



# Temple Israel FOUNDATION

## *Biographical Information Sheet*

**Kahn**

### **The Kahns of Leadville: Three Generations of Connections**

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#### **Leadville: the first generation**

The Kahn line of which there are any documents or memories can be traced only as far back as Moses and Susie Kahn all born in southern Germany, from Karlsruhe and Mannheim. We believe the men were bargemen on the Rhine. Moses came to America in the 1860s and settled in Morrison, Illinois along with his four sons: Maximillian (Marx), Isaac, Samuel and Aaron.

Two of the sons, Marx and Isaac, married sisters, Fannie and Hermina (Mina) Guthmann, who they most likely knew from their hometown or at least a nearby town in Germany. Family memories seem to support the notion that the sisters came together from Germany to Chicago to marry the Kahn brothers. Then both couples moved to Morrison Illinois and began their families.

It is unclear whether Susie emigrated to the U.S.; it is clear that neither she nor Moses traveled west with their grown sons to Leadville. Marx and Isaac set out for the west in the late 1870s each taking with them their eldest sons. The foursome arrived in Leadville and started a grocery business (perhaps 1878 or 1879). Later the two brothers would each own and operate their own, separate groceries.

Samuel Kahn, the third of the four sons of Moses and Susie, went west but only as far as across the Mississippi River from Morrison, Illinois to Iowa. It was in Maquoketa, Iowa that Samuel Kahn became the first Jewish mayor west of the Mississippi (elected in 1881). Samuel took his family to Leadville several times but did not set up shop with his brothers though Samuel's grandson, Robert Kahn, believes they continued business connections, supporting each other's independent ventures.

The history of the fourth son, Aaron, is unknown to us. We believe he had no heirs.

#### **Leadville: the Second Generation**

Marx and Fannie Kahn had six children -- three boys and three girls: Carrie, Solomon, Matilde (Tillie), Jacob, Edwin and May, who grew up living above the family business on 10th Street.

Isaac and Mina Kahn and their four sons (Lee, Jacob, Maurice and Herman) had a grocery store at 506 E. 6th in Leadville and also lived above their store. According to one source, on occasion Aaron Kahn (Marx and Fannie's youngest son) lived with his cousins above their Leadville grocery.

Marx and Isaac Kahn have been called the patriarchs of the Jewish Community of Leadville by historian Patricia Tritz. Both couples (Marx and Fannie, Isaac and Mina) were active in all aspects of Jewish cultural and religious life, from the establishment of the local chapter of B'nai Brith and the foundation of Temple Israel (at 4th & Pine Streets) to the many social events that included Jews and the larger Leadville community.

The Kahn brothers didn't become wealthy as did the legendary Jewish successes Guggenheim, May, Newhouse, Boettcher but did well enough with their green grocery businesses to send three sons to the best medical schools in the east and educate all the siblings.

The Kahn brothers and their families observed their religion and kept their culture alive, subscribed to and built two temples, socialized extensively, organized concerts and theatrical productions and reading circles. The family loved poetry and music and were highly sentimental. In letters that remain, they address each other as 'my dearest darling sweetums' like many American Romantics, they mixed old world German Idealism with new world Emersonianism.



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Marx Kahn also indulged in Leadville's less high-minded entertainments, drinking and gambling. Marx was jolly, round, with big mutton chops and a full beard. In photos he looked like Santa Claus in a real sleigh. He also had a gambling streak and often sunk his grocer's profits into grubstakes, and on occasion, went out and mined a claim himself. In fact, as a result of Marx's investments in Leadville mining efforts, today -- three generations later-- the Kahn family heirs still hold interests in three mine shafts on the mountain sides above Leadville.

It's remembered that scarcely a night passed that Marx didn't frequent one of the choicer saloons for drinks and a card game.

Alas, one evening he went out, leaving the younger children home with their mother, Fannie. When she heard noise downstairs in the store, she carried a candle to investigate. Before she could call out, the robber hit her over the head. Fannie's eldest son Solomon was already practicing medicine in Leadville with his cousin, Isaac's son Maurice, yet they couldn't save Fannie who died from head injuries. Truth or fiction, it is part of family lore that Fannie's murderer was a member of Jesse James' gang.

