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# The Sad Saga of the Charles Francis Bull Family

Adultery charges, Prison, Exoneration, Release - the complete story

This is an incredible, complicated, multi-layered story of a San Francisco family at the turn of the 20th century. There are adultery charges, arrests, jail time, exoneration, missing persons, fraud, aliases; much of it played out in the San Francisco newspapers. I've tried to piece it all together in a detailed and chronological way. So, here we go.

## The Parents:

Charles Francis Bull

1845–1922

**BIRTH** 15 AUG 1845 • Worcester, Massachusetts

**DEATH** 4 SEP 1922 • San Francisco, California



Married: April 10 1883, Greene County, Ohio

Charles was 37

Mary was 17

Divorce: Abt. 1901

Mary Catherine Martin

1866–1951

**BIRTH** 11 MAR 1866 • Fairfield County, Ohio

**DEATH** 30 MAY 1951 • Hayward, Alameda, California



**Cohabitation** - leading to adultery charges filed by Charles Francis Bull, spring 1901

Clarence was 23

Mary was 34

Clarence Aften Bassett

1877–1937

**BIRTH** 20 JUL 1877 • San Jose, Santa Clara, California

**DEATH** 16 AUG 1937 • Santa Clara County, California

## The Children and relevant spouses:

1) Sarah Roxanna Bull

1884–1949

**BIRTH** 9 MAY 1884 • Elsah, Jersey, Illinois

**DEATH** 22 JAN 1949 • San Jose, Santa Clara, California



Married, while in jail: June 16 1901

Divorced: Oct 1903

Franklin Charles Lippold

1877–1961

**BIRTH** 3 OCT 1877 • Santa Cruz County, California

**DEATH** 13 MAY 1961 • Alameda County, California

Child of Franklin and Sarah: Edward Lippold  
1900–  
**BIRTH** 13 MAY 1900 • Alameda County, California, USA  
**DEATH Unknown!**

Married: Abt: 1907  
Divorced: Abt. 1918

Walter W McPherson  
1882–  
**BIRTH** 1882 • Nevada  
**DEATH Unknown!**

2) Horace Caitlin "Harry" Bull Brown  
1887–1952  
**BIRTH** 23 FEB 1887 • Otterville, Jersey, Illinois  
**DEATH** 26 FEB 1952 • San Francisco, San Francisco, California

3) Thomas Barzalia Bull Brown Sr  
1890–1930  
**BIRTH** 3 MAR 1890 • Otterville, Jersey, Illinois  
**DEATH** 11 NOV 1930 • San Francisco, San Francisco, California



Married: April 1917

Leta Frances Bauswell (a 1st cousin of author, JR Baldwin)  
1895–1973  
**BIRTH** 15 SEP 1895 • Kansas City, Wyandotte County, Kansas  
**DEATH** 9 OCT 1973 • San Francisco, San Francisco

4) Harold Francis Bull  
1895–  
**BIRTH** 28 FEB 1895 • Oakland, Alameda, California  
**DEATH Unknown!**



## The Charges:

In the spring of 1901, Charles Francis Bull, Oakland, CA, charged and had arrested his wife, Mary Catherine Martin-Bull for alleged adultery with a Clarence A Bassett. Here are the facts, as I understand them, supported by relevant news articles:

It appears that Charles Bull had separated from his family sometime in 1900 (or earlier). In the 1900 census, he was living alone at 653 East 12th St, Oakland. In a separate 1900 census record, Charles' wife, Mary Bull, was living about ten blocks away at 811 East 21st St, Oakland.

Interestingly, in the 1900 census, Mary was living with her new son in law, Marvin Belden, age 25 and Mary's daughter, Sarah R Bull-Belden, age 16, along with the son of Mary and Marvin, born May 1900. None of the other children of Charles and Mary Bull were living with either parent.

On June 15, 1901, Charles Bull caused the arrest of his wife, Mary, age 35, and a Clarence A Bassett, a veteran of the Spanish-American war, age 23. Clarence had recently returned to Oakland from the Philippine Islands. The charge was infidelity with Clarence Bassett. At the same time, Charles had his 17 year old daughter, Sarah, arrested for vagrancy.

Here is the chronology of events as played out in the San Francisco newspapers.

