



STORIES OF THE SECRET SERVICE

BY Capt. Patrick D. Tyrrell

STORY No. 3 The MISSOURI LAND LEAGUERS

Being an Account of the Operations and Conviction of the Band of Land Thieves Operating in Missouri in the Early Seventies.

By CAPTAIN PATRICK D. TYRRELL

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Two men sat in the back room of the well-appointed offices of the Real Estate Loan and Trust company, of St. Louis, one night in the fall of 1872. One was young, under 30, slender and somewhat stooped. His eyes were dark and shifting and he wore a black beard and mustache. The other was slightly older and bore the appearance of a prosperous business man. Save for the other's eyes were deserted, but nevertheless they talked in undertones.

"The plan has been tested in all its questionable points and found absolutely safe," said the younger man, the owner of the offices and at all times the leader in the dialogue. "The only weak point remaining is the limited market we now have in the sale of these lands. This market must be extended, and the east is the place the extension must be made. It is my intention to establish English and European agencies and to place safe agents in some of the eastern centers of population. The opportunity is the greatest that will ever come to you."

There was no dissent from this statement on the part of the other. His manner suggested an evident desire to learn more of the plan under discussion. The point in the negotiations between the two where there might be any danger in freedom of speech had already been passed. There was no exhibition on either side of troublesome qualms over the moral phase of the business in hand, and the conversation turned on nothing but the prospects of carrying out the scheme with safety and profit.

"You must bear in mind," said the master spirit of the conference, "that this is nothing new. A smart chap conceived the possibilities of the plan when he was with Gen. Price's raiding army in southwest Missouri during the war. This chap was one that happened to be turned loose in the land office at Ironton and grabbed 300 patents, each to 320 acres of land. He would probably have taken more, but that was all he could carry. He planted them at the time and resurrected them after the war—in 1868. While he had a general idea of their value he had little ingenuity in realizing them."

"Finally he met a friend with a quicker brain, and this friend suggested securing the services of a notary to take the acknowledgements necessary to securing land under the patents. They came to St. Louis and found the man they wanted—a notary who liked his liquor a bit too well to ask too many questions. The deeds based on the patents were made and a good business was done in the sale of the lands until the stock of patents ran out. This pair discontinued operations, but they opened a great field. I saw that thousands of these patents were available—never mind how—and am ready to carry on business on a big scale."

"But how can a deed be made in 1872 or later so that it will look like it was made a dozen years before, when the patents were issued?" cautiously asked the other.

"Take my word for it, the deeds issued from these patents are as good as wheat for commercial purposes. I have a process that gives them a semblance of age that no one has ever questioned. In short, it's a market we want—nothing else."

"Might not the signatures to these deeds be construed as forgeries?"

"Possibly, although no one has questioned them so far. But in order to prevent any complication from that source we can provide for the signing of the documents in another state. They can't force witnesses across the state line."

Numerous other objections, designed to test the security of the scheme rather than to discourage the execution of it, were offered by the visitor. Each was met with a comprehensive and plausible answer, indicating that in all its details the plot had been subjected to the scrutiny of a bright mind trained to the consideration of legal technicalities. Before the men left the office they had entered into a hard and fast agreement to carry out the plan proposed by the Missourian.

Robert L. Lindsay, the president of the Real Estate Loan and Trust company, of St. Louis, and the leader of the conversation in his private office on the night in question, was a man of increasing prominence in his state. He was the son of James Lindsay, who had located in St. Louis in 1834.

Lindsay Sr. became the editor of the first "free soil" paper published in Missouri, and was later sent to the legislature as a "Benton democrat." During the early days of the war, while Ulysses S. Grant was recruiting the regiment at the head of which he made his first leaps toward military greatness, he went to Iron county, Mo., in the southeast part of the state, and became acquainted with James Lindsay, making the latter's log house his headquarters in the county.

Because I am held to the dead level of history in these narratives and not permitted to indulge in the temptations to flights of romance that constantly present themselves, I am here forced to call attention to a trait in the character of Grant that was in a great measure responsible for the Missouri land thefts.

