



# Temple Israel FOUNDATION

## *Biographical Information*

**Robert M. Murdoch**

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Robert "Bob" M. Murdoch, Builder & Contractor

Following the opportunities that come with rapid expansion, Robert Murdoch<sup>1</sup> arrived in Leadville in 1878 from Washington, D.C. where he had been an experienced building contractor.<sup>2</sup> Upon his arrival, he established the contracting firm of *Murdoch & Search*.<sup>3</sup> The partnership with Henry Search was short-lived and likely disbanded sometime in 1881. Murdoch built many homes for some of the wealthier Temple Israel congregants,<sup>4</sup> as well as the Temple Israel Synagogue in 1884 which still stands today and serves within the Leadville Community as a museum and research institution. In addition, Murdoch is responsible for many commercial buildings which now stand as historic structures throughout Leadville. Both Bob, as he was commonly known, and Henry lived onsite in their shop at 311 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.<sup>5</sup> Murdoch dabbled in mining,<sup>6</sup> was an avid sportsman,<sup>7</sup> and with relative frequency participated in the various social activities about town. Not necessarily a model citizen, Bob was not above spending time with the local working ladies<sup>8</sup> nor was he free from controversies whether at work or play.<sup>9</sup>

In 1881, Murdoch operated a contracting enterprise under his own name and continued to reside in his shop at 311 W 3rd Street,<sup>10</sup> but by 1883, Bob had opened a new shop at the rear of 114 East 5<sup>th</sup> Street and maintained a separate residence in the Keystone Block, a boarding house with indoor bathrooms.<sup>11</sup>

In 1884, Bob again changed residences, this time to the Union Block located at 425 Harrison Avenue.<sup>12</sup> He partnered in several projects with Architect George King<sup>13</sup> which included a major hotel that operated under several ownership groups as *The Tabor Grand Hotel* and *The Hotel Kitchen* before it was permanently renamed *The Hotel Vendome* in 1894.<sup>14</sup>

Construction of the hotel project was wrought with difficulties that included both construction and financial issues causing additional expense and time. Problems with construction stemmed from architect George King's refusal to accept material shipments of specified finishing lumber from Denver, a shortfall of cash flow by the original investors, elevator materials that were custom manufactured in Chicago, and a number of other projects Murdoch had under contract complicating the hotel's scheduled completion date in September of 1884. Those additional projects included the Temple Israel Synagogue. Murdoch was forced to file suit against his client, the Leadville Hotel Company, for failing to make good on scheduled payments. Bob claimed that he had only received \$15,486.84 against his contractual \$33,058.60 total.<sup>15</sup> This issue was contested from March until the end of that year.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, stock in the Leadville Hotel Company was sold at the urging of the court, which raised the additional \$20,000.00 needed to complete the construction. Stockholders included prominent Jewish Leadville businessmen such as Jacob Schloss, Adolph Hirsch and Sam Mayer. Much of the cash infusion came from Denver and the largest contribution was \$7,500.00 by Horace Tabor.<sup>17</sup>

The other major construction project for King and Murdoch in 1884 was the construction of the Temple Israel Synagogue. Early in 1884, a temple association was formed and the desire to build a temple building established.<sup>18</sup> "It is proposed to erect a synagogue of brick and stone, at a cost of \$10,000, a suitable site for which will be selected immediately, and work will be begun as soon as weather will permit."<sup>19</sup> Soon the project took shape and official plans for construction were in place,



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“The board of officers of the Jewish congregation met yesterday at noon for the purpose of letting the contract for building the new temple. A number of bids were presented and opened, the lowest being that of Mr. Robert Murdoch. The architect will be Mr. George E. King.”<sup>20</sup> “Its dimensions will be 25x70 feet. The audience room will be 24 feet high. The windows will be of stained glass... There will be a gallery for the choir. The seating capacity of the room will accommodate 250 people. In the rear of the building there will be a platform and pulpit and a handsome ark where the ten commandments will be stored. ... There will be a vestibule of seven feet in front which will be nicely carpeted, as will be the entire building throughout.”<sup>21</sup>

