

## History of the Salmon-Greer House

By Andrew J. Schumann, Think New Mexico Leadership Intern, 2023



*Greer House in 1910. Courtesy of the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), #HP.2014.14.1025*

The Salmon-Greer House sits on the corner of Don Gaspar Avenue and Paseo de Peralta Street in New Mexico south capitol district. As part of the Don Gaspar Historic District, the house has been home to some of the most influential figures in Santa Fe during the twentieth century. Today, the building stands as a testament to having faith in New Mexico, and its history encourages all those within it to continue its long tradition of uplifting our fellow New Mexicans.



*Exterior Gate of Salmon Greer House on Don Gaspar Avenue -  
Courtesy of Diane Greer*

Nathan Salmon, a prominent Santa Fe merchant, purchased the lot for \$6,000 in 1906. Salmon took inspiration from the Alvarado Hotel in Albuquerque, building the residence in the California Mission Revival style. The original grounds of the substantial abode included a sprawling garden, towering pine trees, a grape arbor, and a pond. While the main house was completed in 1910, the house's elaborate stucco and wrought iron wall was added in the 1920s, modeled after a similar design Salmon had seen in the Chapultepec Heights of Mexico City.



*Col. Nathan Salmon sits in an armchair, July 20, 1939 – Albuquerque Museum*

Nathan Salmon, born as Na'aman Soleiman in Biskinta, Syria (now Lebanon), in July of 1866, Salmon arrived in the United States at age twenty-one. Two months later he journeyed westward to Durango, Colorado, where he sold goods from a wagon as a traveling merchant. On a trip to New Orleans, Salmon met and fell in love with Petra Mahboub El Hage.

On their return trip to Durango, the couple was stranded in Santa Fe by a snowstorm. Down to his last 25 cents, Salmon pawned his watch to wire a friend for a loan and, with that help, he resumed business. Salmon later opened The Big Store on San Francisco Street in 1894. Family lore has it that the down payment on the store came from his winnings in a pool game.



*Salmon Family circa 1920. From left to right: Nathan Salmon, Petra Salmon, Salome Salmon – Courtesy of Diane Greer*

Salmon bought property throughout Santa Fe and Albuquerque, and by 1917, he had become one of most affluent and influential people in New Mexico. Salmon was also an avid outdoorsman, often taking hunting or fishing trips in Rio Arriba County. It was on these excursions that Salmon forged friendships with high-ranking government officials, including Governor Washington E. Lindsey, Judge Clarence J. Roberts, and State Engineer James A. French. Given that Salmon is referred to as a Colonel by 1919, it is likely that one of these officials appointed Salmon colonel aide-de-camp – a high honor given to citizens who have demonstrated outstanding achievement.

Elias John Greer Sr. was born in Beirut, Syria (now Lebanon) in 1891 and his original surname was Arab (ah-rahb). He immigrated to the United States at the age of four, and he lived with his mother in Brooklyn, NY while his father worked in Puerto Rico. After working in a variety of jobs, Greer found success as a salesman for the American Tobacco Company, where he introduced Lucky Strikes to the market. In 1919, Nathan Salmon and his daughter, Salome, traveled to New York on a buying trip and they crossed paths with Greer. Salome and Greer quickly fell in love and married that summer in St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe.

Greer would eventually become the owner-operator of several theaters across Santa Fe, and served as the head of Gibraltar Enterprises, an association of theater managers in the Rocky Mountain region. He also served as Vice President of the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce. In addition to his business activities, Greer was an avid philanthropist, often hosting musical comedy galas at the Lentic and directing all proceeds to the Red Cross and Salvation Army. Notably, Greer was also one of the primary sponsors for La Fonda's 1937 President's Benefit Ball in honor of Franklin D. Roosevelt's birthday.



*Col. E. John Greer in downtown Santa Fe circa 1935 – Courtesy of Diane Greer*



*Salome Greer (left) and E. John Greer Sr. (right) at La Fonda circa 1945 - Courtesy of Diane Greer*

For all these notable contributions to the community, Greer was appointed as colonel aide-de-camp by Governor Clyde Tingley. Shortly thereafter in 1939, Governor John E. Miles appointed Greer as one of three Santa Feans to sit on the Capitol Building Commission charged with selecting the design for the new state capitol. Although Greer would pass away in 1952, over a decade before the new capitol building would be finished, his influence as an entrepreneur and patron would be remembered for years to come. Not one to rest on his laurels, Greer exemplified the spirit of giving back to the community that embraced him.



