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The Story of Sutter Buttes "Boom Town"

(Edward Thurman first settler in thriving sector)

By Stephen Hust

From the excellent historian, Richard De Witt, whose tribe had so much to do with the early history of the Sutter Buttes country, I am indebted for this brief story of its earliest settlement.

It was settled by Americans quite early when Edward Thurman built his cabin on what was to be the George Brittan place, where the road through the Buttes begins its trip to West Butte, and he began herding cattle. The next settlers were some more cattle raisers located on the old Moore Getty ranch, now the Moore ranch, in 1851.

Then on the level lands, just skirting the south-east extension of the Buttes was Eben Griffith of Illinois. This was in 1853. In 1854 a man by the name of Price built him a cabin right where the Butte House was to be erected, a short distance from the cemetery.

The De Witt ranch was occupied by Herman Utt in 1854. William Golder De Witt, the patriarch of the tribe, acquired this land in 1872 when he came to California and added to it until he had 180 acres of fine grain and almond land. Price's possessions next fell into the hands of Isaac Fryndall and John Buchanan in 1855. Buchanan, an uncle of Wm. Golder De Witt, established the Butte House in 1871, called the South Butte Post office.

Horizons Unlimited

In the spring of 1887 where Sutter City now stands was a quiet country side whose inhabitants, sturdy to a man, carried on such bucolic pursuits as grain raising, stock growing, or sheep raising. By fall it was the fastest growing town in the United States with horizons unlimited. Part of this, perhaps one percent was due to the fact that in the late eighties towns were springing up like toadstools after a rain, but 99 percent was due to a human "A bomb," by the name of Peter D. Gardemeyer.

I don't know where he came from or what things he had done. He was one of those people who make you ask yourself not, "what has he done, but what will he do next."

He was like a dynamite charge with a long, long fuse. Both take a long time exploding, but when they do - oh mamma! He hailed vaguely from down Frisco way and he was a salesman.

For nine long years he peddled sewing machines and patent gates - the kind in which you didn't have to get out of the buggy. Nope - just pull a handle, and there you are, it was a good territory, populated by honest, sturdy, hard working pioneers, most of whom date back to the '50's and their descendants are still there. Those people had character and stamina.

Overdoing His Fence

Among his clientele was a comely widow, of German origin, Mrs. Herman Erke, who had a ranch on the road to the Long Bridge, which is now the Moorhead Ranch. Part is level but part is located on the slope of the Buttes. Conspicuous in this area is an infinity of volcanic boulders; some of which are built into rock fences. Old timers report that Herman brought on his death by overdoing his fence building. Be that as it will, Herman died in 1874 leaving a well fixed widow, with three children.

Not long after this salesman Gardemeyer invaded the Erke premises, intent on selling either a gate or a sewing machine. I know not which. What he did sell was P. D. Gardemeyer. Shortly after they were married. Certainly it was love; but P. D. Gardemeyer was not the man to discriminate against a lone widow just because she had property and money. This was in 1884. A few years later they sold the ranch and moved to "Dutch Flat" a German settlement in the northwest of the Sutter City of today.

So P. D. went about in his little buckboard apparently absorbed in business of making Sutter County sewing machine conscious, but now that he was in the money, great things were aborning in that fertile Gardemeyer brain. But perhaps I better tell a little about him.

Salesman with Pressure

According to old timers who knew him he was short, tall, husky, fat, crooked and honest - smart and stupid - and I'm not kidding, but one thing they agreed on, he was the highest pressure salesman who ever sold a sewing machine to a bachelor who just went around and ignored the holes in his pants. His age - 17 or maybe 50 - I'll settle for the last.

It was in mid '87 that Gardemeyer began to give the waiting world a few hints of the world shaking idea he was generating in his noggin and kept Sutter County in a turmoil for almost ten years, incidentally inciting one murder and dozens of wrecked lives.

In late '87 mildly optimistic, articles which dwelt on the beauties of the Buttes area, its economic possibilities and above all, its suitability for a community of homes, began to appear in local papers. They were ostensibly chatty articles without any hidden motive, but there was: they were a deftly trap to get people to thinking about the area and its possibilities.

Evidently Nov. 17, 1887 was deemed right to let the waiting world know who was papa, said the Appeal.

The South Butte Enterprise

"P. D. Gardemeyer is up from San Francisco, and yesterday went out to South Butte: He and several others are interested in disposing of some land they recently bonded there. He talked very confidently of making a sale and colonizing the vicinity." The newspaper editor added a bit of excellent caution; "Where the colony is to come from he did not state."

Engineering a Boom

Leave it to Gardemeyer. In the next issue of the paper November 18, 1887, he lets us in on it. "Messrs Gardemeyer, Lyon, Barrows and Riddle are the parties engineering the South Butte boom."

Day by day the barrage of promotion items popped out in the daily papers. In an item of Nov. 23, 1887 they answered the question of where the colonists were to come from and also touched on the delicate question of where money was to come from.

