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GEORGE VANDERBILT OWNER OF BILTMORE HOUSE PASSES AWAY.

He Had Undergone Operation for Appendicitis, but Was Thought to Be Improving.

Washington, March 6.—George W. Vanderbilt, of Biltmore and New York, died at his Washington residence this afternoon at 1 o'clock. Mr. Vanderbilt underwent an operation for appendicitis about ten days ago but his death was unexpected. He talked with friends and relatives shortly after noon, and told his physician, Dr. James E. Mitchell, that he felt better than he had in a number of years. Shortly afterwards he had a sinking spell from which he never rallied.

"Mr. Vanderbilt's death was the biggest shock to me I have ever had," said Dr. Mitchell to the Daily News correspondent. "I talked with him shortly after 12 o'clock and I would have wagered my life that he was on the rapid road to recovery. In less than two hours, however, I was summoned to his bedside and found him in a serious condition from which he never rallied and died within a few hours."

Asheville, March 6.—When the gentle spirit of George W. Vanderbilt, possessor of millions and master of Biltmore house, went back to its Maker this afternoon, Asheville and western North Carolina lost their greatest benefactor, while hundreds of people in this immediate section were bereft of a true friend. It was George W. Vanderbilt who literally placed Asheville on the map a quarter of a century ago, when, drinking in the beauties of the near western slope of the Smokies with Pisgah and the Rat on the sky line, from the veranda of the Battery Park hotel, he decided to east his lot among the people of this section and gave in the most magnificent private home on this or the other side of the Atlantic.

The Charm of Nature.

How George W. Vanderbilt fell an easy victim to the wiles of nature in this chosen spot has been told and retold to visitors of national and international fame for more than a decade. He looked upon the tall granite-ribbed sentinels of the day and the night and listened to the low murmur of babbling brook and realized that Zeb Vance's word-paintings and Bob Taylor's picture-sonnets had merely brushed the surface. He gazed upon Pisgah, where "Fiddling Bob" Taylor once said he "stood and tickled the feet of angels," and forthwith decided to build a home in the shadow of that granite dome to spend his future years. He did and today nestling in the heart of the mountains and within clear view of the center of Asheville is Biltmore House—the Mansion—a pile of gray granite chiseled from the bosom of surrounding peaks standing as a monument to modern architecture and the man who but yesterday was its master.

Vanderbilt's First Visit.

The first visit of George Vanderbilt to Asheville was away back yonder in 1888 or 1889. He came south on a pleasure trip and incidentally stopped over in Asheville. Asheville at that time was little known. It had then as it has now the irresistible charm but the thousands and tens of thousands of people who once have whiled away pleasant and profitable hours here and hereabout didn't know it. Mr. Vanderbilt with his party of friends stopped at the Battery Park hotel. They came to the night, so the story goes and expected to leave early the next morning but as the sun broke across Beaucatcher mountain the following morning and shed its rays along the western range across the plateau Mr. Vanderbilt was up and pacing to and fro the long front veranda of the hotel. He looked across the valley where the sun cut from the morning dew myriads of sparkling gems and then on to the mountain range until his very soul took in the freshness and the glory of the scene and he determined to linger yet awhile.

As Mr. Vanderbilt paced backward and forward along the hotel veranda his eye glimpsed a tall blackened pine away in the distance. It was a lonesome sentinel of the forest standing naked and in bold relief against the sun's early rays but it caught the eye of the man of millions and later seeking out a liveryman he inquired if it were possible to drive to the spot. It was and over a rough mountain road the future owner of Biltmore estate took his first drive to what was destined to become the center of his thousands of acres possession. The old pine tree stood on a little hill—a rise. It is not there now but in its stead is Biltmore House into the construction of which Mr. Vanderbilt with lavish hand is reputed to have poured several millions of dollars.

The Coming of Vanderbilt.

Soon after Mr. Vanderbilt's visit to Asheville, which was little noted at the time, Col. Chas. McNamee, a New Yorker, and man of affairs; with a shrewd business man, came to Asheville. Mr. McNamee enlisted the aid of several Asheville men and began buying property around Asheville. The spot of the old pine tree was first taken, and then all that property now known as Biltmore village changed hands. Options were taken on a vast number of acres of land both in and around Asheville and then came the announcement that George W. Vanderbilt was the purchaser and that he would erect near the village the most magnificent mansion in the world. All the options on all the property that Mr. Vanderbilt desired had been secured and the "natives" made wise to "something good" immediately began asking city prices for worn out tobacco and corn fields. And they got them. Fancy prices were paid later by Mr. Vanderbilt for a strip of land here and another there. Among the "holdouts" as the baseball players call them, was the base ball player, George Collins, of some fame. Collins owned a few acres near where the mansion was to rise but he refused to sell, saying on one occasion that he didn't need the money (which he did) and beside he "didn't object to Mr. Vanderbilt as a neighbor." There were many other property owners in Buncombe including some of the Alexanders, the Joneses, Reeds, the Gudgers, who sold out to Mr. Vanderbilt for nice sums.

