



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Witkowski

Julius Witkowski

Born: 1863, Cincinnati, Ohio

Died: 1920, Denver, Colorado

In Leadville: 1891-1892

Julius Witkowski was the eldest son of Anna and Louis Witkowski. He was born in Ohio in 1863, probably Cincinnati, as he was later referred to as a “former Cincinnati” in a short mention in the *American Israelite*. The same mention also indicates that Julius and two partners named Fogel stuck silver at a mine in Evans Gulch, which will be explored later in this study.¹

The Witkowski family came to Colorado at an unknown date, but lived at 323 Glenarm Place, Denver, according to census data in 1880.² Julius’s father, Louis Witkowski, was a successful boot and shoe dealer in Denver with a store located at 376 Lawrence Street.³ According to the 1880 census, Louis immigrated from Prussia and was born in 1838 and his wife Anna was a native of Ohio. Anna’s parents were both from Germany. Julius had two brothers named Frank and Lorenzo who were born in Cincinnati and Denver respectively, but did not live in Leadville and thus are not explored in this study.⁴ According to the 1880 census, Julius was a clerk at his father’s shoe store that year.

In 1886, at the age of 22, Julius opened a shoe store with A. Powell at a busy intersection in Pueblo, Colorado.⁵ A. Powell was Adolph Powell, brother of the owner and businessman behind the long-lived Leadville “Famous” shoe store, Herman Powell.⁶ The store was called “The Eagle” and before it opened on April 1, 1886, the local newspaper referred to Adolph and Julius as “red-hot young businessmen” with a “large force of workmen.”⁷ The day before the Eagle store opened, Richard Metz, an important Leadville shoe salesman who was partnered with Herman Powell, visited Pueblo to congratulate Adolph and Julius.⁸ Such a visit suggests the close knit nature of the shoe business the Powell brothers and their partners set up. Later

that summer, however, Adolph departed as co-founder of the store in Pueblo, and Julius operated the store as the sole proprietor until November of 1886, when he returned to Denver.⁹ Julius’ Denver store was located at 907 16th Street and presumably operated at that location for the next several years.¹⁰

In January 1891, Julius relocated to Leadville.¹¹ According to the 1891 Leadville city directory, his store was located at 407 Harrison Avenue; a contemporary advertisement is included here.¹² His place of residence was not specified.¹³ A contemporary newspaper article claimed that Julius bought out the stock of Herman Powell’s “Famous” shoe store.¹⁴ Julius regularly published advertisements for his store in Leadville newspapers throughout 1891 and took part in several social activities including a sleigh ride to Evergreen lake in March.¹⁵ During the middle of July, “Witkowski” appeared as one of a list of retail businessmen who pledged to close their businesses all day on Sunday at 7pm on Saturday with the exception of major holidays. The notice appeared for several weeks in the *Herald Democrat*, was captioned as an advertisement, and was signed by the Commissioner of the Knights of Labor.¹⁶ The 1890s were a divisive time for the labor movement and violence visited many cities. Labor conditions for manufacturing and mining were often at the forefront of the union causes. Merchant’s clientele were often union men which may explain Julius’s participation in the pledge. Later that summer, Julius appeared on a petition which included many Lake County taxpayers to protest \$50,000 in compensation for a former county attorney. The sizable list included many fellow Jewish merchant names such as David May, J. Heimberger, C. A. Wineberg, and M. Leppel also appeared on the list.¹⁷



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Advertisements for Julius's store continued into the late spring of 1892, albeit with a prolonged "Closing all stock" sale, before a fire struck the 400 block of Harrison Avenue.¹⁸ Late on the night of May 26, the fire spread from the attic of the Young Men's Christian Association into both the Star block at 405 Harrison Avenue and Julius's store at 407 Harrison; damage to his stock from smoke and water was \$5,000 and was insured.¹⁹ Three days later, the city officially condemned the building at 407 Harrison Avenue and it was torn down.²⁰ The report of the condemned status of the building also revealed the owner of the building to have been Fred Butler, a well-known Leadville clothing merchant, who was accused and then later acquitted of arson a decade earlier at the Palace of Fashion.²¹ Following the fire, Julius moved his store to 429 Harrison Avenue for a very short time; his final advertisement for a "fire sale" appeared on July 1, 1892.²²

While he did not appear in the 1892 Leadville city directory, there is evidence Julius remained in Leadville even as advertisements for the store faded away; the "Famous" disappeared from the business directory and 407 Harrison was listed under different tenants.²³ In the aforementioned "100-years Later" article in an October 1992 *American Israelite*, a brief mention of Witkowski and Fogel's silver mine "strike" in Evans Gulch can be clarified in a late 1892 *Herald Democrat*. In December of 1892, a civil complaint was filed in Lake County court by the owners of the Midnight lode on Little

