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Thanks again,

Sharon Hall  
Editor, Publisher, Researcher, Writer and Graphic Designer  
*Digging History Magazine*



# Crazy in Colorado: Wheels in Their Head and other (insane) stories

by Sharon Hall

In 1876 Colorado became the 38<sup>th</sup> state of the United States, dubbed the “Centennial State” in honor of the nation’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The land we now know as Colorado had been home to a number of Indian tribes for centuries prior to the time Spanish conquistadors began exploring and settling the region in the sixteenth century.



Spain conquered the region, including Mexico, and decades later Anglos like Zebulon Pike were met with resistance. In 1803, as a result of Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase which almost doubled the size of the nation, the United States laid claim to a portion of the eastern Rocky Mountains. Spain disagreed and acted swiftly when Pike took an expedition into the region in 1806 to discover the source of the Arkansas and Red Rivers.

The 1806 Pike Expedition followed closely on the heels of another expedition begun in 1805 to locate the source of the Mississippi River. On July 15, 1806 he again set out from Missouri and by early November made his famous observation – the sighting of the mountain now known as Pike’s Peak and towering over Colorado Springs. An attempt to scale the peak was abandoned as the expedition continued south in search of Red River headwaters.

In 1846, several years following Mexico’s independence from Spain, the United States went to war with Mexico. Mexico was defeated and the resulting Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 paved the way for Anglo settlement as the New Mexico and Utah Territories and Kansas and Nebraska Territories were organized in 1850 and 1854, respectively. In April 1851 the village of San Luis (now in southern Colorado and then in northern New Mexico Territory) was settled.

A series of small gold strikes precipitated the so-called Pike’s Peak Gold Rush as “Fifty-Niners” – Pike’s Peak or Bust! - flooded the region for three years before the rivers and streams played out. The population boom did, however, result in the organization of The Territory of Colorado in 1861, just as the rest of the nation was being rent in two. The Union would need to hold on to the valuable mineral resources of this now-vital Rocky Mountain territory.

In 1879 silver was discovered high in the mountains at Leadville, founded in 1877 and known as “Cloud City” at an elevation well over 10,000 feet. On February 8, 1879 the Colorado State Legislature enacted legislation to establish the young state’s first public hospital for the insane.

At any given time during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were plenty of people deemed insane in Colorado. Many were confined to the state asylum in Pueblo, and if the asylum was full, in local jails. Local authorities, no doubt, preferred to shuffle their crazies off to the state facility in Pueblo.

Early asylum records indicate quite a few Leadville residents ended up in Pueblo for one reason or another. Was it the altitude? Was there something in the water (or the whiskey)? Was it the isolation of the miner toiling day in and day out, hoping for the next big strike, only to come up empty-handed again (and again)?

Perhaps it was altitude-related. Young Bert Adams, son of a prominent area ranchman, suffered from epileptic fits:

### **THE EFFECT OF FITS.**

#### **Unfortunate Mental Plight of Ranchman Adams' Oldest Son.**

*A man bearing all the outward evidence of mental troubles and sorrow was a caller at the county court Wednesday morning. He was accompanied by a good sized boy, whose appearance indicated that he was sufferer from some malady that had wrecked his physical constitution and was making rapid inroads on his brain power. Upon introducing himself to Judge Nash, the man explain that his companion was his son, Bert Adams by name, and that he had brought him from their ranch, lying some miles from Leadville, to be turned over to the state authorities to give the youth the attention and provide him with the medical skill which his condition demands.*

*It was represented that the lad had been subject to violent epileptic fits for a number of years, and they have grown on him in such severity that his brain has at last succumbed to the strain, and he has become mentally irresponsible for his acts.*

Bert was examined by Doctor Cook to adjudge whether he was indeed insane. In the court's afternoon session his father was called to the witness stand and described the epileptic fits which had "dethroning effects" on Bert's mental powers. Bert had been afflicted for two years and had experienced

a number of (supposed) ill effects as a result: accidentally shooting himself in the palm of his hand, or at times becoming "ill tempered and ugly". At these times Bert would threaten to kill himself, or injure his brothers and sisters.

