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Rick Sedlisky, Editor

Murder and Suicide at Throop November 1895

By Joe Rudzinski

While searching the Library of Congress Chronicling America Newspaper data base for items related to Throop, I came upon an article about a murder/suicide that occurred in Throop on 25 November 1895. What first caught my attention was that the article stated the murder occurred on Sanderson Street near the Pancoast Company store and Post Office located at the corners of Sanderson and Charles streets (marked in red). This was very close to the area where I grew up (also marked in red). The name of the victims, Robbins, was one I recalled from research for a previous History Bytes article about the early settlers of Throop. My first thought was, that it should be easy to identify the exact location of the tragedy; however, as I collected more articles, each new find added a new dimension and twist.

This story has all the ingredients for a modern TV reality show; murder, suicide, alleged infidelity, a property dispute, challenged estate and a supposed villain.

The two leading newspapers, The



Scranton Tribune and The Scranton Republican took differing slants on the story. The Tribune painting Robert Brown Girling as a villain with the Republican, while not sympathetic, a bit kinder.

The articles that follow have all been retyped because of condition issues of the originals and to make it easier to read. They are in chronological order and I have included notes when I found errors or points that need clarification. Because of the length, some articles have been rendered in original column format. This also helps to give the feel of the original content.

The Scranton Tribune 26 September 1895

Woman Applies for Divorce the Same Day Her Husband Drove Her Out

Mrs. Jemima Josephine Robbins, represented by Attorneys Hulslander & Vosburg, began a divorce proceeding against her husband, Zara A. Robbins. She was married in June 1, 1871 and lived with him until yesterday morning.

They had a dispute and it ended in a flare-up. Mrs. Robbins left the house and went to her lawyers. Although she abided at home until yesterday, she says that the culmination of all their troubles came and she could no longer stand him. Cruelty is the essential ground in which she asks separation from her husband.

Note: This is the only time Jemima appears as the given name of Mrs. Robbins.

The Scranton Tribune 26 November 1895

BLOODSHED IN THROOP

A Jealous Husband Shoots His Wife and Then Suicides

SOME MOST UNUSUAL SCENES

He Repeatedly Kisses and Caresses His Wounded Wife Before Taking His Own Life –Inhuman Action of the Wretch Who Caused the Trouble

Throop was yesterday the scene of the most sensational shooting affray that has probably ever occurred in

Lackawanna County. Zara Robbins, frenzied by jealousy, put a bullet in his wife's head and after some time had elapsed deliberately committed suicide in plain view of a throng of neighbors who were attracted to the scene by the report of the first shot. Robbins died two hours after he fired the bullet into his brain; his wife is at the Lackawanna Hospital, hovering between life and death.

Robbins and his wife were both originally from Cherry Ridge, Wayne County, where they were married

twenty-two years ago. He was a carpenter by trade, and 45 years of age. She was five years his senior. They came to Throop about twelve years ago and lived happily and quite peaceably until about two months ago, when a disturber in the person of Robert Brown Zerling, commonly known as Robert Brown, came between them. He is a miner, employed in the "Rough and Ready" Colliery and from the speech of the people, is none too well thought of by the residents of the quiet little borough.

Robbins Went To Wayne County

Robbins was a hard drinker, but while he neglected his wife and children, he was never known to have abused them. His neglect finally culminated in a disruption. He went off on a drunk and drifted over to Wayne County about five weeks ago where he stayed until yesterday. Before going, he had suspicions of Brown's intimacy with his wife, and it is said this was the cause of all the trouble.

Robbins owned two small adjoining properties on Sanderson Street, both of which were in the wife's name. Just before he went away she sold to Brown the smaller property, which is located between the Robbins and Brown residences. On this lot was a 12 x 15 one-story building used as a butcher shop. Brown caused this to be moved onto his original property and set up in front of his own house, not twenty feet from his door. After Robbins went away, Brown induced Mrs. Robbins to rent her own house and take her abode in the butcher shop structure, which was

partitioned into three rooms and would serve very well for her and the youngest daughter, the only one of the three children left with her, the eldest daughter being wayward and the little boy being in Cherry Ridge, where he was taken by his father when he went away.

Robbins Goods Thrown Out

Mrs. Robbins secured a tenant for her house, threw her husband's belongings into the yard and went to live in Brown's house. A week later she took legal steps to secure a divorce. The case is now pending.

All these things came to the ears of the jealous husband, who as after events proved, loved his wife fondly. Although not wishing to confess to her that he was not able to banish her from his mind, he could not brook the thought of his detested neighbor, Brown, paying attention to his wife without molestation, so he brought himself to write a letter begging her to make up and take him back again. She paid no heed to his importunities, whereupon he sent her another letter warning her that unless she consented to live with him, he would kill her. This letter she received on Saturday last, and knowing her husband's temperament, was much worried for fear he would put this threat into execution. She told some of the neighbors of the receipt of the letter, and yesterday morning stated that she had dreamt for two successive nights that her husband had shot her.

