



Temple Israel Building History

Desire for a Dedicated Building for Worship

A building project was disclosed in the January 15 papers: The want of a Hebrew temple of worship has been one long felt by the Jewish residents of Leadville, and not only they, but the community of which they are such numbers will be gratified to learn that initiatory steps have been taken for the erection, establishment and permanent maintenance of a temple in this city. Sunday afternoon [January 13] a meeting of leading Jewish citizens was held, which resulted in the organization of a temple association and election of the following officers: President J. H. Monheimer; vice-president, David May; treasurer, Sam Berry; secretary, M. Kahn. The organization consists of thirty members, and with it is incorporated the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent society, and all other Jewish associations existing prior to yesterday. In fact, the entire Hebrew

element of the city will unite in the laudable enterprise of establishing an appropriate place of worship. It is proposed to erect a synagogue of brick and stone, at a cost of \$10,000, a suitable site for which will be selected immediately, and work will be begun as soon as weather will permit. The location of the new temple will be as central as possible and will be at least as near to the avenue as a half block. A committee was also appointed at the meeting to proceed at once with the collection of funds, and tonight at the rooms of Mr. Sol Rice the committee on constitution and bylaws will prosecute their labor. [1] [When the synagogue was completed later in the year, the building was a wood frame structure located on the southwest corner of Fourth Street and Pine street.]

Acquisition of the Land and Construction of the Building

With the Jewish population in Leadville increasing during the first five years of Leadville's existence as a town, the need for a permanent temple building was obvious and great. Therefore, during a meeting on August 7, 1884, "The board of officers of the Jewish congregation met... for the purpose of letting the contract for building the new temple." [2] The land at 201 West 4th Street (the southwest corner of West 4th Street and Pine Street on what was then referred to as Millionaires' Row) in Leadville, Colorado was acquired on July 13th when Horace A.W. Tabor conveyed title to "David May for the benefit of the Congregation Israel" [3] via a quit claim deed "all of Lot (32) Thirty Two and (31) Thirty One on Block (8) Eight of the Stevens & Leiter subdivision to the City of Leadville, State of Colorado" [4]. The nominal price of \$1 indicates that the property was a gift from Tabor, whose generosity was

legendary and ultimately impecunious. The Temple itself cost \$4,000 to erect [5].

"A number of bids were presented and opened, the lowest being that of Mr. Robert Murdoch [6]. The architect will be Mr. George E. King [7]. The following are the specifications of the building: Its dimensions will be 25x70 feet. The audience room will be 24 feet high. The windows will be of stained glass, 7 feet high by 3 1/2 feet wide. There will be a gallery for the choir. The seating capacity of the room will accommodate 250 people. In the rear of the building there will be a platform and pulpit and a handsome ark where the ten commandments will be stored. The building will be lit by 50 gas burners. The pews will be of modern style and handsomely cushioned. There will be a vestibule of seven feet in front which will be nicely carpeted, as will be the entire building throughout. There will be one main aisle leading through the audience room, affording



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Temple Israel Building

easy entrance to and exit from the pews. The contractor will begin work at once on the edifice, which will be pushed forward until it is completed. The exact day on which it will be completed will be the twelfth of September as nearly as can be ascertained at present. When finished the Temple will be an ornament to that

Building Dedication

The building was dedicated on September 19, 1884, by Rabbi Morris Sachs of Cincinnati, Ohio, a recent graduate of the Hebrew Union College. One supposes that the event was especially propitious as it coincided with Rosh Hashanah, 5645. Unfortunately, David May, vice-president and chairman of the building committee, was unable to attend the 8 o'clock dedication. In his place Isaac Baer presented the key of the building to J.H. Monheimer, president of the congregation. Mr. Monheimer retaliated with the obligatory few words before releasing the pulpit to Rabbi Sachs [9].

This new house of worship reflected the size and strength of the Jewish community in Leadville. Of a population on the order of 30,000, Jews accounted for nearly 1% or 300 residents during the early 1880s. They supported several organizations in addition to the Temple. Leadville was host to a lodge of the B'nai B'rith (a Hebrew Benevolent Society), a religious school, and required a Jewish cemetery. Jews were with the earliest settlers of the upper Arkansas Valley and while a few actually did work in the mines, stereotypically their presence was mostly felt in the retail trades and as professionals. The stellar performers amongst the Jewish businessmen were the Guggenheim family and David May who went on to establish firms of national importance. Jewish names were also associated with a wide variety of social, philanthropic, and political activities [10].

neighborhood, and in fact to the whole city. The building committee consisting of Messrs. Sam Mayer, Dave May, Ike Baer, and M. A. Kahn, are all go-a-head men, and our citizens can depend on their having the edifice completed according to agreement." [8]

