

BULLETIN



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JIM BECKWOURTH, C. 1856.

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Molly Bloom, Museum Director / Curator

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Visit the Museum

1333 Butte House Road

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www.suttercountymuseum.org



Our Mission

The Sutter County Museum shares local stories to strengthen community bonds, to inspire celebration of our diverse cultural heritage, and to demonstrate how understanding the past prepares us for the future.

About the Bulletin

The **Bulletin** is published quarterly by the Community Memorial Museum Association. This fiscal year, the Association is publishing three editions due to the financial ramifications of the pandemic. Editors are Sharyl Simmons and Phyllis Smith. Renewal of annual membership provides you with a subscription to the **Bulletin**.

Museum Association

The Association is a 501(c)(3) organization that fundraises and supports the operation of the Museum.

Applications to join are available on the Museum's website. If you are interested in history and want to do something meaningful for our community, please consider applying! New applicants to the Association are approved by a vote of the full Association. Members serve for 4-year terms.

Current Association Members:

Phyllis Smith, President

Barbara Hankins, Vice President

Babs Cotter, Secretary

Amber Milner, Treasurer

Carol Bordeaux

Tony Kurlan

Manny Cardoza

Debbie Reid

Eric Gruenthal

Margit Sands

Scott Hankins

Sukh Sidhu

Wade Kirchner

Chuck Smith

In Special Memory of
Loadel Piner

We want to acknowledge the passing of Loadel Piner (1928-2023), a longtime friend, collaborator, Commissioner, and supporter of the Sutter County Museum. In 1971, Loadel's parents, Norma and Howard Harter, along with Gilbert Williamson, gifted property at Butte House Road to Sutter County with the intent that the land be used for a park and Museum. The Museum was completed and accepted by the Sutter County Board of Supervisors on April 25, 1975.

Loadel continued the legacy of her parents to ensure that the Museum could thrive and serve its mission far into the future. She generously provided her ideas and insight over the years as a longtime Museum Commissioner for the County of Sutter, representing the continued interests of the Harter family and championing the Museum within the community.

"Loadel was very active in the community, and in everything she did, she told people about the Museum," said Babs Cotter, current Harter interest member serving on the Museum Association nonprofit. "She brought people to the Museum, which turned into more visitors and volunteers and supporters who helped sustain our mission. Personally, I'm very thankful that she got me involved with the Museum, and it was such an honor when she asked me to serve as the Harter interest because of all the great work that she did."

We were honored to receive Loadel's devotion to our mission through her many intersections with the Museum - from donating local history artifacts to the collection, to running fundraisers and events to sustain operations, to coordinating with her own garden club, the Sutter Buttes Garden Club, to maintain the Conkey Memorial Rose Garden in Harter Park. Our thoughts are with Loadel's many family and friends as we remember her and her legacy.



LOADEL (HARTER) AND NORMAN PINER
 ON THEIR WEDDING DAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1951.

Exhibits

- ***Gadgets Galore: Transforming the American Household*** is on display until November 19th.
 - Take a closer look at historic household objects from the Sutter County Museum's collection and consider how the gadgets of yesteryear informed our modern technology.
 - ***Gadgets Galore! Transforming the American Household*** is a traveling exhibition from Exhibit Envoy and Heather Farquhar. The traveling exhibition is based on its initial iterations at the Hayward Area Historical Society, Hayward, CA and Los Altos History Museum, Los Altos, CA.
- Next year, you can look forward to great temporary exhibits on a variety of topics, including:
 - Pioneer women who traveled to California prior to statehood in 1850
 - Stories from American Indian boarding schools in the United States
 - Natural disasters in California, including floods and fires
- The Museum's permanent exhibit on Black History in Yuba-Sutter is scheduled to be installed in 2024! Our wonderful interns, Katelyn Bell, Huy Dao, and Emily Dominguez, have been hard at work researching local Black history. An open community forum in October brought new stories to light and creative ideas about this project. Objects and archival material have been added to the Museum's collection related to local Black history, and plans are coming together for the text panels and objects that will be on display. Stay tuned for exciting events as we get closer to the exhibit opening!

News

Marika Garcia, our accomplished Development Officer, has accepted a new position as the Development Director at California Humanities. Her last day with the Sutter County Museum and Sutter County Library was October 27th. Marika has made a significant impact on the ways that we can serve the community, including increasing donations, memberships, and fundraising income by 39% from the previous year and spearheading proposals that led to \$418,183 of grant awards. We will miss having her as a key staff member on our team, but please join us in congratulating her on her exciting new position!

In the meantime, we are working to fill the Development Officer fundraising position and will look forward to sharing updates with you all when someone new is hired. To learn more about open positions with Sutter County, visit www.governmentjobs.com/careers/SutterCounty.

To learn more about the Museum's exhibits, events, and projects, visit our website at www.suttercountymuseum.org. Sign up for our e-Newsletter to receive monthly updates by scrolling to the bottom of the page.

Events

You can look forward to a couple more special events at the Sutter County Museum in 2023.

- ***Trees & Traditions: The Nutcracker*** on Friday, December 1st from 6:00-9:00pm. Join us for the Museum's annual fundraiser featuring festive food and drinks, local music, and, of course, holiday trees and traditions. Tickets are on sale now at the Museum, by phone at 530-822-7141, or online at suttercountymuseum.org/events.
- ***Annual Children's Holiday Party*** on Sunday, December 10th from 12:00-2:00pm. Enjoy art, activities, crafts, cookies, and more in this free program especially for kids!



GADGETS GALORE! EXHIBIT ON DISPLAY AT THE SUTTER COUNTY MUSEUM.



CHILDREN ENJOYING MUSIC WITH LOCAL PERFORMER JOSEPH MOYE AT THE 2022 CHILDREN'S HOLIDAY PARTY.

Inventor of the “Aeroplane,” and the Was Born in Sutter County, and His Last

By Chuck Smith



JOHN JOSEPH MONTGOMERY AS A YOUNG MAN.

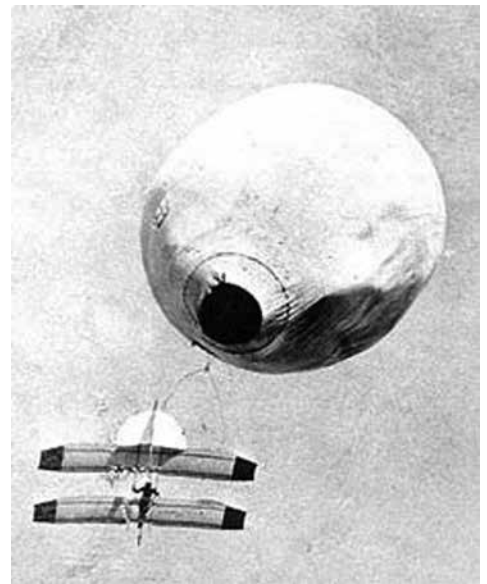
The Wright brothers were not the first to build and successfully pilot an airplane. They weren't even the first Americans to do it. That honor belongs to a Sutter County boy whose earliest memories are of observing the clouds passing in the air and seeming to rest on the Sutter Buttes a few miles from his birthplace.

John Joseph Montgomery was born in 1858 in a house on B Street just west of the Sutter County Hall of Records in Yuba City, the son of Zachary and Eleanor Montgomery. His father was the Sutter County District Attorney, and his mother recalled he used to lie on his back as a baby and watch the birds of the Pacific Flyway. At the age of 26, he became the first American to control a heavier-than-air craft in flight when he launched a glider off a hill just south of San Diego, controlling its flight for a distance of two football fields – just over 600 feet. That was in 1884, almost two full decades before the Wright brothers' famous controlled flight of a motorized airplane at Kitty Hawk.

Over the course of the next three decades, until he died in the crash of one of his own planes at age 53, Montgomery continued to improve his flying machines and trained men to pilot them, launching them at high altitudes from hot air balloons in dramatic public demonstrations that included loop-to-loops above Santa Clara College where he was a professor. After the aeronautical gymnastics, the pilot landed the plane at a pre-determined spot. Following one demonstration, Alexander Graham Bell said, “All subsequent attempts in aviation must begin with the Montgomery machine.” In 1906, Montgomery was awarded a U.S. patent for the “aeroplane.”

Why the Wright brothers and not Montgomery are credited with “first flight” – and why North Carolina might want to give up its state motto, “First In Flight” – are subjects of two books released in the last decade that describe the intense competition and jealousy that characterized much of the early development of the aviation industry, and they set the record straight about Montgomery's place in aviation history. Those books are *Quest for Flight: John J. Montgomery and the Dawn of Aviation in the West*, by Craig S. Harwood and Gary B. Fogel, published in 2012; and *Achieving Flight: The Life and Times of John J. Montgomery* by John G. Burdick and Bernard J. Burdick, published in 2017.