*The regal Lensic Theater opened in 1931 with an "atmospheric" auditorium, parlors for men and women, and a rooftop garden.  
Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, Neg. No. 051556*

Together, Nathan Salmon and E. John Greer dominated Santa Fe's theater industry. This began in 1914 when Salmon, having established himself as an influential merchant, constructed the city's first true cinema – the Paris Theater. In 1930, Salmon and Greer announced plans for a Spanish-Moorish style venue that would offer a luxury experience at an affordable price. The new theater, whose acronym "Lensic" combined the initials of each of Greers' children (Lila, Elias John Jr., Nathan, Sara, Mary Irene, and Charles), soon became a social hub for all of Santa Fe. By 1950, Salmon and Greer Enterprises would operate three major cinemas on San Francisco Street: the Lensic, El Paseo Theatre (built on the site of the former Paris Theater), and the Alley Theatre.



*Paris Theater circa 1914 - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, Neg. No. 137065*



*E. John Greer (far left) at Gibraltar Enterprises Mangers Meeting in Denver, Aug. 6, 1936 - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, Neg. No. 137065*



*Hilton Hotel in Albuquerque circa 1939 - Hotel Andaluz Historic Timeline*

On buying trips to Socorro County, Nathan Salmon often stayed at a ten-room hotel owned by Mary Genevieve Hilton. While there, Salmon met her son, Conrad, a former Republican legislator in the New Mexico House of Representatives, who soon became a close family friend. In 1939, Salmon and Greer partnered with Conrad to construct the Hilton Hotel (now Hotel Andaluz) in downtown Albuquerque. The Hilton was the first major hotel in New Mexico constructed by a New Mexico native, and the first building in in the state with air conditioning. Three years later, the wedding reception of then hotel magnate Conrad Hilton and actress Zsa Zsa Gabor was held at the Salmon-Greer House.



*Santa Fe theater entrepreneurs E. John Greer (left) and Nathan Salmon (second from right) dominated Santa Fe's cinema industry for half a century. Here they are joined by Alderman Raymond Shaya (second from left) and Justice Clarence J. Roberts, circa 1935. #4293, New Mexico Movie Stills Photograph Collection; State Archives of New Mexico.*

As the residence of two prominent entrepreneurs in Santa Fe, the Salmon-Greer House became a gathering place for legislators, judges, and other movers-and-shakers. The Greer family's influence continued for decades, with their home receiving visits from well-established and newly elected politicians alike. However, the Salmon-Greer House was also a community space. Family members can recall children from across the neighborhood playing in the garden, women gathering to play cards together in the evenings, and joyful singing filling the halls on holidays. The Salmon-Greer House stood as a symbol of unity and prosperity in Santa Fe. Its rich history, deeply intertwined with the city's growth and evolution, bore witness to both significant political and social gatherings and the simple joys of bringing the entire community together.



*From left to right: Attorney General Frank Zinn, Mary Greer Soldow, Salome Salmon Greer, and Justice David Carmody - Santa Fe New Mexican December 29, 1958*



