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THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF WINDSOR A. KEEFER

by

Frances E. Bishop

W.A. Keefer's disappearance in 1897 brought to light the amazing and successful maneuvers of a professional swindler to amass a fortune, ostensibly using the legal means of the day, by duping his stockholders and associates. Even though technically insolvent in 1887, Keefer was able to retrieve hidden assets and to continue accumulating his illgotten wealth for another ten years, when he mysteriously disappeared.

Frances E. Bishop, of Arnold, an indefatigable researcher, has made a notable effort to reconstruct the career of this totally unscrupulous promoter from the surviving mass of recorded documents and from other information. The reader should realize, however, that there are still a number of questions in the Keefer saga not as yet and perhaps never to be explained.

We are pleased to add this fascinating chapter to our county's history by printing Mrs. Bishop's article on W. A. Keefer in "Las Calaveras," and wish to acknowledge also the editorial assistance given Mrs. Bishop by Prof. W. Scott Perry, retired, of Arnold.

Editor

Windsor Atchison Keefer, a prominent figure in Calaveras County for more than twenty years, was connected with many enterprises conducted on a magnificent scale. Keefer was a handsome fellow, tall and well-built with regular features, blue eyes, dark, wavy hair, and was the snappiest dresser in the entire Mother Lode. His winter attire included a splendid full-length fur coat reaching nearly to his ankles that, combined with his striking appearance, presented a dashing figure attracting atten-



WINDSOR A. KEEFER

tion wherever he went. He was a man of sophisticated tastes and he took advantage of every opportunity to indulge his inclinations, moving among the best circles, not only in San Francisco where his favorite haunt was the Palace Hotel, but in Paris as well. With his dynamic and charming personality, he appeared to have the trust and confidence of all who knew him until his mysterious disappearance in 1897. At that time Keefer was secretary and treasurer of the Jupiter Gravel Mining, Water & Electric Power Company as well as manager of the Jupiter mines.

On the morning of March 24, 1897, Windsor Keefer and Beach Thompson, president of the company and at whose home Keefer was boarding, accompanied each other to the Jupiter Company's Monarch hydraulic placer mine near Dogtown, four miles northeast of Altaville. Sometime during the morning Keefer suggested that Thompson go to the Stockton ranch nearby, where the company had six men employed, to see how their work was progressing. He would continue to operate the hydraulic monitor alone, and would join Thompson at the ranch for lunch. Keefer failed to keep the appointment. Thompson was not overly concerned about his absence until he did not appear at the house by nine that evening. Somewhat dismayed, he returned to the mine in search of his companion. However, all to be found of Keefer was his torn and battered hat.

Rumors abounded as to the reason for his disappearance. One theory held that he had committed suicide, but this thought was said to be untenable. Surmises that Keefer had absolutely no reason for doing himself in, or

for running away, almost led to a direct charge of murder against a suspect. Another theory was that he had met with foul play and his body had been thrown down a prospect hole. A Stockton newspaper claimed a sighting of his body in Milton, but this claim did not deter a search of the mining site even to the extent of sluicing away the large pile of tailings from the mine, the search being conducted by the murder suspect! That effort proved fruitless. Officers of the law worked on the case for months but neither "hide nor hair" of Windsor A. Keefer was ever seen again in Calaveras County. Although Keefer's sister, Mrs. Martha Davids, refused to believe ill of her beloved brother and stoutly maintained that he had been murdered, no evidence either confirming or disproving any of the theories of murder was brought to light.

Then, piece by piece, the scenario of a carefully staged "disappearance" began to emerge. It was ascertained that, contrary to his usual habits, Keefer had slipped out of the house early that morning of the 24th and then returned before anyone was astir. Apparently, in preparation for a hasty departure from the area, he had secreted business clothing into which he intended to change from his rough miner's clothes and rubber boots usually worn by hydraulic miners. To allay suspicions that he had indeed deliberately planned his flight, everything in his room was left undisturbed. This included his dress clothes and white shirt with diamond studs that he planned to wear to a banquet to which both he and Thompson had been invited that evening at the nearby Torrey home.

Keefer had reasons for wishing to disappear, for his dealings in connection with the Jupiter enterprises had involved him in serious personal controversies and he had many bitter enemies. In one shooting scrape with George Longstreth, one of his employees, during a difficulty between them at the Monarch mine, he narrowly escaped death when a bullet from Longstreth's gun cut the collar button from his throat.

Keefer's career as a business man and mining promoter in Calaveras County began in the early 1870s when he first appeared in the records as an investor in the "Calaveras Group of Big Trees" and several mining properties. Keefer's early transactions were not conspicuously different from those of most other promoters of that day. California gold mine promoters in general were already viewed with suspicion by the savvy investing public in the East, some of whom tended to class them as outright crooks, and it would not be long before wise investors in California communities followed suit. Keefer's operations undoubtedly added to the growing

local distrust. His rise to prominence began when he entered into association with the owners of the Jupiter mining property near Dogtown. The Jupiter was held in the name of the Bully Boy Mining Company and consisted of the Bully and the Buckeye placer mining claims on the Central Hill Channel. The owners were in need of capital to develop this property on which they had expended their own labor for several years without tangible profit. It was common knowledge among miners but probably not to Keefer that this Tertiary gravel channel often contained stretches with only low values in gold or was even barren. Keefer came to them at this time, in February, 1878, and offered to find them a buyer. The owners agreed to commission him to sell the mines and the selling price was set at \$36,000. Keefer was to receive ten per cent as his fee for the sale. It was this transaction that launched him upon a most amazing career of nefarious schemes.