In his sojournings at the Lindsay home Grant conceived a strong personal liking for his host, and after he was elected president he appointed his friend Lindsay pension agent at St. Louis. To this trust Lindsay proved recreant and was soon found \$22,000 short in his accounts. This brought about his removal from that office, but it did not deter Grant from appointing him registrar of the Ironton land office in 1877, just before his second term expired, thereby indicating the bulldog constancy with which the great military genius clung to his old friendships whether the objects of them were worthy or not.

Robert L. Lindsay, the son, inherited many of the traits of his father, the keenness of mind, geniality of manner and, unfortunately, the shifty standard of morals. The younger Lindsay was educated in the law and had centered his energies on the practice of that profession along honorable lines he would have attained a place of prominence among lawyers. Instead he turned from the law to real estate, and early in his career began the development of the most gigantic steal of the century. It is around this swindle, with Robert L. Lindsay as the pivotal character, that this bit of history turns.

This steal has passed into criminal history under the title of the Missouri

through their own misguided efforts. In the land of "moonshine" stills knowing too much has been a capital offense punishable by death at the hands of self-constituted judges and executioners. So it was in Arcadia valley and throughout southwest Missouri following the civil war, the tabooed subject being land frauds instead of the making of white corn whisky.

From this readers must not infer that Robert L. Lindsay and the other principal thieves were in a conspiracy to commit murder; but they were in a conspiracy that led to murder as an incident. Young Lindsay was supreme in the district and his word was law, even when it meant the commission of crimes of violence to protect the land conspirators in their nefarious plans.

A large number of supernumeraries were necessary, men who little by little were dragged into the crime vortex for meager pay, and, once involved, were driven to desperate crimes to protect themselves. Innumerable county officials and other men—prominent within the county lines, but the merest cogs in the big machine of fraud—were drawn into the common cause of land stealing. Such men composed strong secret, oath-bound rings in the counties of Shannon, Dent, Butler, Wayne, Reynolds, Iron, Carter, Oregon, Madison, Stoddard and Ripley.

Do not understand me to say that all officials in these counties were corrupt, for some were honest men who dared not move against the thieves. There were enough of the dishonest ones, however, to control largely in public affairs of the district, and to succeed in fostering a general belief that no man's life was safe who became informer.

Thus matters stood in the fall of 1875; Carl Schurz was secretary of the interior and James J. Brooks was chief of the secret service, Elmer Washburn having been deposed by President Grant because he had been so vigorous toward some of Grant's friends in the whisky ring scandals. I had been chasing the ever-active but elusive counterfeiter through the central west when my chief called my attention to a communication from a resident of Missouri to the department of the interior. This letter pointed out the fact that wholesale

When the original application was made it was customary to forward it to Washington, where a patent was made out and sent back to the land office of the district, where it was held until the applicant appeared with proofs of settlement and improvement.

The graduation act was the outgrowth of a peculiar physical condition. All early settlements of new territory are made along its principal waterways. In Missouri the first settlements were made along the Mississippi river in Cape Girardeau, New Madrid and Ste. Genevieve counties, the land titles in this district going back to the original Spanish grants. The United States surveys of the territory lying west of this were made in 1820-21, but the lands back from the river had not proved tempting to the pioneer. For a quarter of a century they lay in their virgin condition.

Congress at that time reflected the general desire for rapid settlement, and as an inducement the "bit acre" act was passed. As far back as the passage of this act there were men who saw the possibilities for land grafting under it. Greer W. Davis, a prominent resident of Missouri, signed thousands of applications contrary to law before the war, and his operations, with those of many others, covered vast areas—so vast, in fact, that a large part of several counties was covered. The patents corresponding to these applications were sent on from Washington to the land office then located at Jackson. In 1861 the land office was moved to Ironton, and with it thousands of patents issued on fraudulent applications.

