

TOMBSTONE BY TOMBSTONE

Eva Dugan

While I was investigating the story, *Murder at Goddard's Station*, I came across the story of Eva Duggan, supposedly the first woman and the last person to be hanged in Arizona. Once again, the initial information was wrong. The very first person to be hanged in Arizona was Delores Moore in 1865, before statehood. So Eva was the first and only woman hung in the state of Arizona, but there were three more hangings after her, according to state records. Her hanging was instrumental in the permanent banning of hanging as a means of execution. Again I thought the story interesting enough to relate. After the state banned hanging, the Feds hung one fellow in a really bizarre, botched up effort.

Normally I would not do a story that occurred this late in western history and call it an Old West story, however, Eva Dugan was born in the age of the Old West and did participate in the Alaska Gold Rush when she moved to Juneau and became a cabaret singer. But mostly she is included because her story fits with the other hanging stories.

Few people in the world have as many distinctions as has Eva Dugan. And none of them are distinctions to be desired. A partial list of her distinctions —some surprises saved for the end—in the state of Arizona are as follows:

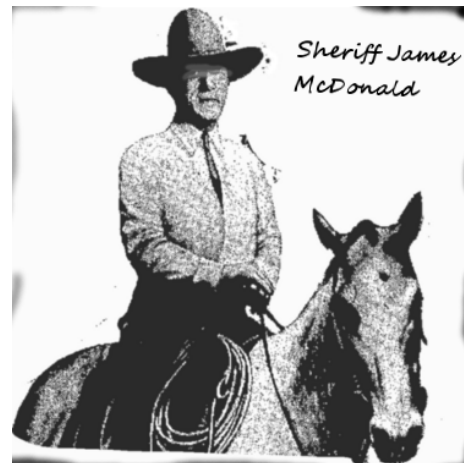
- ❖ She was the first and only woman to be hanged by the State of Arizona.
- ❖ Her execution was the first-time women were admitted as witnesses.



Dugan (Photo at left) was born in 1878 and when and where seems to be unknown. In fact, virtually everything about her early life is unknown. She did move to Juneau, Alaska during the Klondike Gold Rush which began in 1896 after gold was discovered in August of the previous year. It lasted through 1899. Her next known location was Pima County, Arizona where she went to work on a large chicken ranch owned by Andrew J. Mathis.

Mathis was not an easy person to get along with, being overly controlling and tightfisted. The period of employment was quite short, with some reporting two months and some as short as two weeks. During that time, they were butting heads quite often. He even accused her of trying to poison him. A friend of Mathis told that he was present when the man fired her and ordered her off the ranch and never return. It was only a few days later that Mathis was reported missing.

Jim McDonald, Sheriff of Pima County, (Photo at right) began an investigation into the disappearance of Mathis and found that the cash box was missing, but everything else in the house was in order. Neighbors reported that Dugan had offered to sell then some of Mathis' livestock. Dugan claimed that Mathis had gone to California and left all of his property to her. They knew that Mathis was too much of a tightwad to give all of his property to a woman he had known for such a short while. The sheriff also discovered that Eva Dugan had also disappeared along with the rancher's Dodge Coupe. A thorough search of the ranch turned up nothing but a charred ear trumpet, no doubt belonging to the hard-of-hearing Mathis.



McDonald began the task of finding Dugan. He dispatched a missing person report to law enforcement agencies all across the country. The Dodge Coupe was found in Kansas City, Missouri where Dugan had sold it for \$600 dollars while pretending to be Mrs. Andrew Mathis and telling

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the car agency she needed the money for her husband's surgery. The investigation also revealed that she had a father in California and a daughter in White Plains, New York. It had been several years since either of them had heard from Eva. Further background checks found that she had been married five times and all five husbands had mysteriously disappeared.

It was about three months after her disappearance that an alert postal clerk in White Plains spotted a post card addressed to her father. She had been living in White Plains and working in a local hospital. She was arrested and Sheriff McDonald began the process of extradition back to Arizona where she would face auto theft charges. She could not be charged with murder as the body of Mathis had not been discovered. On March 4, 1927, she was returned to Arizona and the legal process was begun. She was indicted and at trial she was convicted of car theft and given three to five years in the Arizona State Prison in Florence, Pinal County, Arizona.



Eva Dugan's mug shot

Nine months into her term Mathis' body was discovered on his ranch by a camper. There are two versions as to how the camper, J. F. Nash of Oklahoma, happened to find the body in a 100-to-1 coincidence. One version has him discovering the body when he drove a tent stake into the ground. Another says he saw a depression in the ground near where he was camping and after removing the topsoil and just a small amount of dirt he discovered a human skeleton. From either story we know he was buried in a very shallow grave. It was also stated that there was still a gag in his mouth. The body was identified as that of Mathis from the tattered clothing and the hair still on the skull.

Dugan had a lot of explaining to do, but all she did was enter a state of denial. She told the police if she had buried the body it would be so deep it would never have been found. Her denials were anything but convincing, but she did settle on a story and stuck with it. She told that she had met a young man named Jack outside of a restaurant. During their conversation she told Jack that he might get a job on Mathis' chicken ranch. Jack immediately went to the ranch and was hired on the spot.

