



Charles A. Buck, Or, Daring to Contradict Lawson

Charles A. Buck, though hardly a household name among chess players today, is well known to Morphy scholars, because of a piece he wrote on Paul Morphy in the year 1900. This entertaining newspaper article, later published as a pamphlet titled *Paul Morphy: His Later Life*, has resulted in a great deal of confusion in chess historical literature. The confusion starts with the question of just who Charles A. Buck was.

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Charles A. Buck is sometimes confused with another minor figure in chess history, the very similarly named Charles F. Buck (1841-1918). Charles Francis Buck was the stakeholder for the world championship match between Steinitz and Zukertort. The stakeholding Buck was a well-known man in his time, a United States Congressman from Louisiana. Chess-related references to him can be found from both his time in New Orleans, and in Washington D.C. Buck is a common name, and I see no reason to believe that Congressman Charles F. Buck has any relation to the subject of this article.

Charles A. Buck (born 1866) came from a family of newspaper men. His father, Napoleon B. Buck, worked in the newspaper business from age sixteen until the day he died.

Being a newspaper man in the nineteenth century was rather different from working in journalism today. Today's American journalists strive for impartiality, at least ideally. Sometimes this can go to ridiculous lengths; if a political candidate tells an outright lie, a newspaper will often try to present this as one side of an issue, giving accusations and denials equal weight. In the nineteenth century, newspapers generally had a partisan political agenda, and were associated with a party or cause. They would support their cause to almost unbelievable extremes, accusing the opposite party of heinous crimes



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Civil War. Napoleon Buck moved west in 1882, eventually settling in Toronto, Kansas, where he took charge of the *Toronto Republican* until his death in 1894. He had five children, of whom four survived into adulthood, including Charles A. Buck.



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This summary is taken from the biography mentioned above, and is probably accurate. There is one disquieting detail that makes it a bit uncertain. Charles A. Buck is given in the same biography as being born in St. Louis, Missouri on October 27, 1866, and educated in Nashville; this is unusual if his father Napoleon moved west to Kansas in 1882. There is probably some simple explanation, but it may mean that Napoleon Buck could have had political views very different from Greeley's. Among newspapers of the time which are now available online, the only hits for a name like Napoleon Buck's are from the *Chicago Tribune*. These deal with an N.B. Buck who was arrested for running a pro-Confederate newspaper in Missouri (May 20, 1861). On January 8 and 9, 1865, the *Tribune* calls the same N.B. Buck the late foreman of the *Republican* office, and says he was arrested for violating his parole for running a rebel newspaper. Although this may be a coincidence, the associations with the newspaper business, when combined with Charles' birth in St. Louis, make it quite possible that the pro-Confederate N.B. Buck is Napoleon



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