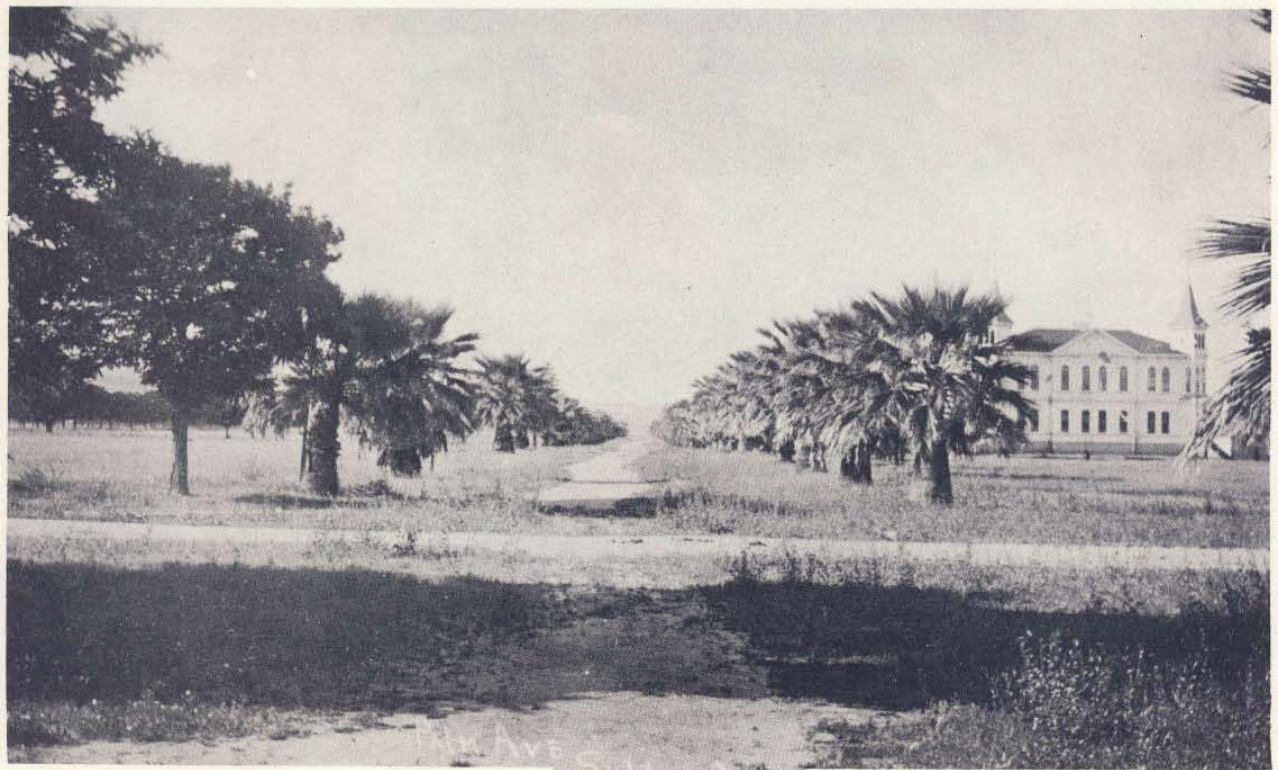
Appeal, November 23, 1887 "The New Town Site at the Base of the Buttes" "By Monday night's Oregon Express train, ten gentleman from San Francisco arrived in this city and yesterday morning were taken to the new town-site at South. Butte where they spent the day. They are evidently interested in the syndicate that had bonded and purchased the lands in that section and talk as though they are assured of the success of the venture. Last evening they were at the U. S. Hotel and discussed what they had done and what they calculate in doing--" While there, some of the gentlemen leaked some information concerning the prospective colonists.

"What about a Name?"

"We have effected several sales of lots to people who will become actual settlers," said one "We intend to bring out a colony of industrious people of some means and give them a chance to see their way clear to an income before asking payment for the land. Of course they will have to make a practical payment to begin with. A \$10,000 hotel (I have lived in it) will be built immediately and when a railroad is through there, as it will be before two years are past, a larger one will be erected.



California Street Sutter City Cal



W. W. AVE SUTTER CAL

Young man, we are not paying cartfare or traveling for our health for we mean business and propose to make this a success.--"More of the syndicate are expected to arrive and go out there sometime today."

About this time there arose the question of a name for the new metropolis and the paper invited suggestions for a name, but in the same issue appeared the answer to the question.

Appeal, Nov. 25, 1887. "Since the above article appeared in type the new town has been named Sutter City. We therefore bid a reluctant farewell to South Butte."

But up to date one important matter of money has been neglected and really it is the most important thing in a way. But don't think the promoters or shall I say Promoter Gardemeyer, hadn't thought of it - he didn't miss anything. This appeared in the paper Dec. 15, 1887.

"A Cash Foundation"

A. J. Lyon and P. D. Gardemeyer yesterday closed their business with several of those from whom they had purchased lands in and near the new town of Sutter. City. They paid over to George Summy \$15,800 and to Captain Stevens something over \$10,000. Messrs Griffith and Brittan will receive their money today and also others who have sold recently to the Syndicate.

The going price was 0100 an acre. The 160 acres purchased from George Summy is now the site of the approximate center of Sutter City. Among the other purchases of land by the Syndicate are the following: W.H. McPherrin, 114/10 acres - Dec. 1887 - \$1710 C.C. Epperson, 78 acres - Dec. 1887 - \$7800.