Keefer and nine others, including the Marquis de Brigés (Eugene Elias Malbec de Montjoc), one of Keefer's partners in the purchase of an interest in the Calaveras Big Tree Grove, immediately filed adjoining placer mining claims for two hundred acres under the name of the Jupiter & Venus Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company.

The following month Keefer convinced his associates that it was necessary for their company to incorporate in order for him to promote the sale of stock. Accordingly, articles of the incorporation for the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company were filed by Keefer in San Francisco on April 8, 1878. Keefer's signature appeared on that document as subscribing for shares in the amount of \$5,000. The purpose of the company was "to work and develop Gravel mines in the County of Calaveras, State of California, and buying, selling dealing in mines and mining claims, water rights, mill sites and mill privileges, woodlands and dumping ground."

Keefer let no grass grow under his feet. In a very short time he persuaded the owners of the Bully Boy mines to agree to give him an "indefinite bond"* on the property, a grievous mistake on their part as they were soon to learn. He then demanded that deeds to the claim be made over to him "so he could command certain capital". At this point the owners of the Bully Boy mines bethought to have an attorney look into the situation and found to their dismay that, according to documents they had already signed, they were indeed required by law to deliver a bond and a deed to Keefer. The latter was given a deed to the Bully Boy mines with the stipulation

*A bond was the term used at that time for an option to purchase a given property.

through a recorded agreement that he was to be allowed possession only until he made a deal for the mine. A number of shares of stock of the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company equal to the agreed selling price of \$36,000 were to be held by the owners as collateral until that amount less ten per cent commission was paid to them by Keefer. The owners were to retain the exclusive right to operate the mine and to the gold extracted therefrom until all the terms of the agreement were met. They also agreed to complete the application for the patent as quickly as possible in the name of James Gunter and twenty other patentees, and the patent when received was to be delivered to Keefer. The twenty other patentees comprised the majority of the owners of the mines incorporated into the Jupiter company.

A few days after the agreement was signed, Keefer filed two additional mining claims on the same ground as the Jupiter claims, one of ten acres in his own name and the other for twenty acres in the name of the Jupiter

Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company. These two claims were not recorded for more than a year and even then Keefer recorded the ten acres filed in his name a full month before he recorded that belonging to the mining company.

The Bully, the Buckeye, and the Jupiter and Venus Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company's claims were transferred by quitclaim deeds to the new corporation to which were shortly thereafter added the other nearby mines, namely, the Brunner, the Basque, and the Railroad placer mining claims. At the same time John Letora granted the company ten acres of land and B. R. Prince and Frank Monteverdi gave permission for a right-of-way to construct a pipeline across their property.*

Keefer was not worried about the amount of gold from the Bully Boy mines that would be retained by the owners. It was a small pittance indeed compared to the

*The Prince and Monteverdi property was originally the homestead claim of John Letora (alias John Lee) of 160 acres near Hawkeye House.



CALAVERAS BIG TREE GROVE

Windsor A. Keefer stands before the "General" on the right, and James L. Sperry on the left, in

1874. Keefer owned 440 acres adjoining the Grove.

Courtesy California State Library

many thousands of dollars his much grander schemes would generate. The use of the deed for the Bully Boy mines and later the patent granted to James Gunter and the twenty patentees along with the manipulation of the newly-incorporated company gave Keefer the instruments which started him on his way to build an Empire! And he very nearly succeeded.

Windsor A. Keefer returned to San Francisco, where, keeping a "low profile", he spent a year ingratiating himself with the stockholders and studying the organization of the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company and how it could best be managed for his own iniquitous intrigues.

Unbeknownst to the mine owners in Calaveras County and apparently known to but a few others, in October of 1879, Keefer then reincorporated the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company into the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company Number One. Keefer's name appeared at the top of the list of the Board of Directors as subscribing to 99,970 shares of stock of par value of \$100 per share. Thus on paper he was owner of stock supposedly worth \$9,970,000, a sum he had never commanded in his entire business career. The true purpose of this second incorporation was, of course, to provide him with undisputed control of the company, and also with an abundance of stock that could be peddled to investors, thus enhancing his own finances. The main purpose of the corporation, however, was stated in the articles to be to especially acquire and work the mining claims and property known as the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company claims and to grant, bargain, sell and convey the same or any portion thereof. The new corporation was not restricted, moreover, to merely taking over the assets and activities of the old Jupiter company. It was also empowered to engage in any and all activities related to locating, mining and processing gold, silver and other minerals; water rights and ditches; agriculture and timberlands; merchandise and such other businesses as found necessary for the success of the corporation. Indeed success for the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company Number One would have meant nothing less than building an economic empire in Calaveras County under the sovereignty of Windsor A. Keefer.

