

Appendix H Thomas Buhler

Thomas Buhler

Thomas Buhler was born 24 March 1859 in New Orleans, Louisiana. His parents were Johann Peter Philipp Bühler and Dorothea Elizabeth Behrns.¹ No evidence has been found that Thomas married. Thomas Buhler probably drowned in December 1896. Thomas' body was found in the Mississippi River on 10 January 1897 in Plaquemines Parish.²

Thomas' father, Peter Bühler, was 63 years old when Thomas was born. Peter's longevity at procreation made for some interesting relationships. Thomas' brother, Anton Bühler, was 34 years older than Thomas.* Anton's son, Charles Buhler, was Thomas' nephew.† Charles was born 5 years before his uncle Thomas.

Thomas Buhler lived only 37 years. His short life generated quite a bit of print in the New Orleans Times-Picayune newspaper. The transcribed extracts that follow offer insight into the life of Thomas, his extended family and life in "small-town" Algiers at the end of the 19th century.

We begin in the summer of 1891 with the "Algiers Gambling Case". Thomas pressed a charge of failure to repay a gambling debt against a sergeant in the New Orleans Police department. A Police Board trial ensued which eventually involved the mayor of New Orleans as a witness. The Picayune covered this story in four issues between August and October 1891.

In 1893 we find Thomas, labeled as an "insane man" breaking out of the Algiers police station jail. An article in January 1897 clarifies that "two years ago he was confined in the Louisiana Retreat for two weeks, when he was released as cured, and since which time he was considered somewhat erratic, but not insane."

The two articles from January 1897 unfold the story of Thomas' demise. His sister reads a newspaper article about an unidentified man found in the river and believes it may be her brother. The article provides a meticulous description of the man. His brother-in-law and cousin travel to Plaquemines to exhume, identify and return Thomas' body to Algiers for burial. It remains unclear how and why Thomas Buhler died.

* Anton and Thomas were half-brothers. Anton was born to Peter Buhler and his first wife Maria Anna Keppler.

† Half-nephew.

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6 August 1891

A Grave Charge against Sergeant Charles Vogt

Several applications for leave of absence without pay and half pay for time lost through sickness were favorably acted upon, and Secretary Donnaud read a complaint from Thomas Buhler, the owner of a gambling-house in Algiers, who alleges that some six months ago Sergeant Charles Vogt, while gambling in his place, borrowed \$44.75 from him. Buhler has several times tried to recover the money, which Vogt, he states, refuses to pay, on the ground that the debt is more than cancelled by his (Vogt's) permitting the gambling to continue in contradiction to the law.

The complaint was referred to the chief to be investigated and reported back to the board at the next meeting.³

27 August 1891

Serious Charges Against Sergeant Vogt Ordered Fixed for Trial.

ROUTINE WORK was disposed of and Chief Gaster submitted a report of Detectives Grabert and Rance upon the charges preferred against Sergeant Vogt by Thomas Buhler, of Algiers, that Vogt owed him \$42.75 for gambling debts contracted in Buhler's barroom. Sergeant Vogt having lost the money while gambling there, and refusing to pay on the ground that he allowed gambling to go on in Buhler's place.

Sergeant Vogt submitted a lengthy written statement, of which the following is a synopsis: Buhler's charge is groundless and false and prompted by malice. Buhler conducted a poker game in his brother Pete Buhler's room, but ran no gambling house. On one occasion, Buhler and Vogt played seven-up, and when Vogt had won \$7 he wanted to quit. Buhler said not to, the game was for fun. They continued until Vogt had lost some \$40, when Vogt quit saying the game was for fun, and he owed nothing. Later learning that Buhler and a friend were fleecing others in the poker games at

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Pete Buhler's, Vogt ordered the games stopped.

The communications were received and filed, and charges ordered against Vogt before the board.⁴

10 September 1891

The Algiers Gambling Case Continued

Sergeant Charles H. Vogt, commanding the Eighth police precinct, was arraigned upon a charge of conduct unbecoming an officer, to wit: interesting himself in a gambling game operated by one Thomas Buhler. The case was continued upon the representation that a statement by Mayor Shakspeare, to whom the sergeant said he had reported the existence of the house, was essential to a proper defense.⁵

29 October 1891

Conflicting Stories Concerning the Algiers Gambling Game. The Charges Against Sergeant Chas. H. Vogt Dismissed.

The board of police commissioners met at 7 o'clock last night, Mayor Shakspeare presiding, and Commissioners Borne, Demoruelle, Denis and Parker present. Superintendent Gaster and his secretary, Mr. Geo. W. Vandervort, were also present.