*Salmon-Greer House lit up with Christmas lights - Courtesy of Diane Greer*



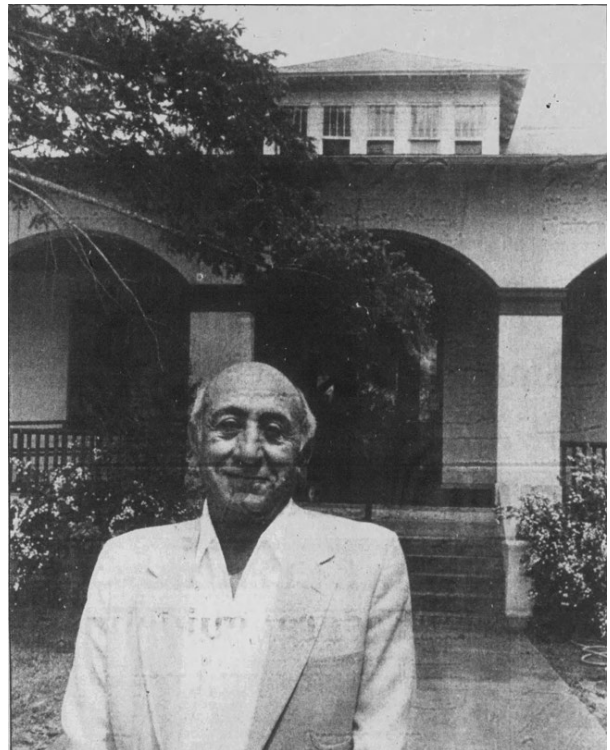
*Cara Huler stands outside the Salmon-Greer House circa 1940 - Courtesy of Diane Greer*

Even for prominent families like the Greers, the historical record remains incomplete. This is especially true for Cara Huler and Elvira Giron, two women listed as “servants” to the Greer family on the 1940 U.S. Census. While much has been written about Nathan Salmon and E. John Greer, little is known about Huler or Giron. Despite this, they likely played a pivotal role not just in upkeeping the Salmon-Greer House, but also in raising the Greer children. Recognizing the contributions of these overlooked women is central to correcting the historical record and ensuring that they, too, find their rightful place in the intricate tapestry of the Greer family's history.

In 1964, the current New Mexico state capitol began construction across Paseo de Peralta from the Salmon-Greer house. This involved not only the razing of the houses on that side of the street, but also the widening of Paseo de Peralta from a two-lane road to a four-lane divided street. The garden and grounds on the Paseo side of the Salmon-Greer House were taken over by the street expansion, and the wall with its wrought iron was moved back to its current location.

After the death of Salome Salmon Greer in 1970, the Salmon-Greer House was left to her three daughters, Sara, Mary, and Lila. Together, the three sisters designated their brother, Nathan Greer, as the primary steward of the home. As a child, Nathan recalled frequently playing in “the big house,” so it was fitting that as an adult he played a leading role in keeping the house in excellent condition. During this time, the house was largely unoccupied, save for an unsuccessful attempt by a local entrepreneur to transform the residence into a high-end restaurant called Club Santa Fe in 1985.

The house was then renovated and used as professional offices for Capital City Title Company and attorney LeMerle Boyd beginning in 1989. In 1999, the house became the offices of Town & Ranch, a real estate agency. In recent years, the building has been used by Stein and Brockmann, a prominent water law firm, as well as other attorneys. Throughout this period, the house remained under the ownership of the Greer family.



*Nathan Greer, grandson of Nathan Salmon, stands in front of the Salmon-Greer House - Santa Fe New Mexican, May 31, 1988*

For the past twenty-three years, the Salmon-Greer House has been expertly maintained by Freddie Soldow, the great grandson of Nathan Salmon. Soldow's hands-on approach to building maintenance has been instrumental in keeping the house in excellent condition. In addition to taking care of the house, he has always ensured that its new tenants know about the building's remarkable history. Soldow also developed an adjacent building on the lot which is currently occupied by the law offices of Gallagher and Kennedy.

In May 2023, the historic Salmon-Greer House found an ideal new owner in Think New Mexico, the results-oriented think tank. As an organization committed to improving the lives of New Mexicans, Think New Mexico's mission aligns seamlessly with the legacy of Nathan Salmon and E. John Greer. The success achieved by these two remarkable entrepreneurs was a result of their commitment to serving their fellow citizens. The Salmon-Greer House is the ideal building to



*Salmon-Greer House in 2023 - Historic Santa Fe Foundation*

support Think New Mexico's work because its proximity to the governor and legislature makes it easy for lawmakers and members of the public who are working to improve state laws to meet and strategize. As the Salmon-Greer house enters this new chapter, its historical significance and its role as a gathering place for both lawmakers and the community at large will last far into the future. Under the stewardship of Think New Mexico, the house will carry forward the spirit of camaraderie and public service.

