



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

May

David May

Born: June 10, 1848?, Kaiserslautern, Rhineland-Palatinate (Bavaria)

Died: July 22, 1927, Michigan

Rosa (Shoenberg) May

Born: March 21, 1861, Ohio

Died:

The story of David May is that of a classic western odyssey. He came to America from Germany as the trials of the Civil War were coming to an end and as the Rocky Mountains were opening up to the world. Like many individuals of the time, exact birthdays were often unknown. June 10, 1848, is written on official documents as his birthdate although dates are sometimes given.¹ Like many immigrants, May's life begins in a troubled homeland. The late 1840s were a tumultuous time in Germany. Revolutions were brewing. Borders were shifting. Within his first year of life, a revolutionary period swept Europe.² Amidst this was born the future founder of the May Corporation Clothing Stores.

While born in an uncertain and violent year, specific events in David May's life before his immigration are difficult to uncover. Immigration documents and a May Company biography by Forbes Parkhill provide much what we know of May's early years in Germany.

He was born into a merchant family. His father Wolf owned a modest store in Kaiserslautern, Rhineland-Palatinate, which transitioned to Bavarian control soon after David was born.³ Young David was exposed to the intricacies of merchant life in the family store during the 1850s and early 1860s, but his prospects for a future were unknown and potentially bleak. Like many German young men of the time, he decided to leave for America in his teenage years. It is said that around the time David turned 15 and finished his early schooling, the May family had a meeting to discuss his future. It was decided that David would

immigrate or "auswandern" to America.⁴ He arrived as "David Mai" at Castle Garden, New York (a predecessor of Ellis Island) on May 15, 1865 at the age of 17.⁵ Young May traveled with two other boys from Kaiserslautern and May recalled later in his life that "We were as lively and full of curiosity as young monkeys."⁶

The United States was reeling with turmoil as young May and his colleagues disembarked from the ship *Saxonia*.⁷ It is not known how long May spent in New York, but shortly after his arrival, he received a letter from an uncle. The contents were a ticket to Cincinnati and an innovation through family connections to a clothing factory job in that manufacturing city. The adventure continued for the young man as he traveled by train across the first frontier of his life in America.

Economic mania plagued the late 1860s and most of the 1870s in the United States. Economists refer to the period 1873 to 1879 as the Long Depression. A panic associated with September of 1869 called Black Friday could have affected May personally through general economic downturn and lack of demand for new clothing. As an energetic and hard-working youth May worked through much of this period. He also gained his American education at a business college in Cincinnati.⁸

After years of factory work May began to move up in business. In his early-twenties, he became a clerk in a store in Hartford City, Indiana called Kirshbaum & Weiler⁹ for \$25 a month plus room and board.¹⁰ The store was operated by German-Jewish immigrants Raphael Kirshbaum and Abraham, Adolf, and Meyer Weiler. These men were all close to the same age as May and possessed a shared culture, religion, and language. The Weiler Brothers and Kirshbaum likely took in young May as their apprentice during this time. By all accounts May flourished in the store. He worked long hours and learned of the clothing and merchandise business in America.



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After two years at Kirshbaum's May's work ethic and steady business helped the store to increase sales by 80%. Total sales neared \$100,000 per year and Kirshbaum decided to award May as a shareholder. Success often is dealt in degrees however. In the spring of 1877 a fiery conflagration enveloped Kirshbaum's store and destroyed much of the clothing stock. May was stricken with lung trouble after the event; he exerted himself while saving stock items from the fire. He may also have been ill after years of hard work in the polluted air of Ohio and Indiana factory towns.¹¹

Tuberculosis and other lung ailments were common killers of late 19th century America. May's doctors advised him to travel to the fine climates in the west. Hospitals and resorts throughout Colorado were known for their rejuvenating qualities. May decided that he would sell his stock in the Kirshbaum store and take some time to regroup his health. With \$25,000 in his pocket and a fresh outlook May departed Indiana to his next and most successful stage in life; the Rocky Mountains.¹²

May elected to visit the health resorts and take in the mineral waters of Manitou Springs, Colorado. While there he met Marshall Field and John Logan. They organized a fishing expedition sometime in the summer of 1878, bound for a new resort in the Upper Arkansas Valley; likely Twin Lakes. While at Twin Lakes May, Fields, and Logan heard stories of the whispers growing into shouts of the metal to be found up the valley in California Gulch. It was during this time that the health-conscious resort goers became perspective prospectors and May's pivotal career choice occurred.¹³

Details of who accompanied May on the first trip up the Arkansas are vague and the exact progress of events is difficult to trace. In his later years May himself recalled Marshall Field and John Logan as companions on his first trip from Twin Lakes to Leadville. A bit later Fields departed but May and Logan stayed on to take an interest in a claim somewhere in the Leadville District in the summer 1878. After some time hauling ore up a windlass, with "blistered palms and an aching back", Logan departed for the east. May stayed on to find his money beyond a hole in the ground.¹⁴

