

Today in Columbus History:

On February 7, 1889 the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun* ran a story on the front page entitled "Bussey's Bad Break" about the flight of W. W. Bussey from his financial troubles two days earlier, on Tuesday February 5. Bussey's action caused considerable excitement in Columbus and was related to two other stories printed in the same edition. It appears that in deference to a prominent local family and major employer, the paper delayed reporting the scandal and allowed itself to be scooped by the *Atlanta Constitution* and *Montgomery Advertiser*.

William Wallace Bussey was a cashier at the Eagle and Phenix Savings Department of the Eagle and Phenix Manufacturing Company. He was also the son of Dr. Nathan. J. Bussey, former president of the Eagle and Phenix Manufacturing Co. and a current director of the Savings Department.

On February 5, attorney John Peabody, a fellow director of the Savings Department, told Bussey that a committee would audit his cash. Bussey later feigned a dental emergency, left work an hour early and skipped town.

To make matters worse, the annual stockholders' meeting was scheduled for the next day, Wednesday February 6. *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun* covered this meeting and the concern over the financial impact of Bussey's actions in the second related story in the February 7 edition.

Bussey was a popular young member of society. He married Lottie Estes, the daughter of Henson S. Estes, the senior deacon of the First Baptist Church, in 1874 and they had several children. News of his hasty departure from town was cause for the *Enquirer-Sun* to launch an "investigation" that stalled its coverage for a couple of days.

William left a note behind for his brother Henry admitting his guilt. Henry vowed to repay his brother's debt, no matter what. He and his friend Jack Odom left immediately to track William down. They caught up with him in Eufaula, Alabama the next day, February 6. He telegraphed his success back to Columbus and spent the night in Eufaula. They returned to Columbus on February 7, by train.

In their absence, the *Enquirer-Sun* kept quiet while the drama unfolded in the other newspapers. However, The *Enquirer-Sun* took exception to the reports coming out of Atlanta and Montgomery. It ran the last of its three related stories in the February 7 edition entitled "Newspaper Enterprise" to chastise the *Montgomery Advertiser* and the *Atlanta Constitution* for publishing fabricated reports.

On February 8, the *Enquirer-Sun* ran another story entitled "Home Again," that provided the details of Bussey's return and the extent of his defalcation. A large crowd had formed at the Broad Street Depot station the day before, in anticipation of their return. The Bussey brothers stayed aboard and instead got off at the Union Depot to avoid them.

The total amount of William's deficit was \$16,184.50, a large sum in 1889 (over \$490,000 today, according to the website: <https://www.in2013dollars.com>). Bussey made good on his debt within a few days as reported on February 10 story "Mr. Bussey's Shortage Paid."

William Bussey landed on his feet quickly and left banking for the insurance business. By May 1889, he was an agent for New York Life Insurance Company in Columbus. He moved to Birmingham, Alabama in the mid-1890's to continue his career as the district manager of the Union Central Life Insurance Company. He

remained in Birmingham until his death in 1936 when his family had his body shipped back to Linwood Cemetery for burial.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

BUSSEY'S BAD BREAK.

THE TELLER OF THE EAGLE AND PHENIX CREATES A BIG SENSATION.

**Mr. W. W. Bussey Quietly Leaves the City
When Notified that His Cash Would
Be Counted, But is Overtaken
at Eufaula by a Brother.**

About 7 o'clock Tuesday night information reached the ENQUIRER SUN office that Mr. W. W. Bussey, paying teller of the Eagle and Phenix Manufacturing Company and the Eagle and Phenix Saving Department, had left the city under suspicious circumstances. Reporters were at once detailed to investigate the matter, but the facts learned up to 2 o'clock yesterday morning did not warrant the ENQUIRER SUN in publishing Mr. Bussey's departure and the circumstances which led thereto. A more complete investigation yesterday developed the following facts:

About noon Tuesday, Hon. John Peabody informed Mr. Bussey that a committee had been appointed to examine his books and count the cash on hand. This

Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun, Thursday, February 7, 1889, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

THE EAGLE AND PHENIX

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE STOCK- HOLDERS YESTERDAY.

The Annual Report of President William
H. Young, Showing the Business
of This Great Institution
the Past Year.

On further motion of the Hon. John Peabody, the meeting then adjourned until 10 o'clock a. m. Thursday, in order to acquaint the shareholders assembled, with the result of the investigation in progress as to the amount of loss supposed to be due by Mr. W. W. Bussey, which in any event was expected to be small.

Headline and last paragraph of a story from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun* February 7, 1889, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



Grave of William W. Bussey and his wife Lottie Estes Bussey, from FindAGrave.com <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/118444488/william-wallace-bussey>

Newspaper Enterprise.

The *Montgomery Advertiser* and The *Atlanta Constitution*, of yesterday, contained articles in reference to the disappearance of Mr. W. W. Bussey, and the officers of the Eagle and Phenix Manufacturing Company, that were a disgrace to the daily press. Out of mere hints that something was wrong, these journals fabricated reports which were false and unjust in almost every particular. The article in the *Constitution* was leaded and padded to the extent of the ingenuity of its author, and was then less than a third of a column. It was shown to an employe of the Eagle and Phenix Manufacturing Company last night, who, after reading it, said: "It contains eleven lies by actual count." This may be enterprise, but - if it is, it is only equaled by that of the tradesman, who admitted that he would tell three lies for a quarter.

Story from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, February 7, 1889,
<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

AT HOME AGAIN.

Mr. W. W. Bussey and Brother Return to Columbus—The Director's Meeting.

The *ENQUIRER SUN* spread the news over the city yesterday, that Mr. W. W. Bussey, defaulting cashier of the Eagle and Phenix Savings Bank, had been overtaken at Eufaula by his brother, and would return to the city before noon. He was expected in the city on the 11:45 train from Troy and a large crowd of people assembled at Broad street depot to witness his arrival. When the train rolled in his familiar form was soon descried in company with his brother, Mr. Henry Bussey, and Mr. Jack Odom.

The trio did not get off at Broad street as the crowd expected but remained aboard until they reached the Union De-

Story from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun* February 8, 1889,
<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

Mr. Bussey's Shortage Paid.

Mr. W. W. Bussey yesterday pa'd in full his shortage to the Eagle and Phenix Manufacturing Company, and now holds a receipt for the same. Here is a copy of it:

"COLUMBUS, Ga., Feb. 9, 1889.—This is to certify that Mr. W. W. Bussey has settled in full with the Eagle and Phenix Manufacturing Company for the shortage in his accounts as teller of said company, by turning over at agreed valuation property sufficient to pay said shortage, and that such settlement has been made by Mr. Bussey, voluntarily on his part, and without any premises or threats made to him to induce such settlement.

"EAGLE AND PHENIX MANUFACTURING CO.,
"A. I. Young, Treasurer.

The Eagle and Phenix Company is perfectly satisfied with the settlement, and say that they have sustained no loss. The friends of Mr. Bussey have regretted the unfortunate affair from the start, and will be pleased to know of the satisfactory adjustment, which took place yesterday.

Story from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun* February 10, 1889,
<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.