

WE NEVER SLEEP

The First Fifty Years of the Pinkertons

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AN EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, JULY 31, 1981, TO JANUARY 3, 1982

WE NEVER SLEEP

The First Fifty Years of the Pinkertons

by

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and

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freely from the agency's rich historical archives and patiently guided us
through them, our profound thanks.

A Man with a Price on His Head

Allan Pinkerton (1819-1884)

He was born in the airless, crime-ridden slums of Glasgow, Scotland, the son of an impoverished weaver and sometime policeman. Left fatherless at about age eight, he was compelled to leave school to work for pennies a day as a weaver's apprentice. By age twenty, employed now as a cooper, he was actively immersed in the workers' Chartist movement calling for reform of Britain's Parliament. If peaceful petition would not bring about the changes sought, then perhaps it was time for a few unpeaceful acts, this hot-tempered youth would fume to his fellow protesters. By his twenty-second year, word of the Glasgow barrelmaker's incendiary views had reached the ears of Queen Victoria's law enforcers. With a warrant issued for his arrest, the young radical had become a man with a price on his head. Taking just enough time to wed his sweetheart and pack his belongings, he and his bride were on the high seas heading for sanctuary in North America. Thus it was that the famed detective Allan Pinkerton, whose name ultimately would become synonymous with the forces of law and order, began his life in the United States.

At first the humble émigré's future in America did not seem to hold illustrious promise. Settled by 1843 in Dundee, Illinois, just northwest of Chicago, Pinkerton set about making his way as a manufacturer of barrels. In a few short years, his sober industry had won him a thriving trade. With his wife, Joan, seeing to their modest household and a growing brood of children, and with eight men working for him in the adjacent cooperage, it appeared that Allan Pinkerton had found a comfortable but unprepossessing niche in the New World. But, unknown to his village neighbors (and probably

The Counterfeiters
Eastman Johnson (1824-1906)
Oil on canvas, circa 1855
IBM Corporation



Allan Pinkerton
Unidentified photographer
Photograph, circa 1866
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

to himself as well), Pinkerton had latent talents that would soon take him into an entirely new endeavor.

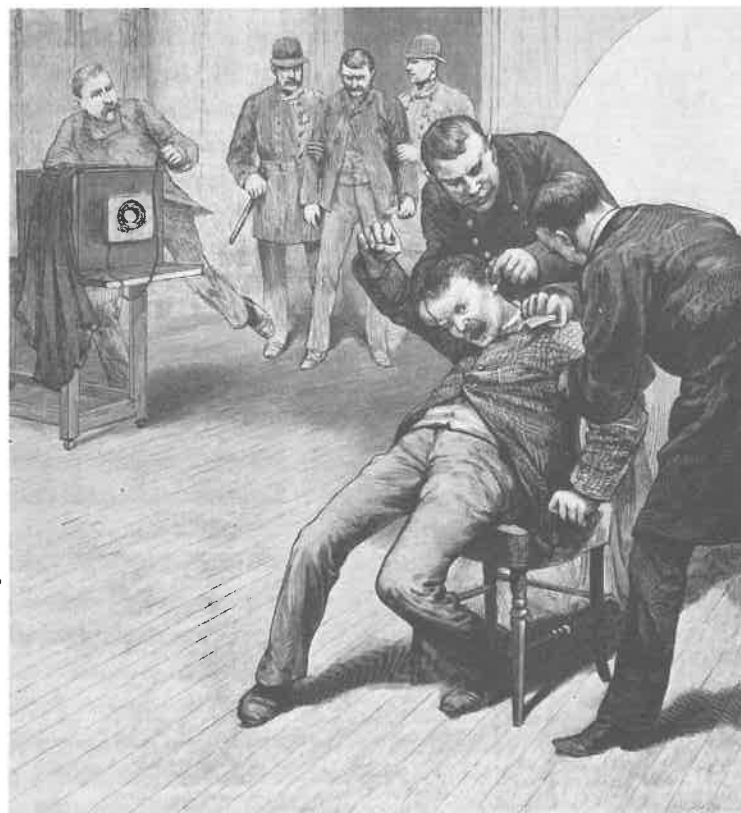
Finding himself one day in 1847 short of barrel staves, the Dundee cooper—as was his wont on such occasions—set out barefoot to replenish his wood supplies from the small trees found on an uninhabited island in a nearby river. In the course of gathering his wood, he came upon the remains of a fire. As Pinkerton cast an eye over this evidence of activity, instincts quite apart from barrelmaking came to the fore. Convinced that there must be something illicit taking place here, Pinkerton returned several times by day for another look. Then, under cover of night, he went again, and this time, cautiously concealed in tall shore grass, he saw several dark figures fashioning small objects around a fire. That was enough for Pinkerton: a few evenings later, he and the county sheriff were rowing out to confront the island's late-night denizens. Soon the citizens of Dundee were learning the details of how Pinkerton's alert and suspicious eye had led to the capture of a band of coin counterfeiters.

Pinkerton's life was changed forever. Shortly thereafter, when merchants of the town discovered that an unknown party was passing them bogus banknotes, they turned to neighbor Pinkerton to find the culprit. The solution to this second problem in crime detection required a bit more patience, but Pinkerton was up to it. Once he had identified his suspect as one John Craig, he began to lure his quarry with friendly intimations of his own dishonest inclinations. After a few small transactions of good currency for bad between the two, Craig arranged to meet Pinkerton at a Chicago hotel to work a larger deal. There, as the conspiring pair haggled over the details of their trade, two waiting constables—present at Pinkerton's suggestion—appeared to arrest Craig.

In the end, Craig bribed his way out of jail before he ever went to trial. As far as Pinkerton's burgeoning new career was concerned, that was immaterial. In the wake of this success, Pinkerton recalled years later, "I suddenly found myself called upon from every quarter to undertake matters requiring detective skill." In 1848, by now decidedly more interested in crime solving than barrelmaking, he readily accepted when the sheriff of Cook County asked him to come to Chicago to serve as deputy. A year later his good reputation earned him appointment as Chicago's first full-time detective. But Pinkerton's talents seemed to demand an arena of operation larger yet. In 1850 he gave up his job on the city police force to establish his own private detective agency.

One of the first of its kind in the country, the new enterprise thrived from the start. In 1856, having the previous year signed lucrative contracts to protect the property of several midwestern railroads and with requests for his services growing daily, he complacently reported to a friend back in Dundee: "I am overwhelmed with business." By decade's end his clientele, which at the outset came mostly from Chicago, had become national in scope.

Pinkerton's quick success grew, in part, out of the circumstances of the times. In an age when local police forces were small, often corrupt, and frequently disinclined to pursue the fleeing criminal into other jurisdictions, it was soon apparent that Pinkerton's Detective Agency was filling a crucial need. For, while constables and sheriffs tended to call off the chase once the wrongdoer had escaped to other climes, Pinkerton was ready, willing, and determined to stalk his prey, if need be, from one end of the country to the other. Moreover, as the agency's geographical range of activity broadened, its dossiers on known criminals multiplied and thickened. By 1860 Allan Pinkerton's offices were rapidly becoming an indispensable clearinghouse for all manner of information on criminal activity.



The Reluctant Model
Wood engraving, circa 1890,
after a sketch by C. Upham

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

The advent and increasing sophistication of photography in the nineteenth century provided police and private detectives with a new and most effective tool: the mug shot. By the 1870s, Pinkerton's had one of the largest collections of this frequently unflattering type of portraiture.

It was not just historical luck, however, that explained Pinkerton's swift rise to prominence within the nation's network of crime fighters. The plain fact was: Allan Pinkerton was a most remarkable detective. A peculiar amalgam of sober diligence and fertile imagination, he seemed, on the one hand, to be simply a stern and able administrator as he issued instructions to his operatives. But Pinkerton's rather prosaic businessman's exterior belied a creative intuition that, once set in motion, could point to the solution of a crime well before a shred of hard evidence had surfaced. Then, too, there was Pinkerton the actor, and, as the case of the moment demanded, this abstaining, staid Scotsman could by turns don the pose of bon vivant or humble day laborer. In one instance, in 1853, it seemed to onlookers that the train conductor most certainly was confused as he slapped handcuffs on a seemingly respectable man rather than the tattered tramp (Pinkerton in disguise) molesting him.

