



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Lavinsky

Sam Lavinsky
Born: 1858
Birthplace: Russia
Immigrated: 1876
Died: ?
Occupation: Saloon Keeper

Lena Lavinsky
Born: 1864
Birthplace: England
Immigrated: ?
Died: ?
Occupation: Housewife?

David Lavinsky
Born: (estimated) 1892
Birthplace: Colorado
Died: ?
Occupation: Child

Luella Lavinsky
Born: 1893
Birthplace: Colorado
Died: ?
Occupation: Child

Herman
Born: 1902
Birthplace: Colorado
Died: ?
Occupation: Child

Other Names Associated With the Lavinsky
Family:
Samuel Blumberg
Fannie Cooperman
Ben Loeb

Samuel Lavinsky, a Russian immigrant, arrived in Leadville in 1876. He would go on to be an integral member of the city's more boisterous citizenry.¹ Lavinsky was born in 1858 and immigrated to the United States when he was 18 in 1876. During 1886 Lavinsky was living in

Salida Colorado. While in Salida, he ran advertisements in the *Herald Democrat* for "Sober, steady industrious tailors" who wanted a steady job.²

Lavinsky worked as a tailor and a saloonkeeper at different points in his life. Samuel met and married Lena Lavinsky. She was born in England and both of Lena's parents were from Russia. The Lavinskys had a child named David around 1888. In the 1910 census David's birthdate is listed as 1892. However in an article from the *Herald Democrat* in 1896 David is listed as being 12 years old, meaning he would have been born in 1884. The Lavinskys also had a daughter, Luella, in 1893 and another son, Herman, in 1902. The 1910 census lists all the Lavinsky children as being born in Colorado.³

The Lavinskys ended up in Leadville by 1895. Lavinsky operated a saloon called the "Owl Joint" at 124 Harrison Avenue.⁴ Lavinsky was one of the donors for the Ice Palace which Leadville constructed in the winter of 1895/1896.⁵ It was hoped the Ice Palace would bring in tourism, a much needed stimulus to Leadville's economy after the Silver Panic of '93.

During their time in Leadville the Lavinskys left a memorable impact on their neighbors and community, perhaps not always in the best of ways. In October 1895 Lavinsky had a terrifying altercation with Samuel Blumberg, his neighbor over a shared set of stairs. Blumberg possessed an excitable temperament and had a history of getting riled up. The following extract from the *Herald Democrat* describes the incident.

"Mr. Blumberg had enjoyed ingress and egress to his apartments through a certain stairway on the Lavinsky premises from some ancient landlord whose power had long since grown obsolete. As long as the relations between the two neighbors were not strained he was permitted to continue



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Lavinsky

in the enjoyment of this ancient privilege, and to which he did not prove the shadow of a title, the landlord testifying that Lavinsky paid the rent and was required to make good the damages that Blumberg inflicted with the ax on the hall door. The relations became so upset that Lavinsky nailed up the doors while Blumberg would chop them down with an ax. This led to Blumberg kicking Lavinsky down stairs and running him up stairs with his gun, while Lavinsky would, as occasion required, lay his neighbor's scalp open with a billiard cue. Blumberg became so engaged that whenever Mrs. Lavinsky appeared on the scene he would call her the worst and vilest of names. After being placed under a bond for keeping the peace and after being warned by an officer, he chopped down a door on the disputed stairway. For this breach of the peace and defamation of character Samuel Blumberg was let off with a fine of \$5 and costs..."⁶

This would not be Lavinsky's last violent incident which would appear in the *Herald Democrat*. As a saloon owner, Lavinsky knew how to handle himself in rough situations. Lavinsky's saloon, the Owl Joint, was a multicultural watering hole which had an interesting clientele. The Owl Joint illustrates how cosmopolitan and multiracial Leadville was during the 1890s. In November of 1895 Lavinsky experienced his next unruly escapade with some boisterous patrons at the Owl Joint. According to the *Herald Democrat*,

"Sam Lavinsky, who keeps the Owl saloon at 124 Harrison avenue, got into an altercation with some colored boys and shot and dangerously wounded Joe Faulkner, the bullet entering the right breast two inches below the armpit, passing through the right lung and out the back at the lower end of the shoulder blade. The shot was from a 38 Caliber revolver. Since Lavinsky has been proprietor of the Owl the place has gotten the name of being a 'tough

joint,' there being frequent brawls and disturbances. It is a sort of homogeneous hole where 'cullud folks' and 'white trash' congregate."⁷