The local press exuberantly announced in March, 1882, that the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel mine at Dogtown, said to be one of the most gigantic hydraulic mining enterprises ever undertaken in this county, was at long last in operation after the expenditure of nearly \$100,000, and that the people were indebted to Mr. Keefer for whatever benefit might accrue to them through the working of the mine.

Alas, the dream evaporated. Pressure from a number of stockholders of the Jupiter Number One, unwilling to wait longer for the promised golden harvest, had forced Keefer to start mining operations before completion of his water system, at that time still under construction. The lack of sufficient water for properly operating the hydraulic monitors was certainly a contributing factor in preventing the enterprise from flourishing. The principle reason, however, was the failure to find rich gold-bearing gravel. This should not have been surprising to knowledgeable mining people as no systematic sampling of the deposit had ever been made. By 1883, the Jupiter Number One was in financial difficulties. At the end of that year Keefer had been forced to loan the company an undetermined amount of his own money, secured by four promissory notes, with a deed to the company's mining property as collateral. This deed was signed under Keefer's persuasion by ten stockholders. These stockholdings, combined with five proxies garnered by Keefer, represented the majority of shares of the company. Although it was customary for a notice of most recorded documents to be published at that time, Keefer stipulated that notices of these documents were not to be published.

The company's financial troubles were revealed in September, 1884, when the local lumber baron, John Manuel, obtained a judgment against the Jupiter Number One for \$1,668.15 for failure to pay for the lumber which he had provided them.

While the Jupiter company was suffering from these reverses Keefer had undertaken another ill-fated venture. Realizing only too well the crucial importance of water he began to lay plans for completing an independent source of water for the Jupiter mines. He set about acquiring water rights to Angels Creek, French Gulch Creek, San Domingo Creek and in 1883, to the Stanislaus River, projecting the delivery of the water from the Stanislaus across country by a continuation of the San Domingo Ditch, then under construction, to supply other counties as well as Calaveras.

In preparation for this latest enterprise, Keefer had purchased stock in the Union Water Company of Murphys and had soon become a director. He then filed articles of incorporation for the Union Water, Lumber, Mill & Mining Company in March, 1884, to operate in conjunction with the Union Water Company. Again Keefer was the principle stockholder, listed as subscribing to 14,970 shares of stock valued at \$1,497,000 while the remaining six directors subscribed to only five shares each. The articles of incorporation of the Union Water, Lumber, Mill & Mining Company specifically stated that the company would supply water to the communities

of Long Beach, Cal., 1888. F. M. We Stock Miss after de night.

W. A. KEEFER'S MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE FROM THE JUPITER MINE.

APRIL 10, 1897.

EXPOSE OF SOME OF SECRETARY KEEFER'S CROOKED METHODS.

His Whereabouts is Only a Matter of Conjecture.

WAS HE MURDERED

Or is He in Hiding For the Purpose of Carrying Out Some Scheme?

—A Few Facts Concerning the Company.

that every living person in that neighborhood knew about the occurrence, we found upon inquiry that comparatively few professed to have heard anything at all about it. It also appears singular that none of the officers seem to have interested themselves in the matter. Whether Keefe has been done away with or whether he has intentionally absented himself remains to be seen, but at any rate there seems to be something rather leery concerning the management of this Jupiter mine. We notice that on January 21, 1897, the enormous assessment of one dollar per share was levied on the capital stock of the corporation payable on or before March 23, 1897.

How the Story of the Finding of His Body Originated.

A WOMAN SPEAKS.

Mrs. J. Guntor an Oakland Shareholder, Thinks He Has Fled to Avoid the Wrath of His Victims.

in granting an indefinite bond on the place. "We employed Henry Hogarth to look into the deal, and on the strength of his report, which was to the effect that Keefe could doubtless make a good showing, and that technicalities had to be conformal with, delivered us a bond and deed. The agreement is still in effect, and is to the effect that we retain full ownership of the mine, operating the same, receiving all moneys therefrom and paying all bills allowed to be made by Keefe and putting the stock on the books of the company as if Keefe were still in the city. The story mark of Keefe's wife from the Altaville ends, jokingly question touching the body of Keefe in a prospect led above. The he dismissed the and never would do but for the long in the city papers, their origin in those which

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SAN ANDREAS, CALAVERAS COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INVESTIGATION OF KEEFER'S WORK.

He is Believed to Have Fled to Escape Justice.

RECORDS FALSIFIED,

And Funds Misappropriated—He Deposited the Company's Money in his own Name and Drew It out Afterward.

Everybody in the corporation believed explicitly in him as he seemed to have questions were asked. He employed men in the name of the company, always on the properties which were held in his own name instead of on those of the company proper. In one instance in particular, after the company had paid the bills for the labor thus performed, he put in an individual bill against the company for the very work they had already paid for, claiming he had advanced

signatures, telling how the same was obtained. The statement of a metropolitan paper to the effect that Mrs. Davids, Keefe's sister, was going to institute legal proceedings against President Thompson, was a fake, for the day after the article appeared, she and her husband both expressed themselves as very sorry that such a story should have gained publicity, as they had never made such a statement nor any part of it, and had never authorized the same to be made. Thompson says that he at first firmly believed that Keefe was dead, but after the investigation which showed crooked work, other little incidents were recalled which under other circumstances would probably never have been noticed, confirming the belief that he had run away to escape justice. There were six suits

THE JUPITER MINE.

