

# THE ABRAVANEL FAMILY NEWSLETTER

"Basta mi nombre que es Abravanel"

---



Newsletter No. 14  
June 1992

## THE ABRAVANEL FAMILY REUNION IN NEW YORK

The Abravanel Family Reunion and the International Conference on Don Isaac Abravanel were held with great success in New York from March 21-23, 1992. See pages 3 to 4.

## A REUNION IN ISRAEL - OCTOBER 1992!

With the many members of the family residing in Israel, the Newsletter would like to organize a reunion in Israel similar to the one held in New York City. The Israel reunion is currently being scheduled for mid-October 1992. The exact date and location within Israel will be announced shortly.

We invite all member of the family residing in Israel, as well as all members residing elsewhere in the world, to take advantage of this opportunity to meet their relatives who have wandered for over 500 years.

## A LETTER FROM HAIFA

LOLA ABARBANEL EUKIN (Haifa, Israel), an 80 year old new citizen of Israel, wrote to the Newsletter of her family's plight as new immigrants from Russia. She reported that since her family, including her two daughters and their families, arrived in Israel in December 1991, they have faced severe medical problems, unemployment (both daughters are doctors, but cannot find work, and the sons-in-law are also unable to find positions). She adds, "I know well about traditional Jewish kindness and sympathy, and hope that members of the famous Abarbanel family (to which I have the honor to belong) will not allow anyone to question that value. I'm sure that in this sad period of our lives, you will not leave us without help."

Please address all correspondence to:  
Allan R. Abravanel, 111 SW Fifth Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97204  
(503) 295-4400

## A LETTER FROM A KIBBUTZ

RAFAEL ("RUDI") ABRAVANEL of Kibbutz Shaar Haamakim ("Gate to the Valleys") in Israel sent the following letter:

"My wife Bojana (Rachel) and I came to Israel in 1944 during the Second World War and ever since we are members and live in this kibbutz...but I shall try to write down...the history of our family."

"Nissim Abravanel arrived [from Salonika] in Pirot, a small town in eastern Serbia in 1877. He founded a family at the age of 16, having married Rejna, from the Konfino family, at the age of 13. Their first son was born in 1878 and was called Jehuda-Leon. The couple had eight more sons: Joseph, Jacob, Israel, Zvi, Haim, Moshe, Samuel, Ben-Zion - altogether nine sons."

"In 1943 all the sons with their families were alive, earning their living by trading, except Dr. Haim, who was a physician, and Joseph and Ben-Zion, who emigrated to the U.S.A., where they had a workshop and traded in furs in Pittsburgh."

"During World War II, the Bulgarians occupied Pirot and Macedonia, and at the beginning of March 1943 the Bulgarians handed over to the Germans all the Jews in that area, among them all our large family; they were all put to death at Treblinka. During the transport to Treblinka, I jumped from the train and escaped to Palestine via Bulgaria, Albania, Italy and Egypt. My parents, Sofia and Jacob, remained on the train and later were liquidated at Treblinka."

"My wife and I have a son Benny and a daughter Rina and seven grandchildren. My brother Nissim also lives on the kibbutz, having arrived illegally in Palestine in 1938. He and his wife Clare have a daughter Dina and a son Amir and seven grandchildren."

"Dr. Haim worked during World War II as a physician with the partisans and was able to save his family. He became the head doctor at the general hospital in Bitolj (Monastir), while his son, Dr. Nissim, his daughter, Dr. Nita, and son-in-law, Dr. Salvator, all physicians, worked in Skopje. In 1963, there was a strong earthquake in Skopje, and all three were killed. Only the daughter of Nita and Salvator, Rachel (Shelly) Levy, age 7, was saved. She later came to Israel with her grandfather, Dr. Haim, and her grandmother Berta. Nissim, Nita, Salvator, and Dr. Haim and Berta (who since passed away) are now buried in our cemetery here at Shaar Haamakim. Shelly, our well loved cousin, whom we regard as our daughter, is now a professor of chemistry at the University of Bar Ilan at Tel-Aviv."

## THE ABRAVANEL FAMILY NEWSLETTER

"Basta mi nombre que es Abravanel!"