This was the stuff of which legends were made and, by the 1870s, the unblinking eye and the phrase "We Never Sleep" (which for many years served as Pinkerton's trademark) had come to embody a meaning that transcended mere professional competence. As tales of the agency's exploits spread, it seemed that the onetime fugitive from British justice was finding a place in the nation's fund of popular lore. However long it took, whatever the cost, Allan Pinkerton always got his man.

In Their Father's Footsteps

William Pinkerton (1846-1923)

Robert Pinkerton (1848-1907)

Almost from the moment he set foot on American soil, Allan Pinkerton had been an archopponent of Southern slavery. In the decade preceding the Civil War, his conscience apparently was never troubled by the curious contradiction that, while his agency's reputation rested on strict adherence to the law, he was secretly, and quite unlawfully, engaged in providing aid to runaway slaves. In any event, when the sectional disputes over slavery finally erupted into armed conflict in 1861, Pinkerton predictably stood foursquare for the Union cause, and he was soon turning over the resources and talents of his agency to the federal government for use in military and civilian intelligence.

It was in this embattled setting that Pinkerton decided the time had come to initiate his two sons, William and Robert, into the ways of detective work. So, by his seventeenth year, William was a member of Pinkerton's intelligence-gathering force that served the Army of the Potomac, and, at war's end, the younger Robert could be found aiding his father in the investigation of army frauds in Louisiana. With the coming of peace, the two boys returned to school to complete their educations, but by the late sixties, as their father had long hoped, Robert and William were respectively overseeing the agency's regional offices in New York and Chicago and advising their father on the more general matters of policy and procedures. Although the older Pinkerton often consulted his sons as peers, he never truly shared the helm. "I rule my office with an iron hand," Allan Pinkerton once told an agent. "*I must have my own way of doing things.*" In short, in the familial disputes that periodically arose at Pinkerton's National Detective Agency—as it was now called—there was no question of who had the last word.

Robert Pinkerton
Unidentified photographer
Photograph, circa 1876
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

William Pinkerton
Unidentified photographer
Photograph, circa 1876
Pinkerton's, Incorporated



For the sons, this arrangement was not altogether satisfactory. Always easily aroused to temper, and increasingly so in his old age, Allan Pinkerton could be a difficult taskmaster even when it came to his own blood. In 1879 Robert—the more sensitive and soft spoken of the brothers—finally decided that he had had his fill of working in his domineering father's shadow. Undoubtedly with trepidation, he informed Pinkerton that he intended to leave the firm. At the same time, apparently feeling somewhat like an outlaw on the lam, he told his father that he was also going to change his name. After



Gun carried by William Pinkerton in pursuit of western outlaws
Pinkerton's, Incorporated



Gold watch from the Pinkerton family inscribed with the firm's symbol, the "All-Seeing Eye"
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

an exchange of letters between father and son, Robert reconsidered and stayed on.

Whatever the problems of working under an authoritarian parent, William and Robert, each in his own way, clearly had a good deal of the detective in them, and, when the destiny of Pinkerton's finally fell into their hands on the death of their father in 1884, they proved themselves able administrators as well. Under their joint aegis, the agency continued to expand its field of operations and, by the turn of the century, its business and good reputation were global.

As the firm grew, so, too, did the Pinkerton legend. Although it would be an exaggeration to say that the "Pinks"—as they were often called—tangled with every noteworthy wrongdoer of the day, the agency's far-ranging activity at times made it seem that way. Indeed, Pinkerton's case files from 1870 to 1890 read like a Who's Who of contemporary malfeasance. From the swash-buckling world of western outlaws there were Missouri's notorious James brothers, Frank and Jesse; Robert Parker and Harry Longbaugh, alias Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid; and the infamous Sam Bass. From the less woolly East, there were the great bank sneaks, forgers, and all-around masters of urban crime: little Adam Worth, the "Napoleon" of international crime; Maximillian Shindburn, safecracker without peer; "Queen of the Underworld" Sophie Lyons, practitioner of many criminal arts and master of all; forger Charles "Scratch" Becker, capable, some said, of reproducing freehand a convincing facsimile of a newspaper; and "Marm" Mandelbaum, proprietor of New York City's largest fencing operation.

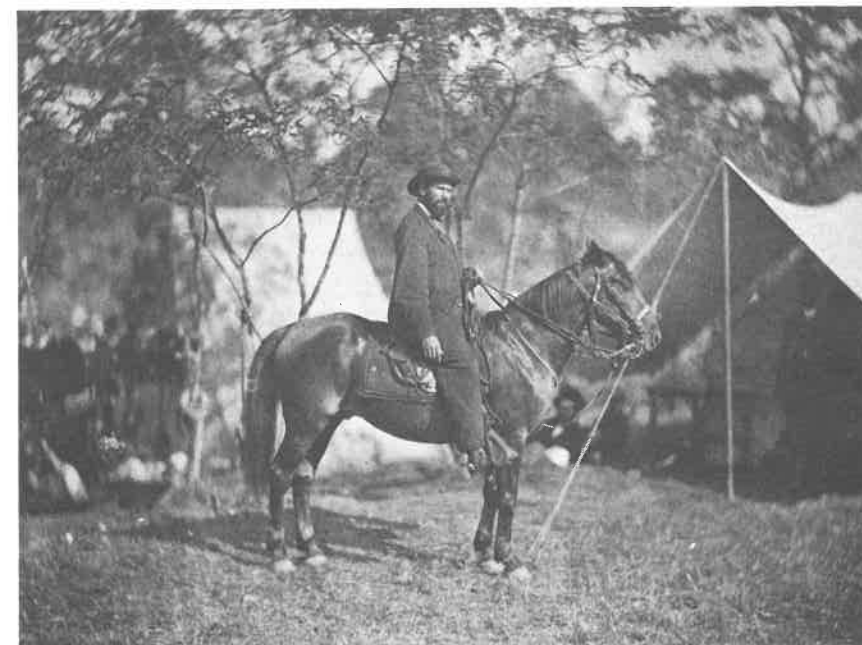
In trailing these notorious celebrities and their cohorts, the Pinkertons did not always succeed in bringing their prey to justice, but what they sometimes lacked in success they made up with dogged thoroughness. Until the day he died, any criminal who came within the ken of the unsleeping "eye" could be certain—paid debt to society notwithstanding—that "Billy" and brother were still keeping tabs on his doings.

In some cases, the Pinkertons had difficulty remaining vigilant. Over the years both William and Robert came to feel bonds of friendly affection, and even professional respect, for many of the rogues they encountered and, as often as not, the fondness was mutual. Thus, in her later, law-abiding years, Sophie Lyons made it a point to pay a call on Robert or William whenever she found herself in the neighborhood. Moreover, when news reached them that an ex-lawbreaker acquaintance was down on his luck, it became almost standard procedure to send off a check to tide over the unfortunate fellow. In at least one instance, William Pinkerton went so far as to finance a reformed bank robber's venture into the saloon business. Unfortunately, that enterprise failed, and soon the recipient of Pinkerton's largesse was back doing what he knew best.

Robert Pinkerton died in 1907 and William in 1923. On both occasions, the tributes to their respective contributions to the cause of law and order were many and glowing. But perhaps the accolades that Allan Pinkerton and his sons themselves would have liked best came from members of the agency's rogues' gallery. Of Robert, one noted thief sentimentally observed: "He was a square one." Shortly after William's death, another member of the underworld wrote: "When Bill Pinkerton . . . went after a man he didn't let up until he had got him."

The Civil War: Triumphs and Failures

Allan Pinkerton, alias Major E. J. Allen
Alexander Gardner (1821–1882)
Photograph, 1862
National Portrait Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution



In 1861 the Civil War took thousands of men away from business and put them into military uniform. Allan Pinkerton was an exception: his expanding detective agency prospered as a result of new opportunities created by the national conflict.

As early as mid-January, Pinkerton received word from Samuel Morse Felton, president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad, that his services were needed to investigate secessionists' threats of sabotage to rolling stock, tunnels, and bridges in the vicinity of Baltimore. With the prospect of war, federal authorities realized the need to keep open this crucial line of transportation in order to ship necessary troops and ammunition from the northern industrial states to Washington and Virginia, the likely field of battle. Baltimore promised to be a troublesome area because of its large and unpredictable secessionist population.

