

THE CONVERSO LEGACY ARCHIVES (CLA):
SUMMARY AND GENERAL INVENTORY OF INAUGURAL COLLECTIONS

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I. SUMMARY

The Converso Legacy Archives (CLA), formerly the Crypto-Jewish Historical Archives (CJHA), represents the first systematic effort to gather and preserve materials pertaining specifically to Sephardic Jewish descent and identity in the American Southwest and northern Mexico. While existing projects, such as the University of Washington's Sephardic Studies Digital Collection (SSDC), have assembled considerable holdings on Sephardic Jewry, none to date have focused on its presence in the region of CLA's scope. In large part this is because, unlike later North American Jewish settlers from the former Ottoman Empire and broader Mediterranean, persons of Sephardic descent in CLA's focal region arrived and settled in the New World as *conversos* (also known as *cristianos nuevos*, or pejoratively as *marranos*). These Jews, who converted to Catholicism mainly under force in the wake of the Inquisition, ultimately assimilated into the Hispano Christian population over the Spanish colonial period. In some cases, individuals continued the practice of Jewish beliefs and traditions, first in secret during this colonial phase, and later as part of a mixed Judeo-Catholic context. Academic literature typically refers to them as crypto-Jews. In most cases, descendants (whether of crypto-Jews or conversos without do not know the Jewish admixture to their ancestry until discovered or revealed through a family member, scholar, community member, their own genealogical research, or some combination of these.

Due to the early modern origin, precarious status, and assimilation of conversos in CLA's focal region, only the faintest hints remain today of their presence. Most of CLA is therefore centered on modern records spanning the past century, during which descendants around the world began to consolidate as self-aware regional communities within a global network. By design, it is not the

purpose of CLA to advance, impede, or serve as a mouthpiece for any point of view in debates of converso history or claimed ancestry. Interpretation will remain the province of researchers, and identity the province of the community members themselves. Rather, the project pursues a nonpartisan mission: preserving a record of modern identity-formation, historical consciousness, and emergence of regional and global communities with a shared cultural backdrop. Both a community archives and an identity archives, CLA is aimed at providing a permanent repository of materials on how this community has emerged since the twentieth century; how publicity and scholarly debates have shaped members' identities; and how members have understood these identities with respect to cultural and religious categories in the region (e.g. Catholicism, contemporary Jewish life, Latinx ethnicity, and the Hispano legacy). Growth in public awareness and interest over the past year has nourished a long-term vision of CLA as the preeminent storehouse for records, oral histories, publications, exhibits, genealogies, multimedia, lectures and presentations, ephemera, and other materials relevant to its target scope, including guides to holdings at other institutions. In time, it is hoped that new collections will allow CLA's scope to broaden more fully into Mexico and other parts of Latin America where conversos settled and modern claimants to descent from them now live.

Its development in this spirit follows important changes in the wider field of archiving, including a boom in digitization efforts and the rapid growth of participatory and community archives. Fuller incorporation of community members as stakeholders in the archival process has fostered new motivations for and approaches to collecting and preserving. Meanwhile, greater focus on inclusion of marginalized groups has opened a door for archives to play more dynamic roles in communities' understanding of their own histories. This fact is especially important for CLA's focal community, as its fairly recent emergence has so far left it scarcely represented in North American Jewish archives. CLA thus imparts to both researchers and regional claimants to converso descent a common hub and shared

resource of cultural memory.

