

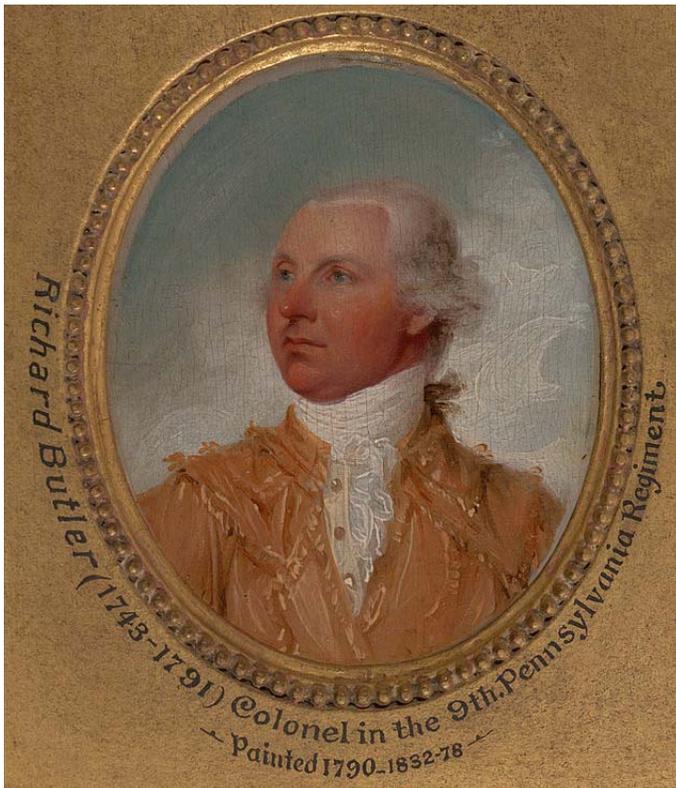
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

A Butler Did It

Thomas Butler was a gunsmith (born in County Wicklow, Ireland) who, with his wife Eleanor, had five remarkable sons who served as officers of the Pennsylvania Line. They came to be known as the "Fighting Butlers" of the Continental Army. To the eldest son, Richard Butler (April 1, 1743 – November 4, 1791), born in Dublin, George Washington conferred the honor of receiving Cornwallis' sword of surrender at Yorktown. Also at Yorktown, Richard's brother Percival (or Pierce) was aide to the Marquis de Lafayette. At the victory banquet for his officers, Washington raised his glass "To the Butlers and their five sons" and Lafayette toasted: "When I wanted a thing done well, I had a Butler do it."



Richard Butler, died fighting Indians in Ohio

Richard and his brother, Colonel William Butler, had been important traders out of Fort Pitt in the Ohio River area. William died in 1789. In 1791, Richard (then a major general) was killed by a tomahawk blow to the head in the Battle of the Wabash. The army had been ambushed, and over 600 men met their death. Brothers Thomas and Edward were with Richard during the fighting. Thomas was shot in both legs. Richard ordered younger brother Edward to leave him and save Thomas, which he did. Richard gave his sword to a fellow officer with the instructions that Butler blood would never be wiped from the blade. The sword was given years later to Edward's son, Edward George Washington Butler, for his father's bravery in attempting to save both brothers. Captain Edward Butler, the heroic younger brother, died on May 6, 1803, in Springfield, Tennessee. The brother he saved, Major Thomas Butler, died of yellow fever in 1805 near New Orleans.

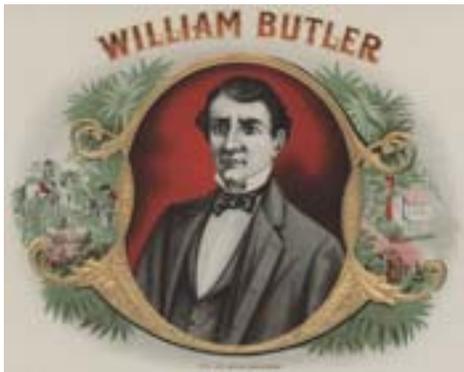


Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis (March 31, 1779 – July 15, 1852), known as Nelly, was the granddaughter of Martha Washington, step-granddaughter of George Washington and mother-in-law of Edward George Washington Butler.