Newborn City is Stuck in the Mud

If there were any misgivings concerning the good faith or financial safety of this promotion of Sutter City the circulation of so much money in the small community dispelled them.

But there were other evidences that the project was the real McCoy.

Surveyors were laying out lots at top speed. An organized system of roads were being built under the direction of Supervisor Humphrey. A young army of carpenters were starting houses while the newly organized lumber yard kept six large drays in operation trying to keep up with the hectic demand. No wonder the Appeal spoke up as follows: November 23, 1887, "The boom continues, in fact, it is the talk of the whole county and spread-to the adjoining counties.

Those from a distance seeing the beautiful location for the first time are more than delighted with the locality and are investing with the utmost confidence in the future city."- Or is Peter Gardemeyer speaking?

In Mud to the Hubs

At the close of 1887 the newborn community of Sutter City was stuck in the mud up to the hubs in the muck of its newly graded streets. A swell time for the skeptics to shout "fake" but they did not rightly estimate the resourceful and determined P. D. Gardemeyer. With the coming of 1888 the rains let up and the town soon began to justify the promoters claim that "it was the fastest growing community in Northern California." "Four new buildings today " Jan. 18, 1888.

Certainly the hectic activity seemed to give confidence in the promoter's promise that a wide avenued, tree lined city of homes would soon rise before their very eyes. Said one enthusiastic reporter:" California Street, 100 feet wide, is complete and makes a fine appearance; it is a pleasure to drive over it."

Another reporter on February 24, that "there are five buildings completed and three being completed in P. D. Gardemeyer's block alone." The block referred to was the block where P. D. Gardemeyer intended building a palatial residence.

Prospects of Coal

Frankly, I think the number of investors surprised the syndicate, and exceeded their estimate, compelling them to purchase more acreage to divide into lots. An evidence of this was the announcement in late February that a new tract of land known as the "Griffith Addition" has been subdivided into lots and acre sites and put on the market. More than half has already been sold at prices satisfactory to the company. The rest will be sold in a few days. As time went on several other such purchases had to be made.

Then indicating the growing confidence in the promoters and the new city N. F. Hoke of West Butte, one of the solid old settlers bought a block of land in the new town with the expressed intention of improving it with a house and appropriate grounds.

Then to stir the investors' imagination they were apprised of a new and quite different activity. "The coal prospects grow better every day. The mine on Newkom's place now shows a two foot vein and on Moody's place the veins are growing thicker as the shaft goes deeper. On Friday last, a chunk of solid coal, weighing 15 pounds, was taken from the mine."

Gardemeyer and Aids

Oh, things were humming generally, with the promoters skittering about like water bugs and the only thing holding

things back was the scarcity of lumber. P. D. took this in his stride and announced with Napoleonic decision that he had contracted with W. A. Walker of Biggs for the burning of 1,000,000 bricks. Count that on your fingers. These bricks were all to be used in buildings in Sutter City.

Perhaps it is now in order to list the achievements of the redoubtable Gardemeyer and his assistants as of the spring of 1888. But first I must say a word for the assistants. First there was A. J. Lyon, whom he referred to as the defacto mayor of Sutter City, and another realtor by the name of Gammon, who had a neat office fitted out in which they enticed prospective buyers. Few emerged without owning a hunk of Sutter City real estate. Then there was a busy corps of agents, "bird dogs," in San Francisco who hypnotized prospective investors in that city, and shipped them north.

"Especially the Poppies"

But back to Sutter City. First of all they organized a local newspaper called the Enterprise, soon a going concern which was their mouthpiece, edited by W. A. Long from Los Angeles. Long just didn't show up one day so they acquired another editor by the name of W. G. Russel. On April 3, Ye editor took a drive around the infant burg. As an introduction, he rhapsodized about the scenery. He called it a "charming drive." "Never was the country more beautiful with its carpet of flowers, especially the poppies, its stately oaks with their new green dress while the play of color on the Buttes was majestic."

Then there were promises of a canal to be dredged from Oroville to Biggs, thence to Sutter City, while these ubiquitous builders of Sutter City were actually constructing the road bed of a railroad to connect Yuba City and the miracle town of Sutter City. They had already picked a site for the station house and graded an extra wide avenue that they dubbed Railroad Avenue for its entry about three blocks north of Nelson.

Mighty Poor Shooting

Amid all these signs of progress I regret to inject a sour note, but that's the way life is. Suddenly a long salvo of pistol shots scared the town builders out of their boots; 390 citizens looked up to see P. D. Gardemeyer standing on the porch of the Elite saloon with a smoking revolver in his hand while another gent, with more of the same in his hand was standing in front of Dogan's livery stable, both hosing shots at each other. Seven shots in all were fired and when the smoke cleared there stood the two gunman, as good as new. But the experts rated the duel as poor shooting. Out of the seven shots only thirty feet apart no shots came within an arm's length.

But why? It was this-a-way. The other gunster was a man by the name of McNabb. He was the father of the proprietor of one of the towns saloons. (3 saloons then) Someone had caused his son to be arrested on the charge of selling liquor without a license and father McNabb suspected someone was Gardemeyer. Therefore, when they met there was fireworks. I guess shooting affairs were all in a days work in those days. After the smoke of battle blew away each gunman pocketed his gun and went about his business. It was just as simple as that. Anyway it was something to talk about.