Mrs. Jones Says 'Things Were Misrepresented to Her.'

Directors of the Corporation Called to Meet to Consider the Matter Last Monday.

It appears that the affairs of the Jupiter Gravel Mining Company, of which quite a sensation was stirred by the sudden and mysterious disappearance of its secretary, Windsor A. Keefe, are drawing to a focus by the official demand on the company last Monday of Mrs. Henrietta Jones, a resident of Santa Clara county and a stockholder in the corporation, for the restoration of property and money obtained from her, she alleges, by fraud. In her demand, she accuses both Keefe and A. B. Thompson, secretary and president of the company respectively, of having obtained from her by false and fraudulent repre-

already served by the existing Union Water Company as well as to other areas. The ditch from the Stanislaus River was to be constructed under the name of the Union Water, Lumber, Mill & Mining Company. However, Keefe was prevented from building the San Domingo Ditch, leading from San Domingo Creek to the Jupiter mines, by several irate landowners who strongly objected to his digging an unauthorized canal across their property. The grand scheme of bringing water from the Stanislaus River to connect with the San Domingo Ditch thus had to be temporarily abandoned. The San Domingo Ditch was eventually completed, but only by following a route that carefully avoided any contact with the disgruntled landowners' properties.

Keefe's activities as determined from available records were murky, to say the least, at this time. However, a lawsuit brought against him in 1885 by John C. Scribner, contesting the title to the 40-acre Barney

Harold (or Perverserance) placer mine, indicated that events were not all going well for Keefe. The suit was won by Scribner. The crisis mounted when a second lawsuit was initiated in 1887 by the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company Number One against Scribner and six others seeking to quiet title to fifteen acres, ten of which were included in the Barney Harold claim. This attempt to recoup at least part of the Barney Harold, probably containing some of the better gold-bearing gravel, likewise went against Keefe and the Jupiter Number One.

For reasons best known to himself, Keefe about this time transferred his personal holdings to various of his associates. We suspect that with his personal finances, as well as those of the Jupiter Number One, in bad condition, Keefe had certain adversaries who were planning to force him into bankruptcy. The Garibaldi placer mine and 120 acres of timberland adjoining the North Grove

of the Calaveras Big Trees were entrusted to Samuel Baker; 320 acres of timberland adjoining the grove on the southwest went to J. D. Whitney; and the Jupiter placer mining claim was turned over to J. D. Whitney and John A. Hammersmith. The four promissory notes and the deed as collateral held by Keefer against the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company Number One were assigned to Moses Hopkins, a trusted associate and subscriber in the Union Water, Lumber, Mill & Mining Company. There is no record of how much Hopkins might have paid Keefer, nor is there a record of just what specific property was involved in this latter transaction, as Keefer was scrupulously meticulous to exclude any legal description whatsoever in either the deed or the assignment to Hopkins.

The explanation for these maneuvers was revealed when Keefer presented a petition of insolvency in December, 1887, to the Superior Court in San Francisco. Safely in the hands of his cohorts, these assets were excluded from the bankruptcy proceedings. The Court-appointed receiver of Keefer's property, Samuel B. Paige of San Francisco, must have been bitterly disappointed when he rushed to Calaveras County expecting to be the operator of a gold mine or two but, instead, found no visible assets whatsoever belonging to the bankrupt Keefer for him to manage or liquidate for the benefit of the creditors.

Another misfortune had befallen Keefer shortly before he went into bankruptcy. Samuel Baker, a close associate and a key figure in Keefer's effort to hide his assets, died. Baker's capable widow, Eliza, was appointed administratrix in November, 1887, of his estate which contained some of Keefer's properties. Fortunately, Eliza remained loyal to Keefer and saved a number of the component parts of his empire. Her first move was made when the Jupiter Number One was put up for sale to satisfy the Manuel judgment. Manuel himself had apparently been bought out of the picture prior to the sale by Baker and Whitney who had been assigned one-third and two-thirds interests accordingly. The company was sold at public auction in December of 1887 to administratrix Eliza S. Baker, the highest bidder, for \$2272. Six months later, as no attempt had been made to redeem the property, a sheriff's deed for the Jupiter Number One was issued to Eliza as administratrix.

The following year Keefer seized the opportunity to recoup his fortunes. G. W. Grayson and R. R. Grayson, the president and secretary of the Union Water Company, had signed a ten-year agreement with Alvinza Hayward and W. J. Hobart of the Utica Gold Mining Company of Angels Camp to supply the water to work

the Utica mine. As a consequence most of the available supply from the North Fork of the Stanislaus was appropriated by the Union Water Company for the Utica gold mine, and the amount of water left in the river was but a small flow. There was almost no water remaining for the use of local communities. Keefer was quick to revive his plan for distributing water not only to these local communities but to other counties as well, and in May, 1888, incorporated the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company. Once again, he had become the majority subscriber to 99,940 shares at par value of \$9,994,000. J. D. Whitney, John A. Hammersmith, Eugene N. Deuprey, W. S. Wood and C. A. Grow subscribed to ten shares each.

