



STORIES OF THE SECRET SERVICE

—BY—
Capt. Patrick D. Tyrrell

STORY No. 1 THE LINCOLN TOMB ROBBERS

Being an Account of the Attempted Desecration of the Grave of the Martyr President at Springfield in 1876, and the Capture and Conviction of a Gang of Counterfeiters That Preceded It.

By CAPTAIN PATRICK D. TYRRELL

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PART II.—Continued.

Besides this bond of intermarriage there was a strong property tie connecting the counterfeiting principals, Nelson Driggs, whose brother kept a hotel in Jersey City which was a rendezvous for "coney men," had \$10,000 in cash, 28,000 acres of land in Texas and other property. Ben Boyd had means in plenty, as did McCartney and several others. They were men of good habits in point of abstemiousness, and many of them lived Jekyll and Hyde lives with such success that in their respective communities they were respected members of society while making and shoving the "queer." Many of them were men of education. Boyd had a magnificent library and was a student. Few of them, during the reputable periods of their careers, engaged in business that was not honorable, among them being farmers, contractors, professional men and an editor.

To this rule, however, there were two or three exceptions. One of these was James Kinealy, who, at the time of this narrative, kept the "Hub" saloon at 294 West Madison street, Chicago, with Terrence Mullen as a partner. Both Kinealy and Mullen had for years held close communion with the counterfeiters of the central west, and their saloon, while orderly enough, was the general Chicago rendezvous of dozens of the most desperate and accomplished counterfeiters in the country. In St. Louis a saloon of similar character was run by Fred Biebusch, one of the most extensive dealers in bogus currency in the world, of whose career and final capture I shall tell in a subsequent narrative.

The same men that frequented the "Hub" in Chicago were at home in Biebusch's in St. Louis. The halfway station was the saloon in Lincoln, Ill., kept by Robert Splane, a headquarters for the large band of "koniackers" that lived in and near Lincoln at that time. The principal members of the Lincoln band were Benjamin T. Sheridan, farm owner; James L. Fox, Sr. and Jr., contractors; Joseph de Haven, farmer; Thomas J. Sharp, editor of the Statesman, published in Lincoln; Nathan L. Curtis, Sharp's outside man; Robert Splane, saloon keeper, and Vibe G. Williams, a bartender. All of these men were intimately associated with Kinealy and Mullen in Chicago and Biebusch in St. Louis, as well as with Nelson Driggs, Ben Boyd, Pete McCartney and many other somewhat less prominent. Another member of the band was John Hughes, an all-around criminal and hoodle carrier for Charles Stadfeldt while the latter was shoving the "queer" made from Boyd's plates.

The incarceration of Ben Boyd in the penitentiary had seriously crippled the counterfeiting industry of the country, and especially among the devotees of the calling who were operating in Illinois. Nearly all the bogus currency shovled in the middle west had been printed from Boyd's plates and handled by Driggs. During the winter of 1875-76, when it became apparent that the evidence against these two arch-conspirators was sufficient to bring about their incarceration, there began a series of conferences of the "koniackers" in Chicago, St. Louis and Lincoln, at which was discussed the prospective serious effect on the counterfeiting business of the locking up of its best plate cutter. The different hands which had been fed from the Boyd plates became more desperate as the cutting off of their source of supply became more certain, and when, finally, Boyd passed behind the gray stone walls of the Joliet penitentiary there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth among the precious lot of criminals that infested the Mississippi valley.

To add to their woes, eight months after the capture of Boyd in Fulton, Irvine White, another expert engraver of counterfeit plates, had been arrested in New Jersey, stopping this secondary source of supply. The dealers

of Chicago, St. Louis and Lincoln could, therefore, secure no "coney" money worth the handling, and the smaller dealers, from the Canadian line to the gulf of Mexico, were sending in orders for bad money that could not be filled. The only plate available for use at the time was the one of a \$10 note of the Bank of Richmond, Ind. This was what was known as a skeleton plate—that is, so made that the part bearing the name of the bank was mortised in, allowing the insertion of the name of another bank, the rest of the note being the same. Counterfeits of the Lafayette and Muncie, Ind., banks had been printed from this plate, but this counterfeit had become worthless on account of the worn condition of the plate. The Richmond "10s" were so well known as to be practically unpassable.

Peter McCartney was at large, but was not inclined to divide the fruits of his labors with the Lincoln crowd. Charles F. Ulrich, another cutter, had been released from the Ohio penitentiary, but his release was not generally known and he was not disposed immediately to resume operations. With a knowledge of these facts it can readily be understood why the straits to which the counterfeiters were reduced were desperate. The release of Boyd was an absolute necessity, to be accomplished at any cost.

For months the members of this most cunning and desperate band had been whipping their brains for feasible plans to effect the release of their pal. None that passed muster in the criminal council had been suggested. The secret service, knowing that every enery of the criminals would be strained to free Boyd, but having no knowledge of the plans suggested, worked diligently to enmesh the known members at large on counterfeiting charges and in so doing made a special effort to trap John Hughes, who for a dozen years had successfully passed and dealt in counterfeit money, besides taking side excursions into other paths of crime. Sufficient evidence against Hughes had been gathered to secure an indictment by the federal grand jury in 1874, but for a year and a half he had eluded the shrewdest men in the secret service.

At that time I often secured information from a man named Lewis C. Swegles. He was what we then termed a "roper" or stool pigeon. Swegles was the son of the first auditor of the state of Michigan—the black sheep in a fine family—but a man who had been of considerable value to the



THE LINCOLN TOMB AT SPRINGFIELD.

secret service on account of his intimacy with criminals.

