EDITOR'S NOTE: It is a pleasure to welcome a new contributor to The Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Notes. Owen Chariton is a graduate student in history at the University of Colorado, Denver and this essay was presented as part of his course work leading to the MA degree. As readers will note immediately, the article is wonderfully well researched in the local newspapers of the Colorado mining towns. These are resources that Chariton’s results indicate have too often been ignored or underutilized by historians of the Jewish experience in the West. He has recovered a surprising number of Jews noted by their fellow citizens in the local press, has documented that the reception of these Jews in the mining towns of Colorado was often friendly and without hostility, and that beneath the newspaper references there often lie human stories that are truly dramatic.

The best known story in the annals of Colorado romance is that of Baby Doe Tabor. Her beloved husband Horace, however, was not her first love. In her home town of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, when she was still known as Elizabeth Nellis McCourt, this lovely Irish Catholic girl raised eyebrows by marrying Harvey Doe, scion of a prominent Protestant family. It was not to be her only interfaith entanglement.

In 1878 the Does moved to Black Hawk and their marriage was foundering. Lonely and isolated, without either affection or money, Baby Doe tried to console herself by window shopping in some of the town’s finer stores. Among these was the clothing store of Sandelowsky-Pelton & Company on Gregory Street. It was owned by Sam Pelton and three Jewish brothers from Poland, Benjamin, Jacob and Charles Sandelowsky. Jacob, who had Americanized his name to Jake Sands, struck up an acquaintance with Baby Doe which soon blossomed into more than mere friendship. He accompanied her to the opera and gave her gifts of clothing, groceries and other merchandise. Long after the affair had ended, Sands remained heartbroken and yearned to reignite the spark between them.

By 1880, Sands and Pelton had expanded to the booming mining town of Leadville. Their new enterprise, “One Price Clothiers,” was ironically located on the ground floor of the Tabor Opera House. Little did Sands know that his new landlord would supplant him in Baby Doe’s affections. Burying himself in his work to fight off his sorrow, Sands became quite successful in Leadville before expanding once again in 1888, this time across the Continental Divide to Aspen. After several prosperous years there, Sands announced plans to liquidate his stock and relocate to Victor in the flourishing Cripple Creek district.

His unrequited affair with Baby Doe notwithstanding, Jake Sands in many ways typified the Jewish merchants who made their way to the Colorado mountains in the nineteenth century. Following the boom-and-bust cycles so common in the mining camps, he made his way from town to town wherever the prospects for business looked brightest. This is not to say, however, that all these Jews were strictly mercenary in their intentions. Many settled permanently in the towns in which they did business. Even among those whose stays were brief, many became leading citizens of the growing young towns and were active in civic affairs. The itinerant Jake Sands, for example, though his sojourn in Aspen was limited, served as
treasurer of the fund-raising drive for the Citizens’ Hospital. This was no casual undertaking, but a six-year project. Merchants such as Sands naturally had a vested interest in strengthening their communities, as growth and stability were good for business.

In camps and towns across Colorado’s Western Slope, Jews came and went like thousands of others, not only experiencing the vicissitudes of life on the frontier, but often shaping it.

Otto Mears began doing business in Colorado shortly after being mustered out of the Army at the end of the Civil War. The influence of this Russian-born Jew in western Colorado cannot be overstated. Among other ventures he built railroads, founded towns, published newspapers and operated retail stores throughout the San Juans. So well was he that newspapers had no need to mention his name, but referred simply to “the Hebrew pathfinder of the Rockies.”

Nor was Mears the only Jew in the rugged San Juans. October 7, 1878 was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar. At the house of Charles Weinberg, a liquor dealer and saloon keeper in Lake City, religious services were held, reportedly the first such ever in the region. The local newspaper report of the services was widely respectful of the occasion “celebrated by our fellow Jewish citizens.”

Weinberg and his brother Louis continued to operate in Lake City until 1885, when new opportunities in the growing town of Aspen beckoned.

The liquor and saloon business was a profitable one in the mining towns, and it attracted a number of other Jews. Isadore Bernstein emigrated from Poland and spent at least eighteen years in Kansas before making his way west to Ouray with his wife and seven children. He ran his “gin dive” there for seven years. One year after his departure, Samuel Newhouse arrived in town.

