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The San Miguel Mystery: The Documents

Spoiler alert! This is for those who've read the novel and care to learn which bits are hard fact, educated guesswork or pure speculation.

For decades after the murder of Jeanne ('Jenny') Bonnet at San Miguel Station, San Francisco, on 14 September 1876, people continued to mull over what was generally called the San Miguel Mystery. Almost no work has been done on Bonnet - Clare Sears's excellent essay (see below, 2006) is the only piece of scholarly research with footnotes - and what floats around online about her is mostly recycled rumour. So what I want to offer here are the key documents about the case that I drew on to write my novel *Frog Music*, arranged in chronological order, with comments.

Note: I found many of these sources on ancestry.com, familysearch.org, genealogy.com, footnote.com, the California Digital Newspaper Collection at <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc>, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/chroniclingamerica>, or in the California Historical Society's clippings files; some of the rarer newspaper articles were graciously supplied by Clare Sears.

Record of Marriage between Sosthène Bonnet and Désirée Leau, Seine Department (Paris), France, 25 April 1850. (The first of their two daughters, Jeanne Bonnet, seems to have been born pre-maritally, around 1849. Both parents were performing at Dumas's struggling Theatre Historique, which would close in October 1851.)

Record of Birth of Adèle Louise Beunon, 9 April 1852, to Marie Thérèse Martin and Francois Denis Beunon, at St-Louis-en-l'Île, Paris. This was Blanche Beunon's legal name, used until she arrived in America.

San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1867-68. Records two charges against females (possibly but probably not Bonnet) for 'Wearing Male Attire', which seems to have been the first time the city's 1863 law against cross-dressing was put into practice.

San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1868-69. One arrest for 'Misdemeanor by Wearing Attire of Other Sex' (possibly but probably not Bonnet). From now on the list of people charged with cross-dressing is not broken down by gender.

Passenger list of the 'Lafayette', Le Havre (France) to New York, arrived 15 January 1870. Includes Mlle Emilie Bagnon (born 1857, who would marry Arthur Deneve in 1876), her sister and an older female relative.

1870 U.S. Federal Census includes:

in New York City, Emily Bagnan (born about 1858), her sister and older female relatives.

in San Francisco, John McNamara (born Ireland, 1835, a labourer worth \$800 in real estate), his wife Ellen McNamara (born Ireland, 1835), and their children Mary (born Ohio, c.1860), John (born Ohio, 1863) and Kate (born Ohio, 1867), as well as two others with different surnames, presumably boarders.

San Francisco Chronicle, 'Seeking Death', 31 January 1872. Attempted suicide by laudanum of Jeanne Bonnet, 'a French Courtesan,' probably motivated by financial loss. Her unnamed 'paramour' came home to 930 Kearny Street (between Pacific and Jackson), found her dying, and called in a Dr Johnson, who saved her. (Although there was one other Jeanne Bonnet in San Francisco in the

same period - a laundress - the frog-catching Bonnet's later connections with French prostitutes make it almost definite that she was the suicidal prostitute in this report. Interestingly, this story dropped out of circulation fast; the many articles about her cross-dressing from 1874 to the summer of 1876 make no mention of her history with this or any man, or any sex work.

Sacramento Daily Union, 'Pacific Coast Items', 1 February 1872. Suicide attempt of 'Jennie Bonnet, living for some time unhappily with a man at No. 932 Kearny Street'. Bonnet claims to have lost \$18,000 over the past two years in stock speculations.

Common Sense, 23 May 1874. Jenny Bonnet arrested for 'misdemeanor in wearing male attire,' claimed she needed to for her job herding sheep in San Mateo. Letter from E. Hughes (Elizabeth Josephine Brawley Hughes, 1839-1926, noted Arizona suffragist) imagining that Bonnet's cross-dressing is a feminist act much like that of the author's women artist friends in France: 'Better freedom on the hills, thought Jenny, than to sew ten or twelve hours a day in a store, or go through the mill-horse drudgery of housework. ... Is life to sink to one dull, dead level, ruled over by the august respectabilities of our metropolitan police?'

San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1873-74. After a four-year lull in the use of this law, two arrests for 'Wearing the Attire of the Other Sex', in May and June 1874. These are probably Bonnet's first arrests for cross-dressing, since the *Common Sense* article makes no mention of any prior history. Like other minor crimes, hers would have been dealt with by a judge in the Police Court.

