

OF MRS. STAAB

impressive ceremony
 the burial of a good
 woman.

Mrs. A. Staab took place
 residence on Palace street
 morning. A large gathering
 ends of the family and
 ceremonies were of a
 character. Hon. Sol
 the patriarch of the
 Santa Fe, with great
 read the burial service
 by Mrs. Bartlett
 and Mrs. McLean at
 head, and the casket, like
 rare floral tributes, were
 the hearse by the party
 Messrs. R. J. Palmer,
 L. Bartlett, Simon New
 and Adolph Bell
 of carriages conveyed
 to Fairview cemetery
 the grave the direction
 of Mr. Spies
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La Posada *de* SANTA FE

STORIES OF LA POSADA-SANTA FE'S ART HOTEL



Stories adhere to houses and to their larger cousins – hotels, inns, resorts – and accumulate over the years because in homes our most intimate dramas occur, and in homes-away-from-home intimate dramas intersect with public life. Seldom does anyone investigate the truth of the stories; they are simply repeated, with errors and embellishments compounded year after year.



SANDRA D. LYNN,
from WINDOWS ON THE PAST:
HISTORIC LODGINGS OF NEW MEXICO (1999)

LONG BEFORE ANY BUILDINGS WERE ERECTED ON THE SITE THAT BECAME **330 EAST PALACE AVENUE** - EVEN BEFORE **SANTA FE**, THE CITY OF HOLY FAITH, HAD BEEN CONSIDERED AS THE CAPITAL OF *LA NUEVA MEXICO* - THE LAND WAS FARMED BY **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES** WHO HAD LIVED NEAR THE RIO GRANDE **FOR CENTURIES**.

Fed by an ancient irrigation stream, the *Acequia de la Loma*, the land later provided sustenance to the Spanish settlers who came here to make a New Spain out of the terrain that reminded them of the home they had left across the ocean.

By the time the Americans saw the land, it was part of the Republic of Mexico and had been farmed by an Hispanic family that migrated north in the early 1700s. Arriving with the American pioneers and traders were emigrants from Europe who came to New Mexico across the epic Santa Fe Trail beginning in 1821, launching a new era of prosperity and identity for the ancient capital city.

One of those early emigres, a German Jew named Abraham Staab, would acquire part of this land on the outskirts of Santa Fe , and, in 1882, would build a Victorian mansion that became the toast of Santa Fe's society for many years.

Thus begins one of the most celebrated narratives of the place known today as **La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa, Santa Fe's Art Hotel**, one of the city's most favored hotels.

After the death of Abraham Staab in 1913 , the landmark home was sold, later serving as a residence of the Elliott family for more than ten years. The Nasons, R.H. (Harold) and Eulala, bought the Staab House in 1936, having earlier acquired the adjacent land from the Baca family, who had lived there for many years.

It was the Nasons who conceived of turning the property into a hotel and constructed a series of traditional adobe casitas (little houses) on the six historically rich acres in downtown Santa Fe, and gave it the name, La Posada, the Spanish term for inn or resting place.

The historic **Staab House** is not listed among the city's nor the state's culturally historic properties because of the manner of its restoration after a fire destroyed the third floor in the early twentieth century. Neither is **La Posada** designated; the subsequent additions and renovations to the property do not conform strictly to the Santa Fe Historic Preservation Design Codes created in 1957. Nonetheless, the property's history and its important role in Santa Fe's history and cultural life ensure its lasting significance in a city noted for nonconformance.



The facts about Abraham Staab (1839-1913) and his wife Julia (1844-1896), sometimes called Julie, are well known. He came to the United States from Germany in 1854 at age fifteen. After arriving in Norfolk, Virginia, where he worked for two years, he traveled over the Santa Fe Trail to the town that would become his home.

He joined the employ of the Spiegelberg Brothers, among the first of the Jewish pioneers to settle in Santa Fe, and after one year, Abraham went into business with his brother Zadoc. Zadoc Staab and Brother, established in 1858, became the largest wholesale trading and merchandising establishment in the entire Southwest, according to Santa Fe historian and city leader Ralph Emerson Twitchell. The Southwest then included Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and as far south as Chihuahua, Mexico. (Twitchell's *Old Santa Fe: The Story of New Mexico's Ancient Capital*, 1925.)

"The Staabs, in 1874-75, transacted sales of \$600,000 in the wholesale trade alone," reports Henry Tobias in *A History of the Jews in New Mexico*, (1990).

Abraham Staab had become rich in New Mexico Territory. In late 1865, he went back to Germany to marry Julia Schuster and brought her to Santa Fe to establish their

home. A family history by their granddaughter, Elizabeth Nordhaus Mince, reports that the newlyweds first lived in a "typical adobe house on Burro Alley." But, Abraham had promised to build a grand home in the European manner for his bride.