Robbins Put in an Appearance

Yesterday morning about 10 o'clock, Robbins appeared at the house of his uncle, Alvin Shaffer, at Dutch Gap, a little this side of Throop, where he spent a part of the day, leaving about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, after avowing his intention of seeking out his wife and making an effort to effect a reconciliation. He was sober when he left his uncle's house, but drank more or less after reaching Throop. At 4 o'clock, he reached the little house in which his wife was living. He paused for a while at the gate and was about to enter when he saw Brown come out of his house, which is about twenty feet in the rear of the little building occupied by his wife. Brown saw him at the same time and beat a hasty retreat into the house.

This guilty action on Brown's part seems to have aroused all the insane jealousy within the furious husband for he immediately drew his revolver and followed Brown into the house. He chased Brown up and down stairs and from room to room for about five minutes, when evidently reflecting that his wife would take the alarm and flee, he gave up the chase and rushed over to his wife's place.

Tried to Bolt the Door

She was in the little sitting room at the rear of the house when she saw her husband, revolver in hand, pass by the side window. Remembering the threat, she was paralyzed with fear and could do nothing but scream to a little girl, Nellie Wallace, who was visiting her, to bolt the door. The girl attempted to do this, but before she could slide the bolt,

Robbins burst in, brushed past the Wallace girl and walked into the room where his wife was.

The Wallace girl was so terrorized at sight of the revolver that she fled from the house across the street. Before she could give the alarm, the report of the pistol was heard, and when the neighbors rushed to the scene, Robbins was at the door with the smoking pistol raised in a threatening manner. He told the crowd that he would shoot the first one who attempted to enter. He then went back to where his wife was lying and those outside could hear him crying and saw him, through the window kissing her passionately.

"I had to Josie." They could hear him say. "I left you to choose between me and Brown and I told you I'd do this. Don't blame me, Josie. I'll be with you as soon as you go."

Two or three times the wounded woman was heard speaking to him, and once she was overheard to remark: "I didn't think you would do it, Zara?" From their actions and the scraps of conversation overheard, those outside were led to believe that both husband and wife were not harshly disposed towards one another. He seemed to deplore that circumstances compelled him to do this rash deed and she accused herself for not becoming reconciled.

Brown and His Revolver On the Scene

While this most unusual scene was being enacted, Brown the cause of all the trouble, came out of his house with a

revolver and started to enter the Robbins house, exclaiming that he would put Robbins out of the way. The crowd prevented him from entering and the remarks, which came to his ears, caused him to realize that he was in danger of rough treatment from the thoroughly incensed citizens, so he pocketed his gun and walked up town.

Five or six minutes after Robbins shot his wife he was heard approaching the door. The next instant he stood on the threshold and addressing himself to the crowd said:

"I killed my wife. I don't deny it, and here goes me too." With that he placed the pistol to the side of his head and pulled the trigger. The cartridge failed to explode. He took a hasty glance at the chamber, raised the revolver to his head and again pulled the trigger. This time the gun worked and he dropped across the threshold with his blood and brains oozing out of both sides of his head, the bullet having gone clear through just above the ears.

Again, Brown appeared upon the scene. Breaking through the crowd, he grasped the dying man by the arm and dragging him through the pool of blood, which had formed on the doorstep, dropped him into a mud puddle in the yard saying "the ---- -- -- ---- can't die in a house that I own. Let him die there, he's no good anyhow."

Brown Gives a Warning

One of the witnesses of this inhuman act, G.B. Meade, raised Robbins' head out of the slush, and others brought him water. The crowd soon recovered its

senses, gave Brown to understand that it would be wise for him to make himself scarce, and carried Robbins into the house. Dr. Franklin F. Arndt, of Green Ridge, who happened to be in Throop at the time, was summoned. He had Mrs. Robbins conveyed to the Lackawanna Hospital in the mine ambulance.

The husband he said could not live two hours and his judgement was verified for he expired at three minutes of six, after lingering in unconsciousness for a little less than two hours.

Mrs. Robbins, the hospital authorities say, is not likely to recover. The bullet entered the forehead just above the right eye, and fractured the skull, although it is not known for sure that it entered the brain.

Nothing has been done to Brown, but it is likely that he will be arrested today if anything can be found in the law that will cover his case, for the citizens of Throop are determined that his inhuman conduct shall not go unpunished. His evident purpose, so the people of Throop believe, was to have Mrs. Robbins divorced, desert the woman now known as his wife and by marrying Mrs. Robbins, secure the property which is in her name.

Coroner Kelley was notified and will go to Throop today to investigate the matter.

Kind of Revolver He Used

The revolver with which the shooting was done was of the Smith & Wesson make, 25-calibre with five chambers.