Although better known for his activities both before and after his stay in Ouray, Newhouse did spend two years there. Previously he had run a freight business in Leadville, where he struck up a friendship with Chancy Nichols, manager of the Clarendon Hotel. When Nichols took a similar position at the elegant new Beaumont Hotel in Ouray, Newhouse accepted his offer to become the head clerk. In addition to his hotel duties, Newhouse made some profitable mining investments, particularly in the Wheel of Fortune Consolidated Mining Company. He and his wife Ida also made a contact which served them well years later. Frank Hargreaves, a wealthy English hotel guest, was stricken with pneumonia, and it was Mrs. Newhouse who tended to him and nursed him back to health. In 1891, when Newhouse needed financing to implement his plans for a four-mile-long tunnel in Gilpin County, it was Hargreaves who provided it. The Newhouses went on to great wealth and social prominence in Denver, Salt Lake City and London, where Mrs. Newhouse became “one of the reigning favorites in London society and a woman who, it is said, has captivated the entire royal set.”

Two events of significance to Colorado occurred on April 14, 1865. In Washington, D.C., John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln; in New York, Abraham Rachofsky arrived from his native Poland. Responding to the invitation of his uncle Alexander Rittmaster, Rachofsky rode and walked his way across the country until he arrived in Central City. In 1877 he was joined by his sister and brother-in-law, Miriam and Samuel Kobeski (later changed to Kobey) and their six children. Over the next five decades, members of this family and their descendants became prominent business and community leaders across the state. They were present on the Western Slope in Aspen, Marble, Silverton and Durango.

In Durango, Abe Rachofsky opened his dry goods and clothing store in 1892 under the management of his nephew David. Their competition was Isaac Kruschke, a German-born Jew who had already been in business there for ten years. Kruschke spent nearly forty years in Durango, dispelling the notion that Jewish merchants were all transient. Other Jews present were W.G. White, owner of a grocery business; and Jim Veitch, who ran the Durango Corral, a stable and feed store. Despite their small number, the Jews of Durango were able to maintain their religious identity. They were, in fact, encouraged to do so and were sometimes admonished by the local press when they did not. One newspaper printed the following reproach:

Yesterday was a peculiar day: it was Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of days. The real good Hebrews closed their places of business and sought solace in prayer, while Lazarus “Billy” White, Kruschke and Jim Veitch kept open and the good God kept it raining all day so they could not do business. He doeth all things well.”

Another member of the omnipresent Rachofsky clan was Julia Rayor, grandniece of Abe Rachofsky. Julia was a deaf-mute who married
Samuel Wittow. Like so many Jewish merchants, Wittow went into the dry goods and clothing business. He opened his store in Silverton in 1905 and ran it for seventeen years. During this time, other Jews in town practiced a less traditional occupation.

Serving the demand created by the large number of single miners, Fanny Wright and Pearl Eastman were prostitutes. Wright was especially kind-hearted and was even known to lower her rates on special occasions. Some local school boys once wanted to "treat" a friend, but were unable to raise the full $2.00 needed. Wright agreed to accept only $1.60 even though she was "losing money on the deal." Known as "Jew Fanny" and "Sheeny Pearl," these two women also served the community in another way. Silverton was hard hit by the influenza epidemic of 1918, and both Wright and Eastman served as nurses to ailing miners. Eastman eventually succumbed to the disease herself, while Wright died in Salida in the early 1950s.10

The Gunnison country was home to a considerable number of Jews in the late 1800s. The town of Virginia City was incorporated in 1880. Solomon Harris was among the eighty-six people who gathered at Pettengill's Drug Store to vote on the issue, and he was elected the town's first treasurer, a position he held for over two years. He also voted in 1882 to change the name to Tin Cup.11 The Harris brothers, Solomon, Isaac and Eli, owned the Rocky Mountain Bee Hive, another in the long list of dry goods and clothing stores owned by Jews. Opening in 1881, the Harrises surely knew their clientele. While they carried a "full assortment of ladies' and gents' furnishing goods and children's wear," they made it a point to note "Miner's boots a specialty." Business was good in the thriving camp, and the next year they were able to relocate to a brand new building more than twice the size of their first store.12 At the corner of Washington and Grand, on the same block as the original Rocky Mountain Bee Hive, stood S.J. Klauber's New York Liquor Store. Klauber had preceded the Harris brothers, arriving in the district with his family in 1879, and served as postmaster in Hillerton, a short-lived camp some two miles north of Tin Cup.13

The Tin Cup cemetery sits on the southeast edge of town on four separate knolls. These are labeled Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Boot Hill, for those who met a violent end or whose faith was unknown. The burials there reflect the harshness of life in that rugged time and place. Isaac and Leah Harris buried an unnamed son on the Jewish knoll November 10, 1882, one month to the day after his birth. The following autumn they repeated this tragic scene, this time with a child of only eleven days. Incredibly, their sorrows did not end there. In November 1884, they buried twin sons who had survived for just seven weeks. Neither were the Klaubers strangers to such tragedies. They buried two young sons on the Jewish knoll, five-year-old Sidney in 1886 and two-year-old J.J. in 1888. In Tin Cup, death made little distinction between Jew and Gentile.14

