

The Sierran

◆ A Publication of the Sierra County Historical Society ◆

WHEN TRUE CRIME CAME TO DOWNIEVILLE

The 1960 Larry Lord Motherwell Case

By Mary Nourse

As Sierran editor, I can't ever recall having so much material on one topic to work with. I was following this Motherwell character willy-nilly on numerous cross-country road trips as he spun his convoluted web of lies - all the while tracking the suspicious disappearance of Mrs. Pearl Putney. Finally, in digging myself out from under a ton of internet files, newspaper clippings, a book, and an oral history transcript, I decided the only way to harness all this information was to lay it out chronologically. So, I made a timeline to help make sense of it. You're welcome. Now hop into your favorite 1950s station wagon, buckle up, and let's get this show on the road!

1949 Larry Lord Motherwell first met Mrs. Pearl Putney (age 63) in 1949 when (at age 32) he took an apartment in the same building where Mrs. Putney and her ailing mother resided. Mrs. Putney was an active, wealthy widow and was considered to be in exceptional health. Due to her former husband's distinguished career with the State Department, she had many contacts in Washington, D.C. with people in diplomatic circles with whom she corresponded regularly. Besides her mother, her closest living relative was a half-brother, Castro Meek Dabrohua, who lived in Illinois with his wife, Eleanor. Mrs. Putney was very close to her half brother and sister-in-law. They were frequently in touch by mail, telephone and personal visits. Mrs. Putney was a prolific letter writer, in constant touch though the mails with various relatives and friends who were scattered throughout the United States.

June, 1957 Pearl Putney's mother, Mrs. Dabrohua died. Motherwell's appearances at the Putney apartment became more frequent. At this time was married to his third wife, Josephine, and resided in Washington, D.C.

Early in 1958 Mrs. Putney, while taking a course of dancing lessons at the Arthur Murray Studios in Washington, D.C., stated to her instructor that she was contemplating marrying a very brilliant man who was a doctor, but who was considerably younger than she.

Spring, 1958 Mrs. Putney visited her brother, Castro, and his wife. At that visit, Mrs. Putney told Mrs. Dabrohua that Motherwell's wife, Josephine, had been unfaithful and that Motherwell was divorcing her. He said the FBI was getting the information on the wife to assist in the divorce. She also told Mrs. Dabrohua that Mr. Motherwell was a brilliant man, working at Cape Canaveral in an advisory capacity. When Mrs. Dabrohua remarked that this was ridiculous and that the FBI would not be involved in a domestic situation, Mrs. Putney "clammed up" and no further mention was made of him.

Mrs. Putney began closing savings accounts and withdrew some \$2,400 in cash. She purchased a draft on the Wells Fargo Bank of San Francisco for \$1,125, indicating an intent to travel to the West Coast. During the ensuing period, Motherwell was constantly at the apartment and he isolated Mrs. Putney from the neighbors; a potential jewelry buyer even had the door slammed in his face. Motherwell attributed the speed of departure from the apartment to getting a mover on short notice due to a cancellation. According to the movers there was no such cancellation.

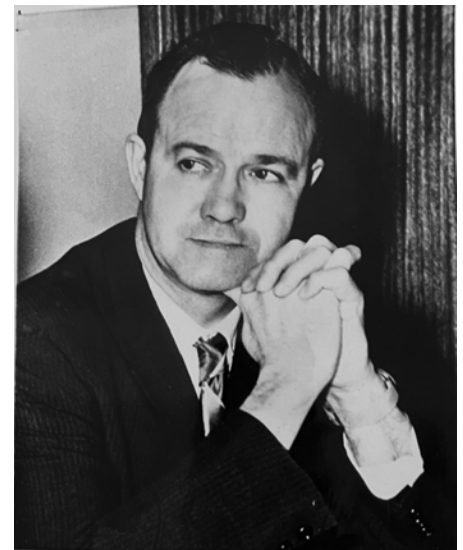
Early July, 1958 Mrs. Putney withdrew \$13,200 and departed from Washington, D.C. with Motherwell in his car, stopping at motels en route to Sarasota, Florida. At the motels, he signed the registers either "Mr. and Mrs." or "Dr. and Mrs. L.L. Motherwell". In Sarasota, they visited friends who lived across from a vacant lot owned

by Mrs. Putney. Before they left to continue their cross-country road trip, Mrs. Putney told the friend that she and Motherwell were going to get married, and they would possibly return and build a home on the lot.

August 4, 1958 The two arrived in Las Vegas. Until then, Mrs. Putney had corresponded frequently with her half-brother and friends, giving them general delivery addresses in cities she intended to pass through. In her correspondence Mrs. Putney claimed to be with a group of friends, concealing the fact that she was with Motherwell.