Her story continued, telling that on the very first day of his new job things went south in a hurry. Mathis became angry when Jack didn't milk a cow as he had been told. Mathis said something to the effect that if Jack couldn't milk a cow he was not good for anything. Then he supposedly struck Jack. The young man recovered quickly and struck a powerful blow to Mathis, knocking him down and he never got up. Dugan claimed that they had done their best to revive him with no luck. She stated she also wanted to get help but Jack would not let her and told her that if she

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refused to help him get the body into the car so that he could dispose of it, he would leave her to face the consequences on her own.

Jack was the biggest problem with her story when only one person was found who would claim to have seen Jack. Most people believed he existed only in Dugan's weak story. One oddity did occur. Just as she was being charged with the murder, Edward Hickman was confessing to kidnapping, murdering and dismembering twelve-year-old Marion Parker, daughter of wealthy Los Angeles banker Perry Parker. Hickman aka "The Fox" stated he had been in Phoenix, Arizona during the time of the Mathis disappearance. He also said that he was in Kansas City during the time Dugan said she dropped Jack off in that city as she was headed for New York. When Dugan saw photos of Hickman she thought it could be him, but she was not 100% certain.

Even if she had sworn that Hickman was her Jack, the Los Angeles police with a sure-fire confessed murderer would never have relinquished him to Arizona. Hickman received a death penalty, and on October 19, 1928 he was hanged.

Eve was then tried for the Mathis murder and found guilty of first degree murder and she received the death penalty. Her only possibility of escaping the death penalty was a successful insanity plea. Two doctors testified that she was mentally deficient because of "inroads made by a disease she contracted more than 30 years ago." She was syphilitic. The jury decided she was sane and the plans for the hanging proceeded.

After the trial she made a public statement and said, "Wal, I'll die with my boots on. An' in full health. An' that's more'n most of you old coots 'll be able to boast on."

Eva Dugan did not wish to be buried in the prison cemetery, so she began making plans for providing herself with a proper funeral. Determined to go out in style, she gave interviews for \$1.00 each and sold embroidered handkerchiefs she made in order to buy herself a coffin. For the hanging, she made a fancy silk "jazz dress." Her spirits remained high, and on March 3, 1930 *Time Magazine* wrote about her execution and called her "Cheerful Eva."

As the day of execution drew nearer, Eva asked the warden what she should wear for the hanging. Prophetically, he advised her not to wear her best dress as it could get soiled. So her hand-made silk "jazz dress" that she had so lovingly embroidered for the occasion was saved for the burial.

On the eve of her hanging, shortly after midnight the normal prison rumor mill was saying that Dugan was going to commit suicide, with the aid of some friends, to prevent the spectacle of a hanging. A search of her cell turned up a bottle of raw ammonia hidden in her bunk and three razor blades hidden in a dress. She was reported to have said, "Well, what do you think? Would you wait for the rope?" She made a request for "one last pint of whiskey" and was not allowed to have it

She had made a request for clemency based on mental illness and it was denied. She was taken to the gallows at 5:00 a.m. on the morning of February 21, 1930. She became the first woman in Arizona to be executed and the first execution to be witnessed by members of the fairer sex. The other five women who occupied death row with Dugan would remain there and never be executed.

Newspapers reported that Dugan was calm as she ascended the stairs. It was said that she told the guards, "Don't hold my arms so tight, the people will think I'm afraid." She swayed a bit as the noose was placed around her neck and shook her head in the negative when asked if she had any last words and the black hood was placed over her head. Warden Lo Wright, clasped her hand and said, "God bless you, Eva." "Good-by, Daddy Wright" she said. That was the last utterance she ever made.

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The trap was sprung at 5:11 and the noose immediately sprang back to the platform without Eva's body attached. Because of an error in calculation of the body condition and the length of the drop, her neck was not only broken, her head was completely severed from her body. The head, still in the hood rolled within a few feet of the spectators. The still beating heart was pumping great amounts of blood from the neck which no longer held a head. It was reported that of the 100 attendees five people fainted, two of them women. Eva Dugan had the distinction of becoming the first and only decapitation during a legal Arizona execution.



Noose that severed Eva's neck

The suffering time for Dugan would have been infinitesimal. The state of Arizona quickly changed its method of execution to the more humane gas chamber. In the gas chamber the victim would normally hold his breath as long as possible and then suffer for a few seconds. Eva Dugan was buried in the Florence Prison Cemetery dressed in the silk "jazz dress" that she had made and, thanks to Warden Wright's recommendation, it was pristine.

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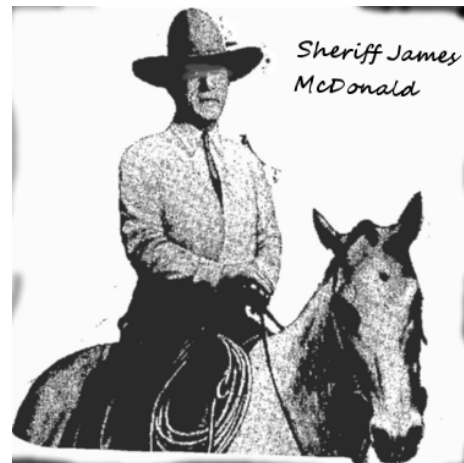


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