



# Temple Israel FOUNDATION

## Biographical Information Sheet

### Wachtel

Simon Wachtel

Born: Birscherg, Germany, July 24, 1854

Died: Denver, CO., February 6, 1941.

Immigration: 1870

Simon Wachtel was born on July 24, 1854 in Birscherg, Germany.<sup>1</sup> He immigrated to the United States as a teenager and became a successful businessman. Fortunately, his life was well-documented in local newspapers and passport applications. These give us a sense of both his physical appearance and personality. According to passport applications in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he was 5'6 with blond, graying hair, brown eyes, and a fair complexion.<sup>2</sup> Wachtel was a "veritable bookworm" and "open to the charms of womankind."<sup>3</sup> Despite that last fact, he likely never married (see below).

In 1870, at the age of 16, he emigrated to the United States on board the *Allemanian*. According to ship records, it appears he traveled alone.<sup>4</sup> The ship landed in New York and he spent the next 10 years on the east coast before heading west to Leadville.

According to city directories, he lived in Leadville for only one year, 1880. That year, he worked as a bookkeeper at Ellis Harris's store.<sup>5</sup> Harris's store sold hay, grain, cigars, and liquor from 224 W. Chestnut Street.<sup>6</sup> Ellis Harris was a colorful, somewhat troubled character who had repeated run-ins with the legal authorities. In July of 1880, he defaulted on his property and 224 W. Chestnut Street was sold at a public auction the following January.<sup>7</sup> Wachtel likely left town with the close of Harris's business, as he does not appear in city directories in the following years. During his time in Leadville, he purchased 1/6 of a mining claim for \$1,000 from W.A. Keller.<sup>8</sup> There are no records as to the success of that claim, but Keller was a well-respected businessman in Leadville at that time. It is possible that that investment financed Wachtel's future ventures.

Wachtel resurfaced in Aspen in 1884, opening Wachtel & Co, a wholesale and retail liquor business. The local newspapers praised this new business and the man behind it. They exclaimed about the "general excellence of his stock" and that "his reputation in that trade is a guarantee that all customers will be pleased with his goods and treatment."<sup>9</sup> His experience in business that the paper refers to, other than his brief stint at Ellis Harris's store in Leadville, is unknown. Yet Wachtel quickly became enormously successful and popular in Aspen: by Christmas 1884, he "[enjoyed] the best trade in camp" and the *Rocky Mountain Sun* referred to him as "one of our leading and most popular businessmen."<sup>10</sup> In 1886, he became ill with pneumonia; his condition was frequently reported on in the papers and "his improvement [was] gratifying news to his many friends and the general public."<sup>11</sup> His business did very well financially and he frequently purchased mining claims across central Colorado, many of which were also successful.<sup>12</sup> He also was very involved in the community, serving as president of the Hook and Ladder Company, president of the Fidelity Building and Loan, and was involved in the Elks and the Keystone chapter of the Masons.<sup>13</sup>

His membership in the Elks brought him back to Leadville for the Elks parade at the Winter Carnival at the Ice Palace on February 15, 1896. The event brought Elks from across the state and Wachtel marched with the blue uniforms of the Aspen Elks. It was a wild event, where the "scene on the streets reminded one of New Orleans during the Mardi Gras." The Aspen Elks were a particularly vivacious group who "paid as they went" and "live at the top of the heap."<sup>14</sup> Other than that event, there is no record of Wachtel returning to Leadville.



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The Aspen papers frequently reported on Wachtel's travels, whereabouts, and love life. He made frequent trips to Glenwood Springs and visited Utah and the east coast. After his east coast trip, the *Aspen Evening Chronicle* reported that Wachtel had "returned from a six week sojourn in the fashion centers of the east," but, "much to the disappointment of his friends, he returned alone, however."<sup>15</sup> During his years in Aspen he was a bachelor, living with his sister Elise Gerstle and her husband and Wachtel's business partner, Max Gerstle.

Wachtel actually spent his later years in Denver, moving away from Aspen in 1899. He sold his business that year to Herman Baer, a Jew from Philadelphia.<sup>16</sup> Newspaper articles about the sale report that Wachtel had made \$200,000 to \$250,000 from the business in 15 years of business, the equivalent of \$6-7 million in 2018.<sup>17</sup> He moved to Denver and lived off his previous earnings for his

remaining years. The U.S. Censuses between 1900 and 1940 list him as having no business/retired and he lived with the Gerstles or boarded in those decades.<sup>18</sup> He traveled frequently, including trips to Europe. In 1908, the *Aspen Daily Times* referenced a Mrs. Wachtel on a trip with Simon in Rome, but other papers refer to Wachtel and the woman he was with, Fanny Weinberger, separately.<sup>19</sup> Neither is mentioned in the other's obituary, census records refer to Wachtel as single, and we assume Wachtel died a childless, lifelong bachelor.<sup>20</sup>

He lived to be 86 years old, dying in Denver on February 6, 1941 of pneumonia and other complications. He was buried in Denver's *Temple Emanuel* cemetery alongside his sister and brother-in-law.<sup>21</sup> While his time in Leadville was very brief, it was mentioned in his obituary as the spark for his many successful years in Colorado.<sup>22</sup>



