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Henry Pelta

Born: October, 1865

Died: September 2, 1918, Chicago Married to: Nettie Goldsmith In Leadville: 1893-1902

Nettie (Goldsmith) Pelta

Born: December, 1869, Missouri

Died: October 26, 1909, Colorado Springs

Married to: Henry Pelta In Leadville: 1879-1902

Ralph Waldo Pelta

Born: January 12, 1893, Buena Vista, Colorado Died: Los Angeles, September 6, 1956, Los

Angeles

Married to: Gisela Feldman In Leadville: 1893-1902

Juanita (Pelta) Sieber

Born: April 4, 1891, Buena Vista, Colorado Died: May 30, 1962, La Junta, Colorado

Married to: Henry Sieber In Leadville: 1911-1914

The Peltas were a successful merchant family with relations in Leadville, Buena Vista, and Colorado Springs. The patriarchs—Abraham and Henry—and their sister, Celia Pelta Block, were the children of Joseph and Hannah Pelta, Prussian immigrants enumerated in Elmira, New York, in the 1880 census. Abraham never settled in Leadville, but his brother Henry operated a clothing business and lived with his family in the Carbonate city for nearly a decade starting in 1893. Their sister, Celia, would also have a long Leadville tenure. Abraham regularly sold the *Herald Democrat* and other Leadville newspapers at his shop in Buena Vista.

Henry Pelta was born in October of 1865 at Elmira, New York.⁴ He moved to Colorado sometime between 1884 and 1892. On March 13, 1892, Henry married Nettie⁵ Goldsmith:⁶ Married in Leadville. Special to the News.

Leadville, Colo., March 13.- Mr. Henry Pelta, a prominent citizen of Buena Vista, and Miss Nettie Goldsmith, one of Leadville's leading society ladies, were united in marriage at 5 o'clock to-night by Judge Goddard, at Temple Israel, in this city. A large concourse of friends witnessed the ceremony and offered congratulations. The newly married couple left [for] Buena [Vista] to-night, where they will take up permanent residence.⁷

A local judge officiated the ceremony. Though the list of guests was not recorded, they probably hailed from both Buena Vista and Leadville, as Nettie grew up in Leadville. Nettie and Henry moved their residence to Leadville from Buena Vista within one year of their wedding.⁸

Nettie and Henry's son, Ralph, was born on January 12, 1893 in Buena Vista; the Peltas relocated to Leadville that autumn. Nettie was first mentioned as "Mrs. H. J. Pelta" in a Leadville social column announcing a party for two visiting ladies, Amelia Friedlander and Hannah Leon, during September of 1893. The party took place at the house of Joseph Cohn. Other names cited at the party consisted in large part of members of Leadville's Jewish community, including Levy and Schayer. Leadville and Henry officially moved to Leadville in late October, 1893.

The first advertisement for Henry's "Cheap Store" (pictured) ran in a January 1894 edition of the *Herald Democrat*. ¹⁴ The store primarily focused on dyeing and tailoring clothes. As indicated by the advertisement, the store was located for a short time at 510 Harrison Avenue, a single-story wood frame building. ¹⁵ By the end of the year, Henry moved the business to 120 East 6th Street, where he would

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remain until 1903.¹⁶ The socially energetic Peltas attended a dance hosted by the Jewish Ladies Reading Club at the Vendome Hotel in October of 1894.¹⁷ Business was brisk during the first year and, later in October 1894, Pelta & Co. hosted a sale of "slightly soiled" underwear.¹⁸

A short article in a late December issue of the *Herald Democrat* exposed a rash of petty crimes affecting merchants on the 100 block of East Sixth Street, including Henry Pelta. The *Democrat* elaborated:

