

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE PLOT TO STEAL THE LINCOLN CORPSE

There are few incidents connected with the final disposition of Lincoln's remains which are of more human interest than the plot to steal the corpse. Although most students of Lincoln have a vague idea of the episode, the development of the plans and the frustration of the effort are not so easily called to mind.

A band of counterfeiters was found operating in Illinois during the latter part of 1876. It was discovered that an expert engraver, by the name of Benjamin Boyd, was making the plates from which the money originated, and it was thought if he would be apprehended, the gang could be broken up. It was also discovered that a printing press, owned and operated by a certain Dr. Driggs, was being used to strike off the currency. His press was discovered in a freight house at Clinton, Illinois, but it was soon removed and traced to its destination.

A plan was laid by the officers to arrest the engraver and printer at the same time, although they were operating in different towns. The United States secret service men had made Fulton their base of attack, and Capt. Patrick D. Tyrell and John McDonald remained there to arrest Boyd, while Chief Elmer Washburn proceeded to Centralia to pick up Driggs. The engraver was found in his workshop in a deserted storehouse, near the river at Fulton, and a telegram was sent to Washburn, who immediately captured Driggs in a secret room in the top story of a building in Centralia, where he had set up his press.

Boyd and Driggs were tried on October 21, 1876, and both were found guilty, and sentenced. The former and the more important one of the pair was sent to Joliet to serve his term.

The salesmen for the gang, who dealt in the worthless money, were Terrance Mullens and Jack Hughes. Their chief locality for the distribution of the goods was Chicago. Running short of funds after the arrest of their accomplices, and with their engraver now in prison, they began to discuss plans to have him released.

There is some evidence that they first conceived of their weird plot at Lincoln, Illinois, in a saloon on Pulaski Street. Possibly their presence in a town, named after the martyred president, and which he is said to have christened with a watermelon, may have suggested the possibility of stealing

the lamented Lincoln's body and holding it as a ransom for the release of Boyd.

Before their plan became mature they had raised their bounty and not only were they to demand the release of Boyd, but also ask for a cash settlement of \$200,000, to boot. Possibly as they visualized this amount of cash the release of Boyd may have become a secondary matter. Their plans were to remove the body from the tomb at Springfield, and transport it to the sand dunes of Indiana. There they intended to deposit it in a secluded place between two trees where the wind would so blow the sand that the traces of their own presence there would be obscured, and the body preserved until it would be redeemed by the payment of the funds.

Soon after the arrest and conviction of their confederates, Mullins and Hughes were suspected of their part in the counterfeiting enterprise, and Lewis S. Swengles, a detective, was ordered to shadow the pair. He did such an excellent job that they soon made him their confidant, and revealed enough of their plans so that he was invited to assist them after he had left the impression that he had some experience in snatching bodies.

The date set for the raid in Springfield was November 7th, 1876. The election of President Hayes occurred on that day, and it was contemplated that election night would be an ideal time for the effort. In the meantime Swengles had kept his other detective associates acquainted with what he knew about the proceedings. At the appointed time not only Mullens, Hughes and Swengles boarded a Chicago train for Springfield, but Capt. P. D. Tyrell, John McDonald, and a force of detectives also found quarters in the sleeping car of the train, while the three confederates occupied the smoker. Just before the Springfield station was reached, the officers were let off in the freight yards without any suspicions aroused on the part of the counterfeiters.

Upon reaching Springfield the part each one of the three men was to play in the abduction was assigned. Hughes was to go immediately to the tomb and make a survey of the situation. Mullens had the task of providing the necessary tools, and Swengles, the detective, was to be responsible for transportation of the body by securing a

vehicle which he assured he could acquire.

An interesting detail about the arrangements called for the wrapping of the tools used in an old newspaper which they felt sure those discovering the empty crypt would preserve as evidence. A part of the front page of the paper was ingeniously torn off through the title and date. This was to be sent to Boyd in the penitentiary so that he might prove he was in touch with the kidnapers, and with the payment of the ransom money could produce the body.

In the preliminary plans of the plot the detective, Swengles, was supposed to act as a watchman on the outside of the tomb. This would give him an opportunity to signal the other secret service men hiding in the registration room of the monument, when the time was ripe to catch the culprits in the act of robbing the grave. At the last moment, however, Swengles was given a lamp to hold within the crypt. It was not until the marble sarcophagus had been mutilated, the end and part of top removed, and the casket holding the body partly pulled from the stone receptacle that Swengles was free to signal. He was sent for the vehicle, but instead notified the secret service men.

As soon as Swengles left on his supposed errand for the horse and wagon, Hughes and Mullens hid in some nearby bushes to await the return of Swengles. They had just reached their hiding place when they saw the group of detectives rush around the monument and enter the tomb. Of course the officers found no grave robbers present. The counterfeiters now conscious that their plans were known made their escape.

Several days after the failure of their plot, they were arrested in Chicago and brought to Springfield for trial. The law at that time provided no penalty for an attempt to steal a dead body, so a charge of burglary was entered against them, and they were sent to the penitentiary for a year.

It is of interest to note that the Pinkerton detective agency which warned Lincoln of the Baltimore plot to assassinate him, on the way to the inauguration, and which became invaluable to the government during the hostilities, conclude their services to the martyred Lincoln by frustrating the plans of those who would steal his corpse.