Daily Alta California, 26 July 1874. 'Jennie Bonnet, the French female-boy' charged with cross-dressing.

Daily Alta California, 'Police Court', 1 August 1874. Bonnet pleaded

guilty, explaining through her lawyer that she needed to wear pants for her frog-hunting work, but agreed to change when back in the city at the end of each day. Paid a fine of \$10.

San Francisco Chronicle, **11 August 1874**. Bonnet one of forty-five people up on charges of inordinate drinking.

San Francisco Chronicle, **21 August 1874**. Bonnet arrested for 'promenading the streets in pantaloons'.

Daily Alta California, '**Police Court**', **23 August 1874**. Records what it calls Bonnet's fourth conviction for 'appearing in male attire'.

San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1874-75. Three arrests for 'Wearing the Attire of the Other Sex': one each in July, August and September 1874; one case 'discharged', two as leading to fines of \$35. Some or all probably Bonnet.

Passenger list of the *Utopia*, Glasgow to New York, arrived 4 January 1875. Includes Adèle Beunon (born France c.1853, a circus rider), and Arthur P. L. Deneve (born France c.1844, an acrobat), listed alongside other circus performers, all travelling in steerage.

San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1875-76. One arrest for 'Wearing the Attire of the Other Sex', July 1875, could be Bonnet.

Daily Alta California, '**Police Court**', **21 July 1875**. Bonnet's arrest on two unspecified charges.

Department of Mental Hygiene, **Stockton State Hospital Records** (at the California State Archives in Sacramento), Collection 320. Synopsis of Commitments [R320.14 (2)] and Commitment Register [Vol 6, p. 676, MF8:10 (22)] record the admission on 25 August 1875 of Blanche Bonnett (born San Francisco County, a 19-year-old single woman of no occupation - this is Jenny Bonnet's

younger sister, born 1856), committed by a Probate Judge due to insanity of unknown cause and duration: 'Says she wants to kill herself. Asks people to hang her [...] very depraved in conversation'. Notes added later: 'Gave birth to a male child Oct 16th 1875. Child died October 22nd 1875.'

Daily Alta California, 'Brevities', 17 December 1875. 'Jeanne Bonnet, the French frog-catcher, has been convicted for wearing man's apparel, although she says she hasn't other. Therefore if she didn't wear it she would be convicted, too. How is Jeanne to keep out of prison?'

San Francisco Chronicle, 17 Dec 1875. Records Bonnet's latest fine of \$200. Either the second zero is a typo - because previous fines do not seem to have been more than \$35 - or the judge lost his temper.

San Francisco Chronicle, 10 May 1876. This time, perhaps afraid of another punitive sentence from the judge in the Police Court, Bonnet 'demanded a jury trial' in the City Criminal Court. This arrest does not show up in the *Municipal Reports*, which suggests that their totals are not always reliable.

Daily Alta California, 10 May 1876. Bonnet described as an unnamed 'eccentric French damsel, who has a fancy for making a spook [something unpleasantly strange] of herself in male attire'.

San Francisco Chronicle, 'Jennie Bonnet's Weakness', 12 May 1876. In the City Criminal Court, Bonnet was fined \$10. Same amount as in the Police Court in August 1874, which suggests that a jury trial did her no particular good.

Morning Call, 'Tired of Women's Clothes', 11 July 1876. On the occasion of Bonnet's being back in Police Court (in gray pantaloons, coat, vest, white shirt and small, jaunty black hat), the *Morning Call* offers several paragraphs of biography, misnaming her father as August Bonnet, and describing her as a child

actress who got in with a bad set and ended up in court for burglary, but a Grand Jury failed to convict her. She was arrested several times for frequenting saloons (technically illegal for women), then for cross-dressing, which Bonnet claimed she needed to do while 'catching frogs in the vicinity of the Seventeen Mile House' [William A. Clarke's saloon in San Mateo, seventeen miles south of San Francisco]. This article claims that her sentences have got progressively tougher and included one of a hundred days in jail; that on one occasion she remarked 'You may send me to jail as often as you please, but you can never make me wear women's clothes again.'

San Francisco Chronicle, 'The Irrepressible Jennie', 12 July 1876. This time her fine was \$20.

Morning Call, 'Jennie's Persistency', 3 August 1876. Another arrest.

San Francisco Chronicle, 31 August 1876. The 'persevering' Bonnet is convicted again.

