

The Killing of Charlie Storms by Luke Short

Being A Closer Look at the Gunfight and its Consequences

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(Dedicated to the memory of the late Roger Jay)



Luke Short shot Charlie Storms to death outside the Oriental Saloon in Tombstone, Arizona Territory on Friday, Feb. 25, 1881. The basic story of the gunfight between these two professional gamblers has been told and retold. However, recently discovered information about the participants, the lead-up to the confrontation and its aftermath adds another chapter to the so-called "Gambler's War" in Tombstone.

The new information shows that the matter did not die in the dust with Charlie Storms. In fact, the fall-out from the gunfight would later impact the Earp brothers along with gambler Lew Rickabaugh, as the animosity between Storms' associates and these men lingered for several years.

In reporting the death of Charles S. Storms, the Denver Daily News was the first newspaper to say that Storms had a half-brother named Peter Vallet living in Denver.¹ Peter Andrew Vallat [also spelled variously as Vallet or Vallette] was a professional faro dealer and

gambler who had worked all over the western states, often in the same towns, at the same time, as Charlie Storms. Both men had frequented saloons in Leadville, Colorado and the sporting fraternity of that city let it be known that the men were actually full blood brothers, even though they preferred to pass themselves off as half-siblings.² The brothers were said to be of French Creole origin and had been born in New Orleans, but relocated at any early age to Watertown, Jefferson County, New York and eventually to New York City. There, apparently, Charlie had worked at a Broadway hotel before running into some serious trouble as a young man that forced him to flee the city and change his name to avoid prosecution.³ This trouble may have happened about the time of the Californian gold rush. Adopting the name of a prominent New Yorker of the day, "Charles S. Storms", seemed like a good idea, so the fugitive Charlie packed his bags and a new identity and headed to California, arriving via Mexico. The California census of 1852 shows him as a

29-year-old saloon owner living near the gold fields.⁴ Using Sacramento as a base for his operations over the coming years, Storms would travel far and wide, dealing faro and visiting major mining and railroad boomtowns to make a living as a professional gambler and "sure thing" man. His methods were not always honest, but this was the case for almost all full-time gamblers of the day.

Peter A. Vallat was about 12 years younger than his brother Charlie, but he eventually made his own way west. The Californian Great Register of 1870 listed both brothers as residents of San Francisco.⁵ By this stage, Charlie was recorded as "Charles Spencer Storms" of New York, and had joined forces with a tough Irish immigrant named Henry Lyons, known to his friends and enemies, alike, as "Dublin." Although dissimilar in age, and from different ethnic backgrounds, Storms and Lyons were both confirmed "Slopers." This was a slang term for men who hailed from west of the Pacific Slope. Almost universally spawned from the gold-rush days, Slopers were schooled in the rough and tumble world of placer gold mining and the cutthroat saloons and gambling dens of San Francisco and the infamous Barbary Coast.



Despite their differences, the two men formed a solid friendship and a formidable gambling partnership that saw them travel to all the major mining boomtowns of the West. Having been born in 1835, Lyons was of similar age to Storms' brother, Peter Vallat, and shared the same wanderlust. In 1856 he claimed to have sailed with the infamous William Walker Expedition to seize control of Nicaragua, before he successfully returned to America to tell the tale.⁶ After spending his fair share of time mining, Lyons eventually gravitated to the sporting world and became a full-time faro dealer. Dublin Lyons was said, by an Oakland newspaper, to have had "lots of nerve, too; no one could bluff him... everyone knew that his pistol was ready to back up his words at any time."⁷ These qualities, no doubt, endeared him to Charlie Storms and the two men earned a tough reputation in Cheyenne, Wyoming and Deadwood, Dakota Territory in the mid-to-late 1870s for their willingness to resort to gunplay in tight situations.

Storms was rumored to have killed three men during his long gambling career, but exact details are lacking. Charlie did have a much celebrated gunfight with a fellow gambler named Johnny Varnes in 1876, in Deadwood, that saw both men empty their pistols at each other without result.⁸ Dublin Lyons was not so lucky in December 1877 when he caught a bullet in the shoulder in a Cheyenne saloon over a disputed faro game. Although wounded, Dublin jerked a pistol and returned fire at his assailant – Tom Mulqueen – before both men could be disarmed.⁹

By the late 1870s and into 1880, Charlie Storms and Dublin Lyons were dividing their days between Butte, Montana; Cheyenne, Wyoming, Deadwood, Dakota Territory and Leadville and Denver Colorado, on a seemingly endless faro road-trip. Making and losing considerable sums, they gambled and tried to break established faro banks across the northwest. This was a cycle typical of professional gamblers of the day. They rarely remained in one town for too long – preferring, rather, to seek new ventures and gambling opportunities in a variety of places. This situation was sometimes governed by seasonal shifts in populations, downturns or booms in regional mining, as well as how much of a stranglehold their opposition had on the various games of chance when they arrived. Luck – good and bad – certainly played a part too, with some gamblers being superstitious and not wanting to break a winning streak, or quickly moving on if they could not catch a break.



So it was, in the middle of August 1880, for Charlie Storms and Dublin Lyons. After an unprofitable visit to Deadwood, they packed their bags and rode the Sidney stage coach out of the Black Hills heading, eventually, for Denver.¹⁰ Here, they reunited with Storms' brother, Peter Vallat, who was working as a faro dealer at one of the many elegant club rooms in the city. In Denver, Charlie Storms was said to have engaged in the "banking business" – slang for running a faro bank or table.¹¹ He didn't know it at the time, but his next gambling road trip with Dublin Lyons would be his last.

