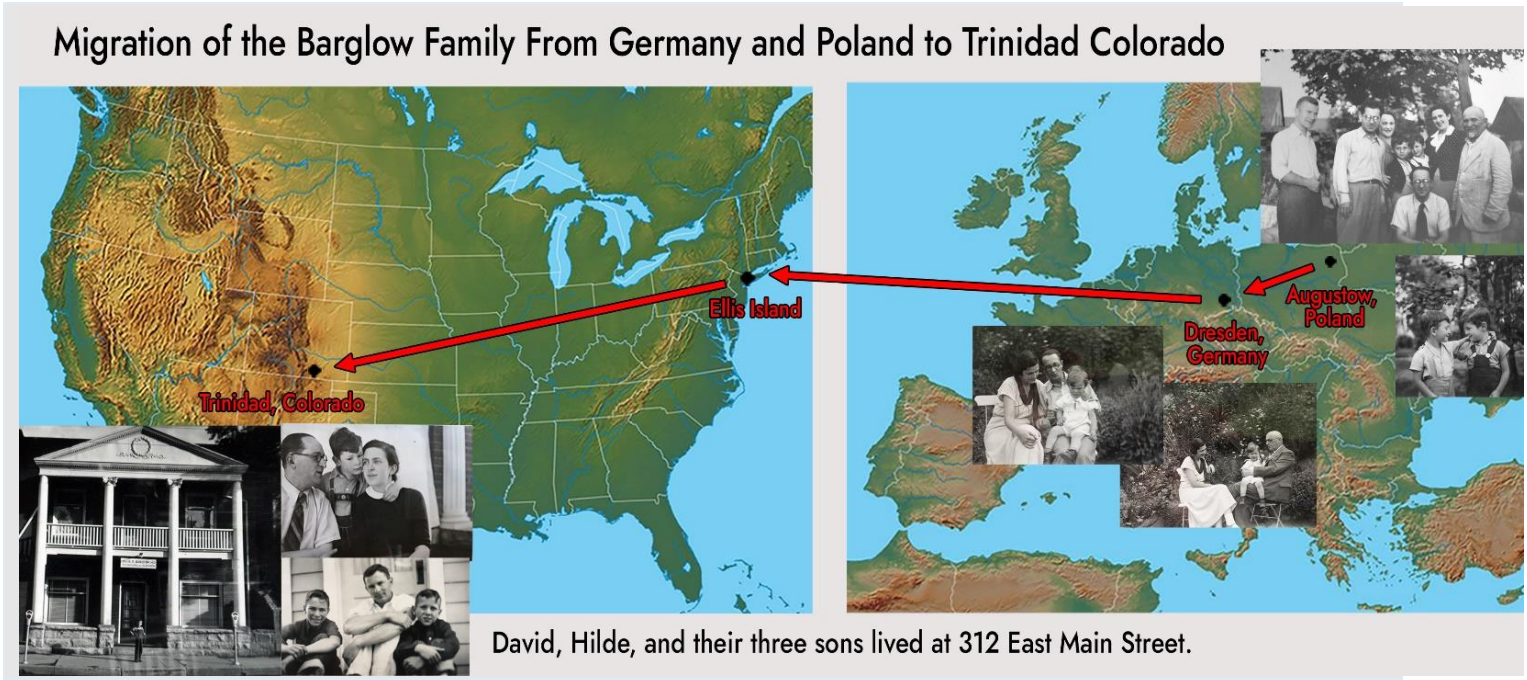
Notes on the History of the Barglow Family in Trinidad, Colorado

— by Raymond Barglow

One of the three buildings belonging to the Trinidad Museum on East Main Street is named the "Barglow building," in memory of my family who lived there from 1941 until 1960. During those two decades, my father, Dr. David Barglow, practiced medicine in the office on the ground floor, and the family lived upstairs.

Our family was Jewish and had immigrated to the United States from Europe, fleeing the Nazi regime that had taken power in Germany. My parents Hilde and David came to this country in the late 1930s, together with their son Peter who was six years old. I was born in 1940, and the family moved to Trinidad in 1941. My grandfather Alfred left Germany and joined us in that same year, and my younger brother Michael was born in Trinidad six years later.



The Barglow family came to Trinidad in 1941, during an epoch of European pogroms and war that took millions of lives. In the 1930s and 1940s, U.S. immigration policy admitted some Jews to this country, but denied entry to many more. We were among the fortunate refugees: Trinidad became our home.