...Probably at no time in the history of Leadville has the hoodlum problem been so annoying to merchants and business men as with the past two months. Those obnoxious urchins do not make a demonstration of their nuisance, but lie in wait till an opportunity presents itself to steal something, or do some damage to an unsuspecting dealer... Those who are most pestered are probably Messrs. H. J. Pelta and J. E. Miller. The gentlemen own adjoining stores, and have, until recently, exhibited a sample of their wares upon benches in front of their buildings. Lately, however, this display has been abandoned, owing to the fact that a large number of young fellows, ranging in age from 12 to 18 years, have constantly hung about the locality and lost no opportunity of stealing the first article within reach...¹⁹

According to the article, Henrys neighbor, J. E. Miller, custom built a "secure" glass display case for his outside wares as a result of the harassment. However, shortly after the case was installed it was punched out by one of the gang members, and glass-infused nuts and candies were stolen. A few

days later, Henry issued a warning to several of the boys identified by the police and swore he would prosecute them to the full extent of the law if apprehended. Miller and Henry also petitioned the city authorities to specifically hire a constable to patrol their section of 6th Street.²⁰ The issue lay dormant for several years and no further burglaries were reported during 1894. A week later, Henry advertised his tailoring services and touted that he manufactured custom pants for \$5, which he claimed "...Equal any \$10 pants in the city..."²¹

In the spring of 1895, Henry became the victim of check forgery committed by a vagrant nick-named "Jim the Penman." The sixty-year-old forged a \$15 check with Henry's name on it. When arrested, Jim said "You see, I'm a penman." That same May, Nettie attended a reading club meeting at the Angerman²³ home.²⁴ During the middle of summer, Henry published a series of advertisements for custom suits.²⁵ The ads continued for the remainder of 1895. Sam Jacobs, 26 another member of Leadville's Jewish community, was one of Henry's main competitors in the tailoring business, sharing advertising space and close proximity on East 6th Street.²⁷ In November, Nettie participated in a theatrical rendition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at the Weston Opera House (modern: Tabor); Nettie played the role of Ophelia.²⁸

Henry's tailoring advertisements began subsiding in early 1896, and a final one was published on January 5th. ²⁹ Though Henry may not have published ads, the store presumably continued to operate at 120 East 6th Street. In March, Nettie again appeared at local music events and was noted for her performance of a recitation at a Foresters Club gathering.³⁰

In late June of 1896, the Western Federation of Miners initiated a strike that would change the course of Leadville history. On June 26, a petition of businesses in support of the union and their strike was sent around the city; Henry signed on behalf of Pelta & Co. This provides an interesting insight into

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the political opinions and loyalties of merchants in Leadville. The extensive list of support consisted primarily of grocers and dry goods merchants who often came in contact with working men and their sympathies. ³¹ Labor strife continued to disturb the economic and social life of Leadville well into the spring of 1897. While martial law was never declared, several gun battles, acts of arson, and assassinations took place in the late fall and early winter of 1896. After a guerilla attack on two important eastside mines, the Lake County Sheriff's office asked for state military assistance. While violence gradually subsided in the winter, a sizable number of troops remained stationed north of the city until the spring of 1897.³² Perhaps as a result of the strife, or from a lack of surviving resources on the subject, few advertisements by or social mentions of the Peltas were found between the summer of 1896 and the spring of 1897.

During March of 1897, Nettie was involved in a Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Association charity tea event and listed as the provider of instrumental music to accompany songs from "Misses Denman, Cohn," and Mr. Guthman..." Sol Guthman, soon deployed to the Philippine theater of the Spanish-American war, was a popular fixture of Leadville's Jewish society in the late 1890s.

