

## Fact-Checking Folklore:

### The Lafayette Vampire

By Krista Barry

*Museum Administrator*

I had not been working at the Miners Museum for two entire weeks before I heard about the Lafayette vampire. Vampires have been a favorite subject of mine for many years, so naturally I wanted to learn more about this infamous resident of Lafayette. The legend of the vampire, as I understand it, revolves around the gravesite of a Transylvanian miner, who is buried in the Lafayette Cemetery. From the middle of his plot grows a thin tree said to have sprouted from the stake driven in his heart. Written accounts also mention roses that bloomed “blood red” growing wild around the stone, but they are no longer there. As I’ve been told, it was (or maybe still is) a pretty common practice for folks to visit the site with friends and family to tell ghost stories about the legend, and other strange occurrences—like reports of glowing orbs and a mysterious shadow figure with “blood red eyes” being seen at the grave. Presumably, all evidence of the vampire’s haunting presence.

Most residents of Lafayette have heard about the vampire, in one form or another, but what do we really know about the man? Todor Glava is the supposed identity of the vampire, but his is not the only name on the headstone. And this is where the real mystery begins. Who was Todor Glava? Who was Trandatir? And were either person really suspected of being a vampire?

### Investigating History

In telling this story I want to be as intellectually honest as possible. Very few records exist to verify not only the lore, but even some of the information that has been previously presented as fact. The most obvious allegation to challenge is of course the one of vampirism, so let’s begin there.

### Vampires in America

The story of the Lafayette vampire is surprisingly popular. You can find articles published on-line from sources ranging from bloggers, to roadside attraction sites, paranormal investigators, to news outlets like USA Today. But the truth behind the fiction is hard to find in many of these stories. Most claim that Todor was suspected of being a vampire at the time of his death in 1918. There is absolutely no evidence to support this claim. At least none that I have found.

You may be surprised to learn that vampires were considered a real threat in New England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is a topic fit

for its own full length story, so without going into too much detail, here are the things to keep in mind: The vampire panic that hit New England was pretty well isolated to New England; and these “Yankee vampires” were associated with outbreaks of tuberculosis. There are historical accounts of deceased people being exhumed and exorcized as suspected vampires, but even at that time these rituals were largely seen as superstitious overactions. I will admit here that I am no expert on the vampire hysteria of this period, but it appears these practices did not reach Colorado. In fact, searching through Google and historic newspapers may even convince you that the only vampire in the entire history of the state was Todor Glava. (Write to us and tell us if you know of any others!)

### The Historic Record of Todor Glava & Trandatir



Researching this story requires thoroughly inspecting the famous, yet modest, headstone. The folklore centers around this concrete slab, making it the natural starting point for piecing together the story of this Transylvanian immigrant.

**The inscription on the headstone reads:**

<b>+2 Romanion</b>	<b>+ Todor Glava</b>
<b>Trandatir</b>	<b>Born in Transivania</b>
<b>Born in Par-</b>	
<b>Hautibocvina</b>	
<b>Austro-Ungfaria</b>	
<b>Died December</b>	
<b>1918</b>	

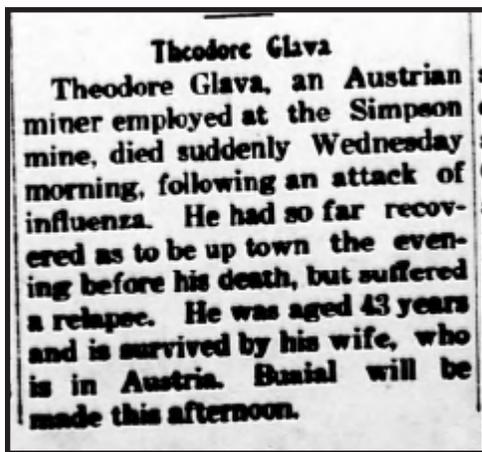
As you will notice, there are a few spelling errors. Presumably “transivania” should be Transylvania. “Austro-Ungfaria” is most likely referring to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which existed from 1867-1918. The boundaries of this region have changed several times in recent history, but these place names still exist. Părhăuți and Bucovina are villages in present day Romania, but historically the whole region was known as Bucovina (in Romanian). Romania occupied Bucovina when Austria-Hungary collapsed in 1918.

