



Temperature
At Noon **60**

BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Forecast

Fair today, sunny and warmer Tuesday. High today 65, low tonight 35. High Tuesday 70. Chance of rain, 10 per cent today, tonight and Tuesday.

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Meirhofer Hanging Probed

By JIM DeWOLF
Chronicle Staff Writer

An inquest has been called in the case of a man who used a towel to commit suicide in the county jail after confessing to four previously unsolved Manhattan area murders.

County Attorney Thomas Olson said today the details of David G. Meirhofer's Sunday morning suicide will be released at a public inquest Friday morning at 9 a.m. in the Gallatin County Court House.

He said that Meirhofer's confession to the murders of 7 year old Farmington Michigan girl Susan Jaeger, Sandra Smallegan of Manhattan, Michael Raney of Bozeman, and Bernard Poelman of Manhattan will also be made public at that time.

Gallatin County Coroner Rob Myers said that Meirhofer apparently used a towel to hang himself from the jail cell block Sunday morning. He said that resuscitation efforts failed to revive the man, and that at 1 p.m. a coroners jury was sworn in over the body.

Myers said a preliminary autopsy report by Bozeman pathologist Darwin C. Lehfeldt indicated Meirhofer died of strangulation by hanging.

Ironically, death by hanging is the mandatory sentence Meirhofer was facing under the charge of deliberate homicide filed in connection with the death of Sandra Smallegan. Mrs. Smallegan died in February and as a result the homicide came under Montana's recently revised murder and kidnaping laws. The laws have been changed to conform with U.S. Supreme Court decisions striking down laws with discretionary death penalties.

18th District Court Judge W. W. Lessley said earlier today he was considering permanently impounding the taped and transcribed confessions because of the effects their release could have had on, "a lot of innocent families."

The judge said he had renewed his order that no one connected with the case make any public statements because, "it's not over yet."

Lessley said he assumed some sort of investigation will be conducted into the Meirhofer jailhouse suicide. He said he doesn't believe that anymore suspects will be charged in the case.

Late Sunday Gallatin County Attorney Thomas Olson announced that Meirhofer had committed suicide Sunday morning by hanging himself in the jail. He said that Meirhofer took his life only hours after confessing to the murders and kidnapings of Sandra Dykman Smallegan and Susan Jaeger, and to the murders of Bernard Poelman and Michael R. Raney.

Meirhofer was scheduled to plead guilty to all four murders in 8th District Court this morning Olson said. He added that the taped and transcribed confessions were made by Meirhofer in the presence of defense attorney Douglas Dasinger and FBI Agent Pete Dunbar.

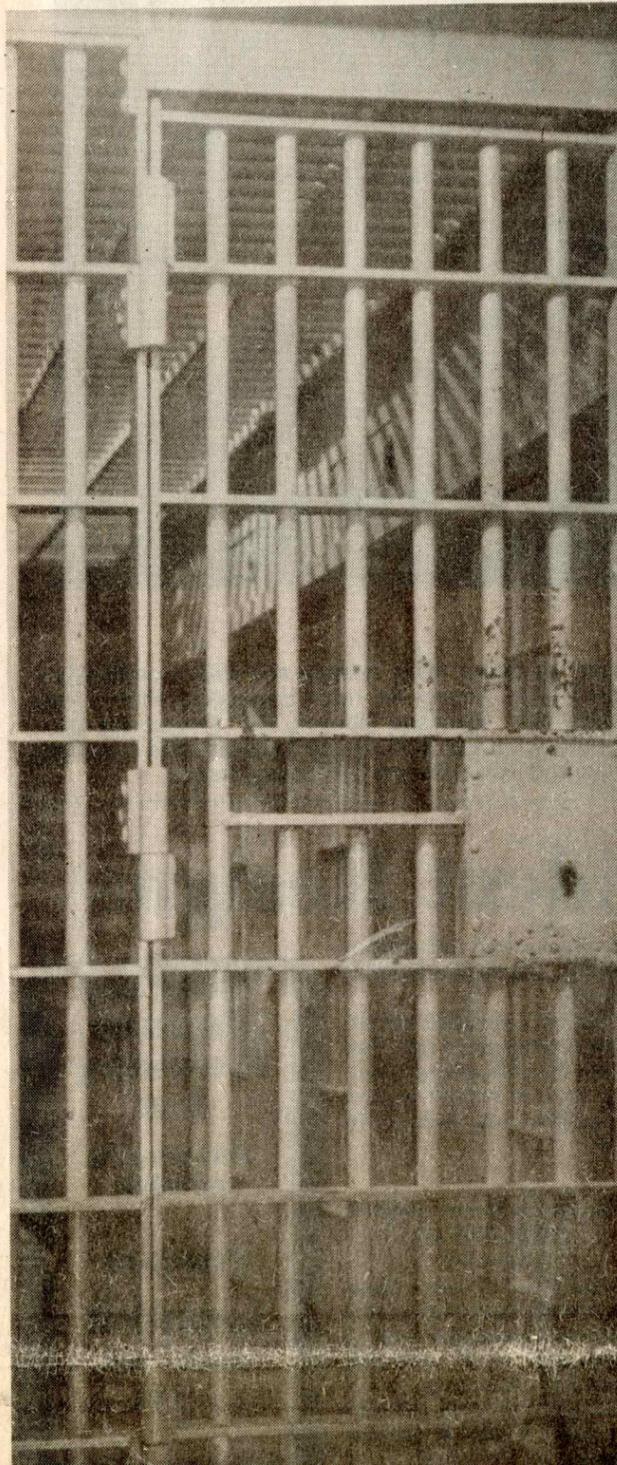
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Chronicle Photo by Jim DeWolf