Another purported James-gang story involved Marx and his youngest son Edwin who were walking down Harrison Street when a stranger approached and asked for the time. Marx pulled out his revolver and not his watch. Time for you to get going, he said. Afterward, Edwin asked the reason for pulling a gun and Marx replied, That was one of Jesse James' gang.

Marx and Fannie's son Solomon Kahn, and Isaac and Hermina's two sons, Maurice and Lee, were physicians who started their practices in Leadville and later became famous outside their community. Solomon and Maurice practiced from an office at 303 Harrison. Solomon was one of the founders of Leadville's St. Luke's Hospital and a Vice President of the Colorado State Medical Society.

When Leadville's fortunes were waning, Solomon moved his family to Utah and became Chief of Staff at Salt Lake City General Hospital. When he was still a family physician in Leadville, he came in second in an ice-skating race at the famed Ice Palace, the winter of 1895-96. Reports say the race was close but the local dentist won by a length.

Dr. Sol made one return visit to Leadville in the late 1930's with his brother Edwin and Edwin's children. Walking down Harrison Street Dr. Sol was greeted by Leadville residents who still remembered him fondly.

The eldest child of Marx and Fannie, Carrie, would marry Samuel Mayer and become a very young widow raising two children (Evelyn and Walter) in Leadville and later in Salt Lake City. Evelyn Mayer would become a professor of art at both the University of Utah and San Francisco City Teachers College. Ms. Mayer was referred to as the fairy godmother of Salt Lake's art society and was an early supporter and expert in the growing European Modern Art movement with a personal collection worthy of note.

Edwin Kahn, after growing up in Leadville, later settled in Salt Lake City with his wife Marion Leopold Kahn, a Chicago native and school teacher. Interestingly, Marion Leopold Kahn introduced her brother-in-law, Jacob Kahn, to her friend Harriet Simmons and they wed. Harriet Simmons Kahn had been a concert pianist prior to her marriage and move to Salt Lake City.

As a young man Jacob Kahn worked for the Baer Brothers (Adolph and Isaac) in their liquor store at 503 W. Harrison. With his brother Edwin, Jake followed Solomon to Salt Lake City where both Jake and Edwin became successful businessmen. Jacob Kahn was the regional manager for the General Electric Company and Edwin was an insurance salesman.



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Tillie never married the family had forbidden her to marry the Leadville Irishman she loved but became a respected businesswoman in San Francisco. Tillie would go on to become an insurance agent by day and a poet by night she composed romantic messages for Hallmark Cards.

In addition to Hermina and Isaac's sons Maurice and Lee entering into medical professions, son Herman became a dentist. In time Maurice left his Leadville practice with his cousin Solomon and traveled further west to Los Angeles, where he was a founder of Cedars of Lebanon Hospital and became Chief of Staff and Surgery in 1913. His patients included the rich, famous and wild, including Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle.

Dr. Lee Kahn became a renowned eye specialist. He practiced in Leadville, was an officer in state and local medical societies and author of articles on tuberculosis and eye disease. Lee married Ruth Ward, a writer. The couple had one son, Milo, who died in childhood. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Lee died, at age 31. Some said he died of grief (the records indicate pneumonia). The father and son have tombstones side by side in the Jewish section of Leadville's cemetery. With Dr. Lee's death, his brother Maurice returned to Leadville for a time to take over at 501 Harrison (and later 815 Harrison) however he returned to Los Angeles and resumed his more colorful and prosperous practice there.

### **Leadville: the Third Generation**

Of course, when the mines were panned out, the Kahns of Leadville, like many others, came down from their mountain side homes and headed to Salt Lake City, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Yet the connection to Leadville continues with small family reunions and visits by one family member or another.

Today, the third generation of Kahn family members with roots going back to Marx Kahn's descendants can be found in New York City, a suburb of Detroit,

Chicago, Los Angeles and northern California. Isaac Kahn's descendants are in Philadelphia and Colorado.

### **Leadville's Fatal Altitude: Tragically Brief Love**

The courtship and marriage of May Kahn to Theodore D. Baer, nephew and bookkeeper-treasurer for his uncles, Adolph and Isaac Baer, who owned the successful Baer Brothers liquor business is a story that deserves retelling.

