



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Holcomb

Jacob V. Holcomb
Born: 1835, Illinois
Died: 1925, Denver, Colorado

Jacob V. Holcomb came to Leadville in 1877 from Illinois where he had been a lumber merchant.¹ Shortly afterwards he formed a partnership in a small Carbonate Camp mine with David May that yielded literally nothing in terms of economic benefit. By September of 1877 the two were disenchanted with their fruitless mining initiative and May suggested they move into more familiar territory in the retail field where they had both acquired a degree of expertise.² They formed a new partnership with T.B. Dean and began to sell Levi's duck clothing and long red underwear³ from a tent structure known as Holcomb, May & Dean located at 25 Harrison Avenue where they also resided.⁴ In 1878, the firm moved to 108 Harrison Avenue,⁵ however in 1879 the storefront is listed back at the 25 Harrison Avenue location.⁶

Holcomb, May & Dean was a successful enterprise, but Holcomb and Dean did not share David May's vision for Leadville's continued prosperity in anticipation for the firm's future.⁷ In 1880 the partnership was disbanded. Jake Holcomb returned to mining very briefly⁸ before joining his former partner's new enterprise of May & Shoenberg in the capacity of company bookkeeper,⁹ a position he would hold within the David May empire well into the 1920s.¹⁰

In 1882, Jake Holcomb was listed in the city directory as having been in the employ of Fred Butler's Butler & Co. clothing firm.¹¹ May & Shoenberg did not operate their store for a period between November 1881 and December 1882, during which time both May and Holcomb worked for the Frankle & Butler venture that operated three Leadville clothing stores,¹² one of which, Butler & Co., was located in the former May & Shoenberg retail space at 318 Harrison Avenue.¹³ There is no explanation as to why May & Shoenberg ceased

operations during this period, however there is some evidence that supports that this was simply a temporary name change rather than a shift in ownership.¹⁴ The May & Shoenberg venture reopened with two storefronts located at 318 and 405 Harrison Avenue¹⁵ in December of 1882. In 1883, May & Shoenberg¹⁶ had returned to normal operations with Jake Holcomb back at his familiar bookkeeping post while residing at 110 Harrison Avenue.¹⁷

In 1884, David May was appointed to the office of County Treasurer and, once again looking out for his old confidant, May employed Jake Holcomb as his Deputy Treasurer.¹⁸ The two would remain in these positions until 1886, while Jake fluctuated his residences between the Butler storefronts at 108 and 110 Harrison Avenue.¹⁹

After serving the county, Jake returned to his bookkeeping position and residence at May & Shoenberg, then located at 501 Harrison Avenue,²⁰ where he remained until 1889.²¹ In 1890, Jake relocated to Denver²² to work for the new May Shoe & Clothing Company,²³ May's first endeavor in that city. Jake Holcomb remained there for the duration of his life²⁴ and married Millie Cole Nye on July 1, 1903.²⁵



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Holcomb

Jake Holcomb's friendship with David May was deep and stood the tests of time. In 1952, a May Company corporate biographer, Forbes Parkhill, wrote of an exchange between May and his subcontracted efficiency expert on the subject of his longtime bookkeeper's work performance in 1920 during Jake Holcomb's declining years:

"He's (Holcomb) nearly ninety," the expert pointed out. "About all he can do is draw his weekly paycheck."

"Dave May tilted back in his swivel chair, brown eyes staring at the ceiling as his thoughts raced back over the years. He was remembering Jake Holcomb, his mining partner, shoveling dirt into the bucket at the

foot of the shaft; remembering Jake, his first partner in the muslin-covered Leadville store; remembering him, loyally staying with Dave May through good times and bad, through fires and bank panics and business depressions."

"Don't you think," he (May) asked gently, the faraway look still in his eyes, "that for a man of nearly ninety drawing a paycheck is in itself quite an accomplishment?"

"Holcomb continued to draw his paycheck, even after failing eyesight led to his retirement several years before his death in 1925."²⁶



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Holcomb

¹ "United States Census, 1920," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MX22-DW8> : accessed 6 June 2018), Jacob V Holcomb, Denver, Denver, Colorado, United States; citing ED 230, sheet 13A, line 48, family 301, NARA microfilm publication T625 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992), roll 161; FHL microfilm 1,820,161.