Daily Evening Bulletin, 'A Foul Murder', 15 September 1876. Report on the shooting dead of Bonnet, 'the well known frog-catcher', with a diagram of the San Miguel Hotel. Quotes Beunon's claim that Ernest Girard had threatened to kill her and Bonnet, and her insistence that Bonnet had no other enemies.

Daily Alta California, 'Murder at San Miguel', 16 September 1876. A discussion of the case - including Dr Crook's autopsy - in anticipation of that day's inquest. Hostile to Bonnet (describing her as notorious and ridiculous for her cross-dressing, and mentioning her suicide attempt) as well as to Beunon, the victim's 'female companion', pointing out that suspicion of Girard is based only on her testimony. Suggests the case has been bungled because the McNamaras failed to gather evidence properly or call in the police until the next day.

Sacramento Daily Union, 'Jennie Bonnet Assassinated', 16 September 1876. Calls Bonnet 'very comely', and explains her cross-dressing (from roughly 1873) as required by her job and motivated by her feminism. Describes Mme Bonnet's death in 1873 or 1874, M. Bonnet's state of dependence on his friend Leon Samson in Oakland, and their other daughter's committal to an asylum.

Sacramento Daily Union, 'Jenny Bonnet's Murder', 16 September 1876. Says Beunon may have been the sole or joint target.

Sacramento Daily Union, 'Arrested on Suspicion of Murder', 16 September 1876. Girard arrested; is thought to have shot and wounded Bonnet in a separate incident some months previously, though she did not accuse him.

San Francisco Chronicle, 'An Unknown Assassin', 16 September 1876. A sympathetic article calling Bonnet a 'character' out of Dickens or Balzac, a 'social outlaw' whose 'strong-minded' (code word for feminist, and sometimes lesbian) longing for independence led to her unusual, lucrative line of work; 'industrious and inoffensive when not subjected to brutal persecution'. Hints that she was 'frail' as well as 'fair'. ('The fair but frail' was a euphemism for prostitutes.)

Daily Evening Bulletin, 'San Miguel Murder', 16 September 1876. Detailed report on the morning's inquest conducted by Coroner Swan. Paraphrases the testimonies of Dr Crook, John McNamara, Mary Jane McNamara and Charles St Clair. Beunon claims: 'Arthur was angry with Jennie because I always went out with her and he believed she was the cause of my leaving him. Arthur and Gerard were very intimate friends.' Deneve sold her house for \$1800 and had \$200 or \$300 in cash as well, plus a purse of \$500 that the other *maques* made up for him on his leaving town. Questioned by a juror about Bonnet's black eyes, Beunon said that Bonnet fell off a horse a few days before, when drunk.

Daily Alta California, 'Coroner's Intelligence - the San Miguel Mystery as Clear as Mud to a Jury', 17 September 1876. Mocks Bonnet for her 'preposterous pantaloons' and the 'peculiar circles of her acquaintance' (i.e. prostitutes) who attended her funeral. Explains that Ernest Gerard was arrested in San Francisco on the 15th, but released because he had an alibi, and that Deneve was thought to be in the Eastern States or Europe.

San Francisco Chronicle, 'The Last Tragedy', 17 September 1876. The first really in-depth piece, over three columns. One of several articles that spell Beunon as 'Buneau', presumably a mishearing by Anglophone journalists. Gives a fuller account of Bonnet's upbringing (including a birth of 1849, Paris) and marriage (c. 1871-73) to a Frenchman named Portal who was a cook at the Occidental Hotel. Testimonies at the inquest, including John (Sr) and Mary Jane McNamara's insistence that they did not know Bonnet was female, and Beunon's story of a fight she and Bonnet had with Girard on Waverly Place, and her claim that Deneve and Girard 'stole away my child, a little boy one year old, and at the present time I do not know where he is'. Introduces the complication of Beunon lodging first with a Monsieur Louis at San Miguel Station before moving to the McNamaras', and vague warnings from Madame Louis. Adds more information from interviews the reporter conducted at San Miguel with Ellen and Mary Jane McNamara (which make it sound as if the entire family knew Bonnet well as a woman), as well as neighbours contemptuous of the McNamaras. Mary Jane blamed Beunon for giving Bonnet black eyes and revealed that her family would not let her say so in court. Reporter points out that the killer was unlikely to have been a stranger because of familiarity with layout and dogs. Detective Bohem's theory: Buneau was 'strangely and powerfully attached' to Bonnet, and

the two women were the intended targets of a killer hired probably by Deneve and Girard, or just possibly Deneve who may have sneaked back into town to do it himself.