The case against Sergeant Charles H. Vogt, Tenth Precinct, charged with conduct unbecoming an officer, was called for trial.

The charge was based upon a communication from Thomas Buhler, dated July 10, 1891, charging that Vogt owed him \$44.70, which had been "playing for the house," and that, besides, something was due him for allowing the game to run.

Sergeant Vogt admitted that he had played poker at Buhler's, but denied that he was interested in the game in any way or that he had accepted money to allow it to be carried on.

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Thos. Buhler, the complainant, was sworn and said that some ten months ago he ran a gambling game in Algiers. Vogt interested himself in the game, induced persons to play in it and sought to secure a percentage of the profits. Vogt was always in uniform when he appeared and took part in the game. Upon one occasion Vogt had lost \$27 and failed to pay. Subsequently, he (Vogt) was reminded of the debt and said that if he (Buhler) did not keep quiet about the matter he would close the house up. Finally, Buhler claimed that witnesses by whom he had intended to substantiate his charges had been tampered with and then admitted, in answer to a question by Colonel Deni, that if it had not been for the debt he would not have prosecuted the sergeant.

Commissioner Borne said THAT SO FAR AS HE KNEW Buhler's place had never been regarded as a gambling-house, although it was known that a social game was played there. He thought that there was SOME SPITE IN THIS MATTER,

John Tiebold, a defense witness, testified that he had seen Sergeant Vogt in uniform in Buhler's place upon two separate occasions. The place was not, however, a regular gambling-house.

Nick Gorman testified that he had seen the sergeant at play in the house, but not often.

Peter Buhler, a defense witness, was heard, but did not add materially to the strength of either side.

Superintendent Gaster was asked to specify the hours during which commanding officers were on duty, and replied that the hours varied according to the duty. Sometimes they might go home as early as 9 or 10 o'clock p.m., at other times they would have to remain on duty until 2 or 3 o'clock a.m., perhaps all night. A commanding officer was, figuratively, upon duty at all times.

Sergeant Vogt, in making a statement in his own behalf, said that he had never played poker in Buhler's place in uniform. He had been in the house, but only after 9 p.m., and when his precinct was quiet. He called the attention to the board to the length of time which had elapsed before the charges were brought.

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In view of the conflicting testimony the board was divided. Commissioners Parker and Demoruella held that it was improper for the sergeant to have participated in the game at all. Commissioners Denis and Borne and the mayor held that the board could not control the officer's leisure hours and that it was impracticable to deprive him of all means of recreation.

Commissioner Borne moved the dismissal of the charges and the board was tied upon the vote, Commissioners Denis and Borne voting for the motion and Commissioners Parker and Demoruella against it.

Mayor Shakspeare voted in the affirmative because it was not proven that the place was a regular gambling-house. If he believed the place to be such he would have voted to dismiss the sergeant at once. The charge was therefore dismissed.⁶

7 December 1893

An Unreliable Jail

Yesterday morning about 6 o'clock an insane man named Thomas Buhler escaped from the Algiers police station by making a hole in the partition dividing cells No. 2 and 3. The prisoner was pursued and recaptured. The cells are in a wretched condition, the partitions are rotten and prisoners are liable to escape at any time if the cells are not promptly repaired.⁷

12 January 1897

Found Drowned

The body of a drowned white man was found floating in the Mississippi river on the 10th inst., about forty-seven miles below New Orleans, at Chas, Fox's plantation. The man was 5 feet 4 inches in height, about 40 years of age. He was dressed in a white cotton undershirt and white cotton drawers, white dress shirt with

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white celluloid standing collar and black necktie, black diagonal frock coat, broadcloth trousers, Guillot suspenders, garters, low-quarter shoes, white cotton stockings. The man had short, full beard, and short black hair. A white handkerchief, one quarter dollar, one dime and one five-cent piece, one black cotton watch chain, one blank message of the Postal Telegraph Cable Company, with the name of D. Goldstein, Esq., Touro Infirmary, written on the back of it, and a piece of paper with the name of Gustave Probst, 1035 Chartres, between Ursulines and St. Philip (tailor), written thereon were found in his pockets. Dr. Schayot viewed the body and had it properly buried.

A reporter visited the house at 1035 Chartres street, and after some knocking awoke one of the ---?---, who proved to be George Probst himself. He was very much surprised when he was informed that he was supposed to be drowned. He established his identity and volunteered the information that perhaps the drowned man was one of his customers, but he could not recall anyone answering the description given above.⁸

14 January 1897

A Body Identified, Through the Description Published in the Picayune, The Drowned Man Found at Plaquemines was a well-known Algiers citizen.