After considering Felton's request, Pinkerton with several operatives left Chicago for Baltimore, where they began to mingle with known rebels. Acting sometimes as "shadows," and under false names, they carried on their investigations in taverns, restaurants, and hotels and even into the seamy back rooms of brothels. Barroom whiskey, combined with deft probing by the agents, loosened many suspects' tongues to boast of rebellion and murder. When Pinkerton heard about plots to assassinate President-elect Abraham Lincoln, he realized that he had opened a Pandora's box of deadly intrigue. His job now centered on protecting the future Commander-in-Chief, who intended to pass through that potentially hostile city on his announced trip to Washington for the March 4 inauguration. In the few intervening weeks, Pinkerton set out to ascertain the hard truth of the matter.

By the end of February, the persistent detective firmly believed that an attempt would be made on Lincoln's life. At best, Lincoln's passage through Baltimore promised to be risky. City officials had neither invited him, nor had they made any arrangement for police protection; the Baltimore police chief was even suspected of being a secessionist. Because President-elect Lincoln would have to change railroads, a cumbersome maneuver that involved hauling horse-drawn cars down city streets from one station to another, Pinkerton feared that such a transfer—in broad daylight—afforded undue opportunities for assassins.

Allan Pinkerton with some of his agents and Union Army officers
Alexander Gardner (1821–1882)
Photograph, 1862
Chicago Historical Society
(Pinkerton stands in center wearing checked vest.)



Meanwhile, when Lincoln arrived in Philadelphia, Pinkerton and railroad president Felton were there to warn him. After jockeying through a hotel crowd in an attempt to reach the presidential party, they managed to corner Norman B. Judd, a close and influential friend of Lincoln's. In the quiet confines of Judd's room, they unfolded the Baltimore situation to him. Later Lincoln was called in and informed of the matter. Pinkerton noted that "Mr. Lincoln listened very attentively, but did not say a word."

When asked if he would consider leaving for Washington that very night, the President-elect refused, because he wanted to honor his speaking commitments the next day, February 22, in Philadelphia and Harrisburg. Once these were fulfilled, he would think seriously about the proposal.

In Harrisburg Lincoln had further word from reliable sources, independent of Pinkerton, of an assassination plot and reluctantly agreed to the detective's plan for making a hasty night trip to Washington. In the interest of utmost secrecy, Pinkerton arranged to have telegraph wires cut, messages sent in code, and guards placed along the route. Thus, in the waning hours of Friday, February 22, the President-elect, accompanied by an old friend, Ward Lamon, boarded a special train at Harrisburg and traveled to Philadelphia, where they met Pinkerton and changed to a Washington sleeper. The night passage through Baltimore, like the entire journey, proved uneventful. At about 6:00 A.M., Abraham Lincoln stepped off the train and into the quiet of early-morning Washington. While he sought rest at Willard's Hotel, Pinkerton hastened to the telegraph office and sent a melodramatic, coded message to Harrisburg: "Plums delivered nuts safely." Although Pinkerton must have taken satisfaction in completing his mission successfully, Lincoln received much derision for his unceremonious arrival in Washington and always regretted it. The clandestine ways of Allan Pinkerton were not those of the straightforward Lincoln.

A week after the mid-April Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, the indefatigable detective again offered his services to Lincoln. Although the President expressed interest, it was General George McClellan, the recently appointed commander of the Department of Ohio, who put Pinkerton to work. As early as 1857, the two men had become acquainted. McClellan, then chief engineer of the Illinois Central Railroad, had sought

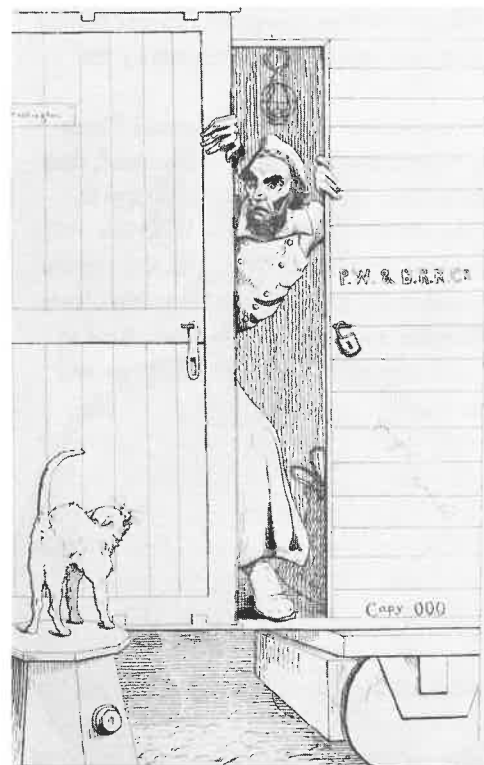
Pinkerton's help in protecting that line. Through this business relationship, each came to respect the other's talents. McClellan now enlisted Pinkerton to do some intelligence work in the field.

On his first assignment, Pinkerton sent agents into Kentucky and the hills of western Virginia to gather information about Confederate strengths and operations. Even Pinkerton slipped behind enemy lines and made detailed reports of Rebel defenses and supplies and the nature of roads, bridges, and streams. He also spent considerable time encamped in his Cincinnati war office, where he carefully analyzed reports sent in from the field.

Meanwhile, on July 21, 1861, a full-fledged battle was raging on the rolling meadows of Manassas in Virginia. Beaten and demoralized, Union soldiers were retreating back to the Washington defenses. Now faced with a tattered army that lacked both organization and leadership, the Commander-in-Chief placed General McClellan, fresh from victories in western Virginia, in command at Washington. Almost immediately, the young general summoned Allan Pinkerton to Washington to organize a secret service for his Army of the Potomac, which the detective gladly did. His force included ten of his best operatives, two of whom were women.

Arriving in sultry August 1861, Pinkerton soon met a woman who was to test his equanimity in a way he never could have anticipated. Some Washingtonians considered her charming; others thought her calculatingly seductive. All agreed, however, that Rose O'Neal Greenhow was strikingly beautiful, cultured in taste, refined in manner and, in her middle age, the most influential woman in Washington. Her long list of friends and admirers included military officers, politicians, and such notable statesmen as former President James Buchanan and Southern Senators John C. Calhoun and Jefferson Davis, now President of the Confederacy. Given her prominence, it was only natural that Allan Pinkerton should come to know Mrs. Greenhow. Unfortunately, he was never able to appreciate her finer qualities. Clashing political sympathies and professions had everything to do with this: Mrs. Greenhow was a Rebel spy, and Allan Pinkerton was a Yankee detective. Yet both were dogged, clever, and stubborn, and under far different circumstances they might have admired each other. As it was, they engaged in a personal war of intrigue, with the nation's security at stake.

Throughout the summer of 1861, Mrs. Greenhow stayed busy. Thanks to her surreptitious activities in early July, Confederate General Pierre Beauregard received from her what amounted to a printed program of the "surprise" Union advance on Manassas. The engaging spy did not stop with this success.



Passage through Baltimore
Adalbert Johann Volck (1828–1912)
Etching, 1863
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

In the waning hours of February 22, 1861, Lincoln, wearing a soft Kossuth hat and a long overcoat, left Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, aboard a special train for Washington, and arrived there safely about six o'clock the next morning. The newspapers and cartoons mocked Lincoln for making this surreptitious trip, and he ultimately regretted having arrived at the nation's seat of power unannounced.

"Halt, or I Fire!"
Joseph Boggs Beale (1841–1926)
Wood engraving, from *Spy of the Rebellion* by
Allan Pinkerton, 1883

On a stormy night in August 1861, Allan Pinkerton spied on Confederate agent Rose Greenhow from outside her Sixteenth Street house in Washington.

Wishing to peek in through an upper parlor window, Pinkerton removed his boots to stand on the shoulders of two companions. At that moment a federal officer was inside passing military secrets to the engaging spy. When the officer suddenly left the house, Pinkerton, still without boots, followed him. A few blocks away, the traitorous officer darted into a building, and Pinkerton was blocked from further pursuit by several armed sentries who ordered him to halt and then arrested him. The detective chose not to disclose his mission until he could collect more evidence.





Rose Greenhow (circa 1815–1864) in Old Capitol Prison with her daughter
 Photograph, taken from an original circa 1861
 negative by Mathew Brady
 Library of Congress

Employing her guile and charm, she continued to woo government secrets from enraptured clerks and aides. In early August 1861, she sent Confederate authorities detailed blueprints of the Washington defenses and specifications about the number, range, and caliber of guns.