August 14, 1958 Motherwell registered the two under the names of "Dr. and Mrs. L.L. Motherwell" in the Town House Motel in Marysville, California. That same

True Crime (Cont. on Page 3) ◆



(FAC) DOWNIEVILLE, Calif., March 16-0092102-Larry Lord Motherwell, 48-year-old Washington, D.C., construction worker, clasped hands as he sat in Downieville, Calif., court last night just minutes after a Sierra County jury convicted him of murdering Mrs. Pearl Putney. Sentence is to be set next Monday. Motherwell today finds himself the target of prosecution efforts to send him to the gas chamber by also proving he murdered his second wife and child as well. (AP Wirephoto)(tdilb0710atn 1960)

➤ The Sierra County Historical Society ➤

The Sierra County Historical Society is an organization of people interested in preserving and promoting an appreciation of Sierra County's rich history. The Society operates a museum at the Kentucky Mine in Sierra City, holds an annual meeting, publishes a newsletter and conducts historical research. Members are sent notices of society activities, receive THE SIERRAN, and are admitted free-of-charge to the museum and stamp mill tour. If you would like to become involved in these activities or would just like to give your support, please join us!

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Membership in the Sierra County Historical Society is open to any interested person, business or organization. Members need not be residents of Sierra County. Dues are payable each January for the calendar year. Membership Categories are as follows:

INDIVIDUAL	\$20.00
FAMILY & INSTITUTION	\$25.00
BUSINESS & SUPPORTING	\$35.00
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LIFE (per person/couple)	\$400.00

In addition, donations are gratefully accepted.

Please send dues and donations to:
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Kentucky Mine and Museum opened for the regular 2026 season on May 23, 2026. Giguetta Knochenhauer and Joanie Engel returned as our great staff who will operate the park 7 days per week. We will call on our dedicated volunteers to assist Giguetta and Joanie when large groups visit the park during the season. This year, because of popular demand, we will increase our season through September with a limited schedule.

On May 23, 2026, approximately fifty people attended the forum sponsored by the Historical Society and funded by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The event was hosted at the Sierra City Schoolhouse by Tom and Shirley Butt. Gretchen Hilyard Boyce, Preservation Historian and Tom Butt, Historic Architect, moderated the forum. The discussion focused on Sierra City, the current condition of the buildings in the business district, the possibilities of creating a historic district or preservation overlay, as well as discussing the many challenges faced.

The Historical Society is pursuing completion of a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for the Kentucky Mine. A nomination was completed in 1977, approved locally, and forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places; however, it was never officially listed due to a clerical error, according to National

Park Service staff in April of 2026. We are seeking to determine if a new nomination, following current standards, is necessary.

Downieville Gold Rush Days, sponsored by Downieville Improvement Group, is scheduled for the weekend of September 18-20, 2026. The Historical Society will have a booth on September 18 and 19 and we will be selling our merchandise, plus we will be holding a raffle of gold which will be generously donated by Rick Solinsky, with 100% of the raffle proceeds staying with the Historical Society.

We are having a fundraiser at the Bridge House on October 10, 2026. This will be a cocktail/mocktail party showcasing the home which was built in 1959 over a creek above Sierra Shangri-la. Architectural historian, Corri Jimenez, has written an interesting history about the Bridge House for this issue of the *Sierran*.

Aaron Hill, a native of Sierra County, recently donated two leather-bound 1850s books of Sierra County Court records to the historical society. Tom Butt donated several copies of his book, *The Old Sierra City School*, with proceeds from the sales going to the SCHS.

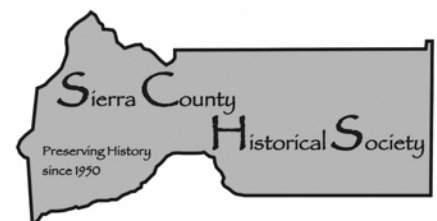
We were unsuccessful in obtaining funding to preserve and digitize the editions of *The Mountain Messenger* donated to SCHS by Carl Butz, but we will continue to seek grants for this purpose. A group comprised

of SCHS board members, Sierra County Public Works representatives, and community volunteers applied for another grant to fund expansion of the Kentucky Mine Museum display space and allow for some interactive exhibits. This project would also extend the mine portal to improve the habitat for our Townsend Big-eared bats and would enhance the visitor experience as well. Though we failed in our first attempt to secure funding, we are determined to seek future grant opportunities for these purposes.

Our Annual Picnic is set for September 13, 2026, at the Sierra Valley Nature Preserve. Additional information will be provided, so please save that date.

The Music at the Mine concert series will not occur this season; however, we have revamped our rental agreement and are encouraging individuals to rent the Kentucky Mine Park for special events.

Jan Hamilton, President
Sierra County Historical Society



True Crime (Continued...)

evening, he and Mrs. Putney were seen by a druggist in his store in Marysville where Mrs. Putney purchased some post cards. Two post cards were received by friends and relatives postmarked Marysville, California, August 16, 1958. Both to the druggist and in her correspondence, Mrs. Putney expressed an intent to return to Las Vegas from Marysville. This was the last time anyone, except Motherwell, heard from or saw Mrs. Putney.