Leadville city directories are not extant before 1879. The first direct proof of May's presence in Leadville is an entry in the 1879 directory. That year David May and his partners, T.B. Dean and Jacob Holcomb operated a store called Holcomb, May and Dean at 25 Harrison Avenue. Leadville was still sorting out its street alignments and some addresses in the early directories are less precise and more descriptive. One entry places the establishment at "Harrison avenue, just above Chestnut street." This was the heart of Leadville's commercial core. According to the 1879 directory all three proprietors lived together at the address. The men probably lived in back of what was a two-story timber frame building with an impressive facade.¹⁵ There were four attorneys located "over" the shop, Laws & Gunnel and Wilson & Taylor. In addition to the three proprietors, there were three other employees: two clerks, William Tughinbaugh and Lena Kringen and a "silk department" which was overseen by Maud Kringen.¹⁶



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May was a thorough advertiser. The first identifiable series of advertisements attributable to a May enterprise were published in the January 29, 1879, edition of the Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle. From this it is found that the focus of Holcomb, May and Dean that year was in general houseware, jewelry, and some clothing. The store advertised “Plated Ware, Napkin Rings, Butter Knives, Gold Lined Mugs and Goblets, Silver Jewelry Cases, Fruit Stands, Cake Stands, Call Bells, and a fine lot of Ladies Jewelry”. Rather than a specific address they remind shoppers that the store is located at “Harrison avenue, just above Chestnut street”.¹⁷ In another advertisement in the same paper, Holcomb, May and Dean tout the virtues of “Boys Ulsters”.¹⁸ A third advertisement in this issue directs ladies to silk handkerchiefs at “the big Dry Goods merchants on Harrison Avenue” and another ad from a few days later advertises wall paper.¹⁹

By January of 1880, Holcomb and Dean were removed from name board of the store.²⁰ May reopened with fellow German Moses Shoenberg as a partner on January 3, 1880, and the store expanded to both 25 and 27 Harrison Avenue. The new venture opened with the verbose Victorian title of “The Great Western Auction and Commission Rooms”. Ever the man of promotion May made sure the advertisement for the opening of this new store was an article sized excerpt in the Carbonate Chronicle.²¹ It was filled with praises and advertising flourishes. It also details the entrance of the important character of Moses Shoenberg into the life of May.

May was active socially early in his time in Leadville. He attended the first meeting of B’nai B’rith in Leadville in November of 1879.²² The event took place at the Hotel Windsor on East Chestnut street and included elaborate dining and toasts. The Jewish Reform congregation in 1879 also met in the Union Society Temple on Chestnut Street above Kamak’s clothing store and David May certainly attended these functions.²³

In keeping with Leadville itself, May’s first two years in the alpine city were extremely busy. Between 1879 and 1881 May and Shoenberg’s store changed addresses three times. Many of the advertisements were on the front page of the Carbonate Chronicle and the Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle. The first venture, The Great Western Auction and Commission House, was simplified to May & Shoenberg’s in early 1880 and by that May they were preparing to move to another commercial block at 108-110 Harrison Avenue.²⁴ The marketing of May & Shoenberg’s focused on ads claiming, “Boston Square-Dealing, One Price Clothing Store.”, a clear nod to Eastern clientele and culture.

Business and home life flourished for May in the early 1880s. By the end of that year gone were the days of muslin tents and cramped quarters behind his store with business partners. May married the sister of business partner Moses Shoenberg in September of 1880. By October that year, Rosa and David May moved into a new house at 203 West 5th Street.²⁵ German immigrants of the time often did not marry until their thirties in order to gain economic stability. This was apparently the case with May as he turned 32 the year of his marriage.²⁶

Rosa Shoenberg was born on March 21, 1861, in Ohio to parents from Prussia.²⁷ According to the 1870 census Eli and Fannie Shoenberg had six children: Hattie; Moses; Joseph; Leopold; Louis; and “Rosey”. It appears that Moses and Joseph were in Leadville as early as 1879 and were employed at, and probably lived above or behind, the hastily built stores which lined East Chestnut that year.²⁸ By 1880, Moses was engaged in business with May, and the pair lived with other employees and tenants at their store at 108 Harrison Avenue. The pair could have met in Leadville or knew each other from Eastern connections. Joseph Shoenberg lived at 116 West Chestnut and his sister Hattie lived with him in addition to other employees, but Rosa does not appear to be listed in residence with either



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brother in 1880.²⁹ There is no indication that Rosa lived in Leadville for any amount of time before her marriage to May in September of 1880. The circumstances that brought Rosa to Leadville are unknown, but it would appear that the courtship was brief between May and young Rosa. In October of 1880, the couple took their honeymoon in Denver and moved into their new home in Leadville that month. The Shoenberg family as a whole would shape business and social life in Leadville throughout the 1880s and Rosa appeared often in social and personal columns.