Based on the layout of the inscription, it appears there is another person beside Todor included on the

headstone, Trandafir. It seems that Trandafir was from Părhăuți and Todor was from Transylvania. Both places were in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time.

Neither person was found while searching the 1910 US census. This means they either arrived in the US after that, or they were missed. Similarly, neither name appears in either the 1916 or 1918 Lafayette City Directories.

Most of the information we know for certain about Todor Glava comes from his obituary, published in the Lafayette Leader on Friday, December 6, 1918.



Theodore Glava died on December 4th during the second, and most deadly, wave of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic (also known as the Spanish Flu). The pandemic of 1918 has a larger death toll than WWI and WWII combined. It is estimated at least 50 million people died worldwide with about 675,000 deaths occurring in United States. The pandemic was caused by an H1N1 virus that was exceptionally insidious. Unlike other flus, this virus was particularly deadly to those between 15-40 years of age, and it also killed quickly. Worsening symptoms could lead to death within just 12hrs. This explains how Todor's death occurred so soon after his seeming recovery.

#### A Plot for One or Two?

One of the more intriguing elements of this story has been the question of whether Todor is alone in his grave. The folklore claims that the stone has an inscription for two people, but there is only one body buried there. This was said to be the case by James Hutchison in the book, *Centennial History Lafayette, Colorado: Treeless Plain to Thriving City*, published in 1990 by the Lafayette Historical Society. I do not know where he learned this from. I have not been able to confirm this claim with any other creditable source, as yet.

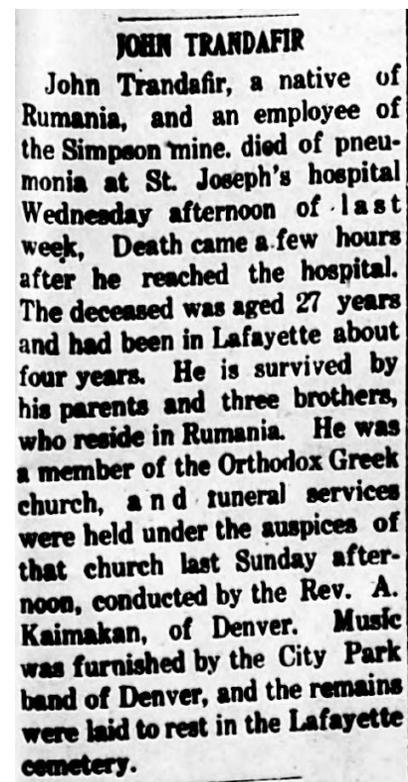
What is certain, is the name Trandafir also appears on the gravestone. So, who was this person?

Interestingly, this question has added another layer to the lore. In a cemetery tour produced by the Lafayette Historical Society in 2014, it was suggested that since "Trandafir" is the Romanian word for "Rose" that the name was presumably in reference to Todor's wife. We know from Todor's obituary that his wife was not in the country when he passed away. So, was her name included on his headstone despite the distance?

#### A Rose by Any Other Name

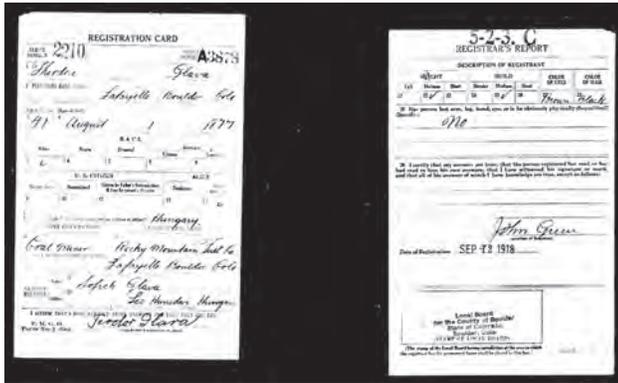
I must admit the story of Rose and Todor instantly attracted my curiosity. It's quite romantic to imagine Rose being present, if only in name, at her husband's final resting place. It is also a somber reminder of the separation the families of some residents of Lafayette experienced as they immigrated to the US. It was not uncommon during this time period for a married man to travel alone to the United States ahead of his wife and children. Once he established work and housing, then his family would make the journey to join him in their new home. As far as we know, Todor's wife never made it to Lafayette.

