

## Today in Columbus History:

On February 10, 1874, a story appeared in the *Daily Columbus Daily Enquirer* entitled "Post Mortem Examination," that confirmed an earlier report on the death of William H. Thompson. Tracking down that story revealed not just one but two unusual deaths in the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* of February 7. Both involved the steamer Julia St. Clair and the abundant use of alcohol. The post mortem examination mentioned on February 10 occurred after Coroner deGraffenreid held an inquest that found that Thompson died from "the discharge of a pistol in a tustle [sic] with Mrs. Edmar Tompkins." The second death was of an intoxicated passenger on the Julia St. Clair, of which Thompson was the pilot.

The first of four related stories in the February 7 *Columbus Daily Enquirer* is the regular notice of the arrival of the steamer and its cargo (83 bales of cotton and 49 barrels). Her schedule at this time had her arriving in Columbus on Friday morning and leaving for Bainbridge on Saturday morning. In addition to her cargo, she likely brought news of a mishap that occurred aboard the ship on the previous Monday, February 2.

The second story was that of the mishap - the tragic death of passenger J. C. Thomas. This young man appears to be twenty-two-year-old John Cuthbert Thomas formerly of Decatur County, Georgia. The *Columbus Daily Enquirer* story describes the scene of a drunk Mr. Thomas avoiding the open hatchway, tripping, and falling, which caused his death in ten minutes. Another account, in the *Bainbridge Weekly Sun* claims Thomas fell into the hatchway and died almost instantly from a badly crushed side. Drunks fall down all the time without dying. It seems more likely that he hit his head.

The third story concerned the death of William H. Thompson, the pilot of the Julia St. Clair, which occurred on Friday, February 6. It's a long story, so I included it in three parts. He was distraught and drunk when visiting Mrs. Tompkins. One wonders if that unfortunate accident aboard the ship weighed on his mind, or if he might be somehow responsible. Although their deaths appear together in several papers, including this one, none drew a connection between the two. Maybe there isn't one.

The *Columbus Daily Enquirer* also never explains the relationship between Mrs. Tompkins and Mr. Thompson. Was he a boarder, a suitor, or maybe both? Little could be found on her, other than she was a widow, living on Jackson between Early and Fulton (2<sup>nd</sup> Ave between 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets). She was also about five years younger than Mr. Thompson.

Why Mrs. Tompkins would attempt to wrestle a loaded and cocked gun away from a drunk is anyone's guess. The description of Thompson's wound seems a bit odd, as well. According to the coroner, the bullet entered the left breast of victim at the heart, passed through the body, and exited out right side, near the nipple. Even with a small pistol, it would be difficult to shoot yourself through the upper chest from the side like that.

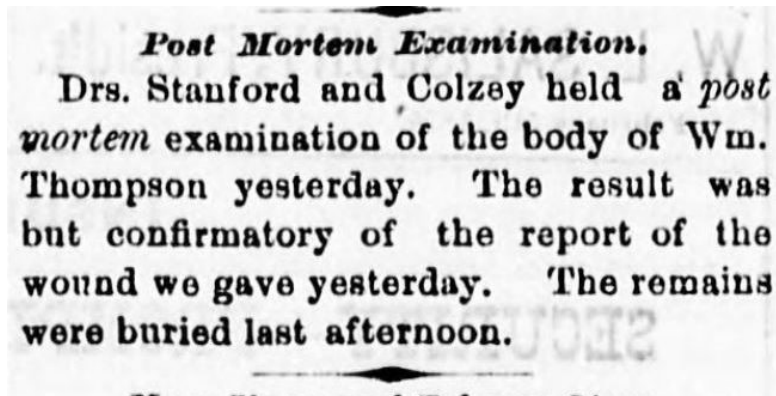
The last of the four stories was the funeral notice for William H. Thompson at the home of his stepmother Mrs. Younger. His birth mother died before he was ten years old. His father remarried and died while he was a teenager. His stepmother then remarried shortly after the death of Thompson's father.

If nothing else, the stories of these two deaths could only help the recruiting efforts of the local temperance societies.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

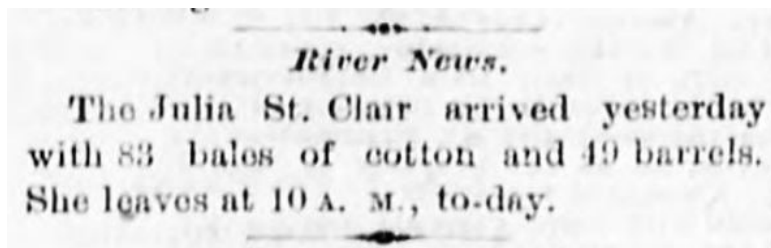
Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

*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.*



**Post Mortem Examination.**  
Drs. Stanford and Colzey held a *post mortem* examination of the body of Wm. Thompson yesterday. The result was but confirmatory of the report of the wound we gave yesterday. The remains were buried last afternoon.

Article on "Post Mortem Examination" from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, February 10, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



**River News.**  
The Julia St. Clair arrived yesterday with 83 bales of cotton and 49 barrels. She leaves at 10 A. M., to-day.

