



Robert A. Pinkerton (left), and William



THE PINKERTONS★

The
Detective
Dynasty
That
Made
History

by
JAMES D. HORAN

Crown Publishers, Inc. New York

to Washington, which maintained an

on making the acquaintance of young observing how "swift" the clerk distrib- night, several days later, Dennison boasted were "so sensitive he knew when a letter ar." Pinkerton maintained a watch over and of packages, and several times he saw envelopes into his pocket.

erton and a Cook County deputy arrested ing. He attempted to flee but was downed been booked and his family connections family told Pinkerton he had better produce gex Pinkerton and two deputies searched ouse. Hours were spent carefully exam- ing up the carpet and even the floorboards. search was nearly concluded without finding pictures when Officer Pinkerton decided to con- the pictures from the walls. On removal of the amount of \$3,738 were found concealed, "The account pointed out that hold the highest amount, \$1,503.

and the prominence of the defendant importance was emphasized when Agent of the Postal Service, was sent General to help Pinkerton obtain by the time Brown arrived, Pinker-

Mr. Pinkerton scarcely has followed up the criminals. department and call after his efforts, until re-double his efforts, until detective, Mr. Pinkerton has in this country."

own private detective working detective officer in this ex- from its awkward rain towers and the mighty and Rock Chicago. stretched hogs in

their pens made the nights hideous with their bawling. The white "balloon" houses were going up so rapidly that painters with dripping brushes worked on the heels of the carpenters. Everywhere was exuberance of life—hustle and bustle, new faces, new people, more business.

And with the wealth were more criminals. Warehouses were robbed. The new express companies reported that the doors of their iron cars were broken and that cash, bonds, and merchandise had been taken. There were reports of outlaws boarding trains in the northern part of the state to rob and kill expressmen and passengers. The rural sheriffs were either corrupt or didn't have the experience to cope with such criminal acts; and in the cities the police were either too busy, paid off, politically dominated, or restricted by local jurisdiction in their pursuit of thieves. It was a time that begged for vigorous, honest law enforcement.

Pinkerton and a young Chicago attorney, Edward A. Rucker, formed what Pinkerton called the North-Western Police Agency. The Agency insists the date was 1850, but that date is debatable. The partners opened a small office on the second floor of 89 Washington Street, on the corner of Dearborn, then the heart of the city. Branch offices were located in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana. Pinkerton appears to have been the senior partner. An early letterhead reads:

Allan Pinkerton and Edward A. Rucker, under the style of Pinkerton & Co., have established an agency at Chicago, Illinois for the purpose of transacting a General Detective Police Business in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana; and will attend to the investigation and depre- dation, frauds and criminal offenses; the detection of offenders, procur- ing arrests and convictions, apprehension or return of fugitives from justice, or bail; recovering lost or stolen property, obtaining informa- tion, etc.

We know little of Rucker; newspaper accounts describe him as "well-known attorney of Chicago," the usual flowery description accorded to every attorney, law officer, merchant or railroad man of the time who agreed to grant an interview. In one of his early books Pinkerton also lists Rucker as Clerk of the Cook County Court. Tradition has Rucker leaving after a year, but an 1856 letter by Pinkerton is written on stationery bearing Rucker's name. But Attorney Rucker, partner or not, soon disappeared. He remains only a name on a yellowing letterhead.³

Pinkerton's firm was not the first private detective agency in the world as some historians have insisted. Eugene Francois Vidocq, Europe's most celebrated detective, founded his Bureau des Renseignements—Informa- tion Office—in 1832. In the United States, two St. Louis police officers opened an agency when Pinkerton was still working his Dundee cooper- age and assisting the Kane County sheriff to catch counterfeiters. On June 5, 1846, the St. Louis newspaper announced that "Mr. McDonough,

