

The Unwritten Law of the Eternal Triangle

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Among the things I discovered when my mother Margaret died in 2015, at the age of ninety, was a spiral notebook of the type used by high school students in which she had written memories of her childhood. This is the first memory she recorded, with a note that the event she was recalling had occurred when she was three.

A tragedy struck. I remember being asleep and awakened to someone crying and running down a staircase near where I was sleeping. Evidently my father shot a man. He was someone my father had invited to stay at the house. I have no idea how long he was there, but he had made a pass at my mother is the story I heard! We had moved from Granby [Missouri] to Baxter Springs, Kansas. I have no memory of any of the aftermath and still do not know what happened at the trial. Father must have been freed because he took the six oldest children and went to Oregon. My half-brother Glenn lived there and took in all the family.

There had been stories circulating in Margaret's extended family for years that Lee Nutt, her father, had murdered a man. There had also been quiet conversations suggesting that Margaret might have had a different father than her siblings. My mother would not discuss any of these stories or their implications. Whenever my siblings or I attempted to broach the subject, she would only say something like, "My father had a hard life. I don't know why you want to dig up all that old nonsense," and change the subject.

Being a curious person, however, I couldn't resist the temptation to dig up all that old nonsense after Mother was gone. Her sister-in-law Carol had compiled a family genealogy, and she sent me a binder with copies of the things she had collected: family

trees, birth and death records, photographs, newspaper clippings, and oral histories from her husband and some of his siblings. The tidbits in Aunt Carol's binder only whetted my appetite for uncovering the real story of my mother's beginnings and parentage.

So, I did my own research. I verified some of Aunt Carol's information and found evidence to contradict other parts of her documentation. I added to what she had discovered, but questions remained. I decided to go to Missouri, where my mother had been born and lived for most of her childhood, to see what else I could find. Based on the information I had gathered, I knew that David Lee Nutt, my mother's father, had murdered John Cole, a boarder who had lived with the Nutt family for several years in Granby, Missouri, where both men worked as miners.

I went to Granby to see what I could find there. The drive into Granby was scenic with an abundance of hills, trees, and green grass. But the town itself was a sad, broken-down remnant of what it had been in its glory days. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Granby was a vibrant mining town known as "the town that lead built."¹ Some of the old buildings have been refurbished, and new businesses have been built where others once stood, but Main Street also has empty buildings and vacant lots.

I had a vague recollection of my mother talking about having lived in a large two-story yellow house. Walking through the old residential section of town, I looked for a house that might fit Mother's description. There were several houses that I could envision the Nutt family having lived in with their eight children and the boarder, John Cole. I imagined Mother's older siblings walking up and down these hills to and from school. Perhaps the family attended Sunday services at the church on that corner. Was that backyard garden like the one Grandma Ollie would have planted to provide her family with fresh summer produce? How far out of town did Lee Nutt and John Cole have to walk to get to the mine where they dug lead and zinc out of the earth? I knew they didn't own a car, but did they have a horse or a mule or did they just walk everywhere?

As I wandered toward Main Street I saw a "City of Granby" sign on the red brick building ahead of me. I entered the lobby and faced a paneled wall, running the width of the building. There was a door in the center of the wall with sliding glass windows on either side. A

¹ Larry A. James. *Granby Missouri: The Town That Lead Built*. Cassville, MO: Shoal Creek Heritage Preservation, 2014.

woman worked at a desk behind each window. One looked up as I came in, slid her glass panel open, and asked if she could help me.

"Maybe," I said. "I'm looking for information on my family. Do you have birth certificates, marriage records, anything like that? My mother was born in Granby in 1925. Her father was sheriff here in the mid-1920s."

She looked dubious. "No. We don't have that kind of records here." She paused and then asked, "What was his name?"

"David Lee Nutt," I replied.

She shook her head, "Doesn't sound familiar."

"Oh, they had all left Granby by 1930," I said, "so I don't think there would still be any of the family here."

"No," she said again, and looked back at the papers on her desk.

"Well, thank you," I said as I headed toward the door. "Just thought I'd ask."

As I opened the outer door, she called, "Well, there might be something in the back room. Just a minute and I'll look."

"Great," I said, as she left her desk. She was back within a few minutes, carrying a white plastic-covered three-ring binder.

"I found something," she announced. She opened the binder and turned it toward me, and there it was: a photocopy of a newspaper article with my grandfather's and uncle's pictures under the headline, "Father and Son in Murder."²

"Ah," I said, "Yes, that's my grandfather."

