver coffee set reflected itself and was complete. Papa enjoyed the rustlings and thought of it as most complete.

The third lady,[2] backed by her father's library and ancestral oils, put cognac in Papa's coffee and told him of the sweet pronunciation of the rival.[3] His ability, Papa–sitting on turnstile chair under the lone star–had to note in his own courtroom,–or twice a year at the Bar Banquet had to overhear the legal witticism and the grateful laughter of others. His was such a sweet pronunciation, straight from the old South with no recent wrestings from adobe and shimmering perspectives of cactus.

At his gloomy courting hour how easily the rival plucked a book off the lady's shelf and read out Horace in the Latin, then translated smoothly. Papa might well twirl his cane but this great classical knowledge of the rival's was a trouble.

For Papa's own father, the old Judge,[4] had had such a large intellect! Toward the last, staying up until the dawn streaked in order to cultivate it. Let her decide when she wants to go to sleep, he had said of my sister[5]–and at what age she wished to give up her bottle. She will know. When she asked for it, he would go and heat it; –but paid no attention as she crawled over his reading proneness to her crib.

As a boy river guard riding on his piebald mare through the brush of the Rio Grande, the old Judge had schooled himself: reading Blackstone and Aeschylus from out the cosiness of his saddle bag, next the jar of black coffee and the frijoles. When the smuggler shot him in the finger, only then did he look up from his immersement.

I held the dike against the encroaching sand and the aroused saloon, he said. Later, in that desolation where no one was going about appreciating his large intellect, he gave up the saloon. And let the mesquite root dig deep to find moisture in its bleakness too, he said.

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[2] Jane Burges Perrenot
[3] Thornton Hardie (Sr.)
[4] William Michie Coldwell; see Ida W. Coldwell, "William Michie Coldwell, Pioneer Lawyer and Civic Leader," *Password*, XXXIV, 3 (Fall, 1989), 121-126f.
[5] Eleanor Coldwell (later Mrs. Eliot Shapleigh and now deceased)

Katherine Coldwell, *(Mrs. Frank Kruesi Slutter) was a member of a pioneer El Paso family. Until her recent death (March 21, 1990), she had been for many years a resident of New York City, where she served as a tutor at a Drug Rehabilitation Center, devoting her time and talents to "helping young people develop lifelong habits of good reading." The present article, a literary "snapshot" of her father, Judge Ballard Coldwell, was written in 1951, when she was living in Salsburg, Austria.*

Under awkward Spanish arcades, inside frantic, half-waisted doors, he pledged the law-abidingness of the English, –shouting with involvement, though his own forebears were Scots off free mountains. Late at night coming home with looming stance and primogenitive conviction, he roused his eldest son[6]–and with vast impatience–taught him the alphabet of Greece. The siblings multiplicitly asleep and only the wife up to take wind from those giant sails. In her one-half Irish way. Such an easy wit she had and happy when able to snatch a quarter hour from esclavitude to play accompaniment at the piano for the uncertain tenor of her brother, Charlie.

Papa was unable to forget those useless rousings, though he had to

Judge Ballard Coldwell, *c. 1940. (Photo courtesy Judge and Mrs. Colbert Coldwell)*

[6] Ballard Coldwell

be brachycephalic and on another eddy of evolution. Sturdier in his ways, he sat in no wrapt study, but drove around in an an orange pickup truck and with new-land breaking and philoprogenitive energy put under cultivation bosque land opened by the dam. Papa had no flat waist to gloat about and revel in year after year. Nor was his head so large with conceptual aristocracy that the largest black-brimmed hat had to be vauntingly stretched. Nor under such a hat did he walk along streets which he had known dusty nor cross railroad tracks he had seen prong western isolation: recognized by many: sympathized with by few: –finding in the scanned pages of a book on the latest universe, his company.

Oh. no. Papa lulled his accumulating guilt and only on Sunday mornings did it project him into his courtships: the life of the intellect made palatable for his easier taste by the attendant gallantries and the fame of being a somewhat stout beau.

The old Judge had had courtships too. No doubt. He wrote poems without erasures to the tiny dark lady of his final years in which apple blossoms laughed over the stream in Lesbos. But such larkings for the old Judge were as a posy to the life of his large intellect which went on around and about. For Papa a courtship was the potlatch. Until he discovered, later, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

For this, the fourth lady[7] was favorite and best. She brought her own disquieting overtone by having been born in a county in Virginia, next to the county where an ancestor of Papa's had performed an heirloom–easier to carry by splashed horse or mule and on wooden wheels than ancestral oils–by having a cane fight with Thomas Jefferson over a farm line.

In her wicker chair, in her rock garden, this favorite lady was willing to play Mrs. Thrale, cajoling Papa and drawing him out as though he indeed had a compendious intellect. And he, with hands folded on his cane, so happy to be cumbersome and plagued: talkative and learned: gallant and a bit testy, too.

But she was of a quick habit and Papa had to fudge during the week to stay in place. There came shavings from the new shelves made to accommodate ordered books and a stand supervised for the ponderousness of a large second-hand dictionary. And a notebook to bear the brunt of thoughts, smacking of Marcus Aurelius.

The labors of Hercules were numbered. And could she name them? Ha! The Augean stables. What a classical knowledge! Reminding him

[7] Elsie McElroy Slater; see John M. Slater, "E. P. M. S., A Biographical Note of Elsie Pomeroy Slater (Mrs. H. D. Slater) of El Paso (1874-1952)," *Password*, XXIII, 3 (Fall, 1978), 96-103.

of his grandfather's favorite, she who had been accepted as the most erudite lady west of the Pecos.

This same grandfather[8] was a separate thorn biting civilian flesh. Throughout Doniphan's Expedition always crawling on hand and knee to listen at the tent of a Mexican general; always too bringing to Texas from Tennessee across those endless miles, a box of books and a magnifying glass for footnotes in the lamp light.

On the final lap, from a government wagon called an ambulance, three times a day spreading a rug on the plains between wife and daughters and the sand. Once settled in an adobe house of the huddled destination, always getting up and saying in a still sweet pronunciation, Can you comfortably accommodate yourself, Mattie? And the piano hauled up from Chihuahua for accomplishments. And the dim trip to New Orleans to pay court to Jenny Lind from an opera box and the faded ink of the rhymed couplet from Pope in with the smelling flowers of the bouquet.

Elsie McElroy Slater, *seated in her garden, 1930s. (Photo from the archives, El Paso county Historical Society, courtesy James W. Ward)*

All these heirlooms weighed variously and subterrraneously on Papa during the week and on Sunday morning sent him out to oppose the tide of stoplights and supermarkets that were becoming our town.

