



# Temple Israel FOUNDATION

## Biographical Information Sheet

### Sternfield

Benjamin Sternfield<sup>1</sup>

Born: 1856

Died: April 26, 1941

Married to: Fannie Silverman (1908)

In Leadville: 1890-1913

Fannie (Silverman) Sternfield

Born: 1872

Died:

Married to: Benjamin Sternfield (1908)

In Leadville: 1908-1910

Mayer (Alford) Sternfield

Born: 1893

Died: Unknown

In Leadville: 1908-1910

Louis Sternfield

Born: 1895

Died: Unknown

In Leadville: 1908-1910

Marion Sternfield

Born: 1909

Died: Unknown

In Leadville: 1909-1910

Benjamin Sternfield was a clothing store clerk and merchant who first appeared in Leadville during 1890 to work for the Sands Brothers.<sup>2</sup> The early life of Benjamin is unknown; his immigration year in census documents varies between 1886, 1890, and 1896.<sup>3</sup> Of these three, the most accurate is 1886 or early 1890, given his appearance in the 1890 Leadville City Directory.<sup>4</sup> He was listed as an immigrant from "Russia-Poland" and according to the 1920 Census his first language was Yiddish.<sup>5</sup> Given his age and arrival date, he was likely a refugee of late 19<sup>th</sup> century pogroms in Eastern Europe and greater Russia.

While he arrived in Leadville in 1890, few notices or mentions can be found in reference to his life and activities in Leadville newspapers until 1899.

However, his employment place and residence can be easily tracked in city directories. He was consistently employed as clerk by the Sands Brothers from 1890 until 1898. Housing was dynamic for a clerk in downtown Leadville during the 1890s as attested by Benjamin's constant change of address. His first year in Leadville he lived on the second floor of 621 Harrison.

Typically, he spent a year at each new residence and the list was documented as follows: 1891-1892, room 2 of 303 Harrison Avenue;<sup>6</sup> 1894-1895, room 34 of the Union Block (400 block of Harrison);<sup>7</sup> 1897-1898, room 10 of the Delaware Block;<sup>8</sup> and 1899-1900, the Hotel Vendome.

In 1899, Benjamin left the Sands Brothers store and became a clerk at Elias Pelton's Famous Shoe store at 318 Harrison Avenue.<sup>9</sup> That autumn, he caught a man in the act of stealing an overcoat. On the afternoon of November 1, 1899 Benjamin noticed the coat was missing from an outside rack of the Famous. After he checked at a nearby pawn shop under the ownership of Nathan Cohn, he tracked the thief down on State Street. The culprit was a man named Flynn whom, with the help of a few bystanders, Benjamin handed over to a constable on a beat. During his trial on December 18, Flynn stated that he had been a gambler for most of his life, but had forgot where he had deposited his winnings which led him to desperate thievery. Judge Rucker decided Flynn was not of sound mind and lessened the charge to petty from grand larceny. Flynn was sentenced to 10 days at the Lake County jail.<sup>10</sup>

The 1900 census counted Benjamin as a boarder at the Vendome Hotel. He was listed as single and he shared the building with 34 other single male boarders between the ages of 20 and 50. There were also 36 servants, cooks, painters, porters, engineers, maintenance men, clerks, waiters, bartenders, and a bellboy who worked and lived at the hotel. In addition, there were rooms set aside for short-term stays as well; the Vendome was a very busy place. Between 1900 and 1904, Benjamin was consistently



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employed by Elias Pelton at the Famous Clothing and Boot store. Like previous years, Benjamin moved his residence yearly: 1901-1902, 221 West 6<sup>th</sup>;<sup>11</sup> 1903-1904; 127 West 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>12</sup> Leadville had an immigration bureau in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and Benjamin was naturalized as an American citizen in March of 1903.<sup>13</sup>

In the early autumn of 1904, Benjamin went east on a business trip to collect stock.<sup>14</sup> Elias Pelton of the Famous joined him although he did not work at the Famous after 1904. He was listed in an advertisement for the New York Bargain store at 609-611 Harrison Avenue as a buyer; he probably simply joined Elias Pelton on the trip but no longer worked for him.<sup>15</sup> By the end of 1904, he was listed as the manager of the New York Bargain store and had severed his ties with the Famous.<sup>16</sup> According to the city directory, Benjamin employed one bookkeeper and one clerk.<sup>17</sup>

In 1905, Benjamin took a year long absence from Leadville. A January 1906 personal mention article in the *Herald Democrat* detailed his trip, and he was quoted, “*Many of the places... have more advantages and may attract the eye of some people, but for good old time living, and living right, give me Leadville every time.*” According to the article, Benjamin went first to New York and shortly after left for Southampton, London, and Liverpool for several weeks. After his time in the UK, he departed for Johannesburg, South Africa, where he was employed as a clerk in a large clothing store. After two months in the store, he moved into mining and worked in the “Jack” and “Zimmer” mines. Benjamin claimed he met men he had known in the mines of Leadville but was clear in the article that labor conditions in South Africa were far worse than Leadville mines. Specifically, Benjamin expressed his concern for the wellbeing of imported Chinese laborers around Johannesburg. He claimed the Chinamen were paid less in a month, than the daily pay of most Leadville miners at the time.<sup>18</sup>