Quest for Flight argues that while John Montgomery was not the first to make gliding flights, his experience in 1884 was different because he had designed his glider to allow control of the path the glider took, and that



HOT AIR BALLOON TAKING GLIDER UP FOR LAUNCH.

First American to Fly One, Name Was Not Wright

these were “the first controlled flights of a heavier-than-air flying machine in the Western Hemisphere.” Both books chronicle a decades-long campaign by Orville Wright to denigrate Montgomery and suppress knowledge of his contributions to aviation, including attempts to stop release of the 1946 Hollywood movie about Montgomery’s scientific experiments with human flight called *Gallant Journey*. In *Achieving Flight*, the Burdicks argue that the Wright brothers benefitted from Montgomery’s early work – which has become the basis for basic airplane construction ever since – but did not want to credit him or any other aviation pioneer for making any prior contribution to flying.

Montgomery spent a lifetime studying birds and their ability to fly, beginning as a child in Sutter

County. Later in life, he studied the anatomy of soaring birds like buzzards, eagles, and pelicans, measuring their wing spans, studying their shapes, and weighing each bird. Like many early inventors, he initially believed there was something in the motion of the wings that allowed the “lift” in flying, and he spent some time building ornithopters – machines that were expected to fly under the power of humans flapping man-made wings – that never worked. It was not until he focused on how birds soar, or glide, through the air, sometimes long distances without flapping their wings, that he began making fixed-winged machines, and through continued close study of bird wings, he developed a knowledge of aerodynamics that was ahead of its time. He introduced the parabolic curve to wing design, and it remains the standard today.



MONTGOMERY WITH GLIDER, 1905.

In 1905, Montgomery described that his interest in flying emerged because of the Sutter Buttes:

I remember when I was a little child in Yuba City—it was when I was almost five years old—watching with delight the passage of clouds across the sky and seeing those clouds resting, as it were, on the mountain tops, because I thought if only I could get there I could take hold of the clouds and fly; that I could grasp them and they would carry me with them. I think my interest in aerial navigation dates back to that time.

John Montgomery’s family moved from Yuba City to the Bay Area when he was six years old. His father, Zach Montgomery, was a well-known Gold Rush era lawyer who became the Sutter County District Attorney and was elected to the California Assembly, representing Sutter County. Zach Montgomery was later appointed by President Grover Cleveland as Assistant U.S. Attorney General.

John Montgomery died on the morning of October 31, 1911, as the result of injuries sustained in a crash during the 52nd test flight of his latest generation glider, *The Evergreen*. A sudden gust of wind caused him to lose control of the glider, and when it struck the ground, a large bolt from the craft punctured him behind his right ear. His obituary ran on the front page of papers throughout the country.

The Wrights’ assault on Montgomery’s contributions to aviation, which had begun when he was still alive, continued immediately after his death. Just two days after his obituary appeared, Orville Wright wrote to another aviation pioneer, “Montgomery had a number of admirers, but for what reason I never clearly understood, for I cannot think of anything of any value that originated with him.”

In the rear-view mirror of history, Wright’s words look petty and ill-informed. But as a result of the organized campaign by the Wright faction, it took several decades for the world to recognize John Montgomery’s significant contributions to manned flight.

His legacy was understood by anyone who tested Montgomery’s designs over the decades. Airplanes of today, even those that have reached space, incorporate Montgomery’s basic concepts. In 1962, the National Society of Aerospace Professionals created the John J. Montgomery Award, which was given in its first year to seven men who piloted the rocket-powered X-15 “spaceplane.” Among the recipients: Neil Armstrong.

In 1964, Montgomery was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame at Dayton, Ohio for “outstanding contributions to aviation with his early research into the nature of the laws of flight, by building and testing a series of gliders, by developing improved methods of glider control, and by bringing widespread attention to aviation by the public demonstrations of his glider.”

In 1967, Arthur D. Spearman, an archivist for Santa Clara University, completed the first in-depth biography of Montgomery, which he titled *John J. Montgomery: The Father of Basic Flying*. Spearman asserted that Montgomery “gave to mankind the principles and the first successful example of basic flying, and that his basic principles are valid today. Basic flying is legitimately his child. He is the Father of Controlled Flight.”

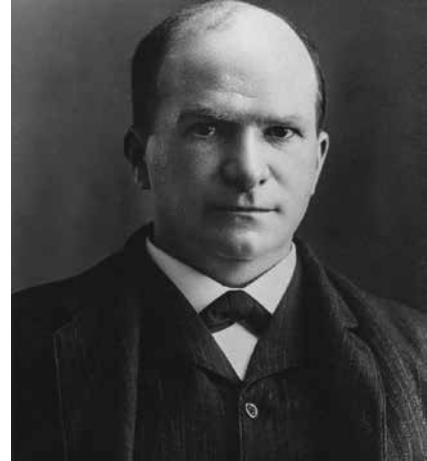
In 1996, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers declared

Montgomery's first glider an International Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark. According to the group, Montgomery's glider was "the first heavier-than-air craft to achieve controlled, piloted flight. The glider's design is based on the pioneering aerodynamic theories and experimental procedures of John Joseph Montgomery (1858-1911) who designed, built, and flew it. This glider was way ahead of its time, incorporating a single parabolic, cambered wing, with stabilizing and control surface at the rear of the fuselage."

In 2012, the authors of *Quest for Flight* wrote, "The fall of 1911 saw the passing of a true pioneer in the solution of human-controlled flight and the dean of aeronautics in the western United States."

And in 2017, Montgomery was inducted into the International Air & Space Hall of Fame, which noted, "his aerial achievements rank as some of the most important in aviation history."

The Wright brothers were not the first in flight, and never the best at it. The boy genius from Sutter County was the first to design, build, and to actually control his own airplane in flight.



JOHN JOSEPH MONTGOMERY.

PRINTED RESOURCES

Achieving Flight: The Life and Times of John J. Montgomery by John G. Burdick & Bernard J. Burdick, 2017.

John J. Montgomery: The Father of Basic Flying, Arthur D. Spearman, 1967.

Marysville Appeal, November 1, 1911.

Quest for Flight: John J. Montgomery and the Dawn of Aviation in the West by Craig S. Harwood & Gary B. Fogel, 2012.

San Francisco Chronicle, November 1, 1911.

WEB RESOURCES

International Air & Space Hall of Fame, inductee John J. Montgomery

<https://sandiegoairandspace.org/hall-of-fame/honoree/john-montgomery>

San Diego Air and Space Museum Archives: "John J. Montgomery History: Glider Pioneer"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-5vfNDYFV4>

Santa Clara University School of Engineering, *John J. Montgomery: Aeronautics Pioneer Gives Wings to Engineering at Santa Clara*

<https://www.scu.edu/engineering/centennial/stories/faculty-profiles/john-j-montgomery/>

The American Society of Mechanical Engineers, *John Joseph Montgomery*

<https://www.asme.org/topics-resources/content/john-joseph-montgomery>

Turner Classic Movies, *Gallant Journey*

<https://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/27776/gallant-journey/#photos-videos>

The Murder of Mrs. Charlotte Gardemeyer

By R. David Hurd



MARYSVILLE DAILY APPEAL, NOVEMBER 18, 1893.

Peter D. Gardemeyer, the infamous developer of Sutter City, was in the habit of handing out blank Sutter City Improvement and Reclamation Company lot sales receipts to individuals he thought had the ability to make quick land deals. The agents usually directed their sales techniques toward land speculators. P. D.'s land agents plied their trade primarily in San Francisco and Sacramento. It was not surprising that those blank receipts would cause confusion

and lead to land being sold more than once.

On January 20, 1889, an agent in San Francisco, possibly Louis "Goldy" Goldstein, arranged a meeting with Peter Schmitt and P. D. Gardemeyer. Schmitt was a recently-arrived, German-speaking immigrant from Texas. Schmitt was not a land speculator. He wanted to live and work in the place he purchased. Goldy, or his like, had surmised that Mr. Schmitt had money. The agent may or may not have known that Schmitt carried all his money in a money belt around his waist. Peter Schmitt, a small, moody-looking man standing about five feet four inches tall, may have carried a pistol to protect himself and his money. P. D. took Schmitt to Sutter City and offered him a job as the groundskeeper for his mansion in Sutter City for \$35 a month in pay, plus room and board with living quarters in the mansion's tank house. P. D. then sold him a house and lot in Sutter City for \$850. Soon after, P. D. gave Schmitt checks in the amount of \$100 in return for cash that Schmitt gave him.