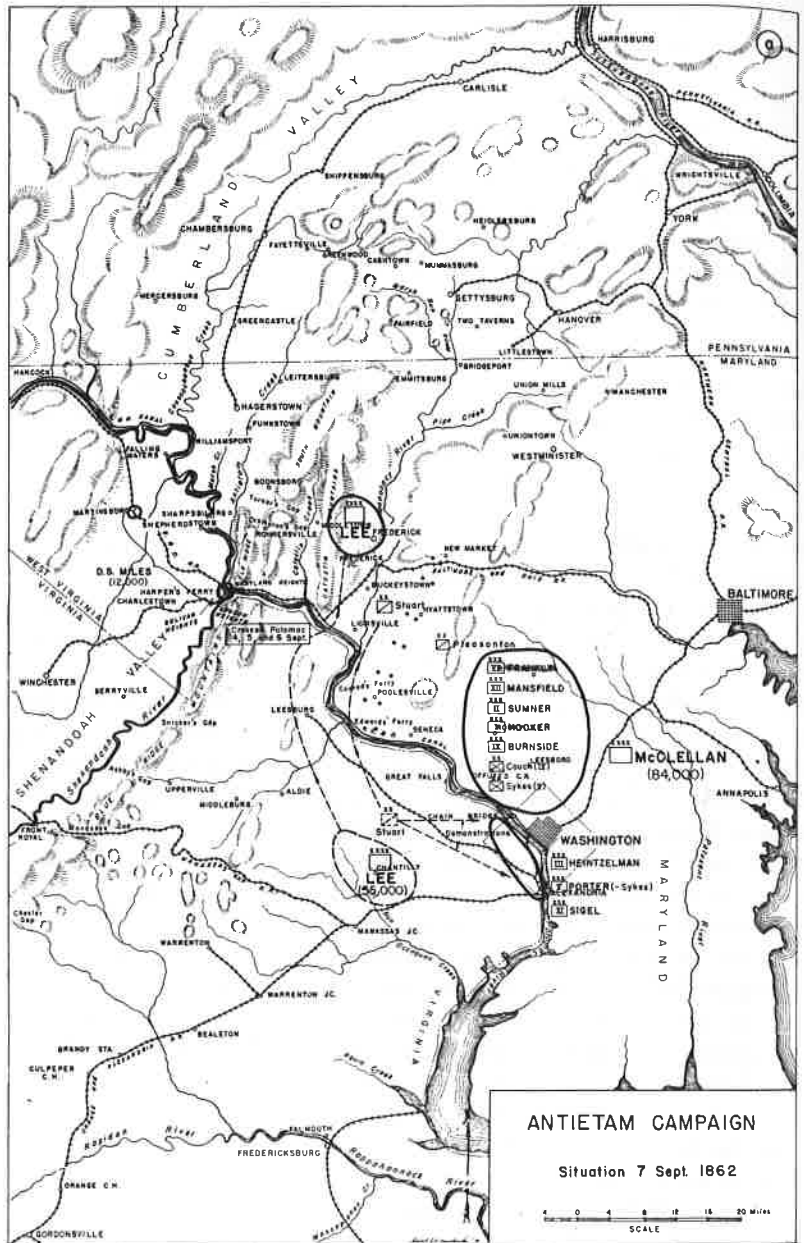
police work, Pinkerton and Bangs arrested Jules Imbert, a famous French forger. Since the thief had been looting the Belmonts and other New York financiers, the feat brought Pinkerton a great deal more than local fame.

In January of that same year, George Brinton McClellan, the Illinois Central's new vice-president and engineer in chief appeared. From the beginning, there was an immediate rapport between the dashing West Pointer and the detective. McClellan's letter books of the late 1850's show that he and Pinkerton held many meetings with William Henry Osborn, the line's president, discussing methods of expanding protection for the line. On December 2, 1858, McClellan was asking Pinkerton to assign "a smart detective to hunt out the sundry small thefts of segars, wines, etc." that occurred along the line. The line's attorney, a tall, rawboned, wryly humorous man from Springfield, also had met Pinkerton. His name was Abraham Lincoln.

The idea of a uniformed guard force was probably growing in Pinkerton's mind, for we find George Power, secretary to McClellan, writing to Pinkerton on December 22, 1858, to commit to paper the ideas he had orally given to McClellan "for a special police force to protect the line; the number of men, expenses and general particulars."