So, as the fourth lady's husband,[9] less faint than most and having brought us cookies hot from the cook, now led us in closing pageantal procession toward the gate of the rock garden, – Papa turned halfway up the path and called back to his lady, still in her wicker chair, some sally chivalrously blown and ready with the ring of other, guiltless places and other, guiltless times.

Such was the nature of the Sunday impulse, which when

[8] Nathaniel Colbert Colbert; see Ida W. Coldwell, *op. cit.*, 121.
[9] H. D. Slater, owner of the *El Paso Herald* from 1897 until 1928 and of the *El Paso Times* from 1925 until 1928.

worked out and the two cockers held back and the gate closed, left us again in the sunbaked percussionless air of our town. But it is becoming weak and mixing with the stoplights and supermarkets and trailer camps. Soon there won't be any more piebald mare through the brush nor carpet on the plains. Though the pieces may work on in some new way. In any case, it all still meant a great deal to Papa and made of his Sunday mornings what they were.✩

In the INTEREST of a HISTORIC DISTRICT...*from page 73*

thirty place settings. (Among the installations was a concert-quality pipe organ weighing more than ten tons, especially built by the California Pipe Organ Company, of Van Nuys, now in St. Francis Auditorium of the Museum of New Mexico, in Santa Fe.) All in all, as examples of architectural styling and in general neighborhood effect, these sumptuous buildings are probably without El Paso equivalency in the admiring reactions they evoke. As show-place attractions, their value is considerable.

Neighborhood sentiment favoring historic zoning appears to be strong. From time to time...members of the Historic Landmark Commission, in twos and threes, have conferred in the area with residents. On three occasions, the full commission has conducted well-attended public hearings...which were previously announced in letters to all property owners. We have invited questions and commentaries to which we have responded and we have conversed with telephone callers. At the hearings, a great preponderance of those who spoke advocated a historic district. A showing of hands at the last hearing (attended by seventy or so) produced only four hands signifying opposition.... Well over two hundred have signed petitions advocating either a temporary or a permanent application of the historic zoning code to the area....

The boundaries which the Historic Landmark Commission recommends seem consistent with guidelines spelled out in our city code and with advisories provided by the Department of Interior for districts seeking enrollment on the National Register of Historic Places....✩

• CASE UNSOLVED •

The Bestial Murder of the FROME Women

by Art Leibson

FOR SAVAGE BRUTALITY THERE NEVER HAS BEEN A killing in the Southwest to equal the double murder of Nancy Frome and her mother, Mrs. Weston G. Frome, whose mutilated bodies were found in the desert brush six miles east of Van Horn, Texas, on April 3, 1938.

Mrs. Frome was the wife of an executive of Atlas Powder Company, and her 23-year-old daughter was a University of California graduate. The women were driving alone, in a new Packard, from their home in Berkeley, California, to South Carolina, where they were to visit relatives. They had stopped off in El Paso for a few days, staying in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles White. White was the El Paso agent of Frome's company. The women left El Paso at noon on March 30, heading out Highway 80 for their next destination, Dallas. They were last seen that afternoon by two soldiers in a surveying party twenty miles west of Balmorhea.

The next day their abandoned car was found by the roadside, ten miles west of Balmorhea. It still had five gallons of gasoline in the tank and the ignition key was in the lock. All baggage was missing. A search covering a 200-mile area was organized, and on April 3 a posse led by Sheriff Albert Anderson of Culberson County stumbled upon the gruesome find in a spot less than four miles from where another body, stripped nude, had been found in 1933.

Jim Milam, an El Paso truck driver, led the party to the death scene. He had seen the women the day they left El Paso, their car followed closely by a coupe. Later in the afternoon, he said, he saw two cars coming from the brush east of Van Horn. A man was driving the Packard, followed by what appeared to him to be a woman at the wheel of the coupe.

Most of the clothing had been ripped from the two women, and they had been beaten with heavy blunt instruments. That the younger woman had died a slow death was indicated by the fact that officers found her fingers rubbed raw where she had clawed into the soil in her death

struggles. Evidence showed that she had been tortured by the live end of cigarettes or cigars forced against her knuckles and also that she had been jumped upon with such violence that her diaphragm had been ruptured. A chunk of flesh had been bitten out of the right forearm of Mrs. Frome, leaving a hole larger than a silver dollar.

Both women had been shot, the daughter with a .32 calibre bullet through the left temple and the mother with a more powerful bullet through her head. The viciousness of the assailants' sadism gave rise to the theory that the two women were thought to be mixed up in the narcotics traffic, the violence interpreted as an effort to force them to disclose where the drugs were hidden. An inner tube had been ripped from the spare tire to further the theory that the killers had searched the car thoroughly for dope after trying to locate it by torture of the women.

At the Davis Mountain filling station, where the Old Spanish Trail turns off Highway 80, the operator said he had seen two men driving the Packard at a terrific speed toward Balmorhea late in the afternoon. With the killers having a head start of nearly four days, authorities massed for one of the greatest manhunts ever organized. The Texas Rangers moved in, and Sheriff Chris Fox set up a communication headquarters in El Paso from which the investigation could proceed.

A robbery theory was offered and given support by the fact that cash and some jewelry was missing. It was evident that the killers were well schooled in their trade. In stripping the bodies, they had taken only such jewelry as could be marketed quietly and easily. But the predominant thought that the ladies had been mistakenly identified as part of a narcotics operation took up most of the investigation.

Each day brought a string of suspects in for questioning. Front pages all over the nation blazed with new clues and suspects' names. Frome, husband and father of the dead women, realizing the possibility of lynch activity if the killers actually were found, issued an appeal to Texas residents to let the law take its course in such case. Reward funds grew in remote parts of the nation. Governor James Allred of Texas even posted a $500 reward just for the finding of the missing baggage.

Two weeks after the frenzied search began, an *El Paso Times* headline admitted that the "Frome Murder Investigation Grows Cold After Long Probe." But a few days later a small headline said that Sheriff Fox expected an early "break" in the case. That "break" never came, and one more tragic crime was added to the unsolved list.✫

Art Leibson, *a retired journalist and longtime resident of El Paso, is a regular contributor to* Password. *He also writes a weekly column for the* El Paso Times.

• PIONEERS IN THE EL PASO SOUTHWEST •

FOUR GENERATIONS in the WILD WEST

The Story of Dr. L. M. Breck and His Descendants

by Louis W. Breck, M. D.

THE YOUNG DENTAL STUDENT WHO WOULD later become my father was fascinated with the idea of settling in the Wild West. Fortunately, his fiancée, Olive Jane Roblee of Topeka, Kansas, was willing to go along with the notion–although, as it turned out, she would complain intermittently about the weather in the El Paso region for the rest of her life. She never got used to the sandstorms.