President Monheimer's report read:

"To the members of the Congregation Israel:

GENTLEMEN In accordance with the duties of my office as president, I beg to offer my annual report. On January 20, 1884, our society was organized and its present officers chosen with the help of God and by the aid of our members, and through the co-operation of the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent society, we have been enabled to erect our house of worship, which we all had the pleasure of seeing dedicated on New Year's Eve, September 19, 1884, and which is an ornament not alone to us as Israelites, but to our city and the world at large. Much credit is due to the members who have acted on the different committees and those who took such great interest in its erection and completion. In consequence of my absence from the city, I could do but little to encourage the work, and therefore feel the more grateful to those who acted in my stead.

It is a pleasure to record during the construction of our temple the hand of providence guided our work and no person was hurt or injured.

Furthermore, I wish to report that the pews of the temple, with the exception of three, were sold to members of the congregation, and the cash realized was \$925, which amount has been collected by our brothers, Sonneberg and Rice without any expense to the congregation for their making the collection, and turned over by me this morning to our worthy treasurer.

The Sabbath school has, during the past nine months, improved, and now that their quarters will be more



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Temple Israel Building

comfortable, we hope their progress will be accordingly advanced. Much praise is due to its management.

Our treasury is not in the condition I would like to see it, yet we have no right to complain. The reports of our secretary and treasurer will show our exact condition, and when the amount deficient is known, I would recommend that a loan be at once taken up sufficient to pay off all indebtedness. Later a ball can be given by the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent society, and through it

enough money raised to bring us out of debt. Of course, these are merely suggestions, and are laid before you for your consideration.

Owing to the vast amount of work to complete the temple in time, it was impossible to make our reports more lengthy we therefore close, hoping that our future may be as prosperous as the past, and that all our members may retain their health, so that the good work so nobly commenced will be continued." [11]

Reform Versus Orthodox

Reflecting the trend of the times, the first group of Jews to settle in Leadville could trace their roots to Germany. They tended towards assimilationist attitudes and the practice of Reform Judaism. This included services largely in English, women as members of the congregation, and the use of a choir. Later immigration to America and Leadville included a large proportion of Eastern European Jews who were more rigorous in their religious observations and practices. As in other Jewish communities, this led to a bit of a schism.

In 1892, the congregation split with the more orthodox members electing to establish their own congregation, Kneseth Israel. In 1893, they occupied the former Presbyterian Church at 119 West 5th Street. The

building survived until 1937 when it was razed to build an Elks Lodge [12]. Rabbis were generally unavailable to Temple Israel, but lay leaders continued to hold regular services until about 1908 [13]. The decline of the Jewish population in Leadville fundamentally reflects the weakness in the Colorado mining industry after America's abandonment of the silver standard in 1893. However, the more aggressive members of the community had already decamped to greener pastures during the late 1880s. David May's move to Denver in 1887 typifies this pattern of Jews gravitating towards larger cities. During the Thirties, the congregation dissolved entirely and the furnishings were allegedly transferred to the Hebrew Educational Alliance in Denver.

The Building in the 20th Century

The chain of title for the Temple Israel property after the occupation by Congregation Israel is as follows:

1. Sam Levin to Steve J. Malin on August 21, 1937, Quit Claim Deed.
2. Steve J. Malin to Anna Malin on April 29, 1953, Quit Claim Deed.
3. Anna Malin on August 3, 1953, Quiet Title Suit.
4. Anna Malin to Steve J. and Anna Malin on October 28, 1953, Warranty Deed.
5. Steve J. and Anna Malin to Bishop and (Episcopal) Diocese of Colorado on July 25, 1955, Warranty Deed.
6. Bishop and Diocese of Colorado to Sterling L. and Sharon K. Hartwig on April 6, 1966, Warranty Deed.
7. Sterling L. and Sharon K. Hartwig to James A. and Betty J. McClellan on August 10, 1971, Installment Land Contract (Warranty Deed followed on December 1, 1978).
8. James A. and Betty J. McClellan to Harvey/Martin Construction on December 15, 1980, Warranty Deed.



