



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Behrens

Fred Behrens
Birth: 1865, Germany
Immigrated: New York in 1884
Occupation: Bookkeeper and Pawnbroker
Death: August, 1895, at Havana, Cuba

Fred Behrens was born in Germany in 1865. By 1885 he had immigrated to the United States.¹ It is possible Fred Behrens, or rather Friedrich Behrens, came over to the United States on the ship SS State of Georgia and landed in New York in May of 1884.² Upon arrival in Leadville, Behrens worked as a bookkeeper for his cousin³ Samuel Mayer at 218 Harrison Avenue from 1885 to 1889.⁴ They lived at 221 E 4th St. with Samuel's son, Maurice, and his uncle and aunt, Maurice and Meta Mayer.⁵ In 1889 Fred began to work for the Baer brothers as a bookkeeper.⁶ During 1889 this job was at 501 Harrison Avenue, Room 17, after 1891 he relocated to Room 22.⁷ It is unclear whether he still lived with the Mayers during his time with the Baer brothers. Besides his busy work life, Behrens was involved in Leadville in a variety of ways.

Behrens was a frequent attendee of various dances and social events in Leadville and even Aspen. He often attended events thrown by the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent society, such as their Strawberry Festival.⁸ He also attended other events affiliated with Congregation Israel, including the annual Simchas Torah Ball.⁹ In January of 1889 Fred visited Aspen and attended the "Hard Times" Ball.¹⁰ The "Hard Times" Ball was an event where people dressed up in costumes representing the various recessions the United States had been through, such as the Panic of 1837, the Panic of 1857 and the Panic of 1873, just to name a few. After attending the Hard Times Ball, Behrens also took the time to visit his friend Burnim Silver, a prior inhabitant of Leadville, who had moved to Aspen.¹¹ Behrens was accompanied by several other

Leadville Jews in this visit and it illustrates the community which they shared during this period. In April of 1893 Fred Behrens was a participant in another more dangerous kind of excitement. Fred was one of the first responders to the fire which claimed Mr. Ben Davies life.¹² Mr. Ben Davies was a prominent Jewish jeweler, who was notorious for seducing his neighbor's wife. Amid all of these events Fred Behrens continued to work as a bookkeeper in Leadville until shortly after 1893.

Behrens was also politically active and was elected secretary for the Republican Party county convention in October of 1893.¹³ At the convention the Republicans condemned the Populist Administration in Denver for being inept and bringing religion into politics. During this time some members of the Populist Party were known for espousing anti-Semitic views. 1893 was a time of great uncertainty for the silver industry in Colorado and elsewhere, due to the debate between bimetallism and the gold standard. Obviously many in Leadville supported the continued use of bimetallism and the Republican Party convention which Fred attended reflected this support. The convention "Resolved, that we fully appreciate and endorse the action of those United States senators known as the silver senators..."¹⁴ The silver senators were those who fought for bimetallism in Washington. Leadville's fortunes would be tied to the fate of silver.

Unfortunately, things would not turn out well for Behrens and Leadville. The United States eventually switched to a gold standard, and business in Leadville was severely hurt. This economic downturn in Leadville may have been what prompted Fred Behrens to leave, looking for work elsewhere. Behrens found employment with his brother in Havana, Cuba. However, after only two years in Cuba, Behrens contracted



yellow fever and passed away in August 1895.
He was just thirty years old.¹⁵

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 1885 Census.

² "19th Century Germanic Immigrants to USA." Germanic Immigration Records : 1880. Accessed June 8, 2016.

<http://www.germanimmigrants1880s.com/>.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. 1885 Census.

⁴ 1885 Leadville City Directory

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. 1885 Census.

⁶ 1889 Leadville City Directory

⁷ 1891 Leadville City Directory

⁸ "Hebrew Ladies' Ball." *Leadville Evening Chronicle*, June 5, 1891. Accessed June 8, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

⁹ "Simchas Torah." *Leadville Evening*, October 19, 1892. Accessed June 8, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

¹⁰ "Holiday Hard Times Ball." *Aspen Evening Chronicle*, January 3, 1889. Accessed June 8, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

¹¹ "Silver Surprised." *Aspen Evening Chronicle*, January 22, 1889. Accessed June 8, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

¹² "Where Was Ben Davies?" *Herald Democrat*, April 11, 1893. Accessed June 8, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

¹³ "Republicans Convene." *Herald Democrat*, October 13, 1893. Accessed June 8, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Death of Fred Behrens." *Herald Democrat*, August 17, 1895. Accessed June 8, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>.