



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Eichner

Samuel Eichner
Occupation: Merchant tailor
Born: Est. 1848
Birthplace: Hungary
Died: 1918 or 1931

Amelia Eichner
Occupation: N/A
Born: Est. 1850
Birthplace: Hungary
Died: N/A

According to the 1880 US Census, Samuel Eichner was born in Hungary in 1848 to Hungarian parents.¹ Sometime before leaving his home country, Samuel married Amelia, an Hungarian woman born in 1850.² Amelia's maiden name is unknown.

Samuel and Amelia arrived in Leadville by 1880, the first year the Leadville city directory listed the former, and lived at either a boarding house or apartment at 110 East 2nd Street.³ Samuel was a merchant tailor running his business from 214 Harrison Avenue above Thorne & Schaefer's cigar and tobacco store.⁴

The couple were largely obscure to Leadville's local newspapers save for one infamous event which unveiled a great deal about Samuel. In 1881, Samuel transported two boxes of textile goods on the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, however the railroad lost the boxes along the way.⁵ Samuel claimed that the contents of the boxes were worth a staggering \$800, roughly \$21,000 accounting for inflation by 2020. An agent for the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, George Williamson, began to investigate Samuel's claim and quickly discovered that he was attempting a defrauding scheme. Williamson obtained statements from two of Samuel's employees, a Mr. Eisenberg and a Mr. Hernandez, who claimed that the contents of the

boxes would have been no more than \$100 (\$2,600 at present). The railroad company eventually found the lost boxes, discovering that the contents were worth only \$75.⁶ In a follow-up article from the *Leadville Daily Herald* published six months later, the reporter revealed that Samuel was partnered in the defrauding attempt with John Nye, an infamous "check fiend" who wrote numerous bad checks in Leadville.⁷

Samuel's shady dealings did not end with his attempt to defraud the railroad, however. Through the reporting of the *Leadville Weekly Democrat* and Williamson's detective work involving Eisenberg and Hernandez, it came to light that Samuel was also considering insurance fraud, supposedly having insured his store's goods for \$3,000 (\$80,000 at present) and suggesting that "what a good thing it would be for them if the store would burn down."⁸ According to Nathan Thorne, one of the proprietors of the Thorne and Schaefer cigar store, Samuel also faked a robbery of his own store and stored the goods in a cabin in a nearby alleyway to avoid fully paying off his debts.⁹ His creditors apparently took pity on him and lessened the amount he owed. Upon paying off his reduced debt, Samuel then brought the "stolen goods" out of hiding and resumed regular business. Finally, the reporter for the *Leadville Weekly Democrat* described Samuel as a well known wife beater, showing that his reprehensible behavior was not limited to his professional work.

Much to the dismay of the *Weekly Democrat* reporter, Samuel managed to escape prosecution by fleeing to Chicago and, eventually, to the East Coast before the conclusion of Williamson's investigation. Tracking his movements after leaving Leadville is difficult. Neither he nor his wife appear in census records after 1880. Two graves roughly match Samuel, both being possible but neither certain. One, located at Mount Zion Cemetery in Maspeth,



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Biographical Information Sheet

Eichner

New York, records the interred individual's death as August 1918.¹⁰ The location matches his movement toward the East Coast which is the only supporting evidence aside from the name on the headstone. The second grave, located at Kozma Street Jewish Cemetery in Budapest, Hungary, displays 1931 as the year of death.¹¹ The year of birth on the grave, shown as 1856, is quite different from that found on his 1880 US Census listing. Even more questionable, however, is that Samuel would return to Hungary at this point in history given the pervasive antisemitism found throughout Europe. Yet Samuel may have returned to Hungary for many reasons. Perhaps his family remained in that country, or perhaps the long arm of the law eventually caught up to him which necessitated his departure from the United States altogether. These are purely speculation, however, and the actual fates of Samuel and Amelia Eichner are not known.



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Eichner

¹ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MFDJ-CTK>; accessed October 13, 2020), S. Eichner, Leadville, Lake, Colorado, United States; citing enumeration district ED 78, sheet 363A, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), FHL microfilm 1,254,091.

² "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MFDJ-CT2>; accessed October 13, 2020), Amelia Eichner in household of S. Eichner, Leadville, Lake, Colorado, United States; citing enumeration district ED 78, sheet 363A, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), FHL microfilm 1,254,091.

³ T. B. Corbett, W. C. Hoye, and J. H. Ballenger, *Corbett, Hoye & Ballenger'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* (Leadville, CO: Democrat Printing Company, 1880), P140.

⁴ Thomas B. Corbett and John H. Ballenger, *Corbett & 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* (Leadville, CO: Corbett & Ballenger, Publishers, 1881), P124.

⁵ *Iniquitous Eichner*, (Leadville, CO: *Leadville Weekly Democrat*) July 16, 1881, P6.

⁶ *Retrospection*, (Leadville, CO: *Leadville Daily Herald*) January 1, 1882, P11-12.

⁷ *Retrospection*, P12.

⁸ *Iniquitous Eichner*, P6.

⁹ *Iniquitous Eichner*, P6.

¹⁰ *Find a Grave*, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com>; accessed October 13, 2020), memorial page for Samuel Eichner (unknown–August 1918), Find a Grave Memorial no. 81182507, citing Mount Zion Cemetery, Maspeth, Queens County, New York, USA; Maintained by Athanatos (contributor 46907585).

¹¹ *Find a Grave*, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com>; accessed October 13, 2020), memorial page for Samuel Eichner (1856–1931), Find a Grave Memorial no. 168303499, citing Kozma Street Jewish Cemetery, Keresztúridűlő, Kőbánya, Budapest, Hungary; Maintained by JOHN SVADBIK (contributor 47988338).



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