Around the time of the success of the “Boston-Square Dealing” establishment at 108-110 Harrison May came across a stock of dresses from a Chicago distributor. These he brought to Leadville and sold for between \$200 and \$400 in less than a week. It is unknown the exact numbers of this sale, but recent monetary conversions put the profits from these dresses well into the tens of thousands of dollars.³⁰

During the summer and fall of 1880, the store and May came into their own. Forbes Parkhill, who wrote the most complete historic biography of May, sums up his ethic as “hard-headed but softhearted”. His store was known as not only a place to find clothing, but also a social venue. A stove and chairs were set out for the purpose of gathering in one of his early stores and May hosted these “cracker-barrel philosophers” with relaxed hospitality.

Success was followed by expansion and in 1880 or 1881 May opened a store in the fledgling Gunnison Country town of Irwin. An intriguing photo captured the store as it existed in the early 1880s. This was his first branch, but the store was as short lived as the town of Irwin. Other May locations sprang up with the booms and busts of early Colorado however, including branches in Glenwood Springs, Aspen, Pueblo, and Kokomo.³¹

After one year at 108-110 Harrison, the store was moved to 318 Harrison. Aside from a one year incarnation as Butler & Co., this store would remain May’s headquarters until 1888. The move to 318 Harrison occurred in the late spring of 1881.³² An advertisement on the front page of the Leadville Democrat of April 28, 1881 points to stiff competition around this time. Next to articles detailing the expulsion of Albanians from the Ottoman Empire and the appointment of railroad directors by new President Garfield, the entire right side of the front page of the issue contains ads for clothing, liquor, and books. The topmost advertisement is for Daniels and Fisher Company; directly below is May & Shoenberg’s. The proximity and size of the ads indicates the importance of the clothing business in Leadville at the time.

The new May family residence on West 5th Street and Pine welcomed a child in the summer of 1881. Morton May was born on July 13, 1881, and would go on to play a pivotal role in the future May Company. He was born in Denver; the pregnant Rosa made the journey for unknown reasons, likely the lower altitude was deemed better for births. Tom May was born on June 3, 1883, probably in Leadville. After the family moved to Denver, Wilbur was born December 23, 1898, and Florene was born February 27, 1903. All three sons became involved in the May Company.³³

During 1881 the store existed as May & Shoenberg at 318 Harrison and was by all accounts successful. In late 1881, the company went through a change.³⁴ Advertisements for May & Shoenberg’s do not exist from November, 1881, until December of 1882. The business that was located at 318 Harrison was called Butler & Co. and David May was employed there. He indicated this at testimony for the Palace of Fashion fire.³⁵ Advertisements for May & Shoenberg’s resume in December of 1882. Through the end 1882 and into 1883, the store and its proprietors settled into Leadville business life. Business advertisements focus on the holiday



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periods and spring time. Starting the first of the year in 1883, May began bringing his own product to Leadville. In an advertisement from early in 1883 with the impressive title of “Progressive!” May advertises that he is manufacturing his own products in Philadelphia. His ad pledges, “. . . a choicer line of goods than we have ever heretofore shown, and will guarantee a saving of fully 20 per cent below the ruling Leadville prices. . .” It is a remarkably eloquent and sincere advertisement, although perhaps embellished.

In March of 1883, an especially eye catching advertisement in the Leadville Daily Herald confidently declares “Like an Avalanche They Come! And the Rush Still Continues! The Crowd Increases Daily! Plenty of Bargains Still to be Had!”³⁶. This was in reference to a “fire sale” following a fire that will be discussed below. Smoke damaged goods were often sold at discount prices after a being cleaned. This is something May seemingly specialized in as fires were a common occurrence in frontier towns like Leadville.

Success came with challenges as well. A large fire early in the morning of May 19, 1882, burned nearly the entire south side of the block of East Chestnut between Harrison and Plum Street. The conflagration killed one man and resulted in an estimated \$500,000 in damage. Men seen moving between May & Shoenberg’s store the morning of the fire rose suspicion from a livery stable veterinarian. The court would later find that these men were in the employ of May & Shoenberg and were moving mis-delivered stock to the Palace of Fashion early that morning. From the beginning, the fire was presumed to have been set on purpose. It was suspected that due to the precarious financial situation of the Palace of Fashion, and the activity between May’s store and East Chestnut before the fire, that there was some connection between the fire and the clothing merchants of south Harrison. May was called to testify a year later on behalf of clothing store colleagues and fellow Jews at the Palace of Fashion who had been falsely accused of

the arson.³⁷ Fire also came dangerously close to May & Shoenberg’s in February of 1883, which resulted in a loss of \$5000 in clothing and furniture and a month long “fire and water sale”³⁸ The fire originated in a gambling house behind the Hyman Saloon which several years later became famous for a Doc Holiday shooting. While the fire damaged little in the buildings, smoke and water damage would prove to be the most costly result in terms of the clothing in May's store.

