
CLEVELAND MOFFETT
TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE PINKERTONS

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About midnight on Tuesday, January 25, 1876, five masked men entered the house of John Whittelsey in Northampton, Massachusetts. Mr. Whittelsey was the cashier of the Northampton National Bank, and was known to have in his possession the keys of the bank building and the combination to the bank vault. The five men entered the house noiselessly, with the aid of false keys, previously prepared. Passing up-stairs to the sleeping-apartments, they overpowered seven inmates of the house, gagging and binding them so that resistance or alarm was impossible. These were Mr. Whittelsey and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. T. B. Cutler, Miss Mattie White, Miss Benton, and a servant-girl.

The bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Whittelsey was entered by two men who seemed to be leaders of the band. One wore a long linen duster buttoned nearly to the knees, also gloves and overshoes; the other wore a jacket and overalls. Both men had their faces concealed behind masks, and one of them carried a dark-lantern. On entering the room the two men went directly to the bed, one standing on either side, and handcuffed Mr. Whittelsey and his wife. Both carried

revolvers. The proceedings were much the same in the other rooms.

After some delay and whispered consultation, the robbers ordered the five women to get up and dress. When they had done so, they were roped together by ankles and wrists, and taken into a small room, where they were kept under guard by one of the band. Mr. Cutler also was imprisoned in the same way. Then the two leaders devoted themselves to Mr. Whittelsey. They told him plainly that they had come for the keys of the bank and the combination of the vault, and that they would "make it hot" for him unless he gave them what they wanted. Mr. Whittelsey replied that it was useless to attempt to break into the bank, as the locks were too strong for their efforts and he would not betray his trust. At this the man in the linen duster shrugged his shoulders and said they would see about that.

Mr. Whittelsey was then taken downstairs, and again summoned to surrender the keys. Again he refused. At this the man in the overalls put his hand in the cashier's trousers-pocket and drew forth a key.

"Is this the key to the bank?" he asked.

"Yes, it is," answered the cashier, hoping to gain time.

"You lie," said the robber, with threatening gesture, at the same time trying the key in the lock of the front door of the house, which it turned.

"Don't hit him yet," said the other; "he is sick." Then he asked Mr. Whittelsey if he wanted a drink of brandy. Mr. Whittelsey shook his head no. Then the man in the linen duster renewed his demands. He wanted the combination of the vault. Mr. Whittelsey gave him some figures, which the

robber wrote down on a piece of paper. These were for the outer door of the vault. He demanded the combination for the inner door, and Mr. Whittelsey gave him other figures. Having written these down also, the robber came close to his prisoner and said, "Will you swear these figures are correct?"

"I will," answered Mr. Whittelsey.

"You are lying again. If they are correct, let's hear you repeat them."

The cashier could not do this, and so disclosed that the figures were not the right ones.

"See, Number One," said the robber, addressing his comrade, "we're wasting time; we'll have to teach him to stop lying."

As he spoke he struck the sharp point of his lead-pencil into Mr. Whittelsey's face so violently as to make a wound, and followed this with several blows on the body.

"Will you tell us now?" he asked.

Mr. Whittelsey kept silent. Then both men came at him, wringing his ears, shaking him by the throat, hurling him to the floor, and pounding their knees into his chest. For three hours this torture was continued. More than once the ruffians placed their revolvers at Mr. Whittelsey's head, declaring they would blow his brains out unless he yielded. Finally he did yield; the suffering was too great; the supreme instinct of self-preservation asserted itself. Toward four o'clock in the morning, bruised from head to foot, and worn beyond further resistance, he surrendered the keys, and revealed the true combination of the vault.

Then the robbers went away, leaving two of their associates to watch over the prisoners. One of the band, before his departure, did not disdain to search Mr. Whittelsey's clothes and take his watch and chain and fourteen dollars in money. The last of the band remained in the house until six o'clock; and it was an hour later before Mr. Whittelsey succeeded in freeing himself from his bonds.