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- <sup>1</sup> "United States Passport Applications, 1795-1925," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9X7-4ZKT?cc=2185145&wc=3XZZ-168%3A1056306401%2C1056428501> : 14 March 2016), (M1372) Passport Applications, 1795-1905 > Roll 640, vol 1018, 1904 Jan > image 621 of 738; citing NARA microfilm publications M1490 and M1372 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.)
- <sup>2</sup> "United States Passport Applications, 1795-1925," database with images, FamilySearch.
- <sup>3</sup> "Positive Facts". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Evening Chronicle*. September 1, 1888. P4; "Positive Facts". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Daily Times*. July 3, 1892. P4.
- <sup>4</sup> "New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1891," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939V-5Y96-XM?cc=1849782&wc=MX6L-738%3A165837901> : 15 April 2015), 336 - 19 Oct 1870-14 Nov 1870 > image 302 of 464; citing NARA microfilm publication M237 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).
- <sup>5</sup> For more information on the Harris family and their time in Leadville, please see <http://www.jewishleadville.org/harris.html>
- <sup>6</sup> TB Corbett, WC Hoyer and JH Ballenger. "Corbett, Hoyer, & Co.'s First Annual City Directory of Inhabitants, Institutions, Incorporated Companies, Manufacturing Establishments, Business, Business Firms, Etc. in the City of Leadville for 1880". Democrat Printing Company Printers; Leadville, CO: USA. 1880.
- <sup>7</sup> "Trustee's Sale". Leadville, CO; USA. *Leadville Daily Herald*. December 31, 1880. P3.
- <sup>8</sup> "Transfers". Leadville, CO; USA. *Leadville Weekly Herald*. October 9, 1880. P1.
- <sup>9</sup> "Local Mention". Aspen, CO; USA. *Rocky Mountain Sun*. August 2, 1884. P2. "Personal". Aspen, CO; USA. *Rocky Mountain Sun*. July 19, 1884. P2.
- <sup>10</sup> "Simon Wachtel". Aspen, CO; USA. *Rocky Mountain Sun*. December 20, 1884. P2; "Personal and Local". Aspen, CO; USA. *Rocky Mountain Sun*. January 1, 1887. P2.
- <sup>11</sup> "Personal and Local". Aspen, CO; USA. *Rocky Mountain Sun*. November 13, 1886. P2.
- <sup>12</sup> "Aspen Men are Near Gold". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Weekly Times*. January 18, 1896. P1. "Mines at Ashcroft". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Daily Times*. June 12, 1897. P8.
- <sup>13</sup> "Locals". Aspen, CO; USA. *Rocky Mountain Sun*. May 4, 1889. P3; "The Fidelity". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Daily Times*. May 25, 1892. P7; "The Elks Owned All". Leadville, CO; USA. *Herald Democrat*. February 16, 1896. P6; "Masons". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Tribune*. August 8, 1897. P3.
- <sup>14</sup> "The Elks Owned All". Leadville, CO; USA. *Herald Democrat*. February 16, 1896. P6.
- <sup>15</sup> "Purely Personal". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Evening Chronicle*. June 30, 1892. P4.
- <sup>16</sup> "The Transfer Made". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Daily Times*. June 20, 1899. P1.
- <sup>17</sup> "City Briefs". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Daily Times*. June 4, 1899. P2.
- <sup>18</sup> United States Census, 1900; United States Census, 1920; United States Census, 1930; United States Census, 1940.
- <sup>19</sup> "Local Items". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Daily Times*. March 15, 1908. P3; "Local Items". Denver, CO; USA. *Jewish Outlook*. April 10, 1908. P6.
- <sup>20</sup> "Fannie Weinberger". Denver, CO; USA. *Denver Jewish News*. January 9, 1919. P6; "Simon Wachtel Died in Denver Thursday". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Daily Times*. February 13, 1941. P1. United States Census, 1920; United States Census, 1930; United States Census, 1940.
- <sup>21</sup> Find A Grave, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 13 August 2018), memorial page for Simon Wachtel (1854–1941), Find A Grave Memorial no. 9908678, citing Congregation Emanuel Cemetery, Denver, Denver County, Colorado, USA ; Maintained by Digginrellies (contributor 46522347) .
- <sup>22</sup> "Simon Wachtel Died in Denver Thursday". Aspen, CO; USA. *Aspen Daily Times*. February 13, 1941. P1.



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- "United States Census, 1920," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MH7N-GYT> : accessed 14 August 2018), Simon Wachtel in household of Max Gerstle, Venice, Los Angeles, California, United States; citing ED 624, sheet 17B, line 63, family 169, NARA microfilm publication T625 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1992), roll 120; FHL microfilm 1,820,120.



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Denver Jewish News (Denver, Denver County, Colorado)  
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SOURCE: Jewish Surnames/Wachtel

PUBLISHED BY: Temple Israel Foundation. Leadville, CO; USA. 2018

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