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Temple Israel Building

9. Harvey/Martin Construction to Willard H. Copper on February 1, 1985, Quit Claim Deed.
10. Willard H. Copper Family Trust to Temple Israel Foundation on October 15, 1992, Warranty Deed. [14]

Whether Mr. Levin held title as a surviving member of the congregation or through some other devise is unclear and apparently the issue was resolved by Mrs. Malin's legal action. In any event, Steve Malin converted the Temple into a single family residence beginning in 1937 [15]. Mr. Malin's daughter, May, recalls that her father built two or three rooms in the rear of the Temple for the family to live in while the front was used for the repair of automobile radiators. This use was superseded during the Second World War when the

front was converted to living space for boarders from the greatly expanded operations at the local mines [16]. After acquiring the building in 1955, Saint George Episcopal Church (located across the street on 4th Street) used it as a vicarage. The Hartwigs converted it into a three unit apartment house in the 1960s. Harvey/Martin Construction created a fourth unit during its tenure [17] and the structure retained this configuration until 2006.

Temple Israel Foundation Acquires Former Synagogue

The Temple Israel Foundation acquired the old synagogue building in 1992. Along with acquiring the

Hebrew Cemetery, this was the first big hurdle toward fulfilling the Foundation's mission.

Front Façade Restoration

After the acquisition of the building by the Temple Israel Foundation in 1992, four grants from the Colorado State Historical Fund have been matched by private contributions. These monies have allowed for the

development of architectural and construction drawings and the reconstruction of the front façade which was accomplished during the summer of 2001.

Fire and Restoration

On May 4, 2006, the building was seriously damaged by an electrical fire.

During the fall of 2006 a curator's unit was built as an addition to the rear of the building.

The Foundation received a third grant from the Colorado State Historical Fund in February 2007, and

reconstruction of the synagogue itself began during April 2007.

Since that time, a fourth grant from the Colorado State Historical Fund was received during October 2007, and work on the building was completed in December 2008.



The Building Today

Since 2008, Temple Israel was restored as a synagogue building houses a museum dedicated to the pioneer Jews of Leadville and of the American West. The building is available for tours or general browsing and for special events by arrangement.

In their revived states, the Temple Israel building and the local Hebrew Cemetery each have been returned to use and now stand as the final tangible remains of what was a large and active Jewish community in Leadville.

References

1. Griswold, p. 1342, January 15, 1884. The newspaper reference is from Leadville Daily Herald, Friday, August 8, 1884. Page 4.
2. Leadville Daily Herald, Friday, August 8, 1884. P. 4.
3. Quit-Claim Deed recorded in Lake County in Book 96, Page No. 171.
4. Ibid. (Quit-Claim Deed cited above.)
5. Exploring Jewish Colorado, Phil Goodstein, University of Denver, 1992. P. 125.
6. Robert M. Murdock was very active as a contractor in Leadville during its silver boom period. He was responsible for the construction of the Tabor Grand Hotel (1884-5), the Breene Block [SE corner, Harrison & 4th] (1887-8), the Armory building [140 E 5th] (1888), and residences for B.F. Follett [W 8th], J.H. Stotesbury [Pine & 8th], and Theodore Schults [Pine & 7th] (1887) amongst many other projects. History of Leadville and Lake County, Colorado, Don L. Griswold and Jean Harvey Griswold, Colorado Historical Society in cooperation with the University Press of Colorado, 1996. Pages 1369, 1371, 1897, 1912, 1916.
7. George Edward King was Leadville's leading commercial architect between 1878 and 1886. In addition to the Temple Israel building, he was responsible for the following structures: the Tabor Grand Hotel; the Delaware Hotel; the 9th Street School; the Central School; the U.S. Post Office; the Lake County Court House; the Clipper Building (Silver Dollar Saloon); and his own home at 212 West 9th Street. King's portfolio also included "Old Main" at Colorado State University, the Arnett-Fullen house in Boulder, and in Mexico: the Casino Club in Juarez; the Opera House in Zacatas; and the Opera House in Mexico City. The above information furnished by William R. Hinken, 212 West 9th Street, Leadville, July 2, 1995.
8. Leadville Daily Herald, Friday, August 8, 1884. P. 4.
9. Leadville Daily Herald, Saturday, September 20, 1884. P. 4.
10. Exploring Jewish Colorado, Phil Goodstein, University of Denver, 1992. P. 123.
11. Griswold, pp. 1538-9, September 21, 1884
12. Exploring Jewish Colorado, Phil Goodstein, University of Denver, 1992. P. 125.
13. The Centennial History of the Jews of Colorado 1859-1959, Allen duPont Breck, The Hirschfeld Press, 1960. P. 133.
14. Lake County Office of the Clerk and Recorder, Leadville.
15. Joseph Jakopic, 429 Elm Street, Leadville, laborer for Steve J. Malin, interviewed June 6, 1994.
16. May Malin Crippen, Canon City, daughter of Steve J. Malin, interviewed by telephone, June 8, 1994.
17. Robert Gilgulin, 601 Harrison Avenue, Leadville, general partner for Harvey/Martin Construction, interviewed May 12, 1994.