

Reunion Keynote Address

Jane Thompson (Weiller)
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Albuquerque Country Club

Welcome cousins!! I hope everyone is having half as much fun as I am. Tonight is the culmination of a journey to find our roots and so many people have helped us.

First, Bud Mandell and his wife Dorothy went to Alsace Lorraine and learned a lot about the family. He thought we should find out what had happened to such a big family so spread out... Many of us not knowing a thing about the others... so the first questionnaire arrived! Take a bow Bud!

Years passed and we forgot about a reunion until a young couple moved to Arizona for an advanced degree (and met cousins they didn't know and a new bond went into a new generation.) The mothers decided we should not put off having a reunion and an up to date family tree... Celeste Mandell and Nancy Blaugrund take a bow!!

Then came the work of making something out of all the old surveys and the new names that came from so many people. Your family tree computer maven... Dan Judd. Of course behind every great man is a woman. Thanks to Julie Judd for helping Dan in getting prices and getting our books put together. Stand up Julie!! And many, many hours later we have a family tree... Stand up Dan!

Other committee members: Felicia Mandell was Celeste's sidekick and computer expert. Joan Allen our competent treasurer... Keeping all the cousins in order and money and addresses all accounted for. To Susie Vernon we owe big thanks for the family shirts and hats. A very generous gift... thanks Susie. (Let's all wear them to the brunch). And to my better half (Bob) Thanks for his help and support!!

In 1976 our Rabbi asked me to speak at the temple about the 4 families. First of all, I must tell you that when I was 10 years the 4 families numbered 42 strong. We were close and did so many things together. But to get background for my talk I went to reminisce with the oldest member of the family, Julius Mandell.

Uncle Julius was 87 at the time and he led me back into memories of a life in a tri-cultured society: Indian, Spanish, and Anglo... and of the importance of our Jewish traditions to each family member.

Most of the families were in the mercantile business in the early days: Then in men and women's clothing. Later on, Cousin Paul Dreyfuss and Julian Dreyfuss spoke many Indian dialects and all the family spoke Spanish.

The main question I asked Uncle Julius was who was the first of the 4 families to come and why to New Mexico? The answer was Kaufman Mandell, a major in the confederate army, Kaufman had settled in Woodville, Mississippi and after the civil war had come west. His brothers, Felix and Mike soon followed. They formed Mandell Hardware Company. Mike Mandell was the second mayor of Albuquerque. In 1890, after the hardware company failed, Kaufman and Felix went to New York. Mike started a clothing business. His interest in politics lasted, as he was County Treasurer for many years.

Mike's Granddaughter and great-grandchildren are here tonight: Rose Marie Gruenburger and children Susie Vernon, David Hyman, Stephen Hyman and their children and grandsons Joe Pollock and Michael Pollock.

Kaufman's sister Carolyn married Joseph Benjamin. He became ill and they moved to Socorro, NM. He died in Socorro, leaving Carolyn with 5 children: Celeste, my grandmother; Marie, wife of Julius and mother of Joe Mandell, Maxine Michaels, and Carolyn Eisen; Sol Benjamin, Charles Benjamin (whose sons are here tonight: Stanton and Charles, Jr.); and Harry Benjamin who married Mamie Armijo (the restaurant we ate in last night was aunt Mamie's home).

The first of the Weillers to come to NM was Dave Weiller, my grandfather's namesake. He was the manager of the Charles Ifeld Company. My grandfather, Solomon, arrived in 1880, the year of the railroad. He was the only member of our family to have his original store in Old Town. A lamppost on the plaza was dedicated to "Sol Weiller, Merchant". Later he merged with his brother-in-law, Sollie Benjamin for Weiller and Benjamin.

Harry Weiller, Clare Dreyer's fathers and Nancy Blaugrund and Joan Allen's grandfather came to Albuquerque and worked for the railroad before opening a clothing store on the corner of First and Gold. Ben Weiller, the younger brother, worked for a wholesale grocer for a while then moved to Chicago.

My grandfather Weiller went to France for a visit in 1903 and brought back Julius Mandell. Uncle Julius lived with my

grandparents on "Honeymoon Row" -- Central between 11th and 12th streets. He then moved to Carolyn Benjamin's, who housed all the remaining family to come to this country.

Dave Weiller, my great uncle, brought back Julian Dreyfuss from a trip to Europe. Julian was Julie Judd, Mel Dreyfuss and Stanley Dreyfuss's father, and grandfather to Joann Meth. In 1908, my grandparents and father went to France and returned with Paul Dreyfuss.

Jewish tradition was so important, as was family. My grandfather, Sol Weiller, was one of the founders of Congregation Albert. In 1899 the congregation was founded. 1905 saw him president of the congregation. In 1924, Mike Mandell was president. 1947-48, Julian Dreyfuss was president, and 1949-50, my father, David Weiller as president.

We were a close family and enjoyed each other's company. 18 to 25 went on picnics in the Sandia or Jemez Mountains during the hot summers. Some of the men left at 5AM to get a large campground and all the rest were on their way by 7. These picnics were fun because there were always lots of playmates for the kids, pinoche for the men and a bridge game for the ladies. My grandfather knew some of the Spanish families in the mountains and they would bring up horses for us to ride.

I think the big family and the closeness of the family kept us all together... united and strong. A big family... yes... 42 strong, dwindling through the years. But, very thankful to the older ones for passing on our history.

In closing I want to thank Uncle Julius for giving me a start on the family history and end with the oldest members of our family here taking a bow. They too remember the good old days: Joe Mandell, and a lovely lady, Cathleen Weiller Stern.