August 1958 Pearl Putney's brother and sister-in-law became alarmed when they received a telegram ostensibly from Pearl in August, 1958 stating, "By the time you read this, I will be married."

Late 1958 Postal authorities in Las Vegas opened Mrs. Putney's mailbox, finding unclaimed mail including dividend checks from stock holdings, social security checks, and personal correspondence.

August 16, 1958 That morning, Larry Lord Motherwell appeared alone in Reno, Nevada and flew to San Francisco International Airport where he sent a telegram to Pearl's half-brother Castro in her name. The telegram announced that she was getting married and going on an extended honeymoon in Mexico where she was expecting to be on a yacht, so she would be out of contact for quite some time. Later that evening, Motherwell flew from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. leaving his car parked at the San Francisco Airport.

August 27, 1958 Mrs. Dabrohua contacted Motherwell by telephone, mentioned the telegram Castro had received, and said they were concerned over the whereabouts of Mrs. Putney. Motherwell told Mrs. Dabrohua that he knew nothing about a telegram, but said that he had run across Mrs. Putney by chance in Sarasota, Florida, and that she was with her fiancé. He described the man as one who had been at her mother's funeral, and that description fit Domingo Paniagua, a longtime friend of Mrs. Putney. Motherwell assured Mrs. Dabrohua that Mrs. Putney was happily married and that everything was all right. That same day, he took an airplane with his wife and child and flew back to San Francisco.

August 31, 1958 Motherwell appeared in Las Vegas with his wife and child, registering at a motel as "Dr. and Mrs. L.L. Motherwell." He then took a long cross-country

motor trip with his family, arriving in Washington, D.C. in mid-September.

Sept. 19, 1958 By this time the Washington Metropolitan Police had opened a missing person's case on Mrs. Putney, and they interviewed Motherwell on September 19. He claimed he had helped Mrs. Putney sell her car and apartment and settle her affairs before leaving Washington. He said that while doing field work, he had run into Mrs. Putney in Corpus Christi, Texas where she introduced him to the man she was going to marry, a longtime friend who had attended her mother's funeral. He said she was traveling with a family named Barr. About a month later, Motherwell showed up in Miami, Florida where he sold the automobile in which he had been traveling with Mrs. Putney for \$1,125. On that same day he left a suitcase containing numerous items of jewelry belonging to Mrs. Putney on the doorstep of a former friend of his named Hilda Ray who lived in Miami. He left a note explaining that it was junk that had come from an old house of his. The suitcase contained numerous items including tennis medals and Masonic jewelry that had belonged to Dr. Putney, an old-fashioned gold watch that had belonged to Mrs. Putney's mother, and other items that would have had sentimental meaning to Pearl.

October 9, 1958 Motherwell flew from Miami to Cleveland under the name of Bill Ray. On the Eastern Airlines flight, he met Evelyn Dougherty telling her that he was a correspondent for the United Press, on his way to Cleveland to cover a big news story; that he had been in Korea; that he had been a prisoner of war; that his name was Arthur Rivers. While in Cleveland, he kept in touch with Miss Dougherty.

Later in October, 1958 Motherwell appeared in Detroit, Michigan where he paid \$3,300 for a brand-new Plymouth station wagon. The cab driver who took him to the dealership later testified that when he opened his wallet to pay his cab fare, the cab driver noticed that the smallest bill he had was for \$10 and that he had a large number of \$100 bills, and that the stack of money in the wallet was at least an inch and a half thick.

Early November, 1958 Motherwell returned to Cleveland and proposed marriage to Miss Dougherty, telling her that he had no wife or family. He then pro-



duced from his pocket a small chamois bag in which Miss Dougherty noticed he had some diamond rings. The bag contained a garnet necklace (which was later established as belonging to Mrs. Putney) and gave it to Miss Dougherty as an engagement present. He told her that it had belonged to his deceased grandmother. The couple embarked on a cross country road trip, ending up in Laguna Beach, California. While in Laguna Beach, Motherwell gave Miss Dougherty three camcots which were later identified as having belonged to Mrs. Putney. He told Miss Dougherty that he was leaving for the Orient and would return to marry her after he had finished the mission to which he had been assigned. Before leaving her, he borrowed \$2,000 from her, ostensibly for the purpose of paying his income tax. He left her in Laguna Beach and that was the last time she saw him.

January 18, 1959 Motherwell was taken in for questioning in Las Vegas, where he had been for about five weeks. He told the police that his name was Arthur Rivers. He had \$1,600 in cash on his person. When questioned by the officers, he finally

True Crime (Continues on Page 4) ➔

True Crime (Continued...)

admitted his name was Motherwell and admitted having been on a trip with Mrs. Putney, but denied having been to Marysville with her or having sent the telegram. He told the officers that he had been hired by Mrs. Putney as a chauffeur; that he had registered as Dr. Motherwell at various motels; that the Dr. in front of his name stood for "Driver"; and that he had been paid approximately \$6,500 by Mrs. Putney to chauffeur her across the country.