A year later, Schmitt found out that the house and lot that P. D. sold him belonged to Fred Beste. Knowing that, Schmitt went to P. D. and asked for his money back. P. D. told him that he would make good on the original deal, if Schmitt was patient. Schmitt

maintained the Gardemeyer estate grounds in the following years and was often seen around the place carrying cans of water, sprinkling the trees, shrubs, and gardens that surrounded the mansion. During the years between 1889 and 1891, Gardemeyer managed to finagle all of Schmitt's money away from him, leaving Schmitt with only a few cents to his name. Schmitt lived in the tank house and received two meals a day from January 1889 to November 1893. Schmitt later claimed that he had only been paid \$66 for all his years of working around the Gardemeyer place. He said that he was left with only cents after being swindled out of over \$1,000 on the first of March 1890, when he was sold tickets to the Sutter City lot drawing by the Gardemeyer family.



PETER D. GARDEMEYER.

The last time P. D. Gardemeyer was seen in Sutter County was on July 17, 1891 when he made an appearance in the Sutter County Court House in front of the

county supervisors with Charles Alpers, who the week before had bought out all of P. D.'s holdings in the Sutter City Improvement Company, which included Sutter City lots, for the amount of \$10. Alpers claimed ownership of the Sutter City Improvement and Reclamation Company, which is not to be confused with the Sutter County Improvement and Reclamation Company, which still listed P. D. Gardemeyer as one of its directors. Charles Alpers lived in San Francisco and had a long history with that city as the collector of dead animals from the city's streets. He owned the New Potrero Fertilizer Company, was the Grand Treasurer of the Grand Council of California Chosen Friends, and was the leader of the Metropolitan Brass Band. Alpers and Gardemeyer appeared before a meeting of the Sutter County supervisors hoping to convince them to shelve the idea of building a new Hall of Records in Yuba City. Alpers asked to be heard, and the Sutter County Farmer¹ reported:

Sutter City Heard From - When the bids for building the Hall of Records were opened by the Supervisors last week, and before action was taken on them, P. D. Gardemeyer the ex, and Charles Alpers the present boomers of Sutter City were on hand, the latter with a little speech. He is an affable, though visionary man, with good address and a soarer from way back and

wanted to be heard. And he was heard, but that is all. He asked the Board not to act on the Hall of Records matter at present but to shelve it indefinitely, and for this reason: he is going to build a railroad to Sutter City instanter; large crockery works are soon to be erected at Sutter City and the picturesque mole known as the Buttes is to be leveled with the valley and its material worked into pottery. A line of steamboats are to ply between Meridian and San Francisco, transporting the earthenware, and the whole country contiguous to Sutter City will be converted into a metropolis. That when this is accomplished, the seat of government is to go to Sutter City also, and it would therefore be but a waste of money to build a Hall of Records. It is needless to say that the Supervisors took little stock in Mr. Alpers' word painting, but went about their business, and let the contract, just as if the new boomer had not wasted a whole lot of breath.

As the years went by, Peter Schmitt became depressed over his penniless condition, having not been paid for his services. He began to think that Charlotte Gardemeyer² and the Gardemeyer family were trying to get rid of him. He spent more time in the tank house crying, gnashing his teeth, and talking to himself. When Charlotte Gardemeyer's brother, Benard H. W. Harstromberg, warned her that Schmitt was acting crazy, she replied that she was not worried and that she could handle him.

Sometime in October of 1893, Schmitt took to always carrying a pistol in his coat pocket. Schmitt said he carried the pistol because he was considering committing suicide and he wanted to be ready when he decided to do it.

The pistol was described by Constable R. W. Tharp as being a .32 Cal. Smith & Wesson. However, in some newspaper reports, the gun was described as a .32 Cal. Forehand 1887 patent. The two revolvers are similar-looking and were sometimes advertised as a lady's pistol or pocket pistol. Both were 5-shot, double-action revolvers, and either one could fit comfortably in a coat pocket undetected.



HERMAN & CHARLOTTE ERKE - WEDDING PICTURE C. 1868. HERMAN DIED IN 1874, LEAVING CHARLOTTE WITH FOUR LIVING CHILDREN AND A SUBSTANTIAL FARM.

¹ Sutter County Farmer, July 24, 1891.

² Charlotte Maria Katarena Harstromberg Erke Gardemeyer emigrated from Germany and settled in South Butte. She married Hermann Erke, another German immigrant who was a rancher in the area. He died in 1874, leaving her with four living children. By 1879, Charlotte owned 500 acres of land and was considered a woman of "considerable means."

The Gardemeyers lived in a mansion located on Walnut Street looking east down Nelson Street. The house was completed in 1888, reportedly at a cost of \$30,000. On January 4, 1891, Irwin Griffith foreclosed on the mansion and grounds for nonpayment of a \$5,398 mortgage. Griffith then bought the mansion at the sheriff's sale that took place later in January for \$5,646.¹⁴ Sometime after Griffith bought the house, the Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company took over ownership, having been the original mortgagee. I was unable to learn what arrangements were made for Charlotte and her family to continue to live in the mansion,³ but in November of 1893, Mrs. Gardemeyer was living there with her children.

On the evening of November 17, 1893, Peter Schmitt walked up the steps onto the back porch of the Gardemeyer house and entered the kitchen. Schmitt had been lying in bed in the tank house all day crying and musing over the penniless, hopeless situation he found himself in. He had lately been thinking it was only a matter of time before the Gardemeyer family would push him out and he would find himself homeless. The .32 caliber revolver that he had recently taken to carrying was in his right coat pocket. The sun had just set, and the house was dark except for a light on in the dining room where Charlotte was standing threading a needle.

When Schmitt entered the house, he had expected to find only Charlotte's two daughters, Minnie and Lizzie, in the house. As Schmitt stood in the dark kitchen, Minnie sat at the dining room table cradling her eight-month-old daughter, Virginia, in her arms. Her mother was standing nearby, and John Henry, Charlotte's nine-year-old son with Gardemeyer, was also in the room.

Peter Schmitt was hungry. He had been claiming for the last few weeks that he was not getting enough to eat and was not always given the meals that the Gardemeyers agreed to give him twice a day when he first came into their employment. As he lingered in the dark kitchen, wondering why there was no kitchen light on and no food set out, he saw Mrs. Gardemeyer through the butler pantry door that opened into the dining room. She was standing in the dining room silhouetted by the dining room light. Schmitt walked to the pantry doorway and stood. Speaking in German, he asked for his dinner meal. Charlotte replied that the family had eaten at an earlier hour and that they had called him to come but he had not. Charlotte told Schmitt that she would not prepare a special meal for him.

Schmitt became enraged, and without warning, he took the revolver from his coat pocket. When Minnie saw the pistol, she

screamed and rose from the chair. Then Schmitt, standing about ten feet away from Charlotte, pulled the trigger and fired. The shot went wide, and Schmitt took a step toward Charlotte as she rushed toward him. When Charlotte was a few feet from him, he fired another shot which struck her in the abdomen just above her left hip. By then Minnie was on him and had grabbed his gun arm, and Charlotte, not yet fully feeling the effects of the bullet, grabbed his collar from behind as a third shot was fired without effect. Charlotte then let loose of Schmitt, and he pulled away from Minnie telling her to stay away. As he walked out through the kitchen, Minnie told Schmitt, "Now Peter, you will get it."

Herman Erke, Charlotte's oldest son, soon returned after having taken his sister, Lizzie, to Marysville to catch her train back to San Francisco. Herman later said that he had seen Schmitt in the tank house when he first returned but did not know about the shooting. When Charlotte saw Herman, she told him to go to the Summy, Fichter, and Tharp houses for help. Herman then went to Eugene Summy's house on Elm Street. Summy, being alerted by Herman's voice in his front yard, stepped out on his porch, and Herman said, "Peter has shot my mother, she wants you to come down quick."

³ The Gardemeyer mansion, then owned by George A. Wynecoop, burned down in a fire started by an overheated car with faulty wiring parked in the attached garage on August 8, 1942.

Summy immediately went to the Gardemeyer house and found Charlotte about sixty yards in front of the house standing in the road crying. Summy saw that Charlotte had blood on the front of her dress, and with Minnie's help, took Charlotte back into the house and to her room. In the meantime, Herman had run to Richard Fichter's and Constable Richard Tharp's houses and alerted them that Schmitt had shot his mother. Peter Schmitt, after the shooting, went to the tank house, discarded the three expended cartridges from his revolver, replaced them with three new cartridges, and put the pistol back in his pocket along with a handful of cartridges in his other pocket.

Schmitt then walked to John Abendroth's⁴ house at the north end of Acacia Street about a half mile away. In the past, Hedwig Abendroth had asked her husband not to bring Schmitt to their home because she did not think him right in the head, but he ignored her request saying he thought Schmitt was harmless. Schmitt said Abendroth was his only friend. When Schmitt arrived at the Abendroth house, he told John what had transpired earlier and that he planned on surrendering to the Constable. As Schmitt stood drinking tea, Constable Tharp and his son arrived, and Peter surrendered to them. Tharp searched Schmitt and found what he identified as a .32 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver in his coat pocket. He found the revolver fully loaded with live ammunition.