The dental student's name was Louis Merrick Breck, and he had spent his adolescent years in Topeka. He had attended Washburn College there for two years before enrolling in Kansas City Dental College, where he subsequently obtained his degree in dentistry. During his last year in dental school, young Breck did a demographic study of New Mexico and came up with Las Cruces as the place to go.

The new dentist and his fiancée were married in Topeka in 1896. Then

with their worldly goods they took the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe to Las Cruces. They were well received in Las Cruces, although the town seemed small for its stated population. After a year and a half, Dr. Breck's dental practice had slowed down severely. He analyzed the situation. Of the 3,500 people who lived in Las Cruces, with many more living in the valleys above and below the town, the vast majority were Indians who did not believe in dental work for the most part and impoverished Hispanics who could not afford it. What was left was a little over 500 people for a dental practice. He had done most of the dental work required by those 500 people, and the return work would not be enough to make a living. He looked around and chose the booming border city of El Paso as the place to establish his dental practice.

Before making the move to El Paso, Dr. Breck and his wife took a trip to Mescalero. The young dentist wanted to get a closer look at some of the wonders of the Wild West–the mountains, the Indians, the desert. They traveled in a covered farm wagon, and they were accompanied by an Indian guide. Their first stop was at the main Cox ranch, located in the foothills of the Organ Mountains on the east side near the present location of the headquarters of the White Sands Proving Ground. They stayed there for several days and–as per previous arrangement–he did quite a little dental work. The next stop was at Pellam's Well, located near the southeast corner of the White Sands. The next leg of their journey was a very long one. They went all the way from Pellam's Well to La Luz. At that time there was still no Alamogordo, and La Luz was a small village. They stayed there several days and he again did a good deal of dental work. The Brecks and their guide then proceeded to Mescalero, where they stayed for about a week at the headquarters of the Mescalero Indian Reservation, commonly called the Indian Agency. Again Dr. Breck mixed business with pleasure. He was kept busy with patients for a day or two and spent the remaining time on short drives through the mountains.

After their return to Las Cruces, the couple again packed up their worldly goods, this time for the move to El Paso. The year was 1898, and the town was wild enough, my father reported, although it was getting more civilized all the time with churches, schools, and steadily improving municipal government.

My mother told me that their first home in El Paso was way out at

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Louis W. Breck, M. D., *a native El Pasoan, practiced Orthopaedic Surgery in El Paso from 1937 until his retirement in 1979 (except for his military service during World War II). He and his wife, Julia North Breck (now deceased), reared their four children in El Paso.*

the edge of town, on Virginia Street between Boulevard (now Yandell) and Wyoming. Virginia Street was the farthest street east that had houses on it. From the back porch she could see the desert and the Hueco Mountains to the east. To the north she could see the rim of the mesa and Mount Franklin, and to the south, Juárez and the mountains in Mexico. She said she could see the little milk wagon coming from a mile or more away, as well as the wagon bringing water in a tank to the homes. Water came on railroad cars from Deming and was "The World's Best Water."

There were five dentists in El Paso in 1898. One of the older ones, Dr. Witmer, took Dr. Breck into his office with him. The practice began slowly, though, and Dr. Breck soon opened a second office in Juárez, where there was little dental care. Two days a week, he commuted to Juárez on the trolley, the old car pulled by Mandy the mule.

Dr. L. M. Breck, pioneer El Paso dentist, 1902. (*Photo courtesy Louis W. Breck, M.D.*)

After several years, he moved into an office of his own on El Paso Street at the end of San Antonio Street. It was on the second floor of an office building over a Chinese restaurant. From his waiting room he had an excellent view of the 100 block of San Antonio Street including the entrance to the Coney Island Saloon. He could also look up and down El Paso Street. He was in a fine location to see all the action–fights, parades, the trolley, and whatever happened. An incident that occurred at the Coney Island Saloon one day was especially exciting, he told me. He heard the shot that killed the sheriff who had earlier killed Billy the Kid. And he saw the gunman run out of the saloon and up the street.

Dr. Breck visited around the second floor where his office was, and he met C. L. North, Sr., a draftsman's helper in an architect's office. C. L. North was to be the father of Julia North, the girl that Dr. Breck's younger son, the author of this story, married many years later.

When Dr. Breck's practice improved in a few years, he closed his Juárez office. Later, he established an office on the fourth floor of the new First National Bank Building, located at the corner of San Antonio

and Oregon Streets. He had an excellent view of the west end of San Antonio Street and was still close to the Coney Island Saloon. However, by then there were few shootings. El Paso had become a much more respectable place.

In those years, Cloudcroft, New Mexico, was a popular vacation spot for El Pasoans. Many families would leave El Paso each summer because of the high mortality rate of infants and children due to enteritis and dehydration. I was told that I made my first trip to Cloudcroft on a pillow as a very sick little boy suffering from severe gastroenteritis. My family liked Cloudcroft so well that they spent the next eight summers there.

One summer when my father's practice was slow, the family got the bright idea of putting in a moving picture theater. It was located in a small, rustic hall that the family rented (the building later converted, I believe, into a bowling alley). My brother, Merrick, who was nine years older than I, ran the projection machine; my mother sold tickets, then went in and played the piano for the feature picture. Through a megaphone, my father stood outside the hall and ballyhooed the current film. I slept on a bench in the back of the theater after I had seen the picture show a time or two. Later I had the job of carrying the cans with the films in them to and from the railroad depot.

Our Cloudcroft days came to an abrupt end with World War I. My brother was a medical student and was deferred from the draft only if he joined the Army reserve and attended school in the summer as well as in the winter. With the moving picture theater closed and my father's Cloudcroft practice small, it was only reasonable that my father return to year-round practice in El Paso.

Dr Breck was very interested in automobiles, and he bought one of the early automobiles in El Paso, a two-cylinder Pope Toledo, manufactured by the Pope Motor Company in Toledo, Ohio. It was a large touring car, and it had no top. It didn't go very fast, but it was a fine thing to have. When he bought the car in 1907, licenses were purchased in El Paso rather than through the state, and were numbered consecutively from the first one bought. My father's Pope Toledo was #17, and he took great pride in that particular feature of his first automobile.

