

# Uncle Sam's War on the "Yeggs."

## How "West Philadelphia Johnny" Became a Bank Burglar, and How He Met His Nemesis in the Person of a Rustic Vermont Constable.—When the "Yeggs" Paid their Visit to Oco-nee and Walhalla.

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**R**OM the lowly "yegg" who preys on poorly guarded post 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 the 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 "yeggdome" 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 organizer of the band, for a leader they knew there was, although he rarely ever, as they figured out, for months, just far and from the last one to get on him all the members of the band were 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 as slippery as an eel, 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 such an apt pupil of the criminal band 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 flush times New York was his goal. There he negotiated with his favorite "fences" for the sale of the stamps he stole from post offices, and these hauls, in the aggregate, netted him handsome returns. His stamps, or "stickers," he sold at a discount of 25 per cent, and the purchasers had no difficulty in disposing of them at a profit to dishonest 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 his argument, for the bank game was not altogether new to him. He had participated in several jobs of this sort while looking over the postal 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—he himself 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, Vermont, 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 immensely 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 nitroglycerine and his companions' jimmies. But he got 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

approaching danger.

A number of citizens, aroused by the report, had run to the bank, and for a few minutes a fusillade of shots were exchanged. All but "California Fingers" escaped. A shot from a deputy sheriff's pistol laid him 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 Charley Cross, alias Charles Blackburn, 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 office at Louisa, Va., was next visited, immediately followed by a trip to the one at West Point. A running pistol battle with deputy sheriffs at Louisa, Va., resulted in the laying out of several citizens of that sleepy little village, but the "yeggs" escaped unscathed.

But McCarthy was still dissatisfied with the small sums these post office robberies were netting him and he sorely fretted for an opportunity to arrange some big bank job which would return him sufficient funds to enable him to return to New York and live the dissolute life of ease that had so fascinated him on previous visits. He hurried South, and

Shortly after midnight, and less than half an hour before an eastbound express train was due, at a given signal from McCarthy the lights were shot out and at the command of "hands up" all those seated at the gaming tables were compelled to range themselves against the wall and deliver over the contents of their pockets to the bandits. The proprietor of the gambling house, as well as his employees, also was robbed, and when the quartet backed out and made their escape McCarthy, who had acted as collector, had upward of \$5,000 in his pockets. All four boarded the front end of a "blind baggage" car and made tracks for the East. They separated at the first stopping place made by the train, and there McCarthy purchased a ticket for New York and rolled into Manhattan in style.

Word awaited McCarthy in New York 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 watchman unexpectedly appeared on the outside. McCarthy ordered him to throw up his hands and "close his

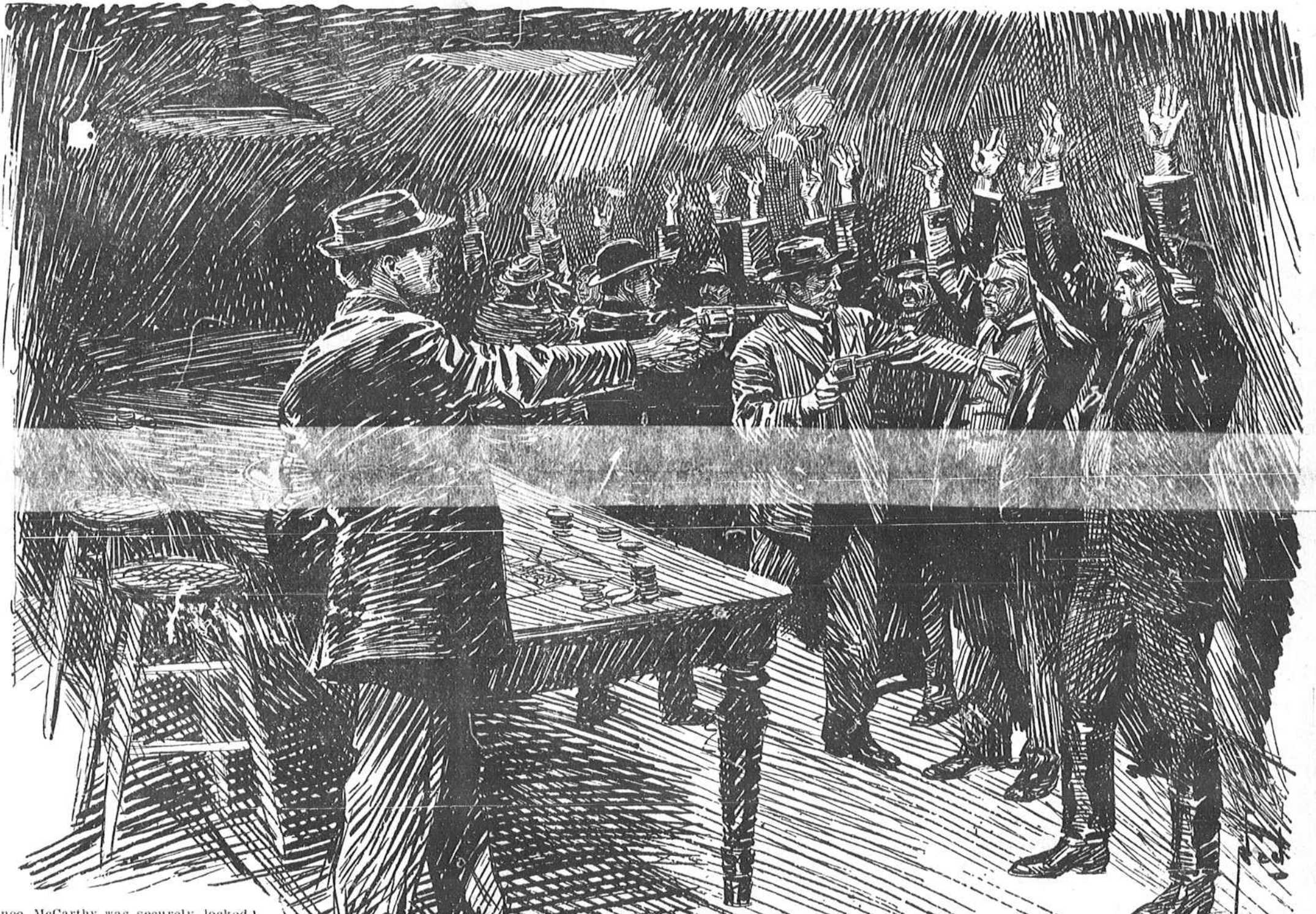
Sheriff and his constable could trace them. One or two little jobs in the vicinity of Fairfax paid them well for their trouble, but they decided it would be healthier to leave the State for a few weeks, or at least until the hue and cry raised over the robberies had subsided.