CITY



Jim Estrin/The New York Times

Allan R. Abravanel, at center with his son, David, during a family reunion in Queens for all descendants of Don Isaac Abravanel.

## 130 Abravanel's Honor Heroic Name

By ARI L. GOLDMAN

Five hundred years ago Don Isaac Abravanel, a Jew who was finance minister to Queen Isabella of Spain, was given a choice: Convert to Christianity or be exiled forever from Spain. Together with thousands of other Jews, Abravanel chose exile, and in the words of one scholar, became the classic wandering Jew, journeying to Naples, Sicily, Corfu and Venice.

Over the weekend, 130 of his descendants gathered in Queens to pay tribute to the courage of Abravanel and to bask in his name. There were Abravanel's, Abarbanel's, Barbanells and Barbanells, among other variations, and they brought with them ancient books and documents and stories and family trees going back eight generations and more.

None could trace their heritage directly to Don Isaac, a Renaissance man on the eve of the Renaissance, a statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator and mystic. The standard for being accepted into the extended family could best be summed up by the family motto, "Basta mi nombre que es Abravanel!" or "It is enough that my name is Abravanel!"

The family gathering Saturday night, and an academic conference on the works of Abravanel held yesterday at Queens College, are among dozens of events around the world recalling the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. On March 31, the precise anniversary of the decree, King Juan Carlos of Spain is expected to formally rescind the order in a ceremony in a Madrid synagogue.

The expulsion came in the same year as Columbus's voyage of discovery. There are those who maintain that Abravanel and other Jews

helped finance the voyage, either voluntarily or through forced appropriation of their wealth, and still others who contend that Columbus himself was a Jew.

But little was made of the Columbus connection. The weekend belonged to Don Isaac Abravanel. People bearing his name came from the occasion from Florida, California, Oregon, Illinois, Texas, the Carolinas and all over the Northeast. Alain Abravanel came from Brazil; David

### Isabella's minister preferred exile to renouncing Judaism.

Abravanel came from Israel; Dr. Roberto Senor Abravanel came from Argentina, and Christian Abravanel came with his two children from France.

"I've been hearing stories about Don Isaac since I was this little," said Christian Abravanel, dipping his hand to half the size of his 12-year-old son, David. Mr. Abravanel, who owns a limousine company in Cannes, said that his mother was Roman Catholic and his father a Jew from Salonika, Greece.

He is a nephew of Maurice Abravanel, conductor emeritus of the Utah Symphony Orchestra, who could not make the gathering but sent a taped greeting that brought a roar of approval from the audience.

"We cannot be humble with a name like that," Maurice Abravanel said.

"That's impossible. The best we can do is try to live in a way that the grand old man would be proud of us."

Allan R. Abravanel, a lawyer from Portland, Ore., and the mastermind behind the family reunion, said that the extended family had both Mediterranean and Northern European branches — Sephardic and Askenazic. But no one is sure how, when or even if the migration north occurred.

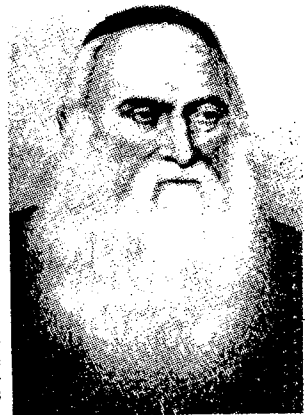
Like other Askenazic family members, Jonathan Abarbanel, a freelance theater critic from Chicago, said that his paternal grandfather came from Ukraine at the turn of the century, the descendant of poor Russian peasant Jews. "But I've always felt ennobled by the name," he said.

Others said that ennobling or not, the name was sometimes a burden. Howard Barbanell, who grew up on Long Island and attended Jewish day schools, said he was greeted by more than one rabbi with: "Do you know who you are? Do you know where you come from?"

#### Trading Spelling Stories

As they gathered for a family photograph at the Separdic Jewish Center of Forest Hills, where a reunion dinner was held, family members traded stories. "I spend half my time as a lawyer spelling my name," said Allan Abravanel. One parlor game was to describe the corruptions of the name by well-meaning listeners: Barbarelli, Barnell, Barbaro, Barbarillio. And more than a few admitted to checking phone directories for long-lost family members whenever they visit a new city.