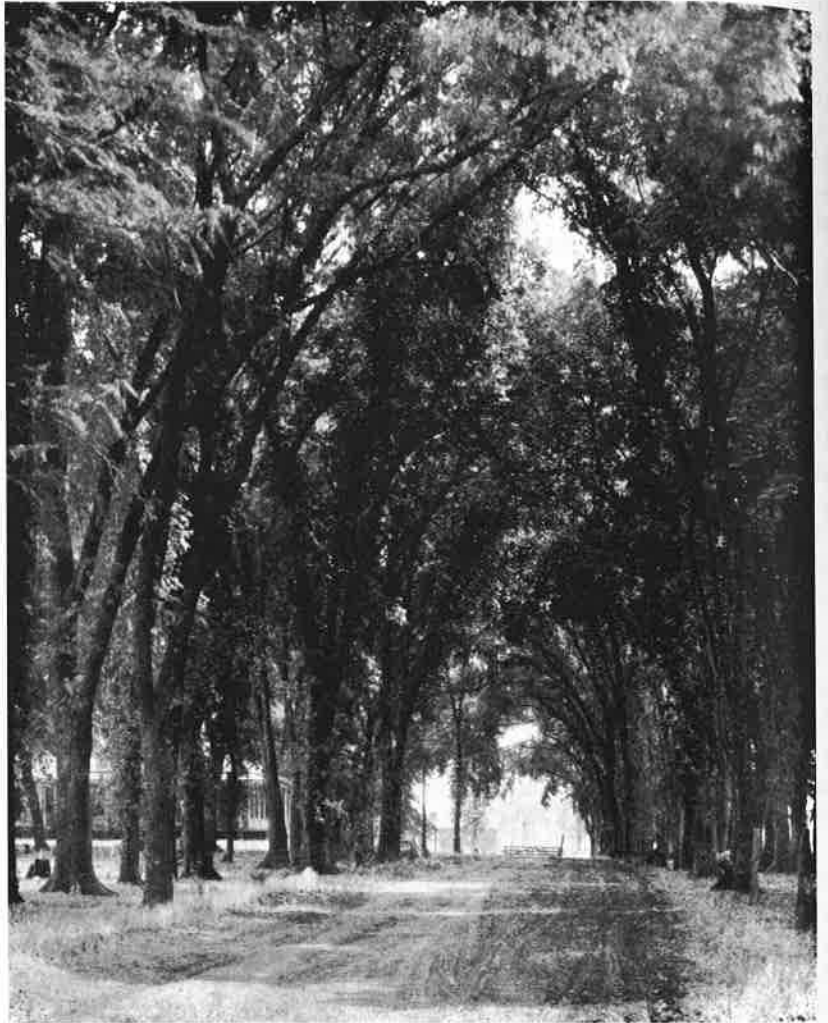
From 1857 to the outbreak of the Civil War, and for many later years, Pinkerton and McClellan were close, socially and in business. It was one of the strangest relationships of their time: the grim, almost humorless detective from the one-room frontier cooperage and the slum tenement in Glasgow and the handsome West Pointer, an observer in the Crimea, a brilliant engineer, and a friend of the great and near great. The motivation for Pinkerton's lasting loyalty and affection was probably very simple: McClellan represented everything Pinkerton ever wanted.

Pinkerton's fervent loyalty and affection for McClellan are sometimes bewildering because McClellan's political beliefs were poles apart from Pinkerton's. This relationship points up the inconsistency in his character. There were times when Pinkerton seemed two men, each with his own belief and philosophy. One could embrace the ideas of the most violent of the abolitionists, while the other could admire and form intimate friendships with financiers and railroad executives who were certainly never the champions of the slaves. The approaching war would bring this duality of Pinkerton's character into startling relief.



