



powered by

A Freely Accessible Repository
of Digitized California
Newspapers from 1846 to the
Present



State support of the CDNC has been cut. **Please sign our petition** to encourage legislators to restore funding.

San Francisco Call, Volume 72, Number 139, 17 October 1892 — DEATH IN A STAIRWELL.
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

DEATH IN A STAIRWELL.

The Fatal Fall of Capitalist Thomas Bell.

DOWN A FLIGHT OF STAIRS.

While Moving About His Home in the Darkness He
Took the Wrong Door---His
Busy Life.

Thomas Bell of the firm of Thomas Bell & Co., commission merchants, died suddenly at his residence, 1661 Octavia street, at 1:30 o'clock yesterday morning, from injuries he received three hours before his death.

Mr. Bell has been an invalid for several weeks. On Saturday evening he passed an hour in the company of his children quite pleasantly, and at 9 o'clock he retired to his

bedroom.

At 10:30 the colored butler heard his master's voice crying out, "Where am I?" and immediately afterward there was a noise, which seemed to come from the rear end of the lower hall.

The butler hastened to ascertain what was going on, and when he arrived at the foot of a winding staircase which leads to the upper floor he was horrified to see the

form of Mr. Bell, dressed in his nightclothes only, lying apparently lifeless on the carpet.

He summoned assistance, and when the aged capitalist was returned to his couch it was found that he was still alive, but doubtless badly injured, and unconscious.

Dr. Peter A. Kearney, who was Dr. Bell's physician, was summoned, and when he arrived he found that his patient had sustained a violent concussion of the brain, and, in addition, had cerebral hemorrhage.

Bell was beyond medical aid, and, as stated, he breathed his last at 1:30 without recovering consciousness.

Investigations were made, and from them the following theory of how the accident occurred was arrived at.

Bell's bedroom is connected with a bathroom, which also has as outlet through a door leading directly to the winding stairs, at the foot of which he was found.

It is supposed that he visited the bathroom and, becoming absent-minded, mistook the door that leads to the stairs for his bedroom door when he wanted to return to the latter apartment.

He was very weak and exhausted from his illness, so when he stepped across the threshold and lost his footing he could not recover his balance, and fell over the low balustrade down to the bottom of the stairwell.

Thomas Bell was a native of Scotland and was a little over 70 years old.

There are few men in this city who have been closer identified with its history and who are more widely known in the world of

finance and commerce than he.

When quite a boy Bell left his native country to go to Valparaiso, where he became a clerk in a large mercantile house, and it was as an agent for that firm that he first visited San Francisco, early in 1850.

He decided to make California his home at that time, but first he returned to Valparaiso to sever his connection with his employers there.

In the latter part of the same year he arrived here for the second time, and for forty-two years he has resided constantly in San Francisco.

Presley C. Hyman, the mining man, who has been a most intimate friend of Bell during all these years, gave his career in this city yesterday to a CALL reporter.

Shortly after arriving here he associated himself with two others, and they founded the firm of Bolton, Barron & Co., which after a few years became Barron & Co.

Eustace and W. E. Barron and Thomas Bell were the partners in this latter firm, which for many years was the leading broker, mining and commission house on the Pacific Coast.

It was during these years that Bell laid the foundation for what later became a large fortune.

There was no mining deal in the great Comstock days that he had not something to do with.

He and his partners were the agents for all the big European and South American houses who did business with California, and when the Barrons died somewhere in 1872 or 1873 the business all fell into the hands of Bell, who took George Staake into partnership, and so created the present firm of Thomas Bell & Co.

Bell was one of the originators and incorporators of the first Bank of California in 1864, and when that institution closed its doors years afterward it was Bell who, with D. O. Mills, cabled to the Rothschilds and got them to become responsible for the bank's paper, thereby enabling it to resume business.

Bell, besides his other multifarious business connections, was also the quicksilver

magnate of the Pacific Coast, controlling as he did the New Almaden, the New Adria and the Standard quicksilver mines.

He was also the owner of the Triompho silver mine near San Blas in Mexico, and when his estate is settled it will be found that he owns mining properties in many parts of the country.

It was Bell who built the Central American Railroad, which runs from Guatemala to San Jose de Guatemala, and which he sold some four years ago to a syndicate.

In Santa Barbara County there is a magnificent ranch covering 30,000 acres owned by Bell, and another ranch located in Sonoma County is owned partly by his widow and partly by Mrs. Mary E. Pleasant, the Mammy Pleasant of Sharon trial fame, who for over twenty years has been Bell's trusted housekeeper and confidential friend.

The very valuable property on Octavia and Sutter streets, where the Bell family resides, was some years ago deeded to his wife by Bell.

Mrs. Bell was out of town when the accident which resulted so sadly occurred. She was at her ranch in Sonoma County, but a dispatch was sent her yesterday and she is expected home to-day.

Besides the widow Bell leaves six children, three boys and three girls. The eldest son, Fred, is 18 years old, and has just returned from Atlanta, Ga., where he has been at college. The oldest daughter is 16 years of age and is a pupil in the Oakland Convent. The other younger children are at home.

Bell was a very quiet and almost unsociable man, but he spent large amounts of money in an unostentatious way for charitable purposes, and there are many people in this community who are largely indebted to him for the timely assistance he rendered them in the hours of need.

Of late years Bell preferred to spend all the hours he did not devote to business at home. He was not connected with any fraternal organization and never strove for political honors.

On 'change in London, Glasgow, New York and San Francisco for many years his name has been synonymous with honesty, pluck and clear business judgment. The funeral will take place on Wednesday from the family residence.



Thomas Bell.

This article has been automatically clipped from the San Francisco Call, organised into a single column, then optimised for display on your computer screen. As a result, it may not look exactly as it did on the original page. The article can be seen in its original form in the [page view](#).