Building of the Mansion.

The building of Biltmore House brought to Asheville its greatest years of business prosperity and attracted more visitors than the town had ever known before. Hundreds of men skilled in the art of chiselling out of stone beauties for the eye to feast upon and hundreds of other craftsmen skilled in this art or that, were "imported" and set to work on the mansion. In instances hill were levelled and hollows filled; roads were constructed and drives laid out. Biltmore became a busy scene and Asheville promptly went on the map. As the mansion rose and took on shape hundreds and thousands of visitors to Asheville and townspeople almost daily drove over the five mile stretch of road to the scene of operation and marvelled at the vast undertaking. As the work progressed and the mansion neared completion admission was made only by card and only upon request at the Biltmore office could these permits be secured. Daily the Biltmore office of the estate was thronged with people seeking admission through the "inner gate" and this continued until the mansion was actually occupied and then, and since, while the owner was away permission to drive over the estate, has been granted.

The Mansion.

Biltmore House has been described and its beauties told in magazine and newspaper. In later days only close friends and invited guests of the Vanderbilts were permitted to pass its portals. In the construction, however, the thousands who visited the place, roamed almost at will over the house; stepped upon the winding stairs; looked out over the landscape from the ball room; passed through what were to be private apartments; handled the chiseled stone and chipped a piece of

granite from this arch or that as a souvenir. Later all this was tabooed. The unrestricted use of the grounds and the Mansion came when it was discovered that one granite arch had been so scarred and disfigured by souvenir hunters that it became necessary to tear it down and build it over. Then, too, the shrubbery was attacked by visitors and for a long time employees of the estate were kept busy resetting shrubbery and flowers that had been ruthlessly torn up by people abusing their privileges.

The Vanderbilt Scion.

With all their wealth and the proud possessors of Biltmore estate, Mr. and Mrs. George Vanderbilt were democratic in their habits and were charming hosts. Mr. Vanderbilt always took a keen interest in All Souls' church, where he was one of the vestrymen. His charity was large and if he ever spoke kindly or harshly to man or beast no one on the Biltmore estate ever heard of it. Mrs. Vanderbilt has always been deeply interested in the work on the estate, especially among the girls and boys for whom largely through her influence were maintained schools of industry and learning, and in this hour of her bereavement many a whispered prayer will ascend from humble mountain cottage that she may be sustained and comforted.

Many Amusing Incidents.

During the construction of Biltmore House or about that time, when Mr. Vanderbilt sought to buy a little piece of land here and another piece there and when "too fancy" prices were asked because it was Mr. Vanderbilt who wanted it, many amusing incidents are told. The negro Collins, whose cabin adjoined the Biltmore House lot and who "refused to sell" finally sold out to Mr. Vanderbilt, but he didn't get \$50,000 as was first reported he had been offered. He sold for a few thousand dollars and was glad to get it. One splendid old lady who owned a spring and an acre or two that Mr. Vanderbilt wanted, refused to sell. Every time a fancy price was placed on the spring, etc., she would back down. She just "hated to part with her spring." Finally, it is said, she agreed to take \$5,000 and Mr. Vanderbilt in an effort to guard against any possible hitch, went with his agent in person and with the \$5,000 in gold. The negotiations were closed and Mr. Vanderbilt had started to count out the gold, so the story runs, when he was stopped. This good lady threw up her hands in horror. She told Mr. Vanderbilt that he could leave none of his gold there; that she had "just as leave he fetched a sag full of rattlesnakes." And the owner of Biltmore House was forced to carry his \$5,000 in gold back home. The next day he sent a check and that spring and that acre or two of land are now part and parcel of the famous Biltmore estate.

Trustee's Sale.

By virtue of the power conferred upon me by a Deed of Trust executed by Walter Moore and wife, Laura Moore, on the 20th of February, 1911, to secure a debt of \$300 to R. W. George, said deed of Trust being recorded in Book 41, page 66 of the Record of Mortgages of Surry County, I will sell to the highest bidder for cash, in front of the First National Bank of Mount Airy, on Saturday the 28th day of March, 1914, at one o'clock P. M., the following described real estate to wit: A tract of land in Surry County adjoining the lands of William Blue, Willis Moore and others and bounded as follows: Beginning on a chestnut oak on the top of the mountain, runs E. with Wm. Blue's line 32 chains to a poplar stump in Blue's line; thence N. 14½ chains to a post oak N. 43½ degrees W. 12½ chains to a small post oak on the top of the mountain; thence S. 45 degrees W. to the beginning, containing 41½ acres more or less. This sale is made to satisfy the said debt.
This Feb. 21st, 1914.
W. F. Carter, Trustee.