By the end of August, Rose Greenhow had become enough of a nuisance and threat that the administration authorized Pinkerton to arrest her. Pinkerton wasted no time. Using his wartime alias, he surprised the petticoated spy at her house on Sixteenth Street and introduced himself as Major E. J. Allen. Mrs. Greenhow knew his real identity, however: a tribute to her craftiness. Her game finally over, she had little choice but to watch idly as Pinkerton agents rummaged through chests of drawers, beds, and wardrobes and through her library. Piece by piece, they discovered detailed reports on weapons, troop movements, and Union morale. A small red diary found by Pinkerton yielded a list of couriers and fellow agents.

The government now had the evidence it needed to imprison Mrs. Greenhow and the dozens of her accessories rounded up by Pinkerton agents. Although initially confined in her own house, Mrs. Greenhow no longer enjoyed the freedom of her domain. Pinkerton operatives—some of them women—watched her every move regardless of whether she ate, slept, or prettied herself. After five months of in-house confinement, she was removed by authorities to the Old Capitol Prison. There she stayed for more than a year, primarily at the urging of Pinkerton, who considered her too dangerous to be set free. When finally released in May 1863, she was escorted by federal agents into Dixie.

As a spy catcher, Allan Pinkerton distinguished himself. Yet, as an enemy intelligence officer with McClellan's army in the first year-and-a-half of the war, he failed miserably. Given the job of assessing the number and strength of Confederate troops in Virginia, Pinkerton badly overestimated, at times by as much as one hundred percent. From reports sent to Washington, President Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton must have thought that Pinkerton was counting shadows, which indeed he was. McClellan, however, sincerely believed his every figure; it was what he wanted to hear in order to persuade the administration to send him more troops.

Pinkerton's troubles centered on his civilian approach to military matters. In civilian practice, Pinkerton made his case against a foe by carefully sifting evidence from scores of witness reports filed by his trained operatives. In the army, he continued this practice, listening to hundreds of fleeing refugees and fugitive slaves. Their exaggerated sightings of enemy forces indeed made the Confederacy appear invincible. Pinkerton was certain of this and McClellan even more so. Lincoln and Stanton were not, however, and when McClellan procrastinated about pursuing Robert E. Lee's army after the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, they decided that the Army of the Potomac needed new leadership.

After McClellan's dismissal, Pinkerton no longer wished to remain with the army as its chief of the secret service. He continued to serve the Union, however, in nonmilitary and nonespionage matters. Lincoln and Stanton still valued his service, and Pinkerton needed the employment—although coaxing the government to pay its bills to him was like coaxing McClellan to fight. Until the end of the war, Pinkerton tracked down embezzlers who had cheated on federal contracts. After the Confederate surrender, he returned to Chicago and resumed the work for which he was best suited: snooping on the common criminal.

Masters of Their Crafts

By the year 1900, police forces in this country and abroad had come to rely heavily on Pinkerton's massive store of criminal files for background on lawbreakers suspected of working in their jurisdictions. Had the agency allowed others to peruse their dossiers—which it discreetly did not—a novelist of the day would have found himself confronted with the makings of more than one good criminal romance. In some cases, there would have been no need for an author to embroider the story. It was all there in the Pinkerton files—plots, characters, and drama—enough inspiration to last a writer a lifetime and then some.

The methods the Pinkertons used in tracking members of their rogues' gallery were as varied as the stories told in their criminal dossiers and in some respects presaged modern police techniques. On one occasion, the tracing of a hat to its place of purchase might provide the clue needed to locate the wrongdoer. On another, it might be a strand of hair or a medical prescription inadvertently left behind by the criminal. In yet other cases, it was the almost magic ability of the Pinkertons and their agents to remember a face. Once, upon hearing the verbal description of a burglar-murderer, Robert Pinkerton was able to inform the local police exactly who the man was. But, whatever the unique sequence of events and methodology, it was fair to say that in all instances the Pinkertons' thoroughgoing persistence made them formidable opponents to the clever criminals described in their office files. Like so many of these rogues, they, too, were masters of their craft.



"Don't Make a Move"
 Victor Dubreuil (active 1888–1900)
 Oil on canvas, circa 1900
 New England Merchants National Bank

Adam Worth (1844-1902)



Adam Worth
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

One of the most elusive criminals of the late nineteenth century, the urbane Adam Worth also numbered among the most accomplished and, at times, the richest. Born in America, where he began his life of crime as a bounty jumper during the Civil War, Worth spent most of his career in London. Ensconced in a sumptuous Piccadilly flat or away sailing his yacht on the Mediterranean, he became the moving force behind diamond heists, forgery operations, and bank thefts throughout Europe. With one exception—a mail robbery in Belgium—the legal authorities were never able to obtain a conviction on him.

As was their habit, the Pinkertons always kept tabs on Worth, but their most famous connection with this international criminal grew out of his theft of Thomas Gainsborough's celebrated portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire in 1876. Actually art stealing was not an important line with Worth, and his thought in this case had been to use the priceless canvas as ransom in winning the release of a close associate from jail. The friend, however, was freed before Worth could ever propose his deal. Nevertheless, fearing that a simple and immediate return of the picture could not be accomplished without suspicion, Worth rolled up the canvas and shipped it to a warehouse in America, where it remained for more than two decades.

Finally, in his old age and in need of money, he went to Chicago to strike a bargain with William Pinkerton: a hefty sum for himself in return for the beautiful Duchess. After consummating this arrangement, Pinkerton received an unexpected bonus, which he probably relished more than recovery of the painting. He sat back, for the next few hours, as the great Adam Worth recounted the details of his biggest exploits and confessed to crimes of which no one had ever suspected him.

Charles Becker (1847-1916)



Charles Becker
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

When Charles "Scratch" Becker came out of San Quentin prison in 1903, he was greeted by a crowd of reporters waiting to hear what the renowned forger and "prince of wits" would have to say after three years behind bars. The "Scratch" did not disappoint them. Clearly unapologetic for his more than thirty years of crime, he declared, "I am what you call an artist." By way of elaboration, he added that in many respects he was quite like the famed sculptor-goldsmith of the Italian Renaissance, Benvenuto Cellini.

The Pinkertons, who had known Becker for years, might not have accepted this hyperbolic parallel. Nevertheless, William Pinkerton once candidly admitted that a bogus banknote drawn with Becker's steady hand could undergo "microscopic scrutiny" and still remain undetected.

For several years following his discharge from San Quentin, Becker devoted his creative ingenuity to selling bankers on an ineradicable ink that would defy any counterfeiter's attempt to tamper with it. Perhaps this was his last try at ensuring that his fame as America's Cellini would never be challenged. In any case, the bankers, whom he had been defrauding for years, did not buy; and Becker's last years were spent running a Brooklyn saloon.

Maximillian Shinburn (1840-1917)



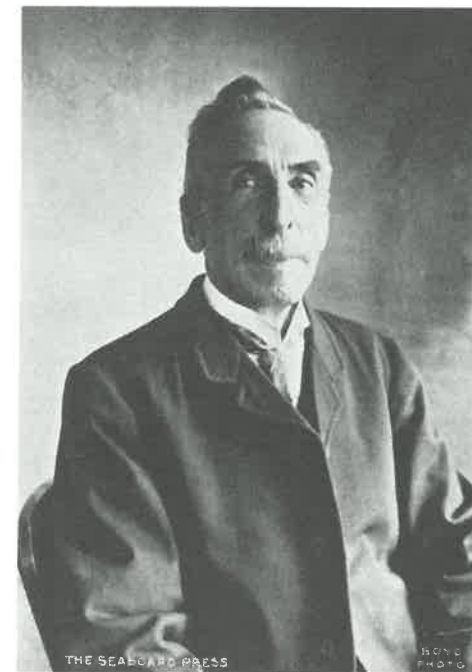
Maximillian Shinburn
Richie (dates unknown)
Photograph, circa 1894
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

Dapper, intelligent, and well spoken, Max Shinburn had the makings of a great inventor. Unfortunately, soon after arriving in this country from his native Germany in 1860, he decided that his genius for things mechanical could be more profitably applied to cracking safes. By his early thirties, having devised a set of tools uniquely tailored for opening vaults and a method of using calibrated paper to discover lock combinations, Shinburn was the acknowledged leader of his trade. It was estimated that by the early 1870s his bank-robbing enterprises along the Eastern Seaboard had netted him \$3 million.

It was at this high point that the clever German came into the Pinkerton orbit. With the agency's operatives now on his trail and local police forces alerted to his identity, Shinburn made haste to Belgium, where he became Baron Shindle, silk entrepreneur. For a while the self-styled nobleman lived lavishly and respectably but, when his investments went bad, he returned to his old craft.