The family resided in an isolated area of Routt County and had been unable to take care of the matter in that jurisdiction due to deep snows blocking the roads to the county seat. The family was desperate.<sup>1</sup>

Bert was adjudged insane, but as so often was the case, the Pueblo facility was full. Instead arrangements had been made:

#### **Bert Will Go to Canon**

*Mr. Adams, father of the youth Bert Adams, who was adjudged insane in the county court Wednesday, called on Judge Nash yesterday, and state that owing the impossibility of the authorities at the asylum for the insane to make room at once for the boy, that different arrangements had been perfected. It is proposed to take the young unfortunate to Canon City, where he will be placed in charge of responsible parties, and it is believed that in a lower altitude he will recover from the epileptic fits, which are the cause of his mental troubles.<sup>2</sup>*

Epilepsy is a seizure disorder, occurring "when nerve cells in the brain fire electrical impulses at a rate of up to four times higher than normal, [causing] a sort of electrical storm in the brain, known as a seizure. A pattern of repeated seizures is referred to as epilepsy."<sup>3</sup>

According to an Oxford University Press timeline, the first epileptic seizure was described in an ancient Mesopotamian text as "being under the influence of a Moon god". An exorcism was in order.<sup>4</sup>

Ancient Greeks believed epilepsy to be associated with "genius and the divine",

calling it a “sacred disease”.<sup>5</sup> Hippocrates disagreed, recording his hypothesis in 500 B.C. as a medically treatable disorder of the brain. The Bible, of course, records an incident of a young boy’s epilepsy in three of the four Gospels.

Astute as Hippocrates’ reasoning was at the time, evil spirits continued to be cited as the cause of epileptic seizures. Those afflicted were often adjudged lunatics, perhaps influenced by periodic phases of the moon. In the original Greek, Matthew’s Gospel (4:24 and 17:15) employs use of the verb “selēniazomai”, meaning “lunatic”, or more literally, “moonstruck”.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> century epilepsy was thought to have been a communicable disease, a belief which would continue well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The 19<sup>th</sup> century and the much-heralded Victorian Era, brought rapid advancement in science and medicine. A more reasoned approach eventually began to overtake superstition.

Queen Victoria’s first obstetrician, Sir Charles Locock, led the way with the discovery of potassium bromide as an effective treatment for epilepsy around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Interest in treating the disorder with electrotherapy grew as physicians and scientists gained a better understanding of the brain’s inner workings.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a reliable and effective way to treat seizure disorders was still several years away. The first modern treatment for the disorder was developed when phenobarbital was introduced in 1912. In 1893, however, epileptic sufferers like Bert Adams were more likely to have been committed to an insane asylum. Such was the case for years to come as one account of a young Nebraska mother illustrates.

Martha Lorena Rockwell married German immigrant Folkert (Frank) Bokelman in 1908 in Cass County, Nebraska. Lorena was

17 and Frank was 28. Six children later, Lorena filed for divorce in April of 1920. Sometime in 1920, records indicate Lorena also spent time in the Lincoln State Hospital.

Presumably, the divorce petition was dropped at some point because by 1922 Lorena had been committed to the Woodcroft Hospital in Pueblo, Colorado. According to the *Wray Rattler*, Wray County (Colorado) was footing the bill for her board and care.

Frank had moved his family to Sidney, Nebraska (although likely lived in Yuma, Colorado at some point it appears) and on June 18, 1922 signed papers committing Lorena to Woodcroft. She was also pregnant with yet another child. Colorado State Hospital notes indicate Lorena was admitted from Woodcroft on November 6, 1922 in the last stages of pregnancy. Her baby was born in Ward 4 soon afterwards.

On June 18, 1923 Frank arrived to take Lorena and the baby home to Sidney. Should his wife require more care she would be placed in a Nebraska facility. Although it’s unclear as to why Lorena went to the Colorado facility in the first place (being a native Nebraskan), she returned to Pueblo on August 24, 1923 because the Nebraska institute refused to care for her. Frank brought her home to Sidney and she ran away. Clearly, he could not care for her.

