

[Home](#)[CEO Hotline](#)[Viewpoint](#)[Classified Ads](#)[Archives](#)[Metro.net](#) (web)

## Resources

[Safety](#)[Pressroom](#) (web)[Ask the CEO](#)[CEO Forum](#)[Employee Recognition](#)[Employee Activities](#)[Metro Projects](#)[Facts at a Glance](#)  
(web)[Archives](#)[Events Calendar](#)[Research Center/  
Library](#)[Metro Classifieds](#)[Bazaar](#)

## Metro Info

[30/10 Initiative](#)[Policies](#)[Training](#)[Help Desk](#)[Intranet Policy](#)

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Accompanied by her daughter Susan, Gaye Buzbee, at right, flew in from Colorado for the March 8 ceremony at the Evergreen Cemetery in Boyle Heights. Both watched proudly as the memorial wall bearing her great uncle's tombstone was unveiled following several moving speeches, prayers and tributes. *Photos: Juan Ocampo*

## Colorado Woman Shares Brief History of Memorial Wall Relative

ByLaura Kloth

*Staff Writer*

(March 9, 2010) Watching Metro staff and dignitaries pay tribute to 174 people whose gravesites were uncovered during a Metro construction project, Gaye Buzbee smiled as she listened and wondered if her family would ever really know how her great uncle T. E. Buzbee, a teenaged Colorado native, wound up so far from home in a long-forgotten Southern California cemetery.

Buzbee, accompanied by her daughter, Susan, flew in from Colorado for the March 8 ceremony at the Evergreen Cemetery in Boyle Heights, and both watched proudly as the memorial wall bearing T.E. Buzbee's tombstone was unveiled following several moving speeches, prayers and tributes.

"It's fabulous," Gaye Buzbee said of the wall bearing painted images of residents of the community. "We were here in November and it (the wall) was just finished. I was just amazed and was blown away by it," she said.



Gaye Buzbee's photo from the family archives shows her Colorado-based ancestors who moved from Scotland to work in the coal mines. Her great uncle T.E. Buzbee was among those remembered during the memorial wall unveiling.

### **A family mystery solved**

"T.E." or Thomas E. Buzbee was born Aug. 12, 1865 and died Feb. 1, 1883 at the age of 17.

The mystery of his tragically short unraveled when Metro staff first contacted Buzbee at her home in Empire, Colo. after T.E.'s tombstone was unearthed during construction of the Metro Gold Line Extension in 2005.

Buzbee, who considers herself her family's "historian," was more than intrigued when she learned that her great uncle was among those buried more than a century ago in what was then Los Angeles' Potter's Field.

"I was so excited because the family story was that Thomas and Newton (his older brother) ran away from Colorado after they stole some money in the little town I live in. They were rascals, and came to California," she said, laughing. "They got drunk and crashed a cable car in San Francisco. Then they got 'shanghaied' on a merchant ship bound for China and just disappeared."

"That was the family story and we never knew if it was true or not and we didn't know if it was family legend or lore, but those two boys were never heard from again," she said.

While no record of whatever became of Newton Buzbee has been found, Metro staff uncovered documents indicating that T.E. Buzbee died in Los Angeles of meningitis.

Before he left home at age 15, Thomas Buzbee was living with his relatives in Silver Plume, Colo., close to Denver, where they had migrated from Scotland during the 1800s to work as coal miners.

"You could tell my family were miners. They're all dressed up kind of shabby," Buzbee said, pointing to an old family photo she brought to the ceremony. Buzbee and her daughter gave interviews to the media during the event, and admitted that they really didn't know much more about their young ancestor.

### **At long last, dignity**

As little as was unearthed of T.E. Buzbee of Empire, Colo., even less information was discovered about the others – mainly nameless Chinese immigrants – whose remains were uncovered during the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension project.

Perhaps the most moving part of the ceremony occurred when Congresswoman Judy Chu talked about the yet unidentified long-forgotten remains.

"It is so significant that those early immigrants who suffered so many indignities in life, will now through interment not have to suffer indignities through death," Chu said.

While they lived, "they were prevented from owning land, marrying non-Chinese, becoming naturalized citizens, and they were prevented from death and dignity," she said.

"When they died, their deaths were considered so insignificant that there were not even any tombstones," she said.

The families of the Chinese buried in the field were actually charged \$10, while others were buried free-of-charge.

"I thank everyone for doing this, and I'm so glad that the community raised their voices and that they were able to finally bring about justice for these early ancestors," said Chu, noting that many of those whose remains are to be re-interred were young men who had immigrated to make money to support their families in China.

All of the remains will be re-interred directly in front of the memorial wall beginning in April.

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