GARDEMEYER MANSION SHOWING THE TANK HOUSE.

The same evening, after having a meal at the Tharp house, Peter Schmitt was taken to the Sutter County Jail in Yuba City, and he and his revolver and cartridges were handed over to Sheriff T. L. Smith. Herman Erke had passed through earlier in the evening on his way to fetch Dr. Cannon for his mother. Schmitt was then put in a county jail cell with Nick Garrah,⁵ an inmate awaiting trial having been charged with stabbing a fellow deck hand. That same evening, sitting around a potbellied stove in the jail house with Garrah, newspaper reporters, and a German interpreter, Schmitt gave a jailhouse interview.

On December 16, 1893, while Sheriff Smith was preparing Schmitt's cell for another prisoner, Smith discovered a part of the cell wall, formerly concealed by a blanket he pulled down, had enough bricks removed for a body to get through, had the wall not been reinforced with an iron grating. A further search revealed the work had been done with an old spoon and a piece of sheet iron. Schmitt was moved to another cell and lost some of his jail privileges.

The Trial of Peter Schmitt for the Murder of Charlotte Gardemeyer

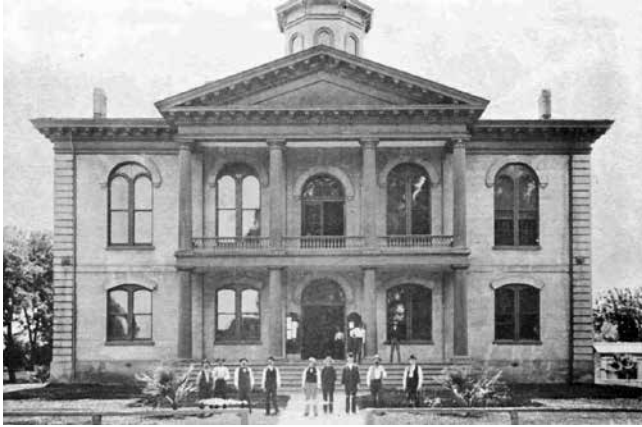
On Monday morning February 12th, 1894, in the Sutter County Superior Court, Judge Davis presiding, the trial of People vs Schmitt began. District Attorney A. C. McLaughlin and Attorney A. H. Hewitt represented the prosecution, and W. H. Carlin and E. A. Forbes were the defense attorneys. The trial would reveal facts about P. D. Gardemeyer's relationship with his family, as well as the details about his land dealings during his boomer years in Sutter City.

Seventy-five jurors were summoned by the Superior Court for the Schmitt trial. On Tuesday, the 13th at 5 p.m., twelve jurors were finally selected.

Wednesday at 9:30 a.m. on the 14th, the first witness called by the prosecution was Charles Kansteiner, Charlotte's oldest daughter Lizzie's husband. He

⁴ The Abendroth name is sometimes misspelled in reports as Abenthroth.

⁵ Garrah was found not guilty and discharged on December 11, 1893.



SUTTER COUNTY COURTHOUSE.

drew a diagram of the porch, kitchen, and dining room and placement of furniture at the time of the shooting on a blackboard.

Mrs. Minnie Beecroft, Charlotte's other daughter, who was present when the shooting occurred, was next called to the witness stand. She said that the trouble started about 6 p.m. She said that she, her mother, sister Lizzie, and brothers Herman Erke and John Henry Gardemeyer had all eaten dinner at 2 p.m., earlier than normal, because her sister Lizzie was going to Marysville to take a train back to her home in San Francisco in the late afternoon. Minnie stated that she was sitting near the dining room table holding her child when Schmitt entered the room. She said her mother was standing nearby threading a needle. Minnie said that Johnny, her stepbrother, was also in the room.

She said she heard the conversation spoken in German between Schmitt and her mother and that it lasted about five minutes. She said she understood German, and she heard her mother say to Schmitt that the meal was over with and that she would not be fixing another. Minnie said that her mother then resumed threading her needle when she saw Schmitt draw a pistol, and she screamed at her mother as the first shot was fired. With that Schmitt came through the door about two feet farther into the dining room, passing between her and her mother, and fired another shot at her mother standing near the window. Minnie, with her child in her left arm, grabbed Schmitt's right arm with her right hand. She

said that Charlotte had rushed Schmitt by then and was behind him, holding him by the collar when a third shot was fired. After the third shot, both she and her mother let loose of Schmitt, and Charlotte walked toward the parlor while Schmitt went back out through the kitchen. Schmitt told Minnie, "Get out of the way," and Minnie told Schmitt, "Now Peter, you will get it."

She said after Schmitt left, Charlotte went through the parlor toward the front door. Minnie then went out the south door onto the front porch and eventually found her mother in the road in front of the house. Minnie said she did not know which shot was fatal to her mother. She said her mother called for help after the second shot. Minnie said that one shot hit the wall near the machine,⁶ another might have gone into the lounge.⁷

Johnny Gardemeyer was then called to the witness stand. It was decided by the court that Johnny, being nine years old, could not legally testify, and he was allowed to stand down.

Next Herman Erke, Charlotte's nineteen-year-old son, was called to the stand. He said that he had breakfast with Schmitt in the morning and that he had taken his sister Lizzie to Marysville in the afternoon and arrived back home just after the shooting had taken place. He had called Schmitt for dinner earlier in the day, but he had not come. He did not find Schmitt to be crazy but said that he had stubborn spells and lately had been doing less and less work. He said that he found him crying occasionally. Herman said that he had seen Schmitt with two pistols. He said that Schmitt would have stubborn spells lasting weeks and had been in one for the past five weeks.

Dr. J. G. Cannon and Dr. E. E. Stone were the next witnesses. Each testified that the bullet wound to Mrs. Gardemeyer's abdomen was the cause of her death. Court was adjourned until the next day.

On Thursday morning, February 15, 1894, the court was reconvened. Constable R. W. Tharp was called to the witness stand. He said that he had arrested

⁶ The "machine" is not further identified and could be a sewing machine or a Victrola.

⁷ A Victorian-era lounge chair.

Schmitt, who had possession of a fully-loaded revolver. He said that the defendant spoke in broken English and that he could not always understand him. Tharp testified that when he asked Schmitt about the shooting, Schmitt said that Mrs. Gardemeyer had gotten what she deserved.

Sheriff T. L. Smith was called to testify, and he said that he had taken custody of the revolver and cartridges, which were introduced as evidence. Next to the stand was Theodore Vagedes, a carpenter living in Sutter City. He said he saw Schmitt at Tharp's house after his arrest and that Schmitt had told him that he "had hit her good" and that she deserved it.

G. F. Beecroft, Minnie Beecroft's husband, took the stand next. He testified to the fact that he had seen Charlotte alive on the day of the shooting and was in the house when she died the following night. F. D. Gordon, owner of a sporting goods store in Marysville, went to the stand next. He was objected to as not being an expert and asked to stand down. W. M. Cutter, the court shorthand reporter in the preliminary examination, then attempted to enter that testimony, which was taken under advisement. Next came A. Dannenberg. He testified that he was the interpreter at the preliminary examination. The prosecution then rested.

Attorney W. H. Carlin for the defense then stated that his defense for Peter Schmitt would

⁸ *Marysville Appeal*, February 16, 1894.

be insanity. In the afternoon, the defense, after having the preliminary testimony entered into the record, called their first witness. B. H. Harstromberg, Charlottes's brother, said that he had seen Schmitt eat in the Gardemeyer kitchen and did not consider him sane. He said he thought Schmitt was absentminded and knew him to talk to himself and cry at times. He said Schmitt cursed Gardemeyer and heard Mrs. Gardemeyer tell him that he would get his money. Next J. M. Herring took the stand. He said he had lived in Sutter City and lost \$4,500 there. He said he considered Schmitt crazy. Swan Segerstrand, a nurseryman, came to the stand next. He said he had slept in the tank house with Schmitt for three years, but left the tank house, telling Mrs. Gardemeyer that Schmitt was crazy.