**OAKLAND TRIBUNE**

**SAYS HIS WIFE  
IS NOT TRUE.**

**Charles F. Bull Makes Serious  
Charges in the Police  
Court.**

As the result of sensational developments, Charles F. Bull of East Oakland has caused the arrest of his wife, Mary Bull, and Clarence A. Bassett, a veteran of the Spanish-American war, on grave charges involving the fidelity of the wife and the alienation of her affections by the ex-soldier. Bull, at the same time, had his 17-year-old daughter, Sarah R. Bull, arrested on a charge of vagrancy, and the trio languish in the City Prison awaiting their trial in the Police Court next Monday afternoon. The young daughter is the mother of an 11-months'-old baby. Other arrests are to follow.

Bull and Bassett were once fast friends, and when the former discovered, about a year ago, that his wife was basking in the smiles of the ex-soldier, the wife left her home, taking with her the two little children. Shortly afterward Sarah R. Bull, the daughter, also departed from her father's home and left him alone.

When the trio appeared in the Police Court this morning, Mrs. Bull, protesting her innocence, entered a vigorous plea of not guilty and consented that her case and that of Bassett be tried together. It was so ordered. Judge Smith fixed their bail at \$100 cash and that of the daughter at \$50 cash.

Shortly after returning from the court room to the jail, Sarah Bull, the daughter, sent word that she desired to swear to a complaint charging the father of her child with felony, but the matter is held in abeyance.

**Man and Woman Sentenced.**

OAKLAND, June 18.—Mrs. Mary C. Bull and Clarence Bassett were sentenced this afternoon by Police Judge Smith to nine months' imprisonment in the county jail. Mrs. Bull deserted her husband, Charles Bull, an East Oakland real estate man, about a year ago, taking with her two minor children, making her home with Clarence Bassett, a returned soldier from the Philippines. Later an older daughter, Sarah Bull, seventeen years of age, went to the mother. Instead of suing for a divorce, Bull swore to warrants for her arrest and that of Bassett. At the same time he charged his daughter Sarah with vagrancy. On Sunday last she was made the wife of Louis Lippold at the city prison.

**POLICE COURT.**

Proceedings, Monday, June 17.—John Smith, Robert Henderson, Dennis Donovan, Charles Weber, John Coats, W. A. Sproul, D. E. Garratt, W. H. Minton, J. B. Stanley, drunk, \$2 or \$1 day; John Specula, Wm. Bevert, drunk and disturbing peace, continued to June 18 for complaint; T. W. Hordan, W. H. B. Miller, S. A. McGraw, Charles Kruger, Arthur Waugh, violating bicycle ordinance, \$2 or 1 day; J. M. Kinsner, disturbing peace, stricken from calendar; Mrs. McLaughlin, same, trial this afternoon; Mary C. Bull, Clarence Bassett, adultery, trial this afternoon.

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# NEW ATTEMPT TO FREE MARY BULL

Point of Law Never Before  
Passed On Will Be  
Raised.

Oakland Branch Office of the "Chronicle,"  
950 Broadway, corner Ninth street.

OAKLAND, September 9.—Another effort will be made to-morrow in the Superior Court to secure the release on habeas corpus proceedings of Mary C. Bull. She is serving a nine-months' sentence in the County Jail, where she was sent by Police Judge Smith some time ago on being convicted of having unlawful relations with Clarence Bassett, a returned Philippine soldier.

In this second attempt to invoke the power of the habeas corpus writ to assist the young woman in gaining her freedom, a point of law, hitherto never passed upon by the courts, will be raised by Mrs. Bull's attorney, Hugh S. Aldrich. In substance the point is this: That a husband cannot charge the same matter in a complaint against his wife which he would be precluded from testifying to without her consent.

When Mrs. Bull was arrested it was at the instance of her husband, Charles F. Bull, who swore to the complaint accusing his wife of sustaining unlawful relations with Bassett. The woman was arrested and tried for her offense in the Police Court, with the result that she received the sentence heretofore mentioned. A hard fight was made in her behalf, but to no avail. Subsequently her attorney petitioned for a writ of habeas corpus. This came up for hearing while he was out of town, and was refused by Judge Melvin. An appeal is also pending in the Superior Court and this is on the calendar in the criminal department for to-morrow.