² Parkhill, Forbes. 1952. *The May Story*. Denver, CO: Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

³ Allen DuPont Breck,. *The Centennial History Of The Jews Of Colorado, 1859-1959*. Denver, CO: Hirschfield Press, 1961. P126.

⁴ "For Sale". Leadville, CO; USA. Leadville Daily Evening Chronicle. January 30, 1879. P4.

⁵ Breck, Denver, CO: *Hirschfield Press*, 1961. P126.

⁶ Clark, WM, Root WA and Anderson, HC. "Clark, Root and Co's First Annual City Directory of Leadville and Business Directory of Carbonateville, Kokomo and Malta for 1879". *Daily Times Steam Printing House And Book Manufactory*; Denver, CO: USA. 1879. P144.

⁷ Parkhill. *The May Story*". Denver, CO. 1952. P11.

⁸ TB Corbett, WC Hoyer and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, Hoyer and Co's First 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 1880". *Democrat Printing Company*; Leadville, CO: USA. 1880. P192.

⁹ TB Corbett and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, and Ballenger's Second 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 1881". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Leadville, CO; USA. 1881. P161.

¹⁰ Parkhill. "The May Story". Denver. 1952. P7. ``

¹¹ TB Corbett and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, and Ballenger's Tenth Annual City Directory: Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms etc. in The City Of Denver for 1882". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Denver, CO; USA. 1882.

¹² Don L Griswold, and Jean Harvey Griswold. *History of Leadville And Lake County, Colorado: From Mountain Solitude To Metropolis*. Vol. 1. Denver, CO: Colorado Historical Society, 1996. P967.

¹³ TB Corbett and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, and Ballenger's Tenth Annual City Directory: Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms etc. in The City Of Denver for 1882". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Denver, CO; USA. 1882. P293.

¹⁴ "The Summing Up". Leadville, Co; USA. *Carbonate Chronicle*. March 24, 1883. P2.

¹⁵ Corbett and Ballenger. Leadville, CO; USA. 1882. P309.

¹⁶ TB Corbett and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, and Ballenger's 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 1883". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Leadville, CO; USA. 1883. P293.

¹⁷ TB Corbett and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, and Ballenger's 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 1883". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Leadville, CO; USA. 1883. P152.

¹⁸ TB Corbett and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, and Ballenger's 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 1884". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Leadville, CO; USA. 1884. P139.

¹⁹ TB Corbett and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, and Ballenger's Sixth 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 1885". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Leadville, CO; USA. 1885. P139.

²⁰ TB Corbett and JH Ballenger. "Corbet, and Ballenger's 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 1886". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Leadville, CO; USA. 1886. P144.



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Holcomb

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- ²¹ JH Ballenger and Richards. "Ballenger & Richard's Tenth 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 1889". *Corbet and Ballenger and Richards Publishers*. Leadville, CO; USA. 1889. P141.
- ²² JH Ballenger and Richards. "Ballenger & Richard's Eleventh Annual City Directory: Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms etc. in The City of Denver for 1890". 2011. *Brigham Young University Internet Archive*. Provo, UT; USA. P595.
- ²³ Corbett, TB and Ballenger, JH. "Corbet, and Ballenger's Fifty-First Annual City Directory: Containing a Complete List of the Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms etc. in The City of Denver for 1923". *Corbet and Ballenger Publishers*. Denver, CO; USA. 1923. P1205.
- ²⁴ "Find A Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVKS-2SSS> : 13 December 2015), J M Holcomb, ; Burial, Denver, Denver, Colorado, United States of America, Fairmount Cemetery; citing record ID 33130359, *Find a Grave*, <http://www.findagrave.com>.
- ²⁵ "Colorado Statewide Marriage Index, 1853-2006," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KNQH-4C6> : 16 February 2018), Jacob V Holcomb and Millie Cole Nye, 01 Jul 1903, Denver, Denver, Colorado, United States; citing no. 31672, State Archives, Denver; FHL microfilm 1,690,089.
- ²⁶ Parkhill. "The May Story". Denver, CO. 1952. P26.



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- ¹ Parkhill. "The May Story". Denver, CO. 1952. P26.
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Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Holcomb

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Temple Israel FOUNDATION

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