Undertaker Jones of Olyphant took charge of Robbins' remains. The corpse was laid out in the little house in which the tragedy occurred and remained there alone over-night. During the evening Brown, in his home a few feet away, was heard singing at the top of his voice as if in great glee.

Eighteen years ago, so the old residents say, a man named Wescott committed suicide in the little house which was the scene of yesterday's tragedy.

Note: The article incorrectly identified one of the key characters. The correct name is Robert Brown Girling vice Zirling.

The Scranton Republican reported the same story, but being less strident towards Robert Brown Girling. In addition, there were some differences in reporting how some events occurred that were interesting. These differences did not alter the fact that a murder-suicide happened. For example, The Tribune reported Mrs. Robbins moved into a 12 x 15 structure on Brown's property that was divided into three rooms. The Republican reported she moved to rooms at the rear of Bellman's store.

Both papers reported Zara Robbins returning to the house at 4 o'clock, The Tribune reporting Robbins upon arriving saw Girling who seeing he was spotted, ran to his house and Zara chased him into and through the house with his revolver drawn. The Republican reported Zara Robbins went to the place where his wife was living and entered the house. People outside could hear them argue and then Zara appeared at the door. He saw Girling in the crowd and raised his revolver and fired two shots, missing the fleeing Girling.

Both papers report Zara re-entering the house, The Tribune writing that one shot was fired, The Republican reporting two shots fired, only one striking Mrs. Robbins. The Tribune reported that Dr. Arndt called for the Lackawanna Hospital ambulance, while The Republican reported the Pancoast Mine ambulance was called.

The Scranton Tribune 27 November 1895

Card from Robert Brown Girling
Editor of The Tribune

Sir: The article in The Tribune in regard to the shooting at Throop, during which Zara Robbins shot his wife and himself, referred to me in a most unjustifiable manner. Everyone in the neighborhood knows that the relations between Mrs. Robbins and myself have always been of the most innocent nature. Both my wife and myself have befriended her as best we could after her husband's desertion, allowing her and her

daughter to live in a small house upon our property, and giving her what other assistance our limited means would allow. The only difficulty I have ever had with Mr. Robbins was in regard to a real estate matter and had no reference to his wife whatever. Mrs. Robbins is a virtuous, hard-working woman, and this report, which must have been furnished by some unscrupulous person for sensational purposes, is as unjust to her as to myself.

Your truly
Robert Brown Girling

Nov 26, 1895

The Scranton Tribune 27 November 1895

Mrs. Robbins' Condition.

Hovers Between Life and Death at the Lackawanna Hospital—Letter given to Coroner—In It Robbins Accuses Neighbor Brown of Being the Cause of Their Troubles.

Mrs. Zara Robbins still lies in a precarious condition at the Lackawanna Hospital. At midnight, the hospital authorities reported that her condition was unchanged. The danger lies in the probability of inflammation of the brain setting in. Efforts were made to extract the bullet, but the probe failed to locate it. The supposition is that the bullet is imbedded in the skull.

The husband's body still lies at the house in Throop in which the tragedy occurred. A telegram was sent to his relatives in Cherry Ridge, but no response to it was received up to last night. If his friends do not come today it is the intention of his uncle, Alvin Shaffer, to ship the body to Cherry Ridge.

The greatest indignation is expressed on all sides among the people of Throop against the man Brown, whom they blame to a great extent for the terrible tragedy, which has scandalized their peaceful hamlet.

Inquest Conducted by Coroner

The inquest conducted by Coroner Kelley yesterday morning brought forth nothing but what was contained in The Tribune's account yesterday morning. He empaneled a jury consisting of Dr. J. H. Murphy, Joseph Fabringer, John Grimes, John Fitzsimmons, C. J. Watkins and C. E. Davies and preceded to hear testimony in the town hall, at 11 o'clock.

Alvin Shaffer, uncle of the deceased, was first called. He told of Robbins' visit to his house in the early part of the day. He spoke of his family troubles to his uncle, but did not on that occasion make any mention of the happiness of his home.

Belle Robbins, the youngest child of the deceased, and Mrs. Brown were

both called, but could throw no additional light on the affair.

Brown himself was then called. He denied the acts of the evening before and the accusations made against him by the deceased, but the next two witnesses, G. B. Meade and John Wallace, swore positively that Brown dragged the dying man out of the house and dropped his body into the mud and with an oath said he could not die in his house.

Nellie Wallace, the little girl who was in the house when Robbins burst in, Mrs. Wallace and W. M. Coleman, neighbors, were also examined, but their stories were along the lines of the already published facts.

Verdict of the Jury

After a short deliberation, the jury returned the following verdict: "We find that the said Zara Robbins came to his

death from a pistol shot wound, inflicted by himself with suicidal intent."