The construction started in August and continued into September. The dedication of the synagogue was in the evening on Friday, September 19, 1884, or Rosh Hashanah, the Hebrew New Year celebration of 5645.<sup>22</sup> An article in the Carbonate Chronicle from September 27 related what happened at the board meeting for Temple Israel. Included in the article was a long, detailed list of the income and expenses by the organization. Listed several times in the expenses list are payments to both Murdoch and King.<sup>23</sup>

The Hotel Vendome project extended far beyond the contracted completion of September 1884 and did not officially open until July 17, 1886. This may have contributed to the demise of Murdoch’s contracting business, which slowed considerably in 1886. Murdock had interests in mining and insurance at this time showing his vocations diversified after his troublesome hotel contract.

His time in Leadville was relatively brief, but Murdock certainly contributed to its skyline. Among the list of many Leadville projects Murdock completed includes the Temple Israel Synagogue, along with residential and commercial structures for Leadville’s Jewish community:<sup>24</sup>

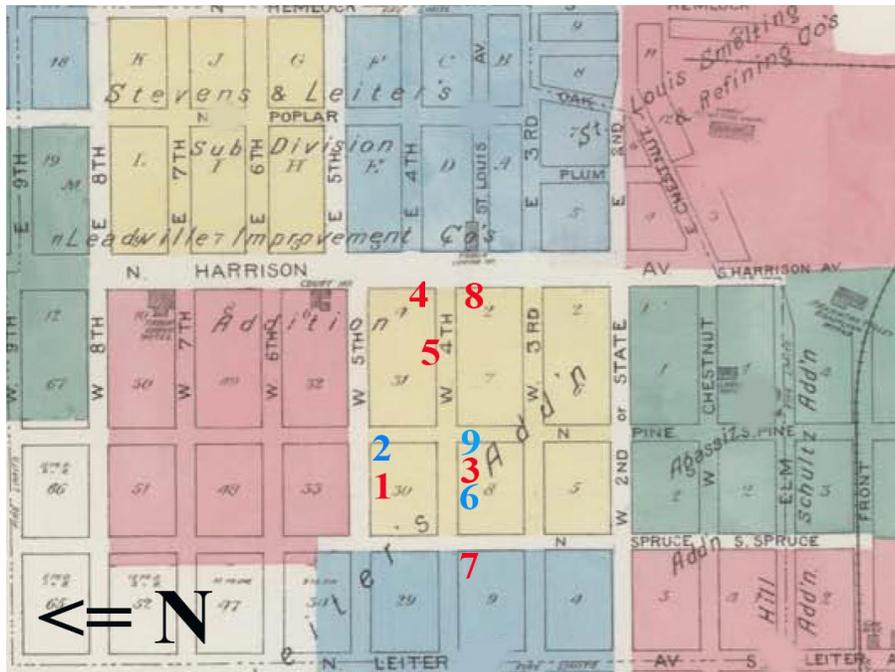
Though information is limited, Murdock probably left Leadville in 1888 and evidence shows that he lost a leg in a locomotive accident during 1895 near Ogden, Utah, while employed as a brakeman for the Union Pacific Railroad.<sup>25</sup>



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*Colored numbers indicating locations where Murdoch built structures for his Jewish clientele between 1880 and 1885. Courtesy of the Lake County Public Library.<sup>26</sup>*

1. David May residence, 203 W 5th Street, 1880<sup>27</sup>
2. M. Shoenberg residence, 201 W 5th Street, 1880
3. J. Shoenberg residence, 203 W 4th Street, 1880
4. Monheimer store building, 321 Harrison Avenue (and 4<sup>th</sup> Street), 1881
5. Monheimer residence, 132 W 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 1881 or 1882
6. Herman Residence, 231 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street.
7. Irving Hauser residence, 304 W 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 1882 or 1883
8. Palace of Fashion building (Frankle & Butler), 407 Harrison Avenue, 1884 or 1885
9. Temple Israel, 201 W 4th Street, 1884



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Murdoch also built the following structures in Leadville.