When confronted with the registration card from a Marysville motel, Motherwell said that he had taken Mrs. Putney to Marysville at her request, but that on the 15th of August they had returned to Las Vegas. He said he let her out on a street in Las Vegas and went to get his car serviced, after giving her the phone number of the service station so she could contact him. He stated he gave Mrs. Putney a card with the name and phone number of this service station, so she could contact him later. He claimed she called, asking him to meet her at the Fremont Hotel and to bring her suitcases. At that time, and as a complete surprise to him, she announced she was marrying a man by the name of D'Avious. He told the police that this man had been at her mother's funeral and was a long-time friend of Mrs. Putney. He said that he had met this D'Avious several times on the trip with her and that he assumed the man had followed Mrs. Putney here to Las Vegas. However, Motherwell had not seen him there.

He said that Mrs. Putney gave him several instructions, one, to go to Miami, Florida, and mail a letter before November 1st; two, to go to Flagstaff, Arizona, and contact a man named Carson; three, to purchase a new automobile, assume the name of Arthur Rivers, and return to Las Vegas and wait for her. He said that he then left Mrs. Putney standing on a street corner in Las Vegas at about four or five in the afternoon of August 15th and that he had gone to Flagstaff, Arizona, looked for Mr. Carson, spent the night in Flagstaff, and then continued on to El Paso when he was unable to find Mr. Carson.

During the interrogation, Motherwell was confronted with the telegram which had been sent from San Francisco, and he denied sending it. When shown the original, printed in his own handwriting, he admitted that he had sent it from San Francisco and that he had lied when he said that he

had gone to Flagstaff and El Paso. He then stated that what really happened was that, in addition to the other instructions Mrs. Putney had given him, she had dictated a telegram to be sent from Los Angeles; explaining that having the telegram sent from Los Angeles would give her a head start on her half-brother whom she did not want interfering in her affairs.

Motherwell stated that he started from Las Vegas to go to Los Angeles to send the telegram, but changed his mind because his wife had friends in Palo Alto he thought she might like to visit. He decided to go to San Francisco to fly back to Washington, pick up his wife and return to the San Francisco area. He claimed to drive north through California, stopping to sleep in his car for a few hours, arriving at San Francisco on August 16th, and sending the telegram before boarding the airplane. He admitted that the reason he had not told of sending the telegram until it was shown to him was because he felt that it might incriminate him. He said he had not known whether or not the officers were "running a bluff". He still maintained that Mrs. Putney had hired him as a chauffeur, had paid him about \$6,500 for this service, and that he expected her to show up in Las Vegas.

January 27, 1959 Motherwell was questioned the by the Washington Metropolitan Police, giving a version of his activities in which some details differed from his previous statements.

The only income he claimed was \$6,500 from Mrs. Putney, but when it was pointed out that he had spent over \$11,000 since last seeing her, he refused to answer any more questions. He also denied that Mrs. Putney had left any personal effects with him.

June 26, 1959 While in Atlanta, Georgia, Motherwell pawned some diamonds that had belonged to Mrs. Putney under the name of Allen Michel DuBar.

June 27, 1959 Motherwell wrote to the United States Immigration Service seeking information concerning his passport out of the United States.

August 16, 1959 Mrs. Alma Freeman was hunting Sugar Pine cones with her children in a remote forest area near Yuba Pass in Sierra County when she came across human remains.

WANTED BY THE FBI

INTERSTATE FLIGHT - MURDER
LARRY LORD MOTHERWELL

FBI No. 4,507,363

Photograph taken January 1954 Photograph taken January, 1959

Aliases: Frank Eugene Crowder, Dr. L. L. Motherwell, Captain Larry Millerwood, Dr. Albert Putney, Bill Ray, Arthur Rivers, Bill Rivers

DESCRIPTION

Age: 42, born March 20, 1916, Pottsville, Pennsylvania (last reported by birth records)

Height: 5'7" Race: white

Weight: 155 to 160 pounds Nationality: American

Build: medium

Hair: dark brown, thinning and graying

Eyes: hazel

Complexion: medium

Scars and Marks: 2 1/2" faint vertical scar near center forehead, scar base of left thumb, small diagonal scar right palm, scar knuckles first and second fingers left hand, star-shaped bruise on inside of left knee.

Remarks: has masqueraded as a doctor, retired military officer, also at times has exhibited a Scottish brogue, very neat dresser, reportedly has preference for chocolate malted milk and steak.

Fingerprint Classification: 9 2 7 1 4 2 6 1 0

CRIMINAL RECORD

Motherwell has been convicted for impersonation of a military officer, illegal wearing of a military uniform, and for wearing military insignia unlawfully.

CAUTION

MOTHERWELL IS WANTED FOR MURDER. HE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED DANGEROUS.