He hurried at once to the bank, arriving there soon after seven o'clock. He found the vault door locked, and its dials broken off, so that it was impossible at the moment to determine the extent of the robbery, or, indeed, whether there had been any robbery. It was necessary to send to New York for an expert before the vault could be opened, which was not accomplished until late that night, twenty hours after the attack had been made. Then it was found that the robbers had been only too successful, having secured money and securities estimated at a million and a quarter dollars. Much of this sum was safe-deposits, and the loss fell on the depositors; and to some it was the loss of their whole property.

At this time the authorities had no clue to the identity of the robbers, though they had left behind them numerous evidences of their presence, such as dark-lanterns, masks, sledge-hammers, overshoes, and the like. Their escape had been managed as skilfully as the robbery itself. Sheriff's officers and detectives did their best during subsequent days and weeks, but their efforts were in vain. The president of the bank offered a reward of twenty-five thousand dollars for the apprehension of the robbers and the return of the property; but there were no discoveries.

When several months had elapsed, the Pinkertons were called into the case. They began by carefully studying certain communications that had been received by the bank directors from persons claiming to have in their possession the missing securities. The first of these communications was dated New York, February 27, 1876, about a month after the robbery. It ran as follows, the letters of each word being carefully printed with a pen, so that there was little chance of identification through the handwriting:

> "DEAR SIRS: When you are satisfied with detective skill you can make a proposition to us, the holders, and if you are liberal we may be able to do business with you. If you entertain any such ideas, please insert a personal in the New York 'Herald.' Address to XXX, and sign 'Rufus,' to which due attention will be paid. To satisfy you that we hold papers, we send you a couple of pieces."
>
> [No signature.]

No attention had been paid to this letter, although two certificates of stock accompanied it which had undoubtedly been in the bank's vault. Three other letters of a similar nature had been received later. To one of these the bank people had sent a guarded reply, which had called forth the following response, dated New York, October 20, 1876:

> "GENTLEMEN: Since you have seen fit to recognize the receipt of our letter, we will now send you our price for the return of the goods. The United States coupon bonds and money taken cannot be returned; but

everything else—bonds, letters, and papers, to the smallest document—will be returned for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. If these figures suit you, we will make arrangements, according to our promise, and you may have the goods as soon as preliminaries can be arranged for the safe conduct of the business. If you agree to this price, insert in the New York 'Herald' personal column the simple word 'Agatha.'

"Respectfully, etc.,

"RUFUS."

The special value of these letters was in helping the detectives to decide which one of several gangs of bank robbers then operating in the country was most likely to have committed the crime. Being familiar with the methods of each gang, Robert Pinkerton was able to draw useful inferences from evidence that would otherwise have been insignificant. He knew, for instance, that the notorious gang headed by James Dunlap would be more apt than any other to thus negotiate for the return of all the securities in a lump, since it was Dunlap's invariable rule to insist upon personally controlling the proceeds of his robberies until final disposition was made of them. On the other hand, the gangs headed respectively by the notorious "Jimmy" Hope, "Worcester Sam," and George Bliss might have divided the securities among the members, and then tried to negotiate a compromise on the individual portions.

A fact of much significance to the Pinkertons was the rather remarkable interest in the case, and apparent familiarity with it, shown by one J. G. Evans, an expert in

safes and vaults and the representative of one of the largest safe-manufactories in the country.

The day after the robbery Evans had been at Bristol, Connecticut, in the interest of his firm, who, on receipt of the news, had immediately wired him to proceed to Northampton. His presence in Northampton was regarded as nothing strange, for he had been there several times during the months just preceding the robbery, and once had inspected the lock and dials of the vault of the robbed bank. What did seem a little strange, however, was Evans's evident interest in the negotiations for a compromise. On a dozen different occasions he talked with the president and other officers of the bank regarding the robbery, and insinuated quite plainly that he might be in a position to assist them in recovering their lost securities. A few months after the robbery he even went so far as to tell one of the directors that he could name the members of the gang.