Like most merchants of any era, May was civically minded. He was appointed county treasurer on March 27, 1884, after two of his predecessors were found to have embezzled public money.³⁹ He served as an appointee through the summer and he won the position in the local election that November.⁴⁰ He served as county treasurer until 1886.

He was a member of several clubs and appears on lists of guests at functions by the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society as well as an appearance at a German-American organized Blaine-Logan Club, a political and social group named for the Republican running mates of the 1884 election. May addressed a Blaine-Logan gathering in November of 1884 in his native German, speaking of his promise to serve well in the important position of county treasurer.⁴¹ The same article later explains that May had been kicked out of another German-American social club, ostensibly for his involvement in “official duties”. There was a great deal of controversy surrounding the county treasurer in 1883 and 1884 and May was caught up in the politics. May was also present at a Colored Blaine-Logan gathering on November 1st. He briefly spoke in favor of his campaign for county treasurer.⁴²



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An important event of 1884 in Leadville Jewish life and May by association, was the construction of a new synagogue on Leadville's west side. Designed by architect George King, the carpenter gothic edifice was constructed in a matter of weeks that late summer. The land was donated by Horace Tabor. May acted as the construction manager of the project and became vice president of the congregation. The new synagogue opened on Rosh Hoshanah, 1884. May was active in the Jewish life of Leadville for his remaining four years in the city and continued to be charitable and giving though out his later life in Denver and St. Louis.

An intriguing insight into the acute business nature of May appears in a newspaper in the summer of 1884.⁴³ The years 1883-1884 were difficult for Leadville. A reporter of the Carbonate Chronicle approached May in the summer of 1884 to record his take on the economy of the city at that time. It is titled "Pleasant Prophecy" in reference to May's optimism. After claiming his confidence in a return to prosperity for the Carbonate City, he is quoted, "Our [May & Shoenberg's] sales have increased 33% this month and are equal to the same period last year". When asked about metal prices, he goes on, "...but my opinion is until the presidential question [Cleveland versus Blaine] is settled, there will be no great changes in the market." He claims to have gleaned this advice from miners with whom he had spoken in the store. May clearly listened to people and was a thinking man. Toward the end of the article May admits that he had been uneasy about the future earlier that summer and he, "...payed a visit east for purpose [sic] of selecting some other place of location." May decided to stay in 1884, but many left the city. In August that year, an advertisement appears indicating that there were individuals in Leadville trying to replicate May and Shoenberg's in appearance and style.⁴⁴ The advertisement is entitled, "We Keep Blowing Our Horn" and continues confidently and defiantly:

"CAUTION! Look for Our Signs Over Our Door, which Read, MAY & SHOENBERG And Our Number 318-HARRISON AVENUE-318. We Request this attention from the fact that since we began our Great Closing Out Sale and Slaughtering of Goods, Unscrupulous Dealers have been Imitating us, by marking out Some Goods as we're are doing, thereby offering baits and attempting to Delude People into the belief that they are Entering Our Store. Be sure and Look for Our Signs and Number."

Clearly the success May and Shoenberg were enjoying was worth replicating; at least as the clothiers wanted to present it to the public. But despite clear success, changes were coming to the store. In the fall of 1884, Moses Shoenberg had decided to move on from the partnership and away from Leadville.⁴⁵ He relocated to "the east". May continued the enterprise with only his name on the sign at 318 Harrison. In February of 1885, another reporter from the Carbonate Chronicle made a circuit of Harrison Avenue and Chestnut Street business owners. When the reporter asked May of his opinions on the economy of the city, he expressed his confidence in the future. "I don't know how to assert my confidence more emphatically ... than to call your attention to the stock of clothing and goods that rest upon those counters and shelves." He also references his former partner Moses Shoenberg's regret at leaving Leadville, who reported slow business in the east.⁴⁶

The year 1885 was another busy one for May. According to the Colorado state census that year, the May household at 203 West 5th Street, was made up of 37 year old David, 23 year old "Rose", Four year old "Marton" (Morton), two year old "DJ" (Tom), in addition to two servants, Mary and Anna Shea, 13 and 23 years of age respectively.⁴⁷ From investigations of the Sanborn fire insurance maps, the house was a one and a half story duplex with round bay windows and a sizable footprint. Three outbuildings in back existed, likely a carriage house and other sheds.