Then came the civil war. In addition to the fraudulent applications thousands of others had been made by bona-fide settlers. Large numbers of these applicants went to the war and either were killed or settled elsewhere when peace was declared. Their patents were still pigeonholed in the Ironton land office. It is undoubtedly true that some of these patents had been stolen by Gen. Price's raiders about the time of the battle of Pilot Knob, but thousands of them remained unclaimed in the office. Such were the physical and legal conditions in which the greatest conspiracy of the generation had its roots.

In the early part of 1880 I registered at the primitive tavern at Ironton as James Hall, of Chicago. Inquiry before my arrival had convinced me that there was one man in the district whom I could trust implicitly, and he was Bernard Zwart, United States commissioner for the district, and as "square-toed" a government official as it ever has been my good fortune to meet. To him I revealed my true identity; to others I was the representative of a Chicago land syndicate.

"You have a prodigious task before you," was Zwart's introductory remark. "Not only that, but you are dealing with a clique of men who are deep in the mire of fraud and who will not submit tamely to being hauled into the daylight by the government."

I realized this fully. I asked Zwart for such information as he could give.

"I first became convinced that wholesale fraud was being committed," he replied, "when, several years ago, Robert Lindsay offered to sell me all the patents to 320 acres each I wanted at ten dollars apiece. I bought none of them, but have kept half an eye on matters since. Recently Mrs. Salisbury, of Ironton, told me that she had been hired by Robert Lindsay in the writing of deeds in his office in that city. As nearly as I can learn, Lindsay has six or seven clerks employed in making out deeds in his Ironton office, and I am convinced that these deeds are not straight."

A survey of the situation showed me that when Grant in 1869 appointed James Lindsay pension agent at St. Louis he made Carroll R. Peck chief clerk. The relationship between Lindsay and Peck was unusual in that Lindsay's second wife was Peck's sister, and Peck's wife was Lindsay's daughter, Peck, therefore, being James Lindsay's brother-in-law and son-in-law, and Robert Lindsay's brother-in-law.

[To Be Continued.]

INTRODUCING THE SPEAKER

Chairman Who Knew Just How to Do It Without Saying Too Much.

How seldom does a speaker get a chairman who has the wisdom to make the right introductory speech, but here is a model. The chairman, in introducing the speaker, said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor to introduce to you this evening the gentleman who is going to deliver an address to us. He goes to the same church as I do. As a pure citizen I respect him! as a personal friend of years I have the warmest regard for him; as a neighbor whose vegetable garden adjoins mine—why—why, I watch him. He is a square, true man in honest politics, and I must say he occupies rather a lonesome position. So broad, so bountiful in his character that he has never turned a tramp empty-handed from his door, but always gave him a letter of introduction to me. Pure, honest, incorruptible, that is the speaker of the evening. Such a man in politics is like a bottle of perfume in a glue factory—it may moderate the stench, but it doesn't destroy it. I haven't said any more of him than I should say of myself. Ladies and gentlemen, our friend will now proceed to talk to us."

Doubtful.

"Is he a poet?" "Well, he writes magazine verse." —Houston Post.

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One of the greatest triumphs of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound is the conquering of woman's dread enemy, Tumor.

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Read these strong letters from grateful women who have been cured:

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Dear Mrs. Pinkham:— (Second Letter.) "I take the liberty to congratulate you on the success I have had with your wonderful medicine."

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"I soon after read one of your advertisements and decided to give Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound a trial. After taking five bottles as directed, the tumor is entirely gone. I have again been examined by a physician and he says I have no signs of a tumor now. It has also brought my periods around once more, and I am entirely well. I shall never be without a bottle of Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound in the house."—Fannie D. Fox, Bradford, Pa.

Another Case of Tumor Cured by Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Dear Mrs. Pinkham:— "About three years ago I had intense pain in my stomach, with cramps and raging headaches. The doctor prescribed for me, but finding that I did not get any better he examined me and, to my surprise, declared I had a tumor."