A Federal warrant was issued at San Francisco, California, on August 20, 1959, charging Motherwell with unlawful interstate flight to avoid prosecution for murder (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 1073). IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION CONCERNING THIS PERSON, PLEASE NOTIFY ME OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FBI OFFICE. TELEPHONE NUMBER IS LISTED BELOW.

Wanted 7/26/59, 210
August 21, 1959

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.
TELEPHONE: NATIONAL 4-7817

This is the FBI wanted circular on Larry Lord Motherwell.

She notified the local highway patrolman at Camp Pioneer and led him back to where she had found a skull. In searching the area, the patrolman picked up more bone fragments, some small bits of cloth, and also observed a pile of bark and brush leaning across a large nearby log. The pile of brush formed a "lean-to" against the log, and was not a natural collection of forest debris. Chester Butz, an expert Sierra County woodsman and animal trapper called in for the investigation, stated that the pile of brush and bark could not have been placed there by animals, nor by natural phenomena. Sheriff's officers summoned to help went to the area and collected more skeletal remains. They found no weapons, clothing, forms of identification, shoes, metal fasteners or buttons, but when they removed the lean-to from the side of the log, they saw an impression on the ground in the shape of a human body. At a later date, Sierra County Undersheriff James Hill returned to the area, and about a half-mile from where the remains were found, he discovered the remnants of a fire from which he removed a small fragment of cloth.

August 25, 1959 Larry Lloyd Motherwell was arrested by FBI special agents at the airport at Atlanta, Georgia, as he was preparing to board an airplane for Cleveland. When approached by the FBI, he told them his name was Craig DuBar Foster, that he was not Motherwell. However, when

True Crime (Continued...)

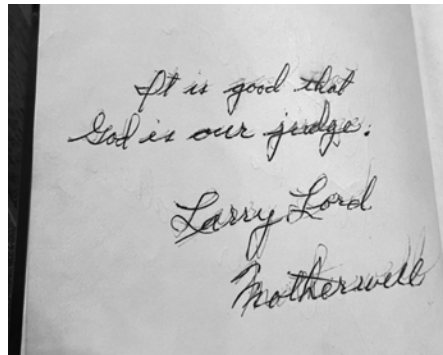
agents showed him a photograph of himself, he admitted he was Motherwell.

October 27, 1959 Motherwell was indicted by a Sierra County, California grand jury for the murder of Pearl Lida Putney.

February 17, 1960 The trial began at the Sierra County Courthouse in Downieville, California. The prosecution presented a tremendous body of evidence against the defendant. During the course of the trial, a lot was revealed about Motherwell's checkered past.

Miss Marie Colley, of Roanoke, Virginia, testified that in October, 1957, prior to Motherwell's trip with Mrs. Putney, he wooed her and she set out on a road trip with him based on the promise that he would divorce his wife, Josephine, and marry her. The couple went to Florida where they rented an apartment; Motherwell told Miss Colley that he was engaged in secret government work and was constantly in the company of bodyguards, one of whom was called "The Dagger". After a short while with Miss Colley, Motherwell disappeared, and she received a telegram signed "The Dagger", saying that Motherwell had been killed and his ashes had been scattered over the Everglades. Miss Colley then returned to her home in Roanoke. About two weeks later, Motherwell reappeared, saying that the telegram was a mistake and that it was his twin brother who had been killed. He also convinced her that Florida's divorce laws had changed, so she joined him on a westward trip, heading toward Reno so he could procure the divorce. She testified that they were turned back because of snow on Donner Pass. They then went to Marysville, California, and took the Feather River Canyon route through the Sierras into Reno. Miss Colley recalled that during this trip through the Feather River Canyon, Motherwell stopped the car near a large cliff so they might look over the side of the canyon. She did not go near the edge and she was reluctant to look over because the ground was slippery and wet, but Motherwell indicated there was no danger. Neither Motherwell's desired divorce, nor marriage to Miss Colley ever took place. He abandoned her in Richmond, Virginia.

In the course of his testimony, Motherwell stated that Mrs. Putney had begun drinking after the death of her mother, and



that she planned to lure him to Sarasota on the pretense of hiring him to build some houses there. He further stated that during the trip, once at New Orleans and once at Marysville, Mrs. Putney while in a drunken state threw herself at him sexually. He claimed that while in Marysville he was so shocked by the whole episode that he told her he would have nothing more to do with her, and he drove her back to Las Vegas.

It was established through the testimony of a Professor Stewart, of friends and relatives of Mrs. Putney and of police officers from Washington, D.C., that there is no such person as D'Avious.

March 16, 1960 Motherwell was convicted of first-degree murder, but that conviction was later reduced to second-degree by the Third District Appellate Court at Sacramento.

March 24, 1960 Motherwell was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Pearl L. Putney.

November 8, 1961 Motherwell's request for a new trial was denied by the California Court of Appeals.

