

Jewish Family & Faith

Organizing Jewish Leadville

Jewish organizations began to appear in Leadville during 1879 and 1880. The *Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Association* could conceivably have been the earliest of these. Women were a driving force for the organization of Jewish life in Leadville. They established annual fund raising events such as the Strawberry & Ice Cream Festivals and the Purim Masque Balls which functioned as popular community events in Leadville for two decades.



Kokomo, Colorado had as many as 1500 residents in 1881

On November 9, 1879, the formation of *B'nai B'rith Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 322* was celebrated with a banquet at the Windsor Hotel and late in 1880 the newly constructed Shoenberg Opera House on East Chestnut Street served as the synagogue used for High Holy Day services that year.

The Hebrew Cemetery has stood the tests of time and the elements since its original consecration in 1880. The remains of one hundred and thirty-two of Leadville's early Jewish residents are interred there. As the population declined, the condition of the cemetery did as well, enduring hardily through heavy mountain snows, forest overgrowth, and a minor act of vandalism by unknown parties in 1970.



Leadville's Historic Hebrew Cemetery

The sudden death of Gustave Jelenko from an overdose of morphine he took to soothe his neuralgia, likely created a greater urgency for organized Jewish life in Leadville. Jelenko was brought down from Kokomo, located near the top of Freemont Pass, in a large procession that passed through downtown Leadville along the way to his final resting place on the outskirts of town. In January of 1880, the *Hebrew Benevolent Association* acquired this gravesite along with an allocated 101,660 square feet of property to be designated for Jewish burials, and Leadville's Hebrew Cemetery was established with Gustave Jelenko as its first mournful resident.



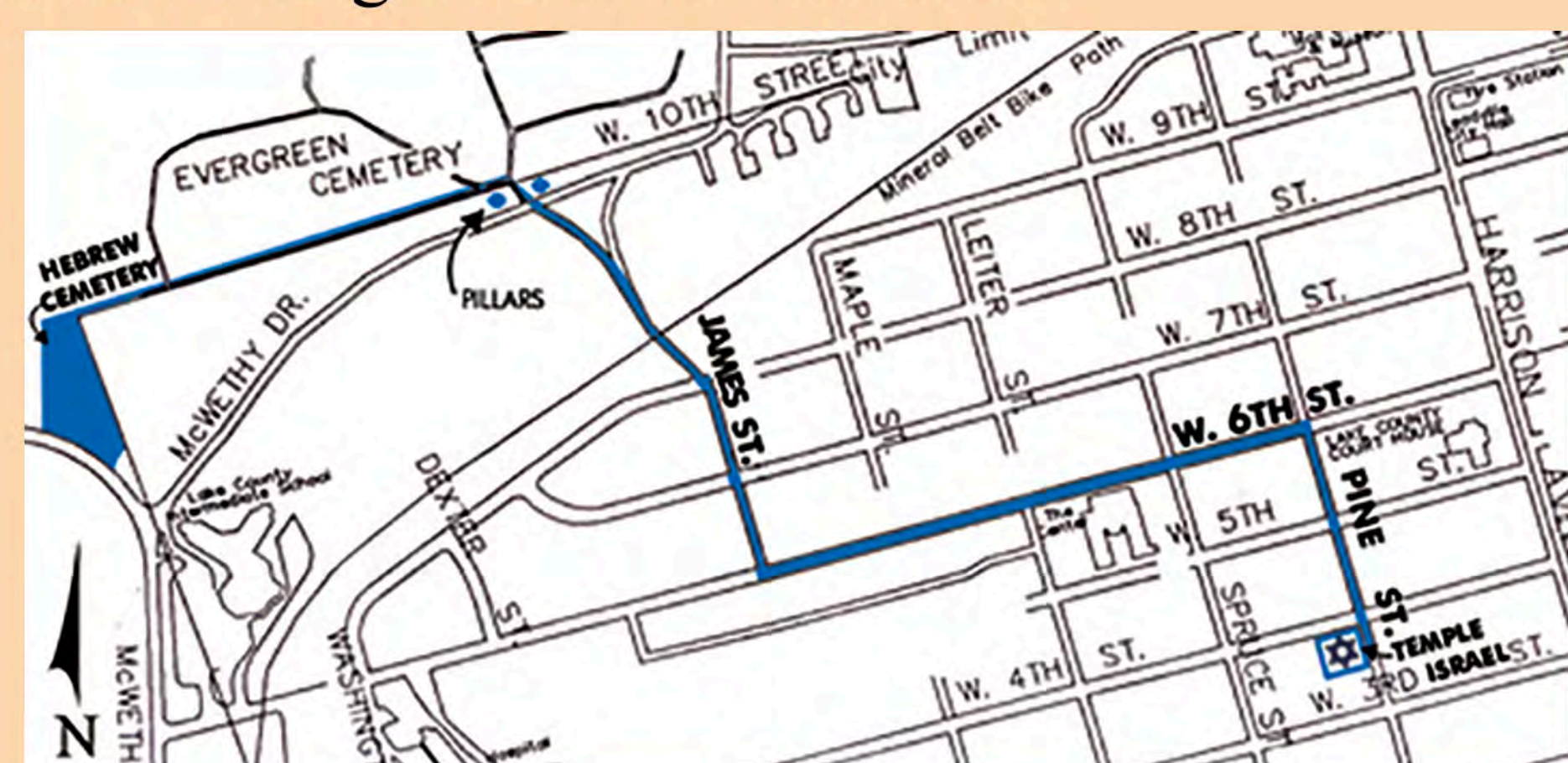
Left: The overturned headstone of Thea Baer, September 4, 1970. Right: Thea's gravesite as it appears today.



Community volunteers tending to the grounds in 1972 after years of neglect. The history of the structure (no longer present) to the upper right of this photo is unknown.

Despite the efforts of longtime Leadville resident Minnette Miller, who is rumored to have performed light upkeep on her family's gravesites until her death in 1981, and a group of anonymous workers who gave a gallant effort fighting back the forest in 1972, Leadville's Hebrew Cemetery went largely abandoned for decades.

The *Temple Israel Foundation* acquired ownership of the cemetery on June 18, 1993, through a quiet title suit. After years of cleanup efforts organized in conjunction with B'nai B'rith of Denver, the cemetery was fully restored, reconsecrated, and returned to service in August of 1999. This beautiful cemetery now stands as a memorial to Leadville's original Jewish residents.



The Hebrew Cemetery is always open to the public and Temple Israel's guests are encouraged to visit.

[For more information on Leadville's Historic Hebrew Cemetery click here](#)

[For more information on Gustave Jelenko click here](#)

[For more information on Leadville's Jewish organizations click here](#)