"And you said he was the sheriff?" the clerk asked. "Sounds like Granby," she sighed.

"Yes." I laughed. "Those must have been wild days here."

A man had come in the back door of the office as we were talking. "A murder and a sheriff?" he asked. "I think I've heard something about that."

The second clerk was interested now. She slid her window open and leaned out. "Why don't you come in," she invited. "There's a table in back where you can look at things." The door buzzed to allow me into the inner sanctum.

"What was his name?" the second clerk asked when I was inside.

"My grandfather was David Lee Nutt," I told her, "and the man he shot was John Cole. He was also from Granby."

² "Father and Son in Murder." Newspaper clipping without attribution other than "Mert Camerer's Collection."

The first clerk showed me to a long institutional-type folding table in a corner of the City Council meeting room. I put the binder she had given me on the table.

“This is our history room,” she said, pointing to a small side room lined with bookshelves. “You’re welcome to see if there is anything else of interest here. Volunteers are collecting things and trying to organize them. We don’t really have anything to do with this stuff, but there might be something here if you want to look.”

The man was now squatting in the “history room,” looking through the binders and old books on one of the lower shelves. He handed me one. “This might have something in it.” I thanked him, took the binder, and sat down at the table.

In these miscellaneous binders, I found family trees, newspaper articles, obituaries, and other items related to the Nutt and Cole families. Using my camera in lieu of a copy machine, I took pictures of the pages I wanted to review more closely later.

Clerk number two came in as I was reading to tell me that she had found “some really interesting stuff” on the internet. Such as that David Lee Nutt had a hook arm (this I knew) and that he had tried to cut John Cole’s ear off with it (this I didn’t know). “There’s lots more,” she said. “I’m printing it off for you.”

Later, over lunch in a Granby café, I read the documents the clerk had given me. Some of the newspaper articles, I had previously located, but she found ones I had not seen and that filled in more details of the tragic story of David Lee Nutt, his wife Ollie Nutt, and their boarder, friend, and Ollie’s lover, John Cole.

This, then, is their story. It is a tale of lives that became intertwined during the early part of the twentieth century, of relationships that were torn apart just as the country was entering the years of the Great Depression, of friendship and mutual care, and of passions that ended in tragedy, taking a life and destroying a marriage.

The story takes place in the Ozark Mountains of southwestern Missouri and the bordering regions of Oklahoma and Kansas. This is a bucolic land of rolling hills, verdant forests, roaring rivers and small streams, wildflowers, and farms. It was also a land of frontiersmen, of rough living, and of gun violence.

The characters in my story all came from Newton County, Missouri, the county seat of which is Neosho. Twenty miles east of Neosho is Granby, and fifteen miles to the west is Seneca. Seneca sits on the Missouri–Oklahoma border; one street running through town divides Seneca, Missouri from Seneca, Oklahoma. Ollie

Owens was born on the Oklahoma side of town; Lee Nutt was born in Neosho and John Cole in Granby.

David Lee Nutt (my grandfather) was born November 2, 1876. His mother, Celena Celasia Nutt, was the unmarried sixteen-year-old daughter of Celena and Henry Lee Nutt. The elder Celena Nutt had her ninth (and last) baby, Henrietta, a few months before the younger Celena gave birth to David Lee.



David Lee Nutt

In 1880, when David Lee was not quite four, his mother married David Sayers in Neosho. David Sayers adopted the young David Lee who, for a time, took the name of Sayers. David and Celena Sayers had three children in quick succession. Celena died when she was only twenty-five, either in childbirth or from resulting complications. David Sayers was left with a nine-year-old stepson, two young children, and an infant. He remarried within a few years.

After his mother's death, David Lee lived alternately with his stepfather and his grandparents. He took back the last name of Nutt at some point. David Lee was called Lee for most of his life. He attended school in Neosho through the sixth grade.

Lee entered mining as a young man, working in various Ozark mines from about 1895 to 1929, most often in Granby, but also in other towns in the region. Carl Nutt, one of Lee's five sons, told this story about his father:

Back in the mining days, they used dynamite, and it would freeze sometimes. They would build a chat fire on a slope so air could get to it. ["Chat" is the dust left from lead mining.] Lee was sitting there by the fire when a stick of dynamite started to roll. As he put his arm down to get up, it exploded. It blew his arm off below the elbow and his eye out.