The following letter was handed to Coroner Kelly by Mrs. Brown:

Sealayville Nov 1.—Dear Joe: Let the courts of heaven separate us, not the courts of earth. Take Heed. If you answer, direct Prompton. Joe, I love you. This would not have happened only for Brown. David said he would like to see ma.

Zara

Joe is the name of Mrs. Robbins and David is their little son whom the father took with him when he went to Wayne County.

Note: One of the Coroner inquest members should be Fahringer vice Fabringer. The article refers to the family as Brown when it should be Girling. Sealayville should read Seelyville. Prompton and Seelyville are located near Cherry Ridge, Wayne County, mentioned in the articles.

The Scranton Tribune 28 November 1895

MRS. ROBBINS STILL ALIVE The Hospital Physicians Say That Her Vitality is Simply Wonderful.

Mrs. Zara Robbins has been trembling on the brink of eternity for four days with a bullet in her brain, yet her condition, though extremely weak, was at a late hour last night no worse than at any time since she was brought to the Lackawanna Hospital; Monday evening.

The physicians at that institution say that her case is truly wonderful: she may live an hour or several days, and during all the time she has been conscious and in full possession of all her feelings. The bullet has not been removed from her head; and any attempt to probe for it would be feared as taking too great a risk.

The Scranton Republican 28 November 1895

The Throop Tragedy

Robert Brown Relates his Version of the Shootings to a Republican Man – Mrs. Robbins Much Slandered Woman.

Robert Brown, who has been given much unpleasant notoriety owing to Monday's tragedy at Throop, was a caller at the Republican office yesterday. Mr. Brown is a reputable appearing man and is well thought of by his neighbors. He claims that he has been outraged in the reports concerning him published in local newspapers and says that he has instructed his counsel to begin proceedings in libel against The Scranton Tribune.

Mr. Brown tells an interesting story. He says that the story that he was accused of intimate relations with Mrs. Robbins is absurdly false. The dead man never thought of making such an accusation and it is the intention of malicious persons bent on inventing some cause for the double crime other than had been stated. Brown says that his troubles with Robbins grew out of a dispute over Mrs. Robbins property, which was in his name. She sold a part of it to Brown and because he would not pay the purchase money to Robbins, he became angry and they had words.

Mrs. Robbins is a good virtuous woman and it is an outrage to brand her in public as an unfaithful wife without being able to produce a scintilla of evidence in support of such a statement.

Caused His Own Misery

Brown says that Robbins owes his unhappiness to his own habits and intemperate conduct. He declares on the day of the tragedy he suddenly turned upon hearing a slight noise and saw Robbins stealthily approaching with a revolver in his hand. Brown says that he then retreated to his own house, which adjoins that of Mrs. Robbins. While he was backing towards the door Robbins snapped his revolver at him twice, but the cartridge did not explode and that probably prevented a third crime. Robbins then rushed into the house and did not emerge alive. Brown says he heard two shots and then he grasped a revolver and went inside to see what was occurring. Robbins had chased his wife into a pantry and she was on the floor bleeding. Brown found difficulty in forcing the door open, as Robbins resisted his efforts to enter. When Robbins clapped his weapon to his temple and killed himself, Brown says that he fell with his head near the door. "I admit that I pulled him out of the

house and laid him on a board near the door.” Brown said.

Mr. Brown also stated that both he and his wife had frequently befriended Mrs. Robbins, but for them she might have starved to death. On September 18 last, he said Robbins pointed a gun at him and threatened his life and it was his little daughter’s soft voice imploring him not to shoot that stayed his hand at that time. Upon the same occasion, Robbins threatened the life of his wife

and while they were living in Wayne County, he threw a butcher knife at her.

A Republican representative who visited Throop yesterday found sentiment somewhat divided as to Brown and Robbins, but there is general indignation over the charges made that reflect on the good character of Mrs. Robbins. All agree that she is an honest woman and that she deserved a better husband.

Note: The Republican refers to Robert Brown vice Robert Brown Girling

The Scranton Tribune 13 December 1895

MRS. ROBBINS IS DEAD

Robert Brown Gerling Wanted to Take Charge of the Remains

Mrs. Josephine Robbins, who several weeks ago was shot by her husband in Throop, died early yesterday afternoon in the Lackawanna Hospital, where she was taken the day of the shooting. The husband, Zara Robbins, shot himself after sending the bullet into his wife’s head and died two hours later.

Immediately following Mrs. Robbins’ death, the hospital authorities notified Coroner Kelley and telephoned to the store of the Pancoast Coal Company in Throop. Three hours later Robert Brown Gerling called at the hospital and demanded the body, it was refused him. Jealousy of Gerling is said to be the cause that led Robbins to commit the

desperate deed. Later in the day a representative of Raub’s undertaking establishment came with a wagon to the hospital and said Gerling had sent for the body. Again it was refused.