Call for More Bricks

I cannot discover just what happened to the 1,000,000 bricks that the man from Biggs was to furnish. At the pace the town was growing, probably they were used up. Anyway, the cry was for "Bricks and more bricks."

They did not ask in vain, as a current item in the newspaper will show. "A Million Bricks for use in New Buildings" Appeal, July 27, 1888. "The Sutter City people are jubilant over the burning of a large brick kiln there, not because there is anything extraordinary attached to the making of bricks, but because they are needed in order to push several buildings that have been delayed. The kiln burned consisted of 325,000 bricks and all are of superior quality. Another kiln of 700,000 will be burned in a few days. All or both kilns have been spoken for and will be used in Sutter City.

The first taken were used for the foundations of cottages in the Epperson Addition, which are now being put up by the Sutter City Building Association.

Classic Recitation

One of the kiln, No. 1, was operated on the Stohlman place near Long Bridge. An army of Chinamen dug the clay for the bricks, a solitary white mule, all by himself, dragged a big rock around in an arrastra to mix the clay and finally the Chinamen moulded and burned them, under the direction of a white man. The No. 2 kiln was operated by John Carrol, a sturdy old timer. The kiln was situated on Railroad Avenue, just east of California Street.

You should hear genial philosopher Henry Stohlman tell about the operations of kiln No. 1. It's classic.

Then kiln No. 2 - Richard De Witt described the art of brick making so vividly I could make a brick myself. But that's to be expected. Richard is the greatest authority on machinery in two counties and has given the natives a free education in engineering for half a century.

But fie on such barbaric stuff as shooting. Here are sore new contributions to the general welfare contributed by Messrs.



SUTTER CITY, HOTEL.

Gardemeyer and Lyon. They now have a kiln built with a capacity of 1,000,000 bricks and which are ready to be burned. They will be sold only to prospective builders in Sutter City and at \$5 per thousand.

It Durn Near Was

Windmill agents have been active and a forest of windmills adorn the sky line.

Joseph Girdner is making plans for the building of a \$15,000 residence, either on his farm southwest of town or in Sutter City.

Finally, the new school will be completed in three weeks, or about the first of August 1888.

Well, it durn near was, and on the 17th of August they held the dedication ceremonies. Early in the morning a special train, with diners and sleepers arrived in Yuba City. On board were newspaper men and interested investors, over 80 in all. At the school 2000 were gathered for the events and the exercises.

The Yuba City Brass band led the march to the grounds early in the afternoon where there were athletic events, then a ball game between Sutter City and Marysville. Marysville was so badly beaten that they were afraid to tell the score when they got home:

Then a supper - supper cooked by the good house-wives of Sutter City.- What cooks!

Even a Time Clock

Then came the literary exercises. A short address by George Ohleyer, a newspaper editor, a farmer, and a great fighter against the hydraulic menace. A poem composed and read by Mrs. John Stevens. A speech by the Rev. Dr. Barrows of San Francisco. Then there was an exhibition of fire works, and a grand dance.

Next week the school opened with an attendance of 100 pupils and two teachers. Then to officially signify that the syndicate had presented the Brittan School District with an elegant new school, erected at a cost of \$15,000, A. J. Lyon handed the trustees a deed for the same. To make the thing complete Messrs Gardemeyer and Lyon had installed a town clock and a set of bells--that's what the paper said!

This is but a partial record of the year's achievement, but as the year wore on promoter Gardemeyer spoke guardedly of a plan to erect a grand resort hotel on the Buttes for which \$100,000 allegedly had already been subscribed. He was not too specific, but people had learned to expect his promises to be fulfilled.

Optimism Was Prize Plant and Pete Fed it Plenty

If booming Sutter City was characterized by any one thing above all other things during 1888 it was optimism. But don't think that this just happened. Oh No It was a prize plant carefully nurtured by Promoter Gardemeyer and his cohorts. Picnics were a favorite method of keeping the investors in an optimistic mood. We will tell of one of these gala affairs to illustrate this. Pete didn't miss anything.

It was given on the Moore-Getty ranch in the Buttes, a favorite spot. Six hundred souls depopulated the town this spring day to attend the affair. They journeyed up to the scene on a road specially graded by the promoter. And who do you think was Master of Ceremonies? Sure-you guessed it- P. D. G.