This time Shinburn ran into some hard luck. In 1892, after a foiled attempt on a bank in Liège earned him a term in prison, he came back to America, where the Pinkertons shortly got him for a theft in New York. After serving his time for this job and another few years for a robbery of many years earlier, the great Max Shinburn fell into impoverished obscurity. But before Shinburn died in 1917, William Pinkerton, in the interest of posterity, made it a point to find the criminal and asked him to describe some of the methods he had engineered for opening vaults. The result was a meticulously diagrammed treatise on the art of safecracking.

George M. White (1837-1909)

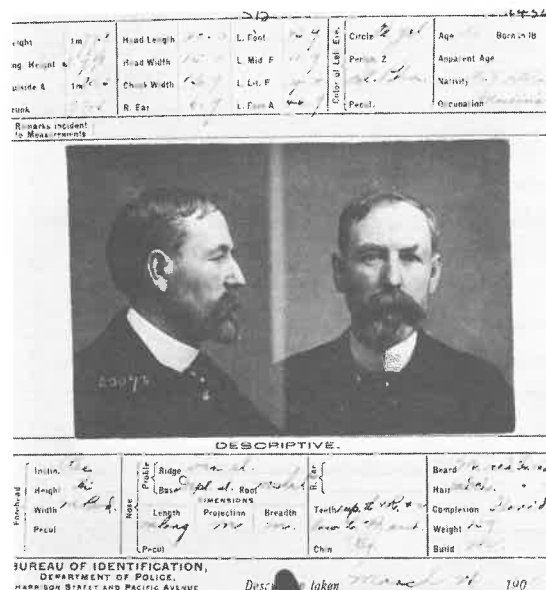


George M. White
Boyd (dates unknown)
Photograph, circa 1907, from the frontispiece of
White's book, *The Penalty and Redemption*
Library of Congress

The favorite modus operandi of bank thief George White, his file at Pinkerton's stated, consisted of entering an unsuspecting banker's home, asking for the combinations to his vaults, and applying torture until he got it. This crude tactic, however, was not always White's way—at least according to him.

Until he was wrongly convicted for a bank job in New Hampshire, he later claimed, he had been a law-abiding citizen, quite content with his humble lot as an innkeeper. But, once labeled a criminal, White apparently asked himself, "Why not?" So, taking his lessons from the best bank robbers of the day, he was quickly outpacing some of his mentors. It was later said that in the course of his long career White had "stolen more money than any other living man."

For many years, repeated captures and convictions could never convince White of the wisdom of going straight. Finally, during his stay behind bars in the 1890s, he embraced religion and confessed the errors of his ways. White's final years found him zealously reciting in books and lectures his sad-happy story of "penalty and redemption."



James Dunlap
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

James Dunlap (circa 1840-?)

Within the first two years of the Civil War, Sargeant James Dunlap's battle-field bravery had earned him three wounds and a minié ball in his leg, which for the rest of his life would complement his lean good looks with a heroic limp. But wartime devotion to country did not necessarily inspire similar devotion to peacetime law and order. By the early 1870s, Dunlap had become the brains behind one of the most prosperous bank-robbing rings in the country. In the morning hours of January 25, 1876, he and his cohorts walked out of a bank in Northampton, Massachusetts, with one of the largest takes in history, a tidy \$1,250,000 in cash and securities.

Soon involved in the case, the Pinkertons finally caught up with Dunlap and his chief partner at the end of 1877. A few years later, they collared the conspirator to whom Dunlap and company had entrusted their plunder while they were serving prison terms.

Even in jail, however, Dunlap was not forgotten. Women adored this red-bearded, handsome scoundrel-war hero. It was said that prisoner Dunlap did quite a brisk business, sending to feminine admirers pictures and locks of his wavy hair for a quarter.

Sophie Lyons (1850-1924)

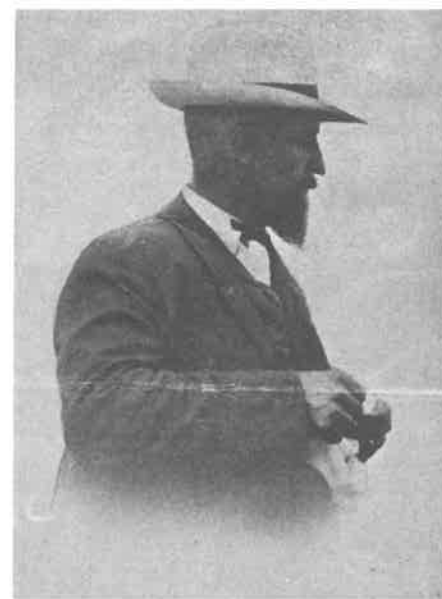
In her memoirs, published in 1913, Sophie Lyons unabashedly described herself as "a thief from the cradle." Although a trifle exaggerated, the description was apt enough. At age six, while other little girls were taking their first embroidery lessons, young Sophie was being schooled in the art of picking pockets—a skill for which she seemed to have a natural bent. Marriage in her teens to one Ned Lyons—a bank sneak of wide notoriety—expanded Sophie's horizons, and she was soon gaining experience in everything from bank theft to blackmail. By the late 1880s, with two prison terms under her belt, she was in Paris, posing as a socially prominent lady of leisure and all the while stealing the jewels and gold of the city's elite. It was said that before her activities won her a deportation order, her take had totaled more than \$200,000.

In 1894 Lyons was in Detroit, where she was the proprietor of the Great Western Matrimonial Bureau. "She claims," William Pinkerton noted in an office memo, "she has settled down. . . . If so, she ought to be encouraged." Shortly thereafter, news came to the agency that Mrs. Lyons was under investigation for mail fraud.

In the end, Lyons did find respectability. Her obituary in 1924 read—as much as any tribute could to a dowager "Queen of the Underworld"—like that of a high-principled gentlewoman. She may have sold some gold bricks and picked some pockets in her day, but whatever her sins, Sophie Lyons "never went back on a friend."



Sophie Lyons
Pinkerton's, Incorporated



Ben Chilson
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

Ben Chilson (circa 1860-19?)

Ben Chilson was a makeup artist, but it was not on humans that he practiced his skills. It was on racehorses. With a few daubs of paint and some cosmetic alterations of the teeth, he could easily make a winning horse look like an established loser. Then, having entered the disguised animal under the latter's name in a race, he and his colleagues would proceed to the betting window and put their money on the twenty-to-one long shot. As the supposed nag crossed the finish line in the lead, Chilson and company scooped up their winnings.

Ardent fans of the "sport of kings" themselves, William and Robert Pinkerton had an emotional, as well as professional, interest in bringing this rake to justice. When their agency was hired to investigate Chilson in the early 1900s, Robert oversaw the operation personally. In many states, however, "horse ringing," as Chilson's enterprise was called, was not illegal. So the best Pinkerton's could do was to circulate photographs of Chilson and urge tracks to ban his presence at races. In the end, that was enough. Although every few years a Pinkerton guard spotted the onetime camouflage artist in the audience at a racing event, Chilson apparently had retired from his former business.

Oliver C. Perry (1864-1930)

A Pinkerton agent described the New York train robber, Oliver C. Perry, as "one of the nerviest outlaws" he had ever run across. Indeed, if Perry's last hair-raising venture in 1892 was any indication for sheer derring-do, this handsome brigand's antics were unmatched.

Climbing atop a moving train, a hook and rope in one hand and gun in the other, Perry inched his way to the express car said to be carrying more than \$100,000 in gold and jewels. Then, swinging upside-down from the roof, he lowered himself through the car's open door. But, once inside, thanks to the guard's feisty determination, Perry could not get to his plunder and instead hurled himself from the speeding train. Although the crime was over, the adventure was not. When alerted railroad employees tried to catch him hours later in a nearby depot, Perry jumped aboard an idling engine car. Following close behind, the workers hopped on another. Soon, with throttles open, the two engines were racing down parallel tracks, with Perry and his pursuers exchanging gunfire. Before long, outlaw and posse switched to horse and buggy and, after some twenty-five miles of chasing down country roads, Perry was finally cornered and arrested.