Even though Lorena was committed once again to the Pueblo hospital was she really insane? That may not have been the case, at least in the clinical sense. Hospital records point to her history of grand mal seizures. Newspaper accounts also bear out those facts, although not implicitly stated.

On February 21, 1914 the *Omaha Daily Bee* reported the following:

*Mrs. Frank Bokelman was seriously scalded Tuesday. She fell while carrying a teakettle filled with hot water. The hot*

water scalded her body from the neck down.<sup>6</sup>

Three years later *The Plattsmouth Journal* reported another accident:

*Mrs. Frank Bokelman was badly burned on the left arm and right hand Monday morning when she fell on the cook stove while preparing the morning meal.*<sup>7</sup>

How frequent were the seizures? While in the Colorado State Hospital it was noted Lorena was well-oriented, clear and a good worker between seizures. Otherwise, when the seizures were active, she might seize three or four times a day (grand mal), followed by a respite of one or two weeks. Through the years her pregnancies appear to have increased the frequency and severity of the seizures. No wonder she was seeking a divorce!

Lorena Bokelman died on June 18, 1927 of tuberculosis with the contributing condition of “psychosis with epilepsy”. By this time her children had been placed in other homes, adopted by strangers. Shortly after Lorena’s death, Frank died as well, although exactly where or how is unclear.

While researching Lorena and Frank Bokelman for a client and looking for records of the Pueblo hospital, I came across a web site with records of “Pueblo County, Colorado Insane Asylum Patients”.

While I didn’t find anything specifically about Lorena Bokelman, glancing through this voluminous set of records revealed some fascinating information which would help me understand more about people who, like Lorena, had no other medical recourse than to be committed to an asylum.

This particular database didn’t contain hospital records, but snippets compiled from census records and newspapers. Not surprisingly, the newspaper clippings provided the most enlightening information

(yet another reason why newspaper research is essential to genealogy!).

Here are a few of the more interesting cases:

### **Frank C. Andsley**

The case of young Frank C. Andsley was adjudicated in Boulder County in 1893. Frank was 17 or 18 years old when Judge Wright issued a “writ of lunatico inquirendo”. According to the *Boulder Daily Camera* Frank had been stricken with typhoid fever at an early age and never fully recovered.

His mother would testify in court that her son was “always weak minded and moody.”<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Andsley also admitted she and her husband were cousins, conceding the possibility of having produced a child with a “diseased mind.”

Frank apparently presented an adequate defense and was released the following day. Frank wasn’t insane — his brother owed him money and had “tantalized him to the point of frenzied attacks. Frank does have a sluggish mind & body but not insane,” the court opined.<sup>9</sup>

### **Wheels in Their Heads**

That was the *Rocky Mountain News* headline on September 8, 1893 as one man after another was adjudged insane in a Denver court. Alfred B. Clark, standing trial for lunacy, appeared fully sensible as most — until someone brought up the subjects of electricity and religion. “Then he became wild.”

Another, John Gunnison, had been accused of killing another man and was now in constant fear of someone attempting to murder him. Albert Anderson’s “bump of locality” (a phrenological term) had been injured, so much so he believed himself to be somewhere near the Columbian

exposition (being held in Chicago that year). Another had received a bump on his noggin and insane ever since.<sup>10</sup>

Overcrowding at the Pueblo asylum was a constant problem. The same could be said for county hospitals often forced to take in the insane. In November 1896 the *Rocky Mountain News* was decrying the level of care for the county's "wheely citizens". After all, the county hospital had never been intended to house this unfortunate group of citizens numbering around thirty.

One reporter "took in the whole works" courtesy of a member of the medical staff. The insane population ranged from the "white-haired old lady who is simply 'off' at times, to the wild, destructive maniac in whose diseased brain is moulded only by a desire to kick, bite, glare and make a 'large noise.'" The second floor was home to a "miscellaneous assortment of the daft, all women."<sup>11</sup> None were really much trouble at all, but someone had to keep an eye on them at all times.