Sour Note is Sounded

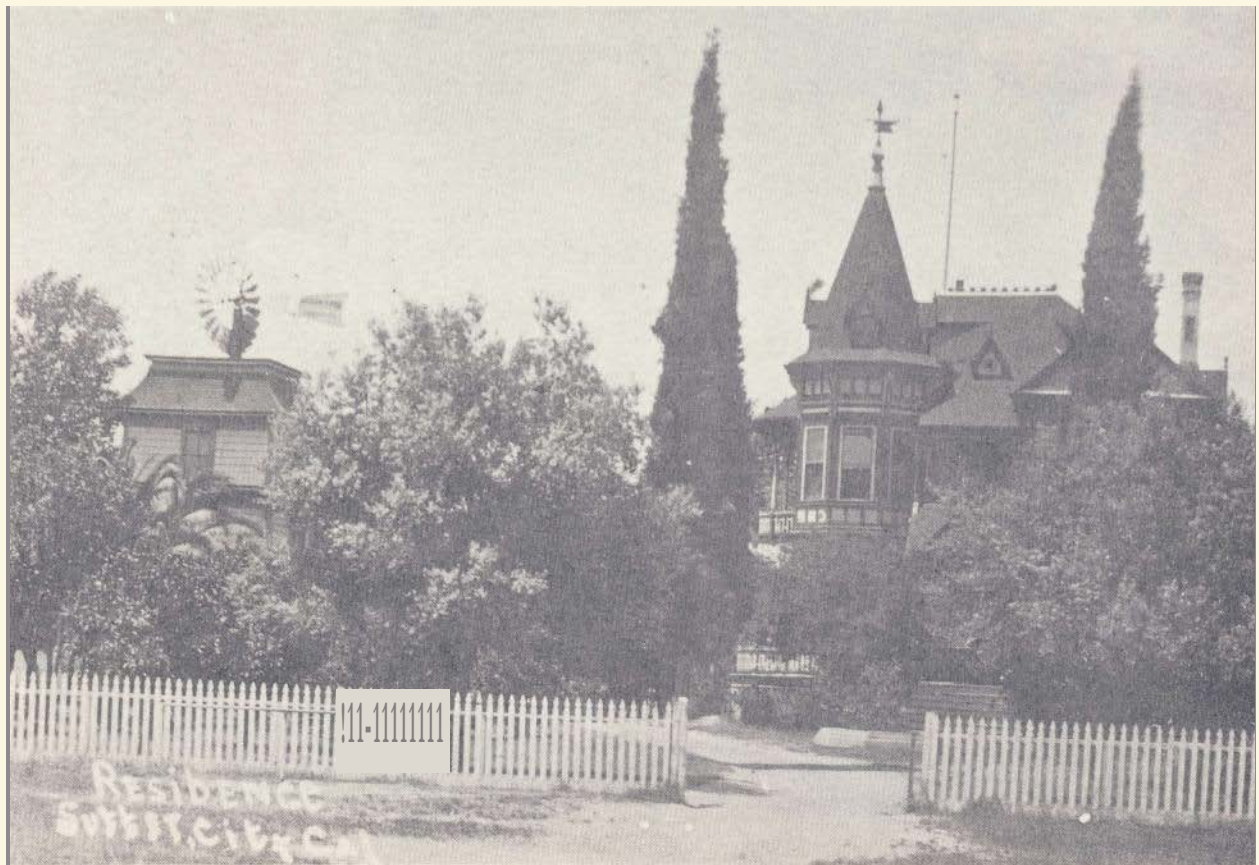
H. H. Brittan made some remarks. A literary program in which Miss May Kimball won the first prize of \$10. A rousing speech by a rousing young attorney Kirby Mahon, music and dancing and finally a sort of a lottery in which the prizes were lots. In his oration Kirby Mahon predicted that the name of P. D. Gardemeyer would long be remembered. It was All of this optimism was boosted by the sight of the many buildings rising before their bedazzled eyes - above all the Felt building and the imposing bank building on the corner of California and Nelson and both built of bricks burned right in their own back yards. These are still sound and useful structures. Yes, 1888 was a bountiful year. But what of 1889?

Well, amid all of this joyful music someone had to sound a sour note, only you have to read between the lines.

Longer, Louder, Orators

The Appeal, March 29, 1889 - "P. D. Gardemeyer was in town yesterday and stated that the report that he had made an assignment was without the slightest foundation and that he could not trace it to any source, but he was confident it was the work of an enemy. He says he was never in a better condition financially than at present and that with the progress of Sutter City he expects to better his circumstances."

So there you have it, but I must add that this was not the only disquieting rumor. There was a whole crop just about to bust into the light. Gardemeyer and his pals were well aware of this and strove mightily to take the investors minds off such disquieting subjects. Why, they were bad for business.



To do this they orated longer and louder about three grand projects that they alleged were in store for the settlers. In justice to the promoters it must be said they were the only ones where they had not made substantial progress. The projects were the railroad, a College in Sutter City and a hotel resort in the Buttes. As for the railroad they redoubled activity on the roadbed, staked out the depot site and graded a wide avenue in the town, over which they assured the settlers, they would be rolling in the near future.

Only Needed Money

The college project was promising; it was to rival the University of the Pacific. They had received the sanction of the Methodist Church and a committee of prominent local men to plug for it and raise money. No better men could have been selected. The chairman was B. F. Walton and M. E. Sanborn was the secretary. The others on the Board were the Rev. E. R. Willis and George Ohleyer. The plans for the College were ready and the 10 acre sight donated, all that was needed was about \$125,000 to build the structure. They started a subscription list. At first money came easily - and then a rumor here and a rumor there - and no more money.

The most grandiose undertaking was the resort hotel. Readers, it was a dilly. what Pete Gardemeyer pictured to a listening world was something unique. South Butte was to be terraced. (he alleged \$50,000 had already been subscribed for this purpose) and on the prepared site there would be erected a luxurious hotel all around which there was to be a high fence. Thus the hotel would be the center of a vast game preserve for the Buttes then abounded in elk, deer, antelope, rabbits and perhaps a bear. And to crown it all, wild pigs.