ANTIETAM CAMPAIGN
 Situation 7 Sept 1862

SCALE 0 4 8 12 16 20 Miles



West Lane leading to the Pinkerton house. *The New York Public Library*

Pinkerton house. *The New York Public*

Pinkerton, whose beginning in the stark poverty of Glasgow's Gorbals may be cited as psychic explanation for his character and temperament, found serenity in the luxury of building *The Larches*. From a farm it became a showplace with an incongruous policeman's touch. There were three main entrances for the big house with its Negro attendants in spotless blue uniforms and gold buttons. Each entrance had a tiny guard-house with an armed guard.

Joan, who never forgot the fields and flowers of the Dundee countryside, insisted that if there were larch trees there must be flowers. Pinkerton had gardeners plant vast beds of riotous colors. On a warm day visitors could smell their fragrance as they entered the driveway.

There were also a racetrack, a beautiful little fishpond, a "camping grounds" where church revivals were held, and a large wine pavilion known as the Snuggery. In the 1870's Pinkerton had a deep tunnel dug that linked the wine pavilion and the main house; some called it the whim of an eccentric old man, but it was much more than that: Hired killers had tried to assassinate him several times, and, later, after the Molly Maguires' investigation, threats of murder and bombing were so strong, legend insists that he kept a six-shooter in a holster by his bed.

The heart of the estate was the Villa, a square building with a pillared porch on three sides and a cupola where riflemen swept the quiet countryside with glasses, seeking assassins. A wide hall ran the full length of the house. At night the hallway glowed with the light of four huge crystal chandeliers.

Pinkerton never forgot the great days when he was in the field with McClellan. He brought Paul Loose, an artist from Scotland, and commissioned him to do a series of panels depicting wartime events, along with his favorite scene of the Pennsylvania countryside. The original oils, admired by famous men and women of Pinkerton's time on their visits to *The Larches*, are now dark, stained, and torn. But some are still recognizable as "The Battle of Gettysburg," "Sherman's March to the Sea," "McClellan and His Staff," "Bull Run," and the "Secret Service Staff of the Army of the Potomac." In the latter panel Allan Pinkerton in his familiar bowler hat is surrounded by fifteen of his operatives. Over each door on the lower floor he had portraits in oil of the men he knew and admired: McClellan, Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman.

One large panel depicted a section of the countryside on the main line of the Pennsylvania, east of Harrisburg. The oil, entitled "Conewago Bridge," shows a high stone bridge spanning a river on which floats an Indian in a canoe. A wood-burning locomotive with a high stack is crossing the bridge.

The estate soon became a gathering place for Pinkerton's clients and friends. Before World War II, old men who had been boys at the time recalled Pinkerton bringing weekend guests to *The Larches* in a private Pullman car: "It was the big event of the town and we all used to troop

down to see the gay crowd of men and women troop off the train. Pinkerton's carriage with four horsemen and a coachman in livery would be on hand and everything would be shined up." ⁶

The once barefoot young cooper of Dundee now had as his guests the great names of his age: Henry Sanford, president of Adams Express; Commodore Vanderbilt, General Grant, August Belmont, Seward, Burnside, Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase. After an elaborate dinner, Joan would take the ladies on a tour of the estate in a buggy, while Pinkerton led the men to the Snuggery for a few glasses and, if they had been with him in the Civil War, to argue and refight the great battles.

An old man in Onarga remembered running across the fields of The Larches as a child and watching Allan Pinkerton and Joan walking slowly along the winding paths, the summer dusk heavy with the fragrance of the flowers that lined the graveled paths and lawns.



Mr. and Mrs. Allan Pinkerton about 1870-1875. *Chicago Historical Society*

Pinkerton always loved horses and dogs, and colts and blooded horses roamed in the pastures beyond the big house, and the yelping and barking of hounds in the kennels echoed across the countryside in the evening when Pinkerton brought them their food. Later on, there would be a small animal cemetery in the corner of one field where the favorites were buried, each with a tiny headstone.

Because the early West was an important part of the Agency's history, in the Snuggery were wall maps where Pinkerton would trace the move-

and women troop off the train. Pinkerton a coachman in livery would be on hand up." ⁶

of Dundee now had as his guests the president of Adams Express; Commodore August Belmont, Seward, Burnside, for an elaborate dinner, Joan would sit in a buggy, while Pinkerton led the masses and, if they had been with him at the great battles.

