



Dr. John Elsner¹
Born: May 8, 1842
Died: April 3, 1922
Married to: Lena Elsner (née Zolinger)²

Although he was never a resident of Leadville, Dr. John Elsner visited the city occasionally as part of his duties as a regional mohel and as a physician. He was present at the deathbed of Leadville pioneer George Fryer in Denver during the autumn of 1884, suggesting some connection with the Carbonate City.³

John was born in Vienna, Austria in 1842. His father was also a physician and participated in protests against the Hapsburg dynasty during the 1840s. As a result of his father's anti-Hapsburg sentiment, the Elsners relocated to Italy. By the 1850s, the family immigrated to America, and settled in New York. John began his medical career during the American Civil War as a naval surgeon and later earned his medical degree from Ohio's Belleview College in 1866. After his graduation, he moved west, and settled in the frenetic and often violent frontier city of Denver. Early accounts of his experiences consist of treatment of gunshot victims and suffers of tuberculosis. During the late 1860s

and early 1870s, he became known for his honesty and integrity in the medical field. He became an official mohel for the Rocky Mountain region and traveled as part of these duties to New Mexico, Wyoming, and throughout Colorado, including Leadville. His close association with David Heimberger⁴ also probably brought John to Leadville occasionally.⁵ John was well established in Denver by 1879 and may have traveled to Leadville during the city's early years.

An estimate of brises conducted in Leadville between 1879 and 1901 can be developed by a statistic found in Griswold's *History of Leadville and Lake County*. In 1901, the *Herald Democrat* reported 53 "Hebrew" babies were born in the city; the number reported by St. Vincent hospital for the period between 1879 and 1901.⁶ If roughly half these were boys, no more than 25 brises were conducted in that time. Dr. Elsner reportedly kept notes of the locations of brises he conducted, but without access to these notes, the precise identity and number conducted in Leadville cannot be determined. Digital newspaper archives do not reveal any evidence of his activities in Leadville. Dr. Elsner lived the remainder of his professional life in Denver and is buried in Congregation Emanuel Cemetery.⁷

¹ Find A Grave, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 11 March 2019), memorial page for Dr John Elsner (8 May 1842–1922), Find A Grave Memorial no. 10592487, citing Congregation Emanuel Cemetery, Denver, Denver County, Colorado, USA ; Maintained by Digginrellies (contributor 46522347) .

² Ancestry.com. Colorado, County Marriage Records and State Index, 1862-2006 [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016. Original data: Marriage Records. Colorado Marriages. State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

³ Griswold, *History of Leadville and Lake County, Colorado*, Vol. I and II p. 1319

⁴ For more information on David Heimberger see <http://jewishleadville.org/heimberger.html>

⁵ Breck, *The Centennial History of the Jews of Colorado 1859-1959* pp. 23-28

⁶ Griswold, *History of Leadville and Lake County, Colorado*, Vol. I and II p. 2209

⁷ Findagrave referred above



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“John Elsner: The ‘Leading Pioneer Physician’ of Denver, Colorado” Jewish Museum of the American West. Website accessed, 3/12/19. <http://www.jmaw.org/john-elsner-jewish-denver/>

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STABLE URL: <http://www.jewishleadville.org/elsner.html>