Lee married Blanche Longacre in 1898. I don't know when the dynamite explosion happened, but perhaps it was after they had been married a few years and had had one or more of their

three children. It may have been unrelated to Lee's injuries, but Blanche was not happy with her life. The family was living on a farm near Neosho in 1908 when Jake Niceley, a cousin of Lee's, came to live with them. The story is told in a newspaper article:

It was not long until Niceley [sic], who was of a prepossessing appearance, proved attractive to the wife and a friendship between the two soon ripened.

The husband remained in ignorance of the condition until one day in July he missed his cousin and his wife. A search divulged the fact they had fled together. The three small children were left motherless.

Nutt was deeply cut. He had been married to Blanche Nutt ten years, but loved her the more for the children's sake. At first he threatened vengeance. Then he forgave her and asked her to return. Relatives came to his assistance and pleaded with Mrs. Nutt, who had been located with Niceley in Kansas City, to return home.

The illegal love would not give up, and the efforts of the peacemakers were spurned. Niceley would not give up the woman, and she stayed.³

On a Monday in 1909, Lee saw the pair in Joplin, a town about twenty miles north of Neosho. Lee was staying in a hotel while in Joplin on business. A witness later reported seeing Lee and Blanche engaged in intense conversation that evening in the hotel's restaurant. Evidently Lee was trying to convince her to return. "*Again his pleadings were refused. He went to his room...in a daze.... All night, he says, he lay in unrest, fighting the problem.*"⁴

The next morning, Lee saw Blanche and Jake enter a shoe store where Blanche asked to have her shoe stretched. While the clerk was in the back room stretching the shoe, Lee came into the store, drew his gun, and fired a shot at Jake. Jake fell to the floor, and Lee fired three more shots into Jake's back. "*Inside the scene was of horrible repulsiveness,*" reported the news article.

³ "Lee Nutt Fires Four Shots at Jacob Niceley, and Three of Them Find Lodgment in His Body." Newspaper article posted on Rootsweb.Ancestry.com. There is no date or source listed on the document.

⁴ Ibid.

According to the testimony of Mr. Church, store owner, there had been no quarrel. Lee just came into the store and fired the fatal shots. Lee's explanation was simply, "That's my wife." Blanche reportedly told Lee, "You should not have done that." Then she asked Mr. Church to return the shoe she had brought in and left.

Nutt was arrested as he stepped from the store and taken to the police station.

Blanch Nutt was taken a few minutes later by Chief Myers.

When he was searched, the marriage certificate which had given him the right to the woman over who he killed, was found in his coat pocket....

Lee was locked up in the boy's cell. The wife was taken to the matron's room.

A few minutes after the shooting, David Sayers, the father, appeared at the station. He was permitted to enter his son's cell. The two met in an embrace.⁵

At trial the jury found Lee not guilty in the killing of Jake Nicely. News of the acquittal ran under the headline: "Lee Nut Freed of Murder Charge. Jury Upholds the Pleas of Defense And The Unwritten Law."

The finding had been anticipated by all who heard the trial of the case. Evidence was introduced to show that Nicely had interfered with the domestic arrangements of Nutt, causing a separation of Nutt and his wife. ... The testimony regarding Nutt's good reputation at Neosho was exceptionally strong.⁶

Evidently, at the time it was unwritten, but accepted, that a man had the right to take action against, and even kill, another man if he had "interfered" with his wife.

Ollie Frances Owens, my grandmother, was born May 9, 1894. She was the third youngest of Tom Owens and Margaret

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Lee Nut Freed of Murder Charge." *The Neosho Times*, Thursday, April 1, 1909.

Bard Owens' twelve children. The family had lived in Seneca but moved to Neosho or Granby. One winter day when Ollie was eight, her father fell on the ice, hitting his head with enough force to kill him. His widow had to take on jobs where she could to support her family. She may have helped keep house for Lee Nutt and care for his three children when Blanche left him, but soon Ollie was dispatched to assist Lee.

Within six months of the Nicely killing, Lee married Ollie. The Neosho Justice of the Peace performed the marriage on November 2, 1909, Lee's thirty-third birthday. Their marriage license has a box checked to indicate that Ollie was over the age of eighteen years, but in reality, she was only fifteen. Lee's children—Roy, Gladys, and Glenn—were ten, nine, and six at the time. Lee and Ollie's first baby, David Wilmore, arrived ten months after their marriage, and seven more children came over the next fifteen years: Carl Eugene, Mildred Nadine, Grace Lorene, Fern Aline, Dorothy Lee, Norman Sile, and Margaret Louise (my mother).