During the afternoon the hospital surgeons sought for the bullet. They had been instructed to do so by Coroner Kelley, but were not able to find it. Late in the afternoon the coroner called at the hospital, instructed the surgeons to continue their search for the bullet, and decided to hold the inquest this morning when the result of the autopsy will be learned.

The coroner was unable to state what disposition he would make of the body. He said, however, that Gerling would not get it if it is demanded by a relative.

Note: Yet again the Girling name is misspelled.

The Scranton Republican 16 December 1895

WILL OF MRS. ZARA ROBBINS

**Had Bequeathed her Real Estate to
her husband – Robert Brown Girling
named Executor**

Letters testamentary in the estate of the late Mrs. Zara Robbins were granted Saturday by Registrar Hopkins to Robert Brown Girling.

Mrs. Robbins died at the Lackawanna Hospital on Thursday last from the effects of bullet wounds inflicted by her husband, Zara, at Throop, on November 25. Her husband died an hour after the attempt to kill his wife from the effect of pistol wounds inflicted by his own hands. Jealousy was stated to be the motive of the murder and suicide, and the name of Mr. Robert Girling was connected with the matter, but he made a complete explanation before the coroner's jury.

The will contains provisions which will cause some surprise at Throop and in the vicinity. Mrs. Robbins bequeathed to her husband all her real estate for his use during his natural life and the balance of her personal and real estate is bequeathed to her three children upon their father's death.

Mr. Robert Brown Girling was appointed executor of the estate. Both Mr. and Mrs. Robbins were insured with life insurance companies, so that the three children are well provided for.

**Note: Josephine Robbins Last Will
named her brother, George Bartron,
and Robert Brown Girling as
executors.**

The Scranton Republican 31 October 1896

IN ORPHANS COURT

A nice question of the construction of a will was raised in the argument on the exceptions filed to partition in the estate of Josephine Robbins, deceased. The will

created contingent remainders in a portion of the land of which partition is sought to be made, and Hulslander & Vosburg, attorneys for the expectant, contend that partition cannot be made in such cases, as it is uncertain in whom the title will vest until the contingency provided for in the will has arisen. T. F. Wells, Esq., representing the petitioners, claimed that this would not bar the partition, but that the money could be impounded until the contingency had arisen and the title vested.

The Scranton Tribune 8 January 1897

ECHO OF THE THROOP MURDER

The "Man in the Case" Comes Into Possession of the Property.

his natural life. And at his death all the property hereby devised or bequeathed to him as aforesaid, or so much thereof as may then remain unsold, I give, devise, and bequeath unto my three children Annie, Belle May, and David Samuel, share and share alike, their

Robert Brown Girling has come into the estate of Mrs. Josephine J. Robbins, who it will be remembered was shot and killed by her husband who also shot himself because of her supposed intimacy with Girling.

Jennie H. Spangenberg got possession of Mrs. Robbins' property on contract. Girling, who was executor of the estate, bought the contract and proceeded to take possession. The children of Mrs. Robbins fought the claim in court on the ground that as executor he was prohibited from possessing himself of the property in the manner he did. Judge Edwards, however, has decided otherwise and Girling secured the estate.

The Scranton Republican 9 March 1897

In the estate of Josephine J. Robbins, deceased, the exception to the inquisition was dismissed and the inquisition as amended by the agreement of parties was confirmed.

The rulings in favor of Girling were overturned and the rights to property in question were awarded to the guardian of the minor children of Josephine Robbins. It is difficult to determine the reason for the dispute regarding the property. A contingency in the will provided for the death of Zara.

The guardian of the children would go on to sell the property and is addressed below in the Epilogue.

The Scranton Republican 9 December 1897

NO RELATIONS IN AMERICA

Josephine Robbins Will Nr 3564

_____ **Death of Robert V.**

Dated 13 Dec 1895

Girling After a Six

Weeks illness

Robert V. Girling, who was injured in the Throop mine about six weeks ago owing to the fall of rock, died at the Lackawanna Hospital yesterday.

Deceased was 50 years of age, and an Englishman without relatives in this country. The funeral arrangements will be in charge of the order of the Sons of St. George, of which the deceased was a member.

_____ **Epilogue**

During the mid-1890's, American newspapers began a practice that would be called "Yellow Journalism", or what today has evolved into Tabloid Journalism. The practice involved using bold headlines, exaggeration and scandal-mongering or [sensationalism](#) to sell more newspapers. The Scranton newspapers were successful in this regard with this story as it was picked up across a good part of Pennsylvania and nationally in more than ten other states. The newspapers certainly exaggerated many facts and choose to portray Robert Brown Girling as the bad guy.

After reading the initial articles I too viewed Robert Brown Girling with suspicion, but with each new article found, I began to doubt he was the "Wretch" being portrayed. This prompted me to dig a little deeper and I found more information on the Girling family than I expected, and my opinion changed. I think some folks in Throop had a problem with Girling and helped stoke the image portrayed in the newspaper stories. I did not find any information that supported that position and I believe that Josephine Robbins and Robert Girling were victims. After reading the information below, I will leave it to the readers to make their own decisions on Girling.