Johnny Tyler Arrives

Around the same time, a fellow Sloper named John E. Tyler was making his way from San Francisco to the boomtown of Tombstone, Arizona Territory. Tyler was a 40-year-old professional gambler who had worked the Nevada mining towns of Pioche, Eureka and Virginia City with Storms and Lyons during the boom days of the 1870s. He had a dangerous reputation with both pistol and knife, having killed a fellow gambler in San Francisco in 1870 and engaged in at least two gunfights in Nevada, before wearing out his welcome. In short, his presence in a town often resulted in violence of some sort, as he jockeyed with rivals for the lion's share of the gambling dollar. This is exactly what happened upon his arrival in Tombstone.

On September 23, 1880, Tyler clashed with a former associate from San Francisco, named Tony Kraker, at Vogan & Flynn's saloon. Pistols were pulled, but fellow patrons separated the two men before shots could be fired.¹² Tyler was at it again on October 10 when he clashed openly with Doc Holliday in the Oriental Saloon and was asked to leave before the trouble he had started escalated.¹³ The location of this confrontation was no accident, for the Oriental Saloon was seen as the "jewel in the crown" in terms of gambling establishments in Tombstone. The gaming room was lavishly appointed and doing good business and Tyler, who was dealing at a different saloon, wanted a piece of the action, or at least an opportunity to discourage their clientele. This behavior was common in San Francisco, where one proprietor once commented that extortion money, or "loans," had to be made to certain gamblers. Otherwise, they would cause trouble at your place and break up your game, driving away the regulars.¹⁴ Gambling was big business in Tombstone with much at stake. One former Virginia City, Nevada gambler described the state of play in Tombstone, on February 15, 1881:

"There are sixty saloons here and ten faro banks, besides chuck-a-luck, percentage, poker and the like. The gambling-houses are crowded from morning till night. The faro games all deal with ten-cent checks and \$12.50 limit. They don't split one check, and take three from a five-check bet. They split the last double, and pay three for one calls."¹⁵

Enter Luke Short

The gaming rooms at the plush Oriental were leased to a group of businessmen who hailed from east of the Pacific Slope, known by the slang term, "Easterners." At the head of this group was Lewis Rickabaugh. Born in Ohio in 1836, he was an experienced gambler who had learned the faro trade in the 1870s in Denver and later in Hot Springs and Little Rock, Arkansas.¹⁶ In May 1878, Rickabaugh had ventured to Deadwood to inspect that camp's



Luke Short

prospects and as luck would have it, he shared a stage coach ride from Cheyenne to Deadwood with Dublin Lyons.¹⁷ Once in Deadwood, he no doubt crossed paths with Charlie Storms, but Rickabaugh was seemingly unimpressed with his opportunities there, as he only remained in Deadwood for six months. In 1880, he had landed in San Francisco to buy fittings and fixtures for his business, before heading to Tombstone.

Rickabaugh was smart enough to know that his investment in the Oriental needed protection from the Slopers and any other would-be trouble makers. With that in mind, he offered Wyatt Earp an interest in the place in an effort to bolster his defences against disruptions to the games. The exact timing of Earp's partnership with Rickabaugh is hard to pinpoint, but it may have coincided with the arrival of another Easterner named Luke Short. Short was only 26 when he arrived in Tombstone about November 1880. Within a brief time he was working at the Oriental for Rickabaugh. Later reports claimed

that Short had been employed, like Earp, to protect the faro games. According to Short's most recent biographers, Jack DeMattos and Chuck Parsons, contrary to popular belief the gunman and gambler had not met Wyatt Earp prior to his arrival in Arizona.¹⁸ He may have been just another gambler chasing money in the boom town, but as it turned out, Lew Rickabaugh made a wise choice when he appointed him as a dealer and look-out at the Oriental. Short may not have had a well-known reputation when he arrived in Tombstone, but he did before he left.

With the Oriental Saloon possibly bolstered by the presence of Wyatt Earp, Luke Short and the soon-to-arrive Bat Masterson, Johnny Tyler may have decided that he, too, needed reinforcements. The task may have seemed more difficult than he first thought, but the Oriental was a prized establishment and the Slopers apparently called for Storms and Lyons from Denver. When recounting the story, *The National Police Gazette* went so far as to say that Charlie Storms was an imported fighter for the Slopers, sent to Tombstone to kill Luke Short. At the time, Storms certainly had the reputation of a veteran gambler and gunman, nifty and quick to violence. According to the *Deadwood* press, Storms had briefly visited Tucson, Arizona in the summer of 1880, prior to Tyler's arrival, to assess the potential of the gambling opportunities. He had returned to *Deadwood* full of praise for the place.¹⁹

Whether he was invited by Tyler, or simply decided to return for the rich pickings in Arizona is hard to determine, but late in 1880, Storms and Lyons left Denver and headed south. Lyons would later confide to Sloper friends in San Francisco that he went to Tombstone to set up a faro bank.²⁰ From Durango, they travelled to New Mexico, arriving at Santa Fe in January 1881. The *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican* reported that Storms visited with former *Deadwood* associates there before continuing his journey to Tombstone.²¹ Their arrival date in Arizona can be estimated at mid-February 1881 coming via Deming, New

Mexico, and eventually registering at the San Jose House in Tombstone. The San Jose House had a colorful past. Some claimed it had been a place of prostitution and had also doubled as a temporary jail before Tombstone had a properly functioning lock-up.²²