TEXAS RANGERS CROSS RIO GRANDE AND SECURE BODY OF VERGARA.

Invade Hidalgo, Exhume the Remains—Two Bullet Wounds in Head.

Laredo, Tex., March 8.—Texas Rangers, who secretly crossed into Mexico last night, today brought to the American side the mutilated body of Clemente Vergara, Texas ranchman, and established the fact of his execution after he was seized by Mexican Federals.

The Rangers were not opposed, accomplished their search without the slightest violence, taking the body from a grave in Hidalgo Cemetery almost within sight of the Texas border. The seizure was divested of possibly grave aspects in international complications by reason of the fact that the Rangers were practically making use of permission granted officially by Mexican Federal authorities several days ago for recovery of the body. This permission had been given to United States Consul Alonzo Garrett at Nuevo Laredo, but he did not get the body because of what he reported as dangers attending search for it in the immediate vicinity of Hidalgo.

Vergara was shot twice through the head and once through the neck, his skull was crushed as by a blow from a rifle butt and the charred findings of the left hand indicated that he had been tortured before being put to death.

Identification was made by the dead man's son and by numerous friends, many of whom were in the party of nine, led by the State border patrol, which made the grim journey to the Hidalgo Cemetery during the early morning hours today.

The body was not badly decomposed, despite its three weeks' exposure. In addition to the trousers which enclosed the body and matched it to the coat which his father had on the day he crossed the Rio Grande.

Bring Body to United States.

The body was brought into the United States at a point 45 miles northwest of Laredo, opposite Hidalgo and near the Vergara ranch. American Consul Garrett of Nuevo Laredo, deputy sheriffs and other authorities were waiting to receive it and pending the arrival of an undertaker from Laredo, an armed force stood guard over the body.

Recovery of the body was made by a force of Texans, including friends of the dead man, acting with the troop of Texas Rangers, under Captain Saunders who have been investigating the circumstances of Vergara's seizure by Mexican Federals. A secret investigation, in which many Mexicans had been questioned, is understood to have preceded the trip into Mexico. Leading the force was a man who claimed to have been a witness to both the execution and burial of Vergara.

Rangers Assemble.

The force gathered near the Vergara ranch, not far from the spot where Vergara crossed the river to meet the Mexican Federals who promised remuneration for stolen horses. Moving silently they began the overland march to Hidalgo, a distance of about five miles. They avoided the town, it was said, under the cover of night and met no one to question their journey.

Grave is Located.

Location of the grave where Vergara was supposed to lie proved an easy task, for it has been a center of speculation and wonder since it appeared, after a swinging body had been cut down from the place of execution, after the hue and cry over Vergara's disappearance started an investigation. The body had been rudely interred, with little effort, to protect it from the earth. With their burden fixed on a stretcher carried by six of the dead man's friends, the procession started unchallenged on the return journey which brought Clemente Vergara home again to the United States.

It is understood a thorough examination of the body has been

ordered by the State authorities.

How Vergara Was Lured Away.

Vergara left his ranch, near Palmito, Tex., Friday, February 13, and crossed the river into Mexico on a message from three Federal soldiers that Captain Apolonio Rodriguez of the Hidalgo garrison, wished to settle for 11 horses taken from Vergara's island pasture in the Rio Grande. Mrs. Vergara pleaded with her husband not to risk seizure by the Mexicans, but disregarding her warnings, he crossed the river in company with his young nephew. Mrs. Vergara has since told how she saw her husband assaulted by the waiting soldiers, and after being knocked unconscious, carried off. Vergara's nephew at the time of the attack on his uncle escaped to safety and hid in the brush until he could recross the river.

On the following day Mrs. Vergara went in search of her husband and found him in the Hidalgo jail. So far as known there was no charge against him. He had been cruelly beaten, according to the woman. She dressed the wounds in his head, she said, and remained with him until forced to leave. That was the last she ever saw of him alive, for early next morning he was taken from the jail, supposedly to be transferred to Piedras Negras and disappeared.

Hanged Then Shot.

When a search was begun for the missing American it was learned that a man had been shot and his body hung to a tree outside of Hidalgo early Sunday morning, February 15, and the body left hanging for several days. Soon after United States Consul Garrett at Nuevo Laredo started his inquiry, the body was removed and a fresh grave was noticed in the old Hidalgo Cemetery. Mexicans that of Vergara, and that they believed he was buried in the new grave.