Ellen Hill in upper Evans Gulch against Fogel, Frankle, Hill, Simons, Glover, and Witkowski, owners of the neighboring Valley lode, for theft of ore. This confirms and clarifies the reference in the 1992 *American Israelite* article without the more vivid language in the *Israelite* about a "strike". The language of the complaint in the words of the reporter read,

*"...On or about September 1, 1892, it is claimed that the defendants wrongfully and unlawfully entered upon and into a portion of the Midnight lode, and have ever since been and are now mining, extracting, carrying away, selling and disposing of the valuable ores and minerals therein contained. The complaint further states that defendants Fogel, Frankle and Witkowski are the leasees of the other defendants of the Valley lode and have entire charge of the ores and minerals in controversy and are now appropriating the proceeds to themselves, and as the plaintiffs are informed and believe, are so insolvent and without means or property, as that these plaintiffs would be unable to collect or recover and damages that might be sustained by them by reason of the trespass and wrong..."*²⁴

Following this incident, Julius did not appear again in Leadville or statewide newspapers and details of his later life after his apparent departure from Leadville were not immediately forthcoming. Julius passed away in 1920 as indicated by his gravestone in Denver's Riverside Cemetery.²⁵



Temple Israel FOUNDATION

Biographical Information Sheet

Witkowski

¹ “The American Israelite- 100 Years Ago” The American Israelite, October 8, 1992 p. 5

² Year: 1880; Census Place: Denver, Arapahoe, Colorado; Roll: 88; Page: 150C; Enumeration District: 007 Ancestry.com and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1880 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³ “Interesting Law Points” Colorado Daily Chieftain, February 14, 1886 p. 5

⁴ Find A Grave, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 15 August 2019), memorial page for Lorenzo “Louis” Witkowski (13 Aug 1867–23 Jan 1890), Find A Grave Memorial no. 38342203, citing Riverside Cemetery, Denver, Denver County, Colorado, USA ; Maintained by Scott Braddy (contributor 46980257) .

⁵ “Personal” Colorado Daily Chieftain, March 19, 1886 p. 5

⁶ For more information on the Powells see <http://jewishleadville.org/powell.html>

⁷ “Personal” Colorado Daily Chieftain, March 23, 1886 p. 4 and “Personal” Colorado Daily Chieftain, March 19, 1886 p. 5

⁸ “Personal” Colorado Daily Chieftain, March 31, 1886 p. 8

⁹ “Chubby Chunks of Chink” Colorado Daily Chieftain, November 30, 1886 p. 4

¹⁰ “Advertisements” Hesperus, Volume II, Number 16, June 15, 1887 p. 15

¹¹ “Denver, Col” The American Israelite, January 29, 1891 p. 3

¹² “No Dilemma” Herald Democrat, February 21, 1891 p. 8

¹³ 1891 Leadville City Directory p. 258

¹⁴ “Announcement” Herald Democrat, January 18, 1891 p. 8

¹⁵ “Merry Sleigh Ride” Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle, March 9, 1891 p. 4

¹⁶ “Advertisement” Herald Democrat, July 14, 1891 p. 3

¹⁷ “Park’s Bond Matter” Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle, August 4, 1891 p. 4

¹⁸ “Closing Out Stock” Herald Democrat, May 24, 1892 p. 4

¹⁹ “Hard Fight of Firemen” Herald Democrat, May 27, 1892 p. 4

²⁰ “The Building Condemned” Herald Democrat, May 29, 1892 p. 7

²¹ For more information on Fred Butler see, <http://jewishleadville.org/butler.html>

²² “Going, Going, Going” Herald Democrat, July 1, 1892 p. 3

²³ Leadville City Directory 1892 p. 266

²⁴ “Didn’t Pay His Share” Herald Democrat, December 23, 1892 p. 5

²⁵ Find A Grave, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com> : accessed 28 August 2019), memorial page for Julius Witkowski (1863–1920), Find A Grave Memorial no. 38342305, citing Riverside Cemetery, Denver, Denver County, Colorado, USA ; Maintained by Scott Braddy (contributor 46980257) .



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Year: 1880; Census Place: Denver, Arapahoe, Colorado; Roll: 88; Page: 150C; Enumeration District: 007 Ancestry.com and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1880 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Leadville, Lake County, Colorado. Sanborn Map Company, 1895. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn01031_001/.

Newspapers:

Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle (Leadville, Lake County, Colorado)

Herald Democrat (Leadville, Lake County, Colorado)

Colorado Daily Chieftain (Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colorado)

American Israelite (Cincinnati, Cayuga County, Ohio)

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