Members of the clan also talked about famous relatives that they have yet to track down. There was talk of Oded Abarbanel of Tel Aviv, who, according to the family newsletter,



Don Isaac Abravanel, who was finance minister to Queen Isabella of Spain.

holds the distinction of being the only El Al pilot whose aircraft was ever hijacked. And there was Mickey Abarbanel, a baseball pitcher who played for an Indianapolis farm team, was featured on a White Sox baseball card as a "rookie star" and then dropped from view without playing in the major leagues.

Perhaps the most unusual story came from Maurice Abravanel, who said that even the sound of the Abravanel name inspired greatness. "When Beethoven did not know how to start his Fifth Symphony, he heard the name Abravanel," the conductor said, singing his name with an emphasis on each syllable but especially the last: ah-brah-vah-NEL.

## ON THE RECORD

The text of the article in the New York Times was introduced into the Congressional Record on Tuesday, March 24, 1992 by Congressman Les AuCoin (Oregon) with the following introduction: "Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to an extraordinary family reunion that took place the past weekend in New York City. Over 130 descendants of Don Isaac Abravanel, the noted philosopher and statesman, gathered together in a joyful celebration of the human spirit.... [To my] friend and constituent Allan R. Abravanel of Portland, Oregon, ...his wife Susan, and their many relatives throughout the world, I extend my congratulations and my best wishes for the next 500 years."

## VIDEOTAPE OF THE REUNION

ELINORE ABRAVANEL BROWN (Dallas, Texas) has prepared a videotape of the Reunion in New York. The tape also contains a brief interview with ALLAN R. ABRAVANEL that appeared on Tuesday, March 24, 1992 on the New York cable television show, "SCHMOOZING." Please send your check in the amount of \$18.00 to ELINORE ABRAVANEL BROWN at 7342 Blythdale, Dallas, Texas 75248. Postage and handling are included.

## A MESSAGE FROM ZALMAN SHOVAL

EMBASSY OF ISRAEL  
WASHINGTON, D.C.



שגרירות ישראל  
ושינגטון

March 10, 1992

It gives me great pleasure to send greetings to the Abravanel Family Reunion dinner.

You can be proud of your family's 500 year heritage, and especially of Don Isaac Abravanel's contribution to Jewish history. As we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, it is most appropriate that you are commemorating the life of your family's patriarch, Don Isaac Abravanel. His life exemplified the Golden Age of the Jews in Spain and also their tragic end. He chose expulsion over conversion, and committed himself to our faith.

Through his endeavors ranging from diplomacy, finance, and literature to philosophy, Don Isaac Abravanel published volumes of Bible commentary and treatises on religion, especially Judaism. He was a true Renaissance man.

I am sorry that Kena and I cannot be with you tonight, and send our warmest greetings to all of you.

I commend your commitment to the Abravanel family and to honoring Don Isaac Abravanel, and wish you great success this year and in future years as you continue to carry on your family traditions and legacy.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

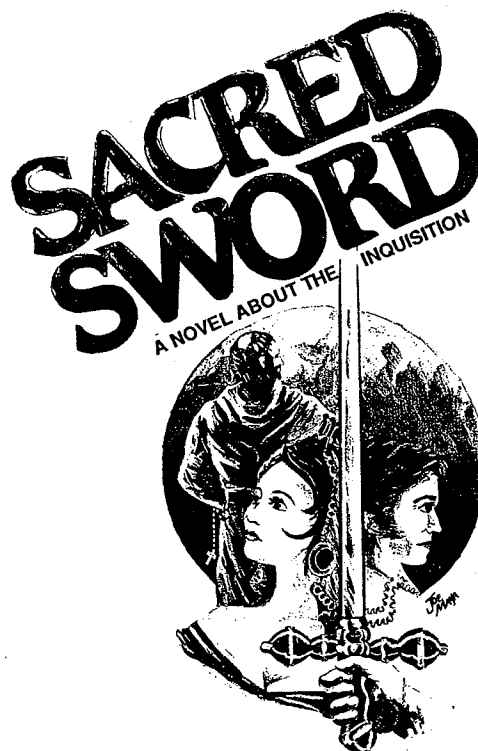
Zalman Shoval  
Ambassador

# THE ABRAVANEL FAMILY NEWSLETTER

"Basta mi nombre que es Abravanel"