End of the Trail

The trail of bone fragment clues in the Smallegan and Jaeger cases started in a campfire pit on the abandoned Lockhart Ranch in the Horse Shoe Hills northeast of Logan, and ended only a few feet away several months later when investigators unearthed one more bone fragment near an outhouse. This picture taken in February shows deputy Sgt. Carl Smith pointing to the location of the fire pit in which the charred remains were first discovered.



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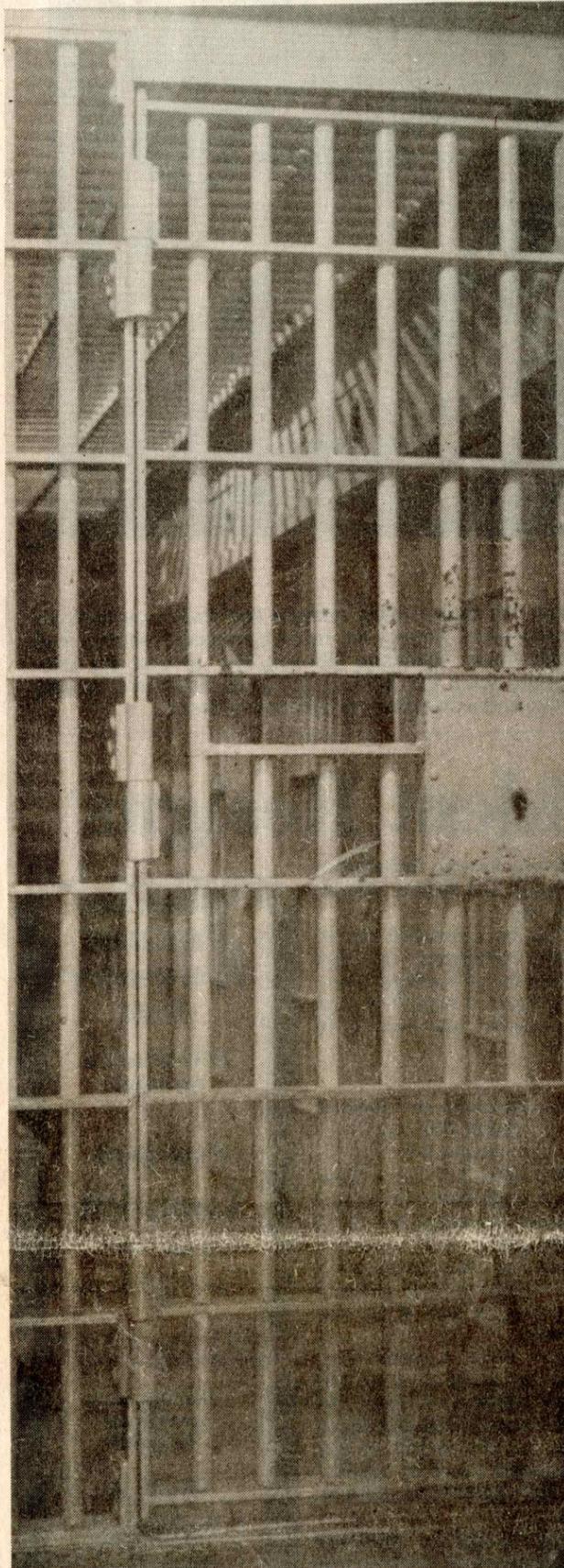
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Meirhofer was charged Friday with the murders and kidnaping of 7 year old Farmington Michigan girl, Susan Jaeger, and 19 year old Manhattanite Sandra Dykman Smallegan. Mrs. Smallegan disappeared in February and several days later her cremated remains were found scattered about an abandoned homestead located northeast of Logan.