The house he built on East Palace Avenue in 1882, then the fashionable residential area of Santa Fe, was constructed in the French Second Empire style, with three stories, a Mansard roof, and a widow's walk. It was indeed grand, and while not in the Santa Fe tradition of adobe dwellings, it was in the company of adjacent fine residences on East Palace Avenue built in the emerging Territorial style, with European influences. Mansard roofs were also seen on the St. Vincent Sanatorium (near the Cathedral), which burned down in 1896, as well as the Palace Hotel on Washington Avenue, also destroyed by fire in 1922.

The Staabs had eight children, one of whom, a daughter, died in infancy, and Julia suffered difficulties with her pregnancies. Despite bouts of depression and illness, with recurring journeys to Germany for recuperation, she found her place in Santa Fe society and was a gracious hostess. Among the Staabs's many friends was Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy.



The late Paul Horgan, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, presents a portrait of “The Gentian Bride: 1870” in his book , *The Centuries of Santa Fe*. While many have assumed that this chapter is all about Julia Staab , and the illustration included of a home that closely resembles the Staab mansion adds to that impression, the narrative portrait is in fact a composite of events and characteristics that reflect the lives of both



Courtesy of Betty Mae Hartman.

Julia Schuster Staab

Julia Staab and Flora Spiegelberg. Spiegelberg, also a German bride, was a close friend of both Julia Staab and Archbishop Lamy. (Horgan notes this technique of composite portrayals in the preface to the 1956 book.)

Horgan’s description of the German Bride’s house and its furnishings is reputedly accurate in representing the Staab House of the 1880s.



Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NHNH/DCA) Negative Number 01040.

Abraham Staab

It was one of the first brick structures in town... There was much ornamental iron work on its roof ridges. The woodwork throughout was massive. Doors and windows had fluted frames with curved tops set in plaster moldings... The social rooms were large and high-ceilinged. Their effect was doubled by a number of floor-length mirrors framed in gold leaf. Everything in the house came “from the East,” and was meant to reflect the richest taste and best style. It was a style with a long history of travel behind it—from Prince Albert’s Germany to the England of his married life, and from the England of his widow to the Atlantic United States, and from there across the country, until by wagon train, it reached even to Santa Fe.

Even as Abraham Staab became more prosperous and more involved in the political life of Santa Fe—he was the first president of the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce and alleged to be part of the powerful Santa Fe Ring—Julia strug-



gled to remain strong enough to manage her home, care for her family, and maintain her position in Santa Fe society.

Twitchell describes the times and the Staabs's role. *The social life of New Mexico's capital, the brilliant functions of frequent occurrences given by the ladies and officers of Old Fort Marry...are wondrous memories with those who were privileged to participate. In those social sidelights of Santa Fe history, the Staab Mansion on Palace Avenue played prominently. Unostentatious, but magnificent in their simplicity were the contributions of Abraham and Mrs. Staab, with their older daughters...*



The Staab House, ca. 1920 Courtesy of Stephen Elliott

It is understood that Julia Staab loved her home and Santa Fe life, but never really recovered from the loss of her child and succeeding unsuccessful pregnancies. She died in 1896 at age 52. Sightings of her ghost have been reported at the Staab House for years, making her the most famous ghost in Santa Fe . That story and its repeated embellishments will be examined later. Abraham, in failing health, began to curtail his activities in the early 1900s and died in 1913, having survived long enough to see New Mexico achieve statehood in 1912, and Santa Fe assured of remaining its capital.



After Abraham Staab's death, the Staab House was sold, as no Staab heirs chose to live in it. Subsequently a fire destroyed the third floor of the house.

The next residents that can be confirmed are Lawrence E. and, Edna Rich Elliott, who were married in August 1920, having resided in Santa Fe prior to that date. They lived in the Staab House for more than ten years, raising a family while they operated the Montezuma Hotel (formerly the Normandie Hotel) located on Don Gaspar and Water Streets and owned by N.B. Laughlin at the time.

The Elliotts, suffering financial losses during the Depression, left Santa Fe about 1933, owing money to many creditors, a family member reports. Their move to Roswell proved to be successful when their profitable ventures with oil and gas leases in Southeast New Mexico enabled them to payoff all their debt and stay in business.

A photo (n.d.) in the Elliott family album shows the three-story Staab House before the fire, indicating that the fire may have occurred after 1920. Later photos depict the residence with two stories; the third floor was not rebuilt when the house was restored.

