

Family Focus



First Row – Noa, Wilhelm and Charles Iffeld Second Row – Louis, Johanna and Herman Iffeld.
Courtesy of the University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research

The Iffeld and Nordhaus Families

The Iffeld story begins in the early days of New Mexico's territorial period. The first of the family to come to America was Herman Iffeld and, soon after, his brother Charles followed. Charles's journey west from New York to Santa Fe in 1865 most likely took ninety days by ox-wagon. He was eighteen years old.

Charles worked in Taos with Adolph Letcher overseeing the operations of the Taos firm of Elsberg and Amberg. Eventually, both Charles and Adolph realized that the opportunities in Taos were limited, and they moved their business to Las Vegas. This journey involved a trek over the mountains with wares packed on seventy-five to one hundred burros. During the period from 1867-1874, Charles took care of local business, while Letcher made trips east to secure financing. In 1874 Charles Iffeld bought out Letcher. The same year, Charles proposed to and married Adele Nordhaus. Soon after they married, Max Nordhaus, Adele's brother emigrated from Germany and moved in with the newlyweds. Max lived with his sister and Charles for nearly thirty-one years and developed close personal ties and an important business relationship with his brother-in-law. Charles hired Max into the family business in 1878.

When the railroad arrived in Las Vegas, the Iffeld Company found itself in a position to provide for the railroad's needs and prosper enormously. The entrance of the railroad into New Mexico forever changed commercial practices.

Max Nordhaus married Bertha Staab in 1905. The relationship between the Iffeld and Nordhaus, and by extension the Staab families, is illustrative of a pattern of interfamilial ties between Jewish merchants. Charles Iffeld continued to reside in Las Vegas, but the focus of his company shifted to Albuquerque. The Albuquerque operation, now directly managed by Max Nordhaus who moved to the city in 1911, quickly exceeded the Las Vegas branch in volume and revenue. After the turn of the twentieth century, Albuquerque was on its way to becoming the commercial and financial center of New Mexico.

New Mexico became the forty-seventh state in 1912. By the 1920s, the Iffeld Company had expanded as far west as Gallup. The company also spread to the northwestern part of the state opening businesses in Farmington and Durango, Colorado. Charles Iffeld died in 1929.

The success of the Charles Iffeld Company was largely due to the relationships Charles and Max were able to forge with Hispanos and Anglos. Interactions between the Iffeld-Nordhaus family and

Hispanos seemed to have been harmonious. Charles learned to speak English while still in Germany. He acquired a working knowledge of Spanish soon after making his home in New Mexico. Max Nordhaus, who, before he assumed major administrative posts in the company, traveled throughout New Mexico buying from and selling to Hispanos and learned to speak Spanish even before he learned English. As had been done for centuries in New Mexico, the Ifeld Company leased livestock out on partido contracts. Another factor in the company's success may have been education. Both Charles and Max had acquired some level of formal business education in Germany and appreciated its importance, which was passed down to their children.

During the early twentieth century, the women's movement gained force as women worked for political and social rights. Bertha Nordhaus actively and successfully pursued legislation addressing the welfare of children and served on the state's first Child Welfare Board.

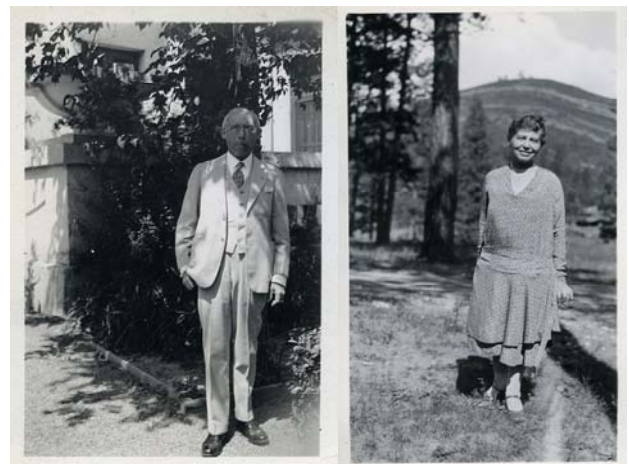
While Charles Ifeld, Max Nordhaus, and their company seemed to dominate New Mexico's commercial economy, other Ifeld family members also played an important economic role. The younger Ifeld brothers, Louis, Bernard, and Noa, as well as their nephew, Ludwig, came to New Mexico to escape military conscription and to take advantage of opportunities in the new and promising world of America. Louis, the youngest of the seven Ifeld children, arrived in New Mexico the day after his eighteenth birthday in 1873. He worked for his brother, Charles, until 1878 when he decided, along with his brother, Noa, to establish his own general merchandising business in Albuquerque.

Louis and Noa worked hard to maintain their successful business, even in the face of some major setbacks. The brothers opened a general merchandise store on the plaza of Old Town Albuquerque and named it Ifeld Bros. In 1884, they moved the store to Third Street and Railroad Avenue (now Central Avenue), occupying the entire first floor of the Grant Building. Ifeld Bros had the largest merchandise store in the territory and remained in the merchandising business until 1898 when a fire destroyed their business. The fire, originating on the second floor of the Grant Opera House, damaged almost everything. After that, Louis and Noa entered the wholesale sheep, lamb, and hide business. They established new offices and warehouses. The brothers' success in business made them respected members of the community. Both Ifelds participated in the creation of Congregation (Temple) Albert in Albuquerque in 1897. The early generations of the Ifeld and Nordhaus families powerfully reflect the image of highly successful individuals who maintained their identity while assimilating into the general community.

Source: Tobias, Dr. Henry and Sarah R. Payne. *Jewish Pioneers of New Mexico: The Ifeld and Nordhaus Families*. The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society (2005).



Louis Ifeld's Warehouse
Courtesy of the University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research



Max Nordhaus and Bertha Staab Nordhaus
Courtesy of the Nordhaus, Ifeld and Staab families