Edward George Washington Butler (February 22, 1800 – September 6, 1888) received a letter from Robert E. Lee in October 1867, by that time the President of Washington College (Washington and Lee University today). Lee wrote, "The prospects of the college, this year, are good. We have nearly 400 students, & about 100 more than we

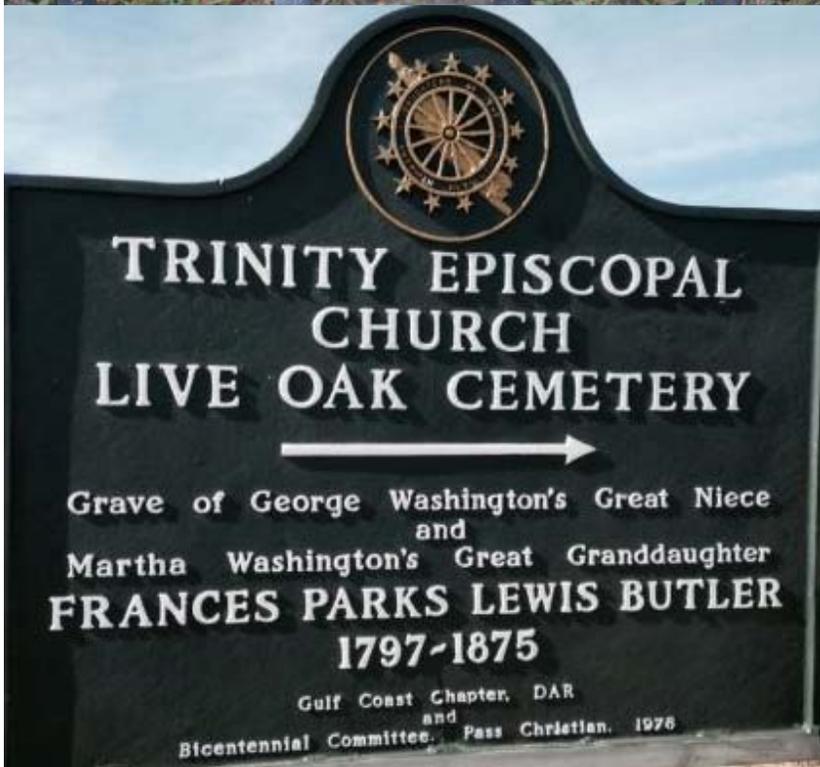
had, at this time last year. As the whole number last year was 400, there is a probability of its reaching 500 this year. The students, too, are of a fine order of young men; earnest & faithful - With my best wishes for your happiness & welfare, I am truly your friend."

Percival Butler became the first Adjutant General of Kentucky, and all five of his sons fought in the War of 1812. His eldest son, Thomas Langford Butler, was aide-de-camp to Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815. Thomas was made brevet major for his service, and President James Madison on January 8, 1816, appointed him "Surveyor and Inspector of the Revenue" of the Port of New Orleans. William Orlando Butler (1791 – 1880), his second son, was also a hero of the Battle of New Orleans, winning Old Hickory's personal praise: "on all occasions he displayed that heroic chivalry and calmness of judgment in the midst of danger". James Knox Polk recalled William Orlando Butler to fight in the Mexican War, after which the President presented him with a gold sword. Kentucky gave him one of silver.



William Orlando Butler, from a 19th century cigar label

Also receiving a sword for valor after the Mexican War (as Colonel of the 3rd U. S. Dragoons) was Edward George Washington Butler, who (after his father's death) had been placed in the care of General Andrew Jackson. A West Point graduate, he retired to his plantation, "Dunboyne" (Iberville Parish, Louisiana), after the war. The "Fighting Butlers" were descended from the Barons of Dunboyne. Edward George Washington Butler wed George Washington's grandniece, who was also Martha Washington's great-granddaughter, Frances Parke Lewis (November 27, 1797 – June 20, 1875) in 1826. Both are buried together in Live Oak Cemetery in Pass Christian, Mississippi.



Katrina displaced the original plaque, first erected in 1976. Should read "Parke" instead of "Parks".

