

**Dr. Monika Ghattas, American Historian from New Mexico, Visits LERC**

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011, LERC, NDU

Reported by Elie Nabhan

Dr. Monika Ghattas, a historian based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and currently working on a research project, on the history of Lebanese immigrants to New Mexico, entitled *Los Arabes de Nueva Mexico: Compadres from a Distant Land*, visited the Lebanese Emigration Research Center at NDU on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011. During her visit, Dr. Ghattas examined documentary material from the LERC archives, including photos, articles, and letters, of value to her understanding of those immigrants who settled in the territory (later, in 1912, the state) of New Mexico.

Dr. Ghattas gained her PhD in Modern European History from the University of New Mexico and during her teaching career lectured widely in her field of specialization. Dr. Ghattas was accompanied by her husband Robert and her brother in law, Mr. Nazih Ghattas,



LERC with the Ghattas family at the LERC library: (from left to right) Mr. E. Sfeir, Mrs. L. Haddad, Dr. M. Ghattas, Mr. N. Ghattas, Mr. R. Ghattas, Mr. E. Nabhan (Apr 2011).

In a meeting with LERC's Acting Director, Dr. George Abdelnour and LERC's Chief Indexer, Mrs. Liliane Haddad, Dr. Ghattas explained that "New Mexico had been annexed by the United States in the mid-19th century and the majority of the population was Hispanic, living in small and somewhat isolated villages. There was no industry in this area and most of the people were

farmers, shepherds and ranchers.”

“Lebanese immigrants” she went on to explain “first came to this area in the late 1880s. The majority came from the East via the railroad and began to peddle in what was then the territory of New Mexico; a much smaller number crossed the border from Mexico. Most of them worked as peddlers initially, but established dry goods and grocery stores as soon as was possible.”

“What is unique about this story is that these immigrants came upon a culture and lifestyle that was very much like the one they had left behind. There were strong similarities in family/village life, the centrality of the Catholic Church, food preferences, the language and many other items.

She went on to say that “many of these Lebanese immigrants came from Roumieh, another group emigrated from Zahle, while a few families are from the north, somewhere outside of Tripoli.”

Dr. Abdnour commended Dr. Ghattas on the novelty of her work, saying that previous studies had concentrated on Lebanese immigration to and from the American east coast. He was fascinated by the stories of intrepid peddlers and the fact that early peddlers had to apply for a license to peddle, a further license for peddling with a horse and another for peddling with a carriage, very much as modern day licenses are issued for diverse types of vehicles. Peddlers themselves were seen as astute salespeople, sometimes trading religious artifacts of questionable origins.



The Ghattas family at the museum: (from left to right) Mr. R. Ghattas, Dr. M. Ghattas, Mr. N. Ghattas (Apr 2011).

Dr. Ghattas had the opportunity to find out how LERC as a research center handles the flow of information and the constant stream of researchers who visit the Center.

After being introduced to all the materials LERC collects in its electronic archives and database, Dr. Ghattas was taken on a tour of the Lebanon Migration Museum at NDU to see first-hand the original materials displayed.

In a departing statement, she thanked LERC for the opportunity to visit its facilities and commended the work and efforts made to collect and archive important parts of Lebanese immigrant history.