Exit Storms

Storms wasted little time in Tombstone before he went seeking trouble – specifically at the Oriental Saloon. Looking the part of a gambler, dressed in a light summer suit, complete with a silk handkerchief in the breast pocket, and carrying a concealed pistol, he proceeded to drink himself into an angry state.²³ In the early hours of Friday morning, February 25, 1881 he made his way to the Oriental's gambling rooms. It seems that his partner, Dublin Lyons, was not with him at this time. Full of booze and bluster, Storms proceeded to abuse the boss of the gambling room – Lewis Rickabaugh – clearly intent on making a spectacle and causing trouble. According to later reports, Rickabaugh could see the matter escalating and removed himself in the hope that Storms would calm



Faro game in Morenci, Arizona, 1895

down. Rickabaugh slipped out a side door, but then Storms turned his drunken attention to Luke Short, who was dealing at a faro table.²⁴

Until now, most accounts of what happened next have relied on Bat Masterson, who claimed he was present for the entire affair, and Tombstone resident and diarist, George Parsons, who arrived on the scene just after the fact. Luke Short's full version of events is

believed never to have been examined, primarily because the coroner's inquest file has never been located and the issue of the *Tombstone Daily Nugget* newspaper that carried the coroner's report is missing. However, a transcript of Luke Short's inquest testimony, reported in the February 27 issue of the *Tombstone Daily Nugget* was reprinted in the *Deadwood Pioneer* on March 13, 1881. It is clear from the testimony that the inquest was conducted on Saturday, February 26. Short stated:

*"My name is Luke Short, 27 years of age; born in Arkansas; resided in Tombstone two or three months; am a speculator. The first of the occurrence was yesterday morning. I went to work at the Oriental. Storms came in there and began playing against the game; he mentioned about fighting, saying he could lick anybody in the house, then he said he would like to be a peon for some son of a bitch and looked at me; I told him to stop it. Here some words followed that I do not remember exactly; [according to later reports in *The Cheyenne Sun*, at one point, Short called Storms an "old gray-bearded son of a bitch".] He asked me to go out into the street and fight him; he said he would give me the first shot; he had about \$75 worth of checks before him at the time and said he would bet me all of them to a quarter of a dollar that he could lick me and give me the first shot. I told him no, that I did not want to fight; but I did not want to be insulted any more by him; he then said, "to show you that I am a fighter I will make you a present of all these checks if you will go out and fight me; I will not make any body (sic) play at you, I will show you that I am heeled." He then pulled his gun; I told him to be careful how he handled it. He then asked if I would go out in the back yard and have a civil talk. I told him that I would and went out with him. When we got out there he said that it was a mistake, he did not want to insult me; it was a different party altogether. I told him it was a very gross insult, but if he did not mean it for me we would drop it and be friends, to which we both agreed. I went back inside and went to work, and he to playing against another game in the same house. Shortly afterward he bought a bottle of wine and called me to drink with him,*

which I did; I thought then it was all settled; I came off watch at 1 o'clock, not thinking; Mr. Rickabough (sic) and Mr. Masterson told me to look out for myself, that Storms was making threats against me, and that he threatened to kill me; I intended to go back and speak to him, but he was drinking and I thought I would wait until he got sober; I, Mr. Masterson and Mr. Lyons, Storms' partner called Dublin, were standing talking on the platform in front of the Oriental; Storms came out of the Oriental and caught me by the lapel of the coat, and said, "I want to see you;" we walked probably 10 feet; he stepped firm; he was a little ahead of me; he then turned around and said, "You called me an old son of a bitch;" and I said (I do not remember the words I used) but I said; Did we not agree to settle it; he made no reply to that, but said: "You called me a son of bitch and I want to know if you are as good a man as you were then;" I hesitated a little; before I had time to answer he said: "You son of a bitch," and then grabbed his gun, and as soon as he did this I grabbed my gun and both went to work; I thought we both fired at the same time; I can't tell exactly as I was excited when he called me away from Mr. Dublin, his partner. The position that Storms stopped in placed me between the two, with my back to Dublin and facing Storms. After the first shots were fired I made a circle back to get away from Dublin to protect myself against Dublin, or whoever may be behind me; I saw that Storms was falling and took my eye off him to look the other way; when I looked back, Storms was nearly on his back, but had his head and shoulders up; when I looked the other way I saw everybody was gone; when I looked back and saw Storms, he was lying on his back with his head and shoulders up off the ground, his pistol in both hands, his eyes following me in a direction I was taking; I tried to get to one side; he had his six-shooter levelled at me, and I expected he would shoot; I dropped on my knees and fired at him; don't know whether I hit him or not; immediately after I fired the last time his hands and gun seemed to fall on his breast."²⁵

(The post mortem showed that both of Short's bullets hit Storms.)

Masterson claimed later that he had intervened to stop a gunfight between Short and Storms during their first verbal argument in the Oriental Saloon, yet Short does not mention Masterson in that part of his testimony. Short maintained that he had calmed Storms during their sojourn in the back-yard area in the early hours. Masterson is only mentioned later in the day when he warned Short of the subsequent threats that had been made while Short had been absent from the Oriental. In Masterson's version, he claims to have escorted Storms back to his room at the San Jose House to sleep off his drunkenness. Masterson had later returned to the Oriental, only to see Storms reappear and enter the place again, hunting for Short. For his part, Short had presumably taken a break from work to eat and rest. He may have been making his way back to do an afternoon shift at about 1p.m. when Storms exited the Oriental and grabbed him by the arm. This time Storms' partner, Lyons, was with him, but waited outside when he went hunting for Short the second time in the Oriental. The fact that Dublin Lyons did not try to stop his partner from assaulting Short may indicate that he was confident that Storms would be too much for Short to handle. For his part, Masterson may well have escorted Storms back to his room without Short's knowledge. Masterson also claimed to have been a good friend of both Storms and Short prior to the gunfight, but this statement, like some others he made, is hard to validate.