"I felt sure that it meant my death warrant, and was very disheartened. I spent hundreds of dollars in doctoring, but the tumor kept growing, till the doctor said that nothing but an operation would save me. Fortunately I corresponded with my aunt in one of the New England States, who advised me to try Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound before submitting to an operation, and let me start taking a regular treatment, finding to my great relief that my general health began to improve, and after three months I noticed that the tumor had reduced in size. I kept on taking the Compound, and in ten months it had entirely disappeared without an operation, and using no medicine but Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and words fail to express how grateful I am for the good it has done me."—Miss Luella Adams, Colomade Hotel, Seattle, Wash.

Such unquestionable testimony proves the value of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and should give confidence and hope to every sick woman.

Mrs. Pinkham invites all ailing women to write to her at Lynn, Mass., for advice.

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THE OPPORTUNITY IS THE GREATEST THAT WILL EVER COME TO YOU.

Land League. The 22 men who were convicted for this crime were the pioneers in the science of government land stealing on a wholesale basis.

In my dealings with criminals I have always been disposed to throw a heavier mantle of charity around the evil-doer who, by birth, environment and lack of opportunity for better things, has followed criminal paths, than around the well-bred, luxuriously nurtured thief whose wrong-doing is contrary to, and not because of, early training or necessity. Such crimes as these gigantic land grabs, therefore, appeal to me as being of a peculiarly vicious kind, and the prosecution of the culprits I believe to call for efforts of extraordinary earnestness on the part of the government. Land grabbing, as exemplified in the Missouri case, was a composite crime, of which forgery, perjury, larceny, arson and murder were the components. Incalculable wrong was done to the owners of millions of acres of land, to say nothing of the moral wrong of the crime itself, by the unsettling of titles to the farms of southeast Missouri.

Naturally one of the richest spots in the country—the valleys fertile and the mountains of solid mineral of inestimable value—the work of the land grabbers of the '70s was a blight on the land for a generation.

If there ever was a spot in nature unfitted for a theater of crime, it is the Arcadia valley in southeast Missouri. Its soil is rich, its streams clear as crystal, its air hazy blue, and its people peaceful. Yet here was the scene of a score of crimes of violence growing out of the one big plot to steal land from the government and sell it by irregular titles to people who could ill afford to lose their savings.

To this day in Arcadia valley there is pointed out to the traveler a tree from whose gaunt limbs 17 men have been hanged between the civil war and the time I entered the valley in the hunt for land grabbers. These tragedies were all the gruesome fruit of the one big crime. The victims were men whose crime was knowing too much about the operations of the land thieves—knowing too much sometimes by accident and sometimes

frauds were being perpetrated in Missouri in land matters, and roughly indicated the method by which the stealing was being done. Secretary Schurz had turned the communication over to Chief Brooks, and it soon reached me.

The preliminary investigations were made by me in my capacity of secret service operative, and in making them it became necessary to incur what at that time was an unusually heavy item of expense in having abstracts of title made. At that time the total government appropriation for the secret division was only \$60,000 a year, an amount but \$10,000 greater than was recently allowed for the search for the plate from which a \$100 counterfeit bill was being made. For this reason arrangements were made ostensibly severing my connection with the secret and making me a special agent of the interior department for the purpose of the land fraud investigation.

It will be necessary for me, at the hazard of lapsing into technicalities, to set forth briefly the law governing the acquisition of the class of lands dealt in by the thieves. This particular law went into effect in August, 1854, and was generally known as the "graduation act." In Missouri it came to be known as the "bit acre" act, this title springing from the fact that the price to be paid per acre under the act was 12 1/2 cents, or a "bit," in Missouri parlance. The act provided that any citizen of the United States over 21 could make application for 320 acres of land in the prescribed district, and must actually settle on the land applied for within six months of application. In one year from the end of this six months' period the settler was required to appear at the land office of the district and make affidavit that he had settled on the land and had improved and cultivated it according to description filed with the registrar at the same time. To the fact of settlement and improvement there had to be two witnesses, neighbors, who were required to swear to the facts as set forth by the applicant.