My father David, born in 1907, came originally from a large Polish family. His Polish last name was "Barglowski," meaning that his ancestors had lived in the district of Barglow, which was located just outside of the city of Augustow in the northeastern corner of Poland. His father Nahum worked in the lumber business and was a religious scholar. His mother ran a small shop out of their home, afraid of but also providing services to the military forces (Russian, Polish and German) that successively occupied Poland and ruled over their lives.

David's diary speaks of his family's terrifying experiences during World War I (1914-1918), when their house was taken over by Russia troops, and the family, impoverished and threatened every day, tried to

cope and survive. David wrote that one of the soldiers "wanted to kill my mother because she didn't immediately find and give him the key to the barn so they could stall their horses there, but in the end he didn't." On another occasion according to the diary, David's mother, carrying his younger brother on her back, "stabbed a Cossack."

In the 1920s and early 30s David went to Germany to attend school, decided to become a physician there, and married my mother Hildegard Zucker, who was an actress in a German traveling theatre company. When Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 and anti-Semitic laws made it impossible for David to continue his medical education in Germany, the family moved to Italy, where David completed his medical studies in the mid-1930s. However, when the Italian fascist regime enacted anti-Jewish legislation there as well, David and Hilde had to leave that country too. (I remember a line in a poem by German playwright Berthold Brecht: European Jews found themselves "changing our country more often than our shoes.") In 1937 David and Hilde, along with their young son Peter, returned to Poland to see David's family one last time before emigrating to America.

1937. From left to right: my uncle Gutman, his brother-in-law Isaak Stejnberg and sister Tatiana, their son Monjusz alongside Peter, then my mother Hilde and grandfather Nahum, with my father David in front.

Only my parents and Peter, who left Europe for America soon after these photos were taken, survived. David came first, followed by Hilde and Peter who embarked by ship (the "Europa") across the Atlantic Ocean, heading for New York.

Monjusz and Peter

In the summer of 1939, the German army occupied Augustow and constructed a detention center for the Jews of the town, before sending them to concentration camps. David's father, brother, sister, her husband and their two children apparently fled Poland by going eastward, into Belarus and Russia. But hatred of Jews was rampant in these countries too, and all these members of David's family perished, along with aunts, uncles, cousins and dear friends. Hilde's family in Germany was decimated too. Her grandmother died in the Dresden ghetto, her mother in a concentration camp in Latvia.

The Europa, preparing to voyage from Germany to New York

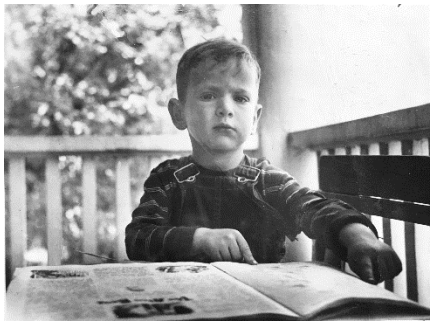
After going through immigration at Ellis island in New York, why did my parents and Peter settle down in the state of Colorado? That happened because years earlier, my father had fallen ill in Europe, suffering from tuberculosis. In the 1930s, there existed no effective treatment for this disease, and David almost died from it. When he recovered, the family wished to live in a clean and healthy environment, which

may have motivated them to choose Colorado, with its mountains and fresh air. Our family spent their first four years in Westcliffe, a farming community of a few hundred people, where my father opened a medical practice. In the small single-story house where we lived, there was only a curtain between the office where my father received patients and the living quarters for the family.

This situation was unsatisfactory, especially to Hilde who wanted to live in a larger community. So when an elderly physician in Trinidad put his practice and home up for sale, our family seized the opportunity and in 1941 arrived in Trinidad, where they lived at 312 East Main Street.

Trinidad remained our home until my father died at the young age of 53 in 1960.