San Francisco Chronicle, 'An Unholy Trade', 18 September 1876. Profile of San Francisco's *maques* or *macreaux*, a 'numerous class of degraded Frenchmen who live upon the sinful earnings of bad women'. Claims they always travel in pairs, have peculiarities of dress (short coat, tight pantaloons, 'a waxed mustache of extravagant size', a delicate cane), get half their women's earnings, and do housework as well as acting as occasional bodyguards in the case of drunken or violent clients. Asserts that Bonnet often advised French prostitutes to cast off their *maques* and was generally hated by these men as a result.

San Francisco Chronicle, 'The Jennie Bonnet Case', 19 September 1876. Detective Bohlen spent all of Sunday at San Miguel and the Seventeen-Mile House but the case is making no headway.

San Francisco Chronicle, 'Hired Assassin', 20 September 1876. Quotes a detective on their certainty that 'a combination of discarded lackeys of debased Frenchwomen' either killed Bonnet or ordered a hit, which could cost anything from \$50 to \$1000.

New York Times, 'A Mysterious Murder', 25 September 1876. Eleven days on, the story goes national, with material drawn from *Chronicle* and *Daily Alta*.

Public Ledger (Memphis, Tenn.), 'Fun Ending in Death - A Reckless Young Lady's Adventure', 2 October 1876. Says that the Bonnets arrived in San Francisco in 1852; that M. Bonnet worked in theatre until the mid-60s and then in a business; that Jenny made a luxurious living from frogs and that McNamara was happy to keep the secret of her womanhood because she spent so much at

his hotel. Interesting if unconvincing new theory: describes Arthur Deneve as Beunon's fiancé, 'William Deneve', who jealously mistook Bonnet for a male lover of Beunon's, and complained to Beunon, who did not correct him; he followed them to San Miguel Station. Claims the inquest, on 2 October, gave a verdict against Deneve. (This article was repeated more or less verbatim in the *National Republican* (Washington DC) as 'Fun That Ends in Death', 3 October 1876.)

New York Clipper, 'A Woman's Mania for Wearing Male Attire Ends in Death', 7 October 1876.

Oakland Daily Evening Tribune, 16 October 1876. Claims Bonnet as a former resident, because she was still living with her parents when they moved to Oakland.

San Francisco Chronicle, 'Jottings About Town', 2 November 1876. Records that the police have targeted the *maques*, arresting six of them for vagrancy.

Passenger list for 'City of Vera Cruz', Havana to New York, arrived 23 November 1876. Includes Arthur P. Deneve (born France about 1845) and Emilie Deneve (the surname suggesting that Emilie Baugnon was passing as his wife), travelling in second class, both 'artistes' who intend to return to France,

Sacramento Daily Union, 'The Murder of Jennie Bonnet', 9 December 1876. Reports that Girard, having left San Francisco, has now been arrested in New York.

Daily Alta California, 'The Jennie Bonnet Murder - Arrest of Persons in New York', 9 December 1876. Correction: it is actually Deneve who has been arrested in New York, together with a friend, August Prosper Robert; Girard is

still in San Francisco.

New York Times, 'Gleanings from the Mails; A California Murder', 9 December 1876. Garbles the names of all the principals but gives some interesting new data. Describes Bonnet as a brilliant child actress who went wild, and whose parents finally committed her to a 'reformatory institution' for several years. (First mention of her time in what must have been the San Francisco Industrial School.) On release, she became a thief before taking up frog-catching. Specifies Girard's alibi: his mistress, Madeline George, swore that he was home all evening.

The Sun (New York), 'Tapped on the Shoulder', 9 December 1876. Details the arrest of Deneve in New York on 7 December at the request of Captain Lees of the San Francisco police. Says Deneve, perhaps a member of the Clodoche circus troupe, became Beunon's lover around 1871; settled with her in San Francisco around 1874 and made a lot of money. Claims that around 1873 Bonnet was shot in the side and almost killed on a frog-hunting expedition, but insisted it was an accident, so the man who shot her was not prosecuted; that she was kind to her mother and gave her money. Says that Beunon was going by the name of Blanche Deneve when she formed her 'warm friendship' with Bonnet; that she promised Deneve she would drop Bonnet, but secretly took up with her again and started going by her real name of Blanche Beunon; that Beunon pawned most of their possessions and stole all Deneve's money; that Deneve took to drink and broke up with her; that his compassionate friends put on a benefit performance to raise \$500 for him and got him an engagement in Havana where he rejoined the Clodoche troupe. (This story sounds as if based on an interview with Deneve or police accounts of their interview.)