Another eyewitness to the shooting was Tombstone doctor and gunshot surgeon, George Goodfellow. He made the following observations about the shooting in a medical paper he wrote concerning the effect of bullets on silk fabric:

"I was a few feet distant from a couple of individuals who were quarrelling. They began shooting. The first shot took effect, as was afterward ascertained, in the left breast of one of the them, [Storms] who, after being shot, and while staggering back some twelve feet, cocked and fired his pistol twice, his second shot going into the air, for by that time he was on his back. He never made a motion after pulling the trigger the second time, the pistol dropping to the ground

with his hands."²⁶

Goodfellow estimated that Luke Short actually shot Charlie Storms from a distance of about six feet and stated that Short's weapon on the day was a cut-off Colt .45. Carrying a small concealed pistol was the popular choice of most gamblers at the time, as betting disputes often escalated quickly to life and death confrontations. Short appears to have preferred the stopping power of a .45, albeit with a shortened barrel for easier carry and concealment. It is not known what weapon Storms fired that day.



Once the shooting had finished, Short stated that he "then stepped up on the porch, and looked around for a moment, when a policeman ran up to me and said, "Give me your gun;" I told him "all right," but that I wanted protection; about that time Mr. Earp got there; he said "this is my prisoner;" I said all right take my gun," and this is all I know."²⁷

Short refers to a "policeman" without providing a name, indicating that he may not have known the officer. He then goes on to refer to "Mr. Earp" placing him in protective custody. This may have been Wyatt Earp, sensing a reprisal shooting from Storms' partner, Dublin Lyons. Short was obviously mindful of the possibility and had taken his eyes off Storms during the gunfight to assess any other immediate threat from Lyons. Wyatt Earp would later say that he helped to carry the body of Charlie Storms back to the San Jose rooming house where the now-deceased gambler and Lyons had been staying, so that a post mortem could be performed by Dr. Goodfellow. Tension must have been very high at this point, as Dublin Lyons was said to have protested against this procedure taking place. Wyatt Earp's first biographer, Stuart Lake, had jotted in his research notes that "Dublin, Storms' partner, tried to stop [the] post mortem."²⁸ Presumably distressed and angered at the death of his close friend and partner of the last 10 years, Lyons understandably did not wish any further indignities to be forced upon the body. Lyons was unsuccessful in his attempt, however, probably due to the presence of Earp, who was asked to wait around at that time.²⁹

The post mortem went ahead and was carried out by Dr. Goodfellow, presumably at the San Jose boarding house. Goodfellow later documented his findings:

*"Half an hour afterward I made an examination of the body. Upon stripping it, found not a drop of blood had come from either of the two wounds received. From the wound in the breast a silk handkerchief protruded, which I presumed had been stuffed in by some of his friends to prevent bleeding. I withdrew it and with it came the bullet. It was then seen that that it had been carried in by the ball. Upon opening the body, the track of the ball was found to be as follows: through the left ventricle, thence through the descending aorta; thence into and through the body of either the second or third dorsal vertebra into the spinal canal, fracturing the laminae. The ball came from a cut-off Colt 45-calibre revolver, fired at a distance of six feet."*⁸⁰

The coroner predictably found that Storms had come to his death via gunshot wounds inflicted by Luke Short. The faro dealer was held for a brief preliminary hearing into the killing, conducted before Tombstone Justice of the Peace Albert O. Wallace. The hearing appears to have taken place the day after the shooting, on Saturday, February 26, 1881, with lawyer William J. Hunsaker representing Short. Justice Wallace promptly found that Short had no murder case to answer and discharged the defendant.³¹

The Charlie Storms was buried in the Boot Hill Cemetery in Tombstone. He had apparently been busy in his private life, as he left one widow, named Mary, in San Francisco and another named Nellie or Nettie, who was a madam, in Leadville, Colorado.³²

As far as Lyons and the Slopers were concerned, Storms' funeral did not end the matter. The following day, Sunday February 27, more trouble occurred at the Oriental between Dublin Lyons, Wyatt Earp and Lew Rickabaugh. Lyons would later tell fellow Slopers that the two men "got the drop on him in the Oriental Saloon and he had a hard time making his escape."³³

Correspondence sent later from another gambler in San Francisco indicated that Rickabaugh may have tried to kill Lyons during this confrontation, but exact details are lacking. Lyons claimed that he decided to leave Tombstone, as the Earps and Rickabaugh refused to allow him to open a faro bank. This story fits with a news item printed in the *Phoenix Herald*, but in reality, Lyons' mind was made up for him and he was ordered out by Wyatt Earp. The *Herald* probably understated the clash when it reported:

*"A slight fracas (sic) occurred (sic) in Tombstone, Sunday night last [February 27th] owing to some misunderstanding between one Lyons (better known as Dublin) who was a partner with the late C. S. Storms in the gambling business, and Wyatt Earp. Dublin was ordered to leave town, which he did."*³⁴

The story of Lyons' exile from Tombstone was later corroborated by former Panamint gunman and gambler Jim Bruce, who had arrived in Tombstone with Dan Tipton, two weeks after Storms had been killed. Writing to a friend in Deadwood on March 17, 1881, Bruce noted:

*"The town and country is overrun with hard cases from all over the world. There are many Black Hillers here, and most of them would like to be back again. Dublin was ordered to leave the town a few days after Charley Storms was shot, and he very quietly got up and dusted."*³⁵



Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp, 1876

Lyons' departure was a little livelier than Jim Bruce wrote, but the fact was that he had been humiliated and forced out of Tombstone for good. Lyons had packed his faro case and headed to San Francisco, where he gave fellow Slopers a heavily biased account of his treatment at the hands of the Earp gang of gamblers, who "had things pretty much their own way." The *Oakland Tribune* reported that Lyons "always cherished hard feelings against the Earps and Rickaban, (sic) and whenever their names were mentioned would give his opinion of them in severe tones."³⁶ Lyons may have been gone from Tombstone, but he clearly carried a grudge and was yet to play his final hand against the Earps and Lew Rickabaugh.