Feb. 28, 1966 Motherwell died in San Quentin Prison of an apparent heart attack. ♣

SOURCES FOR MOTHERWELL RESEARCH

The Associated Press online

Butz, Peter, Chester Butz: Recollections of an Outdoorsman, Oral History Interviews, 1978

Dabrohua, Eleanor, Chronicle of a Crime: The Larry Lord Motherwell Story, Doubleday, New York, 1961

The Mountain Messenger, November 23, 1961

Numerous newspaper clippings from the files of Lee Adams

THE MOTHERWELL TRIAL SHOOK THE GOOD FOLKS OF SIERRA COUNTY

By Mary Nourse

Near the tiny town of Sattley in Sierra Valley, a remote road into Turner Canyon became the setting for one of Sierra County's most shocking crimes. In August 1959, what began as an innocuous pinecone-gathering excursion led to the discovery of the remains of elderly widow Pearl Putney, exposing dark secrets that would reverberate throughout the county. The grim find sparked a lengthy trial that captivated residents, leaving them disgusted, puzzled, and deeply unsettled.

The San Francisco Chronicle commented during the trial, "The Sunshine Club bench on Main St. was deserted today because all the old timers drifted up to the courthouse to see Larry Lord Motherwell on the witness stand. Honorary mayor Tony Lavezzola led the procession across the rusty Durgan Flat bridge to the courtroom where the amiable confidence man is trying to convince a mountaineer jury that he did not kill wealthy widow Pearl Putney." Guests at the Riverside Motel found signs on their doors saying, "Make your own damn beds. We've gone to the trial." Gene Stowe, editor of the local paper, the *Mountain Messenger* commented, "This is the biggest story that ever broke in Downieville," and local fire chief Bob Hostetler made a quick trip to Marysville for new glasses so he could read the nine solid columns of print on the big trial.

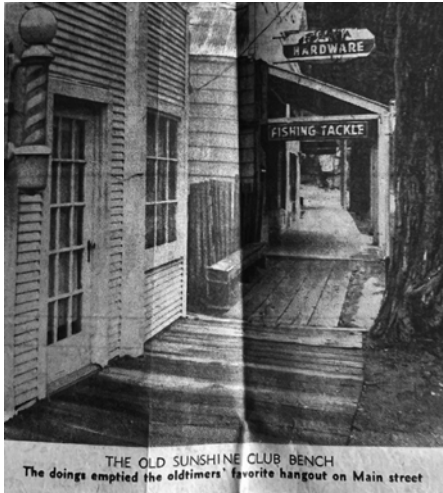
Chester Butz, a local mountain man, knowledgeable about animal behavior and recognized as a talented tracker, was frequently called upon to help with search and rescue operations. He testified as an expert witness about the crime scene at Motherwell's trial.

The following remarks are from an interview recorded by Chester's grandson, Peter Butz in August 1978:

"You wanted to know about Larry Lord Motherwell, I suppose. Well, he was... he was the biggest liar in the country and most everybody (still) believed him after the stuff that he told. But anyhow, he got in good with this old lady Putney and her

Motherwell Trial (Continues on next page) ➔

Motherwell Trial (Continued...)



THE OLD SUNSHINE CLUB BENCH
The doings emptied the oldtimers' favorite hangout on Main street

mother back there in Chicago {Washington D.C.} and he was quite the chore boy. He did this and he did that and everything else for her. Then, when old lady Putney's mother died, why then he pretty much took over for the business deals with the old lady. She was 72 years old and he was 48, 49 {43 years old}.

After they got the estate all settled up, why he talked her into selling everything that he could, and taking over her stocks and bonds and helping her out with her business deals. So then, evidently, he finally talked her into taking this trip with him.

"The year before there was a poor little gal that he talked into taking the same trip, about the same trip that he took the second time. This gal financed some of the trip and all, but they practically came on the same route that he took the next year. When they were going up the Feather River Canyon over here, why that's rough country there, and this little gal she was... He'd got her pregnant, about five, six months along. He tried to talk her into going out on the point along the road there. What a beautiful scene it was down there under the hill, there down on the river and all. Probably, if she had gone out there - she didn't fall for it - she didn't go out there, but probably if she had gone out there, she'd have been floating down the Feather River someplace or another.

"Well, they had his first wife here to testify about one time - they had two boys and they were out on the lake fishing or boat riding anyhow. She just turned her head around in time to dodge a piece of pipe that he went to conk her on the head with. But he tipped the boat over, but there was another boat there that rescued them. But he figured on ducking the whole shootin' works right there. He was a professional crook as far as that went."

Chester Butz was certainly right about that. Another horrible stain on Motherwell's past was that, in 1954, he had been questioned, but not indicted in the death of his 14-month-old mentally disabled daughter. He said the child had choked on mucous and he buried her in a pet cemetery the next day. That gruesome tale, along with the fact that the second Mrs. Motherwell had earlier been found floating face up in the couple's bathtub, compounded the increasingly disturbing image of Motherwell. Though the death had been ruled accidental, under California law, a defendant's past was allowed as evidence in determining the convicted man's sentence.