Very recently, though, I found new evidence to explain who Trandafir really was. On Friday, December 13, 1918 the Lafayette Leader published the obituary of another local victim of influenza, John Trandafir.



Both Theodore Glava and John Trandafir died on December 4, 1918. Their obituaries were published a week apart. We also know from their obituaries that

both men were miners at the Simpson mine, and that they were both buried in the Lafayette Cemetery. This is the only headstone in the cemetery with either name; there are no other Trandafir or Glavas.



WWI Registration draft card for Theodore Glava, 12 Sept. 1918.

In addition to finding John’s obituary, I also found Theodore’s draft registration card.

The card offers a few more details about Todor Glava. He had black hair and brown eyes. He is listed as a citizen of Hungary, and his nearest relative was still there. Was Sofich Glava Theodore’s wife, or a different relative? Whatever became of Mrs. Glava? Did she make it to the United States, or did she stay in Romania? Did she also succumb to the global influenza in 1918? The list of questions goes on and on. This is perhaps the most alluring part of historic research—chasing down leads and piecing together a story from just a handful of small clues.

To that end, it is highly likely that Todor Glava and John Trandafir are both buried in this plot. We know that both men were miners at the Simpson Mine,

and they died on the same day. It is also important to consider the location of the grave is in the section known as the “potter’s field”. This is where the poorest residents were buried, often without any markers at all. These men also died during the deadliest period of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic. The death rate was overwhelming. Lafayette had two doctors, and the Congregational Church was turned into a makeshift hospital. It is a sad fact that mass graves were used during the pandemic across the world. A shared grave in a potter’s field would not be unheard of in 1918, and neither man had any other family in the country at the time of their deaths.

### A Legend is Born

The story of the Lafayette vampire is really one of immigrant stereotyping in the creation of local folklore. Bram Stoker may have written Dracula in 1897, but vampires really surged in American pop culture the 1950s-1970s. Movies brought Dracula, and other vampires, to theatres across the country. I think this is the time period when the legend of the Lafayette vampire was most likely born. Not in 1918 as the legend claims. Dracula has forever associated vampires with Transylvania, and one of the more legible, albeit misspelled, words on the headstone is “Transivania.” This headstone, with its spindly tree, has certainly sparked the community’s imagination. Regardless of when the stories first began, the Lafayette vampire is now a famed figure in local folklore.

***How old is the legend of the Lafayette Vampire?  
Tell us about the first time you heard the story!***

### Then and Now

The Congressional Church that was used as a hospital in Lafayette during the 1918 Spanish Flu quarantine. Over the years the building has housed several different churches, served as Lafayette’s public library and currently is used as the Mary Miller Theatre. *News article from January 9, 1919 Lafayette Leader*



What Lafayette would have done without the emergency hospital which has been maintained in the Congregational church since the prevailing epidemic of Spanish influenza broke out, is a matter which no one can determine. Without a doubt it has been one of the greatest blessings the town has ever possessed. Without this hospital the death rate in Lafayette would have undoubtedly been greatly increased. Under the direction of the town authorities the institution has been most ably conducted, and much of the credit for the manner in which it has been conducted and for the great good resulting from its maintenance is due to the town health officer, Dr. V. W. Porter, and to A. C. Howe, chairman of the Lafayette chapter of the Red Cross. No money or work was spared in the fitting up and conducting of the hospital and the corps of nurses, under the direction of Dr. Porter, did their work thoroughly and capably. A vote of thanks of the entire community is due to those who had charge of the conducting of Lafayette’s emergency hospital. It has been a blessing and a necessity.

***Thanks to all our healthcare and other essential workers during this pandemic!***