

Theron R. Butler

By Walt Zaenker

The following article appears at greater length with graphics and documentation on the history blog at pineknollhistory.blogspot.com.



Alice Green Hoffman, who is so much a part of the history of Pine Knoll Shores, is often described as an eccentric New York socialite, but her life was more complex than that. In 1920, at the age of 57, she controlled a real estate portfolio that included holdings in Paris, New York City, Connecticut and Carteret County. She regularly dealt with the highest ranks of business and government players in those locales. She never hesitated to call on her connections—and expected attention and results. Where did this wealth come from? How did these character traits take form, this attitude of entitlement? An understanding of the life and times of her grandfather, Theron R. Butler, and his influence helps explain her life.

Butler family history

According to a *Butler Family History*, compiled and published in 1919 by Henry Langdon Butler, the first Butler of the line from which Theron R. Butler descended left Sandwich, Kent, England, on the ship *Hercules* on June 9, 1637. That hearty and adventurous soul was one Nicholas Butler. The ship's manifest identified 80 passengers, including Nicholas; his wife, Joice; three children; and five servants. They arrived in New England two months later and built a home on a land grant. Nicholas received in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

The family history sketches the story of the expanding Butler clan and eventually arrives at the 10th generation, when Theron Rudd Butler, the youngest son of Charles and Mary Thompson Butler, was born in Poughkeepsie, New York, on March 9, 1813. As a young man, he left New York and moved to Ohio, where, in 1839, he married Mary Beach. Their daughter, also named Mary, was born on December 6, 1840. Mary Butler married Albert W. Green of Ohio in 1860. This union produced three daughters: Alice Green (1862-1953), Grace Green (1865-1938) and Mary Butler Green (1872-1947).

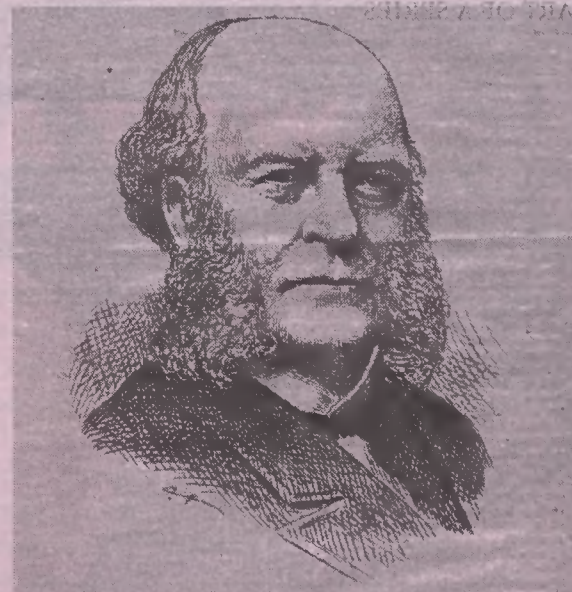
Mrs. Mary Butler Green preferred living in New York City and resided with her parents in their five-story home at 433 Fifth Avenue between 38th and 39th streets. Albert Green spent much of his time attending to business in Ohio. He was part owner of the Green-Joyce Department Store chain.

Alice, along with her sisters, spent formative years living in the Butler home on Fifth Avenue, being raised by Mr. and Mrs. Butler and her sister. This was especially so after Alice's mother died in 1872, after her daughter Mary's birth. The U.S. census of 1880 shows Albert Green, his three daughters, Theron and Marie Butler and her sister Helena living at 433 Fifth Avenue along with three servants.

The record does not reveal when Theron Butler moved from Ohio to New York, perhaps after his wife Mary Beach died in 1845 and after he married his second wife Marie E. Miller some years later. However, it is clear that by the time the Green sisters are born—under his roof—he was well established, an influential citizen and successful businessman.

New York City, 1860-1890

During the second half of the 19th century, the Erie Canal, railroads, telegraph and telephone made New York City the trade and industrial hub of the United States. Half the populations of the city were immigrants filling the tenements of lower Manhattan and the shantytowns of midtown. This constant arrival of new immigrants provided the cheap labor needed for new industries and major construction projects taking place throughout the city—public and private buildings, railroads, water and sewer systems, subways and bridges.



Pen and ink drawing of Theron R. Butler.—New York Public Library, Prints Division, Digital Collection. From Photograph by Sarony. Gift of J.E. Whitley

These conditions produced wealth and privilege for some while many faced low pay in dirty, dangerous work, crowded unsanitary living arrangements, limited opportunities, and the day-to-day struggle to pay rent or buy food. In this caldron the Butler-Green family thrived.