In reply to further questions, the witness (Segerstrand) stated that the defendant was always talking about his money; would grind his teeth, talk to himself and rush around the room at night. On cross-examination by Mr. McLaughlin, he stated that he traded some horses for two lots that Gardemeyer valued at \$500; would sell the lots for \$25; entered into a contract with Gardemeyer to start a nursery, but that gentleman failed to keep his contract and after he (Gardemeyer) had got everything he had, he was obliged to sleep in the tank house.⁸

Chris Carstensen, a former resident of Sutter City, was

next on the stand. He said he roomed with Schmitt for about 16 months. He did not think him right in the head but considered him harmless. He said that the room and board was good, but he left because he was not paid for his work. John Abendroth followed. He said he had known Schmitt four years and gave him German papers to read. He said that Schmitt complained he did not get enough to eat, and he had given him food. He said that Schmitt would sometimes be fed when Mrs. Gardemeyer had company, and that in the past month Schmitt had come asking for food twelve or thirteen times. He was sure the defendant was crazy. Court was adjourned.

The morning of Friday, February 16th the court reconvened. Undersheriff Brittan was called to testify that the revolver handed to him by Constable Tharp was the one the court exhibited. He said he could not determine if the pistol had been discharged the night of the crime and that it was fully loaded at the time he received it. Sheriff Smith then examined the pistol, and it was offered as an exhibit to the jury. Evidence for the defense was resumed. Dr. A. E. Kosby was sworn to act as the German interpreter. Peter Schmitt was then called to the witness stand.

The following testimony made by Peter Schmitt is taken from several different newspapers published in February of 1894 and is paraphrased. Schmitt said that

he was fifty-six years old, born in Nassau, Germany and that he went to New York in 1879 with \$80 and did not work for two weeks. He then went to Philadelphia and St. Louis to see the sights and on to Texas with \$21 and worked in a garden for six years and on a farm for three years. Because of his headaches caused by heat and sun stroke, he went to San Francisco in January of 1889 with \$1,100 savings in a money belt. He met P. D. Gardemeyer through one of his agents and went with him to Sutter City with a group of men.

He was asked by P. D. how much money he had but did not tell him. Gardemeyer hired him to work around his place for \$35 a month plus room and board and sold him a house that Fred Beste was living in. Schmitt testified that Gardemeyer owed Beste money and that he was therefore not receiving rent for the house. He told Schmitt that he would have to wait to move in. Schmitt paid \$850 for the house and got a receipt and paid him \$2.50 to record the deed, which he did not receive. The receipts were shown as evidence. Schmitt found out a year later that Beste, not P. D., owned the house. He demanded that P. D. give his money back, and P. D. told him that he would give the money back or find something else for him, but he never received anything. Schmitt said that over the years, P. D. would come to him asking for money and gave him receipts in return. He said that he received a \$428 note for work that he had done but only received \$66. The receipts and note were entered as evidence. Schmitt said that both Mr. and Mrs. Gardemeyer promised to repay him with interest. In further testimony by Schmitt, he said that a few years before, Mrs. Gardemeyer had asked him to work for her and that she gave him her word of honor that she would see him get paid.

He testified that:

In settlement for the \$850 and the money I loaned him, Mrs. Gardemeyer told me to consent to let the house and lot go and to take five lottery tickets for a drawing about to take place. I consented and was present at the raffle and Constantine⁹ told me after the drawing that I had won three lots and an acre and a half. Gardemeyer and his wife also

⁹ Charles Kansteiner, the Gardemeyers' son-in-law.

told me that I had won the lots. I was never shown the lots and had asked Gardemeyer and his wife for a deed, but never got it. Mrs. Gardemeyer had promised to give me a deed for the lots; she told me to keep quiet and that she would make everything all right. She gave her word of honor that I would, if I continued to work. I was shown the lots on the map, never saw them on the ground.

The tickets, or receipts, for the drawing in November 1889 were then offered in evidence; they were for the sum of \$1,500.

The drawing did not take place until March 1, 1890. It must have seemed to Peter Schmitt, if you believe his testimony, that a lot of the Gardemeyer family were in it together and had defrauded him of all of his money.

In further testimony cited in local papers, Schmitt

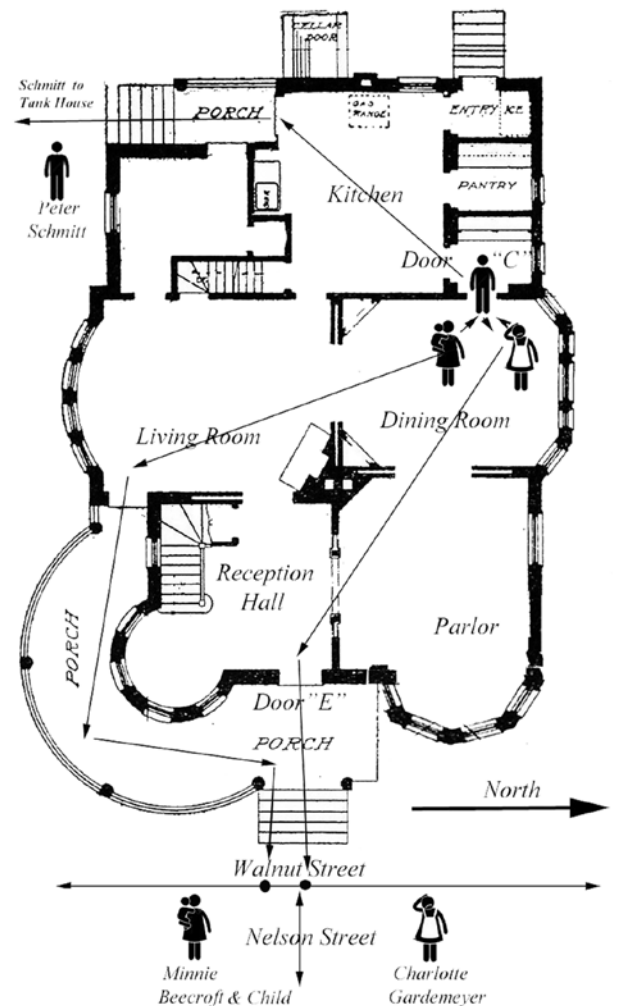


DIAGRAM OF GARDEMEYER HOUSE SHOWING ROUTES TAKEN FOLLOWING THE SHOOTING.

was asked where Mrs. Gardemeyer was sitting when he entered the house. He testified that he did not know and stated that he went from the kitchen to the dining room where he found Minnie and her mother. He asked Minnie if they had supper and Mrs. Gardemeyer stamped with her feet on the floor and said she would give him nothing to eat. It was at this point he lost his mind and when asked why he shot her, he answered that he did not know. Schmitt concluded his testimony by saying he had reloaded his pistol after the shooting because he intended to kill himself.

If what Schmitt says of the shooting is true, the image of Charlotte stamping her feet and saying that she would give him nothing to eat completely betrays the prosecution's description of Charlotte being a kind woman. Still, the defense had given no good reason for Schmitt to shoot Charlotte. However, they gave an illustration of why Schmitt was upset and possibly driven insane by her treatment of him.

The next witness, A. H. Hewitt, was the Sutter County Recorder at the time. He stated that no deeds had been recorded for Peter Schmitt. The last witness before court was adjourned was Mrs. Scherding, a resident of Sutter City. She said she knew Schmitt and thought him to be insane. Court was then adjourned.

The court was reconvened the next morning, Saturday, February 17th. Witnesses for the defense were called to the witness stand.

Chris Anderson, a carpenter, was the first witness. He stated that when he first knew Schmitt, he was as rational as any other man, but after the Sutter City drawing, he would not talk and lay in bed crying. Anderson said that he saw Mrs. Gardemeyer help sell lots to ladies in Sacramento and heard her say that she could sell lots as well as Mr. Gardemeyer. C. Rubel was next to the stand and said that he had owned a grocery store before coming to Sutter City to earn his fortune and that he now worked as a clerk in a grocery store. He said that he had seen Schmitt watering the grounds about the Gardemeyer place and had spoken to him but received no answer.

M. J. Gastman, once the secretary for the Sutter City Improvement Company, was next on the stand. He identified P. D. Gardemeyer's signature on Schmitt receipts the court had entered as evidence. He said he saw Schmitt at the Sutter City drawing and that he was cheerful at the beginning and not talkative at the end. Gottlieb Crow, a baker, was next. He said he had worked with Schmitt. Dudley T. Elwell, a landlord, who in 1892 bought the A. J. Lyon residence located on the same street as the Gardemeyer residence, came to the witness stand next. He said that he knew Schmitt and Mrs. Gardemeyer and that Mrs. Gardemeyer told him that Schmitt "would not work and she would kick him out or not give him meals."

John Abendroth was recalled, and

he said that Schmitt had not made the statement that Theodore Vagedes said he had. He said that Mrs. Abendroth was ill. The court said they would take her deposition. The defense rested, and court was adjourned.