In my early teens, I was thinking of becoming a dentist, and after school I often helped my father in his office. I worked on what were then called plates (now called dentures), which were made of hard rubber by the dentist himself. Part of my father's office consisted of a small laboratory where the dentures were made and where he did certain other parts of his work which are now done by dental laboratories. One day I

was looking for something in the little drawers of his small cabinet. To my surprise I found some dice. When the office was clear, I took a couple of the dice to my father and asked, "What are these doing in your laboratory?" He sat back and replied: "Well, I'll tell ya. When I'm not busy, I load those dice with dental amalgam. The dice are pure ivory and the load of the amalgam, which is quite heavy, does not show. I then very carefully surface the hole and repaint it just like the other holes in the dice. I charge the same amount for a loaded die as I do for a filling in a patient." When I asked him if he did much business, he said, "Yes, I do quite a little. After word got around that I was good at this from one gambler telling another, I sell a surprising number of these. Every once in a while a gambler will come in and buy a pair of my special dice."

Although my father was interested in the dice, he was not interested in going to the gaming tables or doing any other kind of casino gambling. His mild form of gambling was confined to the punchboards, which in those days were located at every cigar stand at the entrance to every building. And, yes, he did engage in another form of gambling: it had to do with gold-mining stock. He got started on that by taking some stock

Dr. L. M. Breck with his younger son, Louis W., and Mrs. Breck in front of Dr. Breck's Cloudcroft office, 1912, the office having opened in 1911. ***(Photo courtesy Louis W. Breck, M.D.)***

certificates in trade from a patient on a gold mine in Arizona, then, later, on another one in northern Mexico. After he got these mining stocks, he kept buying more stock for cash because the salesman would come in always with the same story: "We're just on the edge of another big vein of gold." After my father died (in 1931), it was literally true that we could have papered at least one room with the mining stock he had.

My father's peripheral connection with the gamblers by way of the dice apparently drew that element to him for dental work. It turned out that he counted among his patients many of the "sporting houses" personnel, as well as the "girls" and the "madams."

My father had found his Wild West, and he enjoyed it enormously. The rustic, wooded setting of Cloudcroft quenched his thirst for the beauty of a wilderness atmosphere; and the rowdiness of turn-of-the-century El Paso satisfied his desire to live on the edge of danger and excitement. But I emphasize that neither wilderness nor rowdiness infected his own upright character and very civilized standards. He was religious and hard-working and strictly a family man–a devoted husband and father. He put both his sons through college and inspired each of them to become a medical doctor.

Merrick established a fine practice in Chicago, which ended when he was called to serve in World War II. He was assigned as the commanding officer of a hospital in the South Pacific, and was killed there in the line of duty.

I began my education at Morehead Grammar School, then went to El Paso High School. I especially remember three of my high school teachers–Mrs. Frank, who taught English with an unforgettable flair and competence; Miss Flynn, my Latin teacher, who managed to bring to life a dead language; and Miss Goldstein, whose extreme degree of discipline gave me a solid foundation in mathematics. Immediately after graduating from high school (in 1926), I attended El Paso Junior College, which was housed on the top floor of the El Paso High School building. The college was small, but it offered a good academic atmosphere and also a pleasant social life. It even had a local fraternity, which asked me to join.

I am fond of saying that I closed El Paso Junior College in May of 1927 and opened the academic division of Texas College of Mines in September of 1927. We "peadoggies" were very unwelcome at the College of Mines. The engineering students did not want us and were unfriendly–sometimes even hostile. But we held our own. We restarted our fraternity that we had brought over from Junior College, and through a long period of evolution that fraternity ended up becoming the Texas Gamma chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon.

I continued my academic education at the University of Chicago and completed it, formally, at Northwestern University. I then went on to receive my medical education at Northwestern University Medical School. During my junior year at medical school Julia North and I became engaged, and we were married soon after I finished medical school, which happened to coincide with her graduation from Northwestern. Following that, I had a one-year internship and then four years of graduate-student education including a residency in orthopaedic surgery at the Mayo Clinic at Rochester, Minnesota. Then came the big decision on where to live. We analyzed the situation and chose El Paso. This was in 1937 when the depression was at its worst in El Paso. At first I thought I had the wrong specialty and the wrong place. But after eighteen months, my practice was very good. It was interrupted by my Army service during World War II, and upon my return from military service, my practice came right back.

A memorable feature of my early years of practice in El Paso was my work at El Paso County Hospital. In those days the hospital was a concrete building which housed a large 20-bed women's ward and another large 20-bed men's ward, as well as separate wards each for the Obstetrics and

Dr. L. M. Breck's automobile, a Pope Toledo, bought in 1907 and, by all accounts, the seventeenth automobile to be licensed in El Paso. The snapshot, taken in front of the Breck home undergoing construction at 211 W. Rio Grande, shows young Merrick Breck at the wheel and–in the back seat–Mrs. Breck's mother, Mrs. Roblee, and Mrs. Breck holding her infant son, Louis W. Breck. *(Photo courtesy Louis W. Breck, M.D.)*

Pediatric sections. There was no cooling anywhere in the building, and sometimes the heat was stifling. There were two operating rooms with a steam sterilizer in a small room between them. The windows in the operating rooms could not be left open much because of the danger of bacteria. Orthopaedic surgery often entails hard physical work, and we had to wear rubber aprons to keep from sweating through our gowns and onto the operating field. At the end of a two-hour operation I felt that I should have been taking an intravenous salt solution instead of the patient. The good part about the hospital was the superintendent, Dr. Butler. He was an old mining doctor who was well informed, stern but very fair. He ran an efficient and economical hospital. The staff doctors were all volunteers with no salary or remuneration of any kind. The interns were paid a very small salary, as was customary at that time.

In 1949, I founded the El Paso Orthopaedic Surgery Group in company with W. Compere Basom, M. D., and Morton H. Leonard, Sr., M. D. Our facility was located at 1220 North Stanton Street. Several years later, my wife and I moved from our home on Richmond Avenue, where we had lived for 22 years and had reared our four children, to a house situated conveniently back-to-back with the El Paso Orthopaedic Surgery Group.

In earlier years, shortly after World War II, in fact, I found myself drawn back to Cloudcroft. Julia and I made several visits there, and in time we found a property in Wills Canyon, 18 miles from the village of Cloudcroft. Like my father, I was responding to the call of the Wild West. When I retired in 1979, the Wills Canyon place became our home for three and a half years–until shortly before my wife's death in 1984.

My father's fascination with the Wild West seems to be firmly instilled in his descendants. Except for our daughter Judy, who is employed as a legal secretary in New York City, all of our children make their homes in the rugged region of the Pass. Our older son, Louis William Breck, Jr., is an inventor and lives in New Mexico south of Las Cruces with his wife, Carolyn. Their oldest son, Merrick, works with his father. Stewart and Ben, their other sons, are college students. Our younger daughter, Susan, married a dentist, Thomas E. Webb, and they live in El Paso. They have two sons, Brian, who is in college, and Christopher, who will be in college next year. Our younger son, Alan N. Breck, M. D., is in family practice (Board Certified). Believe it or not, he has completed a full circle back to Cloudcroft, where he is the well-respected and hard-working town doctor. He married Lucy Moser, an El Paso girl, and they have two sons, Aaron and Austin, both of whom are in college.