Lawrence Winsheimer, an English Jew, arrived in the Tin Cup district in the late 1880s and lived the rest of his life there, engaging in a variety of occupations. His first enterprise was growing hay in a large meadow some ten miles northwest of Tin Cup, an area now submerged beneath Taylor Park Reservoir.15 As a member of the town board, Winsheimer helped gain federal approval of a patent for Tin Cup.16 Soon he embarked on a new venture as proprietor of a feed and meat market, and later still he turned to the lucrative freighting business in which he remained engaged until his death in 1905. Winsheimer was an anomaly. While so many Jewish merchants moved from town to town with their commerce, he stayed in Tin Cup and changed not his location, but the nature of his business.

Some thirty-five miles west of Tin Cup is the ghost town of Irwin, whose rise and fall was mercurial even by mining camp standards. Born in 1879, "It died so fast in late 1883 and 1884, that many of its cabins still had dishes on tables and beds unmade."17 David May, who went on to build a retail empire, crossed the Continental Divide from his Leadville location and opened his Irwin store in a tent in the summer of 1880. Within a year he had built a substantial 20' x 40' wooden structure to house his growing business. Like most of Irwin, it was closed down by 1884.18

Among the more colorful characters of Irwin was Joseph Selig, a German-born Jew. Arriving in the Gunnison country in the spring of 1880, he was widely recognized by the end of the year. It was said of him that "He is engaged exclusively in mining and other speculations. In fact, Joe will put money in anything that promises a safe and profitable return."19 One such investment was a liquor and cigar business, a field in which many Jews were involved. His motto was a refrain still popular today: "In God We Trust – All Others Are Expected to Pay Cash."20 Liquor being a highly profitable business in the booming town, it soon
attracted many newcomers. When Selig opened, he briefly had a monopoly on the market. During the four-month period from November 1881 to March 1882, however, Irwin issued twenty new saloon licenses, and three new liquor dealers quickly appeared.23

Apparently wishing to avoid the competition, Selig went into real estate for a brief time before he moved west and helped found the town of Montrose. There he met with success in a variety of businesses which included real estate, irrigation, a sawmill, and loanbroker to local ranchers.24 His personal life, however, was far less successful. One report stated, "Joe Selig, the woman-hater of the Uncompaghre, has returned from California single and wretched."25

The French-born Joseph Block had over ten years’ experience in the meat business in Denver when, in 1881, he followed the rush to Irwin and set up shop there. While he was not a religious man (his wife was Catholic), his Jewish background was well known. One nearby resident was clearly aware of it when he told the story of a lynx that had raided his father’s henhouse and killed over fifty chickens:

Not one of them was bitten or scratched in any way except one bite in the neck through which the blood had been sucked. It was some satisfaction to Father to shoot the lynx and the chickens were sold to the butcher, being really killed in the best Kosher fashion.26

Just as he had followed the rush into Irwin, Block followed the exodus out in 1885. Moving on to nearby Crested Butte, where he eventually retired, he fortuitously located his new shop next door to the bank. A Star of David prominently displayed by the entrance attested to his pride in his heritage.

In the special New Year’s Day edition of 1883, the Gunnison Review-Press featured profiles of distinguished local citizens. The praise heaped upon Moses L. Bloch was exceptional. Bloch was the “pioneer clothier of the Gunnison country,” having arrived in early 1880. His first small store quickly grew to become the largest in town and he soon needed seven employees to serve his customers. Both his character and his business acumen were commendable and he was deemed “worthy of the success and friends which have attended him in this city.”27

Sixty-two-year-old Joseph Block (seated at right) in front of his Crested Butte meat market in 1891. A Star of David clearly marks the entrance. (Denver Public Library Western History Collection.)
Also in town at this time was Mr. N. Weinberger, who dealt in liquors and cigars. In Bloch and Weinberger, Gunnison had two men involved in the two most common businesses among Jewish merchants of the time. Aside from their careers, both were also involved in their community. Bloch was a member of the popular snowshoe club, and Weinberger was Master of the local Masonic Lodge. Both were members of Fire Company No. 1, which Gunnison residents held to be the best in the state. They were not exempt, however, from the violence so commonplace in frontier towns. In a dispute over Viola, a “dance hall girl,” Melvin Yard killed saloon keeper George Walsh in a wild shootout on Main Street. Bloch’s store was in the line of fire and incurred serious damage when struck by no less than fifteen bullets.