Attorney Aldrich pins his faith to his new petition for a habeas corpus writ. He makes the argument that the State law as it now stands prohibits a husband or a wife from testifying in court against each other in any criminal action without the other's consent. Following out this contention, he makes the further argument that neither should be permitted to swear to matter in a complaint without the other's consent, and that, therefore, in this instance the wife, being the non-consenting party, the complaint is defective and the imprisonment and conviction are without due process of law.

## MARY C. BULL MUST

REMAIN IN JAIL.

An ineffectual attempt was made this morning to release Mrs. Mary C. Bull from the County Jail on habeas corpus proceedings. It was contended that her husband should not have been permitted to testify against her in the Police Court, when she was being tried on a charge of living with Clarence Bassett. Judge Melvin, however, held that the contention was not valid and remanded Mrs. Bull to jail to serve her sentence of nine months.

TO ERECT A NEW

## BULL'S COMPLAINT WAS NOT LEGAL.

### Supreme Court Reverses the Lower Court and Orders Release of Mrs. Bull.

OAKLAND, September 23.—After four successive attempts, Mrs. Mary C. Bull has finally secured her release from the County Jail, where she has been serving a sentence of nine months on account of her illicit relations with Clarence Bassett. The Supreme Court to-day granted her appeal on habeas corpus, and incidentally reversed the decision of Judges Melvin, Greene, Ellsworth and Hall of the Superior Court of this county.

The order for Mrs. Bull's release was received by Sheriff Rogers late this afternoon, and she was discharged from custody. She had already served about three months of her sentence. Her attorney, Hugh S. Aldrich, made three attempts before the Superior Court to secure her release, but in each instance he was unsuccessful. The matter was first brought up on habeas corpus proceedings before Judge Melvin. The writ, however, was denied on the ground that the defendant had already been convicted and it was immaterial whether the complaint against her was valid or not. Mrs. Bull's attorney had contended that the complaint was not valid because it had been sworn to by her husband, Charles F. Bull. He contended that, inasmuch as the law did not permit a husband to testify against his wife in a criminal proceeding, it also prohibited him from swearing to a complaint charging his wife with a criminal offense.

The matter was next brought up on an appeal from the judgment of the Police Court. Practically the same points were advanced as in the habeas corpus case. The Court, however, held that the objection to the complaint should have been made before the case was tried in the Police Court. The appeal was accordingly denied.

A third attempt to secure Mrs. Bull's release was made about ten days ago. The matter was heard on habeas corpus before four of the Superior Judges. The points presented at the previous hearings were again argued and the writ was again denied, this decision being in line with that of Judge Melvin. It was further held that habeas corpus was not a proper proceeding to test the contention made.

The Supreme Court has now reversed this ruling and has upheld the contention that a husband cannot swear to a criminal charge against his wife.

Clarence Bassett, sentenced with Mrs. Bull to serve nine months in the County Jail, is not released by the decision.

Death Calls Captain Miller

oner will hold an inquest over his remains.

### Bassett Is Released.

OAKLAND, October 10.—Judge Melvin has granted Clarence Bassett his freedom on habeas corpus proceedings. Bassett was serving nine months in the County Jail on account of his illicit relations with Mrs. Mary Bull. The latter was released by the Supreme Court because her husband had sworn to the complaint charging her with the crime. As the complaint was invalid against Mrs. Bull, Judge Melvin held that it was also invalid against Bassett.

