

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **A Scandal in Bohemia**

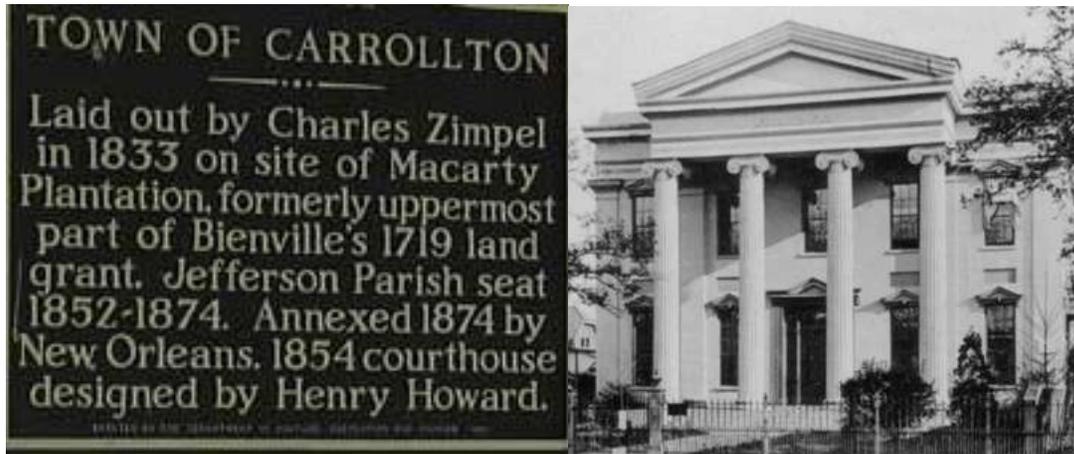
The "scandal" in question is not "A Scandal in Bohemia", written by Arthur Conan Doyle, in which Sherlock Holmes (who never spoke to Dr. Watson "of the softer passions") encountered Irene Adler (who he would always refer to as "*the woman*"). No, this "scandal" is factual, not fictional, literal, not literary. It involves a young Jewish man who could not go home to face his family, but instead made his way to New Orleans and secured his fortune.

Samuel Kohn (1783 - 1853) was a young man born in the village of Hareth, Bohemia (present-day Horany in the Czech Republic). Most would say his youth was wasted on taverns, young women, drinking and gambling. On one fateful evening, in an unseemly *gasthaus*, the inevitable happened. Some shrewd strangers were either card sharps or luckier at the game than Samuel, and they took him for every silver *thaler* he had. (The currency known as the *thaler* originated in St. Joachimsthal in Bohemia, and from it comes the word dollar.)

Samuel was distraught. Knowing he could not go home to Mama with the shame and scandal of his folly, he just kept walking. His footsteps took him off to Saaz and finally to the port of Hamburg. He worked for his passage on a sailing ship bound for New Orleans arriving some time around 1806. By the summer of that year an advertisement in the paper announced the opening of an inn at Bayou St. John with Samuel Kohn as co-proprietor. His partner was listed as H. Labruyère. The inn offered liquid refreshments, gambling and loans to keep one in the game. This time he would run the establishment instead of being its victim, a lender rather than a spender.

He became a successful financier, which led to his opening a bank. He was also an investor and real estate promoter. From a penniless immigrant to one of the city's wealthiest businessmen, Samuel Kohn built residential dwellings and commercial buildings. He was one-fourth owner in the development of the City of Carrollton, which was

the former Macarty Plantation. The New Orleans Canal and Banking Company had acquired one-half, and Laurent Millaudon and John Slidell had acquired the other quarter. Samuel Kohn had obtained his fourth interest from Benjamin Macarty as per act passed by Louis Thimele Caire, Notary, on April 30, 1831.



*Kohn was one-fourth owner in the development of Carrollton*

Also in April of 1831, Millaudon and Kohn acquired from Louis Bouligny the land, which was to become the Faubourg Bouligny (bounded by Upperline, General Taylor and Clara streets and the river, and bisected by Napoleon Avenue). There is a Cohn Street in New Orleans, but it was named for Solomon Cohn. He was owner of Carrollton's first manufacturing concern, a rope walk.

During this same period, Samuel Kohn returned to his homeland a rich man. With carriage, servants and untold wealth, he could finally return to Mama Kohn's cottage in Hareth and make his appearance. It was a splendid one indeed. The entire village could scarcely believe the vision of success. British Jewish historian and journalist, Lucien Wolf (1857 – 1930) wrote about Kohn and that thrilling homecoming. He related the emotion of moment: "the whole of Hareth was thrown into a paroxysm of the most intense excitement."

It is from the writings of Lucien Wolf that many of the facts of this fascinating story have become known.



*A caricature of Lucien Wolf in Vanity Fair, 1911*

Having returned to the village of his birth, Samuel Kohn retired to Paris in 1832.

But that was not the end of the Kohn family in New Orleans. Samuel had brought his nephew, Carl Kohn, to the city in the early 1830s. He quickly learned English and French, as well as Spanish. His uncle easily introduced him to the New Orleans business community, and there he excelled. His various enterprises included the Atlantic Insurance Company and the Union National Bank. In 1850 he became a member of another prominent and wealthy family by marrying Clara White, daughter of Colonel Maunsel White and Héloïse de la Ronde.

Samuel Kohn's younger brother, Joachim, was born at the turn of the nineteenth century and was brought to New Orleans in about 1819 or 1820. After Samuel's move to Paris in 1832, Joachim was set up in the shipping and commission brokerage business and also served as his brother's agent in New Orleans. He was on more corporate boards than any other Jew of his time. He was a director of the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad, an insurance company, the Carrollton Bank, as well as the Mechanics' and Traders' Bank, to name a few.

Joachim Kohn married Marie Thalie Martin, daughter of a French doctor. Thalie and Joachim's daughter, Marie-Amélie Kohn, married Jewish banker and philanthropist Armand Heine who came to New Orleans in 1842. Armand and his brother Michel founded the famous *Bankhaus Armand & Michel Heine*, in cooperation with *Rothschild Frères & Co.* in Paris, France, and New Orleans. Armand's brother Michel married Amélie Miltenberger and became the father of Alice Heine. Born on Royal Street, Alice Heine would by marriage become the Duchess of Richelieu and the first American-born Princess of Monaco (well before Grace Kelly). The family of Samuel Kohn would continue to live nothing resembling a Bohemian lifestyle.

There is a beautiful portrait (oil on canvas) of Samuel Kohn in the possession of the Historic New Orleans Collection, attributed to the artist Trevor Thomas Fowler. The handsome, middle-aged Kohn is seated in a red chair with his hand tucked inside his coat. He has dark hair, even in his sideburns. He is wearing a black coat and waistcoat, white tie and shirt with a jabot of cascading ruffles.

He was truly most capable of creating "a paroxysm of the most intense excitement" back in Bohemia.

## **NED HÉMARD**

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