But news of another Butler's arrival in New Orleans was not well received. His father, Captain John Butler, had served under Jackson in the Battle of New Orleans. But the son, Major-General Benjamin Franklin Butler (November 5, 1818 – January 11, 1893) would forever be remembered as "Beast". Born in Deerfield, New Hampshire, Butler was in charge of the Union forces that occupied the city of New Orleans in May 1862 after Farragut's successful naval operation. New Orleans cotton dealer Charles Hémard wrote relatives in France decrying "*le monstre Butler*". New Orleans ladies (from Bourbon Street to Esplanade) made derisive comments to his troops and cast

hateful glances. Some even spit.



Political Cartoonist Thomas Nast's portrayal of Butler as a "monster"

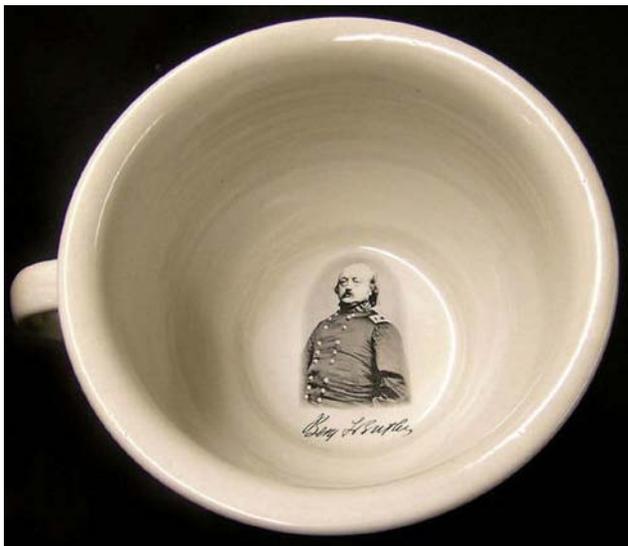
Butler's beastly error was to issue General Order No. 28, which stated that, if any woman of New Orleans continued to show contempt for the Union soldiers, she would be "held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation," namely that of a prostitute. It is curious that he referred to this activity as a hobby and not a career, but nevertheless this was protested as an outrage in both the North and South (as well as in European capitals, especially England and France).

Butler was also known as "Spoons" since he had silverware confiscated from the populace. He had William Mumford executed for removing the U.S. flag from the Mint. These actions and his insults to women moved Jefferson Davis to call Butler a felon worthy of hanging. Interestingly, Butler had been a strong supporter of Davis for President in 1860. Butler demanded oaths of allegiance from visiting foreigners, which Lincoln called "a flagrant disregard of international law". He was recalled seven and half months after he took command of the city.



Before and after Butler's Proclamation, Harper's Magazine, July 1862

Butler's lack of popularity prompted some in New Orleans to line the bottom of their chamber pots with pictures of the despised general. After the Civil War, a lucrative business continued in the sale of commemorative Butler chamber pots, this time with his image glazed on. In the South, even to this day, he is a figure of loathing.



Butler Chamber Pot



Carte-de-visite of Major-General Benjamin Franklin Butler, who supported John Breckinridge for President in 1860 after earlier supporting Jefferson Davis for the Democratic nomination

In Massachusetts, however, he was popular. Elected Governor of that state from 1883 to 1884, he appointed the first Irish-American judge and the first African-American judge. In addition, he appointed the first woman to executive office, Clara Barton, the Civil War hospital nurse who founded the American Red Cross. She was appointed by him to head the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women. Butler ran for President of the United States in 1884 as the nominee of the Greenback and Anti-Monopoly parties, polling 175,370 votes. Butler died in 1893 while attending court in Washington, D. C., and was buried in Lowell, Massachusetts.

His direct descendants include the famous scientist, Adelbert Ames, Jr., and participatory journalist, George Plimpton. Comus had for its theme in 1873 "Darwin's Missing Links" where Butler was portrayed as a hyena with a giant spoon over his shoulder. Plimpton's "Paper Lion", however, was a "beast" one could come to love.



"Missing Link" Butler sketch for the 1873 Comus

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