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On January 17, the May family bade farewell to the family of Moses Shoenberg, his business partner, friend, and brother in law. The usual Victorian flourishes were both present at the luncheon as well as written in the society columns of the *Carbonate Chronicle*.⁴⁸ His presence in the newspapers beyond advertisements increases during this time and life likely became more and more complicated for the ever more public and engaged merchant. He was embroiled in several lawsuits,⁴⁹ payed bail for a man held on murder charges, and was investigated by the district court in November.⁵⁰ He was also a vocal supporter of a new road to Aspen; the beginnings of the road now known as Independence Pass. In the spring of 1885, May is quoted with optimism:

“You bet I want to see that road built, and it’s going to be done too. We must do something to get more trade, and there is no scheme that commends itself so readily to a sensible man as that one of building a short road to Aspen. We can do it at a small cost, and the country can do more for itself and for the people by this scheme than by any other. The committee appointed by the meeting on Wednesday last to have a survey of the proposed route made will send a surveyor next week, and the subscription committee will call on the merchants for the expenses of the expedition.”

Such devotion, eloquence and confidence is manifest in May’s character. Whether or not the words were embellished by the paper is unknowable; but by all accounts May was intelligent and insightful.

On March 5th, 1885, an important social event of Jewish Leadville took place in the form of the annual Purim Ball. Purim is a springtime holiday of the Hebrew calendar that recalls the deliverance of the Jews from a despotic and genocidal Persian king. The Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society organized the elaborate event in City Hall, and a lengthy excerpt in the *Leadville Daily Herald* captures the atmosphere, attendees, and details the

background behind the Purim holiday. The May family appears on the attendance list, and Mrs. David May is noted as a judge in a quartet costume contest during the ball.⁵¹ A “tableaux” or static stage performance was held midway through the evening with skits representing relevant elements of the story of Purim as well as the story of Leadville. The event was also a fundraiser toward the debts incurred by the Reform congregation with the construction of the Temple Israel the previous summer. The event took place in Leadville annually in the spring from 1879 until 1898.

A notable event occurred at May’s store on the night of December 5, 1885. A vagrant man broke into May’s closed storefront at 318 Harrison. He removed a clothed mannequin from a front display and took it to an apartment access stairway one door down from May’s store. The thief then, “...coolly took his time in disrobing the imitation man”. Disrobing accomplished, he laid the dummy down in front of the exit door and made his escape wearing the stolen suit. A resident of a second floor room later came down the stairs and upon reaching the bottom of the staircase, stepped on the dummy. The article continues, “...[the gentleman] then became so alarmed, thinking it to be a corpse, that he ran into the street almost wild with fright, and there was great excitement until the true state of affairs was discovered.” The article goes to great lengths to describe the use of mannequins for the purpose of clothing display; either evidence of embellishment or indicative of the uniqueness of May’s store display.⁵²



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In the fall of 1885, May leased the Davis lode on Friar Hill "...for one year from the time of striking pay mineral." This was not his first venture into mining, but it follows a period of concentration on his merchant business.⁵³ May's mining interests apparently did well. In the Herald Democrat of September 19, 1886, a column titled "Positive Facts" presented the statement that "Dave May is looking forward to a magnificent harvest from his mines." This society entry falls one year from the lease of the Davis lode on Friar Hill, which in addition to his lease of the Gertrude mine in June of '86 and his interests in the Smuggler Union operation, brought him additional income outside of his clothing business by the fall.⁵⁴

In early 1886, May stepped down as Lake County treasurer.⁵⁵ His time as treasurer was short but he was remembered in his fair dealings. Thoroughness in the realm of taxes did not make him popular, and it was likely a stressful position. A passport application made years later reveals an interesting detail of May and early United States immigration. May was not a citizen when he was appointed to county treasurer. According to the same passport application cited above regarding his date of birth, May wrote that his naturalization was on May 2, 1888, nearly two years after he stepped down as treasurer. This was not unusual at the time, and either there were simply no regulations regarding immigrants, citizenship, and public office or they were ignored.

Travel between Leadville and Denver was optimized by this time. Two railroads served with once daily service to and from the Carbonate City. May made regular trips to Denver throughout 1885 and 1886, as well as to the East. Late 1886 saw a number of absences by the entire May family. In November, the family returned from several months in the East and they checked into the Tabor Grand Hotel; they likely did not want to come home to a cold, unkept house.⁵⁶ Another social column points to a resumption of housekeeping on December 5th.⁵⁷ Despite May's absences, advertisements

continued to regularly run in the *Carbonate Chronicle*, *Daily Herald*, and others. May's "fire sale" strategy continued. In September of 1886, a nearly full page advertisement in the Herald Democrat claims to offer "...the largest trade ever experienced since my residence in Leadville"⁵⁸ It is difficult to know if May was simply engaging in optimism for the sake of business or if business was truly good in the last years of the 1880s. Given the fact that May began to transition away from business and residence in Leadville around this time points to May's shifting interest. May traveled to Denver in a sleeper railcar in March of 1886, suggesting a time sensitive visit to Denver during that month.⁵⁹