Beginning in 1898, a man named James Stewart partnered with Henry to create "Pelta & Stewart Men's Furnishing" goods, still based at 120 East Sixth Street.³⁷ Mentions of Nettie and Henry in the social columns are less common in 1898. Nettie played in several musical recitals at the Odd Fellows Hall.³⁸ The Peltas also hosted Mrs. Peltason when she visited Leadville from St. Louis during the autumn; she was later revealed to be a cousin.³⁹

A brief notice in the 1899 New Year's morning edition of the *Herald Democrat* detailed the status and success of Henry's clothing business during 1898. The article claimed that Henry and his partner, James Stewart, were well known in the city

for their quality tailoring, handmade suits, and were "well acquainted with all the old timers." 40

The winter of 1898-1899 was one central Colorado's snowiest. Storms in January and February dropped deep snow throughout the high country; train service froze to a halt. Famine was rumored in many surrounding mountain cities, and coal supplies dipped. Even as survival concerns mounted, snow needed to be removed from the front entrances of businesses. In early February, a group of six men from the "Board of Trade rustling committee" canvassed Harrison Avenue to obtain donations from local companies to pay shovelers known as "snowbirds" to clear sidewalks. No mention is made of clearing streets; most freight commerce and personal transport were conducted on horse-drawn sleighs during the winter months, which required some street-covered snow in order to function. Sidewalks, however, were cleared in order to access the stores, some now several feet below street level. Henry donated \$1 of the \$449 collected for the snow removal effort. ⁴¹ In a time before heavy machinery and tax-funded local snow removal services, the donation drive provides insight into mandatory self-sufficient ethics in the late nineteenth century.

After the spring thaw of 1899, Henry and Nettie were cited as attendees at several social events. In May, both went to a gathering at the Block residence, where Nettie sang several solos of popular songs. Another event at the Block residence took place in September, honoring Mrs. Pelterson with a masquerade dance. A few weeks later, Henry and Nettie advertised that they would depart for Port Arthur, Texas within the week.

Henry's store again appeared in the New Year's Day, 1900 edition of the *Herald Democrat*, which commemorated 1899. Similar to the previous year, another prosperous cycle for the business was recorded. In contrast to 1898, when clients of the store were described as "old timers," clients in 1899 were reportedly young men who valued the suits for

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their quality and low cost. Additionally, James Stewart was identified as a mine owner. ⁴⁵ By this time, Henry's business had been established to such an extent that no other ads beyond the one mentioned at the year's beginning were deemed necessary.

The 1900 United States Census enumerated the Pelta family residing at 209 West 7th Street. Their son Ralph was listed as seven years of age, Henry, thirty-four and Nettie, thirty. During March, Henry traveled to Colorado Springs with brother-inlaw, fellow merchant and Jewish community member Levi Block. That same day, Nettie returned from a lengthy trip to the West Coast. One week later, when Nettie and Henry returned to Leadville, neighbors and friends hosted a ninth wedding anniversary party for the couple. In May, Nettie and Henry's son Ralph first appeared in Leadville social columns as an honor roll student at the Seventh Street School.

Later in the month, a profile of Henry's business partner, James Stewart, was published in a social column. The article stated that Stewart, in addition to being a shift boss at the Ibex mine, was an investment partner at Pelta & Stewart, the latter reported as his better known position in Leadville. Stewart's vocational experience in the clothing business and his supervisory underground mine work is a unique blend. That he was more recognizable as a member of Pelta & Stewart suggests a more pervasive role besides investor; perhaps he helmed the store's counter when not working at Ibex. Also, the column says that Stewart was a "Scotch-Canadian." The 1900 Leadville City directory identified his residence as 231 East 8th Street.⁵¹ The remainder of 1900 was subdued. No social notices for Henry and Nettie were uncovered.

Early 1901, which also passed quietly for the Peltas, did include the couple's visits to Buena Vista on several occasions.⁵² In November, a gang of thieves similar to the one causing the disturbance in 1894

began prowling the grocery and clothing stores of lower East 6th Street. When Henry went to supper on a mid-November evening, he left one of his young clerks in charge of the shop. After several "hoodlums" saw the proprietor leave, two brothers by the name of Jennings entered the premises. While one distracted the young clerk, the other stole \$29 from the cash register. ⁵³ Police apprehended the Jennings boys and two others the next day. All four were reported to be "steeped in petty crime" and familiar to local constables. ⁵⁴ Though initially charged with larceny, the accusations were dismissed due to their young age. ⁵⁵