(...Continued on page 94)

The NEWS at the PASS— ONE CENTURY AGO
(April–June, 1890)

by Damon Garbern

SPRING OF 1890 FOUND EL PASO IN ITS USUAL uproar with city elections, city bond sales, a school scandal, and census problems. April began quietly enough: the Franco-Italian Restaurant ("at head of El Paso Street") offered a full-course dinner for 50 cents; Pomeroy's Transfer announced "a new carload shipment of Phaetons, Buggies, Surreys, Carriages, and Carts to be sold cheap"; and Myar's Opera House had as its April First show Katie Emmett in her great play "Waifs of New York" with "its thrilling Great Railroad Scene." The *Times* found its major excitement in reporting the California Prune War, California growers demanding increased protection against imported prunes. Editorials waxed eloquent:

> There is little reason at this time for increasing the duties on fruit. When it is considred that California prunes are of such excellent quality that they have created a high price market of their own among the richer classes..., the bulk of foreign prunes consumed [being] a low grade

> Turkish article bought by the less wealthy classes, how absurd does the demand of the Californians become! California prunes have sold in large quantities in New York at from 7.25 to 7.5 cents per pound. The Turkish prunes, used by plain, unpretentious people are sold from 3.5 to 3.75 cents a pound including the one cent duty.... The consumers of foreign prunes paid in duties last year $437,000; are they now to pay $1,300,000 or else go without their prunes?

It is interesting to speculate how *Times* editor Hart would react to present-day Japanese capitalistic ventures in the United States given his concerns for the "plain, unpretentious people" who ate Turkish prunes.

Other matters also entered Mr. Hart's arenas of concern. In its usual unbiased fashion, the *Times* reported on Republican efforts to prepare for city elections. (Copies of the Republican *Herald* for this period are not available for comparison.)

> No enthusiasm was exhibited by those present, but the routine work of selecting delegates was gone through in a most indifferent manner. And the work of nominating candidates for aldermanic honors was limited strictly to the question of who would have the nomination. The party bosses, those who never attend meetings, except when chances for office are to be distributed...were there ready to take anything that would come their way.

Contrast this to the *Times* comments concerning the candidates it recommended: one such candidate "Stands high in his professional life"; another "preferred to come out to this 'metropolis of the frontier'" and to "win for himself an enviable reputation in El Paso business circles"; yet another was "A young man possessed of every qualification belonging to a gentleman of integrity and thorough business principles"; and J. W. Magoffin ("Raised in El Paso" and "known to every individual in the city") was "a young man thoroughly capable of paddling his own canoe in business or politics and just now he is rowing for a seat on the city council."

When the Democrats won overwhelmingly, the *Times* pronounced that "Republicanism in El Paso is dead because respectability has been forced out of the party by boycotters."

Politics in El Paso was not without its unsavory side, however. A "county official" was brought into the county jail for being drunk and disorderly. Sobering up, he created a great racket to call attention to himself. He broke a water pipe and let the water on in full force, aiming it toward an adjoining cell housing two "soiled doves" who did not hesitate to voice their displeasure.

Damon Garbern, *the author of this regular* Password *feature, is employed in a supervisory position by the El Paso Public Schools and is also a performer with EL PASO PRO-MUSICA.*

The sale of city bonds, the passage of which had been a long, hard-fought battle, hit a snag when the high bidder did not respond after many attempts to contact. The next high bid was found to have been made by a company that had submitted three bids under three names. The bonds had to be re-bid, and water improvement for the city was again delayed.

The city was not at a standstill, however. One new city ordinance resulted in the creation of the City Scavenger position (ordinance Number 23), whose duty was to keep the city free of filth, to be paid at the following rates:

Produce and commision houses daily	$1.50
Restaurants, daily, per week	1.50
Clearing privy vaults and cesspools, per cubic foot	.15
Saloons, selling hot lunches, daily	1.50
Other saloons	.50
Groceries, 6 times a week, each	.35
Barbers, 6 times a week	.50
Hotels, per wagon load	.75
Dead horses, cows, mules, each	2.50
Dead dogs, each	.25
Dead cats, each	.12
Dead fowl, each	.05

A petition signed by 57 citizens asking that the city spend $1,000 for a summer of daily music in the plaza was referred to committee–as per the time-honored custom of politicians everywhere.

Such delaying tactics and assorted snags to the contrary notwithstanding, a Mr. Valentine, vice-president of the Wells Fargo Company, declared El Paso "one of my favorite points," adding that his company's "faith in El Paso is more than ever," especially in view of a recently organized "progressive association with active business men at its head which has as its objective the advancement of the resources of the town."

The Progressive Association, the Board of Trade, and the Mining Association were soon entering into discussion about merging the three groups into one organization to be known as the Chamber of Commerce, an organization enjoying success in Denver and Houston. Unfortunately, some members of the three organizations were rather jealous of turf and self-interest, and their reluctance slowed the formation of a Chamber group for a time.

In courthouse business, a Mr. L. C. Chism was tried for "cursing out" superintendent of schools Esterly. It seems Chism felt his son had received excessive punishment at Esterly's hands. The town and newspapers were soon divided into pro-paddling and anti-paddling camps. The *Herald*

demanded Esterly's instant dismissal, both for using excessive force and for turning out an inferior product ("No El Paso graduate can make it to the State University"). The *Times* adopted a wait-and-see-after-hearing attitude, although it did take the *Herald's* assertion about the inferior product of the schools as "wanton slander of the noblest institution of the city." After two hearings before the school board and a criminal trial, Superintendent Esterly was vindicated of all charges. However, in June when the teachers' contracts were renewed, the superintendent's was not.

Spring ended relatively peacefully. Additional census forms had been found, and the charges that the deliberate attempt of the dastardly Republican administration to manipulate an undercount of the southern states were forgotten in the belief that El Paso would be fully counted. The school year ended with a glorious graduation ceremony at Myar's Opera House, where an art exhibit of student crayon sketches graced the building and the Fort Bliss orchestra "discoursed music during intermission." Thirteen carloads of hogs from Kansas and Missouri passed through the city on their way to Mexico City (news is not always easy to come by), and the information that nickel beer had been discussed at a Methodist church youth meeting was held to be erroneous.

