



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Block

Levi "Lee" Block

Born: September 14, 1862, Perryville, Missouri

Died: April 4, 1938, Los Angeles

Celia (Pelta) Block

Born: January 31, 1871, Elmira, New York

Died: March 22, 1964, Los Angeles

Myrtle L. (Block) Sellner

Born: July 21, 1888, Buena Vista, Colorado

Died: April 18, 1980, Los Angeles

Darwin L. Block

Born: March 24, 1892, Buena Vista, Colorado

Died: March 2, 1976, Los Angeles

Levi Block was a prosperous dry goods merchant in Colorado from the mid-1880s into the twentieth century. Levi was born on September 14, 1862 in Perryville, Missouri to Jewish-German immigrant Hyman Block¹ and his wife Carolina.² Thirty-two years Carolina's senior, Hyman passed away before Levi's seventh birthday³ and his widowed mother was left to care for the couple's six children alone.⁴ At some point during the 1880s, Levi made his way to Buena Vista, Colorado, where he married Celia Pelta on August 31, 1897.⁵

Celia, the daughter of Prussian immigrants,⁶ was born January 31, 1871 in Elmira, New York.⁷ She moved to Buena Vista, Colorado with her family⁸ sometime before the end of 1884.⁹ The Peltas, a successful merchant family, had branches in Leadville, Buena Vista, and Colorado Springs. The union of Levi and Celia produced two children in Buena Vista: Myrtle, born on July 21, 1888; and Darwin, born on March 24, 1892.¹⁰ During 1898, the Blocks departed Buena Vista for new opportunities in Leadville. There, Levi opened the Block Dry Goods Company at 610 Harrison Avenue, where the family also resided. Celia's brother, Henry Pelta,¹¹ also relocated his family and business to Leadville at this time.¹²

From 1899¹³ to 1902,¹⁴ the Block family lived at 218 East 9th Street. During 1903, they moved to 220 East 9th Street,¹⁵ where they remained until 1907.¹⁶ The family briefly occupied 100 West 9th Street¹⁷ and 127 W. 4th Street in 1908.¹⁸ The next year, the family removed to 224 East 9th Street and Miss Myrtle L. Block had her first solo documented listing in the city directory.¹⁹ The following year, Myrtle partnered with her father in M.L. Dry Goods located at 423 Harrison Avenue.²⁰

The Block family featured prominently in Leadville's social strata. Levi periodically appears in local newspapers contributing funds to various events and charities. A 1900 article in May lists Levi as an ardent supporter of the city's planned Fourth of July festivities:²¹

In June of 1900, Levi donated some cloth that would be made into clothing for children.²² Celia, who also had her own endeavors, is listed as hosting the weekly Whist Club at her home.²³ Myrtle was the most ubiquitous member of her family in Leadville society. A performer at various musical events, she was an experienced pianist.²⁴ In 1909, Myrtle played the organ for Yom Kippur services at Temple Israel.²⁵ During 1910, she was the president of the J. S. C. society and held a meeting in her home.²⁶ On January 11, 1913, Myrtle and her cousin, Juanita Pelta, co-hosted a musical and luncheon for her music class.²⁷

It is unclear when Myrtle left Leadville for Los Angeles, where she married Sydney Sellner on December 1, 1913.²⁸ During 1914, Levi and Celia pulled up stakes and journeyed to another mining town, Prescott, Arizona, where they operated a "Mine Clothing Store."²⁹ Darwin remained in Leadville for at least another year, working as a clerk for the Muller Mercantile Company.³⁰ He likely stayed in Leadville until he enlisted in the United States Army during 1917. He served in the First World War and was honorably discharged on August 4, 1919.³¹



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By 1930, the entire family had reunited and dwelled in the same Los Angeles home. The date of Sydney Sellner's death is uncertain, but he is not listed in the home with Myrtle in the *1930 United States Census*.³² Curiously, the family lived together under one roof for the rest of their lives.³³ Levi would die from unknown causes in Los Angeles on April 4, 1938.³⁴ Celia, who never remarried, joined him on March 22, 1964.³⁵