David, Peter, Hilde



Michael sitting on the front porch

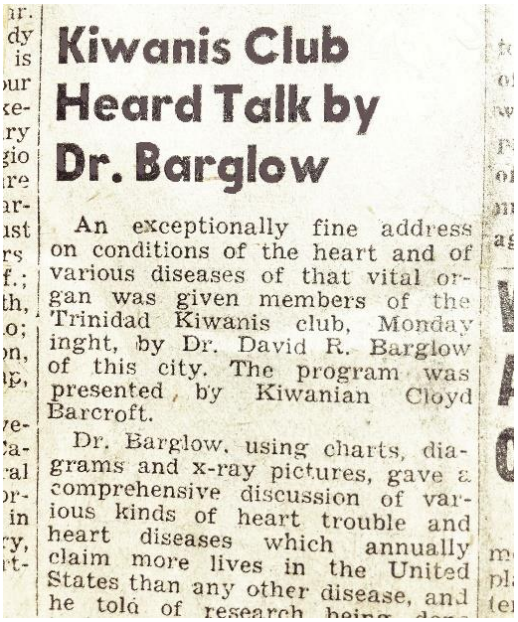
The three "Barglow boys"

But let's go back to 1941, the Barglow family's first year in Trinidad. For my father the new town was paradise—he could freely put to use his medical knowledge and skills, which he had longed to do since the years of his medical training Europe. Trinidad was a place where he could peacefully practice medicine without fearing the hatred and persecution that he and the family had encountered every day in fascist Germany.

My mother worked as a receptionist in the Barglow medical office at 312 East Main. As in Westcliffe, this building served as home to the entire family, consisting of my parents, my brothers Peter and Michael, and me. The house has two floors, with David's medical practice located downstairs and the family's living quarters upstairs. When the nurse in David's practice, Elaine East, came to work, she would

sometimes bring her son Gary with her, and he and Michael would play together in the backyard. Gary became Michael's closest friend. Elaine would also look after the house and the practice—and on occasion my elderly grandfather Alfred too—when the family went on vacation.

Many immigrant families, speaking diverse languages, had originally come to South-Eastern Colorado to work in the coal-mining industry. And some of these families received medical care from David. In Europe he had spoken German, French, Italian, English, Yiddish, and Polish, and Hilde knew a number of languages too. In this country they both learned Spanish as well, which meant that they could communicate with just about all of the patients in their native tongue. And when some of the patients were unable to pay, my father and mother were OK with that.



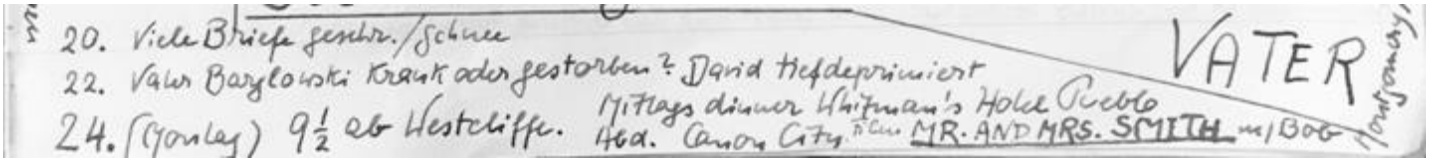
Kiwanis Club Heard Talk by Dr. Barglow

An exceptionally fine address on conditions of the heart and of various diseases of that vital organ was given members of the Trinidad Kiwanis club, Monday inght, by Dr. David R. Barglow of this city. The program was presented, by Kiwanian Cloyd Barcroft.

Dr. Barglow, using charts, diagrams and x-ray pictures, gave a comprehensive discussion of various kinds of heart trouble and heart diseases which annually claim more lives in the United States than any other disease, and he told of research