San Francisco Chronicle, **'The Murdered Frog-Catcher' 9 December 1876.**

Says that Deneve went to NY, then Cuba, then back to NY, where he was under surveillance and finally arrested with Robert. Girard called in at the *Chronicle* to deny the rumour that he was arrested in Chicago for Bonnet's murder.

San Francisco Chronicle, **'The Arrest of a Suspected Murderer in New York', 9 December 1876.** Follow-up article says that policeman caught Deneve in New York by coming to his home at 158 Wooster Street disguised as a postman. Describes him as lightly pockmarked from recent smallpox, 'a fluent conversationalist and *debonaire* in manner.' Quotes him as telling the *New York Herald* that he left San Francisco because 'he found that he could not live any longer with Blanche Bonneau' but never made any worse threats against her than to say that 'he would have her arrested if she annoyed him'. Quotes Ernest Girard as saying that Bonnet had many enemies, and in fact that it was she who threatened to throw vitriol on Girard (not vice versa) because he advised Beunon to stay with Deneve. For the first time, the missing child becomes plural children: 'As to the charge of stealing the children from Blanche, Girard says Deneve placed them in his charge.'

San Francisco Chronicle, **'The Frog-Catcher's Murder', 10 December 1876.** Prosper Robert (Deneve's friend who has been under surveillance in New York, then Paris, then New York again) released.

The Sun (New York), **'Blanche Beunon's Lover', 11 December 1876.** Based on a visit to the French saloon of a Mr Louis [presumably unrelated to Louis of San Miguel] on 116 Greene Street, the reporter describes the release of 'Arthur Devine', a thin man of five foot five with 'the lightest of moustaches' and short glossy black hair. Claims that the 'Devine' family is well-respected in Paris and

Brussels, and that Arthur angered his parents by falling in love with a lowly girl: 'for Blanche's smile he forsook home, family and friends', landing in the US on 4 January 1874 with 1300 francs. He opened a chemical distillery in San Francisco and they had 'children'. He tried to break the bad influence of Bonnet on Beunon by himself, by his friend Girard's mediation, and then by having Bonnet arrested. In despair 'Devine' gave up his business and gradually lost all his money. He asked Girard to look after his son, the only one of the four of Beunon's children that he believed to be his own. His friends raised money for him and got him an engagement with the Clodoche troupe in Havana but before he left he gave Beunon some of the money; he and his friend Robert were travelling from San Francisco and New York between 7 and 14 September. This account ends with a tragic twist; recently 'Devine' got engaged to the sympathetic daughter of a Parisian agent here in New York, who mentioned him to a French tradeswoman, who got word to the police and had him arrested. (This story is made less convincing by the claim that Beunon managed to give birth to no fewer than four children by different men between January 1874 and September 1876; the reporter also got their date of arrival a year wrong, as well as mangling Deneve's name.)

Record of Marriage between Arthur Pierre Louis Deneve (son of Pierre De Neve and Annette Barnay) and Emilie Baugnon (born Paris, daughter of Jean Baugnon and Catherine Alice), Manhattan, 12 December 1876.

Daily Alta California, 'Echoes of the Bonnet Murder', 20 December 1876. Quotes *New York Herald* on Deneve's release for lack of evidence, and his claims of having been an analytical chemist trained in his wealthy father's firm of Badin & Co of Nos. 15, 17 and 19, Rue Therenot, Paris [I have been unable to find any

such firm or street, so 'Therenot' may be Deneve's English-language joke], who made Beunon - daughter of one of the foremen - pregnant, got cut off by his parents, and brought her to America at his own expense. Deneve insists that when the relationship broke up he 'took the child under his own protection', and left for New York five days before the murder.

San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1876-77. Four arrests for 'Wearing the Attire of the Other Sex': one in August, two in September, one in November 1876. All but the November one (a copycat perhaps, after the murder) seem to be Bonnet. In the Coroner's Listing of Decedents' Property, the Colt Bonnet always carried is described as the property of a Prussian real estate dealer called Julius Funkenstein.