On Monday, court was reconvened. Mrs. Hedwig Abendroth was first to be called. She said she had known the defendant about two years and that he had come to her house many times to get something to eat. She said that when she first knew him, he looked good but, in the weeks before the shooting, he had changed considerably and acted strangely. On the night of the trouble, he was trembling and white when he arrived at her house. She said that she said to him that evening, "I guess you got no meal." And he said, "I got no supper, no dinner. I ask Mrs. Gardemeyer for something to eat, and she refused me." She said that Peter then asked for the Constable, and she gave him a cup of tea. She said at the time she did not know what had happened. On cross examination, she said that when she first knew Schmitt, he talked considerably but said nothing in the weeks before the shooting, and when he came to the house, he would pick up the newspaper and growl. She said that she noticed Schmitt not right in the head after he had lost everything, and then he continued to get worse.

The prosecution then started to present their rebuttal evidence. Charles Alpers, who had taken over what was left of

P. D. Gardemeyer's holdings in the Sutter City Improvement Company in July of 1891, was called to the stand. He stated that he had known Schmitt since 1890 and that he thought he was sane nine months ago and that he had not seen him since then. He said he had eaten with him but never was in the tank house with him.

Mrs. Beecroft was then recalled to the stand. She said that she thought Schmitt sane and that she had an interest in the case.

Mrs. Lizzie Kansteiner was next on the stand. She said she was a resident of San Francisco and that she had resided in Sutter City three years while Schmitt was there and that she was at the home on the morning the shooting took place. She said that she had breakfast there that morning and left later in that day. She said she did not talk to the defendant much and had noticed no peculiarities about the defendant since she had known him. She said she had quite an interest in the case.

Charles Kansteiner was recalled to the stand. He said that he was acquainted with the defendant and had not seen him since September of 1891. He said that he (Kansteiner) was on good enough terms to eat with the Gardemeyers at the same table and that Schmitt ate in the kitchen. He said that he had seen Schmitt talk to himself occasionally.

William Hoke was next on the stand. He said that he had seen Schmitt a number of times in the past two years and had a conversation with him about

plants. He said that he had never sat down and conversed with him and had not seen him for six weeks before the homicide nor ever paid any attention to his personal appearance and considered Schmitt to be sane. On cross-examination, he said that he had discussed business with Schmitt, but never about money that Schmitt had lost to Gardemeyer and had never worked with him, but had dined with him. He denied that he had talked to Hans Stromberg (B. H. Harstromberg, Charlotte's brother) about the case and tried to dissuade him from giving certain evidence.

William Ellington, a Sutter City resident, was next on the stand. He said he had worked with Schmitt three or four times and knew him slightly and that he considered him to be sane. Herman Erke was called next. He said that he considered Schmitt sane and swore that Schmitt had stubborn spells and he had never dogged him, starved him, or quarreled with him. He said he had seen Schmitt crying once.

George Tharp, one of Constable Tharp's sons, testified that he had seen Schmitt eat his supper at their house the night of November 17th and that he heard a conversation between Schmitt and Vagedes. Henry Huelsman of West Butte then testified that he had worked at the Gardemeyer house in 1889 and had a conversation with the defendant in 1890 about money that Gardemeyer owed him. Schmitt spoke to him in

German.

Theodore Vagedes was recalled but failed to respond. Judge Davis said that if he were brought into court he would be fined for contempt. District Attorney McLaughlin announced that the prosecution rested. Mr. Forbes for the defense said they had no further witness to examine.

Attorney Hewitt argued first for the prosecution, pointing out the facts in the case that proved the defendant was sane. After Attorney Hewitt concluded, E. A. Forbes spoke for about an hour in his argument for the defense. Court was then adjourned.

Tuesday morning, February 20th at 9:30 a.m., the case of People vs Schmitt was reconvened. There was a large crowd in the courtroom, and a large number of ladies were present. E. A. Forbes for the defense resumed his address to the jury, and then W. H. Carlin took over the speaking for the defense.

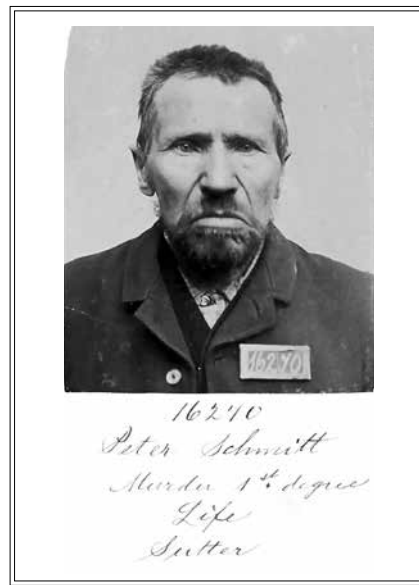
If I could only have dragged P. D. Gardemeyer by the hair into the courtroom when Peter Schmitt was testifying, I would have been able to give you, gentleman of the jury, a test that would have struck home to your inmost hearts. The defendant was not affected with insanity until he was touched by the withering hand of P. D. Gardemeyer. It was after five years of torture by Gardemeyer that the defendant became a wreck in mind and body. It was next to impossible to find a man who had lived in Sutter City that had not been robbed by Gardemeyer, and thus it happened that the majority

of witnesses for the defense who were Peter's intimate acquaintances had been all bitten by the same snake.

Gardemeyer was surrounded by human sharks who sucked the life blood out of their victims until reason and vitality was almost gone. It was a hellish plot that showed the cunning of Gardemeyer, for he had selected men of his own race to rob and plunder, and as in the case of Peter Schmitt to compel them to beg for food. The arch fiend, Gardemeyer, had robbed Peter, not alone of the golden coin that he made on burning plains of Texas, but had also robbed him of his reason.

Wednesday morning, February 21st, Attorney Carlin concluded his arguments for acquittal at 10:30 a.m. Attorney Carlin had spoken for five hours in his defense of Peter Schmitt.

District Attorney McLaughlin then made his final arguments. He stressed that Peter Schmitt had asked for a constable after the crime was committed and if at that time he had known he had done wrong, he should be held to be responsible for the crime. The prosecution case was then concluded, and Judge Davis gave his instructions to the jury, which retired to consider the verdict at 3:20 p.m. At 4:30 p.m., the jury returned a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree with the penalty of life imprisonment in the State Penitentiary of San Quentin. It was reported that three ballots were taken by the jury and that, on the first one, several members of the jury voted for hanging. On the second ballot, one of the members voted for



PETER SCHMITT, INMATE #16270.

manslaughter, and on the third ballot, they all voted for murder in the first. In the following months and years, appeals were made on behalf of Schmitt, but all failed. Peter Schmitt died in San Quentin August 13, 1906.

The Schmitt trial revealed that the Charlotte Gardemeyer family and their relatives all followed a similar narrative in their testimony. Except for B. H. Harstromberg, Charlotte's brother, the family stuck together and told similar stories about Peter Schmitt's mental acuity, thus making sure that the jury knew they thought Schmitt a sane person. Interestingly, the people who knew Schmitt just as well, if not better, than the Gardemeyer relatives had a different view of things. They said that they not only thought Schmitt insane but revealed facts about P. D. Gardemeyer's wily way of doing business and deceptive ways of putting off people when confronted about his false promises. Some of the people who testified in the defense of Peter Schmitt had been cheated out of money by P. D. and ended up in the same tank house with Schmitt.

In conclusion, I am left to think that Charlotte must have known about some of the deceptive things that her husband was doing and that she at times knowingly participated in the deception. I do not know whether Charlotte was convinced to join P. D. in his schemes by his plausible talk and their husband-and-wife relationship or if she viewed people, some of whom spoke their same native language and were their countrymen, in the same way that P. D. viewed them. It was a different time, and there were those who thought taking advantage of another's guilelessness, lack of knowledge, and reluctance to research the facts before acting made them fair game. It was the "Gilded Age," the age of "Buyer Beware." Whatever Charlotte's involvement in P. D. Gardemeyer's schemes and her knowledge thereof, she certainly did not deserve to be shot and killed. Had her husband been in the house instead of Charlotte when Peter Schmitt entered that November evening, and Peter Gardemeyer left mortally wounded, many future victims would have been saved from the sort of misery that drove Peter Schmitt to do what he did. As it happened, at the same time that the Schmitt murder trial was ending, Peter D. Gardemeyer, using an alias, was in White City, Florida, involved with a Danish Colony, doing the same thing he did in Sutter City when he was there. But that's a story for a future *Bulletin*.