Convicted on several counts, Perry—with the exception of a brief escape to freedom in 1895—spent the rest of his life in prison, where he took to composing poetry. One effort began:

*My name is O. C. Perry,
And in New York I was born.
My mother's wealth was piety,
My father's, brain and brawn.
"Thou shalt not steal,"
They very oft endeavored to instill
Into my boyish memory,
Against my thievish will.*



Oliver C. Perry
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

The Pinkertons Investigate Labor

In the 1870s Allan Pinkerton met with both disaster and success. In 1869 he suffered a near-fatal stroke that partially paralyzed him for several years and significantly curtailed his involvement in the business. Two years later, the great Chicago fire destroyed his home office—a \$250,000 loss, Pinkerton claimed. A decline in business activity throughout the nation, culminating in the severe depression of 1873, left Pinkerton groping for work and wondering how he would pay his agents. Amid the prevailing doom, opportunity opened up in the anthracite coal region of eastern Pennsylvania.

Trial Scene (Molly Maguire)
David Gilmour Blythe (1815–1865)
Oil on canvas, 1860–63
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of
Rochester, R. T. Miller Fund



James McParlan (1844–1919)
Myers (dates unknown)
Photograph, 1907
Library of Congress



In this economically depressed area inhabited largely by Irish immigrants, mine workers and owners frequently battled over wages. Strikes were common. They severely crippled the hard-coal industry, in which the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad had a major stake because of its freight monopoly. Its president, Franklin B. Gowen, never liked to see the cars of the Reading stand empty and idle. Worse yet was to hear that striking miners, angered by Gowen's attempt to lower wages and increase production, had destroyed railroad property. Gowen had long suspected that secret societies of Irish immigrants were responsible for these depredations. In 1873 he hired the Pinkertons to infiltrate the area. Their preliminary investigation of the incendiary burning of a coal tippie at Glen Carbon, Pennsylvania, first connected this violence with the name "Molly Maguire"—a name that was more often whispered than spoken in the dingy mining communities.

Further investigations disclosed the Molly Maguires to be an organization of Irish Catholics who had banded together, under the pretense of Christian brotherhood, to avenge purported wrongs committed against its members. Allan Pinkerton, judging this case to be unique, realized the need to send a special type of operative to the troubled coal fields. His man had to be both Irish and Catholic, the two conditions necessary to gain the inner circle of this clandestine mob. After careful consideration, Pinkerton chose James McParlan, a twenty-nine-year-old Ulster immigrant, for the extraordinary assignment.

*James McParlan being sworn into the
Molly Maguires*
Joseph Boggs Beale (1841–1926)
Wood engraving, from *The Molly Maguires and
the Detectives*
by Allan Pinkerton, 1877



On October 27, 1873, McParlan, posing as an "itinerant tramp" named James McKenna, arrived in the strife-ridden coal fields. Here he began to investigate the sinister doings of the Maguires and gather evidence of their alleged crimes against the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad. As he visited the neighboring coal towns, called patches, in search of work and a room, the red-haired Irishman easily made friends. His quick smile, native brogue, and tavern generosity were all the calling cards he needed. With a bit of luck and plenty of deft role playing, McParlan won the confidence of several key Molly leaders. In mid-April, he accepted an invitation to join the Molly lodge in the town of Shenandoah.

As an initiated Molly Maguire, McParlan gradually discovered just who and what he was up against. A recent murder of a Molly, by a rival Irish society called the "Chain Gang," revealed to the surprised detective that the Mollies were involved in factional fighting in addition to antimanagement violence. Several murders later, McParlan concluded that his society "friends" were no more than hoodlums who had banded together to settle personal vendettas.

McParlan's situation quickly became precarious at best. Having earned the trust of the Mollies, he soon found himself pegged to commit sabotage and even murder. His dilemma was how to remain innocent of crime without raising suspicion. Somehow, either by clever alibi or by just plain good fortune, he always found a way out of involvement. In the event of a planned murder, his problem became one of tipping off the intended victim without revealing his true identity. His position amidst the Mollies was like that of an Indian snake charmer surrounded by deadly cobras: he had to keep them perpetually enchanted or else lose his life.

Meanwhile, murder led to more murder in the tunneled hills of the anthracite region. With a dogged determination that must have impressed the Pinkerton office in Philadelphia to which McParlan secretly sent weekly reports, the young detective stayed with his accumulating pile of cases. A combination of events, however, eventually brought an end to the Molly Maguires.

In early July 1875, the shooting of a respected police officer in Tamaqua ignited public outrage throughout the area. After McParlan gave to newspapers the names and residences of more than four hundred Mollies, the public finally had targets at which to hurl their anger. The subsequent

James McParlan's expense sheet for July 13–17, 1875
Reading Company Collection, Eleutherian Mills
Historical Library

13	Jim Butler friends at Maltys, Pros Bank	50
14	Supper & crowd of M. M. Roy Mine Run	1 00
15	Due to Mahanoy City	25
	Feasting Toley friends at Ryans	1 00
	" McHugh friends at Dillons	60
	Coffee to Lannaga	60
	Dinner at Lannaga	50
	Feasting Muller & friends at Carrolls	80
	" O'Brien friends at Roberts	1 50
	Coffee Lannaga to Lannaga Station	20
	Feasting crowd M. M. at Horn Hall	1 20
	Feasting Alex Campbell friends at McKannas	70
	Feasting M. M. at Fishers Turn out	1 80
16	Feasting O'Hair friends at Fishers	70
	" Gallagher friends at Jannet	50
	Feasting Mike McKenna & friends at McKannas	40
	at Campbell	1 80
	Lost playing cards with M. M. for drinks	1 20
17	Feasting Mainelli's friends at Campbells	60
	" Muller friends at McKannas	70

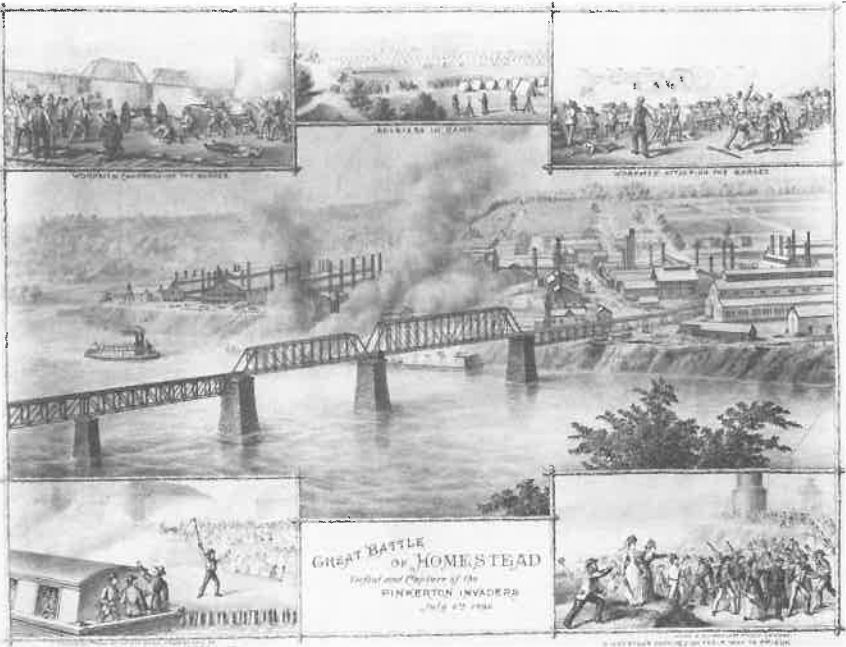
conviction of the policeman's murderer proved to be a major victory for law and order—and for the Pinkertons. This verdict, given in February 1876, was the first to break a seemingly endless pattern of “Molly justice” that had always resulted in delays, fixed juries, and eventual acquittals. Of greater significance, however, was that the sworn testimony prodded one captured cohort to turn state's evidence. His damaging confessions implicated others who were subsequently arrested for one murder or another.

In the midst of this roundup, the Mollies began to suspect McParlan of being the “loose screw.” After he had been shot at, he knew that he could no longer survive in the coalfields. On March 7, 1876, McParlan fled from the area, ending a dangerous two-year stay. Two months later he reluctantly returned to testify (usually Pinkerton agents did not) in the sensational murder trials that followed.

When all the evidence was examined and crossexamined, it was enough to condemn to death twenty men. Although the Molly Maguires were finished, they were not forgotten. Both the Mollies and James McParlan quickly became legendary, and this success capped a remarkable detective career for the aging Allan Pinkerton.

Perhaps it was fortunate that the founder never knew of a tragic event that occurred in 1892, eight years after his death, in Homestead, Pennsylvania. In this grimy industrial community along the Monongahela River, the Carnegie Steel Company operated a mill. That summer, employees belonging to the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers struck over wage cuts. The company's general manager, Henry Clay Frick, refused to meet the union's terms and renew its contract. Wishing to keep the ousted workers clear of the premises, Frick ordered a plank fence, topped with barbed wire, to be built around the plant, which he closed. When it looked as though congregating strikers would ultimately seize the mill, Frick decided to call in the Pinkertons.