In conjunction with the incorporation of this new Jupiter company, the following month Keefer filed on water rights to 3000 miner's inches of water of San Joaquin Gulch that emptied into the north side of San Domingo Creek just above the fountainhead of the Jupiter ditch. The water rights filing specifically stated that the water so appropriated was not only to be used in Calaveras County but also for supplying cities, towns and villages in the county of San Joaquin.

Just three months after the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company was established, J. D. Whitney and John A. Hammersmith returned the Jupiter placer mining claim to the fold by signing a quitclaim deed for the property to the new Jupiter company.

Under the supposedly watchful eye of the court, Eliza S. Baker transferred the two-thirds interest in the Jupiter Number One, held in trust for J. D. Whitney, to the new company in September, for 5000 shares of the stock of of the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company. Eliza turned these shares over to Whitney who then released her from her obligation. The Superior Court made an order of sale of the property of Samuel Baker the same month and in March, 1889, Eliza sold Baker's one-third interest in the Jupiter Number One to the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company for \$855. In spite of these transactions passing through the Superior Court, none of them were recorded until 1891, and might well still be interred in the files of Keefer's Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company if the death of another stockholder and the ensuing settlement of his estate had not forced the documents to surface.

Both parcels of the valuable timberland adjoining the Calaveras Big Tree Grove were duly turned over to the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company. The Garibaldi Placer Mine was retrieved from the estate of Samuel Baker in February, 1888, by a sheriff's deed to the Jupiter Company, due to non-payment of taxes by Eliza S. Baker

for the fiscal year of 1887-1888.

Thus the property of the now defunct Jupiter Number One that had been so cleverly hidden from the clutches of the law during Keefer's bankruptcy was now safely in the possession of the recently- incorporated Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company, the Phoenix that had arisen from the ashes of Jupiter Number One, and was once again under Keefer's personal control. He was at last ready to proceed with his latest water company plans, as well as to continue the Jupiter mine operation, and his stock-selling schemes. For the next five years he busied himself with the affairs of the new Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company, and in devising ways of replenishing his personal finances.

In a determined effort to provide sufficient water for all needs, Keefer now filed water rights to 3000 miner's inches from Murphys Creek in March, 1895. Keefer's claim was very near the site to which the Union Water Company had held water rights since at least as early as 1852, and where, the preceding January, that company had built a powerhouse, the first generating plant in Calaveras County. The powerhouse was constructed to run the machinery at the Utica gold mine in Angels Camp. There was still a necessity for the use of water to run some of the facilities at the mine as the small 500 kw. generator could not produce enough power for an operation as large as the Utica.

In the following May, Keefer purchased a right-of- way to construct a dam in French Gulch and then built the Union Water, Lumber, Mill & Mining Company's reservoir, now known as the Keefer Reservoir.

At this point in the Jupiter saga, a vibrant new personality entered the scene. Trained as a geologist at the University of Michigan, A. Beach Thompson came to California to pursue graduate work at Stanford University. Shortly after leaving Stanford with his Master's Degree, he became acquainted with Keefer, and in the fall of 1894, joined the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company. Thompson's boundless enthusiasm and knowledge of electrical power development combined with Keefer's compelling personal charm formed an irresistible combination. Young Thompson, barely thirty, was soon installed as Jupiter's president while Keefer continued as secretary-treasurer and as manager of the Jupiter mine.

Thompson and Keefer built their own electric light plant on the grounds of the Jupiter hydraulic placer mine. They put on a nightly show for the benefit of sightseers and, undoubtedly as far as Keefer was concerned, future victims, who came to see the operations of the three large, iron hydraulic monitors under the wonder of the new electric arc lights, some of the first in use in the county.

By 1896, the Thompson-Keefer team had worked out

THE JUPITER PIT

Variously called the Bully Boy, Monarch, and Jupiter hydraulic pit in its early history, it was renamed San Domingo in 1898 by Beach Thompson to enhance its respectability. This view shows the operation in 1907, during Thompson's final but futile effort to make a profitable operation of this Tertiary gravel channel.

Fred Leighton



the details of a corporation that would be the most grandiose scheme of all, a new company with all the assets of the Jupiter to which would be added a great electric power development. Was A. B. Thompson now carrying the ball himself, or was he a dupe of Keefer's? When the new Jupiter Gravel Mining, Water & Electric Company was incorporated in October, 1896, A. B. Thompson headed the list of directors and subscribers. Thompson's father-in-law, A. P. Veeder, was also a subscriber, as was Edward Lande, Keefer's attorney and close personal friend, along with several other incorporators. At this point the mystery deepens, for one of the subscribers, Jas. F. Sheehan, signed up for 199,930 shares whereas the others took only 10 shares each. Where was Keefer, in this new incorporation, and who was Sheehan? These questions will be, in part at least, answered as we continue our narrative.

The purposes of the the new Jupiter company as spelled out in its articles were so all-encompassing as to require some fifty-five lines of small type. Literally every conceivable purpose for doing business, whether of a mining, agricultural, manufacturing, merchandising, or any other type imaginable, was included.

While the capital stock of the original Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company was listed at a total of \$5,000,000 at par, the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company Number One at \$10,000,000, the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company at \$10,000,000 also, the Union Water, Lumber, Mill & Mining Company at \$15,000,000, that of the Jupiter Gravel Mining, Water & Electric Power Company was increased even further to the sum of \$20,000,000, a substantial amount for those days. The new Jupiter company was now ready to be introduced and brought out into the open.