Robert Brown Girling was born in England in 1847. He married his wife, Maria Kent Girling, in England in 1876. I could not find a record of when they emigrated to the U.S. The earliest that they can be placed in the U.S. and Throop is 1888. This is based on

the death record of a daughter, Ruth, indicating she was born in Throop, 15 September 1888. Girling's had two children, Ruth and Michael, both died in 1892 of Scarlet Fever. Maria Girling died in Throop 29 September 1896 of liver cancer. The Girling family are buried at Forest Hills Cemetery, Dunmore.

Robert Girling had a brother, George, who also lived in Throop. An April 1892 newspaper article reported that George Girling was charged by his brother, Robert, of sending "a scurrilous package" through the mail to him at Throop.

The Scranton Republican 23 March 1892

A Vile Letter

Robert Girling of Throop was about the city yesterday exhibiting a most vile letter which had been mailed to him. He appeared before the mayor and made complaint. The Mayor assured him that this was a case for the United States authorities and he should consult Commissioner Colburn, who was not now in the city. Girling says the letter was written by his brother, George Girling, who is also of Throop.

George Girling was prosecuted in Federal court for sending obscene material through the U.S. mail. The case was heard in Federal court in Pittsburgh where his attorney argued that the material sent via mail did not meet the standard for "obscenity". The jury agreed and acquitted George Girling. Later in the year, George had a dispute with a neighbor in Throop that went to court. No record could be found regarding disposition of the complaint. Although the evidence is scant, it appears George Girling was a disagreeable fellow and not on the best terms with his brother, Robert.

According to Robert, he and his wife, Maria, were caring, helpful friends to Josephine. When Josephine filed for divorce on 25 September 1895, she did not have any visible means of support and the Girling's provided some assistance. It is also interesting to note that when Josephine filed her will in February 1895, Robert Girling along with George Bartron, brother of Josephine, was designated one of the executors of her will. Maria Girling was one of the witnesses. Generally, people select family or very close or trusted friends for these matters.

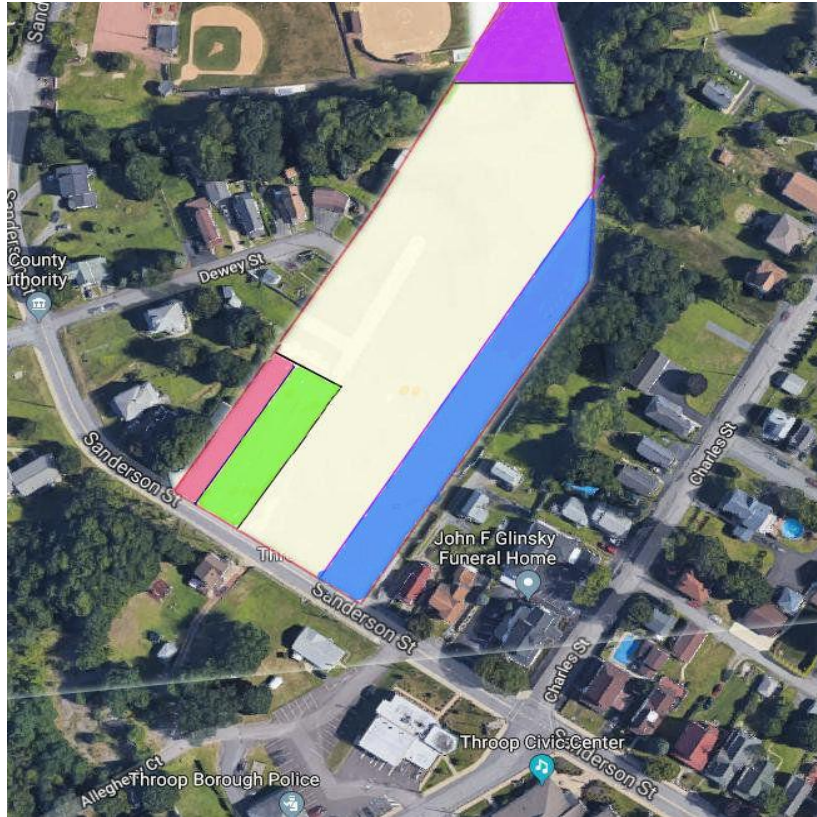
There was speculation in the newspaper articles (noted above) that Girling's motive for his alleged relationship with Mrs. Robbins was the estate. Papers reported that It was rumored that once the Robbins divorce was obtained, Girling would divorce his wife, marry Josephine and gain control of the Robbins property.