El Paso was entering a sleepy summer with music in the plaza only possible once a week through private subscription, municipally-furnished music held to be against the city charter. However, being El Paso, how sleepy would the summer be?✫

FOUR GENERATIONS...*from page 91*

Four generations of the Breck family have enjoyed El Paso and Cloudcroft continuously for more than 90 years and are working at making it a century.✫

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A MAN NAMED AOY

by Conrey Bryson

ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1890, A SIXTY-SEVEN-year-old man was on a ladder, cleaning the windows of his rented rooms, above and behind the Reckhardt Assay Office on San Francisco Street in El Paso. He slipped and fell to the icy sidewalk below, suffering a broken leg. A doctor was called, and the injured man was taken upstairs to his rooms. Dr. Baird found that the man was not only seriously hurt, but was suffering badly from malnutrition. The doctor and the others soon made another discovery which was to play an important part in the educational history of El Paso.

The small quarters were equipped with seats, a blackboard, a case of books, chalk and erasers. Clearly this was a schoolroom, a fact that was soon verified by the arrival of some pupils who had learned of the accident to their beloved schoolmaster, identified by them as "Señor Aoy."[1] His students were all Mexican Americans, and it was soon found that this was the only facility in boomtown El Paso for their education. City fathers and education-minded citizens were hard put to provide education for children who already spoke English. The rolls of the first public school, opened on March 5, 1883, show an enrollment of 94 pupils, and not a Spanish surname in the list.[2]

The El Paso School Board was soon apprised of the contribution which "Professor Aoy" was making toward the education of a neglected segment of the city's population. As soon as Mr. Aoy recovered sufficiently, he was placed on the payroll; and preparations were made for establishing a school for these students. In the fall of 1892, the Mexican Preparatory School was opened, with Professor Aoy as its principal. The new school met in an old Custom House building at Third and Oregon Streets while a new building for the school was being financed and constructed. Before it could be completed, Professor Aoy passed away, in 1895. He died penniless, and the school board provided for his burial and erected a suitable headstone for his grave in Evergreen Cemetery.[3]

It was inevitable that the new school should be called Aoy School, the name it has retained for nearly one hundred years; but where did the name come from? A-O-Y is not a natural combination of Spanish letters, and it was widely speculated that this was an assumed name, possibly from the initials of his parents.

One man who tried to unravel the secrets of Aoy's background was G. W. Hare, who wrote the story of Aoy's life for *Quien Sabe*, published by El Paso High School in 1900. According to Hare's account, the subject was born in Spain of parents who belonged to nobility in Valencia. Because the young man was precocious and devoted to learning, he was assisted by Franciscan priests and studied to become a part of their order. At the age of 17 he took vows and entered a monastery; he was ordained a priest in 1854. Soon he began to doubt some of the things he had been taught, left the order, and began a wandering career of searching for the truth. He worked for a time on the docks of Havana. There he heard favorable reports about the Mayans of Yucatan and lived among them for a time. Still not satisfied that he had found the truth, he came to the United States; and in Arizona or Utah, he became acquainted with the Mormons and joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[4]

It is at this point that the present author's research into the Aoy story begins. In 1933, President Anthony W. Ivins, First Counselor to President Heber J. Grant of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wrote a letter to Bishop Arwell L. Pierce of the El Paso Ward of his church, commonly known as the Mormon Church. The pertinent part of the letter reads:

> Professor A. V. Joy, founder of the Joy School of El Paso was a member of the Church and died so. He was the principal translator of

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Conrey Bryson, *a past president of the El Paso County Historical Society and a former editor of* Password, *retired several years ago from a distinguished career in the news media.*

> the Spanish edition of the *Book of Mormon*, a man of very high attainments and a splendid character so far as I have been able to determine. I was not acquainted with the man, ...but I knew of his work, and think that it might be...proper if we should place a marker at his grave.[5]

Clearly the letter referred to Mr. Aoy; and Bishop Pierce, knowing of my interest in El Paso history, asked me to investigate the matter and give him my recommendations. The statement that "Professor A. V. Joy....was the principal translator of the Spanish edition of the Book of Mormon" sent me hurrying to a statement in G. W. Hare's narrative:

> He spent two years...translating the *Book of Mormon* into Spanish. He was an accomplished linguist and a born poet, and in consequence the *Book of Mormon* is a great deal better Spanish than English. Completing the work, he did not copyright it but gave it to the apostle of the Church, as he had done it wholly as a labor of love, the reader may judge of the honest, confiding man's surprise, when it began to be noised about that the apostle had received a new revelation, which was nothing more than the *Book of Mormon* in classical Spanish. Once more he was disappointed in human nature. He attempted to expose a fraud, but the ignorant fanatics, the Mormons, would not listen to him. Every man who heard of it was turned against him. He could no longer live in peace among the Mormons.

This seemed entirely unreasonable. Why should a translation of the *Book of Mormon* be put forth as "a new revelation"? Did it actually happen? From William A. Lund, Assistant Church Historian, I secured a photostat copy of the title page of the first translation of the *Book of Mormon* into Spanish. It showed the translators as Meliton G. Trejo and James Z. Stewart. No mention of Aoy.[6]

I located Meliton G. Trejo's son, who was then Bishop of the St. David Ward, St. David, Arizona. Bishop Trejo described his father as a well-educated Spaniard who had served as a missionary in Mexico with his companion translator, James Z. Stewart. But the Bishop knew nothing of Aoy.[7]

Then the question arose: If Aoy was an assumed name, as many supposed, what name was the man using in Utah? Trenial Pauly, First Counselor to Bishop Pierce, found a new clue. He located an elderly Mexican woman who told him that Aoy's real name was Jaime Vila. At that point, Archibald F. Bennett, Secretary of the Genealogical Society of Utah, was most helpful. In the records of the Mormon temple in Logan, Utah, he found the following record of sacred ordinances performed on November 3, 1884:

> Name: Jaime Aoy Olives Vila
> Born: 24 Mar, 1823, Mahon, Menorca, Spain
> Father: Jaime Vila (born Villa Carlos, Menorca)
> Mother: Margarete Olives.

One thing seemed certain–if Aoy was an assumed name, it was assumed at the time of his birth.[8]

Still unanswered was the question of Aoy's connection, if any, with the Spanish translation of the *Book of Mormon*. Then, in 1980, the Church News section of the Salt Lake City *Desert News* published an article about the translation, stating that Trejo and Stewart had received valuable assistance from a "Brother Oay." I rushed a letter to Gordon Irving, Research Historian of the Church Historical Department. He responded, enclosing copies of two letters which answered the question.[9]

The first was a letter dated July 15, 1884, from Moses Thatcher, member of the Council of Twelve Apostles of the Church, to John Taylor, President of the Church. After reporting that the Spanish translation of the *Book of Mormon* was ready for the press, the letter read:

> Brother Oay...has assisted in the final revision of the translation and...besides being thoroughly educated in his own language (the Spanish) is an editor of considerable experience and a practicable printer. He is now out of employment so that we can secure his services both as proof reader and tipho [sic], should you decide to go on with the publication at once....I hardly know how we can get along with the printing without the assistance of Brother Oay....[10]

Aoy's name is spelled correctly in the letter of January 19, 1885, from George Q. Cannon, First Counselor to President Taylor, to James Z. Stewart, one of the translators of the Spanish edition.

