

## Charlotte Poor Levy Comes Home (Sue Silver)

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A rare treasure was recently located by the Mineral County Museum when it recognized a name on an old photograph being offered for sale. The seller had incorrectly stated the name, but on close examination of the handwriting on the backside of the old portrait, Museum staff knew exactly who the young girl was.

The words written on the reverse side of the photo are, “Lottie L. Poor, Aurora Nevada Care B. V. Poor.” A “Mezzo-Tinto Photograph,” it was taken by H. L. Kilgore, a photographer of Belfast, Maine. The Mezzo-Tinto process was patented on July 16, 1867. This provides at least an approximate time in which the photograph was taken.



### **Lottie L. Poor, circa 1867-1871**

Born in Belfast, Maine in January of 1854, Charlotte “Lottie” Poor was the daughter of Aurora pioneer Benjamin Varnum Poor, also a native of Maine. Her father came west to California sometime before 1860 and was enumerated on the 1860 census mining near Columbia, in Tuolumne County. Columbia was also near where his brother, James J. Poor, had been the superintendent of a ditch company near that place in 1859.

B. V. Poor may not have been away from home for long, as he was also listed with the family in Maine of the same year. (Enumerators were to list anyone who had lived in a place in the year prior to the census taking.) In this census year, the Poor family consisted of father Benj. V. Poor, mother Rosella (sic) H. Poor, son William A. Poor, daughter Catherine J. Poor, sons Horace and John Poor, second daughter Charlotte, and youngest daughter, Lucretia Poor.

Back in California, like many mining men of Tuolumne County, Charlotte’s uncle, J. J. Poor apparently answered the call of the newly discovered mining district of Esmeralda, then-believed to be in Calaveras County, California. In 1865 he was assessed income taxes at Aurora by the IRS tax collector. In 1867, J. J. Poor was reported to have employed half a dozen Chinese laborers to build a ditch “to take the water from the upper end of Esmeralda gulch and carry it along the side of Silver Hill, to sluice wash the hill...”

It appears Charlotte’s father split his time between Nevada and Maine for a few years, perhaps allowing the children to grow up more before bringing the family west. In November of 1866, B. V. Poor was elected to the Nevada State Assembly from Esmeralda County and served in the Third Session of the legislature from 1867 to 1868. Less than a month after being elected, the Esmeralda Union reported that

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“B. V. Poor & Son...have opened a new claim on Silver Hill, from which they are taking out a large quantity of rich ore...”

Charlotte’s father, Benjamin Poor was back in Maine with the family and enumerated with them on the 1870 census, noting his occupation as a miner. In 1870, all the Poor children except eldest son William and youngest son Horace remained in their parents’ home in Maine. Horace was enumerated at Aurora in that year, where he was working as a miner. The whereabouts of son William in this year has not been found.

The following year three events affected the family of Benjamin V. Poor. The first was the marriage of his daughter Catherine to Porter S. Allen, at Boston, Massachusetts, in February of 1871. The next event occurred on the other side of the nation, when William A. Poor, riding express for Billy Wilson, left Sweetwater for Wellington on September 19, 1871 and never made his destination.

Two days earlier vicious convicts had escaped the Nevada State Prison and in their flight for freedom they encountered the pony rider. William’s body was found some days later among some rocks near the road, where the convicts had stripped him of his clothes and killed him. His body was taken to Aurora and given an Episcopal Church burial service. He was 24 years old.

The third event experienced by the Poor family that year also occurred in Nevada, with the marriage of daughter Charlotte to Aurora merchant Isaac Levy, on December 21, 1871. It is difficult to believe that the memory of the murdered son and brother did not somehow hang heavy over this otherwise happy day.

Charlotte’s husband, Isaac, a 22 year old native of France, was living and working in the town of El Dorado, in El Dorado County, California in the summer of 1860. In this year Isaac was a clerk in the store of Nathan Rhine, merchant of Bavaria. Isaac’s brother, 36 year old Baruch Levy and his family were living east of El Dorado in the town of Diamond Springs where he was a merchant and the partner of 26 year old Leopold Dryfuss (sic), also a native of France. Baruch Levy’s personal estate was valued at \$2,000 and Dreyfus’ was valued at \$10,000, which indicates these men were quite well off in the Mother Lode of California.