Theodore had been in banking in Germany and England, a handsome, cultivated young man of sophisticated taste who spoke four languages. It is difficult to imagine a young man of accomplishment, living in London and loving the theater, moving to Leadville a western frontier town with few refinements and many rough characters. However, when his uncles commanded his bookkeeping talents be employed on their behalf, he obediently crossed the ocean and most of the United States to join the Baer Brothers liquor enterprise.

Imagine what Leadville must have seemed like in 1895 it must have when Theodore Baer, just arrived by wagon and looked out his window on Harrison Street and East 3rd Streets, next to the Tabor Opera house.

There was some culture in Leadville, but also nine months of snow and mud and weary, often drunken miners trudging to the saloons below hardly the atmosphere he'd been accustomed to. Moreover, Theodore had had rheumatic fever as a child and his heart was never strong. The altitude would kill him it is remembered that he breathed with difficulty and the cold of the liquor wholesaler's back office did him no good but he had fallen in love with tall, broad-shouldered, grey eyed May Kahn. He was to remain and marry into the Kahn family.

An older sister Mathilde had already taken a fancy to Theodore, but once he saw May, then only 18, Tillie, a poet and dreamer, lost her chances. Theodore



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courted May for seven years until she finished her education -- graduating from Wells College, Aurora New York. They danced together in the great hall of the Ice Palace in 1896. She was nearly his height and loved to waltz. They married in an evening ceremony at Temple Israel on January 27, 1903.

May Kahn Baer left one note in her wedding book that seemed ominous. As she waited for her father to take her to the Temple, to her surprise and delight, My sweetheart came to see me in my wedding gown before the formal meeting. I felt a chill when I read these words, but May had no forebodings. We were absolutely happy, she wrote in her wedding book with gold initials.

The news reporter for the Herald gushed, The Kahn-Baer nuptials were pronounced by all as one of the prettiest and swellest weddings in years. Though it was the coldest winter month, Temple Israel was covered in white and pink southern smilax, white roses, palms and ferns, brought in refrigerated cars to Leadville. After the vows were pronounced, the groom kissed the bride so vigorously, with such a smack that it was heard in the gallery. May concluded her thoughts in her book: A perfect union of heart and soul. Her slighted sister Tilly (maid of honor) wrote a poem for the occasion that ended, two hearts beat as one.

All one needs to do is hold the small Bible wrapped in white taffeta that May carried down the aisle of Temple Israel in 1903 to feel their love come to life if only, tragically, for a few short years. .

May and Theodore honeymooned in La Jolla, California, where sea level altitude improved the bridegrooms health. Unfortunately, family responsibility demanded his return. Not long after resuming his post as secretary-treasurer of Baer Brothers, Theodore suffered the first signs of congestive heart failure. His physician brother-in-law insisted he leave Leadville but the Baer uncles prevailed. May bore her first child, Theodore Frederick 1904, and her second child, Louise, two years later.

Theodore had a final heart attack when his son was four and his daughter was two. In the wedding book where May had recorded her greatest joy, she then wrote, My sweetheart and I are separated for life. I am crushed and broken-hearted and you my two cherubs, have lost the dearest father in the world. Your heritage, my treasure children, is the remembrance of his noble character. He was high-minded, true-hearted, innately refined, well and broadly educated and ever seeking to improve himself.

The widow's in-laws did not support her or take an interest in her children, according to Kahn family memories. Her Kahn brothers became her protectors, moving her to Salt Lake City where brothers Edwin and Jacob were in business and Solomon already had established his medical practice.

May herself became an educator. She never remarried, was dignified, stoic, admirable and to her granddaughter, slightly forbidding. Hers was the generation ever seeking to improve themselves and their children. She died in her early nineties on the same day of the month she had been married.

Neither Theodore F. Baer, nor his sister Louise Baer, ever visited Leadville. They both said that their mother had suffered too much there to make it a place they would return to. They always felt the lack of a father in their lives. Louise remembered visiting Baer family grandmother and great aunt in San Francisco where the two Baer women lived many years after leaving Leadville.

Louise remembered feeling embarrassed that her mother, a successful professional woman, still acted obsequiously toward her former mother and sister in law, almost bowing as she left the hotel room. Such are the memories of sorrow that are passed down.