In early February 1902, it was announced that Henry had partnered in the Belgian Mine with his brother-in-law Levi Block, discovering a large vein of silver. Later that spring, Henry traveled to Denver and met with friends; otherwise, he was generally absent from newspapers until later in 1902. In the autumn, Henry began advertising a series of sales. James Stewart, conspicuously absent from the advertisements, was no longer listed as a partner or part of the store name by 1902. The sale consisted of "toilet soap for the boarding houses" and fleece-lined items. Those initially low-key sale advertisements of late 1902 boldly appeared in newspapers as "Bankruptcy sales" by early 1903.

During this same period, Levi Block's store apparently purchased the stock of Henry's store. By the end of February, 1903, a referee recommended to the court that Henry be released from bankruptcy proceedings. Though a formal departure notice was not discovered, by October of that year Henry had opened a new department store at 125, 127, 129 and 131 Tejon Street in Colorado Springs. While the Leadville branch did not close until 1903, Henry did not appear in that year's Leadville city directory. Levi Block announced a big sale of the Pelta goods in early February of 1903; these are the last mentions of the Peltas' Leadville residency. Jaunita, who stilled traveled back to Leadville during this time to perform with



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her violin, was often accompanied by her cousin, Myrtle Block, on the piano.⁶⁶

Nettie passed away in Colorado Springs on October 26, 1909:⁶⁷

DEATH OF MRS. NETTIE PELTA-

Yesterday Mr. L.[Levi] Block received the sad intelligence of the death of Mrs. Nettie Pelta at Colorado Springs. Before her marriage Mrs. Pelta was a well known Leadville young lady, Miss Nettie Goldsmith, and was educated at the public schools of the city. The immediate cause of death was kidney trouble superinduced by nervous prostration. Deceased was about 40 years of age, and haves [has] a husband and son aged 17.68

By 1910, Henry and Ralph lived in a large boarding house on Tejon Street in Colorado Springs.⁶⁹

During 1913, Ralph was listed as a senior at Colorado Springs High School, which published his portrait (right) in the yearbook.⁷⁰ By the time he was drafted to serve in the First World War, Ralph lived in Chicago and was enrolled as a law student there.⁷¹ Henry passed away while visiting him in Chicago on September 2, 1918. His remains were returned to Colorado Springs and laid to rest at the Sons of Israel cemetery⁷²

Ralph married Gisela Feldman, a native of Chicago, during 1919. Unfortunately Gisela passed away in 1920 at the age of twenty-five; her death roughly coincided with birth of their daughter Henrietta. Taler in 1920, Ralph married a distant cousin, Beth Block, from Buena Vista. Beth and Ralph raised Henrietta and eventually settled in Los Angles. Henrietta was an accomplished performer and

professor in Los Angeles before her death in 2014 at the age of ninety-four.⁷⁵

Ralph died in Los Angeles on September 6, 1956.⁷⁶ He and Beth were laid to rest at Green Hills Memorial Park in Los Angeles.⁷⁷ Ralph's sixty-three-year lifespan encompassed a transformative world. As a young boy, while his father ran the tailor shop and clothing store on the busy 100 block of East 6th Street, he undoubtedly witnessed a remarkably vivid time in Leadville's history.

Although Henry, Ralph, and Nettie left in 1903, Henry's niece Juanita continued the Pelta narrative in Leadville. Juanita's paternal grandfather, Joseph Pelta, a Prussian immigrant, is buried in Colorado Springs' United Hebrew Cemetery. Her paternal grandmother was interred at United Hebrew Cemetery of St. Louis. Juanita's father, Abraham, who operated a department store on Tejon Street in Colorado Springs in the early twentieth century, was primarily based in Buena Vista. Abraham and Henry also had a dry goods store in Buena Vista before Henry relocated to Leadville.⁷⁸