Robert Girling made a point in his rebuttal letter to The Tribune and in his interview with The Scranton Republican that he and Zara Robbins had a disagreement over a property transaction. There could be some merit to Girling's claim that a property transaction was the cause of their dispute and contributed to Zara Robbins going over the edge. As you will see, there are some interesting aspects associated with the Robbins property that persisted until the settlement of the estate.

Josephine Robbins' father, Samuel Bartron of Wayne County, died in 1879 and Josephine inherited a portion of his estate. With her inheritance she purchased 4 ½ acres in Throop from Elizabeth Wescott, recorded in Lackawanna County on 11 June 1881, for the sum of \$900.00. As shown in the deed, Josephine Robbins is the sole purchaser and this could have been the beginning of Zara Robbins jealousy. Later transactions would show Zara and Josephine as owners, some with a qualifier, "with wife", after Zara's name. Another reflection of the times was a misogynist statement at the end of the deed indicating that the above deed was explained in full and understood by the woman.

*Elizabeth Wescott. This Indenture made the twenty-eighth day of
To August in the year of our Lord one thousand
(Josephine J. Robbins) eight hundred and eighty-two Between Elizabeth
Wescott, of the city of Scranton, county of Lack-
awanna (late Luzerne), state of Pennsylvania party of the first part
and Josephine J. Robbins, of the borough of Dickson (late a part of*

The Robbins' tract location is shown over-laid on a current Google map. The frontage on Sanderson Street was 280.5 feet with a depth of approximately 600 feet. Almost immediately, a portion of the tract was sold to the Delaware Lackawanna and Western Railroad for right-of-way of the Pancoast rail spur. For those familiar with Throop, this ran above the current little league fields. Other transactions followed and are listed below. The map is color coded to show the transactions. The portion remaining in white totals 2 and 4/10ths of an acre and is what remained when Josephine died.



- 11 June 1881 Josephine Robbins purchases 4 ½ acre tract in Throop from Elizabeth Wescott for \$900.00.
- 4 September 1881, Josephine and Zara Robbins sell 1 acre right-of-way to Delaware Lackawanna and Western Railroad for \$100.00.
- 18 Mar 1885, Zara and Josephine Robbins sell a portion of the 4 1/2 acres to J. S. Fahringer. Tract was 56 x 550 (approx. 1 acre) for \$200.00.
- 26 Feb 1895, Zara and Josephine Robbins sell a 35 x 200 portion to Robert Brown Girling. The price was \$101.00. Note: This is the same day that Josephine Robbins signed her will with Maria B. Girling as one of the witnesses.
- There is a 55 x 200 piece adjoining the piece above apparently purchased by Girling that can't be accounted for. I have gone through the deed books at the Lackawanna County Assessor's office and have not been able to find a deed that records this property. The people at the Assessor's office advised that it is possible a hand shake deal was made and never recorded.



There is an interesting item in the accounting of the Robbins' will. A payment of \$200.00 by Girling for "sale of a lot, contract of Josephine J. Robbins in her lifetime". This could represent final payment by Girling for the above lot.

What complicates the issue is that when Girling died, he bequeathed his "lot, two houses and barn to the Dunmore Lodge – Rose and Crown – Sons of St. George, their successors and assigns forever, so long as they shall be and remain a lodge. The said property not to be sold but to be held and remain the property of the lodge....."

With the inventory as filed in the Register's Office,	
amounting to.	\$360.80
Of tenants rent for January, 1896,	9.00
Of Metropolitan Insurance Company,	146.30
Of Robert Brown Girling, sale of lot, contract of	
Josephine J. Robbins in her lifetime,about,...	200.00
Total charges on this Account,	\$716.10

Page one – Final Accounting of the Estate Of Josephine Robbins 22 Dec 1896

The Sons of St. George was a fraternal organization. The Dunmore lodge dissolved in the 1920's and as a result, the Girling tract would end up auctioned at a sheriff's sale for back taxes. Alice Mae Dainty purchased it 20 April 1928 for \$261.47. According to the Assessor's office, the transfer to the Sons of St. George did not require a deed to be recorded and the Sheriff's sale does not require tracing the deeds backwards.

The idea that Robert Girling was scheming to get control of the estate of Josephine Robbins is a hard sell. Josephine's will is a public record and I have reviewed it and it only shows meager assets. In addition to the 2 and 4/10th acres of land, only \$200.00 in liquid assets remained after all expenses were paid. Girling, as executor, appears to have been completely above board in the disposition of all the personal property, and the will with accompanying documentation does bear this out. However, the 2 and 4/10ths acre of land did cause some problems.