A Flood of Suits

For fun the guest would shoot the game and for board money - leave it to Pete. He had noted the attempts at gold digging in the Buttes- well! the guest could mine gold for their upkeep. What's the matter with that?

Now - all that was necessary to realize this magnificent pipe dream was money, Money - one P. D. had only to wave his magic wand and money just grew, apparently. But now! How different it was. It seemed that every time he had his prospect sold something damaging to his financial standing arose and the money just flew away.

First, almost over night, there was a veritable flood of suits filed against him on mortgage defaults. These were bad enough, but in their trial followed arrests on criminal charges. For instance on March 2, 1890, he was brought before Justice Arnold in Yuba City and charged with obtaining money under false pretenses.

Technical Escape

In a word he sold one lot to two persons. He was released on \$1500 bail and the suit was dropped on a technicality. You will note this - he escaped on a technicality. More suits ensued and he did show great cunning in beating them on technicalities - but soon there was such a host of suits that there was just not enough technicalities to go around, and no longer was it a case of raising money but escaping a long, long stay in jail. In fact the suits were too numerous to even make an attempt to record them. Witness a few:

Jan. 30, 1890- Obtaining money under false pretense.

Jan. 11, 1890- Charged with larceny.

June 20, 1890- Gardemeyer again, Alleged to have sold the same lot to two different people.

July 8, 1890- Gardemeyer's bail forfeited.

Surprise Performance

These are but random samples, picked from an infinity of cases against him. The town was panicked and two rumors circulated all over.

Pete Gardemeyer had sold out his interests.

Pete Gardemeyer had taken a runout powder.

Both were true, yet not quite true. He really had sold out all his interests to a slinky character from San Francisco named Alpers for the incredible sum of \$10 and while he had decamped, he did sneak in town once in a while under the cover of darkness and dressed in woman's garments, to see Mrs. Gardemeyer.

His last public appearance was a surprise performance. The supervisors of Sutter County, on the night of July 24, 1891, were in session at the courthouse. Sutter County was about to build a hall of records and they were there to open the bids. Just as they were about to do this a pudgy, dapper little man popped up in the audience and plunged into a surprise speech, delivered with great gusto and assurance. It was none other than the mystery man, Charles Alpers, to whom Gardemeyer sold out his interest for \$10. What's more he was accompanied by the elusive P. D. Gardemeyer.

Mr. Alpers lectured the astounded supervisors like the principal lectures his class of naughty boys. His subject was Sutter City. Sutter City he asserted was the coming town, and it would grow until it and all of the country around would be one great metropolis.

The railroad now under construction was bound to speed this expected growth, but there were greater things in store. Among the industries projected to support the economy of the new town was a crockery plant. Not just a plant, but one of the largest, for in the Buttes there was unlimited amounts of the finest crockery clay in the country, just waiting to be burned into the best chinaware.

To transport all of this crockery to San Francisco, the central distributing point, he and his associates were organizing a line of steamers to run between Meridian and San Francisco, bearing great cargoes of crockery.

Ten Dollar Interest

In view of all this, continued Promoter Alpers, it would be a waste of money and a disgrace to build the hell of records in Yuba City when butter City, considering its obvious advantages, should not only be the proper location of the hell of records, but the county seat, itself.

A reporter of the Marysville Appeal reports the considered opinion of the Board as follows: "For a man who had only a \$10 interest in the county that being the whole price he paid for the whole of Boomville, and one up to a few weeks ago did not know that a county by the name of Sutter existed, he was making himself very officious. We never had any but good words for Sutter's prosperity, but we are fast losing confidence in her, especially her boomers."

Townfolk Waked to Find Angel Missing

Sometime about the end of 1891 the Sutter City Citizens awoke to the fact that Peter Gardemeyer just wasn't around. Why he left their midst was quite obvious. Not even a wonder worker like Pete could cope with the deluge of delinquent tax sales, mortgage foreclosures, civil suits, criminal suits, and what have you that poured upon him. Finally there was a small army of the bilked who were willing aye, even anxious to fill his thick hide with buckshot, the rascal!

Yes, he was a rascal, but he was a constructive rascal. With a little more luck and a little more money he might have made Sutter City a miracle of town building. Even as it was, he left it one of the best laid out cities in the states, boasting of wide, tree lined avenues, a livable residence section, adequate schools and a business section that needed only business to be a crackerjack. Yes, he might have been a rascal, but none can deny that he had vision.

A Swarm of Victims

Just after he left there was a period of terrific deflation but life must go on. Slowly the town recovered its morale and discovered the whole bottom hadn't fallen out. Of course there was no wizard to announce such daily wonders as a new flour mill or a \$50,000 court house, but in spite of the lack of these shots in the arm the city managed to carry on and it even grew a little. Those tough old timers took things in their stride, while most of the newcomers proved to be solid citizens. But the evil that men do live after them.

Pete left in Sutter City a swarm of victims, a few ignorant foreigners, whom he had tricked out of their last cent and left to wander about, penniless, hopeless and hungry, depending on skimpy charity that the little town could afford. One of these was a puny, middle aged, psychotic little German by the name of Peter Schmitt. Remember Pete!

So, with the passage of a few months Sutter City relapsed into the usual dull but peaceful existence normal in most small towns when - bang, bang, bang and the dove of peace was blasted into atomic dust.