It was finally determined to the satisfaction of the American investigators that he had been executed.

Persistent denial was made by the Mexican Federals, and prior to this General Alvarez, commanding at Piedras Negras, had promised American Consul Blocker at Piedras Negras, that Vergara would be released and his captors called to account. This allayed the fears of his friends until his continued absence set in motion an exhaustive investigation in which the United States Government took a part. Consul Garrett proceeded to Hidalgo, and personally interviewed Captain Rodriguez, the man held responsible for Vergara's kidnaping, but the Federal captain denied all knowledge of the ranchman's death and said that he had been sent to Piedras Negras, but had escaped en route and that the Federals were certain he had joined the Constitutionalists.

Consul Garrett, however, after interviewing numerous Mexicans and others, reported officially that Vergara had been executed. He added that he was convinced from the Federals attitude while he was in Hidalgo that it would have been dangerous for him to demand surrender of the body.

Investigation Ordered.

The investigation was ordered continued by the State Department and in addition the State of Texas also ordered an investigation by the Texas Rangers, the State military police who guard the border. The island pasture of Vergara where first it had been reported he was assaulted, complicated the affair by the question whether it was Mexican or American territory, until it was found that Vergara had been taken on the Mexican mainland. This rendered those responsible safe from State prosecution. As the horses were alleged to have been taken from this pasture, however, and county records showed it to belong to the State of Texas, Mrs. Vergara filed an affidavit charging Captain Rodriguez and three of his men with horse theft.

Governor Colquitt requested permission of the United States Department to send Texas Rang-

ers across the border to pursue the "abductors and murderers" of Vergara, and was told by Secretary of State Bryan that the United States Government alone cared to take authority for sending an armed force to a foreign country. Later, when Mrs. Vergara made the change of horse theft, Governor Colquitt asked of the State Department "whom the United States recognized as constituted authority in Northern Mexico," so that he might make requisition under the Mexican treaty, for the men named. This question was never answered to the satisfaction of Governor Colquitt and the Governor announced that to solve the question he would requisition both the Federal and Constitutional Governors of the State of Nuevo Leon and Chihuahua. This was on Friday, and so far as known, the requisition has not been issued.

Disappearance Caused Bitterness.

Vergara's seizure and disappearance east the Texas border country in this section into a turmoil. Many bitter expressions have been heard, and while there has been no sign of disorder, feeling has run high. Dissatisfaction was especially keen because of what Vergara's friends thought a delay in demanding return of his body for burial, and there had been rumors that an attempt might be made to secure it. Interest in the case was renewed tonight.

Named in Mrs. Vergara's complaint were Captain Apolonio Rodriguez and the following privates of the Hidalgo Federal garrison: Nito Sierra, Juan Vastillon, and Andres Rodriguez. It has been said that they were transferred to another post after the Vergara incident became public. Their arrest was promised by General Joaquin Maas, Federal commander of the northern

border, but it was not said whether they would be delivered to the Texas authorities.

No further word has come from General Maas.

Governor Did Not Authorize.

Austin, Texas, Mar. 8.—Gov. O. B. Colquitt tonight authorized the statement that he had not specifically instructed Ranger Captain J. J. Sanders who recovered Clemente Vergara's body to cross the border to get it. The Governor, however, said he had no complaint to make about Sanders' action. He wired the Ranger captain for full particulars, receiving the reply that owing to lack of telegraph facilities this report would not be available until tomorrow. The Governor announced that pending receipt of this report from Captain Sanders he would have no statement to make.

Unofficially it was said the Governor presumed Captain Sanders' men had proceeded to get the body with the co-operation of Mexican authorities. The choice of an early hour for the expedition was said to have been to avoid suspicions of onlookers and to avoid clashes with Mexican military authorities.

Vergara's body tonight still was opposite Hidalgo, 45 miles from Laredo. The body will probably be taken to Laredo tomorrow.

Beggar's Hump a Box of Gold.

San Francisco Dispatch.

William Kahler, aged 70, has been hunchback beggar for 20 years, eating the food he found in ash cans and sleeping wherever he could find shelter. A patrolman arrested the old man last night and took him to the lockup so he might have a comfortable bed.

In searching Kahler it was found that his "hump" was uncommonly hard, and investigation revealed that it was not a deformity, but a tin box packed with gold coins and paper money. Various false pockets in Kahler's clothes were emptied of additional money. When all was counted the total was found to be \$11,000.

Kahler's "hump" also contained three bank books that showed deposits amounting to \$23,000. He was held on a charge of vagrancy.