Since initial development of CLA in January, organizational and individual donors of its inaugural collections have played the essential role of bringing it to life. In particular, the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies (SCJS), on whose board of directors Sean serves as Archivist, has formally transferred to me the requisite copyrights to make its full archive part of CLA. The organization's close relationship to the Southwest since its founding in 1991, along with its standing as one of the most important organizations for Sephardic descendants in the region, makes the state's own archives a superb fit for its current and future materials. In this connection should also be mentioned the papers of Prof. Stanley Hordes, co-founder of SCJS and the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society (NMJHS) (a center for Sephardic descendants in its own right), and former State Historian of New Mexico (1981–82). Community members know Prof. Hordes as one of the most distinguished scholarly voices on the subject of New Mexico's converso and crypto-Jewish history. He and Sean have been regularly in touch since CLA's inception, and he continues to be an avid supporter. In 2022, Prof. Hordes donated his 14 cubic feet of papers to SRCA, where it is now the Stanley M. Hordes Collection (2022-013). The presence of both Prof. Hordes's archive and NMJHS's archive at SRCA further singles it out as the ideal permanent home for CLA. On August 7, in response to a proposal from Sean, Prof. Hordes kindly agreed to incorporate all of his donated papers into CLA as a distinct sub-collection, further enriching its focus and strengthening its cohesion of purpose. Together under one roof, Prof. Hordes's collection and the collections Sean has gathered would add up to the largest single archival assemblage ever made on this community. Achieving this outcome would be an outstanding victory for the state of New Mexico, SRCA, CLA, and its focal community alike.

Below follow a general accounting of CLA's founding collections (IIa), a table of their estimated linear footage (IIb), and an overview of prospective collections (IIc).

IIa. GENERAL INVENTORY OF INAUGURAL COLLECTIONS

The collections inventoried in this section are those for which all materials have been physically transferred to me, and a deed of gift has been completed and obtained from the donor(s). Collections are listed by size in descending order. Digital objects are noted as such. An estimated range of linear footage is included in each listing.

Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies Papers

13 accordion folders of annual SCJS conference planning (4–6 linear feet)

8 folders (2 linear feet)

3 large binders of news coverage, operations documents, and organizational planning (contents 1.5 linear feet)

20 print issues of *HaLapid* (2014–present) (SCJS’s official publication; 1 linear foot)

50+ digitized issues of the *SCJS Newsletter* (1992) and *HaLapid* (1993–present) (digital objects; PDF)

1 VHS tape (*Secret Jews of the Hispanic Southwest* (1995))

1 video file (*Secret Jews of the Hispanic Southwest* (1995)) (digital object; digitized from VHS tape)

Sean Schifano Collection

1 original black-and-white photograph (1989) taken by Frédéric Brenner, contained in 1 photo book autographed by Brenner

– appraised by the photographer’s gallery at \$5,500

1 published and autographed photograph collection (*Marranes Exilés de l’exil* (1992)) by Frédéric Brenner

1 published photograph collection (*Diaspora: Homelands in Exile* (2003)) with loose bookplate autographed by Frédéric Brenner

1 copy of *Fractured Faiths / Las fes fracturadas: Spanish Judaism, the Inquisition, and New World Identities* (2016) by Roger L. Martínez-Dávila, Josef Díaz, and Ron D. Hart, signed by all three authors
– companion volume to the exhibition “Fractured Faiths” at the New Mexico History Museum

1 modern facsimile of the *Sefer Azharot* by Eliahu Adeni (d. 1631), originally published in Amsterdam in 1688

1 copy of *Suddenly Jewish* (2000) by Barbara Kessel

1 copy of *Saudades: The Jewish-Portuguese Connection: Poems and Laments* (2005) by Ada Jill Schneider

1 copy of *Inquisition Papers of New Mexico I: The Trial of Simón de León* (1946), compiled and signed by Horace J. Nunemaker

1 copy of *Os cristãos novos em Portugal no século XX (The New Christians in Portugal in the 20th Century)* (1925) by Samuel Schwarz (digital object; PDF)

1 copy of *The Oporto Synagogue: From the Old Jewish Quarter to Barros Basto* (2016) by the Comunidade Israelita do Porto

1 copy of *Two Millennia of the Jewish Community of Oporto, Chronology 1923–2023* (2023) (digital object; PDF)

1 copy of “The Museum of Sefardi and Anousim Heritage at Netanya Academic College” (digital object; PDF)

1 oral history (to be conducted in early November)

1 oral history transcript (digital object; PDF)

1 genealogy (of oral history interviewee)

1 Inquisition trial record of Francisco Gómez Robledo (1628–1693) (digital object; PDF)
– one of very few such records involving a charge of “judaizing” in what is now New Mexico
– Robledo was likely of converso descent