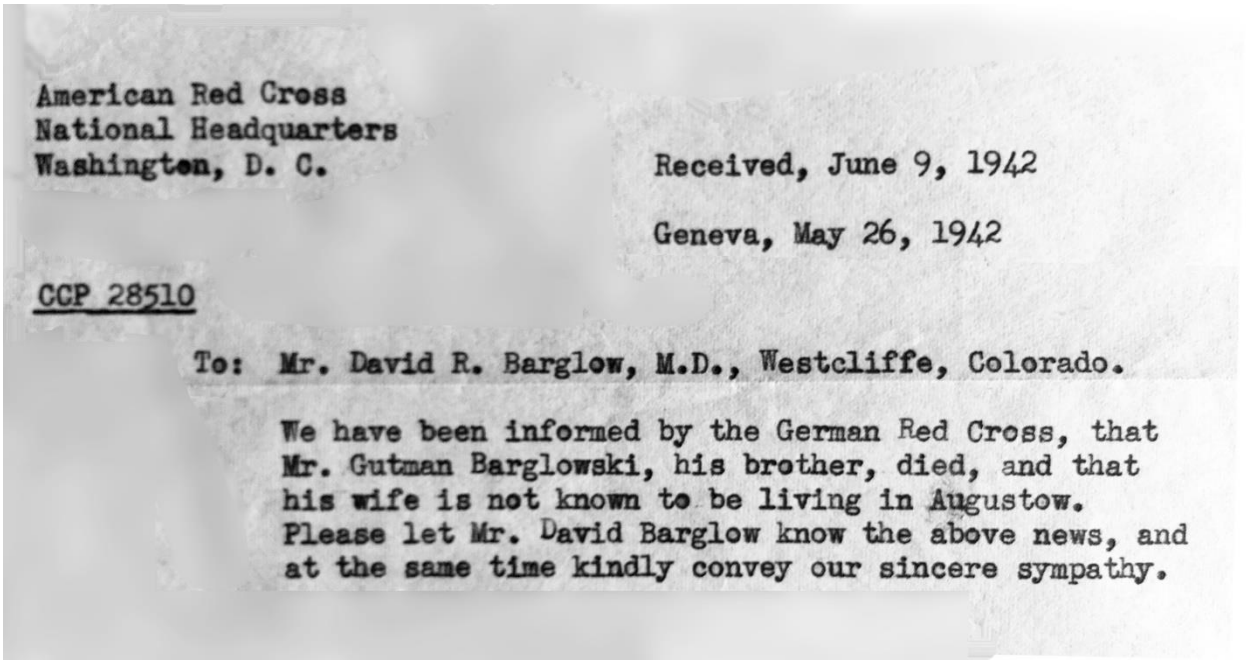
David's medical practice flourished. He had gone to medical school in Germany, a country that was famous for providing doctors with a scientifically rigorous education. There were a handful of other doctors in town, and sometimes, when they encountered a case that they could not diagnose or treat, they would call on David to get advice. He was recognized as one of the most knowledgeable medical authorities in Las Animas County, and would sometimes give public talks on medical subjects.

Although our parents set out to build a new life in America, they of course remembered what their lives had been in Europe, and they recalled everyone—family members and friends—whom they had left behind in Europe. Not hearing any word from them, David and Hilde wondered whether they remained alive.



In her diary note for March 22, 1941, Hilde tersely reports David's fear about the fate of his father, "Father Barglowski sick or dead? David deeply depressed."

In 1941—two years into the war and four years after he had last visited his family in Augustow—David wrote a letter to the Red Cross, requesting information about what had happened to family members. The replies were negative, as in this report about his brother Gutman, forwarded to David in Trinidad from his previous address in Westcliffe:



American Red Cross
National Headquarters
Washington, D. C.

Received, June 9, 1942

Geneva, May 26, 1942

CCP 28510

To: Mr. David R. Barglow, M.D., Westcliffe, Colorado.

We have been informed by the German Red Cross, that Mr. Gutman Barglowski, his brother, died, and that his wife is not known to be living in Augustow. Please let Mr. David Barglow know the above news, and at the same time kindly convey our sincere sympathy.

As the war years went on, between 1939 and 1945, it became more and more certain that most of David's and Hilde's relatives had been killed in the Holocaust. Mourning these losses, there was a pervasive unhappiness in our home, along with relief that our own family had survived.

My mother and father had been so traumatized by their lives in Europe that they wanted to protect their children from learning anything about that experience. They never discussed with us children the persecution and terror that they had survived. They wanted their children to grow up in an environment unburdened by their own horrific past. That succeeded only partly. As a child whose early years unfolded just at the time that my father and mother's dear friends and relatives were losing their lives in Europe, I was aware at some level of their anguish and sadness. I was a quiet boy who, according to my mother's diary, didn't begin to talk until the age of 3½.

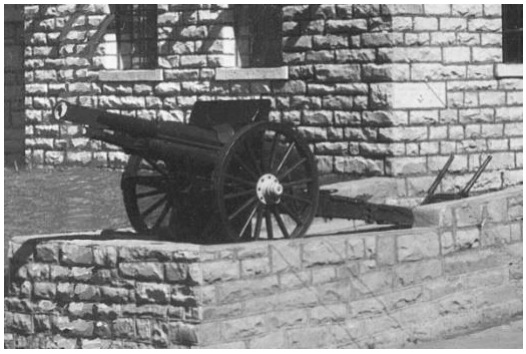
Because our house stood on an incline, with the lower floor built into the hill, an air shaft about 20 feet deep had been dug at the backside of the house to allow light to reach through the windows of the back rooms of the medical office downstairs. Around this air shaft a pretty high fence had been erected to prevent a child like myself from falling in. At five years of age, I fearlessly climbed the fence, lost my grip, fell to the concrete bottom, and was knocked unconscious. Fortunately, my father was near one of the windows downstairs and saw or heard me fall. He carried me upstairs and placed me in a warm bath, where I "woke up," not badly injured. I remember vividly this fearful accident.