Keefer and Thompson moved next to shift the assets of the Jupiter over to the new company in accordance to instructions ostensibly received from the board of directors. On November 21st Keefer transferred all right title and interest to that property under his personal control to the Jupiter Gravel Mining, Water & Electric Power Company. These holdings consisted of the following:

1. James Harold land patent of 140 acres.
2. Monteverdi property of 6 $\frac{3}{5}$ acres.
3. California State Land Patent of 40 acres.
4. One-half interest in the Lundt and Drallmeyer placer mine.
5. One-fifth interest in the Buckeye placer mine.
6. Alcyone placer mine.
7. Garibaldi placer mine.



A. BEACH THOMPSON

Originally duped by Keefer, Thompson recovered to successfully promote the Camp Nine Powerhouse project on the Stanislaus River, and went on to other successful ventures.

From "Notables of the Southwest"

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8. Total of 440 acres adjoining the North Grove of the Calaveras Big Trees.
 9. Right-of-way for dam and reservoir in French Gulch.
 10. Right-of-way for ditch through Letora property.
 11. Water right to waters of French Gulch.
 12. Water right to waters of Stanislaus River.
 13. Water right to waters of Murphys Creek 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles northeast of Murphys.
 14. Water right to waters of San Joaquin Gulch.

Thompson, as president of the old Jupiter, followed suit deeding over these Jupiter assets to the new company:

1. Bully Boy Mining Company.
2. Letora property of 10 acres.
3. Jupiter placer mines of 50 acres.
4. Right-of-way for laying water pipe across property of Monteverdi and Prince.

Although the two deeds were recorded, but not until early March, 1897, both Keefer and Thompson requested that notice of their recording not be published in the local newspaper.

Meanwhile, the finances of the Jupiter company had deteriorated to the point at which drastic action was necessary. On January 21st, 1897, a very large assessment of one dollar per share was levied on the capital stock of the corporation, payable on or before March 23rd to W. A. Keefer, secretary-treasurer of the company.

On the surface, the new Jupiter company's business appeared to be proceeding smoothly. However, if Keefer's hopes were truly represented in all that had transpired before this, he far surpassed in audacity the schemes of empire builders such as Sutter, Brannan, Fremont, or even the organizers of the Hudson's Bay Company. But the hollowness of his hopes and the falsity and of his intentions was revealed with his disappearance on that fateful day in March as recounted at the beginning of our story.

Many startling discoveries were made when Thompson looked through the company's books and papers left behind in Keefer's room in San Francisco, prompting further investigation into the latter's activities. When the facts of Keefer's false entries into the books became known, a small army of widows and others raised the cry of having been duped by Keefer. Ever since the inception of the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company Number One, Keefer had been busy floating bogus stock amounting to thousands and thousands of dollars of worthless paper. Sometimes he resold the same block of stock to several unsuspecting purchasers, appropriating the proceeds himself. A typical example was the acquisition of an entire 480-acre ranch near Hollister for which the owner, Mrs. Henrietta Jones, was given one thousand shares of stock in the Jupiter Gravel Mining, Water & Electric Company. Keefer did not cancel the certificate for the shares of stock, and a short time later turned the same stock over to Mrs. Cadwallater of San Jose as collateral for \$3,500 cash which he received and pocketed.

Few could resist Keefer's seductive tales of the worth of the Jupiter mines. He described in glowing terms the value of the Jupiter Hydraulic Placer Mine (itself), at \$2,000,000, and promised that the stock was nonassessable; that shares then worth ten dollars would soon rise to seventy dollars; that the Jupiter mine was more valuable than the Utica gold mine, among the largest on the Mother Lode, and in fact, that the owners of the Utica were attempting to trade it for the Jupiter.

Always a gentleman, Keefer preferred to take money

only from those who could afford to lose it. His victims were carefully chosen from among the wealthy, rich widows and other prominent people such as the Armour family of meat-packing fame and the wife of Alvinza Hayward, the widely-known business tycoon.

A Dr. Ruth E. Newland fell under the spell of Keefer's irresistible charm and gave her all, including her entire savings of \$18,000. Such was Keefer's hold over her that she refused for a long time to believe that she had been swindled. When she was finally forced to face that realization, her retaliation was as swift and merciless as had been Keefer's betrayal.

In January, 1894, Dr. Newland approached thirteen of the twenty original owners of the Bully Boy mines who had become disenchanted with Keefer. She found them more than happy to sell her their interest in the Bully and the Buckeye placer claims giving her the majority of the shares and control of the Bully Boy Mining Company.

Deliberately withholding the recording of these two deeds, Dr. Newland left for New York City where she was able to interest Charles F. Blandin in purchasing all of her holdings in the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company for \$3,000 on November 26, 1895. Included in the wording of the deed to Blandin was the specific statement that not only was Ruth E. Newland selling her interests in the Jupiter Deep Blue Gravel Hydraulic Mining Company Number One, the Union Water, Lumber, Mill & Mining Company and the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company but also "all right, title and interest to any and all of my mining claims and property, water rights, deeds, agreements, contracts, or otherwise, claimed to be owned by one Windsor A. Keefer, situated in Calaveras County . . ."