Leadville newspapers from the year 1887 continue the same lineup of "Popular and Progressive Clothier" ads for May's store at 318 Harrison. Normal settled life continued at the May residence. On January 22, Mrs. David May entertained her friends with a "coffee party". Eighteen ladies attended and were "...ushered into her spacious dining room..." In March, May and A. Hirsch bought the stock of the Lion Clothing house from Samuel Rich.⁶⁰ A month later, the same store and stock were sold to the famous "Cheap Joe" Shoenberg, with the sale notice published in the newspaper by Lake County Sheriff Joseph Lamping. Personal mention columns in Leadville newspapers abound with trips to Manitou, New York, and Denver, but little if any advertisements were run for the store early in the year.⁶¹ Like 1886, May traveled often. May likely had a trusted clerk run the store while he traveled and pursued other business. Despite his confidence in the mid-1880s, perhaps May had become unsure of Leadville's future during this time. Some time during 1887, May became vice president and treasurer of Smuggler Union mining.⁶² He also traveled to Aspen in search of mining interests at the Franklin Mine later in the year and to Denver on "important business".⁶³



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On October 1st, 1887, J.H. Monhiemer, who had been president of the Temple Israel, a prominent clothing store merchant, and a county commissioner, decided to leave Leadville. The farewell party took place at the “Texas House” and was host to prominent Leadville characters, as well as many Jews. The May family was in attendance and, as was common at the time, orations and toasts were the mainstay of the party. According to the Leadville Daily/ Evening Chronicle, May compiled a list of those who attended the party, “... and their correctness testifies to his sobriety, although the wine flowed like water.” May clearly knew and was likely associated with everyone there. The menu of the occasion included, “Champagne, Steinberger Cabinet [wine from the Rhine valley], Oysters, Turkey, Tongue, Fried Oysters, Cold Meats, Potato Salad, Chicken Salad, Ice Cream, and Cake.” Two appearances of oysters testifies to the shipping abilities of the time and the wealth present in Leadville in the 1880s.

May remained with his store at 318 Harrison until late 1888. This would be the tenth and final year the May family lived in the Carbonate City. For unknown reasons, the family moved one block from their 5th and Pine Street house to “...their elegant Queen Anne cottage...” at 120 West 4th Street on January 2 from Dr. D. H. Dougan.⁶⁴ Later in January May traveled to the East to shop for new spring stock and in February and March he was in Philadelphia and New York visiting “clothing markets.”⁶⁵ He and the family traveled to Europe separately and stayed for much of the spring and summer. Rosa and the children left in February on the steamship *Etruria* and Mr. May left on around May 20th on the steamship *Umbria*.⁶⁶ In June, while the May family were away in Europe, advertisements for May’s store continued. In one, hard times play a part in the pitch; “...Everything in our store is marked down to the standard of hard times...”⁶⁷ It seems a stark contrast that May would be vacationing in Europe during hard times. He had clearly built a strong savings account since his 10

years in Leadville were filled with furious activity and success.

As part of May’s trip to Europe, he was required to apply for a passport and, as part of that application, he also became naturalized as an American citizen at the Lake County Courthouse in the spring of 1888. After the family returned from Europe, they settled down for a short time. In September, they attended a Simchas Torah ball held at city hall. Attendance seemed smaller than the departure of Jacob Monheimer the year before with only 35 attendees. Jewish Leadville was on the slow decline. On December 3rd, Mr. and Mrs. Schayer entertained the Mays at a “Thanksgiving dinner”.⁶⁸ This would prove to be one of the final social mentions of May in a Leadville paper while still a resident. The last advertisements for his store at 318 Harrison would run late in 1888. On January 17th, 1889, Rosa and the children left Leadville behind for Denver; David likely left earlier to prepare their new residence.⁶⁹

May’s time in Leadville was formative. His business style and the environment in which his skills were tested allowed for the company to grow in later years. As May matured in his interests, his Denver operation was advertised prolifically in Leadville papers well into 1889. In February of 1889, May sold his interest in the Manhattan Clothing Store. May again teamed up with a Shoenberg upon his move to Denver in January, 1889. In an advertisement in the Herald Democrat in August of 1889, L.D. Shoenberg and David May are listed as the proprietors of a new store at the prime location of 15th and Larimer Streets in Denver.⁷⁰ The new May and Shoenberg team published advertisements to their Leadville customers for the Denver store until nearly the end of 1889. May returned to Leadville in 1890 and stayed at the Hotel Kitchen, now the Tabor Grand.⁷¹ The May family was also mentioned in social columns of Leadville newspapers for several years after their departure from the city, and they again traveled to Europe in spring of 1890 according to