Throughout the San Juans and the Gunnison country, Jews were an integral part of life in the mining camps and towns. Nowhere on the Western Slope, however, was this more true than in Aspen. It began in January 1880. When David M. Hyman invested five thousand dollars, sight unseen, in several claims in the Roaring Fork district, he unknowingly began a thirty-seven-year career in Aspen mining ventures. As Aspen grew into the largest city on the Western Slope, its Jewish population grew as well. When the town declined after the silver crash of 1893, many of its Jewish residents left for more promising venues, such as Cripple Creek. Some did remain, however, and their presence through the years was a constant in the fluctuating fortunes of Aspen.

Abraham Rachofsky had established successful clothing stores in Black Hawk, Georgetown and Boulder as well as his original location in Central City. In 1888 he sent Harris and David Kobey, sons of his sister Miriam, to open a new store in Aspen. As the city prospered from the rich ores of its mines, so too did Rachofsky Kobey & Company. Rachofsky relinquished his ownership in 1892 and brothers Mark and Ben joined the newly renamed Dave Kobey & Company. When Dave moved his family to New York in 1900, it became the Kobey Shoe & Clothing Company.

The Kobey brothers posed in an Aspen photo studio – 1890s. Clockwise from top left: Harris, Benjamin, David, Mark. Picture courtesy of Dorothy Kobey Berry.

Kobey brothers’ store, Aspen, CO (unidentified persons). Picture courtesy of Dorothy Kobey Berry.

Under all three names and in three successive Hyman Avenue locations, the store flourished despite its competition. At least three other Jewish-owned clothing stores were present – Dave Cohen’s Rocky Mountain Bee Hive, Sands Bros. (owned by the ubiquitous Jake Sands and his brother Isadore), and the Weinberg Clothing Company. The Weinbergs used the greatest political issue of the time to gain favor with their customers. They claimed not only the “finest made clothes in the state,” but also that “the free coinage of silver will be our battle cry.” After the silver crash of 1893, which threw some 2,100 Aspen miners out of work, these three
stores soon disappeared. The Kobeys not only survived, but thrived. During the Spanish-American War, their store became something of a community gathering place as they posted the latest Aspen Daily Times war bulletins for all to read.

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- Hebrew Holidays -

Next Monday and Tuesday are the Hebrew Holidays. In accordance with our usual custom, we shall keep our store closed these two days.

To our patrons, who will probably need some goods on the above days, we shall make a special inducement if they will do their purchasing today.

These Prices are Positively for Today Only.

**MEN'S FURNISHINGS.**

- Men's Camel Hair Underwear, that was reduced to 1.50, for today only. 1.00
- Men's Fine Shantung Wool Underwear, worth 2.00, for today only. 2.00
- Men's Wool Shirts and Flannel Shirts, that are sold for 1.25 a suit, for today only. 1.10
- Men's Heave Ribbed Hosiery, also Heave Wool, odd Shirts, for today only. 1.25
- Men's Light Flannel Shirt, for today only. 1.30
- Men's Cambric Shirts, regular price 1.25, for today only. 1.00
- Men's White Flannel Shirt, worth 1.50, for today only. 1.30
- Men's Wool Working Glove. 35c

**SHOES.**

- Henry Green Goodness Shoe, splendid quality, for today only. 1.50
- Our Best Grade Cowhide Shoe, well worth 2.50, for today only. 1.00
- A fine Kid Dress Shoe, in Cottage, Opera and Plain Style, for today only. 2.50
- A fine Kangaroo Inexpensive Walk Shoe, Needle toe, sold all over at 2.50, for today only. 1.50
- Our Boys' Huerter double sole Shoe, extra strong, for today only. 1.50
- Men's Work Shoe, worth 1.75 to 2.00 a pair, strict only, to close out. 1.35
- Men's Work Shoe, worth 1.75 to 2.00 a pair, strict only, to close out. 1.35
- Boys' Heavy Chukker Rose Panta Suits, sizes 8 to 10, for today only. 1.60
- Boys' Heavy Rose Panta, regular price 1.50, for today only. 1.00
- Boys' Heavy Rose Panta, regular price 1.50, for today only. 1.00

Buy your goods today if you want to save money.

D. B. Kobey & Co.

Aspen's Leading and Strictly One Price Clothiers.