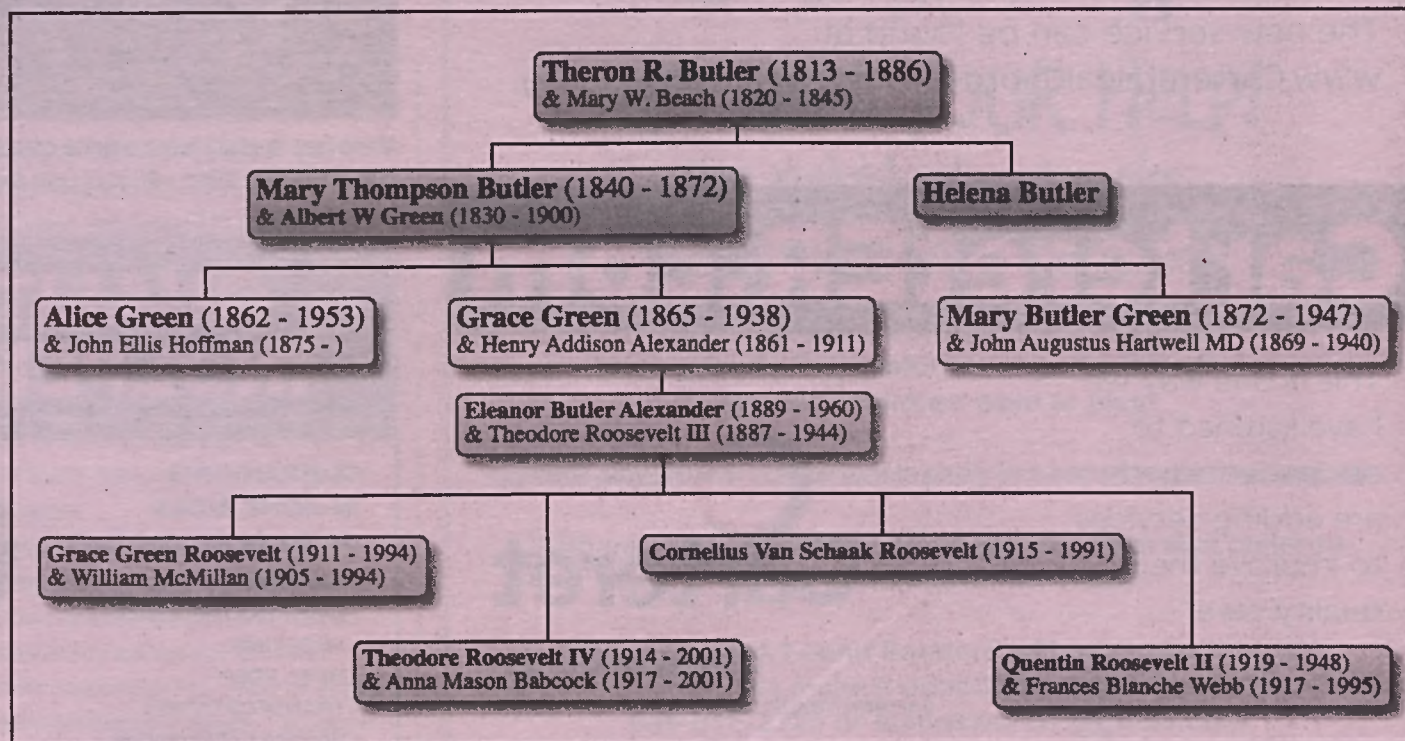
Parenting

The Green sisters received much of their parental nurturing from their Butler grandparents, who generously shared their home, wealth, social standing, and ideals. The Butlers were storybook doting grandparents.

As early as the 1860s, Fifth Avenue was a developed thoroughfare as far north as 50th Street, with a mixed streetscape of residential, public, social and retail establishments. The Butler family carriages and horses were kept in a stable located a block east on 38th Street. When the girls were young, Mr. Butler also kept a dairy cow at the stable. One of the servants would milk the cow every morning and bring the milk to the Butler kitchen before breakfast.

The prospect of fluency in a foreign language, particularly French, was considered in the selection process when hiring servants, to expose the girls on a regular basis to the languages of Europe. Music lessons, both singing and piano, were provided. Educational opportunities extended beyond the home. Primary

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The Theron R. Butler family tree