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the Herald Democrat.⁷² It is revealed in an issue of the Herald Democrat in July of 1891 that May was involved in a case pursuant of unpaid taxes of an individual that went to the Colorado Supreme Court.⁷³ On January 17, 1893, May also attended court in Leadville on another tax matter.⁷⁴ Mentions of May in Leadville papers continue on a small scale throughout the 1890s. In 1895, he bought the Harris-Manhattan Block for \$12,100 and he "...considers conditions here [in Leadville] very good and the outlook very bright."⁷⁵ Clearly, May did not let go of Leadville overnight. As late as 1896 he was listed as a large mine developer in the Herald Democrat:

"Mr. David May of Denver is becoming so largely interested in Leadville mines that it is very natural to group them under the above heading [The May Properties]. Mr. May has associated with him in his enterprises several other Denver capitalists, as well as some New York gentlemen, and has already expended large sums in the development of ground here. There are four properties in which he is a leading spirit, these being the Macon lease on the Eliza, the Black Prince, the Humboldt, and the Nisi Prius."⁷⁶

As he transitioned slowly away from Leadville, David May's store in the 1890s continued with expansion and success in the Denver market. He was well known to the boys of Denver for his generosity and the store enjoyed extensive patronage. Starting in 1891, he created a joyful and memorable perk to a boy's suit purchase: a free baseball and bat. According to the "May Story," written by Forbes Parkhill in the early 1950s, Denver citizens at that time still fondly remembered their free baseball gear from purchases at May's Denver store in the 1890s.⁷⁷ In 1898, May was credited in a Leadville paper for attaining a US military contract for a "...combination overcoat and shelter tent made of brown canvas."⁷⁸ In 1898, May was lauded for his pro-business attitude. "Mr. David May is one of those who has demonstrated his nerve and stick-to-itiveness repeatedly in mining

enterprises and in doing so has won a favorable standing in the minds of thousands of people all over the state."⁷⁹

The Spanish-American war was underway in April of 1898. David May benefited directly from the conflict. According to a mention in a Leadville paper, David May & Co. was "...awarded a contract for supplying the army with 100,000 hats and caps and 10,000 pairs of shoes. May & Co. also have bids in at New York and Philadelphia for other contracts amounting to about \$1,000,000 and feel quite confident of securing them."⁸⁰ One of his early out of state store expansions occurred in 1898 with the acquisition of Hull and Dutton of Cleveland, Ohio, and his son Morton, born during the hectic early years of Leadville, got his first job there.⁸¹ The store at 15th and Larimer underwent the first heavy duty remodel in 1899, and the company was well on its way to nationwide success.

Starting in the early 20th century, May was invested in Texas oil and still appeared in Leadville occasionally to attend to legal business.⁸² By 1904 his appearances in Leadville newspapers diminish significantly. The expansion of May & Co. became his priority and the family left Colorado by the end of the first decade of the 20th century. In 1900, May became involved with the National Jewish Hospital.⁸³ His health struggles in the late 1870s had initially brought him to Colorado and he likely remembered his own travails with health when contributing to hospitals and other charities. David May & Co. was incorporated in 1910 and was well along to become one of the largest clothing companies in the United States. In 1905, the May family moved from Denver in order to be closer to the new company headquarters in St. Louis. In 1906, May built a large department store at 16th and Champa Streets in Denver. It was one of America's early malls; with a dining room, escalator, and 91,250 square feet of retail space.⁸⁴ The store was later a victim of Denver's urban renewal efforts in the 1960s.



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David May died at his Michigan vacation home on July 22, 1927, nearly fifty busy years after his first store opened on chaotic South Harrison in the long past summer of 1878.⁸⁵ May stores were a powerful player in the clothing retail market throughout the 20th century. The legacy of the May Department Stores ended with a merger with Federated Department Stores, later Macy's, in 2006. Today, the corner of Chestnut and Harrison Avenue on the edge of Leadville is quiet; the bustle that ignited so much fortune is gone. The site of May's first storefront at 25 Harrison avenue is a roadside motel; dust and snow swirl around in an empty lot across the street. A little further up the avenue, just past the Tabor Opera House, a memorial plaque marks the location of May's "first store" at 318 Harrison Avenue. It was actually his third location in Leadville after 108-110 Harrison and 25 Harrison. The building at 318 Harrison is gone. The space is currently a plaza which hosts events for a new boom in Leadville: bicycle and running races.