Arthur Benveniste Papers

2 full banker’s boxes of relevant studies, research notes, field notes, conference presentations, news coverage, correspondence, and other documents (approx. 6–7 linear feet)

Gloria Golden Collection

26 photographs with 24 exhibit panels
– Exhibition set 1 (5–6 linear feet)
– 15 black-and-white photographs
– 10 oral history panels (containing 6 oral histories)

- Exhibition set 2 (3.5–4.5 linear feet)
 - 11 cocoa black-and-white photographs
 - 14 oral history panels (containing 11 oral histories)

Scholarly literature, artistic literature, news, and other documents on Sephardic Jewry and crypto-Jewish descendants (1.5 linear feet)

3 spiralbound booklets (0.5 linear feet)

2 copies of *Remnants of Crypto-Jews among Hispanic Americans* (2004, 2013), compiled by Gloria Golden

Dolores Sloan Papers (or Collection)

1 banker's box of SCJS materials, a complete run of the *Journal of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian Crypto-Jews* (for which Ms. Sloan served as editor), relevant academic programs documents, news coverage, correspondence, and other documents (4–5 linear feet)

Nan Rubin Collection

1 banker's box of promotional materials, news coverage, published research, photographs, ephemera, and other documents (approx. 3.5–4.5 linear feet)

3 audio files of *The Hidden Jews of New Mexico* (digital objects; three-part NPR series, 1988, 1992, 1996)

6 audio files of *Mi Seferino* (digital objects; six-part monthly radio program, KUNM 89.9 FM, 2002)

Mark Schneegurt Collection

1 microfilm of Inquisition trial record of Leonor de Cáceres (1601)

1 file of Inquisition trial (digital object; PDF; digitized from microfilm)

1 copy of “Leonor de Cáceres and the Mexican Inquisition” (2001) by Margaret Mott

1 copy of “The Cochin Jewish Community – Impressions from a Mission to India, 1966” by Aaron Grenbaum (digital object; PDF)

1 copy of “The Kerala Synagogues: Heritage of the Cochin Jews” () by Orna Eliyahu-Oron and Barbara C. Johnson (digital object; PDF)

1 sound file of chanting of the Parur Tablet (digital object)

156 issues (complete run) of the *Ha-Lapid* newsletter (1927–1958, Órgão da Comunidade Israelita do Porto; digital objects; PDF)

– not to be confused with *HaLapid*, SCJS's official publication (see SCJS Papers above)

Texas Jewish Historical Society Papers

7 issues of the *Texas Jewish Historical Society Magazine* (approx. 0.5 linear feet)

1 journal offprint

Kulanu Papers

93 issues of *Kulanu Magazine* (digital objects; PDF)

IIb. ESTIMATES OF LINEAR FOOTAGE

This section tabulates lower- and upper-value estimates of linear footage for CLA's inaugural collections (IIa above). Overall, total linear footage is estimated to favor the lower values below, with allowance for some exceptions. Upper-value estimates are intended to offer a maximum limit and tolerance in the event that some collections occupy more space than the expected lower estimates.

Collection	Approx. Linear Feet
Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies Papers	8.5 – 10.5
Sean Schifano Collection	1.5
Gloria Golden Collection	10 – 12.5
Art Benveniste Papers	6 – 7
Dolores Sloan Papers (or Collection)	4 – 5
Nan Rubin Collection	3.5 – 4.5
Mark Schneegurt Collection	< 0.5
Texas Jewish Historical Society Papers	0.5
Kulanu Papers	0
Total	35 – 41.5

IIc. PROSPECTIVE FUTURE COLLECTIONS

The collections summarized in this section are those which are not yet in hand and for which a deed of gift has not yet been completed and obtained from the donor(s). As such, all information is current but necessarily tentative. Several collections not named and summarized here are known to exist. Some of these latter collections are in the earliest stages of review and/or discussion for potential accession.