This disposition of Evans to put himself forward in the negotiations had all the more significance to Robert Pinkerton from the fact that it had been rumored that a series of daring bank robberies lately committed in various parts of the country had owed their success to the participation of an expert in safes and locks, who had been able, through his position of trust, to reveal to the robbers many secrets of weak bank locks, safes, and vaults. Up to this time these rumors had remained indefinite, and no one ventured to name the man. It was known, however, that the false expert was a man of high standing in his calling and generally regarded as above suspicion. It was also known that there was great jealousy in other gangs of bank robbers

because of the amazing success of the gang with whom this man was working, and that overtures even had been made by the leaders of some other gangs to win over to their own gangs this desirable accomplice. Robert Pinkerton had already concluded that the gang so ably assisted was the Dunlap gang; and he was now pretty well persuaded, also, that the Northampton robbery had been committed by the Dunlap gang. There was every reason, therefore, for keeping a sharp eye on the safe-expert Evans.

As he studied the case, Mr. Pinkerton recalled a circumstance that had happened in the fall of 1875. On the night of November 4, 1875, the First National Bank of Pittston, Pennsylvania, had been robbed of sixty thousand dollars, and Mr. Pinkerton had gone there to investigate the case. He met a number of safe-men, it being a business custom with safe-men to flock to the scene of an important bank robbery in order to supply new safes for the ones that have been wrecked. While they were all examining the vault, still littered with debris of the explosion, the representative of one of the safe-companies picked up a small air-pump used by the robbers, and, looking at it critically, remarked that he would have sworn it belonged to his company, did he not know that was impossible. The air-pump was, he declared, of precisely his company's model, one that had been recently devised for a special purpose. At the time Mr. Pinkerton regarded this as merely a coincidence, but now the memory came to him as a flash of inspiration that the man who had remarked the similarity in the air-pump represented the same company that employed Evans.

In view of all the circumstances, it was decided to put Evans under the closest questioning. He did not deny that he had made unusual efforts to effect the return of the securities, but professed that it was because he was sincerely sorry for the many people who had been ruined through the robbery. And he professed to believe, also, that he had been unjustly treated in the affair, though just how, and by whom, he would not say. To the detective's trained observation it was apparent that he was worried and apprehensive and not at all sure of himself.

In November, 1876, George H. Bangs, superintendent of the Pinkerton Agency, a man possessed of very remarkable skill in eliciting confessions from suspected persons, had an interview with Evans. He professed to Evans that the detectives had secured evidence that practically cleared up the whole mystery; that they *knew* (whereas they still only surmised) that the robbery had been committed by the Dunlap and Scott gang, and that Evans was a confederate; that for weeks they had been shadowing Scott and Dunlap (which was true), and could arrest them at any moment; that there was no doubt that the gang had been trying to play Evans false (a very shrewd guess), and would sacrifice him without the slightest compunction; and, finally, that there was open to Evans one of two courses—either to suffer arrest on a charge of bank robbery, with the prospect of twenty years in prison, or save himself, and at the same time earn a substantial money reward, by making a clean confession of his connection with the crime. All this, delivered with an air of completest certainty, was more than

Evans could stand up against. He broke down completely, and told all he knew.

The story told by Evans is one of the most remarkable in the history of crime. He admitted the correctness of Robert Pinkerton's inference that the Northampton Bank had been robbed by Scott and Dunlap and their associates, and in order to explain his own connection with this formidable gang he went back to its organization in 1872. The leader of the gang was James Dunlap, *alias* James Barton, who, before he became a bank robber, had been a brakeman on the Chicago, Alton and St. Louis Railroad. His inborn criminal instincts led him to frequent the resorts of thieves in Chicago, and thus he met "Johnny" Lamb and a man named Perry, who took a liking to him and taught him all they knew about breaking safes. Dunlap soon outstripped his masters, developing a genius for robbery and for organization that speedily proved him the most formidable of all the bank robbers then operating in the country, not even excepting "Jimmy" Hope, the notorious Manhattan Bank robber. He had the long-headedness and stubbornness of his Scotch parents, united with the daring and ingenuity peculiar to Americans. In the fall of 1872 he organized the most dangerous and best-equipped gang of bank robbers that the country had ever known.

Dunlap's right-hand man was Robert C. Scott, *alias* "Hustling Bob," originally a deck-hand on a Mississippi steamboat and afterward a hotel thief. Scott was a big, powerful man, with a determination equal to anything. Their associates were what one might expect from these two. Other members of the gang were Thomas Doty, William