

Leonhard Summer's Burglar-Proof Safe by Laura Van Dusen

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In 1881 as part of a basement remodel project a large and beautifully decorated safe, once owned by Leonhard Summer of historic South Park Brewery fame, was placed inside a basement vault in the Old Park County Courthouse on Fairplay's Main Street. It isn't known what else may be in the safe, but in 2005 items from a suicide investigation were put inside and the lock froze tight. It hasn't opened since.

1881

According to the *Flume* editions of Jan. 13 and Jan. 27, 1881, the then Park County Commissioners contracted that month for a remodel of the county's seven-year old courthouse at a cost of \$1,150 (about \$27,000 in 2015 dollars). The project was to remove the jail cells from the basement and remodel the space into three offices. Windows were to be lowered and a vault was to be built in place of the central jail cell.

(Prisoners were once housed in the basement, but the cells were no longer needed because the new jail on the courthouse lawn was completed in November 1880. Without prisoners housed in the basement, the possibility of escape was no longer an issue so the windows could be lower to let in more light.)

The contract also called for the installation of heavy iron doors at the entrance of the new vault to make it fire proof. For added security the commissioners approved spending \$345 (\$8,000 in 2015 dollars) on a "large and

perfectly new" burglar-proof safe to be placed in the fortified vault. The safe was bought from Leonard Summer, owner of the Summer Brewery. The first use of the vault may have been for County Treasurer John L. Gray, whose office would be in the remodeled basement.

Progress was made quickly. The January 27 edition reported that the contractor, C. Potter, had removed all the stone walls of the old jail cells with the exception of the central cell; those walls would remain as part of the vault. A new floor was laid and the safe was on the courthouse grounds ready to be placed inside. Potter had completed the lathe work, built a new storm door and was waiting for good weather before cutting out the door and window openings and finishing the plaster work.

2015

The safe has never been moved, it is still in the basement vault of the Old Park County Courthouse.

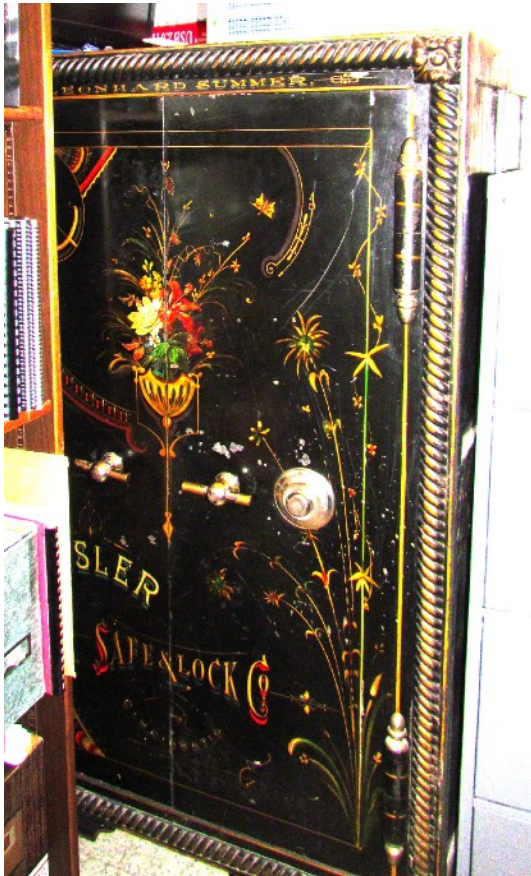
It is black, approximately six feet tall and three feet wide and probably quite heavy. It has Leonhard Summer's name written in gold across the top. A large still life of red and yellow flowers with green foliage is emblazoned on the front. It has two large silver-colored handles on the doors and a large combination dial. It's a majestic piece, reduced now for use as a shelf for an unused computer tower and boxed in by a fully packed bookcase on one side and a filing cabinet on the other.

2015

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The safe was placed in the vault before the remodel was completed, speculates Linda Balough, executive director of the South Park National Heritage Area who has an office in the basement today. That's her take because, she said, there is no way it could be moved out of the vault, it won't fit through the heavy iron doors.

And so, the safe sits, protected and secure and, it seems, still burglar proof.

The last time the safe door was open was in about 2005, when Sharon Morris was coroner and had her office in the courthouse basement. She put some items belonging to a suicide victim inside for safekeeping, said current Park County Coroner, Dave Kintz, Jr. and although the lock had worked fine until then, it froze on that day and hasn't opened since.

Is the safe really burglar-proof? The South Park National Heritage Area and the board of the Park County Local History Archives, also housed in the Old Courthouse, as well as the Coroner's Office, would like it opened. They challenge those with vintage safe-cracking skills to give it a try—with supervision and witnesses, of course.