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Dave Kobey was the first merchant in Aspen to close his business on Jewish holidays, and nine others soon followed his precedent. Kobey, in fact, often took out large ads in the Aspen Daily Times announcing such closures, and the paper would sometimes explain the significance of a holiday to its readership. During the spring Passover holiday, the Jewish families sent to Denver for matzos, the unleavened bread traditionally eaten at that time. Religious services were held in private homes as there was no synagogue or other formal gathering place. Jewish weddings also took place in their homes. One of the social highlights of 1898, attended by over fifty guests, was the October 4 marriage of Morris Rosenberg, a clothing salesman, to Adeline Shoenberg. The bride's family owned a local cigar store and had previously been in business with David May in Leadville. The ceremony at the Shoenberg home was performed not by a rabbi but by a judge.

Harris and Leah Kobey raised their six children in Aspen. A strong believer in religious training, Harris had no access to Jewish education for his family. His daughter Dorothy explained his answer to this dilemma:

We all went to the Episcopalian Sunday School. Everybody went to the Young People's meeting at the Methodist church on Sunday night. It didn't matter what religion you were. Now my Aunt Dora went to the Christian Science Church. She called herself a "Jewish Scientist."

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This ad appeared in the Aspen Daily Times on September 25, 1897, two days before Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

Despite this unconventional upbringing, the Kobey children all grew up secure and proud of their Jewish heritage.

Aspen may have been devoid of anti-Semitism, but other forms of bigotry were common in the local press. Indians, African-Americans, Chinese and Italians all faced blatant discrimination. About the Indian it was said that “He is an inhuman savage at best.” And when a young Chinese man, born in Denver and raised a Christian, tried to settle in Aspen, a committee led by the mayor promptly put him on the next stage out of town. They explained their action by saying, “He is objected to on principle – he is a Chinaman.”33 Treatment of Jews differed dramatically. Even international events received favorable local coverage. When Czar Alexander III of Russia imposed the repressive May Laws in 1882, one Aspenite railed at “the renewal of outages to the Jews.”34 The treason trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in 1899 received continuous front page coverage in Aspen for weeks, nearly all sympathetic to the beleaguered Dreyfus. One headline read “Some Very Flimsy Evidence Against Dreyfus Exploded.” Another called his conviction “the disgrace of France.”35 Aspenites seem to have based their hatred strictly on appearances. They befriended the Jews, who were white, while reserving their bigotry for those who looked different.

NOTES

2. Letters from Jake Sands to Baby Doe Tabor, Tabor Collection, Colorado State Historical Society. Unfortunately, most of these letters are missing dates, making it difficult to reconstruct the sequence of the relationship.
4. Aspen Daily Times, Oct. 6, 1897. See Duane A. Smith, Rocky Mountain Mining Camps (Bloomington IN: Indiana UP, 1967), chap. 5, for a more complete discussion of the merchants’ role in mining camps.
5. Solid Muldoon, Oct. 21, 1887. A complete account of Mears’ activities is beyond the scope of this study. Michael Kaplan, Otto Mears: Paradoxical Pathfinder (Silverton CO: San Juan County Book Co., 1982) and Ruby Williamson, Otto Mears: Pathfinder of the San Jun (Gunnison CO: B&B Printers, 1981) are two of several chronicles of his life.
7. United States Bureau of the Census, 10th Report, 1880; Solid Muldoon, Sept. 23, 1887.
12. Tin Cup Record, May 28, 1881; Tin Cup Banner, Aug. 26, 1882.
13. The Federal Census of 1880 lists Klauber’s occupation as cigar maker. It was common at that time for a business to deal in both liquor and cigars.
15. Ibid., p. 99.
18. Elk Mountain Pilot, Aug. 5, 1880; June 16, 1881; Rocky Mountain News, Mar. 21, 1884.
26. Gunnison Review-Press, July 25, 1883-Aug. 1, 1883. The incident occurred on March 31, 1882. This information was reported as part of the testimony in Yard’s murder trial, which ended in a hung jury. Whether Bloch was compensated for the damages is not reported.
27. The author is indebted to two of Harris Kobey’s children, Silas Kobey and Dorothy Kobey Berry, for much of the information on early Aspen. The former, now deceased, was interviewed in 1983; an audio tape is available at the Colorado Historical Society. Dorothy Kobey Berry, who also made personal memorabilia available, was interviewed by the author in April 1996.
31. Aspen Daily Times, Oct. 4, 1897. During World War I, when anti-German sentiment swept the nation, several members of the Shoenberg family changed their name to the French equivalent of Beaumont (beautiful mountain). Rocky Mountain Sun, Feb. 13, 1886, Nov. 29, 1890.
32. Rocky Mountain Sun, Apr. 15, 1882.
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