



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Schiff

Lee J. Schiff

Born: November 3, 1860 (Plattsburgh, New York)¹

Died: Unknown

Married to: Rebecca Bernheimer (February 3, 1892. Missouri)²

Rebecca Bernheimer

Born:

Died: Unknown

Married to: Lee J. Schiff

Lee J. Schiff was a well-known clothing store salesman in Leadville, typical of the highly successful individuals who made a living from the booming clothing business. He was born in Plattsburgh, New York at the dawn of the American Civil War. His early life is obscure, although a passport application from 1904 and the Colorado State census of 1885, provided his birth place, year, and the origin of his parents. In addition, a *Herald Democrat* article mentions nearly 12 combined years of sales experience in 1886 between Leadville and New York. Both Lee's parents immigrated from Germany.³ His exact relation to another famous Jewish-German immigrant, New York banker Jacob Schiff is not precisely known. Given his birth date and the fact that Jacob had only one son and a daughter, Lee was possibly a nephew. Details of Lee's early life were not found by this researcher.

While still in his early 20s, Lee arrived in the bustling city of Leadville in 1882. His first job was as a salesman for the Monheimer brothers clothing store at the corner of Harrison and West 4th Street.⁴ Typical of the high density living and work spaces of early Leadville, Lee lived in a residence above the store during 1882 and 1883.⁵ At the end of December 1883, Lee was considered "a prominent candidate" for First Lieutenant of the Tabor Light Cavalry, a local militia group.⁶ Activity in small, localized militias and paramilitary organizations was common in Victorian cities across the United States. These militias were often popular for their social events (the "Militia Musings column in most

early Leadville newspapers is extensive), in addition to their contribution to the martial tradition which persisted less than two decades after the end of the Civil War.

In 1884, Lee moved to the residence of the Monheimer family at 124 West 9th Street.⁷ Early in the year, an altercation in the clothing store left Lee with a broken nose. On the morning of January 23, a man named Al Robinson created a loud disturbance in the Monheimers clothing store. According to the *Leadville Daily Herald*, Lee was the acting manager. The *Herald* elaborated:

*"...Mr. Al Robinson, a brother of the man injured at Greenwood Lakes on Sunday, who was a clerk, was making what Mr. Schiff considered an unnecessary amount of noise, and he ordered him to stop, whereupon Robinson applied some most opprobrious epithets, and was told to get out of the store. He turned and struck Schiff a terrible blow in the face, breaking his nose. Schiff made an effort to return to blow but failed. Each swore out a warrant for the other on charges of assault and battery. Robinson will answer to Judge Krell this evening for his immurement... the injured man is getting along nicely but will probably always be in procession of his antagonists autograph."*⁸

The altercation did not diminish Lee's reputation however, and in February he was again mentioned in a militia newspaper column, this time with distinction:

*"Sargent Lee Schiff of the Tabors is 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form'"*⁹



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In March, Lee attended the Purim “Masque” Ball at the East 6th Street City Hall venue. Ed Powel, Lee, and Max Monheimer were all listed as wearing a costume called “Jumbo”. It is interesting to speculate on the nature of a “Jumbo” costume. The most likely explanation is the men dressed as a famous elephant called Jumbo, who was on tour with P. T. Barnum during that year. A “jumbo” could have also been someone obese. Viewed in modern terms, the costumes were often of a racy nature; “dago, dunce, Chinaman, bum,” were among those unlikely to be replicated today. Others reflected the patriotism of the time such as “Pride of Denver”, Uncle Sam”, and “Columbia”.

In October of 1884 the Temple Israel building was newly completed, and Lee attended the first Simchas Torah services in the new space.¹⁰ He was listed as part of the “Floor Committee” for the service, alongside such prominent young men as David May¹¹, Jacob Bernheimer¹² and Irving Hauser¹³.