Lee was short and wiry. Ollie was a tall thin woman. In the only photograph I have of the two of them, they appear to be the same height, about five-and-a-half feet tall. Lee was wearing a work shirt and bibbed coveralls, a felt Fedora covering his full head of thick, dark hair. Ollie wore a print dress covered by an apron and squinted at the camera. In other photos, Lee has an engaging smile with deep dimples. He was fun-loving, generous, and friendly, but he also had a violent temper, which he may have used on his wife and his children.

* * *

John Noah Cole was born March 5, 1891, in Granby. He was the fifth of the eight surviving children born to Noah Thomas Cole and Martha Hedrick Cole. According to a Granby history, N. T. Cole was a merchant in the town in 1881.⁷ He later entered mining, which was to be the cause of his death at the age of fifty-three.

According to the newspaper account of Noah's death, he and his seventeen-year-old son John were working together, sinking a shaft. Noah was in the shaft, and John was operating the windlass. The windlass stuck, and when it did, the crank hit the ore bucket

⁷ James. *Granby Missouri*.

being lifted up from the bottom of the shaft. The bucket full of lead ore fell on Noah, crushing his skull. Several men pulled Noah out and carried him home, where he remained unconscious until his death later that night.⁸ When her husband died, Martha Cole was left with four children at home: John, Nola, Garland, and Tennessee. John stepped into the role of head of the household.

A few years after his father's death, John married Eva McCaslin on January 21, 1911. They had one child, a daughter. John's draft registration, completed June 5, 1917, described him as of medium build with blue eyes and light brown hair, reported that he was married, and listed his dependents as his mother and one child (but no wife). Eva had left John earlier that year, leaving their young daughter with John and his mother.

John was not called to military duty; he was in prison by the time the United States became actively involved in World War I. The Newton County newspaper reported a story in its August 3, 1917 edition under the headline "Cole Held for Murder of Lucas and Kincannon."⁹

According to the reported story, John and Eva Cole had been separated for several months. She was staying near Neosho with a sister, identified in the newspaper only as Miss McCaslin, at the home of another sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. George Corker. John had come to visit his estranged wife. He found her sitting in the front yard. As they talked, a car drove up. George Kincannon got out, talked with John and Eva, and then asked for the sister. Miss McCaslin came out and went for a ride with the two men.

When the three returned, Kincannon and the sister got out of the car and left Ralph Lucas sleeping on the backseat. John initiated a fight with Kincannon, pulled a gun, and shot him. Lucas leaped from the car and ran. John shot him four times in the back and the head.

According to the newspaper:

*There was nothing brought out at the inquest tending to show that Mrs. Cole had planned a motor ride with the men, but Cole is said to have accused his wife of "having a date" with them when he saw them approaching in the car.*¹⁰

⁸ Obituary for Noah Cole in *The Granby Miner*. The clipping found in the Granby City archives is undated.

⁹ "Cole Held for Murder of Lucas and Kincannon." *Newton County News*, Friday, August 3, 1917.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

At the Kincannon murder trial, John Cole was convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison. “*The verdict was a great surprise to the defendant and his friends, who immediately filed a motion for a new trial, which was overruled by the court and an appeal was taken to the supreme court.*”¹¹ Cole and his friends probably assumed that the unwritten law that had protected Lee Nutt eight years earlier would also keep John Cole out of prison.

After he had served a year of his sentence, the state supreme court reviewed Cole’s case, overturned the murder conviction, and returned the case to the lower court. A circuit court jury heard evidence and deliberated an hour before finding John Cole not guilty. He was never tried on the second (Lucas) murder charge.¹²

While John was in prison, his younger brother, Garland Cole, married Ressie Owens, Ollie’s younger sister.

* * *

Lee Nutt and John Cole had known each other for years, working together off and on in the mines of Granby and surrounding areas. Mining was hard and dangerous work, but the money was good. And the miners did what they could to watch out for one another. So, when John was released from prison in 1920, Lee took him in, perhaps because he understood the passion that had led John to pull a gun on the men who were interfering in his marriage. Besides, the men were practically related through the marriage of Garland and Ressie, and having a paying boarder would help Lee and Ollie and their children make ends meet.

John likely did some of the hard labor of mining such as using a pick and shovel to dislodge the ore. A strong workman moved six to eight tons of ore a day.¹³ Lee had to find jobs that he could do with his left hand or with his right hook arm. He fired boilers, laid dynamite, and worked the teams of horses that pulled wagons to haul ore out and water in.