The world war came to an end when I was five years old, and I remember the public celebration on Main Street in front of our house. I found all of this a little confusing: Germany had been defeated; but we in our family were German, so could we be happy about the victory along with everyone else? We could, because we were Jewish, and that made us different, the war had been fought on our behalf. I was American, but sometimes felt like an outsider somehow.

All three of us boys, Peter, Michael and I, attended public schools in Trinidad. I went first to East Street School, then to Rice Junior High, and then to the high school across town. Behind our house on Main Street was a row of adobe houses in which mostly Hispanic families lived. We all became friends.

Raymond and younger brother Michael on the left. Bobbie Briones in the middle. Brothers Garfield and Wedo Nieto on the right. Wedo, the boy on the far right, died from polio, a disease that was rampant in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s.

Like many youngsters in those days, we played outdoors with toy guns. About half a block away, between First and Second Street, stood the huge stone structure that is Fort Wootton Veterans' Memorial Square. There was an old cannon placed at the corner of First and Chestnut, as if to protect the fort. This was a perfect setting for letting our imaginations run wild.



My only surviving grandparent, Alfred Zucker, rented a room on Spruce Street, a few blocks from us on East Main Street, and came over to our house to chat with my mother just about every day. My father was very absorbed in his medical practice, so my mother relied a lot on her father Alfred for company. I remember my mother ironing clothes while Alfred sat nearby in an armchair, and they talked with one another—always in German, because that was the language most familiar to them but also as a precaution against us children listening in!

My mother had been an actress on the stage in Germany, and she and my father loved theatre and literature. For several years they hosted a Shakespeare reading group that met in our living room.

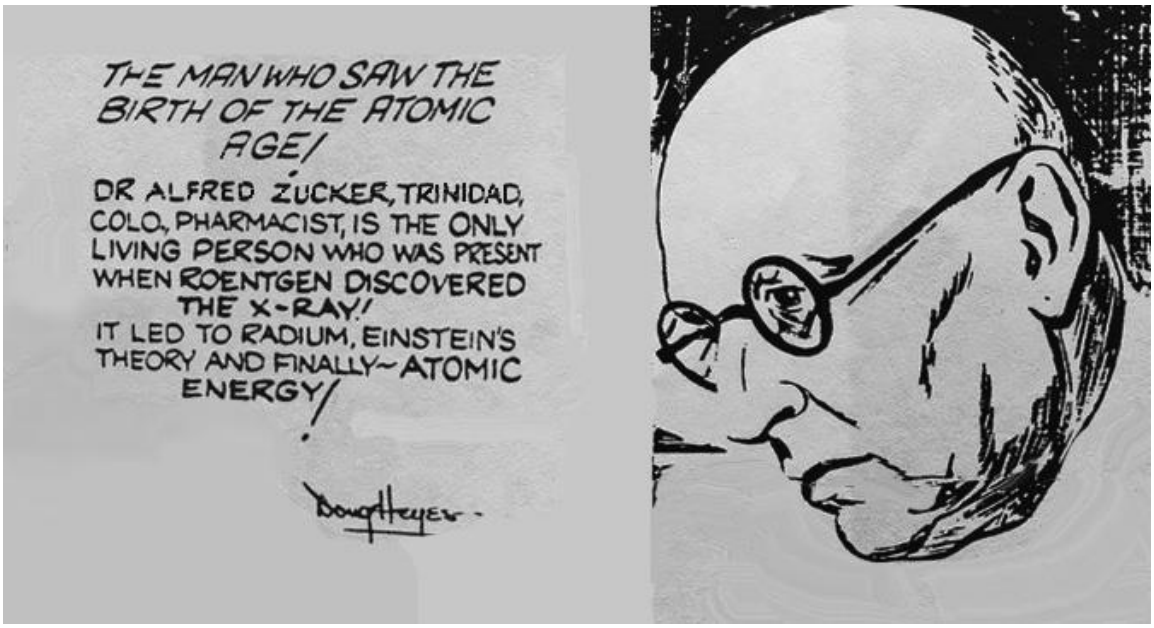
I remember so clearly the beautiful, resonant voice of my mother, whose English, it always seemed to me, was clear as a bell. Even when I was an adult, she sounded to me like a masterful, perfect

Hilde playing the lead role in G.B. Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*

speaker of the language. I was surprised to learn from my friends that my mom actually spoke English with a substantial German accent!