At Mt. Olive, N. C., the little bank looked promising. "Portland Ned," "Connecticut Shorty" and McCarthy all figured that this robbery could be effected with little trouble or fuss, when they could all return to Courtenay, S. C., where it had been decided that a bank there would yield rich returns. After blowing the outer vault of the Mt. Olive bank it was found the trio did not have a sufficient quantity of "soup," or nitroglycerine to apply to the big safe within. Only \$100 was found in the vault, but a bundle of bills amounting to about \$500 was found in a locked tin box usually used for private papers. This was in the desk of the bank cashier. The lock was easily smashed and the contents taken.

The Courtenay bank proved to be just as fertile as it had promised. The same trio figured in this affair and both the vault and steel chest yielded readily to the heavy charges that were applied to them. The yeggs had profited by their experience at Mt. Olive, and never again would they be handicapped by a lack of material with which to work success-

them to South Carolina. "Shorty" had no difficulty in locating the hiding place and when "raised" the loot was placed in a buggy provided by Rabens and all three drove to the home of Rabens's father, at Walhalla, S. C., where the plunder was packed into a trunk and checked to Charleston. The "baggage" upon its arrival in Charleston was taken to Rabens's saloon, where he had the gold and silver converted into bank notes. For his part in the transaction McCarthy and "Shorty" gave Rabens \$300 and a bundle of bank notes which had been singed and burnt in the explosion. Rabens had no difficulty in having these exchanged at a sub-treasury for good currency.

South Carolina had been so kind to McCarthy that he was loath to leave it until he had made wider excursions among its small towns. "Pennsylvania Swipes," who together with "Portland Ned" had journeyed down from Virginia to join McCarthy and "Connecticut Shorty," located a bank at St. George. Rabens drove "Portland Ned" and McCarthy in his carriage from Charleston to a railroad junction a few miles beyond the city limits and "Swipes" and "Shorty" boarded the same train as it left Charleston. Their conduct in jumping on and off the train at stations (not the one designated on their tickets) aroused the suspicion of the conductor, and when the band



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

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 "Bellefontaine 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 his old associations and free himself from his old "yegg" comrades he knew that this was dangerous when 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 he 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 to Tom Lee at his place on the Bowery, New York, he jumped to Michigan to visit an old sweetheart there.

Returning from Michigan, McCarthy failed to meet his friend, the bank robber, so with "Walter," "Bellefontaine Slim," "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 nitroglycerine were set off, but the safe would not yield. As the report of the explosion was so sharp and loud, the burglars fled from the building just as a warning cry from "Bellefontaine Slim," the lookout, apprised them of

joining forces with "Portland Ned" and "Missouri Shorty," they set forth to make a killing. They decided to work their way West over the "blind baggage" and under rod route." Stopping off at Raisburg, Va., they robbed the Norfolk and Western Railroad station, procuring several hundred dollars in cash. An adjoining town was next visited and a little store there was entered and its safe yielded \$240 to the general fund.