¹¹ “Slayer of Two Men is Sent to Prison.” *The Monett Weekly Times*, Friday, June 14, 1918. Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress.

¹² “Cole is Cleared of Lucas Murder.” *The Monett Weekly Times*, Friday, June 14, 1920. Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress.

¹³ “Missouri Lead Mining History by County.” Missouri Department of Natural Resources Website. August 18, 2016.

His disability did not prevent Lee from following in his grandfather Henry's footsteps. For many years Henry Nutt had served as constable of nearby Neosho; Lee was twice elected sheriff of Granby, serving from 1920 to 1924. The last Nutt child, Margaret, was born in 1925, a few months after his second term ended.

In 1927 the Nutt family and John Cole moved to Neosho, where the men worked at a newly-constructed Pet Milk plant. The next year the two men took lead mining jobs in Baxter Springs, Kansas, as did Lee and Ollie's oldest son Wilmore, who was eighteen by then.

John's brother Garland was living in Baxter Springs, so John boarded with Garland and Ressie rather than with the Nutt family. Or, perhaps John Cole was no longer welcome in the Nutt home. Ollie had taken at least some of the children and gone to live with relatives in Holdenville, Oklahoma, sometime in 1928. Lee came after her and convinced her to return to their home in Baxter Springs. Evidently Lee had become aware of the relationship that had developed between Ollie and John and wanted to keep his family together. To get his wife back, Lee may well have threatened to harm her, the children, or John Cole.

On the morning of December 11, 1928, Lee and Wilmore came home for lunch and discovered John and Ollie together in an upstairs bedroom. Most likely they were just talking, perhaps making plans to get away from Lee. When he found them together, Lee reportedly told John, "I thought I told you to stay away from my home," as he started a physical fight with John.¹⁴ According to testimony at the trial, Lee's hook tore John's ear before he broke free of Lee and ran. Wilmore pursued John and continued fighting with him as John fled down the stairs and out of the house.¹⁵

Ollie also gave chase. I imagine her crying and frantically pleading with Lee not to hurt John. She caught Lee and pulled the hook off his arm. She ran back in the house with it, and Lee chased her. When Ollie refused to return his hook, Lee grabbed his .41 caliber revolver and ran back outside. Half a block from the Nutt house, Lee caught up with John and Wilmore in a neighbor's yard where they were continuing to struggle. Lee fired three shots

¹⁴ "Defendants in Cole Killing Testify." *The Joplin Globe*, Friday, January 18, 1929.

¹⁵ "Kills Man Over His Wife, Putting 2nd Notch on Gun." *The Joplin Globe*, Wednesday, December 12, 1928.

at close range, two of which hit and killed John Cole. Later when the police chief came to the Nutt home, Lee surrendered his gun saying simply, "I killed him."¹⁶

Both Lee and Wilmore were jailed on murder charges, and bond was set at \$5,000 for each man. The family was unable to raise the money, so Wilmore and Lee remained in prison that December. At Lee's trial in January, Ollie was called as a witness. She admitted to having been involved with John Cole "for ten or twelve years." She testified that she had left Lee because John promised her "a life of ease." Ollie testified that, on the day of the shooting, John had only been in her home for about fifteen minutes when Lee and Wilmore arrived.¹⁷

Lee's defense to this murder charge was self-defense. He testified that Cole had attempted to break up his home, but that he hadn't shot him for that reason. Lee said that he first shot at Cole to frighten and wound him but that he fired the fatal shots to save the life of his son, who was grappling with Cole, to prevent Cole from using his own .41 caliber revolver. Because John had previously killed two men, Lee knew he would not hesitate to use his gun. The jury deliberated for two hours before finding Lee Nutt not guilty. Charges against Wilmore were dropped after his father was acquitted in the death of John Cole. John was thirty-seven years old at the time of his murder. He is buried in Galena, Kansas.¹⁸

The story of Lee Nutt and John Cole and their violent acts was big news. There were at least eleven stories reported in the *Joplin Globe* between December 12, 1928 and February 13, 1929. One headline summed up the complicated mess: "Kills Man Over His Wife, Putting 2nd Notch on Gun; Victim Slew 2 in Triangle."¹⁹ The United Press wire service distributed this sensational story of the multiple love triangles involving these two men, and it was picked up by newspapers as far away as Lubbock, Texas; Twin Falls, Idaho; and Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

* * *

So, I ask myself, how did the Nutt family go on? I imagine that Ollie was devastated and angry. She probably was glad to have

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Defendants in Cole Killing Testify."

