



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

May

A sole monument erected outside the locale of his last store in Leadville on Harrison Avenue today remains the only mention of David May in Leadville. Now tourists stop beside the stone monument and ponder where it all started.

The story of David May is, perhaps, not as well known as some of his contemporaries. This might have been because his success was unmarked by personal flamboyance or scandal. A rather solid member of his community, he prospered initially through the usual virtues of hard work, integrity, and some good luck. Over time his talents led him to establish a large retail enterprise. To the extent that May's life has been chronicled, the emphasis has been on the commercial aspect. But David May also had a strong commitment to his family, his religion, and his civic obligations.

Within two years of his 1877 arrival in the Leadville area, May was associated in business with his future brother-in-law, Moses Shoenberg. He was also active among the area's Jews as evidenced by his membership in the local, and short-lived, chapter of B'nai B'rith and by his participation in the organization and subsequent operation of the Hebrew Benevolent Association. Like most fraternal organizations of the era, both of these groups served important social welfare functions for the growing Jewish presence in Leadville and David May's affiliations bespeak his sense of dedication to his fellows.

The following year, 1880, was pivotal for May as it was the year during which he met, wooed, and married Rosa Shoenberg, sister of his partner. They established their home at 203 West 5th Street, immediately next to Moses at 201 West 5th Street and just a short walk to the store (where May had previously lived) on Harrison Avenue. In addition to his growing business interests, the Mays expanded their social activities to include membership in the Standard Club and service on the welcoming committee for the First Annual B'nai B'rith Ball.

Rather promptly, Rosa was delivered of Morton J. a year after the wedding and there is evidence that May was able to arrange for the circumcision of his son by Dr. Elsner, a traveling mohel. As a signal of May's growing importance in the community, he was invited to join as an incorporator of the Leadville Electric Light Company. In 1881, May sought better retail accommodations and leased 318 Harrison Avenue from the very flamboyant and scandalous Leadville legend: Horace A. W. Tabor. The relationship would bear happy fruit three years later.

In 1883, Tom was born and it seems that with the closing of the branch store in Irwin May was focusing more on his Leadville activities. Certainly, by 1884, he had become deeply involved in community affairs. Early in the year he was elected vice president of Temple Israel and appointed chairman of the building committee. The building was ready for services by September on land donated by May's very agreeable landlord, Horace Tabor. May was also "to have charge of burial grounds", an obligation passed down from the Hebrew Benevolent Association as it evolved into the Congregation Israel. But this was not enough for the busy Mr. May. Shortly after serving as a judge, dressed as Music, for the Purim Bal Masque, May was appointed County Treasurer on March 25. He successfully defended the appointment the following November as a Republican and held the office until 1885.

Such a large commitment seems to have had a sobering affect on May and 1885 marked a partial withdrawal. Not only was the Treasurer's office lost, but the partnership with Moses ended in January and May's tenure as an officer of the Temple Israel was over on September 13. Still, May continued to contribute to the larger community and there is a record of his gift to the Catholic Church of the Annunciation during their campaign for a new bell. And the social life continued. The apex appears to have been dinner with a visiting Baron St. Lindoner of Berlin.

By 1887, David May had become very active investing his growing resources. He bought real estate, a mine lease, and a competitor. May was a director of the Leadville Board of Trade and found time to attend the annual Purim Ball at the Tabor Opera House where he was a member of the reception committee. But his vision was wandering and May acquired retail space in Denver, joining with in-laws Joseph and Louis Shoenberg in entering the Queen city's burgeoning market.

Still a resident of Leadville, May served on a jury during 1888 and bought a fine home at 120 West 4th Street, which he sold in 1889 to a local banker, A. V. Hunter, who inhabited it for many years. It is now a bed and breakfast. May had already sold, in 1888, his Leadville store to Meyers Harris.

David May's last recorded event in Leadville involved the receipt of a key to the City in conjunction with the Ice Palace ceremonies in 1896.