

THE SPANISH FLU EPIDEMIC OF 1918 IN NEW MEXICO: A CAUTIONARY TALE:

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One hundred and two years ago, the United States faced the worst epidemic in our nation's history. New Mexicans tried various measures to avoid the flu in this public health emergency. Governor Washington E. Lindsey ordered the closing of all schools, courts, houses of worship and other public gathering places. All business activity came to a standstill. Over 15,250 New Mexicans caught the flu, with a high percentage dying of influenza or pneumonia within hours. Railroad towns were especially vulnerable.

Enter Rabbi Moise Bergman

Clergymen of all faiths joined the many volunteers and workers who labored above and beyond the call of duty. Rabbi Moise Bergman of Albuquerque's Congregation Albert was one of the most active religious leaders in the crisis.

Rabbi Bergman became even more active once the epidemic struck Albuquerque. Under his direction, and with the help of the Board of Charities, a facility for tuberculosis patients was converted into a makeshift hospital for victims of the flu.

As for Rabbi Bergman, he continued serving at Congregation Albert, on the Board of Charities and as president of the state board of the Salvation Army. In 1922, Bergman was honored at a meeting of the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, at which University of New Mexico President David Hill declared: "To all citizens ... whether they be Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, Dr. Bergman is best known as a leader in civic betterment."

Bios:

Naomi Sandweiss is a native New Mexican and avid historian. She has written numerous articles about New Mexico Jewish history and a book entitled, "Jewish Albuquerque: 1860 – 1960." She is currently Executive Director of the non-profit, "Parents Reaching Out." Naomi is also a past President of NMJHS.

Richard Melzer is Regents Professor Emeritus from The University of New Mexico- Valencia and is the author of many books and articles on New Mexico History. He was the 2019 Recipient of the NMJHS Hurst Award which is given to the person, persons, or organization who has contributed to New Mexico Jewish history, culture, and community over a substantial period of time.