Blandin hastened to California where he promptly recorded the deed in Calaveras County on December 18, 1895. Notice of the recorded deed was duly published in the Calaveras Prospect and it was said that when Keefer came across the item while perusing the newspaper his face turned purple with rage and he swore not only lustily but long.

Since the two deeds transferring the shares in the Bully Boy mines to Dr. Newland had not been recorded, Keefer had no knowledge of the transaction. He wrote a blistering denunciation of Dr. Newland that he took pains to have officially recorded in the office of the county clerk of Calaveras County to insure that it would come to the attention of one and all when it appeared in the local newspaper.

Keefer was not accustomed to having anyone outsmarting him, especially his lady-victims, and Ruth Newland's action shook him to the very core. His mortifica-

tion was increased when, in July, 1896, Blandin recorded the two deeds for the majority of shares in the Bully Boy mines that had been sold to Dr. Newland. Although he still held the vast majority of shares in the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company, and was able to counter Blandin's claims, Keefer had been humiliated, and to make matters worse, bested by a woman at that. It was some time before the chorus of sniggers that followed him everywhere he went, died down and the matter was forgotten. Dr. Ruth E. Newland's revenge had indeed been sweet.

The wife of Cornelius Hammerschmidt, who owned a considerable amount of stock in the Jupiter mines, was so enthralled with Keefer that at his request she transferred her husband's stock during one of the many reincorporations, neglecting to tell Hammerschmidt anything about it. Keefer somehow managed to keep the transaction from the glare of public scrutiny nearly ten years before Hammerschmidt discovered he had been victimized. When he finally realized what had occurred it was too late, for the stock had been sold. The shock of losing the stock due to his wife's deceit was too much for the old man and undoubtedly hastened his death. Hammerschmidt had the last word, however. In a new will that was drawn up while he lay on his deathbed, his estate was left to his son while his wife was cut off with five dollars.

These examples of Keefer's fraudulent and underhanded dealings and their tragic effect on the victims were widely reported in the press as part of the sensational revelations of Keefer's career. How many similar cases went unreported we will never know.

Keefer was not content with bilking investors. He also hoodwinked the directors of the company with an accomplished ease. At a meeting of the board of directors of the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company late in 1896, a motion was entertained concerning the transfer of stock of that company to the reincorporated Jupiter Gravel Mining & Electric Power Company. President Thompson was obviously not present, as he was not a director. There was also a proposal to award Keefer 100,000 shares of stock in the new company in consideration for properties he owned in several counties that he planned to transfer to the company and also as compensation for money he claimed he had advanced out of his own pocket to pay the men hired to work on the company's property in Calaveras County.

The minutes of the meeting showed that certain members of the board had voted in favor of the proposals. Director W. B. Murdoch was entered as having made the motion and F. Formhals as seconding the motion. Neither of the two men were even present at that meeting

and when the discrepancies were revealed they both repudiated their signatures. Keefer had altered the minutes and had presented them for approval to Murdoch and Formhals at a busy moment. Since both men trusted him implicitly, he had obtained their signatures without question. The money Keefer claimed to have paid out of his own pocket proved to be for work for which the company had already paid, and, moreover, he had put the men to work on his own property in some cases instead of that belonging to the company. For all practical purposes, the action of the Board ordering the transfer of the Jupiter's stock and assets to the new company was pure fiction concocted by Keefer.

In his capacity as treasurer Keefer had collected a very substantial part of the January assessment of one dollar a share and blithely deposited the money in the Crocker-Woolworth Bank in San Francisco in his own account, along with other deposits he had made of the company's money.

Keefer had another very neat little method of feathering his own nest with plumage plucked from the wings of the unsuspecting stockholders. All bills against the company were carefully folded in half by Keefer with the name of the claimant and the supposed amount of the bill endorsed on the back as they were received. Keefer presented these bills at the Board of Director's meetings still folded, as he explained to the directors, "to expedite the business of the meetings." The amounts of the endorsement were noted and Keefer was authorized to pay the bills. Investigation disclosed that the amount he had written on the back differed substantially from the true amounts on the inside. As an example, a bill for \$1.25 appeared as \$125; one for \$1.08, as 100.08. Keefer was careful when he changed the figures so that if they should be detected he could account for them as a clerical error "in the heat of the moment." Thus he was able to appropriate the difference when he paid the bills. Never one to pass up an opportunity, he also included all the duns against the company for amounts that had never been paid. Keefer had already pocketed the money with which he had been entrusted to pay them! Certainly, he had need of any and all methods of raising cash to finance among other luxuries, the \$200-\$300 dinners he was accustomed to giving at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

However, in early 1897 the winds of retribution were blowing hot on Keefer's neck. Six disgruntled stockholders, angered by the discovery of the extent of Keefer's betrayal of their trust, instituted lawsuits against the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Electric Power Company. The summons for the lawsuits were served in San Fran-

GIANT MONITOR

One of the monitors in action at the San Domingo gravel mine in 1907.

