

A Story from Real Life

How "West Philadelphia Johnny" Became a Bank Burglar and How He Met His Nemesis in the Person of a Rustic Vermont Constable.

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FROM the lowly "yegg" who preyed on poorly equipped offices in small towns and rural districts to a bank burglar who never knew the word fear, or ever hesitated in resorting to violence if it would further his ends, is not a far cry in the opinion of the average reader, yet, according to the records of police and post office authorities, the two types of criminals are so distinct that each as a rule confines his operations to that field in which he started.

The depredations of the "yeggmen" in their attacks upon the strong boxes of rural post offices in all parts of the country had become so daring that the Chief Post Office Inspector at Washington detailed five of his best deputies to round up the various bands, capture as many as possible, and, at the same time, learn every detail concerning "yeggdom" in the United States. It was possible to obtain. They were given their own time in which to accomplish this gigantic task so long as results were obtained. Two or three years were required to clean up this assignment, but when they finally reported to their superior officer many of the more notorious of the band were behind prison bars and the inspectors were in possession of information which not only incriminated hundreds of others, but nearly every haunt and associate of these desperate characters were known to the postal police. It is from one of these confidential reports that the writer gleaned the facts that go to make up this series which deals with the "yegg" and bank burglar.

The post office inspectors, after trailing various bands of post office robbers from one end of the country to the other, soon learned that it was necessary to concentrate their efforts on the capture of the ringleader of the band, for a leader they knew there was, inasmuch as nearly every robbery committed, no matter how far distant from the last one reported, bore all the earmarks of having been directed by one master mind. In this they were not mistaken, and by trailing and relentlessly pursuing John F. McCarthy, alias John C. Dandrell, alias "West Philadelphia Johnny," they learned more from him when he was finally brought to bay than they ever had known about "yeggs" and their operations before. McCarthy—that is not his right name, for the post office authorities, respecting the feelings of the burglar's highly respectable parents in Philadelphia, have faithfully kept their promise to their captive and never revealed it—was the man they decided to "get," and get him they did. He was an alibi as an ex, had broken jail several times and once, as has been told, fled his captors just as they were about to conduct him through the gates of a federal prison.

McCarthy, while young in crime as far as years went, had proved himself an apt pupil of the criminal hand he consorted with that he soon dominated it and was the recognized leader. He took chances that others quailed at and he invariably made his "getaway." His operations extended to every State in the Union, and at times New York was his favorite "fence" for the sale of his stamps he stole from post offices, and these hands, in the aggregate, netted him handsome returns. His stamps, or "stickers," he sold at a discount of twenty-five per cent, and the purchasers had no difficulty in disposing of them at a profit to disloyal clerks and office boys. Even unscrupulous business men aided this nefarious undertaking by purchasing stamps at these resorts, thereby saving five or ten per cent on their purchase.

McCarthy, after a very successful tour of the country, arrived in New York with his pockets bulging with bank notes, and set out to enjoy himself in the Tenderloin. He spent his money like a prince and fell in with a notorious bank burglar, who convinced him that one good bank job was worth fifty post office lootings. McCarthy saw the logic of this argument, and he had participated in several jobs of this sort while looking over the post office field and he figured that the risk attached to looting a bank, where he was assisted by a man who understood the manipulation of locks and combinations—his aim being an adept at safe blowing—was little, if any greater than cracking a post office safe. According to the postal inspectors, in their report to the Chief Inspector, McCarthy soon became quite as successful in the bank field as he had been in the other.