Hunting More History – Beckwourth Trail

By Tom Silver

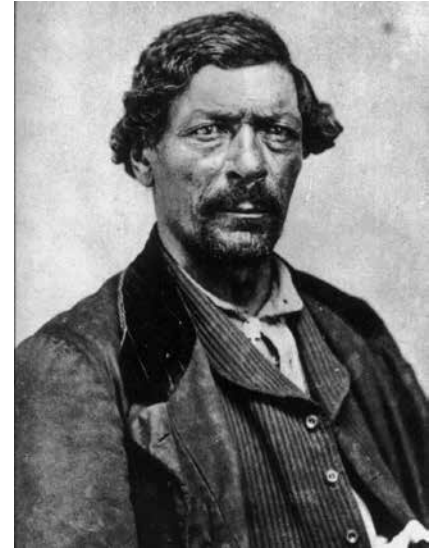
You may have read in the Summer 2023 issue of the *Bulletin* about emigrant trail marker B-50,¹ the end of the Beckwourth Trail in Marysville. So, where is B-1, the beginning of the trail? It lies roughly 260 trail miles to the east, in Sparks, Nevada, on the north bank at what is now McCarren Blvd.

From there, it generally follows Highway 395 northwest to Hallelujah Junction, California, then Highway 70 to Marysville, except for departures from 70 in the vicinity of Quincy.

The trail was opened by Jim Beckwourth, the son of an enslaved woman and her white slaveholder. Beckwourth was freed by his enslaver and eventually discovered the trail that bears his name. It has the distinction of having the lowest summit elevation of the Sierra Nevada passes. Opening in 1851, it came five years too late to be available to the Donner Party.

The earlier *Bulletin* article described the fun of tracing the pioneer trails all around us with friends in the comfort of air-conditioned SUVs with 4-wheel drive, good signage, GPS, and an abundance of accurate route descriptions. Those features, combined with roads allowing up to 70 MPH instead of the difficult 10-12 miles per day the emigrants made, result in a great day of hunting the routes of the early emigrants.

Northern California and Northern Nevada abound with emigrant trails. At many marker sites, ruts from wagons are still visible. At the Beckwourth #4 (B-4) marker on the outskirts of Sparks, you can see the juxtaposition of part of the original emigrant trail, a section of macadam road, which was the first paved



JIM BECKWOURTH, C. 1856.



THIS IS THE JIM BECKWOURTH MUSEUM LOCATED NEAR BECKWOURTH TRAIL MARKER #11 (B-11) PHOTO BY BILL BISHELL. PERMISSION FOR REPRINTING GRANTED BY TRAILS WEST, INC.

¹ The B refers to Beckwourth Trail, a T refers to the Truckee Trail, etc. More information is available at www.emigranttrails.org. Information about the benefits of a membership to Trails West can be found at this website.



(LEFT TO RIGHT) BARBARA AND TOM SILVER, AND PHYLLIS SMITH AT TRUCKEE TRAIL MARKER #40. THE MARKERS HAVE QUOTES FROM PIONEERS WHO CAME OVERLAND TO CALIFORNIA. THE QUOTE ON THIS MARKER READS, "IT WAS ONE CONTINUED JUMPING FROM ONE ROCKY CLIFF TO ANOTHER. WE WOULD HAVE TO ROLL OVER THIS BIG ROCK, THEN ANOTHER. WE WOULD HAVE TO ROLL OVER THIS BIG ROCK, THEN OVER THAT. ...THEN WE HAD TO LIFT OUR WAGONS BY MAIN FORCE UP TO THE TOP OF A LEDGE OF ROCKS" - WILLIAM I. TODD, SEPT 1845.

road in Nevada, and cars speeding up and down Highway 395.

Three is a good number to have on a trail marker hunting team. For us, my wife, Barbara, is the Driver, Phyllis Smith is the Spotter, and I am the Navigator/ Photographer. We have enjoyed many years on many trails, but we have just scratched the surface of the Beckwourth Trail.

My main source of trail information is Trails West, Inc., headquartered in Reno, Nevada. Information is available at www.emigranttrails.org. The website has driving guides for sale and an online photo tour of the Beckwourth Trail along with several other important trails. The guides include navigation information from one marker to the next, geocoordinates, descriptions of what to expect, and 4WD recommendations. Their newsletter, *The Marker*, is also very informative. If you feel like hunting emigrant trail markers, there's no better place to start. So, begin now, and you will soon be enjoying the fall colors at the same time.

Letter Home

By Thomas Taylor

Earlier this year, Joshua Whitgob reached out to the Museum and shared a letter written in 1849 by his great-great-great grandfather, Thomas Taylor. The letter details his trip from St. Joseph, Missouri overland to the California gold fields citing all the trials and tribulations his company met on the trail. The letter includes some edits to make it easier for 21st century readers to read, but it is not severely corrected in order to preserve Mr. Taylor's original voice. Our thanks to Mr. Whitgob for sharing the letter and to his ancestor for doing such a marvelous job telling the folks at home about his experiences.

Parks Bar, Yuba River, Cal. September 7th, 1849

Dear Parents,

I have taken this opportunity to give you some information of our travels and of the proceedings in the gold digging. Our company consists of twelve men. Their names are William Sidle Captain, William Anderson, William Metzler, William Shadle, William Wible, John Wise, John Braneman, John Bunton, Simon Swarts, Jackson Swarts, Abner Lenard, Thomas Taylor, and George Vannest. We left St. Joseph, Missouri the first day of May and arrived at Johnston's¹ ranch on the Sacramento Valley on the eighteenth day of August making our journey across the plains and Rocky and Sierra Nevada mountains in 110 days. The first part of the journey is over prairie land [with] good roads, bad water, and not any wood so that that we had to burn buffalo chips for cooking.

Near Chimney Rock on the Platte Valley, we were caught in a severe snow storm, which lasted two hours. The wind blew so hard that we had to take the wagon bow down and tie the covers tight around the wagons to keep them from blowing away. We had to lay on the ground and hold the tent tight over us to keep from blowing away. Our cattle went away in the storm and we searched for them all the next day without finding them. At night we laid down under a large rock in a deep ravine. Next morning we resumed the search and found them in the afternoon about twenty or twenty-five miles from the wagons. There was four wild ponies with the cattle when we found them. This delayed us three days.

From Fort Laramie to Fort Hall, a distance of 500 miles, is across the Rocky Mountains with good water, bad hilly and stony roads, and some fine timber. Crossing Green River we lost one wagon and came near losing two men. The ferry boat was made of five cotton wood canoes each about fifteen feet long placed side by side and fastened together at each end and some pieces of timber placed across them to put the wagons on. The wind was blowing hard and the boat upset, throwing the men and wagon into the river. One of them got on the boat again, but Anderson was carried down the river nearly a mile and when he was taken out of the water he was almost dead.

From Fort Hall to the Humboldt River is a rough hilly country. The water of Humboldt is warm and bad. We traveled down this river about 300 miles. Not a tree is to be seen along this river and nothing to make fire with but a few willow brush. This river receives no branch on the north side for 200 miles above the sink. At the sink the water spreads into lake and sinks into a bed of sand. The water at the sink is warm and salty with little grass for one hundred miles above the sink so that we was obliged to swim the river and cut rushes and flag with our butcher knives to feed the cattle here and to feed on the desert.

From the sink to the Truckee River is fifty miles across a desert without grass, wood or water with the exception of one spring of boiling hot sulphur water and one small spring of water as salty as sea water. There are hundreds of dead cattle and mules that died of hunger and thirst. We lost twelve cattle

¹ Johnson's Ranch near Wheatland, Yuba County.

11/3
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chips for cooking, near Chimney rock on Platte

FIRST PAGE OF THOMAS TAYLOR'S LETTER HOME.

out of 36 on this desert in one day and we was obliged to leave one wagon with all its contents at the boiling spring.

At Truckee River is good grass, good water and wood. We traveled up this river fifty miles and crossed it 27 times. This is a large river, very swift current and cold water and bad stony crossings. Near the head of this river is where the emigrants² perished in the snow.

A company of emigrants numbering about 90 was caught here in a severe snow storm on the 12th day of October 1845 which lasted 3 days. The snow fell 8 feet deep so that they could not travel. They built a house of logs which is yet standing and after eating all of their provisions forty-five of them died of hunger and cold before relief reached them. There are pine stumps ten feet high where they stood on the snow and cut the timber.

We leave this river and cross the Sierra Nevada range. This range is covered with snow in many places. The road here is very steep and rocky. Out of five wagons and thirty eight head of cattle, we have now have two wagons and ten yoke of poor worn out cattle. In going up this mountain we had to hitch eight yoke of cattle, all that was able to work on one wagon, and take it up the mountain and then go back and get the other. It took one day to travel one mile.

There are pine trees over 200 feet high and ten or twelve feet across the stump. I stepped eighty-five long steps on the body of a pine tree that had fallen down and a portion of the top had burnt away. That tree when standing was over 300 feet high and from twelve to fifteen feet through at the stump. We was obliged to let the wagon down over the rocks with ropes in five places. On the 20th of June I was on snow 20 feet deep and on the 10th of August I was on snow eight feet deep and ice froze an inch thick in one night.