Fred Leighton



cisco on March 23 and Keefe had been aware that they would be served. The evidence brought out in any of the cases would surely send Keefe to prison for many years. Keefe knew that now was the time to execute his carefully laid plan of flight. On March 22nd he went directly to the bank and withdrew all the money he had been harvesting, especially the stock assessment funds. He even had the audacity to ask for an overdraft, which the teller wisely refused. He then caught the first available train to Calaveras County, carrying with him a brown valise that he never let out of his sight. And we do not even have to hazard a guess as to what the valise contained.

When Beach Thompson arrived at Keefe's room in San Francisco to examine the company books after Keefe's disappearance, he found the room turned upside down. At first he thought the disorder was due to the foul play about which there was so much speculation, but soon found that the landlord had asked Keefe to find other quarters because the other tenants had complained of Keefe's habit of bringing "fast women to his room and holding nightly carousels." The landlord had agreed to Keefe's request to continue to use the room but only as an office until the stock assessment had been collected. An angry Keefe had left the room a shambles when he removed his personal effects on March 22nd.

Keefe's brother-in-law had grumbled all along that Keefe had probably fled to Europe, the sanctuary at the time for those who found it necessary to hastily depart this country one jump ahead of the law. As it happened he was right. Nearly eight years after Keefe disappeared, sensational news was brought from France. Keefe had been found alive and well in Paris enjoying

the benefits of his ill-gotten gains. A gentleman who had known Keefe well in San Francisco had occasion to visit Paris and while there was leisurely making his way about the city when he came face to face with Keefe. He greeted Keefe and with recognition lighting up his face, Keefe returned the greeting but immediately became frigid and hurried away. Windsor A. Keefe had been found and he was alive!

Beach Thompson was so appalled by the extent of Keefe's chicanery revealed by his examination of the company books that he immediately moved to dissolve the Jupiter Gravel Mining Water & Electric Power Company and return all holdings to the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company. The property deeded by Keefe to the new Jupiter company, including his water rights, was transferred, as well as that held by the company itself.

On April 2, 1898, the Jupiter Gravel Mining & Water Company was reincorporated into the San Domingo Gold Mining Company with modest purposes, scaled down considerably from the overly ambitious purposes first proclaimed by the Jupiter Gravel Mining Water & Electric Power Company, and was specifically incorporated for dealing in mines and mining, real estate and livestock. Within four months amended articles of incorporation were filed for the San Domingo Gold Mining Company to include developing water systems and the generation of power and the sale of water and power.

Thompson revived Keefe's plan for construction of a water system from the Stanislaus River, promising the local residents that they would have "all the water in the world". Since the request for the water rights Thompson had filed on the North Fork of the Stanislaus River were apparently not granted, he eventually built a siphon

taking water from the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus to which he had acquired water rights when he incorporated the Stanislaus Electric Power Company in the early 1900s. The siphon delivered the water into a ditch near Collierville that ran past Yea Hoo Flat to Cataract Gulch from where it was conveyed through Table Mountain by a tunnel into another ditch that was to take the water to the head of the Peppermint Creek, and then on to the Dogtown Area.*

It was at that point that work proceeding at the Jupiter mines showed there was no rich gold-bearing gravel, just as Keefer had found so many years before. Apparently with no compunction about his promise to provide an unlimited supply of water to the community, Thompson abruptly dropped the construction project and the system was never completed. He did, however, continue to employ a man to work on the ditch for several years to keep it in repair to insure the system would not be claimed by someone else as abandoned.

In spite of Beach Thompson's energetic attempts, essentially all of the grandiose plans and hopes of Keefer, founded as they were upon deceit and fraud, fell apart. Only those developments based upon Thompson's own sound technical ideas and good planning, such as the Camp Nine hydroelectric project, survived.

It is fully apparent now, as was generally supposed in the wake of the Disappearance, that Thompson was a man of principle, and had been duped by Keefer. In fact, his promotion of the Camp Nine project, in part out of the wreckage of the Keefer empire, was very ably carried out and established Thompson as an engineer and capitalist of sufficient standing to be included in "Notables of the Southwest," published in Los Angeles in 1912. That biographical account points out that Beach Thompson was one of the early promoters of hydroelectric power generation. Unfortunately, the Stanislaus Electric Power Company that he organized for the Camp Nine project failed as a result of the 1906 financial crisis. Thompson, however, continued on with the reorganized company, the Sierra & San Francisco Power Company, as vice president and director. It is interesting to note that in the biography no mention is made of his association with the Jupiter nor with a certain Mr. Keefer!

Windsor A. Keefer was an outstanding example of the unprincipled and rascally mine promoters that flourished a century ago. His insatiable greed, flagrant dishonesty, and complete lack of personal integrity, even when dealing with his closest associates, left a path strewn with

*Undoubtedly this was to be along the route of the old Andrew Lee ditch that ran west from Coyote Creek along the south side of the "Palisades" to Angels Creek, where the water could then be picked up by the Dogtown ditch.

angry and bitter people, many of whom were in much poorer financial circumstances than before their associations with Keefer. He played shrewdly upon their cupidity and lack of perception. He apparently lived for a number of years after the Disappearance in lavish circumstances, but as a fugitive in exile. His machinations during that exile and the conditions of his final demise will probably never be known, and perhaps this is just as well. California and Calaveras County were well rid of Mr. Keefer.

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