After his extended stay in New York had absorbed all his ill gotten gains McCarthy set out for New England. The Windham County Savings Bank, at Newfane, Vt., was settled upon as the first to be tried and when McCarthy and his associate emerged from one of its rear windows they had concealed about them nearly every big and small bank note that had been stored in its strong box. Silver and gold they left intact, deciding not to burden themselves with so bulky a load as might prove embarrassing in the event of pursuit. It was a clean job and one that McCarthy was fully proud of. There had been no need of violence, since the watchman was not in the building and the burglar alarm had been silenced before they began their operations on the safe, which yielded readily to McCarthy's application of nitro-glycerine and his companion's flame. But one of the con-men had seen their flight and he got



THE PROPRIETOR OF THE GAMBLING HOUSE, AS WELL AS HIS EMPLOYEES ALSO WAS ROBBED.

but a fleeting glance at McCarthy's features. That was enough to stamp them indelibly upon his memory, however, and some years later stood him in good stead, for he recognized the burglar and captured him. For once McCarthy was securely locked up and "did his bit" without interruption. But before this was accomplished McCarthy left a trail of shattered bank safes from coast to coast and from Vermont to the Gulf that kept the police and detectives of the surety companies busy for years.

It was a short jump from Vermont into Massachusetts, and while in the Bay State McCarthy met several of his old yegg associates, among them "Fitzey," "California Fingers" and "Bellevue Slim." Another of the band was known as "Walter," and on previous occasions he and McCarthy had successfully operated together on post offices. As much as McCarthy wanted to shake off old associates and free himself from his old yegg comrades he knew that this was dangerous, for they had so persistently urged him to aid them in several jobs pending in Massachusetts. He feared if he refused they would set the police upon his track, and this was a contingency McCarthy didn't care to face in view of the recent bank robbery in Vermont. McCarthy stuck with the band and several post offices were looted. McCarthy settled with his associates in cash for their share of the loot and after selling the stamps John Lee at his place in the Hovey, Vermont, he jumped to Michigan to visit a joint sweetheart there.

Returning from Michigan, McCarthy failed to meet his friend the bank robber "Canada Trapper," and "California Fingers" they tapped a bank on a branch road a few miles from Brattleboro, Vt., procuring \$2,100. From the vault they made desperate but futile attempts to get into the big safe, which contained many thousands of dollars. The terrifically heavy charges of nitro-glycerine were set off, but the safe would not yield. As the report of the explosion was so sharp and loud, the burglar fled from the building just as a warning cry from "Bellevue Slim," the lookout, apprised them of approaching danger.

A number of citizens, aroused by the report, ran to the bank, and for a few minutes a fusillade of shots was exchanged. All but "California Fingers" escaped. A shot from a deputy sheriff's pistol had slain low and he was seized and locked up. He was later convicted and got a twelve-year term.

Longing for a glimpse of his old friend "Portland Ned," McCarthy took a flying trip to Alexandria, Va., and there, learning that "Charlie Cross" alias "Cherry Bunch" alias "Missouri Charley" and "Irish Jimmy" had located a bank job at Gordonsville, Va., he hurried on to join them. The bank job did not materialize, but the post office was entered and a small amount of money and stamps stolen. The front end of a "blind burglar" car and this was in the desk of the bank cashier, made tracks for the East. They separated, the job was easily smashed and the con-

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McCarthy wasn't heard of again until he dropped off of an express train at "Gardner, Penn." and, aided by "Harry Mitchell," "Pennsylvania Pickpocket," lifted a safe's booty of \$900. They nearly towns were visited and paid dearly for the lack of police protection, since each netted the trio in the neighborhood of \$300. The trio was reinforced at this time by "Soda Paddy" and all went to Biadec, Ariz., where they were held for a week or more. As the money derived from recent operations soon melted away, the quartet became desperate and decided to "stretch" the town's most flourishing gambling house.

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train, and there McCarthy purchased a ticket for New York city and rolled into Manhattan in style.

Word awaited McCarthy in New York from "Portland Ned" to the effect that he had "located several easy bank jobs" in the South and that McCarthy should join him at once. This he did, and arriving in Denmark, S. C., he found Ned, "Walter," "Kentucky Billy" and "Connecticut Shorty" waiting for him. The bank in that little town had been marked. Shortly before midnight the burglars were at work on one of the rear windows when the night

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What you all do in that? I'm going to tell you, dat I is. But before the negro could make good his threat "Connecticut Shorty," who had been doing lookout duty, ran up, seized him and pointed a pistol at his head while the others fled and gagged him. The sound of the struggle had attracted the attention of nearby dwellers, and before the yeggmen could re-enter the bank and obtain the hoards that lay invitingly within reach the alarm had been given and the chase was on. The yeggs, however, were not deterred in outstripping their pursuers and getting safely away.