Peter Svarzbein Collection

Unknown number of photographs

1 video file of *A Minyan to A Million* (digital object)

Promotional materials and documents related to “A Minyan for the Million”

New Mexico Jewish Historical Society Papers

Unknown number of issues of the *Legacy* newsletter containing scope-relevant content

Unknown number of scope-relevant video files

Arizona Jewish Historical Society Papers

Unknown number of issues of the society newsletter containing scope-relevant content

Sara Koplik Papers (or: New Mexico Jewish Federation Papers)

44 issues (1972–2014) of the *New Mexico Jewish Link* containing scope-relevant content

Seth Kunin Collection

Large number of oral histories

Isaac Artenstein Collection

3 documentary films on Sephardic crypto-Jewish descendants and Jews of the borderlands (*Challah Rising in the Desert: The Jews of New Mexico* (2018); *A Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest* (2020); *People of the Crossing: The Jews of El Paso* (2023))

Joseph Lovett Collection

1 documentary film on Sephardic crypto-Jewish descendants (*Children of the Inquisition* (2019))

Isabelle M. Sandoval Papers

Unknown quantity of literary fiction, notes, research, and news coverage

Salomon Buzaglo Collection

2 video files of Hebrew-language documentaries on Sephardic crypto-Jewish reverts to Judaism (*I am Jewish*; unknown title) (digital objects)

Seth Ward Collection

Unknown quantity of digitized VHS tapes

Norma Libman Collection

Unknown quantity of digitized cassette tapes of oral histories

San Albino Church Collection

Unknown small quantity of documents and photographs pertaining to a 2007 or 2009 interfaith event between Catholics and Southwestern Sephardic descendants

Rachel Kaufman Collection

1 signed copy of poetry collection *Many to Remember* (2021) by Rachel Kaufman

1 video presentation on *Many to Remember* (digital object)

1 copy of “Whispered Tradition: New Mexico Crypto-Jewish Memory, Origins to 2007” (2020) by Rachel Kaufman

David Graizbord Collection

1 video of Prof. Graizbord’s lecture for the Santa Fe Jewish Book Council’s 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award to Prof. Stanley Hordes (digital object)

[Anonymous] Collection

1 handwritten journal, poetry book, and *siddur* (Jewish song- and prayerbook)

CONVERSO LEGACY ARCHIVES (CLA): ADDENDUM ON CHANGE OF NAME

In the final developmental stage of this project, I made the decision to change its original name, the Crypto-Jewish Historical Archives (CJHA), to the Converso Legacy Archives (CLA). Several key reasons, uncovered in discussions with community members and other scholars of Sephardic studies, justify this change. As the project's collections have grown in both number and historical time-span, a persistent issue has been the increasingly awkward fit of the term "Crypto-Jewish." Specifically, the terms "crypto-Jews" and "crypto-Jewish" refer in this case to a sub-group of conversos—namely those whose families maintained traditions of Jewish or purported Jewish origin, whether known to be so or not. This fact has resulted in a growing gulf between the project's initial holdings, which chiefly grew out of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, and the much wider gamut of North American converso descendants, not all of whom have or claim specifically crypto-Jewish heritage. Moreover, assimilation into a Catholic host population over the Spanish colonial period also means that there are almost certainly more descendants of conversos today than of the sub-category of crypto-Jews in particular. Jews' conversions to Catholicism spanned a wide gamut between total coercion and total voluntary choice. In a few instances, individuals even attempted to be open or somewhat open about their Jewishness (always to their detriment), making the label "crypto-Jewish" more problematic still. Singling out crypto-Jews and their descendants thus unnecessarily limits the actual range of converso descent by implying a narrower range of historical narratives than was in fact the case. To offer an archival space that is both as inclusive and as accurate as possible, it was vital that the history of Sephardic Jewry in the Southwest and northern Mexico receive a broader welcome than it previously had. To be sure, the term "converso" has historiographical issues of its own. Nonetheless, in this context I believe it to be the clearest and most inclusive term to apply to an archives that includes holdings pertinent to multiple categories of converso descent (crypto-Jewish and otherwise).