It's no wonder the Motherwell case gave the community the heebie jeebies, particularly the jury. In a recent Facebook post Linda Langley, recalled that her mother, juror Nellie Huffman, was relieved when Motherwell died in prison because he had threatened to return and kill the entire jury. Bill Copren, whose mother Georgene was an alternate, remembers her being quite anxious during the trial.

The jury was comprised of three men and nine women. Edward Moon, jury foreman, was a Sierraville laborer, James T. Turner of Loyaltown was a carpenter, and George Hyland of Alleghany was a miner. The nine women on the panel were all housewives: Mrs. Columbine A. Deller of Sierraville, Mrs. Frazer Spradling and Mrs. Elsie E. Thornton of Loyaltown, Mrs. Monica Fultz of Calpine, Mrs. Anna Brett, Mrs. Nellie P. Huffman and Mrs. Jewel Rixey of Downieville, Mrs. Madonna Bosworth of Goodyears Bar, and Mrs. Alice (Brady) Ostrom of Sierra City. The three alternates were also all housewives: Mrs. Ruth Westall of Sierra City, Mrs. Dolores D'Andrea of Loyaltown, and Mrs. Georgene Copren of Sierraville.

The Hill family of Sierra City was involved with the case on several levels. As undersheriff, Jim Hill was an instrumental player in the investigation; he and his wife Kate also hosted the Dabrohuas (Mrs. Putney's half-brother and sister-in-law) at one of their cabins during the trial. This trial wasn't just something the locals read about. Downieville's 327 residents scooted over and made room for reporters, witnesses and attorneys from all over the country. The bar became a typing pool where reporters tapped out their daily stories, and Sheriff Dewey Johnson even called Chester Butz to the jail to cut the defendant's hair. Souvenirs of the trial still exist. Miriam Dines has a thank-you bracelet given to her grandmother, Kate



BOB HOSTETLER, THE CHEF
"I wouldn't want to be on that jury"



Victor Figone of Sierra City, top center, poured himself a cup of coffee during the noon hour yesterday when Downieville residents and visitors jammed the courthouse stairway and corridor to wait for seats at the Larry Lord Motherwell trial. Another picture on page A1. Bee Photo by Don Donaldson

Hill, by Eleanor Dabrohua, and her brother Aaron Hill has a copy of Mrs. Dabrohua's book *Chronicle of a Crime*. The book, given to Undersheriff Hill, was autographed by a few of the jurors, and by Motherwell himself. The Motherwell Trial certainly had a lasting effect on Sierra County. ☘

THE BRIDGE HOUSE OF DOWNIEVILLE

By Corri Jimenez

Sierra County abounds with classic nineteenth century buildings, but mid-century modern architecture is barely represented here. Mid-century was a post-WWII design movement, roughly from 1945–1970, that revolutionized home building. It featured sleek lines, open floor plans, and deep integration with nature. Few of these buildings exist in our area, but one exquisite example is hiding in plain sight behind Sierra Shangri-la Resort in Downieville.



Photo by Corri Jimenez

Straddling Jim Crow Creek, the “Bridge House” was built in 1959 by distinguished San Francisco architect Francis Joseph McCarthy for W. Coy Filmer as a summer house; Filmer, also a resident of San Francisco, hired McCarthy to design his house to reflect the Usonian style. Frank Lloyd Wright had coined the term “Usonian” in 1936 to describe homes intended for the middle class. These affordable, single-story houses featured asymmetrical layouts, low-pitched roofs, natural materials, built-in furniture, and expansive floor-to-ceiling windows. The most character-defining feature of Usonian houses was that they were organic, with wide windows that brought in nature and the environment.

Francis Joseph McCarthy (1910-1965) was born in Sydney, Australia and raised in Virginia City, Nevada. He attended the California School of Fine Arts at Stanford and apprenticed for 16 years at prominent architectural firms such as the Bay Area’s William Wooster, until opening his own firm in 1938. In 1945, he became an American Institute of Architecture (AIA) fellow and president of the Northern California AIA Chapter as well as was a member of the San Francisco Art Commission. He received design awards for several public libraries in the Central Valley. McCarthy was aware of the architectural concept

of “Form vs. Function” and wrote in the 1940s, “It is the duty of designers to orient themselves within these forces which affect environment and to make actual contact with them in order to understand them and their directions, then to use this knowledge in the designing of a better environment for people to adjust their lives within.” This quote synthesizes how the built environment communicates with architectural setting—a fragile dance familiar to most designers.



