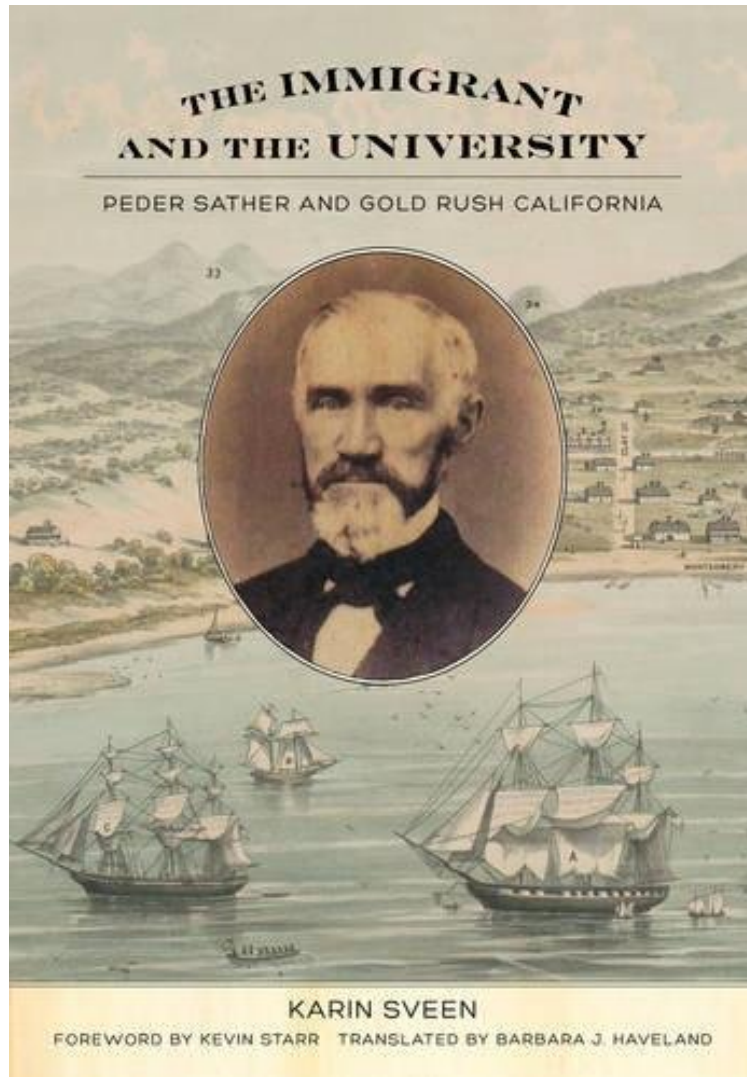


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# The Immigrant and the University: Peder Sather and Gold Rush California

*Karin Sveen*

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**Karin Sveen : The Immigrant and the University: Peder Sather and Gold Rush California** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Immigrant and the University: Peder Sather and Gold Rush California:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Beautifully presented biography of a little known influence to the California dreamBy TarynI awaited the publication of Karin Sveen's The Immigrant and the University: Pedar Sather and Gold Rush California with great anticipation because it is set in Gold Rush California and follows the life of Pedar

Sather, for whom Sather Gate, the Campanile, two professorships, and the Sather Center at the University of California at Berkeley are named. Sveen's book boasts a preface by Kevin Starr and has been beautifully translated from Norwegian by Barbara J. Havelund - beautifully because the author's voice clearly shines through with dreamy passages such as this from page 20. "I picture him in his cabin, head bowed over his grammar book and dictionary, in calm weather and when storms tore at the sails and tugged at the rigging. I picture him up on deck, his dark hair blown back by the wind, his face splashed by the cold salt spray.....In my mind's eye I see him in the galley at daybreak, as the ship slices through the waves, wallowing from side to side. He sits down at a table bolted to the floor, alongside American seamen and deckhands, and leaving his mother tongue behind him he extends his hand and says: "Hello, I'm Peter."The style or voice employed in *The Immigrant and the University* was revelatory for me simply because of the author's use of "I". While Sveen didn't entirely insert herself into the narrative as a character, la Edmund Morris' ground-breaking Dutch, she did allow herself to recount certain research related quandaries and reflect and suppose how Pedar Sather felt about certain life situations. This strategy was employed to supplement the scant records available and was a great vehicle for filling in gaps in the historical record and expressing what she (as the closest person to Sather since his family died) KNEW to be true but couldn't precisely prove with material fact. Sveen completed a remarkable amount of research and effectively reconstructed the life of the little known Sather. Readers will learn that Pedar Sather was born in a Norwegian village, immigrated to the U.S., founded a bank, grew rich, and gave a great deal of money to the fledgling University of California. While Starr, in his preface, describes the narrative as "restrained" and evocative of Norse sagas, I found it indeed to be lyrical on a granular level but as a whole, so rich with the minutiae of Sather's life, that it obscured his life's consequence. The "story" of Pedar Sather's life - the significance, the moral, the lesson - didn't hit me over the head, despite the trials he faced trying to build a business in the infant West, having a chronically ill daughter and living away from his family for many years. While I plowed on and finished the book because of the interesting tidbits about early San Francisco, I quickly came to the conclusion that "cradle to grave" biographies are not my preference. Every life, if you look hard enough has the heroic deeds, fatal flaws, sinister antagonists, supportive sidekicks, and relevant resolutions that make fictional stories exciting. The trick in biography is presenting these aspects of a life in such a way so as to drive the story, provide the reader with a moral (to the one of many life stories being told) and hit them hard with the life's significance. Certainly this is easier said than done, particularly by a professional reader. At any rate, I bow to Sveen's accomplishment. If you love San Francisco and California history or are interested in the founding of the University of California this is a must read.

Peder Sather was a scribe before he emigrated from Norway to New York in 1832. There, he worked as a servant and a clerk at a lottery office before opening an exchange brokerage. During the gold rush, he moved to San Francisco to help establish the banking house of Drexel, Sather Church on Montgomery Street. Sather was a founder and a liberal benefactor of the University of California at Berkeley where he is memorialized by the Sather Gate and Sather Tower (the Campanile), three endowed professorships, and more recently the Peder Sather Center for Advanced Study. Karin Sveen, one of Norway's most accomplished writers, pieces together a story yet untold a beautifully crafted biography based on her dedicated search for scraps of information. The result gives readers a look at the life of a successful entrepreneur and a leading California patron who engaged in public education on all levels; supported Abraham Lincoln; and worked to give emancipated slaves housing, schooling, and employment after the Civil War. His legacy and vivid persona and the frontier city of his time are brought to life with interesting anecdotes of many famous people General William T. Sherman, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, and above all, his close friend Anthony J. Drexel, legendary Philadelphia financier and one of the founders of Wall Street.

"Sveen's elegiac biography is an intimate and rambling look at Sather . . . its a well-researched addition to the literature on early San Francisco, as well as the experience of Norwegian immigrants in the U.S."