Great Battle of Homestead
Kurz & Allison (active 1880–1899)
Lithograph, 1892
Library of Congress



In the hazy predawn hours of July 6, two barges, with 316 Pinkertons on board, plied up the murky Monongahela. The guards, an odd assortment of mostly unemployed drifters, college lads, and hoodlums mustered in Chicago and New York, knew nothing about their assignment other than their order to guard the property of an unnamed company. They had been warned, however, to expect to be the targets of a few brickbats and ugly names. As the troubled city of Homestead loomed nearer and nearer, most men guessed their destination, although an inquisitive few still asked where they were going.

When the barges reached the wharf at the Carnegie plant, an armed mob of strikers greeted them with stones and warnings not to land and ultimately fired bullets. The Pinkertons rushed topside and fired into the crowd. Instantly, more than thirty men fell wounded or dead. Although the Pinkertons intended to do no more than guard the plant, the workers considered them strikebreakers and refused to let them land.

For most of the day, gunshots creased the sultry air and animated the scene for thousands of spectators who came to watch and picnic. Intent upon killing every Pinkerton on board, the angry strikers peppered the barges with rifle fire, shots from a vintage Civil War cannon, and sticks of hurled dynamite. Pinkerton regulars, armed with Winchesters, sporadically returned the fire.

By late afternoon, as men bled to death on both sides, the strikers allowed the Pinkertons to surrender. The march to prison—the town theater—became a gauntlet run for the terrified captives. Workers beat them with clubs; children threw stones; and one woman poked out an agent's eye with an umbrella. It was after midnight when the Pinkertons boarded a special train for friendlier Pittsburgh.

The Homestead riot had taken the lives of approximately nine strikers and seven Pinkertons. Hundreds more suffered either gunshot wounds or injuries received from beatings. Months later, the strike gradually ended in Carnegie's favor. It broke the union and left the workers even worse off than before. As for the Pinkertons, their involvement in this labor dispute, as in others, left them with a tarnished name among the working class, a name that the agency attempted to rectify through its success in tracking bank robbers, forgers, and ringers.

The Pinkertons in the West

The offices of Pinkerton's National Detective Agency were located in large established cities, but its operatives were not strictly the greenhorn city slickers they might appear to be, seated at their desks in conservative business suits. After the Civil War, as bank and train robberies became an ever-increasing problem in the frontier West, Pinkerton's proved itself readily adaptable to the demands of boots-and-saddle law enforcement. In the following three decades, swashbuckling stories of how the agency's men had pursued some bandannaed wrongdoer through swamp and wood or bearded him in a remote hideout became legion. By 1900 the name Pinkerton was almost as intertwined with the romance of western banditry as the outlaw himself.



William Pinkerton with Southern Express Company agents Pat Connell (left), and Sam Finley (right), probably in the early 1870s
Copy photograph courtesy of Pinkerton's, Incorporated



The Holdup
Frederic Remington (1861–1909)
Watercolor, circa 1892
Valley National Bank of Arizona

The Reno Brothers' Gang

In the late 1860s, the Reno Brothers' Gang earned the dubious distinction of being the first organized band of train robbers in the United States. The four brothers, John, Frank, Simon ("Sim"), and William Reno, all former Civil War bounty jumpers, operated in Indiana and Missouri. Joined by several cohorts, they frequently preyed upon the baggage cars of the Adams Express Company running between Indianapolis and New Albany, Indiana.

The Reno Gang succeeded in this business of robbing trains and banks by careful planning and good organization. To reduce the chances of arrest, they courted corrupt politicians and invoked fear throughout the countryside by burning the crops and buildings and crippling the cattle of persons suspected of being unfriendly.

The Pinkertons, hired by the victimized Adams Express Company, pursued them to the end. In 1868, by a clever ruse, agents arrested John Reno at a train station in Seymour, Indiana. For his lead role in the \$20,000 burglary of the county treasurer's office in Gallatin, Missouri, he received a twenty-five-year prison sentence.

Now under the leadership of Frank Reno, the gang struck again and again. On May 22, 1868, six members, amply armed, boarded an Ohio & Mississippi Railroad train at Marshfield, Indiana, and robbed it of \$97,000 in bonds and securities.

After bolstering his detective staff by two, Allan Pinkerton concentrated his efforts on the Renos, and promptly arrested William and Sim in Indianapolis. Later the Pinkertons arrested Frank Reno and Charles Anderson in Canada for their part in the Marshfield holdup; the other participants, Miles Ogle and Mike Rogers, temporarily went free before eventually being apprehended. After a tedious extradition process that required President Andrew Johnson's signature, the pair captured in Canada were reunited with William and Sim Reno in a prison at New Albany, Indiana. In December 1868, before the four could be brought to trial, about two hundred vigilantes stormed the jail and hanged the three brothers from the prison rafters.



Frank Reno (died 1868)
Pinkerton's, Incorporated



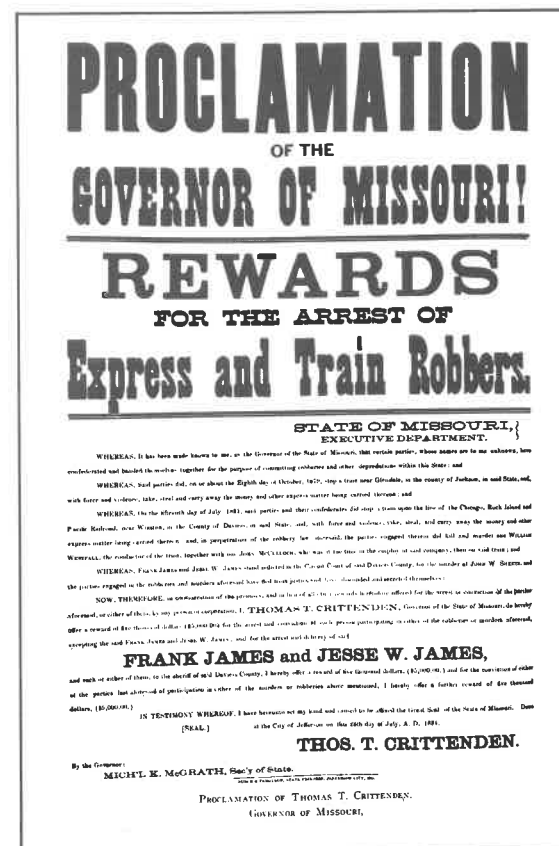
Miles Ogle (dates unknown), member of the Reno Gang
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

Jesse James, the notorious Missouri bank and train robber, proved to be one man Pinkerton never got—but then neither did any other officers of the law. For more than a decade, beginning in 1866, Jesse, his brother Frank, and a dozen other companions terrorized the Midwest, looting bank safes, holding up trains, and leaving numerous dead along the way.