> The first pages of the *Book of Mormon* in Spanish are in the hands of the printers, and Brother Aoy has read the proofs and has suggested several changes. He suggests the use of *planchas* all through the book for the word used by us in English–plates–instead of *placas*, which is sometimes used in the translation...and which , he says, means "medals." He also says that the word *anales* is used for "record" a large number of times, which he says is the correct word, but the word *recuerdos* is used twice, and, as he says, incorrectly. In the last sentence of the testimony of the three witnesses, where the words *La Gloria* are used, he would substitute *el honor*....
>
> There are several other corrections...which I do not think necessary to enumerate here, there being two or three instances where he suggests the use of the singular instead of the plural, it being singular in English. There are also, he says. several changes in the termination of words, by which the tense is changed.[11]

Apparently all the suggested changes were acceptable to translator Stewart, for the present edition of the *Libro de Mormon* contains all of them. Clearly Aoy was of major assistance in translating the book into Spanish. Equally clearly, he was not the sole nor chief translator. There is no evidence in the Church archives of any quarrel between Aoy and

others involved in the translation. There is no record that Aoy ever left the Church, and it may well be, as stated in the letter from Anthony W. Ivins quoted earlier, that he was "a member of the Church and died so."

There yet remained the request from President Ivins that the local Church place a memorial marker at Aoy's grave. I had stood at his grave one April 27, the anniversary of his death, and watched a group of girls and boys from Aoy School place flowers at his grave and hear the words of tribute from their teacher. Reporting to Bishop Pierce, I stated my opinion that no better tribute could be devised than the one already carved on his tombstone:

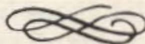
O. V. AOY

EL MAESTRO DE LA ESCUELA
NACIO EN LA ESPANA, A. D. 1822
Y MURIO EN EL PASO, TEXAS April 27, 1895
"y respondiendo el Rey, los dira:
De cierto os digo que en cuanto los
hiciesteis a uno de estos, mis hermanos
pequeñistos, a mi lo hicisteis."
San Mateo XXV-40

In English, the familiar words from St. Matthew are: "and the King shall answer and say unto them: inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye have done it unto me."✩

NOTES

1. G. W. Hare, "The Life and Character of Olivas Villanueva Aoy," *Quien Sabe*, Vol. I, No. 8, May, 1900. Monthly publication of El Paso High School. Hare was evidently the editor, since the initials "G.W.H." appear after the editorial. Copy in the Southwest Reference Department, El Paso Public Library.
2. Elaine Lewis Morrel, *The Rise and Growth of Public Education in El Paso, Texas*, Masters Thesis, University of Texas, 1936, 40-50.
3. Bertha Archer Schaer, *Historical Sketch of Aoy School*, El Paso Public Schools, April 27, 1951, 3-7.
4. Hare.
5. Ivins to Pierce, May 11, 1933. In possession of author.
6. Lund to Bryson, August, 1937.
7. Trejo to Bryson, August, 1937.
8. Bennett to Bryson, July 19, 1943.
9. Irving to Bryson, December 17, 1980.
10. Thatcher to Taylor, July 15, 1884. Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
11. Cannon to Stewart, January 19, 1885. Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.



THE SILVER CRADLE: LAS POSADAS, LOS PASTORES, AND OTHER MEXICAN AMERICAN TRADITIONS by Julia Nott Waugh. Austin: The University of Texas Press, $8.95.

Quaint, charming, intriguing–these are a few of the adjectives that one might apply to this year-long visit with the customs and culture of Mexican San Antonio–but far better is the word *authentic*. Waugh takes the reader on a tour of the "Mexican quarter" of that fascinating city, introducing individuals who sound absolutely real and who all take part in the annual cycle of religious and social pageantry.

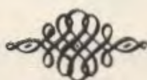
The silver cradle is the central point of the Christmas *nacimiento*, the manger scene that starts the year's celebrations. Over half a room of Graciana's house is given over to the scene each year, and on December 16 friends and neighbors descend on the home to begin the sacred season. They come from Las Posadas, a traditional searching for shelter (as suggested by Luke's gospel) with the Holy Family represented by a diminutive Joseph and Mary. This search, drama-like, takes place for a series of nights. Each night the family asks in vain at a succession of doors, describing themselves as "Poor pilgrims who, disconsolate,/ Seek shelter on a foreign soil." And the answer comes, "We have no room, it is too late at night,/ There is no shelter anywhere." Eventually, of course, a home is opened to them, where a fiesta has been prepared. Such is the case at Graciana's–but one looks in vain for the infant Jesus in the treasured silver cradle that she guards carefully all year long. In the Mexican tradition, the cradle logically stays empty until the night of the Christ Child's birth.

Other events of the year–all of them flavored richly with Mexican spice–find their way into the book, each event treated with depth and understanding for the reader not a home in the culture. Waugh notes that these devout people are poor, swept off to the fringes of Anglo/establishment society. Felix Almaraz, who appreciatively introduces this reprint

of the 1955 book, notes that these days one says "Mexican American" rather than "Mexican," but Waugh emphasizes the roots of the culture, which are, definitely, from south of the border.

Militant folk might question the validity of her work; after all, what does a non-Mexican (and Protestant at that) know about such treasured rituals and events? But such a charge is pointless; Julia Waugh is in love with the subject and the people she lived among while gathering this rich bounty. Perhaps it is precisely because she is an "outsider" that she can see–and make come alive–all that she does in this wonderful book. As another "outsider" I commend her for sharing it all with us.

JOHN O. WEST
Professor of English, The University of Texas at El Paso



MAVERICKS–TEN UNCORRALED WESTERNERS by Dale L. Walker. Phoenix: Golden West Publishers, 1989, $5.00

El Paso author and Director of Texas Western Press offers us now a collection of essays, each one devoted to a Westerner who strayed from the herd, whose thoughts and actions propelled him down rebellious paths. As C. L. Sonnichsen notes in his Foreword, "We do not always admire these exceptional people, but they do capture our attention, and they always will."

Four of the ten had connections with El Paso. For example, if you run across the trivia question, "Where did King James I of Trinidad die?" the answer is El Paso. James A. Harden-Hickey, the self-styled "King James I of Trinidad," wrote a book on suicide in which he said. "The wise man lives as long as he ought, not as long as he can." Harden-Hickey came to El Paso in February of 1898, checked into the Pierson Hotel, and turned his words into deed.