Luke Short may have remained in Tombstone until May 2, 1881 when a grand jury agreed with Justice Wallace's previous decision and took no further action. In any case, Short left Arizona and was seen, possibly in early May 1881 in Deming, before making his way to Dodge City, Kansas.³⁷

For his part, Johnny Tyler must have been disheartened by the bungled "all or nothing" play by Storms and the subsequent humiliation and exile of Lyons. However, further gunplay and another shooting at the Oriental, not two weeks later, forced Milt Joyce, the lessee of the saloon, to close the gambling room. Tyler had achieved success, albeit at the high cost of Storms' life and he remained in Tombstone, awaiting a further opportunity to rise in the ranks among the gambling fraternity. The next three months were quiet for him in terms of gunplay, but he did receive a mention as participating in a high-stakes poker game at the Alhambra Saloon in Tombstone. The May 29, 1881 edition of the *Tucson Weekly Citizen* reported the participants as Dick Clark, who was a partner of Lew Rickabaugh; John Marshall Nichols, a faro dealer from the Crystal Palace known as "Napa Nick"; Williard Augustus "Bill" Freeze, a former Deadwood gambler, and Johnny Tyler, the prominent Sloper. The game ran for several days with a \$2.50 ante and \$10 a chip. Who the big winners were went unreported.³⁸

Rickabaugh and his partners eventually moved their gambling rooms to a new location above the Oriental Saloon. They reopened for business on June 11, 1881 and, according to available circumstantial evidence, it would seem that soon after the reopening, Johnny Tyler

made another attempt to cause trouble for the house.³⁹ Earp biographer Lake later wrote that Tyler arrived at the Oriental with some followers and proceeded to abuse Rickabaugh at his own faro table. According to Lake, Earp stepped up and forcibly removed Tyler from the gambling room, throwing him out into Allen Street and warning him off.⁴⁰ There may have been a lot more to the clash, as records show that Wyatt was arrested by his brother, Virgil, around this time and fined in Justice Wallace's court for disturbing the peace. The incident may have cost Earp a \$20 fine, but the consequences were far worse for Tyler. His humiliation at the hands of Wyatt Earp echoed the previous treatment of Dublin Lyons and also marked the end of his stay in Tombstone. He packed his bags and relocated to Tucson, before heading to Colorado. A notice of an unclaimed Wells Fargo letter for Tyler published in the *Arizona Weekly Citizen* on December 18, 1881 was the last evidence of his presence in Tucson. A San Francisco newspaper would later report that Tyler had fled Arizona after running afoul of the Earp brothers. It noted that, "he took a licking from some of them and allowed himself to be driven out of Tombstone."⁴¹



Johnny Tyler then moved to Leadville, Colorado where he dealt faro and sought the company of former gambling friends from Nevada. Dublin Lyons moved back to San Francisco, allied himself with some powerful Democratic politicians, and opened a faro bank on Sutter Street in far more friendlier surroundings. Both men probably took great pleasure and a certain degree of satisfaction when they read, or heard, of the subsequent violence and misfortune that ended the Earp brothers' stay in Arizona early in 1882. Starting with the gunfight near the OK Corral, next came the maiming of Virgil Earp's arm; the murder of Morgan Earp and several revenge killings by Wyatt Earp. Wyatt and Warren Earp were exiled for a period in Colorado to escape extradition. James and Virgil Earp and their respective wives returned to their family home in Colton, California, and tried to recover from the physical and mental scars inflicted on their family over the previous six months.

Virgil, in particular, was in need of surgery on his badly wounded left arm. In May 1882, he made his way to San Francisco to seek expert care and surgical treatment.⁴² He must have liked the city and its apparent money-making opportunities, since the *Los Angeles Herald* reported in July 1882 that Virgil had started a business in San Francisco.⁴³ The enterprise, of course, was faro. Earp had opened a gambling den on the second floor of a building at 15 Morton Street. A reporter from the *San Francisco Chronicle* visited the "clubrooms" of the Earp brothers and described the "Tiger's Lair" as having a front door fitted with a burglar or police alarm; thickly carpeted stairs that led to a second story and a knob-less door, in which a four-inch cut had been made so that a look-out could screen any visitors and "watch over the tiger's fortunes."⁴⁴

This time, the Earp brothers were in Sloper territory and the old Arizona troubles would come to the fore again.

Dublin Lyons' faro bank was located on Sutter Street in San Francisco and now, 18 months after his humiliation in Tombstone, he wanted to even the score. The *Oakland Tribune* noted that, "his hatred toward the Earps was such that even at the risk of hurting his own game, he took steps to have their gambling house closed up when they opened on Morton Street, and many a raid on their place was credited to Dublin."⁴⁵ It did not take him long either. The *San Francisco Chronicle* noted that raids were carried out by police on nine establishments on the evening of August 1, 1882. The first joint hit, and hit hard, was the Earp clubrooms at Morton Street. The *Chronicle* told the story:

*At 15 Morton Street, the posse under Sergeant Bethel broke in the door and ascended to the second story, where the gambling rooms are located, and succeeded in arresting fifteen persons and in capturing the entire layout of checks, boxes, cards, etc., and \$1422 in cash. The game at this place was conducted by Virgil Earp, a member of the notorious Earp family of Arizona who carried his arm in a sling from the result of some recent fracas.*⁴⁶

The *Chronicle* went on to document the other raids that the night, but noticeably failed to mention what had happened at the raid on Lyons' place at Sutter Street. Apparently his joint was one of those where a warning had been given in

time for the closure of the game and the exit of the patrons before the police arrived.