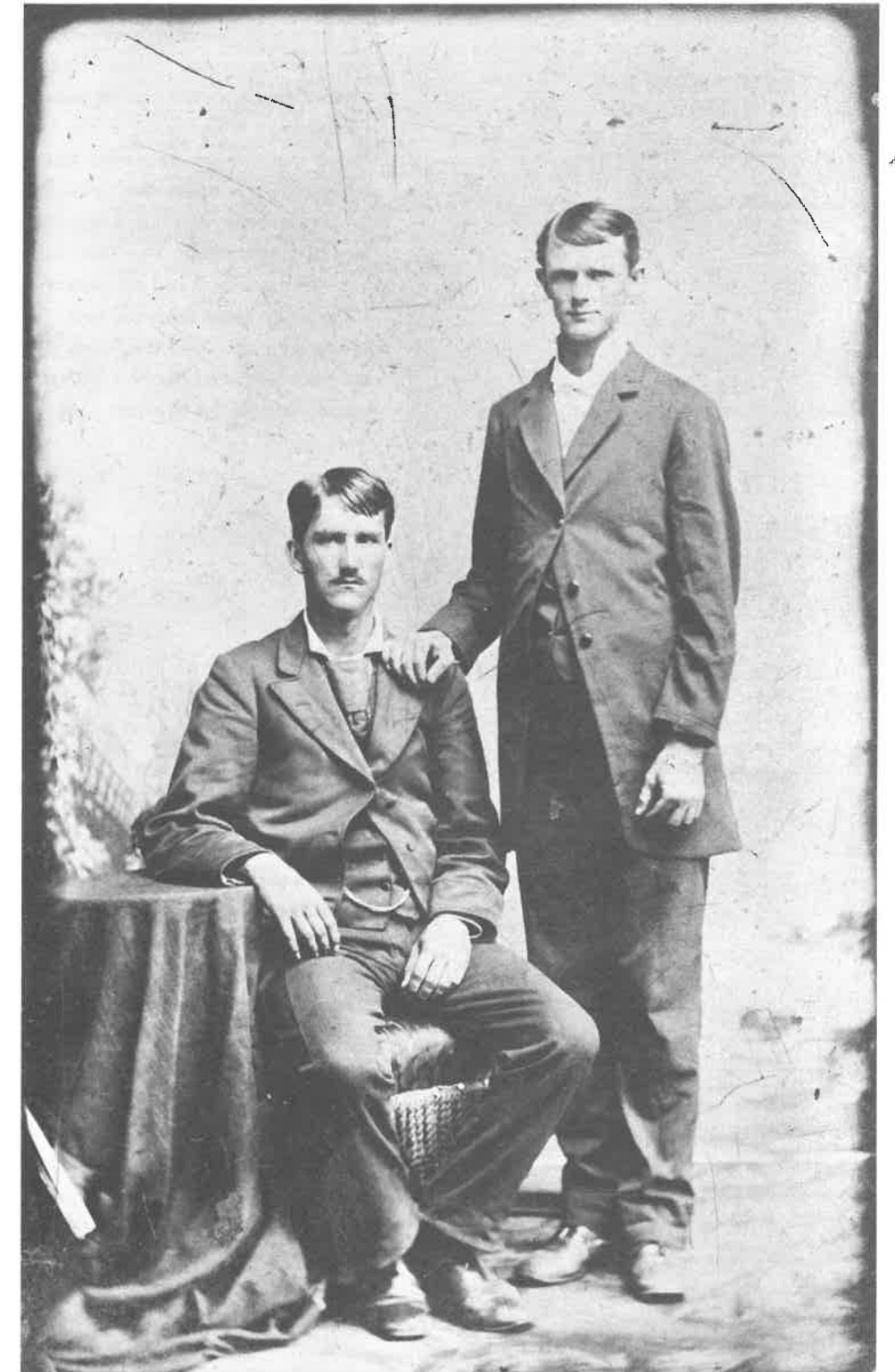
The Pinkertons received bad press for their involvement in this bungled episode. The agency vigorously denied that one of its operatives had thrown the “Greek fire.” Afterwards the Pinkertons quickly lost track of the James brothers. Not until April 1882 did they learn that Robert Ford, a former member of the Gang, had just shot and killed Jesse at his home in St. Joseph, Missouri. The following October, Frank James surrendered and was eventually tried for murder but miraculously was acquitted.



Zerelda James Samuel (mother of Jesse and Frank James) and her third husband, Dr. Reuben Samuel
Unidentified photographer
Tintype, circa 1870
The Amon Carter Museum of Western Art



Wanted circular for James Gang, 1881
The State Historical Society of Missouri



Frank (1843–1915) and Jesse (1847–1882) James
Unidentified photographer
Tintype, circa 1870
The Amon Carter Museum of Western Art

Bill Miner (1847-1913)

At thirteen, Bill Miner set out from his native Kentucky to become a cowboy, but by his late teens his taste for high living had convinced him that robbery was more his proper milieu. His new career, however, almost died aborning when, hours after his first stagecoach holdup, he was captured and eventually sentenced to fifteen years at San Quentin. Let out early for good behavior, Miner was still not persuaded that crime did not pay. By 1880 or so, he had robbed enough stages and trains to treat himself to a grand tour of Europe. When his money ran out, it was business as usual until the mid-eighties when he was caught again. This time Miner received a twenty-five-year sentence.

On his release in 1901, Miner still had a few good years left. But, when a Pinkerton agent cornered him in a Georgia swamp shortly after a railroad holdup in 1911, "Old Bill," now sixty-four, finally had to admit that the time for retirement had come. "You know," he confided to his captor, "I'm really getting too old for this sort of thing."



"Old Bill" Miner
Miss M. Spencer (dates unknown)
Photograph, circa 1906
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

Fred Wittrock (1858-1921)

Chicago storekeeper Fred Wittrock was in the habit of seeking escape from his rather humdrum existence by reading about crime in dime novels. After awhile he began to wonder if he, too, might be capable of some of the daring feats of malfeasance about which he read. One day in November 1886, masked in a black bandanna, he finally put his criminal mettle to the test and, in minutes, was walking out of an express office near St. Louis with a small fortune in cash and securities.

Wittrock, however, wanted notoriety more than money. Within twenty-four hours, he had sent the inside story of his exploit, as well as a few pertinent clues, to the newspapers. Thanks to these helpful hints, Pinkerton agents and police were soon knocking at his door. As they led him away, the mild-mannered Wittrock quietly asked if, henceforth, they would please refer to him as "Terrible Fred."



Fred Wittrock
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

Marion Hedgepeth (1857-1910)

In an age when most outlaws of the trans-Mississippi West sported plaid shirts and boots, Marion Hedgepeth was a decided standout with his fine silk stockings, diamond stickpins, and derby. Sartorial splendor notwithstanding, Hedgepeth was as rough and ready as any. During his first year of train robbing, he and his gang managed to dynamite and otherwise work their way through the doors of at least four express-car safes.

When the Pinkertons, working in tandem with local police, finally caught up with Hedgepeth in St. Louis in 1891, it almost seemed that they had collared a matinee idol rather than an outlaw. As flowers poured into his prison cell from one female admirer after another, the dapper brigand could barely find a place to set his derby.



Marion Hedgepeth
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

Bill Rudolph (?-1905)

Perhaps more than any other criminal they tracked, the Pinkertons wanted Bill Randolph. A bank robber with few inhibitions about killing, this Missouri outlaw committed the act that William and Robert Pinkerton lived in daily fear of: Rudolph and his partner, one George Collins, had shot down an agency operative. "The world is not big enough to hide Bill Rudolph," William Pinkerton told reporters, and, with that, an unrelenting two-year search after the two men began.

At their respective trials, Rudolph and Collins were both sentenced to hang. Shortly before Rudolph met his fate, however, he wrote to William Pinkerton asking in the name of his "dear old mother" that the detective request commutation of the death penalty. "I certainly don't wish to see a young man die on the gallows," William told his brother, "but I will not interfere in this case."



Bill Rudolph
Pinkerton's, Incorporated

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the American West had lost much of its wildness. Westerners had already begun to rope the prairies with barbed wire, use telephones, and ride bicycles. One aspect of old frontier life, however, remained the same: trains still crisscrossed the land, and bandits still followed their smoky trails. But as long as outlaws continued to roam free, the Pinkertons found plenty to do on the plains and in the boomtowns west of the Mississippi.

In the early 1900s, a bandit gang known as the “Wild Bunch” fell under the watchful eye of the Pinkertons, who chased them from Montana to Texas to New York City and then into the jungles of South America. The members met and banded together at a mountainous hideout for desperadoes in Wyoming called Hole-in-the-Wall. Although numerous men rode with the Wild Bunch at one time or another, the ringleaders and most wanted characters were George Parker, alias “Butch Cassidy,” and Harry Longbaugh, alias “The Sundance Kid.”

On June 2, 1899, near Wilcox, Wyoming, the Wild Bunch held up the Union Pacific Railroad's Overland Flyer and made off with \$30,000 in unsigned banknotes. After a manhunt by a local posse had failed to bring results, the Pinkertons took up the chase. Other robberies followed. Two especially lucrative holdups occurred in 1900 and 1901, when the Wild Bunch robbed the First National Bank of Winnemucca, Nevada, of \$32,640 and stole \$41,500 in banknotes from a Great Northern Railway train near Wagner, Montana. This last robbery put a posse of a hundred men on their trail. The gang escaped to Fort Worth, Texas, and disbanded. Some members returned north to continue robbing and ultimately face justice. Cassidy and Sundance concluded that outlawry in the United States had become too risky. After a brief spree in New York City, the two, with Etta Place, the dark-haired beauty with whom Sundance had fallen in love in Texas, eventually fled to Argentina and began robbing banks there. In 1909 they supposedly met their deaths in a bloody shootout with a troop of Bolivian cavalry at San Vicente, Bolivia. And that was the last that the Pinkertons ever heard of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