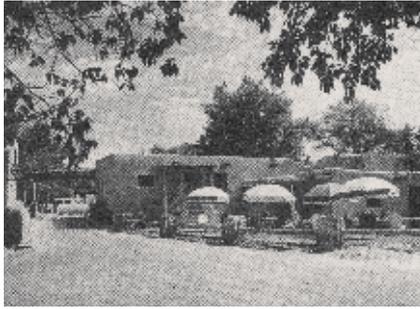


The Staab House, after the fire

The Staab House was then acquired by Harold and Eulala Nason in 1936. He had come to Santa Fe for his health and formed an interest in Spanish-Pueblo Revival architecture. Along with the historic mansion, Nason acquired the land that had belonged to the Baca family, including portions of adobe structures that dated to the seventeenth century.

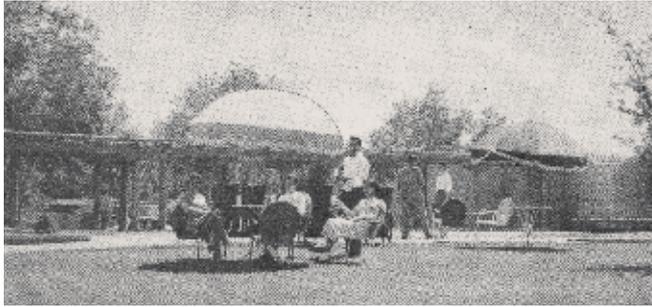
They chose the name La Posada for the unique kind of Santa Fe hotel they envisioned, incorporating the old Staab





burning fireplaces to create the authentic New Mexico feel of the place. The existing fruit trees and native plantings were integrated into the hotel community, with a swimming pool and outdoor terrace added.

The Nasons later developed resort hotels in Tucson, Arizona and San Carlos, Mexico. Harvey Duran, a longterm partner and manager of La Posada de Santa Fe, worked with the Nasons to establish La Posada de San Carlos south of the border.



La Posada in the early days



mansion into a compound of adobe *casitas* on six landscaped acres near the heart of town. Building in the ancient manner, creating adobe bricks from local clay and straw, the series of houses was constructed.

Traditional *vigas* (roof beams) and *latillas* (twig supports) in the ceilings combined with wooden floors and wood-

In 1974 the Nasons sold their interest in the Santa Fe property to a consortium of investors including two of their grandchildren. La Posada remained one of Santa Fe's two most prominent hotels where local families would choose to celebrate milestone events. During this time, Michael Cerletti, then managing partner of La Posada, and then Secretary of New Mexico's Department of Tourism, came to understand the hotel's particular charm. "La Posada is so much a part of the history of early Santa Fe; it has been a gathering place for locals as well as an elegant lodging for visitors," Cerletti emphasized.

In 1998, La Posada became part of the RockResorts Collection of hotels and stayed under their guidance, until 2012 when it once again became an independent hotel.



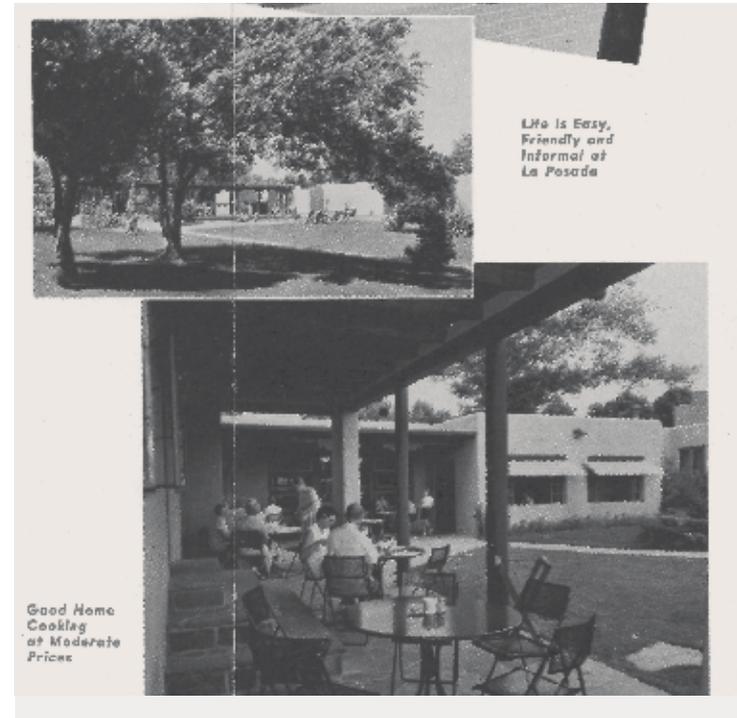
LA POSADA SANTA FE'S ART HOTEL

Artists and writers began to settle in Santa Fe in the early part of the twentieth century. During the ensuing years, Santa Fe's artist and writer colonies vied with those in Taos to produce the most hilarious parties and theatrical productions in addition to serious works of art. They also promoted Indian rights and preservation of historic buildings.