Throughout 1885, Lee continued to work and live with the Monheimers. The 1885 Colorado State Census for 124 West 9th Street lists the five Monheimer family members, Lee “Scheff”, and two young women servants Tina Collins and Ellen Hoy.¹⁴ Lee is not mentioned in other Temple Israel events during 1885, but again appears in newspapers in reference to his personal qualities in 1886. On January 1, 1886 the *Herald Democrat* published a short profile of Lee:

“He Is Only a Clerk’

Some may say, but they are mistaken. A clerk simply waits on customers watches the hands of the clock, quits work when time is called, and draws his salary with religious regularity. The subject of this sketch is a very different sort of personage. By always making his employer’s interest his own, he has risen above his profession, and commands more trade directly than many a proprietor, while his income, on account of his valuable services, exceeds that of many with large sums invested. He was born in

Plattsburgh, New York, served six years in New York and six years in Leadville for one firm, and is now connected with the Palace of Fashion. He is one of the most popular salesmen in Leadville, and his is known far and near as plain Lee Schiff. His dash and energy long since entitled him to a place in the front rank, and it is cheerfully accorded him by dealers and buyers alike. He is thoroughly conversat [sic] with every branch of the dry goods business, familiar with fabrics and values and never hesitates. Uniformly polite and courteous to all, whether rich or poor, of smooth and even temper and gentle disposition, it is not, after all, matter for surprise that he occupies an exalted place among the dry goods people of the Carbonate metropolis.”¹⁵

The 1886 Directory indicates that Lee was employed by Frank Butler and that he had moved to a residence at 111 West 4th Street. This residence was a livery and boarding house located at approximately the present location of High Mountain Pies. The building paralleled the alley directly behind the Monheimer’s store, although Lee had begun working at the Palace of Fashion on the 400 block of Harrison, and it was a block away from Temple Israel. Lee’s living arrangement is worth exploring, as in keeping with the multi-purpose housing of the time, it was common in western towns to combine horse and human boarding. Horses were kept in stables on the first story of, or adjacent to, a boarding house. The 100 block of West 4th Street, in fact, had two such combination horse and human boarding facilities, often referred to as “livery & boarding”.¹⁶



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Lee did not appear again in social columns of Leadville newspapers during the remainder of 1886. By 1887, Lee again moved his residence, this time to room 37 of the Clarendon Hotel and his job as a salesman for Daniels, Fisher and Smith: both located on opposite corners of 3rd and Harrison avenue.¹⁷ The final appearance Lee made in a Leadville newspaper is a vague reference in election night coverage in April: “*Rod King sat on the railing throughout the day with Lee Schiff as his side partner.*” It is unclear if Lee ran for office or was simply loitering somewhere during the election excitement and captured the attention of a newspaperman.¹⁸

Lee later moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where he married Rebecca Bernheimer in the winter of 1892.¹⁹ His later movements are not known, but he lived in Kansas City as late as 1904, according to a passport application. Date of death and place of burial were not precisely determined from existing records.

¹ 1904 Passport Application

² Missouri, Marriage Records, 1805-2002

³ 1885 Colorado State Census

⁴ For more information on the Monheimers see <http://jewishleadville.org/monheimer.html>

⁵ 1882 and 1883 Leadville City Directories p. 251 and p. 240

⁶ “Militia Musings” Carbonate Chronicle, December 22, 1883 p. 12

⁷ 1884 Leadville City Directory p. 218

⁸ “Another Broken Nose” Leadville Daily Herald, January 24, 1884 p. 4

⁹ “Our Soldier Boys” Carbonate Chronicle, February 23, 1884 p. 8

¹⁰ “The Law’s Holiday” Carbonate Chronicle, October 11, 1884 p. 6

¹¹ For more information on David May see <http://jewishleadville.org/may.html>

¹² For more information on Jacob Bernheimer see <http://jewishleadville.org/bernheimer.html>

¹³ For more information on Irving Hauser see <http://jewishleadville.org/hauser.html>

¹⁴ 1885 Colorado State Census accessed via ancestry.com

¹⁵ “He Is Only A Clerk” Herald Democrat, January 1, 1886 p. 9

¹⁶ 1886 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

¹⁷ 1887 Leadville City Directory

¹⁸ “Anglings from the Election” Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle, April 6, 1887 p. 4

¹⁹ Missouri, Marriage Records, 1805-2002



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1904: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington D.C.; Roll #: 642; Volume #: *Roll 642 - 01 Feb 1904-17 Feb 1904*

Map:

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Leadville, Lake County, Colorado. Sanborn Map Company, Sep. 1886. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn01031_001/.

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