Juanita was first documented as a visitor to Leadville in late December of 1907; she was the guest of her aunt and uncle, Henry and Celia Pelta Block. During 1910, she performed a duet of the song "Impromptu Alahongrofe" with her cousin Myrtle Block. A week later she was listed as a guest at a party at the Block residence. 79 In Buena Vista at the end of December. Juanita had officially relocated to Leadville by early 1911.80 During her three-year Leadville tenure, Juanita lived with the Blocks at 224 East 9th Street.⁸¹ Juanita was a musician throughout her Leadville residency according to city directories. By the end of 1911, Myrtle Block and Juanita hosted a musical evening featuring many piano and violin solos.82 Few mentions of her social life were found for the year 1912. She was listed as a resident of the Block's household and a musician.83



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During 1913, Juanita was employed as a musician at the Grand Theater. 84 She was noted as an attendee of a party at the Janowitz⁸⁵ residence in April. 86 The following month, Juanita and Myrtle played a complex rendition of Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2" at a Union dance of the American Federation of Miners. 87 The summer of 1913 is undocumented; Juanita did not appear in social columns during that time although she was listed in the city directory. However, she participated in several club events in the autumn and was a musician in a well-attended "music fest" in November.⁸⁸ Juanita played music for another American Federation of Miners meeting in February of 1914.89 While she was absent in the 1914 Leadville city directory, she attended several important social events, including a "Caledonian Club" picnic in September. 90 Juanita's final appearance in a Leadville newspaper occurred in 1917, when her wedding to Henry Sieber in Buena Vista was announced. She was identified as a "former piano player in Leadville theatres..." It was also reported that Juanita had moved to La Junta to play in "moving picture theaters." Her husband was described as a wealthy cantaloupe farmer in La Junta.91 Henry and Juanita Sieber remained in Otero County for the rest of their lives. Juanita passed away there on May 30, 1962.92

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- ² For more information on Celia Pelta Block and her family, please visit: http://jewishleadville.org/block.html
- ³ Where the Democrat May be Found on the Continent. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat. March 16, 1894). P4.
- ⁴ Year: 1900; Census Place: Leadville, Lake, Colorado; Page: 8; Enumeration District: 0048; FHL microfilm: 1240125.
- ⁵ Denver Public Library. *Colorado Marriages 1858-1939*. Denver, CO. USA. The Colorado Genealogical Society. 2004. P7,662.
- ⁶ For more information on Nettie and the Goldsmith family, please visit: http://jewishleadville.org/goldsmith.html
- ⁷ Married in Leadville. (Denver, CO: The Rocky Mountain News). March 16, 1892. P2.
- ⁸ Married. (Denver, CO: Colorado Democrat). March 16, 1892. P3.
- ⁹ State of California. California Death Index, 1940-1997. Sacramento, CA, USA: State of California Department of Health Services, Center for Health Statistics.
- ¹⁰ For more information on Amelia Freidlander and her family, please visit: http://jewishleadville.org/friedlander.html
- ¹¹ Pleasant Autumn Days. (Leavile, CO: Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle). September 11, 1893. P2.
- ¹² For more information on the Cohns see http://jewishleadville.org/cohn.html
- ¹³ Back From the Big Affair. Leadville, CO: Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle, October 30, 1893. P2.
- ¹⁴ Advertisements. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). January 16, 1894. P5.
- ¹⁵ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Leadville, Lake County, Colorado. Sanborn Map Company, Sept, 1895. Map.
- ¹⁶ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Fifteenth Annual City Directory: Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms etc. in The City of Leadville for 1894.* (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers. 1894). P206.
- ¹⁷ An Evening of Pleasures. (Leadville, CO: Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle). October 19, 1894. P2.
- ¹⁸ Pelta & Co. 120 East Sixth Street. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, October 21, 1894). P2.
- ¹⁹ Mischievous Gamins. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat,). December 16, 1894. P3.
- ²⁰ Mischievous Gamins. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, December 16, 1894). P3.
- ²¹ \$5 for \$10. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, December 23, 1894). P7.
- ²² Martin's Bad Break. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, March 5, 1895). P8.
- ²³ For more information on Henry Angerman and his family, please visit: http://jewishleadville.org/angerman.html
- ²⁴ Society. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, May 5, 1895). P5.
- ²⁵ Pelta & Co. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, July 28, 1895). P2.
- ²⁶ For more information on the Jacob's family, please visit: http://jewishleadville.org/jacobs.html
- ²⁷ For more information on Samuel Jacobs, see http://jewishleadville.org/jacobs.html
- ²⁸ Uncle Tom's Cabin. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, November 3, 1895). P2.
- ²⁹ Pelta & Co. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, January 5, 1896). P10.
- ³⁰ Foresters Social. (Leadville, CO: Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle, March 23, 1896). P3.
- ³¹ Signed by Businessmen. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, June 26, 1896). P1.
- ³² Don L., and Jean Harvey Griswold, History of Leadville and Lake County, Colorado: From Mountain Solitude to Metropolis. Vol.
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- ³⁵ For more information on Sol Guthman, please visit: http://jewishleadville.org/guthman.html
- ³⁶ For more information on Sol Guthman see http://jewishleadville.org/guthman.html
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- ³⁹ World of Society. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, October 2, 1898). P6.
- ⁴⁰ Pelta & Stewart. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, January 1, 1899). P12.
- ⁴¹ Sinews of War for Snowbirds. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, February 11, 1899). P8.
- ⁴² The World of Society. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, July 30, 1899). P6.
- ⁴³ The World of Society. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, September 24, 1899). P6.
- ⁴⁴ Personal Mention. (Leadville, CO: Carbonate Chronicle, October 16, 1899). P8.