In 1894 the county hospital had its hands full with one unfortunate inmate, Harry Noble Fairchild, a former Colorado Assistant Secretary of State. Again, the state facility was full. Fairchild put on quite a display at his hearing, as the room was filled with leading politicians of the city and state:

*He was brought from the county hospital in charge of guards, his hands in muffs and his wild cries startling all who were in the building. So violent was the form of the mania that he was not permitted to take the stand, and it was with greatest difficulty that he was restrained from doing injury to the spectators. "Harry Noble Fairchild!" he screamed, "The first god of the earth." . . . Amid the turmoil created by his cries, the people sat quietly, and no remark of the insane man, although many were witty and some grotesque, caused a smile on the face of anyone. . . In*

*maudlin tones Fairchild fought again the battles of the war, which he entered as a boy. . . Again he was behind the walls of Andersonville, and lived over the days and months of anguish, hunger and cruelty [his name doesn't appear in Andersonville prison records]. . . He never ceased speaking for an instant, and most of his remarks were addressed to the court. "Judge! Judge!" he yelled, addressing the court, "both your legs are off, and your heart's been hanging out for some time." Airships, canary birds, campaigns and other things and objects were hopelessly tangled in his brain. . . The doctors testified that the disorder was, under certain conditions, curable. The jurors saw the strange actions of the man, and these were far more convincing than the testimony of experts. They were absent only a few moments, and amid a hush Clerk Reitler read the verdict, that "Harry Noble Fairchild is so disordered in his mind as to be dangerous to himself and to others, and as to render him incapable of managing his own affairs."<sup>12</sup>*

What became of Harry Fairchild is unknown. Perhaps he died in Pueblo. In 1992 skeletal remains of approximately 130 people were uncovered near the site of the original grounds, leading anthropologists to posit them buried there between 1879 and 1899. Inmates would have likely been buried in unmarked graves.

Citizens might be deemed insane for any number of reasons, such as one Montrose rancher, George A. Arnold. In 1909 he purchased a horse, docked its tail and painted half its body red, earning George a straight-jacketed trip to Pueblo.<sup>13</sup> Some people may have been declared insane because of poverty and the inability to care for themselves.

Mrs. Isaac Armstrong was confined to the Pueblo hospital and Boulder County paid \$11 per day for her care (a lot of money back

then). She had been declared insane two months after her husband passed away. By early May 1903 the county decided the charge was too burdensome and a recommendation was made to build a wing at the local poor farm for the “harmless insane.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Insanity Instead of Typhoid (Too Much “Jake”?)**

An instance of someone committed to an asylum because of behavior outside the norms of society may have been the case for William Bach. At first Ouray doctors thought he had typhoid fever, but after examination declared him insane. His case was adjudged to be so severe the hospital would not be able to care for him — he was out of control.

It was a well-documented fact that Mr. Bach was addicted to a rather peculiar habit of drinking a mixture of Jamaica ginger, known by its slang name of “Jake”, ketchup, hot sauce, “or any other kind of hot stuff”. He seemed perfectly happy as long as he was drinking — without it he became morose and violent.

“Jake” was a late nineteenth-century patent medicine (and truth be told many patent medicines were almost 100% alcohol), the choice of many to skirt liquor restrictions. Bach was known to drink Jake by the quart with a gallon chaser of the ketchup concoction.<sup>15</sup>

These are but a few of hundreds of cases documented in Colorado newspapers. What a treasure trove they are, especially since asylum records are notoriously difficult to locate. Ancestry.com and Family Search have some records, but not as many United States records as one might expect to find. Quite by accident I stumbled across these. I could write a book (maybe I will!). As you can see, I barely got out of the “A” section.

One more case caught my eye in particular, that of William Arundale. His was a sad story and, after a bit of extra research, brought to mind one of my top “genealogical pet peeves” — Find-A-Grave “virtual” entries. Why these types of entries are allowed is beyond me since they are often misleading (and incorrect). Such was the case for William Arundale.

William was on his way home to Hot Sulphur Springs after being released from the Pueblo hospital when he was crushed by a train at Elk Creek. Authorities believed he had relapsed and committed suicide. His wife was sure it was an accident.