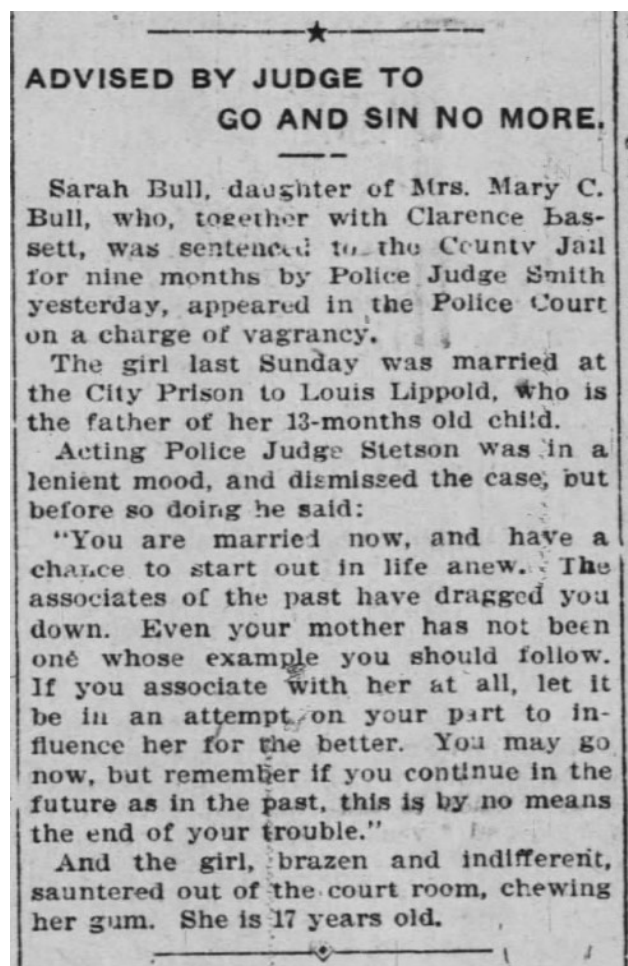


## The Aftermath:

Upon release from prison, Mary Bull divorced Charles Francis Bull. She married William Storey Abt. 1902 in San Francisco. It does not appear that she had any other children. She died in 1951. Charles Francis Bull never married again and died in 1922. Clarence Bassett married Abt. 1910 in Santa Clara, CA, and fathered at least one child.

## Sarah Roxanna Bull:

As for Sarah Roxanna Bull, daughter of Charles and Mary Bull, her story took several turns, during and after the incident with her parents. On June 20 1901 she was in court on charges of vagrancy. The judge dismissed the charges with admonition: "**Go and Sin no More.**"



Here are some notes, speculations, and questions regarding Sarah Bull-Lippold-Belden-McPherson:

### Frank Lippold (aka Marvin Belden)

In the June 1900 federal census Sarah Belden, age 16, was in the household (811 East 21st) of “husband” Marvin Belden, age 25, along with a son, age 0, and mother in law, Mary C Bull, age 34. Coincidentally, living next door (805 East 21st), was Kate Lippold, daughter Frederica, and son Frank Lippold, age 22. On June 16, 1901, Frank Lippold married Sarah Bull at the Alameda County jail as part of a plea bargain for her to be released from jail on a vagrancy charge. On June 19, 1901, Sarah Lippold (nee Bull) was released from jail with the admonition from the Judge: “Go and sin no more”. The judge also stated that her 13 month old child was the son of Frank Lippold.

Even though there is a birth record stating that M. Beldin was the father of the son in May, 1900, there’s no further mention of Marvin Belden/Beldin in public records after June 1900. There’s no marriage record for Marvin Belden/Beldin and Sarah R Bull. However, there is a marriage record for Frank Lippold and Sarah Bull in June 1901. Thus, I contend that Marvin Belden/Beldin was a fabrication, an alias, that Frank Lippold, age 22, used in the 1900 census and the birth records to mask his true identity while living with 16 year old Sarah Bull, who gave birth to his son in May, 1900. Sarah and Frank Lippold (aka Marvin Belden/Beldin) and unnamed Belden son and Mary Bull were living at 811 East 21st with Frank’s mother (Kate Lippold) living next door at 805 East 21st St. I think it’s likely that Kate Lippold fabricated the name alias scheme, to protect her reputation and that of her son, Frank.

[Note - there was a Marvin D Belden (1875-1956) living in a San Diego hotel in 1897, and in an Oakland hotel in 1902. Supposedly, he was married to a Beatrice Anderson in 1896 (Marvin divorced Beatrice in 1904 on grounds of desertion). Perhaps this Marvin Belden was known to the Bull’s and Lippold’s such that his name could be used for their deception.]

[Note - interestingly, Frank Lippold and Clarence Bassett (who had the affair with Mary C Bull (Sarah Bull’s mother), both joined the 8th Infantry of California Volunteers (Spanish-American War) in the summer of 1898. Thus, it’s likely that this is how Mary Bull came to know Clarence Bassett.]