Bangs and Screams

It was on the evening of November 17, 1893, a date to remember. Blacksmith Fichter was relaxing when he heard the report of three shots and a woman's screams. He ran to the Gardemeyer house a few blocks distance. Arriving there he found Mrs. Gardemeyer, her dress bloody, lying on the floor moaning, while hovering over her was her daughter, Mrs. Minerva Beecroft, weeping at her mother's fate. He helped make her comfortable. Then, as several neighbors arrived he left to fetch Constable Tharp to the scene.

It developed that she had been shot by Peter Schmitt, their German gardener. Just how it happened is brought out by Minnie Beecroft's statement. Her story: Schmitt came into the dining hall and asked her mother if they had supper. She replied that they had long ago and that she had called him but he did not come. He answered that he had not heard her, to which she replied that she was not going to get it over again.

Three Shots Fired

Then Schmitt put his hand in his pocket. Minerva saw something shine and screamed to her mother, then heard a pistol shot. Her mother rushed at the man and grasped him by the collar. In the struggle Schmitt fired two more shots, the second striking her in the abdomen. After the third shot he left the house and started for Abendroth's about a half a mile north. Minnie followed him screaming. "You'll get it for this, Pete!"

Her mother followed by another door and ran about 80 yards distance where she and Minnie met. Mrs. Gardemeyer put her hands on her dress and brought them up bloody, Minnie cried, "Are you hurt mother?" Yes - answered her mother and sent her boy, young Herman Erke, to summon a neighbor, Eugene Summy, who lived about 275 yards away. Said Summy, "At about 7 O'clock Mrs. Gardemeyer's boy came running and inquired if I was home. I went to where he was standing he said, "Pete has shot my mother and she wants you to come down quick."

"I ran down and saw her standing in the street about 60 yards from her home. She was crying and as I noticed blood on her dress I assisted her to the house and with the aid of her daughter, Minnie Beecroft, took her to her room"

Massacre Intended

Fichter soon located Constable Tharp who lived about one half mile away. Tharp, a tall, commanding individual, strapped on his gun and together with his son George sallied forth to John Abendroth's in Dutch Flat, a half a mile north. There he found the killer, of all things, calmly sipping a cup of tea with his German friend.

"Throw up your hands," thundered Tharp. Schmitt upped his hands, stating as he did that he had planned on surrendering. Shaking him down, Tharp relieved him of a fully loaded 32 Smith and Wesson. "Loaded," grunted Tharp. "Yes" explained neighbor Abendroth, "he intended to kill all of the family if his wrongs had not been righted."

And he had been wronged, alright. Gardemeyer had located him in San Francisco, brought him to Sutter City, where he sold him a house and lot for \$850. When the poor immigrant tried to take his property he learned that Fred Best was in full and legal possession of the property. When he protested, Gardemeyer promised to make good, by compounding one promise with another, borrowed the last few hundred Schmitt had left, leaving him penniless. Then he gave Schmitt a job as his gardener, letting him sleep in his tank-house. This looked good, only Gardemeyer refunded nothing; he wasn't the refunding kind: he paid him the merest dribs of his wages - just enough, plus more promises, to keep him on the job.

After P. D. decamped, Schmitt stayed on, still sleeping in the tankhouse, getting little or no wages, and eating slim. But in justice to Mrs. Gardemeyer, she had little or no money, and two children to feed. Finally, Peter Schmitt developed into the biggest bellyacher that ever pestered a good woman trying to support her children on nothing.

Schmitt's examination was held before Justice of the Peace, John Q. Lisle of Sutter City. Because he did not understand English a Yuba City doctor by the name of Krosby translated. At the hearing Minerva Beecroft told of the shooting while Dr. Cannon who had been called to attend the injured woman described the wound. Only one shot had taken effect. It struck high in the left side of the abdomen and was lodged there. Cannon described it as a very serious and dangerous wound.

Peter Schmitt asked permission to make a statement but it was so wandering that Justice Lisle ruled that it was immaterial and cut him off. He did, however, contribute one pertinent fact.

He came to the country from Passau, Germany six years before. He landed in New York, and from there he went to Texas to work as a gardener but had to leave Texas because of a sunstroke, something that probably added his poor wits more than mother nature had. From there he came to California. During his testimony he remarked that he had not seen Gardemeyer for two years, which would date P. D.'s retreat from Sutter City about the last of 1891.

When Dr. Cannon pronounced Mrs. Gardemeyer's wound very serious he was tragically right. He left her resting comfortably on Saturday afternoon, in the night she began to sink and at one o'clock Sunday morning, November 19, she departed this life. Shock and peritonitis was the doctor's diagnosis. Her death was a tremendous shock to a wide circle of friends, for she was a fine woman in every respect.

She was born in Germany in 1846 and came to America as a young girl. In 1868 she married Herman Erke, who had a ranch where the Moorhead ranch is now. Herman died in 1874 and 10 years later she married Gardemeyer. She left a son, Herman Erke, about 17, and two married daughters, Mrs. Minerva Beecroft of Sutter City and Mrs. Konsanstein of San Francisco. Finally a son by Gardemeyer, John Gardemeyer about nine.