Sacramento Daily Union, 'Death of Blanche Beunon', 26 April 1877. A single paragraph reports that Beunon (given here as aged 35, not 25) died of throat cancer on 24 April at the French Hospital in San Francisco, leaving a two-year-old boy in the care of a family in Oakland. This brief report suggests that Beunon did get her son back, even if she didn't live very long. I know nothing about this 'family in Oakland', but it is worth pointing that the French saloonkeeper Leon Samson and his wife housed not only their own children and the crippled Sosthenes Bonnet but several apparently unrelated juveniles with French names, from 19 down to 3; even if it's stretching things too much to suggest that Samson might possibly have fostered Beunon's child (and there is no boy of the right age in the 1880 Census listing for the Samsons), it does suggest that the French in the Bay Area took care of their own orphans.

Daily Alta California, 'Do Detectives Ever Detect?', 12 January 1878. Lists the Bonnet murder among other neglected cold cases.

Department of Mental Hygiene, **Stockton State Hospital Records** (at the California State Archives in Sacramento), Collection 320. Register of Discharge (1862-1933) [R320.05 (03)] records that Bonnet's sister Blanche Bonnett, being 'Recovered' after two and a half years, was discharged in 1878 into the care of Mrs. C. Douillard.

Morning Call, 19 October 1879, 'Jeanne Bonnett'. More than three years on, the *Call* gives three columns to the case. A highly colorful account of Bonnet's youth (father here named Paul; her teenage longings to be male and a brigand; she ran a gang of male thieves till it was broken up by police; 'turned man-hater', vowed to save Frenchwomen from men; tyrannised over a band of hunters in the mountains of San Mateo; persuaded a series of French prostitutes to give up the trade and their *maques*; induced Beunon to dump Deneve by means of a '*Pour Prendre Congé*' card while he was recovering from smallpox). Claims that the *Call* is free to publish new information now because the detectives have given up hope of being able to make an arrest. Calls Deneve 'a ticket-seller' in a minor French theatre who forced Blanche into prostitution in San Francisco as soon as their newborn baby could be farmed out. Blames McNamara for his vague telegraph which let police assume that Bonnet's death was suicide. Introduces a new theory about an elderly male patron of Bonnet's called Jean Jacquin, who killed himself in the California Hotel after visiting her at San Miguel on 13 September, whom the detectives thought could be her killer until the Coroner determined that Jacquin died twelve hours before her. (This man's death is confirmed by the Coroner's Listing of Decedents' Property, *San Francisco Municipal Reports, 1876-77*, though there is no other evidence of his knowing Bonnet.) But the article puts its weight behind a more elaborate though still not

spelled out theory about a rich Southern European businessman known only as 'L'Amant de Blanche', who showered care and money on Beunon for two years while she managed to hide from him the fact that she was involved with Deneve or anyone else. The suggestion is that he wanted Beunon to stop hanging around with Bonnet, and that he visited San Miguel and may have hired her chicken-farmer landlord Monsieur Logis (the man the *Chronicle* calls Monsieur Louis) to shoot Beunon. (This reporter argues that Bonnet cannot have been the intended target, because it would have been easy enough to kill her a few minutes earlier when she was out on the porch.). The detectives interviewed Logis and 'L'Amant de Blanche' but could prove nothing. Several months later 'L'Amant' went back to Beunon and treated her lovingly again; the couple never spoke of Bonnet before Beunon died of throat cancer six months later. The Logis couple disappeared in early 1877, and in 1878 were reported to have bought a farm back in Canada for \$900 in cash; they were overheard discussing a murder, then they left town. This lurid article was abridged (uncredited) by Officer Peter Fanning as a piece in *San Francisco Police Journal* (September 1925) and then in his *Great Crimes of the West* (1929), which is probably what made its unsubstantiated fantasy of Bonnet as a gang leader – elaborated by Asbury in 1933 (see below) – so influential into the twenty-first century.

***Deseret News*, 9 July 1880.** Quotes *The Times* (Montreal) as saying that one Louis Dufranaut, a native of California who bought a farm in Papineauville, Quebec, recently assaulted his wife, who told police that her husband was the killer of Bonnet. Although this article does not identify Dufranaut as M. Logis/Louis, chicken-farmer at San Miguel Station and briefly Beunon's landlord, who was said to have moved to Canada and bought a farm for \$900,

they are clearly the same man.

Daily Alta California, 'The Frog-Catcher Murder', 9 July 1880. Records the arrest of Dufranaut.

Sacramento Daily Record-Union, 'Murder Will Out', 9 July 1880. Names the arrested man as Lewis Dufrannon.