Site Plan Image from Pacific Architect & Builder, August 1961

McCarthy was commissioned by W. Coy Filmer (1898-1981) to design the Bridge House near Downieville, and he hired structural engineer A.V. Saph Jr. who had worked with him for years. Saph’s firm professionally engineered bridges; and the Bridge House’s foundation was set on a 48-foot-long steel beam bridge which was anchored to concrete abutments poured into the bedrock. Designed as a three-bedroom house, the siding was clear all-heart redwood, and the living room was adjacent to an L-shaped kitchen with state-of-the-art appliances. A large recreation room spanned the creek and had sliding glass doors opening to exterior porches. Besides McCarthy and Saph, the contractor of the house was Clarence V. Dawe who worked locally in Downieville. The house received recognition in multiple magazines including *Redwood News*, *Pacific Architect & Builder*, and *Sunset*.

Filmer owned the house until March 1964 when he sold it to Sierra County Planning Commission Chairman, Dick Tuthill (1914-1995). The Tuthills called their house the “River House.” According to former Planning Director Tim Beals, when he arrived in town in June 1973, his first impression of Downieville was from visits to the house with Tuthill. Tim recalled he smoked “North Sea” tobacco in a pipe,

drank “Ezra Brooks Bourbon” with soda, and kept a detailed journal. One memorable story that Tuthill told Tim was that the 1964 flood was so powerful that it took out a boulder dam near the house:

“The creek flowing under the house got so high... The water was slammed into the house and bridge, that they had to open both sets of sliding doors and constructed with plywood sheets, a 12-foot-wide raceway for the creek to pass through the house. While there was some water damage that action saved the house from serious damage.”

The Tuthill family sold the house to Jim & Susie Steinbarth in November 2000. The Steinbarths added a two-car garage on the north end and a deck to the front entrance. They also enlarged a bedroom/bathroom on the south end. During the 1997 flood, the sliding glass doors were opened again to allow the water to move through the building. Supervisor Lee Adams recalled moving the furniture around for the Steinbarths so it would not be washed away. Currently, the Bridge House is part of Sierra Shangri-la Resort and is a short-term rental. Among the many historic resources in Sierra County, the Bridge House is a unique architectural gem and is Sierra County’s salute to Frank Lloyd Wright. 🌿

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The Sierran

Sierra County Historical Society

P.O. Box 260

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THE SIERRAN

SPRING - SUMMER 26

CAST OF CHARACTERS: CHESTER BUTZ By Mary Nourse

Chester P. Butz was a Sierra County native who was born in Celestial Valley, near Camptonville in 1897. His grandparents had homesteaded there in the early 1850s. Chester and his three brothers traveled 3 miles to school in Camptonville, either walking or riding a donkey. Chester always said it was those donkey rides that had made him bow-legged. As a child, living on the family ranch, he



Butz Family Photo

was no stranger to hard work. In adulthood, he worked as a timber faller, diamond driller, and equipment operator; he became foreman of the California State Division of Highways and worked in that position from 1925, until retirement in 1956. He loved the outdoors, and hunting and tracking played a major role in his life. Because of his tremendous knowledge of the woods, he was often called upon to take part in search and rescue missions. On one occasion, a little boy went missing near Snag Lake where his family was camping. Even though two trackers with dogs, and a helicopter searching from above missed the child, Chester found him after noticing a tennis shoe print in some of the only soft earth in a rocky area.

It was no surprise that Chester Butz was brought in to work on the investigation of Pearl Putney's murder site, and to later testify at the trial. On the stand, Chester revealed how Motherwell had concealed his victim. "He buried her. There was a big log that broke off, up about 40-50 feet high, a big silvertip fir, and he'd put her right in there against this log and then covered her up with bark and brush and little trees and stuff. Rocks stacked up against it, you see." Defense attorney John

Reges tried to undermine Chester's qualifications, demanding to know if he was a zoologist or an expert, and Chester replied by saying, "No, but I think I can answer any question YOU want to ask me." ❁

In every issue, the Sierran features real live folks who formed the rich tapestry of our past. If you would like to share anecdotes about your favorite character in a future issue, email your submission to mnourse46@gmail.com.

A Taste of 1953

Take a trip back to the 50s with this fun, retro recipe. "Lazy Housewife Pickles" was submitted by Ruth Drury to the Naomi Parlor of Native Daughters of the Golden West for their 1953 *Loyalty Cookbook*. Thanks to Jan Hamilton and Pam Brandon for raiding their mom Marian Lavezzola's cookbook collection. ❁

LAZY HOUSEWIFE PICKLES

Pour boiling water over cucumbers and let stand until cold. Wipe each with dry cloth before putting in vinegar. Take $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of salt to 1 gallon of vinegar, 1 cup dry mustard, 2 cups white sugar. Cover with horseradish leaves if you like. Some put in a little cloves, allspice, and bay leaves with them. You can add cucumbers to this at any time by stirring it up from the bottom.

They should first be put into a large crock until they begin to turn brown and make pickles then they may be packed into Mason jars and covered with new vinegar mixed in the same proportion as the first.

RUTH T. DRURY

Naomi Parlor