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important part of the Agency's history, where Pinkerton would trace the move-

ments of his operatives chasing the outlaw gangs. The tough western Indian ponies, half wild, struck a responsive chord in Pinkerton, and William and Robert never left one of the territories that he didn't give them specific instructions for buying a good horse. This probably accounts for the herd of western mustangs he brought to the estate "just for the sport of watching a good rider breaking them to the saddle." There were also several Shetland ponies and carts for the grandchildren and the children from the nearby farms. One recently remembered how they would ride around the estate with Pinkerton telling them stories of Lincoln and the far-off days of the front lines during the Civil War.

Finally the Villa was finished. Thousands of larch trees had been planted along the driveways. The famous scenes in oil on the walls gleamed in the soft light of the chandeliers. There were footmen in livery, uniformed guards, gardeners, fieldhands, and expert horsemen and grooms for the stables. It was important that the still vivid memories of the tenement on Muirhead Street be wiped out forever. For Allan Pinkerton, The Larches was more than a beautiful, midwestern farm—it was a symbol, his final triumph over the Gorbals.⁷

During his illness and convalescence Allan Pinkerton turned over the administration of his beloved Agency to his sons, William and Robert. As their father had done, they toured the branch offices, poring over the profit-and-loss ledgers, "raising" new business in the slowly recovering South, and personally conducting most of the major investigations. In 1871, Allan returned to his office in Chicago, slower, irascible, but still "A.P.," the Founder. He had been back at his desk only a short time when disaster struck with fury: The great Chicago fire wiped out most of Chicago, including the Pinkerton's National Detective Agency. Early records and his pioneering Rogues' Gallery were reduced to ashes. A major blow was the destruction of his Civil War files, which he was about to sell to the government for \$100,000, a figure never officially confirmed.

Pinkerton had tried desperately to save his records. In February, 1872, he wrote a long letter to his old friend Chief Justice Chase, in Washington, describing how he and his staff tried to drag records from his Washington Street office, only to flee before the fast-moving inferno that jumped the river and roared up the streets with terrifying speed. As Pinkerton said, everything was reduced to ashes within fifty minutes, "including four volumes of my records of the Army of the Potomac, from the time McClellan took over the Army of the Ohio until the time he retired from the field . . . among these the history of Cameron and Stanton was fully portrayed."

However, the detective refused to be defeated. As he wrote to Chase, the buildings were still cooling when he hired a team of carpenters "and was soon made pretty comfortable with some lumber." Pinkerton even

CHAPTER 27

The Death of Allan Pinkerton

In 1880, Allan Pinkerton was badly crippled, almost completely paralyzed, yet he refused to retire. Each morning his carriage brought him to the office on Washington Street, Chicago, where he carefully read the copies of reports neatly stacked on the desk, dictated for hours, then went home to spend most of the afternoon sitting in his gardens with Joan.

There was now peace in the family. Pussy had finally married "Young Chalmers," who was on his way to become an important midwestern industrialist. On Sundays, the big house echoed with the cries and laughter of grandchildren, but old friends were dying, and Joan, his "wee bonnie lass," was confined to her bed much of the time. One of the last projects that Pinkerton insisted be carried out was his favorite employment of "female detectives." He was still doggedly writing to Bangs in New York:

I suppose you have not yet hired a female detective, but I think with some effort you will. I now give you a description of the class of woman you will require. Say a lady about 35 years old, about five feet six or seven inches high, hair dark, black or auburn. I don't think blonde would do. She should be either married or single, but if married her husband must be dead [!], face oval, forehead large and massive. Her hair should be worn plain or very little braided or banged, eyes should be large, whether black, blue or gray, her feet moderately small. An easy talker but careful and one who can keep her own counsel, yet be able to carry on a conversation on any subject and be always self possessed and natural, although assuming a character.

I am anxious to have such a female detective and if you are able to get such a one, I will be highly pleased. We will find plenty of work for her to do by and by. I am anxious for you to give this your strict attention and let me know what you are doing.¹

A short time later Pinkerton dictated another letter to an old friend, publisher of a northern Illinois newspaper, enclosing a paid ad for a "female detective," and listing the same qualifications.