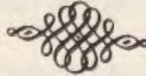
In December, 1913, at the age of 71, Ambrose Bierce wrote his daughter, "Why should I remain in a country that is on the eve of prohibition and woman's suffrage? In America you can't go east or west anymore, or north; the only escape is south." Bierce came through El Paso to disappear into Mexico, arriving in Chihuahua a few days after the town was occupied by Pancho Villa's revolutionists. On Christmas Eve he wrote a friend, "Pray for me–real loud." Though many have tried to follow his trail, there has been no answer to the question of how Ambrose Bierce met his end.

John Reed eschewed the attentions of socialite Mabel Dodge to come

to El Paso and use the city as a base of operations for reporting on the Mexican revolution. And then there was Tracy Richardson, machine gunner for hire. According to the story, he confronted Pancho Villa in an El Paso saloon regarding the $10,000 price the revolutionary leader had put on his head. Villa was forced to apologize for inconveniencing Richardson.

The remaining six "square pegs" are equally interesting. Once started, this book is hard to put down before the last page.

FRANCIS L. FUGATE
Professor Emeritus of English, The University of Texas at El Paso



FORT UNION AND THE SANTA FE TRAIL by Robert M. Utley. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1989 (Southwest Studies Series 89), $12/7.50

For sixty years before the railroad came to New Mexico in 1879, the Santa Fe Trail served as the pathway for trade between Kansas and Missouri, at one end, and Chihuahua City, at the other. The importance of Fort Union, established in 1851, to the maintenance of this artery of trade is interestingly presented in a well-documented work, written when the author was with the National Park Service.

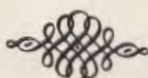
A vivid picture of that section of the Santa Fe Trail which lay between Fort Dodge, Kansas, and Fort Union is rendered in detailed descriptions of the wagon routes confirmed by aerial photographs of the area taken in 1959. The ruts which marked the wagon trails were preserved remarkably for study because the land had not been used for any purpose other than grazing cattle. West of Dodge City the trail divided into two branches: the Mountain branch served the southeastern portion of Colorado, including Bent's Fort, and entered New Mexico through Raton Pass and Taos; the shorter Cimarron branch followed a more direct route across the panhandle of Oklahoma to the junction of the two trails at La Junta (Watrous, New Mexico), a few miles below Fort Union.

The author's accounts of the use of the military forces stationed at Fort Union emphasize protection of the transcontinental mail service as their primary obligation. (The freighters had to organize to protect themselves.) The principal difficulties encountered by the military were engendered by hostile Indians, but during the Civil War incursions by Confederates against the Union forces presented an additional problem. The military units were also expected to maintain and improve existing roads.

Robert M. Utley has held several important offices as a distinguished

historian, finally as deputy director of the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Several of his works have received awards by prestigious history organizations, and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame gave its Western Heritage Award to his account of the Lincoln County War in 1988 and to his biography of General Custer in 1989. His monograph on the importance of Fort Union to the Santa Fe Trail is another significant addition to the preservation of the nation's frontier heritage.

HENRY D. GARRETT, M. D.
El Paso



SUN COUNTRY BANKER by Joseph Leach. El Paso: Mangan Books, 1989, $19.95

Samuel Doak Young was seventeen years old and about to graduate from the high school in Woodville, Texas, when he told his teacher he was going to quit school and take a job at the Gulf National Bank in Beaumont. The teacher was aghast: "Sam, you can't do it; you are ruining your life!"

Far from ruining his life, that decision set the course for a remarkable career, which in time would significantly influence the growth and development of El Paso.

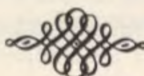
Sam Young first saw El Paso in 1919, when he visited the city as a bank examiner. He returned–supposedly for a short stay–in 1924 to take over a failed bank. The temporary stay was lengthened when Sam was asked to organize a new bank. And the stay became permanent when the enterprising young man conceived the El Paso National Bank, talked with local financier Charles M. Harvey (who bought 51 percent of the stock), and formed a board. The new bank opened in 1925 with a capital stock of $200,000 and resources of slightly more than one million dollars.

And what a dramatic role that bank and its founder played in the subsequent five-plus decades. It financed, for example, the hotel built by Conrad Hilton, and it became Hilton's major financial depository. It also helped Dorrance Roderick to purchase the *El Paso Times*. It encouraged Mexican investments in El Paso National and inspired Sam Young's vigorous leadership on behalf of the Chamizal settlement (for which leadership Samuel D. Young received the Aztec Eagle Award, the highest honor Mexico bestows on a foreigner). The bank also enabled Paul Kayser and H. G. Frost to start the El Paso Natural Gas Company.

Also included in the presentation of Samuel D. Young the banking giant is the story of Sam Young the human being. With great skill and sensitivity, the biographer shows Young as a devoted husband and father

and as a person deeply interested in the welfare of his community. El Paso was fortunate indeed to have Sam Young as its friend as well as its "Sun Country Banker."

RUBY BURNS
Woman's Editor (retired), *El Paso Times*



THE CHILDREN OF THE SUN by Marcienne Rocard. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989

An interpretation by a Frenchwoman of interpretations by American writers of Mexican-Americans would seem, at first glance, to be distantly removed from anything substantial or real. But Professor Marcienne Rocard brings excellent credentials to her task. A teacher of English, American, and Canadian literature at the University of Toulouse-le-Mirail, she has studied and taught in the United States, and Chicano literature is one of her specialties. In *The Children of the Sun*, she conducts her readers over a long trail that affords a commanding view of Mexican-Americans as they were imaged in the literature of the United States from 1848 to 1974.

The material of the book is arranged in chronological order, and is divided into three sections–the period 1848-1940, the period 1940-1965, and the period 1965-1974. Each section includes a discussion of Mexican-Americans as presented by Anglo-American writers and then of Mexican-Americans as presented by Mexican-American writers. The juxtaposition of the two views reinforces the characterization of Mexican-Americans and also clarifies the source and nature of the tension between the two ethnic groups as it received expression in each of the three periods. The author guides her readers along paths of racism, romanticism, stereotyping, and a developing realism–paths which sweep in the final section to a stimulating presentation of Chicano feelings and dreams. She supports her arguments throughout the book with abundant references to the literary works and with an impresive succession of apt quotations.

The Children of the Sun is an intriguing view of an important segment of American social history–a view seen not from the perspective of documented facts, but from the vantage point of artistic vision and the dedicated labor of a careful scholar.

RICHARD C. CAMPBELL
Chaplain, Lydia Patterson Institute, El Paso

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