Upon his return to Leadville, Benjamin did not return to management of the New York clothing store. He was listed in the city directory of 1906 as an employee of the Minowitz clothing store at 317 Harrison Avenue and a resident of 200 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.<sup>19</sup> For a short time during the summer of 1906, Benjamin worked in a clothing store in Ouray, Colorado, and returned to Leadville by July.<sup>20</sup> In 1907, Benjamin’s employment place and residence remained the same. The following year, Benjamin returned to the Famous store and reprised his role as head clerk until he left Leadville in 1913. In the middle summer of 1908, Benjamin married Fanny Silverman in an unknown city in Colorado. According to the document in the Colorado marriage archives, Denver based Rabbi Kauver married the couple.<sup>21</sup> Fannie already had two sons from a first marriage, Louis and Alford. She was also a Polish immigrant and was listed in the 1920 census as a native speaker of Yiddish. Sometime between their marriage in 1908 and 1910, a daughter named Marion was born. According to the United States census of 1910, the Sternfield family lived at 202 East 8<sup>th</sup> Street and consisted of Benjamin aged 50, Fanny aged 38, and children Louis aged 17, Alford aged 15, and Marion aged 1 ½.<sup>22</sup> This entry is some of the only evidence extant that Fanny and the children lived in Leadville for any extent of time. In addition, “Meyer” Sternfield is mentioned as a pall bearer for Henry Miller’s funeral in November of 1909.<sup>23</sup> Meyer was the middle name of Alford as recorded in the 1920 United States census.<sup>24</sup> The final time Benjamin is mentioned in a Leadville newspaper came in the summer of 1910. Benjamin assembled a baseball team which bore his name; the Benjamin Sternfield Fighters beat the Mount Massive Blues 14-3 on July 17.<sup>25</sup> Benjamin was listed among the employees of the Famous clothing store in directories until 1912 and lived at 309 and 311 Harrison Avenue during his final two years in Leadville.<sup>26</sup> It is unknown if the family lived with him during these years. By 1920, Benjamin and the family are listed as residents of Denver, where Benjamin was still listed as a clothing store merchant.<sup>27</sup> By 1930, the family



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had relocated to Queens County, New York.<sup>28</sup> Benjamin died in Manhattan in April of 1941 and was still listed as a clothing salesman upon his death, although he was well into his 80s.

Benjamin Sternfield endured a difficult economy in Leadville during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The combination of the labor wars of the 1890s and the depression of 1906 likely made business difficult for merchants in Leadville. Typical of the Jewish merchant class of the time, Benjamin remained dynamic and maintained nearly 20 years of endurance in the face of challenges in the mining city.



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<sup>1</sup> "New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949," database, *FamilySearch*.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Charles, Jacob and Bernard Sands see <http://jewishleadville.org/sands-sandelowsky.html>

<sup>3</sup> 1900, 1910, 1920 United States Census

<sup>4</sup> 1890 Leadville City Directory p. 237

<sup>55</sup> "United States Census, 1920," database with images, *FamilySearch*.

<sup>66</sup> 1891 Leadville City Directory p. 236 and 1892 Leadville City Directory p. 244

<sup>7</sup> 1894 Leadville City Directory p. 236 and 1895 Leadville City Directory p. 250

<sup>8</sup> 1897 Leadville City Directory p. 265 and 1898 Leadville City Directory p. 255

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Elias Pelton and the Famous Shoe Store see <http://jewishleadville.org/pelton>

<sup>10</sup> "The District Court" *Carbonate Chronicle*, December 18, 1899 p. 7

<sup>11</sup> 1901 Leadville City Directory p. 308 and 1902 Leadville City Directory p. 318

<sup>12</sup> 1903 Leadville City Directory p. 294 and 1904 Leadville City Directory p. 297

<sup>13</sup> National Archives at Denver; Broomfield, Colorado; Naturalization Records, Colorado, 1876-1990; ARC Title: Naturalization Cards, 1880 - 1906; NAI Number: 1307044; Record Group Title: Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787 - 2004; Record Group Number: 85

<sup>14</sup> "Society" *Herald Democrat*, September 11, 1904 p. 6

<sup>15</sup> "Telegram from Our Buyer" *Herald Democrat*, August 10, 1904 p. 5

<sup>16</sup> 1904 Leadville City Directory p. 297

<sup>17</sup> 1904 Leadville City Directory p. 86 and p. 145

<sup>18</sup> "Back From South Africa, Benjamin Sternfield's Experience" *Herald Democrat*, January 10, 1906 p. 4

<sup>19</sup> 1906 Leadville City Directory p. 310

<sup>20</sup> "Some Local Happenings" *Ouray Herald*, July 13, 1906 p. 5

<sup>21</sup> "Colorado Statewide Marriage Index, 1853-2006," database with images, *FamilySearch*.

<sup>22</sup> "United States Census, 1910," database with images, *FamilySearch*.

<sup>23</sup> "The Mortal Remains of Henry Miller" *Herald Democrat*, November 11, 1909 p. 3

<sup>24</sup> "United States Census, 1920," database with images, *FamilySearch*.

<sup>25</sup> "Amateur Baseball" *Herald Democrat*, July 17, 1910 p. 5

<sup>26</sup> 1911 Leadville City Directory p. 250 and Leadville City Directory p. 245

<sup>27</sup> "United States Census, 1920," database with images, *FamilySearch*.

<sup>28</sup> "United States Census, 1930," database with images, *FamilySearch*.



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AUTHOR: Trevor Mark

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SOURCE: Jewish Surnames/Sternfield

PUBLISHED BY: Temple Israel Foundation. Leadville CO; USA. 2019

STABLE URL: <http://www.jewishleadville.org/sternfield.html>