

## From Our Readers

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### **"A Wrongful Death in Newcastle," Historical Perspectives, February 2019**

Dear Mr. Gibbard:

I am a fan of your legal history articles in *Colorado Lawyer*. Thank you for continuing to research and produce them!

The tragic story of the death of "Mrs. Gunning" in a train wreck in New Castle, Colorado in 1897 was particularly poignant. I did a bit of research to learn more about her and her husband.

I identified Mrs. Gunning from her burial record in Cedar Rapids, where her remains undoubtedly were shipped at her parents' behest: [www.findagrave.com/memorial/32646758/edith-m\\_gunning](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/32646758/edith-m_gunning). Edith M. Langham Gunning's date of death, September 10, 1897, matches precisely the date of the train wreck. Another researcher helpfully attached her obituary from the Cedar Rapids newspaper, which describes Edith as "23 years old, bright, pretty and talented, having taught in the school . . . with much success."

Mr. Gunning is described in Edith's obituary as "the son of a well-known Linn county [Iowa] pioneer . . ." Ancestry.com contains a wealth of information about him. Perhaps most interesting, a handwritten family record states that he "[t]raveled on stage as Gunning the Hypnotist (1896). Performed in Tabor Grand Opera House (Denver, Colo.). In partnership with Al G. Barnes with 5 cent phonograph, later bought dog and pony show." After Edith's death, he returned to

Iowa, enlisted in the 49th Iowa Infantry in 1898 (Spanish-American War), and then went back to Colorado, where he was a school teacher in Cripple Creek in 1900 (described as "single"). But he soon married Maude Porter, also of Linn County, Iowa, at Leadville in 1901. She bore two children in Colorado before dying in 1904 at age 22, and was buried in Salida. John married again, to Jessie Irene Sappington, in 1905, and in 1910 was a fruit farmer in Palisade. John moved to Los Angeles around 1920, where he went to a chiropractic school, received his degree, and practiced chiropractic from 1923 to 1930. In the 1930 census, he is listed in Los Angeles with Jessie, and his occupation was mechanic/glazer in a tile factory. He died there October 14, 1935, age 65, and as a veteran was buried in Los Angeles National Cemetery. Jessie had died in 1931, and is buried in Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Los Angeles County.

The only tangible artifact of John Gunning's time in Colorado appears to be his second wife Maude's gravestone in Fairview Cemetery in Salida. [www.findagrave.com/memorial/45090096/maude-gunning](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/45090096/maude-gunning).

Despite the tragedy of John Gunning's loss of two young wives within a few years of each other, we can hope that he found solace in his long marriage to Jessie and the family they raised together.

Regards,  
**Joe Halpern**

Wow, Joe!

I am really impressed by your research. The details you uncovered are fascinating. Thanks for taking the time to look into this story further.

This article has sparked more than the usual amount of reader feedback. I'm always glad to know people are intrigued by the interesting and poignant cases that came before the Colorado courts more than a century ago.

Best Regards,  
**Frank Gibbard**



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