La Posada, during the thirties and forties, often housed resident artists and writers, as well as visitors, and its relationship to Santa Fe's artistic community has always been strong. The hotel is committed to maintaining its close connection with Santa Fe's cultural life, sponsoring weekly history talks, gallery tours, and displaying a range of art works throughout the property organized by our own Art Curator.

Long-time gallery owner and Santa Fe resident Jean Seth recalls attending dancing classes at La Posada as a young girl in the 1930s. Dorothy Belle Hughes, one of the country's first successful women mystery writers, played the piano during classes, Seth said. Hughes lived in Santa Fe until her death in 1993. Her popular novel, *Ride the Pink Horse*, features the Santa Fe Fiesta as the backdrop for criminal activities involving leading politicians and La Fonda Hotel. Artist Ford Ruthling, who grew up in Tesuque, acquired at

an auction some of the original iron work that was part of the Staab House's widow's walk; he uses it in his gardens, for which he is almost as celebrated as for his art.



An early marketing brochure



🌀 GHOST FROM THE PAST 🌀

The many guests who visit the Staab House each year seldom see her, but the ghost who haunts La Posada is never very far away, according to author Mary Lee White.

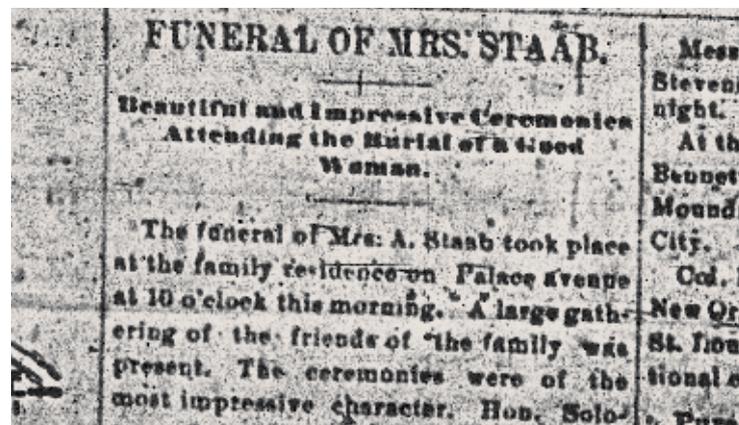
“Oh yes, she’s been wandering around for many years,” says Michael Cerletti, former general manager of La Posada. “She has always been described the same by those who have witnessed her presence. She wears a dark flowing gown and a hood.”

La Posada’s ghost has most often appeared at the top of the grand staircase in the original building in the main complex of the inn. However, she has also been seen in the Nason Room, a small alcove built upon the old formal gardens of the original structure.

The woman for whom the house had been built in 1882 was apparently never left it. So, why does Julia Staab linger? Some say that ghosts appear when death occurs in a state of turmoil and anxiety, such as the circumstances that seemed to attend Mrs. Staab’s final years. Depressed over the loss of a child and other unsuccessful pregnancies, Julia Staab was rumored to have gone mad, retreating to her bedroom until her death at age 52.

Karen Walker, Santa Fe real estate broker, experienced several ‘Julia encounters’ when her office was located at La Posada. The day after the party celebrating the Staab House’s 100th anniversary, Walker lunched at the bar in the old building. “It was February and all the doors and windows were shut tight,” she recalls, “when suddenly a cold, shivering wind swept in. I asked if someone forgot to invite Julia to the party. After some nervous laughter, we placed a glass of champagne and some roses on the bar and we apologized to Julia. The wind instantly disappeared.”

Believe it or not, Julia’s troubled spirit has been featured on local ghost tours, as well as the television shows, “Unsolved Mysteries” and “Weird Travels.”



In a city known worldwide for its arts and creative community, La Posada today combines many of the “assets” that the Santa Fe City Fathers were promoting to encourage commerce in the 1920s: a climate and facilities for health and well-being, diverse arts and culture, fine food and lodging, distinctive performing arts and music and magnificent outdoor adventures just moments away.

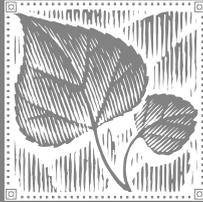
Visitors to La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa will experience charming adobe-style casitas with kiva fireplaces, shady patios, and unique Southwestern decor; the AAA Four Diamond Award-winning Fuego restaurant, The Patio restaurant, and the historic Staab House; a full-service Spa; and 157 guest rooms, including 30 signature suites.

Guests are invited to socialize and enjoy one of the resort’s awarded Wine Spectator wine selections, listen to local performers, or admire the vibrant gallery that adorns the walls courtesy of Santa Fe’s only hotel Art

Curator. Colorful history and culture lectures are offered each week in the hotel lobby, featuring local scholars, and educators in history, anthropology, and the arts.

*Written by Barbara Harrelson,
Santa Fe-based author.*





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