Then, in 1881, the letters to New York and Philadelphia began to dwindle; the fire died; he trembled more, and for the first time sought out his favorite seat in the garden rather than his desk. One day William came to see his father. They sat for some time exchanging comments on the business, with William faithfully presenting a progress report on the Agency's important cases. Then he told his father that the Chicago office had received a telegram that morning informing them that George Bangs had died. He recalled that his father barely nodded, but when William left, Allan was staring straight ahead, hands gripped tightly over the head of his cane, tears rolling silently down his cheeks.

One of the last letters Allan Pinkerton dictated was to William Gladstone, England's prime minister, when the British government was considering hiring the Pinkertons to assist Scotland Yard in the apprehension of the Fenian assassins who had murdered two British officials. Dated July 8, 1882, and labeled "Private and Confidential," Pinkerton's letter warned Gladstone that if his Agency was retained, "I differ very much in my ideas of detective work from the police of Ireland, England and Scotland. . . ." Gladstone was undoubtedly surprised to find this American detective advising him that investigators could only be "honest . . . bold in the truth, sleepless in energy and loyal in thought and act. . . ." It would be very difficult to find investigators possessing such qualifications Pinkerton informed His Lordship, "for it requires great caution to select these men and women." For three pages Pinkerton outlined the methods he would employ to select informers "from men of leisure or the laboring Irishman with the dudeen in his mouth."

Pinkerton also reminded Gladstone that the Agency had worked for the British government "in other matters"; unfortunately, he does not detail those assignments. For the first time in months, probably in deference to Gladstone's position, Pinkerton signed his name to a letter. It is barely discernible, and obviously written by a violently shaking hand. There are no known records of Gladstone's government retaining the Pinkertons, and apparently Scotland Yard persuaded the prime minister that they were quite capable of handling any amount of Fenian terrorism without any help from American detectives, even though the *Times* called them "America's Scotland Yard."²

While Allan was living out his last years in comparative serenity in his Chicago garden, Jesse James, the one symbol of lawlessness the Pinkertons

ER 27

Allan Pinkerton

In 1880, Allan Pinkerton was paralyzed, yet he refused to retire. Each day he went to the office on Washington Street, and the copies of reports neatly stacked on his desk at home to spend most of the afternoon there. His wife, Mary, had finally married "Young" John Pinkerton, an important midwestern industrialist. The house was filled with the cries and laughter of children dying, and Joan, his "wee bonnie" daughter, was of the time. One of the last projects he undertook was his favorite employment of dictating letters to Bangs in New York:

a female detective, but I think with a description of the class of woman 35 years old, about five feet six or seven inches tall, black or auburn. I don't think blonde or married or single, but if married her husband should be of good social position, oval, forehead large and massive. Her hair should be little braided or banged, eyes should be blue or gray, her feet moderately small. An easy-going man, who can keep her own counsel, yet be able to take any subject and be always self possessed and of a strong character.

PINKERTONS IN THE WILD WEST

...ding records ends on a quiet, Miner, certainly the oldest out- e last time by the Pinkertons in tier legend: He held up his he escaped from the vigilantes, d robbed the famous Del Norte hree-man outlaw band that was ia. Captured by a posse, he was e the prison walls.

...ter and telegram to all western Oregon Railroad & Navigation rbett, and had fled to Canada. ounted Police notified William uilty of train robbery and sen-

...on walls couldn't hold Miner, superintendent to obtain the w road agents from the Royal out the Agency, together with g newspaper accounts of his



...ld Bill Miner, when he was al- ost ninety years old



Offices of Pinkerton's National De- tective Agency at 57 Broadway, New York City, in the early 1900's. *Pinkerton's, Inc.*

am Pinkerton idly glanced out leaving behind two surprised national forger in the passing se, and notified Scotland Yard. sted, and a major robbery was er returned to the shop, and to taking his measurements.