Across the street from our house stood the Trinidad Post Office. The Postmaster during the 1940s was Ben Beshoar, whom I remember as an elderly and kind, white-haired man whom my father befriended. Decades earlier, before he retired from his medical practice, Ben had been a physician to those who labored in the coal mines near Trinidad. He had worked for the United Mine Workers union and treated the wounded after the Ludlow Massacre in 1914. Ben's son Barron wrote a book, *Out of the Depths*, about the time when the Colorado National Guard opened fire on a group of striking coal miners and set fire to their settlement in Ludlow, just a few miles north of Trinidad. By the time our family was living in Trinidad, almost all of the mines had shut down. But I was told about this history, and still today my brothers and I remain strong supporters of labor unions.

My grandfather Alfred, worked part-time for several years at Lawson's drug store on Commercial Street. (Peter as a teenager also worked for a time at Lawson's, behind the soda counter.) He had been educated as a chemist and pharmacist in Germany, and had been a researcher present in the laboratory of Roentgen when the x-ray was discovered.



I don't know whether my grandfather ever shared with his co-workers at Lawson's anything about his past life in Europe.

I remember my wonderful first-grade school teacher Miss Dalton at East Street School. She was also an accomplished singer and performed so beautifully when she sang during the holiday services at our local synagogue, Temple Aaron up on Maple Street.

When my family met with other Jewish families to celebrate the religious holidays, my father David, who knew Hebrew, would read from the Old Testament. We interpreted the biblical stories metaphorically, not literally. I remember that one evening my father presented a sermon at the temple, discussing a line in *Psalms*, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" of the temple. The lesson being that those who are cast out may yet find redemption.

Temple Aaron congregation. Hilde is the woman seated at the far right, with David (in profile) standing nearby. The rug covering the floor is Native-American made.

As a teenager I was interested in science and became an amateur ("ham") shortwave radio operator. In order to make my signal strong, I wanted to put up a wire antenna high in the air. The neighboring Baca House was quite a bit taller than our house, so it wasn't all that difficult to figure out what to do. I waited until the family living in the Baca House left home, and then I slipped inside through an unlocked door, quickly climbed up into the attic, lifted the cover to the roof outside, and then attached the wire to the highest point. I don't know whether the family living in that house ever noticed the wire. Happily, in any event, they did not bring this matter to the attention of my parents or me!

The Purgatory River that ran through town wasn't for swimming, but we engaged with it in various ways. Peter remembers that at the end of the school year, the students in his high school would joyfully cast their books into the river. Peter played trombone in the high school band, and one time during a flood he and two other student trombonists were in a car making their way across the muddy water. They had to abandon the car, and one boy's trombone got banged up by the current—he played also for local dances in town and felt wiped out by the loss. During this flood, many families, newly homeless, found shelter at Trinity Church a block below Main Street, I accompanied my father when he, along with other doctors in town, went to the church to provide health care services.

Our family in Trinidad felt appreciated by the community, including David's patients of course. Many acts of kindness came our way. Every year at Christmas time, for example, we would receive gifts from patients whom David had treated. One of them, a generous woman who lived on 3rd street, made candied apples and baked a cake for us every year. I certainly remember that!

In the 1950s, my mother Hilde took courses at Trinidad Junior College, in preparation for becoming a German language teacher. By the time my father died in 1960, Peter was completing a medical training in Chicago and I had gone off to California to attend Cal Tech in Pasadena. In that year, Hilde, Michael, and her father Alfred moved to Denver so that she could continue her education. During the following decade she would teach at several high schools, and finally at Arrowsmith Academy in Berkeley California, a school that had been founded by my brother Michael. I lived in Berkeley too, where I studied philosophy and psychology and became a writer. Peter, a psychiatrist, also moved to Berkeley, where today all three of us "Barglow boys" reside. Although we left Trinidad long ago, a foundation for our lives was laid by our experiences in this town on the Purgatory River in Las Animas County.