Several family trees speculate that the son of Frank and Sarah Lippold was named John Edwin Belden (son of Sarah R McPherson of Port Arthur, TX) and that he died at sea while in route to Australia in 1916. With regards to the Oakland, CA Bull family, this is simply not correct. Aside from the fact that the child, later named Edward Mcpherson, was born biologically a Lippold, there’s no explanation as to why a 15 or 16 year old

would be a seaman (2nd mate) working on a British ship sailing from Port Arthur, TX, bound for Australia. This was another person named John Edwin Belden, not related to the Bull family in any way. In a section of the death report it was stated that the seaman was 21 years old, born about 1895 in Port Arthur, TX.

Therefore, a pertinent question to ask is what happened to Edward Lippold-McPherson. He last appeared in a public record in the 1910 census as a 10 year old, name Edward McPherson, living with mother Sarah and step father, Walter McPherson in Columbus, OH. After 1910, he disappeared from the public records. He would have been military draft age in 1918. Checking, I found no WW1/WW2 draft registration record for Edward Belden, Edward Mcpherson, or Edward Lippold.

In the 1920 census Sarah and daughter, Bertha McPherson, were again living in San Francisco, with no mention of any Edward. Did Edward die? Did he remain in Columbus, OH with Walter or move back to San Francisco? He would have been 20 in 1920, so perhaps he was not living with Sarah. Was he adopted in Columbus, OH? Did he change his name?

### Walter W McPherson

Here is a man of mystery. At present, all that is known of Walter W McPherson is information from the 1910 census. The only thing we know (1910 census) is that he was born in 1882 in Nevada. It was stated that he and Sarah had been married 11 years - about 1909. The 1920 census, as previously stated, indicated that Sarah and daughter Bertha were living in San Francisco and that Sarah had been widowed. A direct descendant of Bertha indicates in her family tree that Sarah and Walter divorced in Aug, 1918. But there's no documentation to support that date. Research turned up no good leads on Walter McPherson. There certainly were other men named Walter W McPherson at the time, but, to date, none link solidly to this individual.

Also, one possible reason Walter and family moved out of San Francisco was the catastrophic April, 1906 earthquake. That, and perhaps Sarah's desire to distance herself from her mother.

What happened to Walter McPherson in Columbus, OH? Did he die before 1920? Was there a divorce/separation/abandonment instead? And, again, what happened to Edward Lippold-McPherson?

In the 1910 census it was stated that daughter Bertha was born in Colorado in Oct, 1907. In subsequent records she listed her birth location as either Colorado or California. So, this is an anomaly. Also, per the 1910 census record, if Sarah and Walter were married 11 years, marrying in 1909 (no marriage records yet found, possibly lost in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake), then Bertha's birth date of 1907 is an anomaly. However, if Bertha was born in Colorado while Sarah was in route to Columbus, OH,



that could be timeline indicator of their move. In 1907, long distance travel by auto was rudimentary at best. More likely, they took the train. Was Bertha born on board a train? Or, did they stop for a few days along the way, in Colorado? There's no birth record for Bertha yet found, so these are intriguing questions.

I theorize that Walter W McPherson was an alias. There was, in fact, no such person. If this notion is correct, then, who was posing as Walter McPherson? Was he the biological father of Bertha? DNA research by direct descendants of Sarah Bull is highly recommended to help solve this mystery.

## **The sons of Charles and Mary Bull:**

Horace C Bull-Brown and Thomas B Bull-Brown (**husband of the author's 1st cousin 2x removed**) are relatively well documented in public records. This, though their early lives are a bit sketchy. It's clear that the family broke up when Charles F Bull abandoned them to live single about 1899. There was such a falling out with their father that Horace and Thomas felt compelled to change their name to Brown. But, Sarah Bull did not change her name. She used Bull as her maiden name all her life.

The brother who is missing is Harold Francis Bull. Sometime before 1910, he was sent to Whittier State School. After 1910, he disappeared from the public records. What happened to this brother? Did he die before 1920 (i.e., census records)? Did he change his name? There was another Harold Francis Bull, 1896-1976, born in Texas but lived quite a bit of his life in San Bernardino. His life is well documented with census records. I did an AI face comparison (FamilySearch.org) between the Whittier State School photo of 1910 and a seaman application photo of the other Harold Bull, 1919. The comparison indicated 40% likelihood of being the same person - not high. So, I think this is simply a case of name coincidence. Again, DNA matching research could turn up the complete story of Harold F Bull.

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