An invitation from "Portland Ned" to visit him at his Alexandria, Va., home was too alluring to be overlooked, so the band separated and "Ned" and McCarthy made tracks for the little city on the banks of the Potomac. McCarthy was himself in need of funds, as the tendering of Washington soon exhausted his visible supply of cash. While a guest of "Ned" he sauntered through the town one night and after tapping the tills of several stores he held up a saloon single hand, and when he was alone in the saloon house early the next morning he was the robber by \$800. That went the way of all the other money McCarthy had acquired, and it was determined to make a little journey to Frederickburg, Va., where a safe yielded up its contents, enriching McCarthy and his host by one or two hundred dollars each.

A new partnership was formed after the Frederickburg job and McCarthy and "Irish Jimmy" fell in with Charles Cross and McCarthy's old friend, "Connecticut Shorty." A stop at Laurel, Md., was made while the party was en route to New York. The safe in the Baltimore and Ollis Railroad station there was dismantled and a small amount of cash obtained. The safe in the flour mill in the same town was blown that night, after which the party abandoned the New York trip temporarily and made their way to Elliott City, Md., about fifteen miles west of Baltimore. A cotton mill office was entered there, and its safe netted its visitors about \$500.

After fleeing from Elliott City, McCarthy and "Philadelphia Pickpocket" (McMann) and "Portland Ned." The three journeyed to Bridgeville, Del., where the bank had just moved into new quarters. The safe was old, the new vault not having been completed. A good strong shot of "soup" shattered the safe doors and about \$500 in silver coin lay revealed.

As "Portland Ned" had "located" several bank jobs in Virginia which he wanted McCarthy to aid him in, the two returned to the Old Dominion and several little robberies netted them a few hundred each. Among them were several in Suffolk, Va. "Ned" and McCarthy again had a dispute over the division of the spoils and again they separated in anger. McCarthy made for New York, while "Ned" and "Philadelphia Pickpocket" followed him to New York, where they were joined by "Bellevue Slim," "Fitzey" and "Walter," and a safe in the office of a big ice concern at Quincy, Mass., was blown. Several hundred dollars was obtained and McCarthy, "Slim" and "Walter" moved on to Middleboro, Mass., where several likely jobs awaited them. Why in Middleboro a bank was robbed and a bank was robbed, and when the burglars decamped they had bulging pockets, for the pickings had been unusually good. But just as the yeggmen emerged from the laundry, the last place they visited, they were held up by the night watchman, who began to shoot before he asked any questions.

The "yeggs" got, too, and the watchman dropped with a bullet through his legs. But the alarm was spread and a running fight was kept up for several miles. In this encounter McCarthy had the narrowest escape of his life, for while running across the street after encountering the night watchman he dropped the bottle containing nitro-glycerine, and when he did so he was momentarily expected to be blown to eternity. All three escaped to the freight yards, where they secreted themselves until the next day, when they were able to board freight trains and get away.

McCarthy operated through Massachusetts with varying success, sometimes making a "killing" and sometimes meeting with dire failures. After one of his successful raids he would hurry back to New York, for the lure of the big town was all-compelling. After one of the trips to New York in which he had disappointed even more recently than on previous stays in the big city, he decided to take the field alone. He operated with marked success and made a number of big hauls before attempting to tackle any real big job. Then it was that he received a letter from "Walter" calling him to New England again, and as he stepped off a train at a little railway station near Brattleboro, he found a man in a blue coat and a badge as big as a pie plate, approached and peered at him and earnestly at McCarthy's face.

"Thought I knowed you," said the blue coat. "You're the fellow what had a hand in that bank robbery