The Sun (New York), 'A Canadian With a Bad Name', 9 July 1880. Claims that Dufrannon, who committed his most recent assault forty miles from Papineauville, has escaped and is now hiding in the woods of Ottawa County.

Daily Alta California, 'Police News', 10 July 1880. Puts the hints in the *Morning Call*'s story of 'L'Amant de Blanche' together with recent news to claim that 'L'Amant' hired French-Canadian Louis Dufranaut to kill Beunon, and that police are trying to decide whether they have enough evidence to extradite him.

Salt Lake Herald (Utah), 'The Murderer of 'The Little Frog Catcher' Caught', 6 August 1880. Gives the suspect's name as DeFramond. Reports that Detective Fahey, having waited in the man's house in Nouvelle Belgique (roughly forty miles north of Papineauville, Quebec), captured him on his return after six weeks of hiding in the woods, and has arrested both him and the woman he was living with and brought them back to Montreal. (No extradition or further news of the French-Canadian suspect from this point.)

1880 U.S. Federal Census includes:

in Oakland, Sosthene Bonnet, 55, 'paralysed', living in household of Leon Samson along with Samson's wife, four of their children, and five other (presumed) lodgers

in San Francisco, his daughter Blanche Bonnett, servant in the household of Charles Douillard (born 1840), and his wife (born about 1856) and

five children

A. Portal, about 56, French, cook, lodging in a boardinghouse at 308 Sutter St

at San Miguel Station, John McNamara, farmer (born Ireland c.1840), and wife Ellen (born Ireland c.1839, keeping house, illiterate), and children John (born California, c. 1863, 'at school'), Jeremiah (born c.1867), and Kate (born c.1870). As the 1870 Census includes Kate but not Jeremiah, the census-taker or the McNamaras may have mistakenly reversed the birth years of Kate and Jeremiah here. Their neighbours Philip Jordan, Mrs Holt, and Louis/Logis all seem to have left the settlement.

Morning Call, 16 May 1881. 'In this city, May 14, John S. McNAMARA, a native of Xenia, Ohio, aged 16 years and 10 months. [...] Friends and acquaintances are respectfully invited to attend the funeral, TO-DAY (Monday) at 1 o'clock p.m. from San Miguel.' As the 1870 Census puts John McNamara Jr's birth in Ohio in 1863, I think this dead San Miguel boy must be him.

Evening Telegram (New York), 'A Double Life Unmasked', 18 April 1885. A short story featuring a Mrs Viola de Vere, missing children, and a sprightly, beautiful French frog hunter called Jennie Bonnet.

San Francisco Directory, 1885, includes:

near San Miguel Station, John McNamara, expressman. If John Jr did die in 1881, this could be John Sr.

in San Francisco, Mary J. McNamara, working at the Golden Gate Woolen Manufacturing Company.

San Francisco Directory, 1889, includes:

on Old Mission Road, Ocean View (formerly San Miguel Station),

Jeremiah McNamara, a teamster.

The Examiner, 'The Story of the Little Frog Catcher' by W. C. Morrow, 27 March 1892. One in a series of short stories based on unsolved crimes – but not one of the better-known stories by this famous master of horror - this offers an intriguingly complicated theory. Bonnet is about to kill a man for seducing her twin sister, but spares his life, whereupon he hires a prostitute to pretend to be 'saved' by Bonnet and manoeuvre her to the window where he will shoot her.

San Francisco Call, 2 May 1893. A profile of an elderly frog-catcher called Alexander Barrette, who claims to have known both Bonnet and Buneau but refuses to discuss the murder. This article repeats some of the claims of the *Morning Call* article of 1879, such as the idea that Bonnet had a 'mission' to separate French prostitutes from their *maques*, and succeeded in half a dozen cases before the killer (here give as Louis de Frammant) was hired by 'L'Amant de Blanche'. Includes a drawing of a meek-looking woman in pants which purports to be a likeness of Bonnet.

San Francisco Call, 'Ocean View Progress', 5 April 1896. Article on the growing suburb of Ocean View (formerly San Miguel Station) occasions a retelling of the death of that 'romantic girl' Jeanne Bonnet, adding the detail that she used to come there to hunt frogs in the pond.

California Voter Register, 1900, includes Jeremiah McNamara (born 1870), living at 128 Broad St. in Ocean View.