- Methodist Episcopal Church, 301 W 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (SW corner of Spruce & Third)
- African Methodist Episcopal Church (St. Luke's Chapel), 124 E 9<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Trimble & Hunter Bank building, 311 Harrison Avenue.
- Tabor Grand Hotel, (Hotel Kitchen, Hotel Vendome) 701 Harrison Avenue.
- Theodore Schultze residence, 200 W 7th Street.
- J.H. Stotesbury residence, 201 W 8th Street.
- Breene Block, SE corner of Harrison Avenue & 4th Street.
- B.F. Follett residence, 226 W 8th Street.
- Armory building, 140 E 5th Street.
- Lee Braham residence
- John Talbot building
- George R. Fisher building



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<sup>1</sup> Both “Murdoch” and “Murdock” appear in historical records as frequent misspellings. This was not uncommon for the time period, and the more frequent spelling of Bob’s last name is “Murdock” which is the spelling used for this article.

<sup>2</sup> “The Leading Architect.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Herald Democrat*, January 1, 1886. P9.

<sup>3</sup> 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. P323.

<sup>4</sup> “The New Episcopal Church.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Leadville Weekly Herald*. October 9, 1880. P1.

<sup>5</sup> Corbett, Hoyer and Ballenger. Leadville, CO. USA. 1880. P273.

<sup>6</sup> “Deeds Filed.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Leadville Daily Herald*. February 29, 1884. P1.

<sup>7</sup> “Gentlemen Sportsmen.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Carbonate Chronicle*. March 22, 1884. P4.

<sup>8</sup> “The New Hotel.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Leadville Daily Herald*. June 14, 1884. P4.

<sup>9</sup> “The New Hotel.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Carbonate Chronicle*. June 21, 1884. P10.

<sup>10</sup> 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. P223.

<sup>11</sup> Corbett and Ballenger. Leadville, CO; USA. 1883. P206.

<sup>12</sup> 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. P188.

<sup>13</sup> For more information about George King, please visit: <http://www.jewishleadville.org/georgeking.html>

<sup>14</sup> 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”. *Corbet and Ballenger and Richards Publishers*. Leadville, CO; USA. 1894. P272.

<sup>15</sup> “The New Hotel.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Carbonate Chronicle*. March 22, 1884. P5.

<sup>16</sup> “Temples of Justice”. Leadville, CO. USA. *Leadville Daily Herald*. December 18, 1884. P4.

<sup>17</sup> Don L Griswold, and Jean Harvey Griswold. *History of Leadville and Lake County, Colorado: From Mountain Solitude to Metropolis*. Vol. 2. Denver, CO: Colorado Historical Society, 1996. P1370.

<sup>18</sup> Griswold. Colorado Historical Society. 1996. P1342.

<sup>19</sup> Griswold. Colorado Historical Society. 1996. P1342.

<sup>20</sup> “Court Proceedings.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Leadville Daily Herald*, August 12, 1884. P4.

<sup>21</sup> “Court Proceedings.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Leadville Daily Herald*, August 12, 1884. P4.

<sup>22</sup> “Congregation Israel”. Leadville, CO. USA. *Leadville Daily Herald*. September 20, 1884. P4.

<sup>23</sup> “The New Year.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Carbonate Chronicle*, September 27, 1884. P5.

<sup>24</sup> “The Leading Architect.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Herald Democrat*. January 1, 1886. P9.

<sup>25</sup> “Telegraphic Brevities.” Leadville, CO. USA. *The Herald Democrat*. May 21, 1895. P1.

<sup>26</sup> Portion of Sanborn Map of Leadville. “1886 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map”. Leadville, CO. USA. Lake County Public Library-*Colorado Mountain History Collection*. Resource ID: 4243. June 8, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> “The New Episcopal Church.” Leadville, CO. USA. *Leadville Weekly Herald*. October 9, 1880. P1.



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