Yesterday afternoon at 4 o'clock Messrs. H. Vezien, J.P. Buhler and Joseph Anseman left on the Grand Isle Road for Pointe-a-la-Hache, 47 miles below New Orleans, to view the body of the drowned man found floating in the river opposite Charles Fox's plantation on the left bank, where it was recovered from the river and buried on last Sunday. A description of the body was published in the Picayune of last Tuesday, and upon reading the account, Mrs. George Kepke conceived the idea that it was the body of her brother, Mr. Thomas Buhler, who has been absent since Dec. 13. The Picayune article was shown to other relatives, and a concerted action was taken to develop the matter, when, as above stated, the brother and brother-in-law of the missing man,

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accompanied by Mr. Joseph Anseman, the funeral director of Mr. Joseph Rutily, left for the scene to view the body, and if possible, to identify it. At 8 o'clock last evening a telephone message was received from Mr. J.P. Buhler that the body was that of his missing brother, and that they would arrive in Algiers on the Grand Isle passenger train at 9 o'clock to-day.

The deceased was 37 years of age last March, was a native of New Orleans, and had resided in Algiers for the past fifteen years, during which time he was engaged in the shoe business. About two years ago he was confined in the Louisiana Retreat for two weeks, when he was released as cured, and since which time he was considered somewhat erratic, but not insane. He left home one month ago yesterday, intending to go to Hot Springs, Ark., for treatment for indigestion, from which he was a great sufferer. Shortly before leaving he sold out his shoe store to his brother, J.P. Buhler, taking in payment principally notes, which he left in the hands of his lawyer in this city. When last seen he had on his person a check on a New Orleans bank for \$150 and between \$40 and \$50 in cash. On Sunday, the day he disappeared, he ate dinner with his sister, Mrs. George Kepke, and attended service at the church of the Holy Name of Mary, with his little niece. He appeared to be in good spirits and mind, and left his valise and jewelry at the house before going off. No theory can be arrived at as to the manner of his drowning, and many are loth to believe that it was intentional.

Among the effects found on his person, which led to the identification of the body, was a receipt for \$10 as part payment for a suit of clothes made by Gustave Probst, the tailor, at 1035 Chartres street. Deceased was a quiet and kind-hearted man, and was most charitably inclined. He left many friends to mourn his loss.

His brother, J.P. Buhler, and sisters, Mrs. H. Vezien and Mrs. George Kepske, have the sympathy of all in their bereavement.

Interment will be in Louisa cemetery to-day, but at what hour is not as yet known.⁹

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Notes

1. Thomas Buhler entry, Orleans Parish Birth Records, volume 26, page 548, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

2. Thomas Buhler entry, Orleans Parish Death Records, volume 112, page 962, Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

3 . "Police Board. A grave charge against Sergeant Charles Vogt." The Daily Picayune, New Orleans, Louisiana, 6 August 1891, page 3, column 4. From Gale. *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. © 2008 Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. www.cengage.com/permissions. Reproduced by permission.

4. "Improving the Force. Serious charges against Officer Vogt ordered fixed for trial." The Daily Picayune, New Orleans, Louisiana, 27 August 1891, page 3, column 1. From Gale. *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. © 2008 Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. www.cengage.com/permissions. Reproduced by permission.

5. "Police Board. The Algiers gambling case continued." The Daily Picayune, New Orleans, Louisiana, 10 September 1891, page 5, column 1. From Gale. *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. © 2008 Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. www.cengage.com/permissions. Reproduced by permission.

6. "Police Board. Conflicting stories concerning the Algiers gambling game. The charges against Sergeant Chas. H. Vogt dismissed." The Daily Picayune, New Orleans, Louisiana, 29 October 1891, page 3, column 1. From Gale. *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. © 2008 Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. www.cengage.com/permissions. Reproduced by permission.

7. "An unreliable jail." The Daily Picayune, New Orleans, Louisiana, 7 December 1893, page 12, column 4. From Gale. *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. © 2008 Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission. www.cengage.com/permissions.

8. "Found drowned." The Daily Picayune, New Orleans, Louisiana, 12 January 1897, page 10, column 1. From Gale. *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. © 2008 Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission. www.cengage.com/permissions.

9. "A body identified." The Daily Picayune, New Orleans, Louisiana, 14 January 1897, page 8, column 6. From Gale. *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. © 2008 Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission. www.cengage.com/permissions.