San Francisco Call, 'Crimes That Have Aroused the Community, Puzzled the Police, and in Some Cases Been Unsolved', 23 February 1902. A quarter-century after the murder, this interview with Captain Lees gives his version of why the case against Bonnet's killer came to nothing in 1880: just as the San

Francisco police had secured hard evidence of his involvement, including a full statement from his wife, the man (presumably Louis / Logis) killed himself in custody.

1900 U.S. Federal Census includes, in San Francisco, Madelein / Madaline G. Girard, wife of Ernest Girard.

San Francisco Chronicle, **8 August 1904**. 'Indigent Frenchman Jean Pierre-Adrien Portal', born 1844 in France, who was working as a gardener for a while before becoming too frail, gasses himself in his room at 1314 Stockton.

The **California Register of Early Deaths**, 1904, gives the same facts about Portal's death but a birth date of circa 1839.

Notice of Death, San Francisco, 1908, Madeline Girard, born Lorraine, France, 1844, beloved wife of Ernest.

1910 US Federal Census includes:

in San Francisco, Kate McNamara Carroll (born Ohio 1869), and husband Cornelus Carroll (arrived from Ireland in 1875), four children, and her mother Ellen (born c. 1830).

Albany Daily Democrat (Oregon), **26 March 1918**. Quotes Bonnet telling Girard, re: Beunon, 'Her lover ran off with nine thousand dollars of her money, and I am going to induce all women to shake their lovers - such men as you are.'

Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast* (1933). The half-paragraph on Bonnet in this flavourful, footnote-free popular history seems to be the source for most modern references to her. Asbury blends two of the *Morning Call's* 1879 allegations - that Bonnet ran a gang of young male thieves, and then turned man-hater and lured prostitutes away from their trade - into a new one: that Bonnet persuaded a dozen whores to give up sex work as well as their *maques*, and

formed them into a thieves gang, with their headquarters a shack on the waterfront south of Market Street. This girl-gang theory seems a very 1930s fantasy.

She Even Chewed Tobacco (1983), a 40-minute video by Elizabeth Stevens and Estelle Freeman. The first placing of Bonnet in the context of other cross-dressers in nineteenth-century California.

Helene Wickham Koon, *Gold Rush Performers* (1994). This invaluable reference work gives brief resumes of the stage careers of all four members of the Bonnet family in San Francisco, from 1853 to 1870.

Rachelle Garniez, *The Little Frog Catcher: the Sensational True Story of Jeanne Bonnet and her Infamous Gold Rush Era Girl Gang* (2002). Apparently this musical comedy, which ran in New York for two weeks, gives Bonnet a Louisiana background.

Bonnet is a character in '**Market Street**', a four-part story in *Caper* (2003-04) by D.C. Comics.

Kevin Mullen, 'The Little Frog Catcher', in his **The Toughest Gang in Town: Police Stories from Old San Francisco** (2005). Unfootnoted account by former police chief drawing on departmental files says that Bonnet was a frequent inmate of the Industrial School, picking fights with boys, and that in early adulthood it was drunken fights rather than mere cross-dressing that put her in prison. After her death Girard told police that he only realised Bonnet was a woman when she pulled a knife on him during their quarrel on Waverly Place, at which point he had her arrested. Mullen says Bonnet was hospitalised with a gunshot wound several months before her death, and that when Girard visited her, she told the doctors he was the shooter. Gives the main police theory about

her murder: Captain Lees heard from an informant that a Pacific Street saloon keeper bragged he knew the killer - Pierre Louis from San Miguel Station - and witnessed, in his saloon, Deneve offer \$2000 to Louis to kill Beunon, to make an example of her for leaving him. After Louis hanged himself in custody in Canada, his wife Caroline confirmed that Beunon had been the target. Some detectives disagreed, insisting that the *maques* collectively hated Bonnet because she persuaded their girls to leave them, and that after her death the *maques* had a big party in Alameda. Mullen's book can be read online at www.sanfranciscohomicide.com

Clare Sears, **"A tremendous sensation": cross-dressing in the 19th-century San Francisco press'**, in *News and Sexuality: Media Portraits of Diversity*, ed. by Laura Castañeda and Shannon B. Campbell (2006), pp.1-20. Probing study of Bonnet alongside two other cases, discussing the rival notions of her as hard-drinking hoodlum and as tragic outlaw/victim. In both interpretations she seems to have been seen by her contemporaries as having a passionate bond with Beunon, but not a sexual one.