Perhaps the best summation of the May Company is David May's own voice as quoted by Forbes Parkhill,

"It seems like almost like a dream since I first came to Denver. I started in this business at \$5 a week. Store clerks were on duty from 6 in the morning till well after dark. It was a period that regarded ten cents an hour sufficient to feed, clothe and house a common laborer and family. Grumblers may tell you there were better chances back yonder, but I know otherwise. The best times that the world ever knew are here now- and common property besides. Millionaires and noblemen of my boyhood could not procure, with all their wealth and power, half the safety or enjoyment that the run of wage earners presently command. America is the squarest and fairest country on earth, and the only land where every citizen can have as splendid a chance as he dares to make or take."⁸⁶



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- ¹ "United States Passport Applications, 1795-1925," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q24F-KRG6> : 16 March 2018), David May, 1900; citing Passport Application, Colorado, United States, source certificate #, Passport Applications, 1795-1905., 537, NARA microfilm publications M1490 and M1372 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).
- ² Beginning in early 1848 with an uprising in Sicily, many European monarchies and city states were fraught with violent Republican revolution. Germany, France, and Austria all experienced violence and uprisings. In May's home province of Rhineland-Palatinate, Bavarian control was overthrown in an 1849 revolution. In point of fact, May was born on a front line; his birth city of Kaiserslautern was a central place of the Palatinate democratic revolution of 1849, for more information see bibliography under Britannica.
- ³ The town transitioned from Bavarian control to Rhineland-Palatinate in May's first year of life, see footnote 2 above for details.
- ⁴ Jeanne Abrams. "David May." In *Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present*, vol. 3, edited by Giles R. Hoyt. German Historical Institute. Last modified May 31, 2016. <http://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=99>
- ⁵ "United States Germans to America Index, 1850-1897," database, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KDQY-Y2D> : 27 December 2014), David Mai, 15 May 1865; citing Germans to America Passenger Data file, 1850-1897, Ship Saxonia, departed from Hamburg, arrived in New York, New York, New York, United States, NAID identifier 1746067, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
- ⁶ Parkhill, *The May Story* 1952 p. 3
- ⁷ President Lincoln had been assassinated less than a month before. Given the transit time from Europe, May likely was unaware of this news until he disembarked. Also, the American Civil War had officially ended less than a week before May arrived, which he certainly would have found out when he disembarked. While he was likely aware of civil conflict in the United States, the fact that he arrived just days after the peace treaty was signed is remarkable.
- ⁸ Parkhill *The May Story* 1952 p. 3
- ⁹ In the 1882-1883 city directory for Hartford City, Indiana, see bibliography.
- ¹⁰ Harriet and Fred Rochlin. *Pioneer Jews*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984.
- ¹¹ Jeanne Abrams. "David May" 2016
- ¹² Parkhill, *May Story* 1952 p. 5
- ¹³ Edward Blair. *Leadville: Colorado's Magic City*. Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Company, 1980. pp 89-90
- ¹⁴ Jean Harvey and Don L. Griswold, *History of Leadville and Lake County, Colorado, Vol. I*. Boulder, CO: Colorado Historical Society in cooperation with the University Press of Colorado, 1996. p 144
- ¹⁵ "Advertisements" Leadville, CO; USA. *Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle*, January 29, 1879 p. 4
- ¹⁶ WM Clark, WA Root And HC Anderson. "Clark, Root and Co's First Annual City Directory of Leadville and Business Directory of Carbonateville, Kokomo and Malta for 1879". *Daily Times Steam Printing House And Book Manufactory*; Denver, CO: USA. 1879. pp. 65, 80, 92, 94, 108, 153, 162, 169, 179.
- ¹⁷ "Advertisements" Leadville, CO; USA. *Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle*, January 29, 1879, p.4.
- ¹⁸ This is a child's version of the classic caped Victorian overcoat made famous by Arthur Conan Doyle.
- ¹⁹ "Advertisements" Leadville, CO; USA. *Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle*, January 30, 1879, p.4
- ²⁰ Entire in the directories and newspaper advertisements have dropped the name Dean and Holcomb by spring of 1880 and by May, May and Shoenberg moved to 108-110 Harrison.
- ²¹ "Grand Opening" Leadville, CO;USA. *Carbonate Chronicle*, January 3, 1880 p. 12 and drawing
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- ²⁵ "Great Closing Out Sale" Leadville, CO; USA. *Leadville Weekly Herald*, October 9, 1880 p.1
- ²⁶ Jeanne Abrams. "David May" 2016
- ²⁷ United States Census, 1870
- ²⁸ 1879 Leadville City Directory
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- ³⁰ Parkhill *The May Story* 1952 p. 8
- ³¹ Jeanne Abrams. "David May" 2016
- ³² "Our Friends and Customers" Leadville, CO; USA. *Leadville Democrat*, April 16, 1881 p.1
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