McCarthy wasn't heard of again until he dropped off of an express train at Globe, Ariz., and, aided by "Harry Mich" and "Pennsylvania Mickey" rifled a butcher's shop of \$900. Other nearby towns were visited and paid dearly for the lack of police protection, since each netted the trio in the neighborhood of one thousand dollars. The trio was reinforced at this time by "Canada Paddy," and all went to Bisbee, Ariz., where gay revel was held for a week or more. As the money derived from recent operations soon melted away, the quartet became desperate and decided to "stick up" the town's most flourishing gambling house.

It was a Saturday night; the rooms were crowded and the play big. All had been regular patrons of the gambling house and were known to most of its habitués.

The watchman was not in the least daunted by the pistol he faced, and advanced upon the band. Three of them opened fire on the watchman, but apparently he bore a charmed life, for he sped across the street, and, entering the hotel, gave the alarm. In a minute or two the street swarmed with armed men who opened fire on the "yeggs" and they scampered off, and although two of them were badly wounded, all escaped on the horses they had commandeered earlier in the evening and left tethered on the outskirts of the town in the event of the necessity of a hurried get away. They fled to Brunson, S. C., where they remained under cover a day or two and then decided that the bank in that little town was far too prosperous for the size of the population.

After carefully reconnoitering, the burglar band found the negro night watchman asleep in a carriage house in the rear of the bank. They covered him with their guns and made him conduct them to a blacksmith shop, where they picked up what tools they needed. The bank vault and safe were both blown, and this explosion yielded the burglars upward of \$2,000, nearly all of which was in silver. They seized the railroad section boss's hand car and fled to Fairfax, S. C., and apparently without leaving a clue by which the

fully.

There was no opposition met with at Courtenay. Apparently the whole town was asleep when McCarthy and his two comrades sallied forth from their hiding place. The rugs and heavy curtains in the bank building easily muffled the report of the two explosions. When the inner steel chest had been penetrated the trio found upward of \$10,000 in bank notes of denominations easily negotiated without arousing suspicion, and aside from this, gold and silver amounting to \$3,500. Much valuable jewelry was also found, among it a handsome brooch containing seven large and pure white diamonds. This "Portland Ned" immediately appropriated, saying it would be his Christmas gift to Maud, his wife, with whom he was still violently in love.

The gold and silver and the kit of burglar tools with which they worked were "planted" on the outskirts of the village, near the railroad freight yards, and this done, the little party separated, McCarthy making for Charleston, where he secreted himself at one of the many resorts conducted by H. Rudolph Rabens. McCarthy had more money when he arrived in Charleston than at almost any one time before. He had intended to remain in hiding a week or two and then make for New York, where he could once more provide himself with an elaborate wardrobe and cut a wide swath in the cafes of the White Light district. But instead he went on a wild debauch in a saloon dance hall boarding house, and at the end of two weeks he was penniless. With Rabens he returned to the outskirts of Courtenay and tried to locate the spot in which he had buried his gold and silver hoard, but without success. Not to be deterred, McCarthy and Rabens went to Baltimore, where they hunted up "Connecticut Shorty," who returned with

left his train at St. George he notified a policeman at the station to keep his eye on the new arrivals. The policeman pressed into service a number of citizens, who followed and surrounded the quartet and opened fire on them without further notice. All were more or less wounded and in turn shot down a number of those in the posse. But in the excitement the would-be burglars fled the town and got to a dense forest, where they remained in hiding until their injuries were sufficiently ministered to to permit of their returning to Rabens's place in Charleston.

An almost identical experience attended their next effort. The little band, by this time broke and in desperate need of money, picked the county treasurer's office at Monk's Corner, S. C., as a likely point at which to reimburse their fallen fortunes. But in entering the office at midnight they awakened a sleeping watchman and he shot so freely that as the robbers fled down the main street it was with a number of half clad but fully armed citizens at their heels and a shower of bullets whistling about their ears.

"Portland Ned" and "Pennsylvania Swipes" picked the bank at Lath, S. C., for the next attempt, and the quartet met again in the little town late at night. The blast was set after entrance to the bank was effected, and when it was touched off the door of the vault was blown and jammed in such a manner that it was impossible to gain entrance to the door of the inner strong box. Another safe in the same building was blown, and from it was taken a few hundred dollars. Not satisfied with their night's work the quartet jimmied their way into the town's leading store, blew open the safe and got away with nearly \$1,000. On their way out of town they stopped at the post office and

(Continued on Sixth Page.)