I had been working to locate Hughes, but had been unsuccessful until August, 1876, when Swegles informed me of his whereabouts. Starting with the information given by Swegles, I soon found and arrested Hughes in the "Hub" saloon at 294 West Madison street, previously mentioned as having been kept by Jim Kinealy and Terry Mullen. Hughes was arraigned and deposited \$2,000 to secure his appearance for trial the following January.

In the meantime Swegles, whose identity and connection with the secret service was a most carefully guarded secret, was working to ingratiate himself into the confidence of the counterfeiting band that made its headquarters at the "Hub" while in Chicago. He confided to Hughes that he had served time in a western prison for horse stealing, but that he was anxious to forsake the crudities of horse stealing and other common lines of crime for the refinements of dealing in counterfeit money. Swegles, by clever dissembling, was successful in convincing Hughes that he was promising material for an addition to the ranks of the "coney men."

I was fully aware that Swegles was working to win the confidence of the counterfeiters that met at the "Hub," but it was about two months before I had any other communication from my "roper" that was of importance. He then confided to me that the band had under way a sensational plot—not along counterfeiting lines—but to steal the body of Abraham Lincoln and hold it for a large ransom. Accustomed as I was to the daring operations of these men, the audacity of this plot startled me. Swegles mentioned \$200,000 as the amount the conspirators had fixed as the price of the return of the body. For a time I found it difficult to convince myself that these men, cunning and daredevil as they had proved themselves to be in other crimes, would actually attempt to carry out a plot so bold and which struck so deeply at the roots of one of the country's deepest sentiments—its love for Lincoln and its reverence for all of him that was earthly.

But the situation permitted the indulgence of no sentiment. The information given me by Swegles had in previous instances been accurate, and I had no reason even to surmise that he was playing me false in this case or that he had allowed himself to be gulled by Hughes and Mullen. He

sides, my informant had given as one of the motives for the proposed crime the desire for the release of Ben Boyd, which I knew to be a consideration of the utmost importance to the men whose operations had been so abruptly curtailed by the plate cutter's incarceration.

The moment was one for action, even at the risk of finding later that the secret service had been led into unnecessary activity by misinformation. My informant had learned that certain St. Louis men, whose names he did not know, were parties to the plot. Previously a similar plot, emanating from the same sources, had been revealed to Chief of Police Wilkinson, of Springfield. In this plan James Kinealy had evidently been the promoter, and had decided to use the Lincoln counterfeiting contingent as his agents. Thomas J. Sharp, editor of the Statesman; Nathan L. Curtis, his assistant, and Vibe G. Williams, a bartender of Lincoln, as the first step, opened a saloon in Springfield, which they made their counterfeiting headquarters as well as the place from which they could gather, without exciting suspicion, such information as they needed to aid them in their work of stealing the body of Lincoln.

From the facts that the sum of ransom money proposed in this plot and the later sum were the same and that the interests of all the men in both plots were closely allied, there was little doubt that one man had conceived the scheme to release Boyd, and there was also little doubt that the one man was James Kinealy. He was capable of conceiving and trying to carry out such a plot.

The dream of the easy acquisition of \$200,000 led the counterfeiters who had opened the saloon in Springfield into the lavish expenditure of money and dissipation. In one of these bouts Thomas Sharp confided to a woman of the town of Springfield that he expected soon to become one of the beneficiaries of the \$200,000 ransom fund and intimated to her the plan by which the money was to be secured. This woman informed Chief Wilkinson of the drunken boasts of her admirer. Wilkinson immediately took steps to place additional guards over the Lincoln tomb and took such other precautions as indicated to the conspirators that their plan could not be carried out. It was in this first plot that the leaden casket containing the body of Lincoln was to be sunk in the Sangamon river till its hiding place should be revealed by Ben Boyd.

After coming into possession of the information concerning the second plot I sent Swegles back to Hughes to keep in touch with the movements of the conspirators as closely as possible. He succeeded so well in this that he was chosen to be one of the men to engage actively in the work, and the details of the plan were intrusted to him without reservation. He was to furnish the light spring wagon in which the casket was to be conveyed from Springfield. The plan to sink the casket in the Sangamon river, proposed in the first plot, had been abandoned, and instead the body was to be hauled swiftly from Springfield by relays of horses into the sand dunes of northern Indiana and buried. The conspirators calculated that the shifting of these dunes due to the action of the wind would soon obliterate all trace of wagon tracks and signs of burial and make a hiding place absolutely past the power of any man to find.

The ghouls were to keep track of the place of burial by taking measurements from some natural object, such as a tree, transmitting the key to the burial spot to Ben Boyd in Joliet. The negotiations for the return of the body, in exchange for his own release and the payment of \$200,000 ransom, were to be conducted by Boyd on behalf of the counterfeiters. In order to render the opening of these negotiations the easier, the conspirators calculated, a plan would have to be devised by which the federal authorities could be easily convinced that Boyd could actually furnish the information concerning the location of the body—in short, they foresaw that Boyd would have to be in position to prove to the authorities that he had accurate knowledge of its whereabouts.

In order to overcome this obstacle it was decided that a copy of an English or some other foreign newspaper should be secured, a foreign paper being decided upon so that Boyd could convince the government representatives that the copy of the paper of which he had a part was not one that could have been obtained in any other way than the one claimed by him. This newspaper was to be torn into two pieces, in an irregular fashion. One piece was to be left in the Lincoln tomb, where it was certain to be found when the discovery of the loss of the body was made, and the other piece was to be sent to Boyd in prison. After the discovery of the work of the ghouls Boyd was to let it be known that he could solve the mystery and, to prove as told the truth, could produce the missing part of the foreign paper which, of course, would demonstrate to the authorities that the tomb robbers had sent Boyd the paper and with it the key to the location of the body.

[To Be Continued.]

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