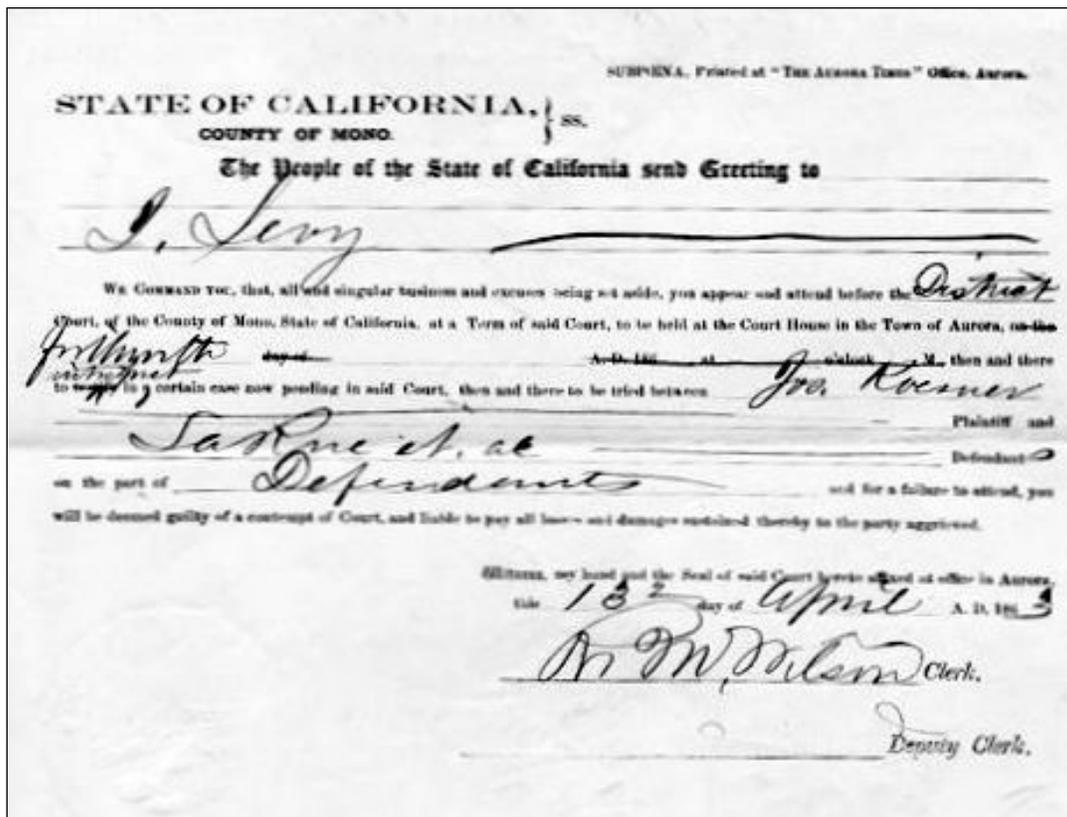
Two months after the 1860 census was taken, E. R. Hicks, J. M. Cory and J. M. Braly made the mineral discoveries that would form the Esmeralda Mining District and send thousands off to find their fortunes in the new district near Monoville. The enterprising Levy brothers and Leopold Dryfuss saw a new opportunity to make their living in the booming new town.

In January, 1863, the Daily *Alta California* newspapers, out of San Francisco, published a correspondent’s letters from “Aurora, Mono County” in which the writer reported a number of things that were going on in the town. The businesses there, he wrote, “all are full and doing a good business...” First among the businesses named was “Levy, Dreyfus & Co.” merchants in provisions.

In mid-March, 1863, a notice of the dissolution of copartnership was published in the *Alta California*, in which it stated that the partnership of Levy, Dryfuss & Company, “existing at the city of Aurora” was dissolved by mutual consent of Joseph Coblentz and Leopold Dryfuss who had sold out their interest in the

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firm to Isaac Levy, who would continue the firm under the name of Levy & Company. Signatures affixed to the notice were Coblenz and Dryfus, as well as N. Levy and B. Levy.



