



# Temple Israel FOUNDATION

## *Biographical Information Sheet*

### **Kamak**

Isaac Henry Kamak was born during 1854 in New York to parents who had immigrated from Germany. An early resident of Leadville, he was, on October 22, 1879, amongst a group of like minded gentlemen who took the preliminary steps towards establishing a local branch of the International Order of B'nai B'rith, chartered as Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 322 (or 373?). Isaac H.'s status in the community was confirmed by his selection as president of the new lodge. On that evening he is also known to have attended the Knights of Robert Emmet (an Irish brotherhood named after the famous orator and patriot) second dinner and grand ball held at Schoenberg's Opera House. On November 9th the installation ceremony for B'nai B'rith took place on Upper (East) Chestnut Street and was followed by a splendid inauguration feast held at the Hotel Windsor for which Isaac H. was partly responsible as a member of the Committee of Arrangements. Four days later he survived an accident on Weston Pass, south of Leadville, while returning from Denver. In that era it was necessary to transfer from the train to a coach to traverse the last stretch over the pass and into Leadville. On this particular Thursday, a nasty early winter storm had delayed the train five hours and deterred the coach drivers. Pressing on, regardless, Isaac H. and thirteen other passengers persuaded "Thomas Cooper, the oldest driver on the Wall & Witter line, to attempt a passage" over the snow bound pass. Tragedy ensued when the carriage left the road in the poor visibility and rolled twice killing the Reverend Mr. Pickett, the recent founder of the Leadville Congregational Church, and injuring most of the other passengers. Isaac H. was riding on top, swaddled in blankets, and was relatively uninjured and able to help those trapped inside.

The 1880 census has Isaac H. living with his wife Rose (born during 1861 in Russia) at 112 Upper (East) Chestnut Street and working as a clerk. Confusingly, the 1880 city directory shows an Isaac H. Kamack, a miner, living at 311 West 6th Street (both listings are possible if he had changed vocation, residence, and spelling between the

compilations of the city directory and the census or it might have been another person altogether).

Maximilian (born September 23, 1860), a brother of Isaac H., was a clerk for J. A. (Isaac A.) Kamak, clothier, during 1879.

Isaac A. (born February 2, 1853, in Posen, Prussian Poland, and immigrated with his parents during 1854) was apparently also referred to as J. A. He was a cousin to Isaac H. and Maximilian. In 1879 he was working, under the name of J. A. Kamak & Co. at the Golden Eagle Clothing House, 23 Harrison Avenue, and the Oak Hall clothing house, 58 Chestnut Street. The next year Isaac A. was living at 106 Upper (East) Chestnut Street as a lodger and engaged as I. A. Kamack & Co. at 108 East Chestnut and 106 Harrison, a purveyor of clothing, furnishing goods, boots and shoes, etc. and, according to the city directory, residing at 106 Harrison Avenue. Events turned to the dramatic on May 19, 1882, when a fire at Frankle & Butler's Palace of Fashion destroyed that business, several others, and killed Arthur Ballou. Isaac A., manager of the store (his sister, Rebecca, was married to Louis Butler of New York City, brother of Fred and brother-in-law of Henry Frankle, and seemingly the absentee financier of the business) and a resident in the rear of the building (J. A. becomes Isaac in the course of newspaper accounts) was accused of arson along with four co-religionists. A coroner's inquest and then a grand jury followed with indictments against Isaac A., Fred Butler, Reuben Weil, Maurice Zippert, and Reinhold Rosendorf. The trial was held in March of 1883 with a definitive defense by the redoubtable Judge Marcus J. Waldheimer. He produced as a witness one of the three men, Jack Brogan, responsible for the arson who identified both of the other participants. Brogan was already incarcerated as a result of another arson and alcohol may have fueled his pyromania. Isaac A. had testified that he was the first to detect the fire, had awoken Weil and Butler, and then rescued the account books and some of the inventory. He celebrated his release after the trial with a large



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**Kamak** *(continued)*

portion of Leadville society at a banquet at the Clarendon Hotel. Shortly after the trial Isaac A. left Leadville, possibly to return to Kansas City where he had been living immediately prior to the court case.

### **An after word by Joe Meyer (great grandson of Maximilian and Mary Kamak)**

My mother's maiden name was Maria Kamack. Her father, Harry Kamack, was the son of Maximilian Kamak and Mary Cavanaugh. Maximilian fell in love with and married an Irish woman and converted to Catholicism. I get the impression there was a major rift in the family as a result, and a change in the spelling of the surname by my more recent ancestors was a result. One of the early immigration records showed the surname as Kamack, but I believe this was erroneous as many other records showed the spelling to be Kamak until the marriage of Maximilian Kamak and Mary Cavanaugh. My mother says the spelling was changed to make the surname sound more Irish, but I don't really believe this explanation. Anyway, Maximilian's parents were Henry Kamak and Albertina Levy. Henry Kamak had a brother, Ahren (Aaron) Kamak, who was married to Bertha Levy. I have no information that suggests Albertina and Bertha were closely related, but they shared the common Levy surname. Eisik (Isaac) Kamak and his wife, Sarah, were the parents of Henry and Ahren Kamak. The Kamak family was living in Graetz, Poland before immigrating to New York City. Ahren and Henry were probably born in Graetz. Eisik Kamak was born in the year 1786 in Grodzisk-Wielkopolski, Poland which became Graetz in 1793.

Maximilian Kamak (b. 1861) and Isaac H. Kamak (b. 1854) were brothers and were both sons of my great-great-grandfather Henry Kamak. Both died and are buried in Connecticut. There is only one (two, according to Henry J. Kamack) living male

descendant of Henry Kamak, who has the surname Kamack, and he is unmarried. So, it is probable this branch of the Kamak surname will end. However, there are many Kamaks descended from Ahren Kamak living in the New York City area and these individuals are still Jewish. I have written to some of these folks and have received replies from some of them, but have not communicated with them since my uncle found the Kamak family in Graetz, Poland. Most of the Kamaks who were living in New York during the mid-1800s are buried at Salem Fields cemetery.

*This additional information has been contributed by  
Harry J. Kamack  
(grandson of Maximilian and Mary Kamak)*