

## **Kate M. Gessford** **( - 26 Dec 1924)**

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**Gessford.** Suddenly, Friday, December 26, 1924, at 7:30 p.m., at her residence, 3123 13th st., n.w., Kate M., beloved wife of Maj. Harry L. Gessford. Funeral services from her late residence, Monday, December 29 at 2 p.m. Relatives and friends invited. Interment private.

*The Evening Star, December 27, 1924*

### **Mrs. H.L. Gessford Burned to Death** **Wife of Former D.C. Police Head Dies After** **Clothes Catch Fire from Heater**

Tragedy culminated a happy Christmas reunion of 19 members of the family of Mr. And Mrs. Harry L. Gessford yesterday when Mrs. Gessford was burned fatally after her clothing took fire from a gas heater in the kitchen of her home at 3123 Thirteenth street.

Mrs. Gessford was in the kitchen preparing a late breakfast for Mr. Gessford, formerly major and superintendent of the Metropolitan Police Department here, when she passed before the gas heater. Attracted by her scream, Mr. Gessford rushed to her side, to find flames encircling her. Vainly attempting to beat out the fire with his hands, he was severely burned about the arms. Miss Catherine Gessford, a daughter, rushed with a blanket, in which she swathed her mother, but the burns were so sever by then that death ensued at 7:30 o'clock last night. Mrs. Gessford had remained at home for treatment by Dr. Millard F. Thompson, but efforts to allay the severity of the injuries from the flames proved ineffective.

### *Had Family Reunion*

The Christmas just passed was one of the happiest of the household, members of the family said. It was the first Christmas that Lieut. Richard S. Gessford, U.S.A., had been home for eight years. Relatives of Mrs. Gessford and the sons and daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Gessford, together with their families, had passed the Christmas at the family home.

The flames had ignited Christmas trimmings in the kitchen and Rev. Dr Griffith G. Johnson of the Immanuel Memorial Baptist Church, residing next door, with his wife, assisted members of the Gessford family in extinguishing the blaze. Dr. Johnson will conduct the funeral services Monday afternoon, and interment will be in Congressional Cemetery.

Mrs. Gessford was 65 years of age. She was a native of New York, but lived here since early childhood. Before her marriage she was Miss Kate M. Koehler. Surviving her are her husband, Maj. Gessford a sister, Miss Matilda H. Koehler a brother, Louis Koehler three sons, Lieut. Gessford, H. Leslie Gessford and Charles Vernon Gessford, and five daughters, Catherine, Eleanor and Margaret Gessford, Mrs. H.H. Surface and Mrs. Leonard Bowen.

*The Washington Post, December 27, 1924, p. 1*

### **Woman, 65 Burned To Death, Mate Hurt, At Family Reunion** **Wife of Former Police Chief Gessford Refuses to Go to Hospital** **Clothing Is Ignited By Gas Stove Flames** **Almost Entire Body Seared** **Minister and Wife Help to Extinguish Blaze**

Mrs. Kate M. Gessford, wife of Harry L. Gessford, former major and superintendent of police here, was fatally burned when her clothing was ignited by flames from a gas heater in the kitchen of her home, 3123 Thirteenth street northwest, shortly before 10 o'clock yesterday morning.

Mrs. Gessford, who was 65 years old, died in her home at 7:30 o'clock last evening. She had refused to go to a hospital.

Mr. Gessford, who was retired as police chief November 30, 1921, was severely burned about the hands when he made a heroic attempt to beat out the flames which enveloped his wife.

The circumstances surrounding Mrs. Gessford's death could hardly have been more tragic. It occurred in the midst of a great family reunion. Gathered in the house were five daughters and three sons and the wives and husbands of the married ones. One of the sons, Lieut. Richard S. Gessford, U.S.A., was home for the first time in eight years. He is stationed at Fort Thomas, Ky.

The house was gay with red and green Yuletide decorations, and the usual evidences of a Christmas party were about the living room. Mrs. Gessford was in a jolly mood and had been talking to her husband about the events of the night before.

Mrs. Gessford had just completed preparing her husband's breakfast when her clothing caught fire. She turned on the gas in the heater and applied a match. A flame burst forth, caught the bottom of her dress, and in less than a half minute she was enveloped by fire.

Hearing his wife scream, Mr. Gessford, who was eating, dashed into the kitchen. He began frantic efforts to beat out the flames with his hands. Meanwhile Miss Catherine Gessford, a daughter, ran in from another part of the house. She saw what had happened and hurried to a bedroom to get blankets. She returned with them and swathed her mother's flaming body with them.

Before the flames were smothered Mrs. Gessford was hopelessly burned. A member of the family, in describing the extent of the burns, said that virtually every inch of her body was seared.

#### *Paper Hangings Ignited.*

Flames from Mrs. Gessford's body ignited paper hangings in the kitchen. The fire was extinguished by the Rev. Griffith Johnson, of Immanuel Memorial Baptist church, who lives next door. He was assisted by Mrs. Johnson.

When Mrs. Gessford weakly protested against being sent to a hospital, the family called Dr. Millard F. Thompson and a nurse. A temporary hospital was set up in the house and heroic efforts begun to save the woman's life.

Members of the family last night said that had Mrs. Gessford survived it would have been almost miraculous. All members of the family were present when Mrs. Gessford died.

Mrs. Gessford was born in New York, but lived here since early childhood. She was Miss Kate M. Koehler and her family was one of the oldest in the southwest section. She leaves her husband, a sister, Miss H. Koehler a brother, Louis Koehler, three sons, Lieut. Gessford, H. Leslie Gessford, Charles Vernon Gessford five daughters, the Misses Catherine, Eleanor and Margaret Gessford, and Mrs. H.H. Surface and Mrs. Leonard Bowen.

Funeral services will be held in the Gessford home Monday afternoon. They will be in charge of the Rev. Mr. Johnson.