**Mono County District Court Summons dated April 13, 1863  
for I. Levy to provide interpreter services in a court case.**

The firm of Levy & Co. included J. Levy, of San Francisco; B. Levy, of Diamond Springs, Nathan Levy and Ike Levy, of Aurora. In 1864, the Mono County Assessor's tax map identified the location of Levy & Co. as being on the corner of Pine and Antelope streets, on a portion Lot 1, in Block 2 of the town of Aurora. Levy & Co. was later assessed taxes by the IRS tax collector for their business as retail dealers at Aurora, in 1865.

J. LEVY, San Francisco, NATHAN LEVY, } Aurora.  
I. LEVY, Diamond Springs, IRE LEVY, }

**LEVY & CO.,**  
**AURORA EMPORIUM.**

—555—

**YOUR ATTENTION** is respectfully called to the following facts: We have opened a warehouse in this place, and are prepared to sell at

**Wholesale and Retail,**

From our large and recently increased Stock, any article at a price as cheap as any other Establishment this side of the Pacific. Our assortment of,

**DRY GOODS,**  
**Clothing, Boots and Shoes,**  
**FURNISHING GOODS, HATS AND CAPS,**  
**CARPETS,**  
**OIL CLOTHS, GROCERIES, LIQUORS,**  
**SEGARS, TOBACCO, WOODEN WARE, &c.,**

Have been nearly all bought for Cash. One of the firm whose residence and experience for the past fourteen years in the great Metropolis of the Pacific, and having connected himself with us in business, enables us to regularly receive new and fresh assortments of all kinds of merchandize, and which we guarantee to be what we represent.

We solicit your examination of our Stock as to assortment, Quality, and PRICE.

Respectfully, yours,  
april 11 **LEVY & CO.**

**Levy & Co. Ad**  
(Aurora Daily Times, 11/30/1863)

While at Aurora in the early 1860's, Isaac Levy was called upon to be juror on the Coroner's inquest into the death of William R. Johnson, murdered by John Daly and his gang of gunmen, in February, 1864. The jury found that Johnson's death came at the hands of the gang members, four of whom were hung at Aurora on February 9, 1864.

In 1870, "Isaac Levi" (sic) and his brother "Benj (sic) Levi" were both enumerated at Aurora, working as merchants. In December, 1871, Isaac and Charlotte Poor were married and a daughter, Hermine, was born to the couple in California in December 1874.

Isaac and Charlotte, familiarly called Lottie, remained at Aurora until about 1884, in which year Isaac rented the Reno home of John Cannon, while Cannon took his family to Oakland, California for the winter. By 1900, the couple was living in San Francisco, where Isaac told the census enumerator that he was a Capitalist by occupation. Living with them were daughter Hermine and her husband Meyer

Wood. Two years later, Isaac Levy, then 65 years old, died in San Francisco.

Most of the Poor family lived at or near San Francisco in the early Twentieth century, but even with a multitude of family to help her through her sorrow at the loss Isaac, Charlotte Poor Levy could not be consoled. Finally Charlotte committed suicide in late July, 1907 by ingesting carbolic acid at her sister-in-law's home. Her mother Drusilla, who lay ill in San Francisco, learned of the news and died the next day. Mother and daughter shared a double funeral at the Odd Fellows Cemetery in San Francisco.

It is difficult to document the lives of women in the west because most were occupied with running the household and, other than social activities, their lives revolved around home, husbands and families. Such was the case of Charlotte "Lottie" Poor Levy. Because of this the photograph of young Charlotte Poor provides a face to complement what little is known of her life.

The purchase of the photograph of "Lottie L. Poor" was made and Charlotte Poor Levy has returned to her Nevada "home."

Writer's Note: The story of William A. Poor's death and burial is featured in the book *Aurora, Nevada's Silent City on the Hill* (Silver, 2011). Only the Odd Fellows Columbarium was allowed to remain at the old Odd Fellows cemetery inside the city limits of San Francisco when the city ordered all graves in the city relocated in the early Twentieth century. Among the graves relocated to a mass burial plot in the Woodlawn Cemetery in Colma, California were those of Charlotte Levy Poor and her mother Drusilla V. Poor.