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Kills Man."

time apart from Lee while he was in prison awaiting trial. I envision her going through the motions of feeding and caring for her children then crying herself to sleep at night. But when Lee was acquitted and Wilmore released, tensions in the house were bound to have been high.

In addition, the economy was falling apart. Within a few months of Lee's acquittal, the stock market crashed, and the Great Depression set in. Lee had always had marginal employment, so when mines closed or reduced output, he was forced to migrate west. (My mother, once referred to her family as "Okies," like those portrayed in the John Steinbeck novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.) The first to leave were Roy and Glenn, sons from Lee's first marriage. They went to California and then on to Oregon. They both found work and women to marry along the way. Glenn and his wife Daisy settled in Richland, Oregon, on the Idaho border, and worked on her stepfather's ranch.

Lee and his sons Wilmore and Carl jumped freight trains, traveling west to Oregon where they moved in with Glenn's family. They worked on the ranch, haying, milking cows, and butchering cattle. Glenn had a car, so he drove back to Missouri for the rest of the family, returning with the four older girls: Nadine, Lorene, Fern, and Dort (ages sixteen to nine). Ollie may have considered staying behind, but she followed by bus a few months later with the two youngest children, Norman and Margaret, aged six and five. But Ollie soon realized her mistake and left Lee for good, returning to Missouri with Margaret.

Why only Margaret? Was it simply because she was such a young child? Norman, fifteen months older, was also young. Or was Margaret John Cole's child, a fact that neither Ollie nor Lee could ignore? Margaret physically favors her mother, but she is the only Nutt child to have had blonde hair. The others all inherited Lee's dark, curly hair. Whatever the reason, Ollie kept Margaret close and away from Lee. Ollie also insisted that Margaret have her mother's maiden name rather than her father's, telling the young Margaret, "Your name is now Owens, not Nutt."



Norman and Margaret



Ollie Owens

While Ollie tried to get on her feet, she left Margaret with relatives, but soon placed her in the Joplin Children's Home, where she would live for four years. Within a year, five other Nutt children returned to Missouri. Ollie filed for and was granted a divorce as well as full custody of the six youngest children. Carl and Wilmore remained with their father.

Ultimately, the relevance of this story may have less to do with biology than with the outcomes the shooting had on Ollie and Lee and their children. The marriage had

clearly been unraveling before the Cole shooting. In her late twenties at the time, Ollie was an attractive young woman. Perhaps John Cole had offered a younger and more physically interesting alternative to her older, disabled, temperamental husband. (I have not been able to locate a photograph of John Cole, so don't know what he looked like. I did locate a descendant of the Cole family—the granddaughter of John's brother Earl. She said that no one in the Cole family would talk about John, and that photographs of him had been purged from all family albums after the shame of his own violent actions and his ultimate murder.)

Regardless of the rumors, Margaret grew up adamantly holding to the belief that Lee Nutt was her father, and she refused to acknowledge the implications of the stories others told about what she called the "ugly business" in Baxter Springs or the rumored affair between her mother and John Cole.

* * *

The players might have taken their secrets to their graves with them, but for modern DNA testing. When my test results came back recently, Ancestry.com provided me with names of others whose profiles have common DNA markers with mine. Some of the names were of cousins and second cousins that I know. However, I did not recognize some of the other names. When I looked at their profiles, I discovered that my "probable second or third cousins" include grandchildren of John Cole's siblings Nola,

Earl, and Garland. How else would I have DNA in common with them if John Cole were not my mother's biological father?

My mother would be horrified that I have delved into her family history so deeply, and I imagine her rolling over in her proverbial grave as a result. However, I see this story of star-crossed lovers with new eyes. Ollie probably loved John, and they both would have loved their daughter Margaret had they been allowed to raise her together. I believe that Ollie had a special relationship with her youngest daughter because of the love affair; unfortunately, she never told Margaret about the circumstances of her birth. Margaret never had much of a relationship with Lee Nutt; he was a distant father who was involved only peripherally in her life after she left Oregon with her mother at the age of five.

But the greatest tragedy of this story surely was the untimely end to John Cole's life. His great-niece recently wrote me to say that this story has changed her impression of John from a family disgrace to a man who could love and commit. The discovery of this second daughter of John's, she says, has restored her belief in his humanity. And we, as newly-discovered second cousins, plan to meet soon.

Confluence