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- ⁴⁵ Pelta & Stewart. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, January 1, 1900). P3.
- ⁴⁶ Year: 1900; Census Place: Leadville, Lake, Colorado; Page: 8; Enumeration District: 0048; FHL microfilm: 1240125
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- ⁵⁰ Society. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, May 27, 1900). P12.
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- ⁵² Personal Mention. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, March 12, 1901). P7.
- ⁵³ Suspected of Theft. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, November 10, 1901). P7.
- ⁵⁴ Young Criminals. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, November 11, 1901). P7.
- ⁵⁵ Lectured the Four Boys. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, December 10, 1901). P6.
- ⁵⁶ The Belgian At Leadville. (Fairplay, CO: The Fairplay Flume). February 28, 1902. P1.
- ⁵⁷ Personal Mention. (Leadville CO: Herald Democrat, March 2, 1902). P10.
- ⁵⁸ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Twenty-Third Annual City Directory: Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms etc. in The City of Leadville for 1902*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1902). P268.
- ⁵⁹ Pelta's Big Bargains. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, October 19, 1902). P8.
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- ⁶² Bankrupt Sale. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, February 6, 1903). P6.
- 63 Discharged from Bankruptcy. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, February 26, 1903). P5.
- ⁶⁴ Attention Students! (Colorado Springs, CO: The Tiger; Colorado College). October 29, 1902. P18.
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- ⁶⁶ Society. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). October 3, 1909. P7.
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⁸⁵ For more information on the Janowitz family, please visit: http://www.jewishleadville.org/pelta.html

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⁸⁷ Celebration of Local Musicians. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, May 19, 1913). P2.

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⁸⁹ Society. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, November 11, 1913). P2.

⁹⁰ T'was a Bad Day for The Picnic. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, September 8, 1914). P6.

⁹¹ Pelta-Sieber Wedding. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat, July 2, 1917). P5.

⁹² Find A Grave. [database and images]. "Memorial Page for Henry A. Sieber (1891–1979)". Find A Grave Memorial no. 94136043, citing Fairview Cemetery, La Junta, Otero County, Colorado, USA.



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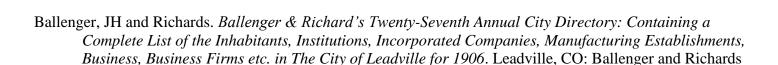
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