The funeral was held in the Methodist Church with the Rev. Kinsey conducting the services which were attended by a tremendous crowd. Six of the best known men of that section were pall bearers. H. L. Howard, M. E. Ramsey, George Brittan, Wm. Foderhase, T. J. Clayee and C. De Witt. They laid her away in the tiny Stohlman cemetery near the Long Bridge, next to her first husband, Herman Erke.

Saved from Lynching

As I have said before, in general feeling was very bitter against Schmitt because of his cold blooded murder of this faithful wife and mother. But one thing saved him from a possible lynching; so many had been swindled by P. D. Gardemeyer that they could well understand how brooding over the loss of his Laney could progress from madness to murder.

Meanwhile, the killer watched. and waited in his cell till the law could take cognizance of his act. He was very anxious to explain the motive of his murderous act. To a reporter he remarked that he had purchased the revolver in Marysville, 14 days before the murder and debated with himself as to whether he should kill the Gardemeyer family with it or Peter Schmitt. But slow footed law finally caught up with him.

On Feb. 13, 1894, Peter Schmitt was haled into the superior court, Judge Daves presiding, to fight for his life. The prosecution was headed by District Attorney McLaughlin while friends

and countrymen of Schmitt's dug up enough dough to hire a tremendous team of lawyers for the defense, Col. E. A. Forbes, and H. Carlin, not to mention young Kirby Mahon.

Eyewitness Story

Prospective jurors were examined by the hundreds for almost all had a fixed opinion, either pro or con. Through all of the ensuing battles Schmitt viewed all with a look of dumb detachment, but that was to be expected for he understood hardly any English.

But all things have an end and the jury was finally secured. This was the roll call: Wm. Mould, F. B. Noyes, W. Hawn, H. Luther, C. A. Stohlman, C. G. Raub, 4. E. Roberts, Frank Calloway, Frank Hogaboom, W. A. Briggs, Henry Meyers and Wm. Steelman.

The chief witness for the prosecution was Minnie Beecroft who repeated the eyewitness story of her mother's murder - a damning recital for the defense to controvert. Then there was the usual routine - a plan of the house and the dead woman's bloody garment followed by a surprise witness, little Johnnie Gardemeyer, the nine year old son of the slain woman and the dear departed P. D. G. He was excused because he was too young to understand an oath.

Direction of Defense

Young Herman Erke, the son, was placed on the stand and his cross examination at the hands of Carlin revealed the plan of the defense. Young Herman denied that they had starved Schmitt or tricked him out of his wages or that they had considered him insane. Nor had they made a slave of him, but the inference that Carlin tried to draw from this and following cross examination was that Schmitt's loss of his money and his treatment by the Gardemeyers had driven him insane.

When the defense took over Carlin still hammered the witness to prove his contention that Schmitt had been robbed and mistreated till he was driven insane. He put a number of Schmitt's German friends on the stand and like all well drilled soldiers they all pronounced Schmitt insane, just as in rebuttal, the District Attorney put on the stand numbers of the dead woman's friends who pronounced Schmitt sane.

Touching Tale Told

Schmitt himself was his own best witness and in his halting tale told laboriously through an interpreter, Dr. Krosby, a touching tale, while Abendroth told how he had to give Schmitt food over the years and during that time watched him driven into insanity by his misfortunes.

In rebuttal the prosecution came up with another surprise witness, none other than the effervescent little man, Charles Alpers, who lived in San Francisco and described himself as a manufacturer. He related his acquaintance with Gardemeyer in the 1890's but his testimony did little either way except to give Mr. Alpers a chance to air his personality.

Attorney Carlin ended with an eloquent closing argument that took five hours. "If I could only have dragged P. D. Gardemeyer by the hair into this courtroom when Peter Schmitt was testifying, I would have been able to give you, gentlemen of the jury, a test that would have gone home in your inmost hearts."

In the First Degree

"The defendant was not affected by 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 who has not been robbed by Gardemeyer.--and compelled them to beg for bread."

But facts are facts in spite of Carlin's eloquence the jury deliberated an hour and took but three ballots when Foreman H. Luther came in with a verdict of "Murder in the first degree" and Judge Levis sentenced Peter Schmitt to San Quentin for life.

There is just a postscript to add to what is known of the career of P. D. Gardemeyer - a genius who went wrong. According to the Appeal of September 20, 1895 at that date he was in Houston, Texas, where he was promoting a land speculation in his well known fashion.

His partners grew suspicious and decided to investigate him. They inquired and received some pointed references to P. D. in response, "that we will very likely knock Gardemeyer's calculations to smitheriens. Gardemeyer told one of the men a pitiful tale how his wife had been brutally killed by a servant who had become suddenly insane. He said that the incident so upset him that he concluded to leave California and seek forgetfulness in a busy Texas life.

As a matter of fact he had not seen his wife for a few years before her death and did not dare go near Sutter City.

Let's say a word for A. J. Lyon, an honest man. He sold many lots in Sutter City, now Sutter, and no one ever had any trouble with them. In spite of P. D. G. the town has never died. The last few years a lot of people have moved there and built nice homes and they love it there. They are kindly and friendly neighbors.

One of the attractions may be the fact that Sutter is seventy feet higher than Marysville, thus leaving very little danger from high water.