Virgil Earp paid bail of \$200 for himself and \$40 a head for all his arrested patrons. Coupled with the loss of \$1422 – the most of any joint on the night – and all the playing equipment, the raid had been a very expensive inconvenience for Virgil. Undeterred, he maintained the lease on the Morton Street location, but spent the next couple of months regrouping, spending time in Colton and allowing his left arm to heal as best it could. In October 1882, he reunited with either Warren or Wyatt Earp, or both, when they returned from Colorado. The *Sacramento Daily Record-Union* of October 20, 1882 noted that Virgil had arrived in town to meet his brother, W. B. Earp, who was arriving from the East. The *Los Angeles Herald* would later report that V. W. Earp and W. S. Earp passed Fresno heading south on October 31, 1882.⁴⁷ It appears that over the next few months, all four remaining Earp brothers, including James, eventually came together in San Francisco to headquarter at the Morton Street faro establishment. Wyatt was definitely involved, as he used this same address in an advertisement he posted in the January 10, 1883 *San Francisco Chronicle*: "Lost – Diamond Ring containing three diamonds, Suitable reward on return to W. S. Earp, 15 Morton Street."⁴⁸

The next significant report of a police raid on gaming in San Francisco came in early March 1883 and it was noticeably aimed straight at the location of the Earp premises. Dublin Lyons had moved his game to Geary Street, and reports of the raids at the time did not mention his name, or his new premises. The police focused on Morton Street and on the night of March 10, they hit a game at No. 21 before attempting to gain access to the Earp rooms down the street. This time, the brothers had been warned. They closed the faro bank and left in time to avoid arrest. Still, the police raids took their toll, and Virgil, James and Warren headed back to Colton, California, where James would run a saloon. Wyatt was on the move, too. The *Sacramento Daily Record-Union* reported that he passed through their city on April, 5 1883, heading east for a stop in Utah, on his way to back to Colorado.⁵⁰ He would soon be called on to assist Luke Short, who was about to experience his own exile from Dodge City.

The Earp brothers' departure from San Francisco could be attributed to the work of Dublin Lyons, with the help of some political pals and a corruptible police force. Upon his return to San Francisco, Lyons had allied himself with one of the most powerful Democratic politicians in the city's history – Christopher A. Buckley. Like Lyons, Buckley was the son of poor Irish immigrants and the two men formed a bond, born of their similar backgrounds and beliefs. Buckley shared Lyons' love of gambling, having been roughly schooled in the saloons and gambling dens of the Barbary Coast and, yet, both men were well-read and well-versed in the politics of the day. In Buckley's case, he had a charisma and political savvy that saw him rise to power within the Democratic political machine in San Francisco. His achievements were remarkable given the fact that he gradually began losing his eye-sight as a young man in the 1870s, eventually being rendered totally blind. This would have ended most men's careers, but not Buckley. He surrounded himself with faithful friends and a bodyguard and continued his rise to power, relying heavily on his remarkable memory and well-honed sensory skills. He would have associates read him the news of the day and other relevant mail and documents so that he was fully versed in the current affairs of the city, the state and the nation.⁵¹ According to later reports, Dublin Lyons was one of Buckley's closest supporters. In fact, Lyons' friendship with Buckley was so strong that he was credited with being one of Buckley's chief political advisors during the period 1883-1885. He also had a financial interest in Buckley's success, as it was said that when times were tight Lyons provided unqualified financial backing for the so-called "Blind Boss."⁵²



Lyons was a decade older than Buckley and his life of roving the frontier, spent mainly in smoky saloons and gambling dens, had taken its toll. His health declined and, stricken with paralysis, he eventually died at 51 on January 30, 1885 in San Francisco. His funeral was fittingly conducted with great respect from the

home of "Boss" Buckley.⁵³

Almost two years to the day after his passing, Lyons would still be able to cause problems for his old nemesis from Arizona, Lewis Rickabaugh. During their time together, Lyons had told Buckley a very biased report of his exile from Tombstone at the hands of the Earp brothers and Rickabaugh. Buckley was fiercely loyal to his friends and, although Lyons was 24 months in the grave, when the opportunity presented itself, Buckley took it upon himself to continue the feud with Rickabaugh.⁵⁴



Lew Rickabaugh had spent the intervening years running gambling houses in Tombstone, Tucson and El Paso. In January 1887, he arrived in San Francisco from Arizona, intent on opening new gambling rooms. He was soon told that he needed permission from the "Blind Boss" to deal faro there. Rickabaugh apparently met with Buckley the same week and Buckley told him in no uncertain terms that he should vacate the city and take his faro lay-out elsewhere. According to the *Oakland Tribune*, Buckley did not waste words when he said, "You injured my dead friend, Dublin, and you shall never turn a card in San Francisco, if I can stop you."⁵⁵

Unimpressed, Rickabaugh at first denied the charge, but then called Buckley's bluff. "Well, all right," he said, "if I can't deal by your leave, I'll deal against it."⁵⁶ Rickabaugh did not believe Buckley had the power to carry out his threats, but he was wrong. The "Blind Boss" called on all his political influence and coerced the Police Commissioner to "flex his muscle." Within a Yet, the circumstantial evidence strongly suggests the power struggle for control of the greater share of the Tombstone gambling dollar was very real, linked by a series of violent confrontations, threats and intimidation. As shown in the case of Charlie Storms and Dublin Lyons, the animosities created by that same struggle ran deep and lingered long after both were dead. week, the police visited all the gambling dens in the area, including Rickabaugh's place, and forced him out of business. A stunned, yet

wiser, Rickabaugh then pragmatically relocated to Los Angeles. John Taylor, a fellow gambler from San Francisco, confirmed the story in a letter to the infamous conman Jeff "Soapy" Smith written January 17, 1887:

"Friend Jeff, I write these few lines to let you know that I am going away for a few weeks. I leave this afternoon for Los Angeles. I am going to try and work the lower country. They close [sic] Bank [faro] on Friday. I heard Buckley had them stop on account of Lew Rickenbaugh [sic]. I hear that he tried to have Dublin kill [sic] in Arizona and they say that is the reason he had them stopped. Yours Truly, John Taylor."⁵⁷

Boss Buckley's final play, on behalf of Lyons, ended a gambler's row that had started six years before in Tombstone. Some writers have downplayed Tombstone's so-called Gambler's War, between the Slopers and the Easterners, while others have not connected Charlie Storms' killing with that same struggle for the faro dollar.

Yet, the circumstantial evidence strongly suggests the power struggle for control of the greater share of the Tombstone gambling dollar was very real, linked by a series of violent confrontations, threats and intimidation. As shown in the case of Charlie Storms and Dublin Lyons, the animosities created by that same struggle ran deep and lingered long after both were dead.

Spiritus Mortem

Charlie Storms' brother, Peter Vallat, seemed to successfully avoid trouble and the limelight, but his life ended just as abruptly and violently as that of Charlie. He rode his luck, good and bad, throughout the West and at one stage, was said to have amassed a fortune from gambling. However, after marrying and settling in Denver, he went the same way as many of his kind. His luck deserted him at the faro tables and, exacerbated by a seemingly insurmountable gambling debt and a failing relationship, he fell into a deep depression. On the morning of June 11, 1887, Vallat locked himself in a hotel room, with his former landlady as an unwilling witness, and shot himself in the head with a .45 caliber pistol. With no money to his name, his funeral was paid for by associates from the Denver gambling fraternity. More than 500 people viewed the 52-year-old's remains prior to his burial.⁵⁸

After his exile from Tombstone, Johnny Tyler spent the next few years gambling in Colorado, where, in 1884, he clashed again with Doc Holliday in Leadville. The old Sloper-Easterner animosity reared its head again, as Tyler tried to cause trouble for Holliday, perhaps as a way to restore the pride he lost at the hands of Wyatt Earp and Lew Rickabaugh in Tombstone. Holliday survived his troubles with Tyler in Leadville, but could not win his own battle with tuberculosis. He was only 36 when he died away in Glenwood Springs, Colorado on November 8, 1887.⁵⁹

Tyler eventually returned to California and lived for a while in Grass Valley, before heading north to Spokane Falls, Washington. He was drinking heavily and flat broke when he scored a job, dealing faro at a resort in Spokane Falls, in December 1890. Tyler was living on borrowed time when his alcoholism dealt him a sudden and final hand. After an all-night bender that left the 52-year-old gambler in a delirious state, he collapsed and died on the morning of January 21, 1891 while trying to return to his lodgings. Once again, it was left to the gambling fraternity to see to his burial.⁶⁰

Luke Short's career after Tombstone involved further gambling disputes and another deadly gunfight as he gained an infamous reputation in sporting circles throughout the West. He became a somewhat successful saloon owner and businessman and was never far from a headline. But his life was cut short by the effects of renal failure. He died on the morning of September 8, 1893 at a hotel in Geuda Springs, Kansas, where he had travelled seeking treatment. He was only 39.⁶¹