News of the arrival of the Julia St. Clair *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, February 7, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

*Accidentally Killed on a Steamboat.*

J. C. Thomas got on the Julia St. Clair at Belleview, Fla. He was removing his stock and farming utensils from Florida to Troup landing on the Flint river. On arriving at his destination, and after nearly all his property was on shore, he started himself. He had been drinking the whole time he was on the boat, and at the time mentioned was well under the influence of liquor. In threading his dubious way he narrowly escaped falling into the hatchway, and in trying to escape it fell against the bulwarks and so injured himself that he died in ten minutes. He was a planter of some means.

Account of the death of J. C. Thomas aboard the Julia St. Clair from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, February 7, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

**Sad Accident.**

We are called upon to record a very sad accident this week. Mr. J. C. Thomas, a young man of about twenty-three years of age, and who has lived in this county the greater portion of his life, was killed on board the steamer Julia St. Clair on Sunday night or early Monday morning, by falling in the hatchway. We know nothing of the particulars of the painful occurrence, save that he accidentally fell and had his side badly crushed by the fall and died almost instantly.

Account of the death of J. C. Thomas aboard the Julia St. Clair from the *Bainbridge Weekly Sun*, February 4, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

## W. H. THOMPSON KILLED.

### *Killing Accidental—Coroner's Inquest.*

Mr. W. H. Thompson, the pilot of the *Julia St. Clair*, was killed last afternoon about 3½ o'clock. He arrived in the city yesterday morning on the boat, and at noon was quite sober. His death occurred at the house of Mrs. Edmar Tompkins, which is located down town.

Coroner deGraffenreid held an inquest over the body. Captain William Davis was foreman of the jury. Two colored persons, Henry Davis and ———, were among the seven members.

It seems that at the time of the occurrence only Mrs. Tompkins and the deceased were in the house. Her evidence was about this:

Thompson sent me down some fish and said he would dine with me. He did not come until after the M. & G. train went out. He tapped at the back door and I let him in. Asked why he did not enter the front door. Replied he came from back street. Saw he was affected by liquor. He said he had been to St. Clair's, (he was away) bought a bottle of liquor and taken several drinks. Told him that would bring him into trouble. Said he did not care for his life and talked about killing, and drew and cocked a pistol, which he flourished. Tried to take it away from him. We had a tussle. I was so excited fearing for my own life, that I cannot tell how long it was. At one time I took the pistol from him, but he seized it again.

I think the pistol was discharged twice.

he seized it again.

I think the pistol was discharged twice. Can't tell intervals between shots. I did not think he was wounded. I screamed for help in room and also at front and back door. Thompson walked to the hall and leaned against door post of room opposite one where we tussled. As I screamed for help at back door he said "I'm not hurt," and immediately after dropped slowly to the floor, and died shortly after Miss Dexter came. I was not mad nor was he. I was scared. I thought after he fell he was fooling. I sent for aid as soon as I could. He never spoke after he fell. The pistol and his watch, which had been pulled out in the scuffle, were left on the bed.

Policeman Foran testified he came on being sent for. Thompson did not speak after I came. Found watch and pistol on bed. Mrs. Tompkins told me where they were. [Pistol was shown. It is a small five-barrel Colt. Two chambers were empty. Mr. Clapham identified it as one Thompson had at Bainbridge last Sunday. It had been given him by policeman Wood.]

Miss Mary Dixon, who lives in adjoining lot, heard two shots and Mrs. T.'s cries for help. Came over. Thompson looked as if he would speak, and could not.

Mrs. Dixon testified to hearing the

Part 2 of the article on William H. Thompson's death from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* on February 7, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

not.

Mrs. Dixon testified to hearing the shots.

A negro woman employed on the lot was across the street, and heard no shots. Went for aid when Mrs. T. called to her to do so.

Body was examined. The ball entered the left breast about the heart, passed completely through the breast, and was found next to the undershirt, near the right nipple. The other ball was found to have passed through a door.

Jury brought in a verdict that "deceased came to his death from the discharge of a pistol in a tustle with Mrs. Edmar Tompkins, whilst she was trying to take it from him."

Thompson was about 43 years of age and was considered the best pilot on our river. Most of his life has been passed on the stream. Directly after the war during a whole season he received \$1,000 to \$3,000 per month, but he spent it. His only relatives are a stepmother and half brothers. His wife died some years ago.

Part 3 of the article on William H. Thompson's death from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* on February 7, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

### **FUNERAL NOTICE.**

The friends and acquaintances of WILLIAM H. THOMPSON, and of Mrs. Younger and family, are respectfully invited to attend the funeral of the former, at the residence of Mrs. Younger, corner Oglethorpe and Few streets, this (Seturday) afternoon at 3½ o'clock.

Funeral notice of William H. Thompson, pilot of the Julia St. Clair from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, February 7, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



Tombstone of J. C. Thomas in Greenshade Cemetery, Fowlstown, Georgia, from FindAGrave.com



Gravesite of William H. Thompson in Linwood Cemetery, from FindAGrave.com