After traveling about two-thousand miles with ox teams we reached the gold diggings wore out by travel and our teams wore out. The mines here is not so good as the accounts we heard at home. Wages is reasonably good. Boarding is high. A man can get ten dollars per day in the mines and boarding and 8 dollars a day in the towns. Three or four men with a washing machine³ can average from one to two ounces of gold to each man in a day. Gold here is worth sixteen dollars per ounce. In New York or New Orleans it is worth 20 dollars. Flour is worth 30 cts per pound, bacon one dollar and fifty cents, and beef one dollar per pound.

² Donner Party.

³ Most likely a gold cradle.

Men have dug as high as eight or ten ounces to each man in one day but the diggings have failed this last year. The best places are worked out. We have worked four days and have got four hundred dollars worth of gold. I would not advise any person to come to this country but as I am here I may stay two or three years, traveling. The mountains here is harder than carrying the musket in Mexico.⁴

George Vanest⁵ and Simon Swarts left our company on Humboldt River about four-hundred miles from the diggings without any provisions and got through by the help of other companies. William Metzler is well at present but he was sick on the road. Write as soon as you receive this and direct to Sacramento City Upper California. With this I close for the present by remaining your affectionate son.

Thomas Taylor

⁴ Indicates Thomas Taylor was a soldier in the Mexican-American war.

⁵ Spelled Vannest earlier in the letter.

Volunteer

We would not be able to do what we do without our volunteers. Volunteers staff the front desk when the Museum is open. This includes greeting visitors, answering any questions they may have, answering the phone, and selling items in the Gift Shop. Volunteers also work on special projects, assist at events, and help decorate for *Trees & Traditions*. We are always looking for more volunteers, so if you are interested, please contact us, or come by the Museum!

Donate

The Museum is a partnership between Sutter County and the Community Memorial Museum Association, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. The Association supports all of the public programming aspects of the Museum, including education programs, fundraising events, temporary exhibits, updates to permanent exhibits, and the Museum Gift Shop. Donations made to the Association are tax deductible.

There are many ways to donate to the Museum:

- Mail a check to:**
Sutter County Museum, 1333 Butte House Road, Yuba City, CA 95993
- Come visit us!** You can use a credit card, cash, or check to donate in person
- Donate online** through our website or scan the QR code with your smartphone
- Legacy giving:** please contact info@suttercountymuseum.org to learn more



We also offer corporate sponsorship opportunities for our events and temporary exhibits.

Memorials & Gifts

June 16 - September 29, 2023

In Memory of **Robert Aaberg**
Marnee Crowhurst

In Memory of **Helene Andrews**
Dr. Michael Andrews

In Memory of **Gordon Bordsen**
Marnee Crowhurst

In Memory of **Mary Spilman Crane**
Jim Coats

In Memory of **David Dunlop**
Marnee Crowhurst

In Memory of **George Jones**
Randolph Deas

In Memory of **Bob Mackensen**
Marnee Crowhurst
Lee & Bob Jones
Lee Roy & Sarah Pryor
Phyllis Smith
Julie Stark

In Memory of **Tom Pfeffer**
Marnee Crowhurst

In Memory of **Loadel Piner**
Linda Baker
Molly Bloom & Nick Lashway
Babs Cotter
Marika Garcia & Christopher Holmes
Kelly Gash
David & Jennifer Giampaoli
Joe & Nancy Goss
Virginia Harter
Kimberly Heisch
Peter & Cindy Jelavich
Lee & Bob Jones
Tony & Joan Kurlan
Drisel Perez
Margit Sands
Sharyl Simmons
Phyllis Smith
Julie Stark
Marcia Stranix
Cynthia Struckmeyer
Jon & Susan Whiteman
Jolyne Williams
Brad Willoughby

In Memory of **Sunny Rogers**
Merlyn Rudge

In Memory of **Norma Sanborn**
Marnee Crowhurst

In Memory of **Mike Lee Smith**
Marnee Crowhurst

In Memory of **Joan Joaquin Wood**
Marnee Crowhurst
Sharyl Simmons

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New and Renewing Members

June 16 - September 29, 2023

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 John Crowhurst
 Marnee Crowhurst
 Lou Anne Cummings
 Sarah Donighi
 Jessica Erickson
 Terry Farmer
 Virginia Filter
 Fletcher's Plumbing &
 Contracting
 Friends for the Preservation of
 Yuba County History
 Nancy Gilmore
 Deborah Hall
 Highlands Community Charter
 and Technical Schools

Mike Hubbartt
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 Aryn Kent
 Joann King
 Wade Kirchner &
 Lisa Buschmann-Kirchner
 Steve & Marie Kroeger
 Kevin Lee
 Tito Luna
 Jana Marquardt
 Jana Pettengill
 Kristi Powell
 David Rubiales
 Carrie Schroeder
 Thomas P. Winn Foundation
 Judy Trutna
 Ron & Patti Whisenhunt
 Joan Young

Renew or upgrade your membership today!

Funds from your membership directly support the work we do, including taking care of our collections and offering stellar education programming.

Not a member?

Consider joining today!
 And, don't forget, a membership is a great gift!

For more information, visit suttercountymuseum.org/support

Puzzling

B	E	B	G	Y	U	E	C	V	I	J	O	N	G	G	U	F	B	N	G
S	Q	W	L	R	L	K	I	F	H	G	E	R	T	Y	Z	T	A	J	S
L	J	C	Z	E	O	T	O	X	L	W	B	D	R	B	I	N	H	W	S
Y	T	Y	S	M	T	H	C	V	E	F	Z	I	A	S	N	O	F	R	N
D	J	V	E	O	V	T	S	P	G	V	M	N	D	V	C	I	T	O	R
A	U	W	A	G	H	N	E	N	F	D	N	C	I	I	K	T	H	G	Z
H	P	U	U	T	V	T	Z	R	M	X	A	D	T	D	K	A	O	S	C
F	V	B	V	N	J	Q	R	H	G	T	N	L	I	L	F	R	G	O	Q
X	U	E	R	O	B	T	X	U	T	A	G	I	O	Y	E	T	R	A	F
M	S	O	T	M	W	P	R	L	O	F	R	N	N	I	H	S	Y	R	L
N	G	S	M	V	U	U	E	P	R	W	P	D	S	P	P	I	F	I	F
V	R	K	Z	P	K	O	F	J	T	A	K	A	E	I	O	G	Q	N	O
O	M	E	B	A	K	R	W	I	G	R	W	C	P	M	E	E	N	G	I
U	A	K	T	A	E	O	D	D	C	G	A	H	E	F	E	R	P	K	C
W	I	B	G	T	H	V	R	L	V	E	R	L	D	B	S	Y	H	R	C
V	R	R	Y	Y	U	Z	O	C	O	U	R	T	H	O	U	S	E	C	I
N	T	E	W	O	U	S	L	Q	I	G	E	L	P	X	P	W	Z	R	B
E	Y	D	R	L	W	B	Y	R	R	H	I	J	M	I	X	C	S	T	I
E	N	I	B	X	O	U	A	M	K	W	S	M	A	A	S	W	V	L	Q
K	Q	L	H	P	H	F	T	G	I	Z	J	L	I	O	Z	J	W	O	W
C	R	G	I	Q	B	Y	D	J	S	P	E	K	R	E	A	T	X	A	Y
U	E	Y	W	Q	U	T	Z	N	E	G	A	Z	R	N	I	E	Q	D	K
R	Q	H	O	U	J	L	B	R	E	V	I	R	Z	F	N	X	A	E	S
T	G	W	Z	F	Q	Z	Y	E	R	P	H	G	Y	J	R	N	W	L	S
Z	G	O	Q	Q	T	E	Q	J	T	F	X	V	G	R	I	T	G	J	R

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SUTTER
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TRADITIONS
TREES
TRUCKEE
YUBA

Membership Information

Our members are vital to the success of the Museum. The funds we raise from your membership help us to properly care for our collection, bring in traveling exhibits, and provide education programs.

For a complete listing of benefits by level, visit www.suttercountymuseum.org/support.

Membership Levels

Basic*	\$35
Basic Plus*	\$60
Bronze**	\$100
Silver**	\$250
Gold**	\$500
Harter Circle**	\$1000

*\$10 discount for Student/Senior/Military/Long Distance (200+ miles away)
**\$15 discount for Student/Senior/Military/Long Distance (200+ miles away)
*** 20% discount for Non-profits

Business Levels

Business Basic***	\$250
Business Basic Plus***	\$500
Business Sustaining***	\$1000
All Business Memberships include Basic benefits as well.	

Business Memberships

Consider a Business Membership to the Sutter County Museum! Annual rates start at \$250 and include benefits such as advertisements in the *Bulletin*, listings on the website, Gift Shop discounts, and more. Visit www.suttercountymuseum.org/support for more information.



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