

An Old Time—\$50,000—Express Robbery

A few evenings ago a *Bazoo* reporter was sauntering around the Garrison House office, wondering what might be turned up to a good account in the way of an item to interest the readers of this paper. Finally he ran against an old expressman, and attache of the United States Express Company.

He invited the reporter take a cigar, and then said:

“Walk up to my room, and while we smoke I will give you an item that, perhaps, may interest the readers of the *Bazoo*.”

The reporter followed, and found the room brilliantly lighted, a fire burning in the stove, and everything exceedingly inviting and cozy.

“Take this chair,” said the expressman, “while I will lie on this lounge,” he continued.

He first commenced telling something about the daring exploits of the Youngers and the Jameses, and asked the question to himself: “If we get all of these fellows, I wonder if a new band will spring into existence that will give us more trouble?”

And then after crossing his legs and getting in a more easy position, for he is a nervous man, he said:

“In 1849, I believe it was, the United States Express Company was organized, and in 1853 we were young and poor. At that time the bankers were in the habit of shipping gold boxes by our company.

“The boxes used for this purpose were all of a uniform size and made of pine—inch and a half clear lumber. The whole box was dovetailed together, except the cover, and this, after the gold was put in, was fastened down by eight large screws sunk into the wood. The holes on the top of the screws were filled with molten sealing wax, and a seal stamped on. There were, besides this, six holes, one-fourth of an inch in diameter, through the cover. These were also filled with sealing wax and stamped. Thus it was a matter of utter impossibility to remove the cover without evidence of it.

“It was in this year, 1853, that our Company was the victim of the great robbery of \$50,000 in gold coin; that filled us with dismay and the country with astonishment. In those days railroading had not arrived at the perfection of the present, and especially in the West, and the means for the detection of crime were not as effective. But to the robbery:

“It was, as I have said, in the year 1853. Our agent at Dubuque received from a banker there a large amount of gold coin for the United States subtreasury in New York. The coin was packed in boxes as above described, each box containing \$50,000. The boxes were all carefully sealed, and every formality required by our company strictly complied with. At that time the line from

Dubuque to New York was divided into runs, with relays or messengers. Thus, one messenger staged it from Dubuque to the nearest railroad terminal point; at that place he transferred his charge to another messenger who ran to Chicago, where he was relieved by one who ran to Detroit; another run was from Detroit to Buffalo, and the last run from Buffalo to New York. Of course this shipment I refer to had to pass through a great many hands before it was safely deposited at its destination. At last the boxes arrived at the subtreasury. The exact number was delivered in good order, every box was exactly alike, every box bore the exact stamps, and every box weighed exactly the same. So far, all right.

“But a terrible denouement was in store for us, for when these boxes were opened by the proper person, one of them, instead of containing \$50,000 in gold coin, was filled with lead. You can imagine the consternation of the officers of our company at experiencing such a heavy loss, for which it was responsible and had to make good. Of course the matter got out and created intense excitement all over the country. It was plainly apparent to us that we had got two things to do: Pay the loss and ferret out the thieves at all hazards and at any cost.

“We kept our own counsel and went to work quietly and systematically, and put one of our shrewdest and keenest detectives at the work. The first thing to do was to trace back that shipment over various trains and ascertain what messenger or other official had charge of it. This we did quietly and without exciting any suspicion among our employes. It was a long time before we got a clew, but get it we did, and you may surmise we held on to it. Among our messengers was one that had charge of that shipment between Chicago and Detroit, and we had reason to believe the change of boxes had been effected on his run; but how, or by whom, we could not determine. The messenger was a general favorite, prompt and faithful in the performance of his duty, and remained at his post after the robbery, pursuing the same course and habits of life that he had previous to our loss.

“A year passed by without bringing any material results. At last our detective took the false box which had contained the lead and went to Dubuque. The banker who shipped the coin looked at the box, then looked at the detective, but he was as much in the dark as before. However, the detective asked him who made the boxes for him in which he shipped the coin. The banker gave him the name of the carpenter. To the carpenter the detective went, and handing him the box asked, ‘Did you make that box?’ The carpenter surveyed it carefully for a moment and promptly answered:

“‘No, sir; I did not make that box.’

“‘Did you make the boxes that contained the coin from Banker — ?’ inquired the detective.

“‘Yes, I did,’ answered the carpenter.

“‘How do you know that this is not one of the boxes that you made for the banker at that time?’

“‘Well, I’ll tell you how I know,’ said the carpenter. ‘I used a certain kind of lumber for those boxes—of clear pine. This box, although made exactly like those I made, is a different kind of

pine. We carpenters never use that kind of pine in this country. It is used around Chicago and Detroit, but not in Dubuque.’

“That was enough. Thanking him for his information, the detective went straight to Detroit and quietly to work. He ascertained that the messenger to whom we have referred had formerly three bosom friends, with whom he had been on extremely intimate terms for years. These three friends had disappeared from Detroit immediately after the robbery, and had not been seen there since. Step by step, however, the patient detective perseveringly pursued his clew until he found his three men in Boston, where they were living in style and affluence. Two of them were keeping a livery stable, with a splendid stock of all the paraphernalia generally found in a first-class metropolitan establishment. The other was conducting a large real-estate business, with an office furnished in magnificent style.

“Two years had been consumed and thousands of dollars expended in hunting down these men; but we felt richly repaid when we found we had secured them. They were arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to ten years in the Penitentiary. From their effects we realized enough to repay us for our loss, for they were sharp rascals, and made the most of their stolen capital.”

“But how did they manage to abstract the treasure-box and substitute the false one?” we asked.

“Well,” replied the narrator, “we never could ascertain that. You see they were great friends of the messenger, and it is supposed that at times they rode in his car. During one of these trips they probably took an impression of the seals, and had a stamp made like it. They then fixed up the false box, and, watching their chance, they somewhere, on that run, substituted it for one of the real ones.”

“What became of the messenger’?” we inquired. “That’s what got us,” said our entertainer. “We could never fasten any guilt or complicity with the others upon him, and yet we were obliged to discharge him for his want of attention, and, at least criminal carelessness. And that’s how the great \$50,000 robbery occurred, that’s how we hunted the robbers, and that’s all I know about it,” said the old expressman, as, throwing away his cigar, bouncing from his seat, he began nervously pacing up and down the room.

And now, kind reader, you have it before you just as he related it. —*Sedalia (Mo.) Bazoo.*

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