The Jaeger girl was kidnaped early on the morning of June 25, 1973 from a tent pitched in the Headwaters State Park Campground at Trident.

Until Friday, authorities had given no indication that the Jaeger and Smallegan cases might be linked, and the Sunday afternoon disclosure was the first reference made to the Poleman and Raney murders since the Jaeger investigation was started.



Chronicle Photo by Jim DeWolf

Death Cell

David G. Meirhofer hanged himself



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Authorities initially listed Poelman as a drowning victim.

In 1967, Meirhofer was a Manhattan High School student attending his last year of school. Following graduation Meirhofer worked with his father until 1969 when he joined the Marines.

Before Meirhofer left Manhattan, Michael R. Raney, a 12 year old Bozeman Boy Scout was stabbed to death while he slept at

Investigators later said that someone had slit a hole in the back of the Raney tent, and then stabbed the youth under the left arm, puncturing a lung.

Raney was taken unconscious from the campground to Bozeman, and then later transferred to a Billings hospital where he died the following day.

Susan Jaeger, age 7, disappeared from the same campground on June 25, 1973. Her disappearance was initially described as kidnapping, but on Friday, Meirhofer was charged with both her kidnaping and murder. The Jaeger abduction and the Raney



Chronicle Photo by Jim DeWolf

Death Cell

David G. Meirhofer hanged himself from the bars of the Gallatin County Jail cell block Sunday morning. His body was found hanging by a towel from the bars. The towel had been issued to Meirhofer when he was arrested Friday, in connection with the murders of Sandra Smallegan and Susan Jaeger.

Smallegan died in February and as a result the homicide came under Montana's recently revised murder and kidnaping laws. The laws have been changed to conform with U.S. Supreme Court decisions striking down laws with discretionary death penalties.

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The four incidents form a bizarre chain of events that now appear to fit together.

Bernard Poelman, age 13, was shot to death on March 19, 1967, while he climbed on the railings of the Nixon Bridge between Manhattan and Logan. A playmate who was with him at the time of the accident told authorities, "I think he (Poelman) said



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In 1967, Meirhofer was a Manhattan High School student attending his last year of school. Following graduation Meirhofer worked with his father until 1969 when he joined the Marines.

Before Meirhofer left Manhattan, Michael R. Raney, a 12 year old Bozeman Boy Scout was stabbed to death while he slept at the Headwaters Campground State Park near Trident on May 5, 1968.

Published reports then said that Raney was sleeping in a tent surrounded by 200 other sleeping Boy Scouts. Raney's tentmate told authorities he woke up at about 5:30 a.m. and called scout leaders when he was unable to awaken Raney.

Investigators later said that someone had slit a hole in the back of the Raney tent, and then stabbed the youth under the left arm, puncturing a lung.

Raney was taken unconscious from the campground to Bozeman, and then later transferred to a Billings hospital where he died the following day.

Susan Jaeger, age 7, disappeared from the same campground on June 25, 1973. Her disappearance was initially described as kidnaping, but on Friday, Meirhofer was charged with both her kidnaping and murder. The Jaeger abduction and the Raney murder were strikingly similar cases. Both victims were sleeping in tents and both were apparently attacked in the early morning hours.

In both cases the victims were sleeping in a tent with someone else, and in both cases the other people in the tent later said they heard no unusual noises during the night.

When the Jaeger incident occurred, Meirhofer had returned to Bozeman after serving in the Marines. He was then working in Manhattan as a self-employed contractor.

Authorities said in their court affidavit that the Jaeger kidnaper had been playing a game of tag with lawmen ever since the abduction took place. They said that electronic voice 'fingerprints' and direct conversations with the Jaeger girl's parents were used to identify Meirhofer as the man who had called the Jaeger's Farmington, Mich., home on several occasions identifying himself as the kidnaper.

Sandra Dykman Smallegan disappeared on Feb. 9, 1974 and investigators found what they later proved were her cremated remains scattered about the Lockhart Ranch on Feb. 19. The same investigators found a bone from a human child age six to eight in the same area on Sept 17.

Authorities said in their court affidavit that Meirhofer had dated Mrs. Smallegan in December and that she had refused to go out with him after that. They also said that Meirhofer had worked on the Lockhart Ranch in the past and was familiar with the area.

Mrs. Smallegan lived in a Manhattan mainstreet walk-up apartment owned by Meirhofer's father and Meirhofer himself lived only a few hundred feet from the apartment building.