The shooting caused an uproar among Leadville's African American community, as is evidenced by the following article from the *Herald Democrat*,

"The shooting of Joe Faulkner, a colored boy, by Sam Lavinsky on November 27, created much excitement among the colored contingent in the city. Lavinsky kept a saloon to which low whites and negroes resorted, and a number of colored boys were in his joint playing pool at the time of the shooting. Lavinsky is a Hebrew, and has a very excitable and quarrelsome disposition. Seeing the men of 'culler' in his place he ordered them out. They objected to his expression: 'Get out of here you damned niggers,' and refused to go. This led to a quarrel ending in Lavinsky shooting Joe Faulkner in the breast. Faulkner's life was despaired of, but, as the saying goes, 'you can't kill a darkey with a gun,' Faulkner fooled the doctor and was sufficiently improved to attend court."⁸

Joe Faulkner survived and Lavinsky went to trial for the incident but was acquitted because his actions were seen as "self-defense."⁹ This incident is a prime example of the colorful life which Lavinsky led in Colorado. It also illustrates he was a figure with a controversial reputation.

Lena Lavinsky, Mr. Lavinsky's wife, also had her own altercations with members of the public. It is unknown whether this was a repeated occurrence. However, it is a trait she shared with Mr. Lavinsky. In May of 1896 Lena Lavinsky got into a nasty row with Fannie Cooperman. On May 19th "Lena Lavinsky [appeared] in court at 2 o'clock Wednesday, May



19. Her arrest was caused by Fannie Cooperman, who accuses her of having committed a breach of the peace by calling some very bad names.”¹⁰ The next day this was followed by an article in the *Herald Democrat* which elaborated on the situation,

“The Lavinskys and the Coopermans of West Fourth street are very much in court. The mothers Lavinsky and Cooperman have grievances to settle that they have taken before Justice Walls. Mrs. Fannie Cooperman is the complainant. ‘Now comes Fannie Cooperman,’ again, but not to let it appear that she wishes to give her patronage to one court, she comes to Justice Grant and enters a complaint against David Lavinsky, the 12-year-old scion of the house of Lavinsky, whom she accuses of having made dire threats against her own offsprings, Moses and David.

Then Mr. Lavinsky takes a hand. He files a complaint against Moses and David for thrashing his little David...

Mr. Lavinsky states that he and his wife are peaceful and law-abiding, and desire no quarrels with their neighbors. They claim that the whole prosecution is due to green-eyed jealousy on the part of rivals in business.”¹¹

While the Lavinskys protested they were a peaceful family, it is evident they had multiple liaisons with the authorities. This casts dubious doubts on their claims of being law-abiding citizens of Leadville. It appears Lavinsky left his occupation as a Saloonkeeper and opened up his own business as a tailor in 1897¹² at 111 W. 4th St. After the move to W. 4th St. there are no more mentions of the Lavinskys in the city directories or in the *Herald Democrat*. Instead it appears they returned to Salida and opened a clothing store there in 1901.¹³ In the 1910 census the Lavinskys are living in Salt Lake City.¹⁴ It is unclear whether they stayed in Utah or continued to move further west. However, it is probable they left a colorful trail wherever they appeared.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 1910 Census.

² “Wanted.” *Herald Democrat*, December 25, 1886. Accessed July 4, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

³ U.S. Census Bureau. 1910 Census.

⁴ 1895 Leadville City Directory.

⁵ “Word As To The Palace.” *Herald Democrat*, September 29, 1895. Accessed July 4, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

⁶ “Blumberg Vs. Lavinsky.” *Herald Democrat*, October 3, 1895. Accessed June 15, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

⁷ “Lavinsky On The Shot.” *Herald Democrat*, November 28, 1895. Accessed July 4, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

⁸ “Sam Lavinsky Is Held.” *Herald Democrat*, December 14, 1895. Accessed July 4, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

⁹ “The Day In The District Court.” *Herald Democrat*, July 14, 1897. Accessed July 4, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

¹⁰ “Big Grist From The Courts.” *Leadville Daily*, May 19, 1896. Accessed July 4, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information

Lavinsky



¹¹ "Big Grist From The Courts." *Leadville Daily*, May 19, 1896. Accessed July 4, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

¹² 1897 Leadville City Directory.

¹³ "A Successful Opening." *Salida Mail*, October 18, 1901. Accessed July 4, 2016.

<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. 1910 Census.