## SACRED SWORD - FICTION AS STRANGE AS TRUTH

Gefen Books has announced the publication of a new book, Sacred Sword: A Novel about the Inquisition, by Mayer Abramowitz, a rabbi residing in Miami, Florida, who says that Don Isaac's life's work has been his obsession. The story deals with Sami Abravanel, a fictional son of Don Isaac Abravanel, who, determined to study medicine in Spain, defies his father and becomes Alberto de Cadiz, a converso under constant threat of death. The book may be obtained directly from the author for the purchase price of \$18 (25% off the publisher's list price), plus \$2 for postage and handling. Checks should be made payable to Mayer Abramowitz and mailed to 1330 Cleveland Road, Miami Beach, Florida 33141.



by  
Mayer Abramowitz

Ironically, the story reflects two true events in the history of the Abravanel family. First, Don Isaac's grandfather converted to Christianity at the end of the fourteenth century, adopting the name Juan de Sevilla. His decision to reconvert to Judaism caused him to flee from Spain to Portugal, where his grandchildren (including Don Isaac) were born. Second, Don Isaac's grandson (not his son) was in fact detained by the king of Portugal (not Spain) in an attempt to convert this child to Christianity. The boy's father, Don Judah Abravanel, wrote a remorseful poem about his son's kidnapping. An English translation of this poem has been published in the Spring 1992 issue of Judaism, a periodical of the American Jewish Congress. While it is not certain what happened to this kidnapped boy, Amatus Lusitanus, a Portuguese converso, reports a meeting with an offspring of this lost boy in Salonika in the mid-1500's. Amatus adds that this descendant of Judah Abravanel owned a copy of a previously unknown work by Judah (since lost to history).

### JOSEPH BARBANEL

The Newsletter received the news of the death of Joe Barbanel earlier this year. Joe was one of the strongest supporters of uncovering our mutual history, and the constant source of family lore. His efforts brought pride and love to the family.

## RUDOLPHE ABARBANELL

A letter from KEMMIS B. MARTIN (Toronto, Ontario, Canada) contained an unusual message about a member of the 19th Century Abarbanell family:

"Certainly the article in the New York Times [about the family reunion] was of great interest to the Martin family. My sister asked me if I remember our father, Protestant that he was, boasting about his Jewish ancestors, even if just a step-great-grandfather."

"My grandfather, William Martin, born in Ireland in 1850, married Mary Jelly in 1877. Mary's father had died some time before that, and as I understand it, Mrs. Jelly had remarried Rudolphe Abarbanell. William Martin's first daughter, my aunt, born in 1884, had Abarbanell as a middle name; her son, John Abarbanell Martin, who recently died, was a resident of the State of Georgia."

"John Martin had in his possession what he referred to as a heavily engraved silver snuff box with the inscription 'To Citoyen Rudolphe Abarbanell, from William O'Driscoll, In Token of Friendship and Brotherly Love, Dublin, 1 August, 1856.'"

"Mr. Abarbanell was reported to have lived in Paris, an author in his own right, and a secretary to Victor Hugo. My grandmother in Toronto had some glass wine goblets which she said had been made by Victor Hugo and came to her from Mr. Abarbanell."

## A MESSAGE FROM WILLEMSTAD

The Newsletter received a communication from LINDA GOUT of Willemstad, Curacao. Ms. Gout was calling after receiving word from the Duelwaite family, her relatives in Surinam, that an American member of the Abarbanell family had, within the past two years, visited Surinam, a country in South America in which a member of her family had been born. The visit was apparently motivated by this gentleman's desire to learn more about the Abarbanell family in Surinam.

Ms. Gout stated that her great-grandmother was the offspring of a man named Abarbanell, although the young girl was eventually given the name of Lamed, the surname of the man the girl's mother married. Ms. Gout is interested in making contact with this recent Abarbanell visitor to Surinam, as well as in learning more about the Abarbanell family of Surinam.