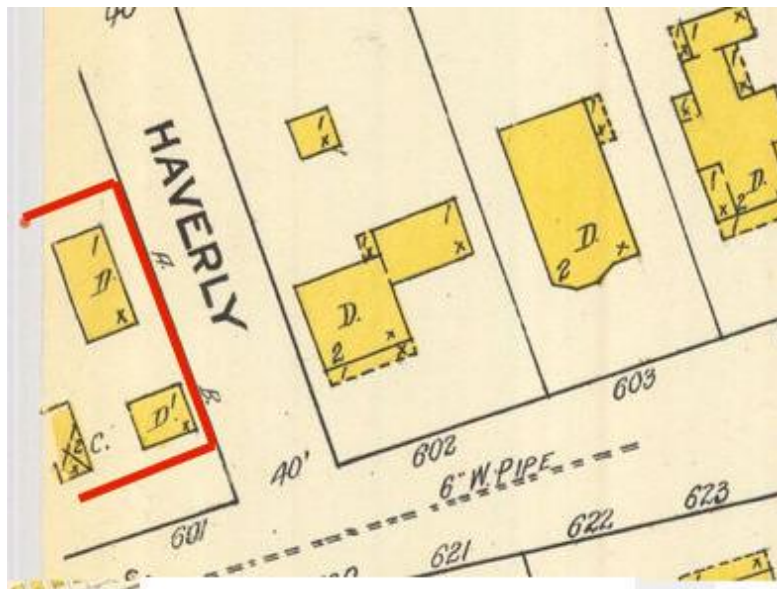
As executor of the estate, Girling attempted to sell the property, however, this was contested by the court appointed guardian of the Robbins' children. There were several hearings with various newspaper articles showing judgements favoring both parties; however, the final ruling on 20 September 1897, granted the property to the Robbins' children.

On 1 October 1897, J. M. Rickard, guardian of the Robbins children and brother-in-law of Josephine, sold the property for the sum of \$1,400.00. The purchase was made by George Haverly who would go on to develop what would be called the Haverly tract that would include several lots on Sanderson Street and what became Haverly and Dewey streets. This sale allowed the final settlement of the Robbins' estate.

Three weeks after the Robbins estate was settled, Robert Girling was injured in an accident at the Pancoast Mine. He was hospitalized for six weeks and died 8 Dec 1897. When the Robert Girling property was in the possession of the Sons of St. George, it appears it was never occupied. A portion of a 1912 Sanborn Insurance map of Throop shows three structures (two dwellings and a barn) still remaining on the property. After the property was sold at auction in 1928, the Borough of Throop placed a lien on the property because the auction price was not sufficient to cover the back taxes. That lien was not resolved until November 1931. The property was sold in December 1951 and subsequently divided into two lots.

When Girling died, there was no family remaining in the U.S. He did leave a hand written will and did bequeath all of his personal effects to friends who were neighbors. These neighbors all lived in close proximity to Girling. It is noteworthy that none of the friends were mentioned in any of the newspaper articles.

Introducing this story, I noted that this murder-suicide appeared to happen close to the area where I grew up. That turned out to be true, in fact it was within two hundred feet of our house. In January 1947, my parents bought what would be our family home for the next 50 years at 320 Haverly Street. I was eight years old at the time, but I can remember moving to the house and that the street was not paved. I also remember that there was a very old abandoned house on what is now the corner of Sanderson and Haverly streets. This was a magnet for all the neighborhood kids and our parents warned us about playing in the house because of its decrepit condition, but who could resist? The stories told by the older kids were that the house was haunted and strange things had happened there.



**Sanborn Insurance Maps
Throop-1912 page 5-11**

I have tried to verify my memories and I have come up with an aerial photo of Throop and surrounding area taken in May 1939. The photo also has an inset of the Pancoast Mine. The inset shown includes some additional adjoining areas. I have labeled Sanderson and Haverly streets and the Girling property is marked in red. It is difficult to discern, but there is a lone house standing on that lot. This is where I remember the house being located and it does correlate to the 1912 Sanborn Insurance map. There is an area in front of the house that shows signs consistent with the second dwelling and barn location.



Photo is from the PENN PILOT Historic Aerial Photographs of Pennsylvania

Lackawanna 051639 agz 74 155

I feel confident that the information I found, especially the aerial photo, confirms the abandoned house we played in as kids was the Girling house. I hope this article gets circulated and some folks come forward with additional information. This certainly was an interesting experience for me and brought back some forgotten memories.

Joe Rudzinski was born and raised in Throop where he attended St. Anthony's Elementary School and Throop High School, graduating in 1957. He then joined the U.S. Navy where he served in the Naval Security Group in Hawaii and Taipei. He subsequently returned to Throop to marry his high school sweetheart, Barbara Kashmer. In 1962, the couple moved to Arlington, VA and for the next 12 years, Joe's work with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) took him on several assignments overseas. Resettling in Sterling, VA in 1973, he continued working at CIA headquarters. After retiring from the CIA in 1989, Joe worked with General Electric, Lockheed and Quest Communications as a Senior Systems Engineer before retiring in 2000. Joe is an avid genealogist and has researched their families for more than 30 years.

Sources

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps at the Penn State University Libraries.

<https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/17019>

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