am's families. Wives and children, only crime, criminals, and aret Ashland of Chicago, whom with his two daughters married, is business. The old Pinkerton Chicago, huge and empty, was t. He was a familiar figure in fifth Avenue to his home in the as "America's leading detective, y know the exact wealth of Li n the election, or what African ank of Timbuctoo. His methods, act. . . ."

d on Brooklyn's Eighth Avenue led "the handsomest mansion beth Hughes of Denver, was a n family. She was the sister of orado Lead Works, and Heney Institute of Denver. Robert's ealth and position in society: or member of the lace import-Carlisle, whose husband repre-Stock Exchange. The only sur-allan II—of whom his grand-ty of the name"—was brought

n, he was "entering service." apprenticeships, started Allan he business." For several years, e various branch offices across uperintendents, James McPar- gs, and others.

any hours of a day or night to s's only form of relaxation was them." The *Chicago Tribune* o a marked degree." If he went nothing cerebral. One doubts ork of fiction or poetry. Their

letters indicate their reading was confined exclusively to reports of internal business matters, investigations, law-enforcement bulletins, and the daily newspapers. Both William and Robert loved the track, and the only time they grudgingly spared from their business was to attend the races. They were now wealthy men.

Allan Pinkerton's daughter, Joan, then a striking gray-haired matron, was a Chicago society leader, and from newspaper accounts of the time, a busy charity worker. Her father would have been startled to learn that "young Chalmers," who he had predicted at best would be a clerk in his father's countinghouse, had become one of the most important industrialists in the Midwest. In all their letters, from the 1880's to their death, the Pinkertons maintained a curious "Dear Sir" salutation, yet we find a telegram from Robert to the Chicago office: "Don't forget roses for Willie on his birthday."

In 1900, William was forty-four, Robert two years younger. The days in the saddle, chasing outlaws or plodding through jungles on muleback, trailing a bank embezzler, lay in the past. Both were deskbound, content to direct operations from Chicago and New York. Each private office reflected their characteristics. Robert's was neat and businesslike; William's, a hodgepodge of pictures of notables—mostly politicians, sheriffs and marshals, prize-winning dogs, favorite racehorses—and a rolltop desk with bursting pigeonholes. Both were putting on weight, and both had thick black Corsican bandit moustaches. Their Agency was now Big Business, and their political philosophies were decidedly conservative. Before the Homestead Strike of 1892, American labor had viewed the Agency with hostility. By the turn of the century, even though the Pinkertons had adopted a policy of refusing to supply watchmen in strikebound plants, labor still considered them an enemy.

In January, 1906, the Pinkertons were retained by the State of Idaho to solve the murder of former Governor Frank Steunenberg, who had been horribly mangled by a dynamite bomb attached to the gate of his home in Caldwell. The killing was believed to be in retaliation for the occasion when Steunenberg asked President McKinley to send federal troops to restore order after a mob of striking miners had left the huge works at Wardner a flaming ruin. This was not the Agency's first experience in the tough mining country. In 1892, Charlie Siringo, Pinkerton's "cowboy-detective," was sent into the Coeur d'Alene district to alert mineowners for acts of sabotage. Before that, an undercover operative for another detective agency had been discovered, and barely escaped being beaten to death. Siringo joined the miners' union and became its recording secretary. Through a series of reports that he smuggled out of Gem, a mining camp of three stores and six saloons supplying the famous Gem, Helen Frisco, and Black Bear mines, Siringo forestalled some of the bombings and murder plots. However, he was finally recognized, and



Pinkerton detectives James McParland (left) and Charles A. Siringo in Denver at the time of the Steunenberg case. *Pinkerton's, Inc.*



William A. Pinkerton in his Chicago office at the time of the Steunenberg case. *Pinkerton's, Inc.*

after a thrilling manhunt, escaped a mob of miners who intended to "burn him at the stake, as an example of what we do to Pinkerton detectives." ³

The Pinkertons' reentry into the Idaho mining wars would result in an almost unbelievable tale of professional murder and arson—and one of the most interesting and important trials in the history of American jurisprudence, a trial whose ramifications would be felt for decades in this country's labor movement. The investigation would last two years,