His remains were to be interred at Mount Olivet in Jefferson County. Let’s say William Arundale was your ancestor and you knew he lived in Hot Sulphur Springs (Grand County, Colorado) and you wanted to find his grave. Many people would automatically go to Find-A-Grave and look up “William Arundale” in *Grand County*. And, you would indeed find an entry for William Arundale — your William Arundale (sort of) — with only the notation “killed by a train” and an unknown birth and death date.

Had you searched all counties in Colorado for “Arundale” you would find two people named “William Arundale” in Mount Olivet, one of them being your ancestor (1867-1900). Someone has apparently entered a “virtual cemetery” entry (or a wild guess!) for William Arundale in Hot Sulphur Springs without adequately researching his demise.



Regular readers of this magazine know what I always say — Keep Digging! Yes, it’s a chore, but you never know what you’ll find. Such is the case for the next article. It’s a doozy! How in the world does someone survive not one, but two lightning strikes? Read on.

# LIGHTNING STRUCK TWICE

an en-lightning "adventure in research" *by Sharon Hall*

I wasn't necessarily looking for unusual headlines or stories, as I often do "just for fun". Some time ago I was researching the comings and goings of my third great grandfather, Wilburn Brummett. I had seen a mention of Wilburn and a man known as "J.G. Keith" (thinking he might perhaps be related in some way to him), and was searching for other clues at the [Gateway to Oklahoma History](#) web site when I came across this unusual headline and accompanying article:

## LIGHTNING STRUCK TWICE

*Dr. J.G. Keith, formerly of St. Louis, who was struck by lightning several years ago, went to Leadville, Col., for his health, and was again hit by a bolt. About 11 years ago the doctor, while walking on the street, was struck by a thunder bolt. His left side was partially paralyzed. He went to Colorado for his health and last spring while on the street he was again hit by lightning. This second bolt practically rendered Dr. Keith helpless as far as his left side is concerned.<sup>1</sup>*

Hmm . . . struck not once, but twice, by lightning (and lived to tell about it, no less). This short article had appeared numerous times in newspapers across the country in January 1907. Sounded like there might be a story to research. Little did I know what a research adventure it would be – an "en-lightning" (and l-o-n-g) one, entwined with stories from the early, wild and woolly days of Leadville.

Of course, for this researcher one of the first things I want to do is go digging around in more newspapers. What was this person's story? How many more references to Dr. J.G. Keith might I find? Leadville was a mining town and in its boom days people came and went. Where was he born and raised? Turns out I had to cast a wide net.

Because I had been researching in Oklahoma for any mention of Wilburn Brummett (he had lived for many years in Jack County, Texas but died in Oklahoma), I was researching at The [Gateway to Oklahoma History website](#). A project of the Oklahoma Historical Society, it is a premier site for researching the state's storied history.

All newspaper archives I would eventually research were showing results for this startling headline in January of 1907 – it was making the rounds of newspapers across the country, perhaps as "filler" to supplement scant local news. Because the original article referred to a residence in Leadville, a good place to begin research was the [Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection](#), a project of the Colorado State Library. This online resource, with the tagline "Experience Colorado as it Happened", features a number of historical Colorado newspapers. Many of these smaller town newspapers cannot be found online anywhere else.

After a bit of initial research I discovered "J.G." was "John G.", although "J.G." was more commonly used (as was common at the time for men to be referred to by their initials versus



# DIGGING HISTORY

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**Fashionably**  
Ways to go (or stay) in days of old



**LIGHTNING STRUCK TWICE**  
(an en-lightning "adventure in research")

OK, I give up . . . what is it?  
The Publick Hath Need of It



**Crazy in Colorado:**  
Wheels in Their Head and other (crazy) stories

Praise the Lord and place your bets



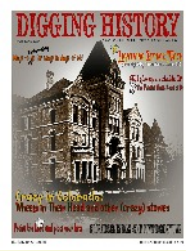
COLORADO'S GLORY DAYS : BOOM TOWN TO GHOST TOWN

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ON THE COVER  
The Colorado State Asylum

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