Peter Brand is a Australian writer and researcher of the American Wild West, with a special interest in Wyatt Earp's Vendetta Posse. Visit tombstonevendetta.com for more on his previous projects.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Denver Daily News*, February 27, 1881.
- ² *Leadville Carbonate Chronicle*, June 20, 1887.
- ³ *Ibid*; *The Denver Daily News*, February 27, 1881; *The Miner*, (Prescott) September 21, 187
- ⁴ Californian State Census, 1852. Ancestry.com
- ⁵ Californian Great Register of Voters, 1870. Ancestry.com
- ⁶ *California Daily Alta*, January 31, 1885.
- ⁷ *Oakland Tribune*, February 5, 1887.
- ⁸ *Deadwood Pioneer*, August 19, 1876;
- ⁹ *Cheyenne Weekly Leader*, December 20, 1877.
- ¹⁰ *Black Hills Daily Times*, August 18, 1880.
- ¹¹ *Black Hills Weekly Pioneer*, October 16, 1880.
- ¹² *Tombstone Daily Epitaph*, September 24, 1880.
- ¹³ *Tombstone Daily Epitaph*, October 12, 1880.
- ¹⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 11, 1872.
- ¹⁵ *Deadwood Pioneer*, March 5, 1881.
- ¹⁶ 1866 Denver Business Directory, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado; 1870 Federal Census, Denver, Colorado, Ancestry.com; 1871 Rocky Mountain Directory, Colorado Historical Society; 1873-1874 Little Rock, Arkansas City Directory, courtesy Jean Smith; 1876-1877 Hot Springs, Arkansas City Directory, courtesy Jean Smith.
- ¹⁷ *Cheyenne Daily Sun*, May 5, 1878.
- ¹⁸ DeMattos, Jack and Chuck Parsons. *The Notorious Luke Short; Sporting Man of the Wild West*. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2015, pp. 30-31.
- ¹⁹ *The Ntional Police Gazette*, July 21, 1883; *The Black Hills Daily Times*, July 29, 1880.
- ²⁰ *Oakland Tribune*, February 5, 1887.
- ²¹ *Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 2, 1881.
- ²² Palmquist, Robert. "Snuffing Out a Gambler: Short vs. Storms." *Wild West Magazine*, October 2004.
- ²³ Goodfellow, G.E., M.D. "The Impenetrability of Silk to Bullets." *The Southern California Practitioner*, Vol. II, No.1, Los Angeles, January 1887. Goodfellow describes Storms' clothing and gun on the day of the fight in discussing his medical findings.
- ²⁴ *The Omaha Daily Bee*, September 12, 1893.
- ²⁵ *Deadwood Pioneer*, March 13, 1881.
- ²⁶ Goodfellow, "The Impenetrability of Silk to Bullets."
- ²⁷ *Deadwood Pioneer*, March 13, 1881. Unfortunately, the *Deadwood Pioneer* only published Short's testimony. The original *Daily Nugget* article presumably reported more witness accounts, but until that issue, or the original inquest papers surface, the other witnesses who testified are not known.
- ²⁸ Roberts, Gary L. *Doc Holliday: The Life and Legend*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2006, p. 448.
- ²⁹ *Ibid*.
- ³⁰ "The Impenetrability of Silk to Bullets," G. E. Goodfellow, M. D. *The Southern California Practitioner*, Volume II, No.1, Los Angeles, January 1887.
- ³¹ Palmquist, "Snuffing Out a Gambler: Short vs. Storms."
- ³² *The Denver Daily News*, February 27, 1881; *Leadville Daily Herald*, March 2, 1881.
- ³³ *Oakland Tribune*, February 5, 1887.
- ³⁴ *Phoenix Herald*, March 4, 1881.
- ³⁵ *The Black Hills Weekly Pioneer*, April 9, 1881. Ironically, Jim Bruce was as much a hard case as any man in Tombstone at the time, having killed two men in separate gunfights in Panamint City in the mid-1870s.
- ³⁶ *Oakland Tribune*, February 5, 1887.
- ³⁷ *The Arizona Weekly Citizen*, May 15, 1881.
- ³⁸ *The Arizona Weekly Citizen*, May 29, 1881.
- ³⁹ Roberts, *Doc Holliday: The Life and Legend*, p. 152.
- ⁴⁰ Lake, Stuart N. *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931, pp. 252-254.
- ⁴¹ *Spokane Falls Chronicle*, January 30, 1891. (Taken from the *San Francisco Examiner*)
- ⁴² *San Francisco Bulletin*, May 29, 1882.
- ⁴³ *Los Angeles Herald*, July 18, 1882.
- ⁴⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 6, 1883.
- ⁴⁵ *Oakland Tribune*, February 5, 1887.
- ⁴⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 2, 1882.
- ⁴⁷ *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, October 20, 1882; *Los Angeles Herald*, November 1, 1882.

⁴⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 10, 1883 contains Wyatt Earp's advertisement; *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 22, 1883 showed unclaimed mail for both Virgil Earp and James Earp. In addition, the San Francisco City Directory for 1883 lists Virgil Earp, Warren B. Earp and Wyatt S. Earp as all residing at 604 Pine. This information was probably collated in late 1882, which fits with Wyatt and Warren's return from Colorado.

⁴⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 11, 1883; *San Francisco Chronicle* of April 22, 1883 reported that "the three gamblers arrested in the faro game of William (sic) Earp at 3 (sic) Morton Street each forfeited \$40 bail."

⁵⁰ *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, April 6, 1883.

⁵¹ Bullough, William A. *The Blind Boss And His City; Christopher Augustine Buckley & Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*. [place]: University of California Press, 1979.

⁵² *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 1, 1885; *Oakland Tribune*, February 5, 1887.

⁵³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 1, 1885.

⁵⁴ *Oakland Tribune*, February 5, 1887.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

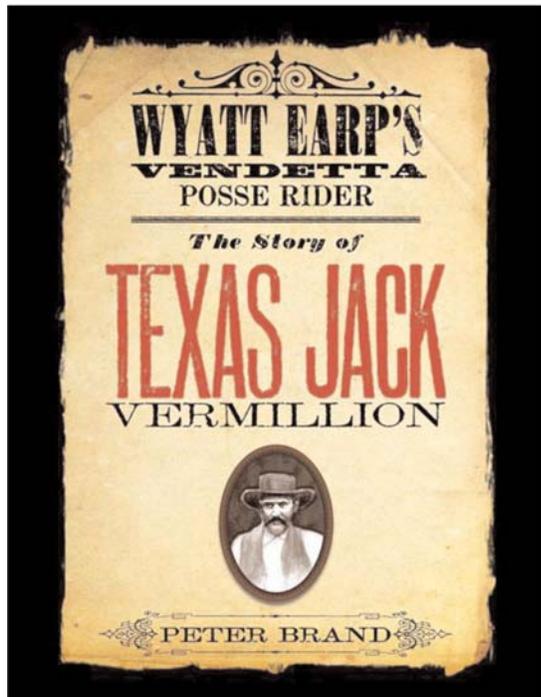
⁵⁷ Smith, Jeff. *Alias Soapy Smith: The Life and Death of a Scoundrel - The Biography of Jefferson Randolph Smith II*. [place?]: Klondike Research, 2009, p. 110.

⁵⁸ *Denver Daily News*, June 13, 1887.

⁵⁹ Roberts, *Doc Holliday: The Life and Legend*, p. 371.

⁶⁰ *Spokane Falls Chronicle*, January 21, 1891.

⁶¹ DeMattos and Parsons, *The Notorious Luke Short; Sporting Man of the Wild West*, p. 232.



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