Darwin, a longtime bachelor, was nearly sixty years old when he married Betty Sternschein on February 20, 1953.³⁶ He passed away in Los Angeles on March 2, 1976.³⁷ Myrtle never remarried or had children. The last surviving member of the Leadville Block family, she died in Los Angeles on April 18, 1980.³⁸



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- ¹ Ancestry.com. *U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current* [Database On-Line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.
- ² Year: 1910; Census Place: *Leadville Ward 3, Lake, Colorado*; Roll: *T624_121*; Page: *7b*; Enumeration District: *0072*; FHL microfilm: *1374134*
- ³ 1860 U.S. census, population schedule. NARA microfilm publication M653, 1,438 rolls. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.
- ⁴ Year: 1870; Census Place: *Perryville, Perry, Missouri*; Roll: *M593_796*; Page: *345A*
- ⁵ Denver Public Library. *Colorado Marriages 1858-1939*. Denver, CO. USA. The Colorado Genealogical Society. 2004.
- ⁶ Year: 1880; Census Place: *Elmira, Chemung, New York*; Roll: *817*; Page: *278D*; Enumeration District: *070*
- ⁷ Place: *Los Angeles*; Date: *22 Mar 1964*
- ⁸ Year: 1880; Census Place: *Elmira, Chemung, New York*; Roll: *817*; Page: *278D*; Enumeration District: *070*
- ⁹ *A Damaging Fraud*. (Leadville, CO: Carbonate Chronicle). December 13, 1884. P1.
- ¹⁰ Place: *Los Angeles*; Date: *2 Mar 1976*; Social Security: *559703593*
- ¹¹ For more information on Henry Pelta and his family, <http://jewishleadville.org/pelta.html>.
- ¹² JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Nineteenth 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 1898*. (Leadville, CO: Corbet and Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1898). Pp. 77 & 224.
- ¹³ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Twentieth 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 1899*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1899). P81.
- ¹⁴ 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). P83.
- ¹⁵ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Twenty-Fourth 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 1903*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1903). P79.
- ¹⁶ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Twenty-Seventh 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 1906*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers. 1906). P80.
- ¹⁷ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Twenty-Eighth 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 1907*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1907). P81.
- ¹⁸ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Twenty-Ninth 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 1908*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1908). P77.
- ¹⁹ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Thirtieth 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 1909*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1909). P76.
- ²⁰ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Thirty-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 1912*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1912). P73.
- ²¹ *Celebrate the Day*. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). May 7, 1900. P6.
- ²² *Things for the Children*. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). June 21, 1900. P6.
- ²³ *Society*. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). March 2, 1902. P10.
- ²⁴ *Around the City*. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). September 28, 1909. P5.
- ²⁵ *Jewish Faithful Observe Holiday*. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). September 25, 1909. P4.
- ²⁶ *Society*. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). March 13, 1910. P8.
- ²⁷ *Society*. (Leadville, CO: Herald Democrat). January 12, 1913. P6.
- ²⁸ *Marriage Licenses*. (Los Angeles, CA: The Los Angeles Times). December 2, 1913. P12.
- ²⁹ Year: 1920; Census Place: *Prescott, Yavapai, Arizona*; Roll: *T625_52*; Page: *15B*; Enumeration District: *119*
- ³⁰ JH Ballenger and Richards. *Ballenger & Richard's Thirty-Fifth 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 1914*. (Leadville, CO: Ballenger and Richards Publishers.1914). P77.



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³¹ Ancestry.com. *U.S., Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

³² Year: 1930; Census Place: *Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California*; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 0460; FHL microfilm: 2339884

³³ *Population Schedules for the 1950 Census, 1950 - 1950*. NAID: [43290879](#). Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1790 - 2007, Record Group 29. National Archives at Washington, DC., Washington, DC.

³⁴ *California, U.S., Death Index, 1905-1939* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013.

³⁵ Place: *Los Angeles*; Date: 22 Mar 1964.

³⁶ Ancestry.com. *California, U.S., Marriage Index, 1949-1959* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013.

³⁷ Place: *Los Angeles*; Date: 2 Mar 1976; Social Security: 559703593.

³⁸ Place: *Los Angeles*; Date: 18 Apr 1980; Social Security: 549668697.



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