

Mister 880

Log Line:

One counterfeiter. One plan. One dollar.

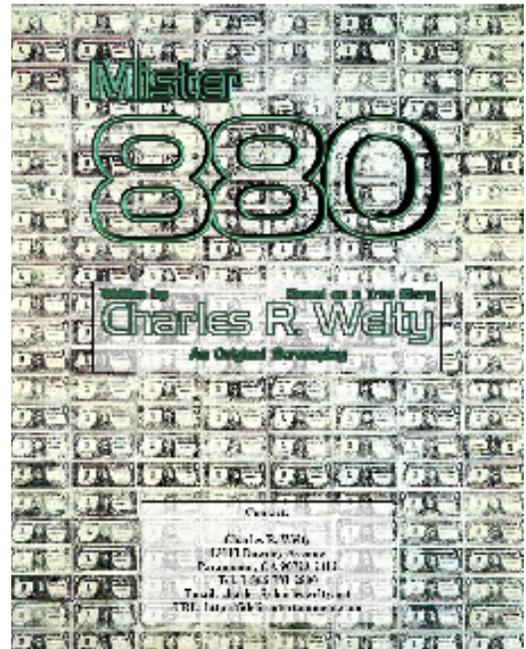
Story Synopsis:

Edward Mueller is the most prolific and sought-after counterfeiter in American history. Dozens of agents have been working in vain for ten years to find him. He is known only by his Treasury Department file number: Mister 880. What is his masterpiece of counterfeit art, his bill of choice? Is it the one hundred dollar bill? No. The fifty? No. The twenty? No. The ten? No. The five? No. Surely not... surely not the one dollar bill? Yep.

In the late summer of 1938, an elderly widower named Edward Mueller found that he was in need of money for the support of his dog and himself. He was a man of simple tastes, and the dog was an undemanding mongrel terrier. Mr. Mueller had for many years been a superintendent in apartment buildings on the upper East Side. Living in the basements of these buildings, he and his wife had raised two children, a boy and a girl. By the time Mrs. Mueller died, in 1937, the children had grown up and gone off to homes of their own. The son had a job and was doing well; the daughter had married.

After the death of his wife, Mueller moved out of the basement and rented a small, sunny flat on the top floor of a tenement near Broadway and Ninety-sixth Street. Mueller tried for a while to make a living as a junkman. He was sixty-three at that time and was gentle, sweet-tempered, and strongly independent. Only five feet three inches tall, he had a lean, hard-muscled frame, a healthy pink face, bright blue eyes, a shiny bald dome, a fringe of snowy hair over his ears, a wispy white mustache and hardly any teeth. He was able to sell some of the odds and ends he picked up to wholesale junk dealers, but before many months had gone by, he began to realize that he wasn't making enough to live on, and that if he didn't do better his savings would soon be gone and he would be destitute.

The life he had lived had been a respectable and law-abiding one. Everybody who had ever known Mueller would have said that he was probably the last man in the world to try to make money dishonestly. That was exactly what Mueller did, however. In November, 1938, he became a counterfeiter of one-dollar bills. When he needed cash, he stepped into his kitchen and turned some out on a small, hand-driven printing press he had set up in a corner next to the sink. Then, with his pushcart and his dog, he would go out into the streets, pick up his odds and ends of junk, and pass one or two of his counterfeit bills. For ten years, he passed them at the rate of forty or fifty a month, dividing them equitably among the storekeepers of his own neighborhood and storekeepers in other neighborhoods around New York. During that period, the United States Secret Service conducted a manhunt for Mueller that exceeded in intensity and scope any other manhunt in the chronicles of counterfeiting. The Secret Service called him Mr. Eight Eighty, and then Old Mr. Eight Eighty, after the number of the file kept on him at Secret Service Headquarters, in Washington, for in those years they knew him only by the bills he passed.



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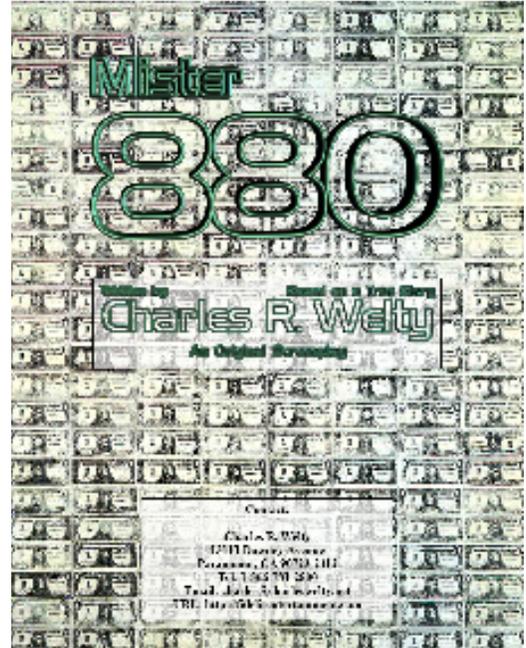
Edward Mueller is the most prolific and sought-after counterfeiter in American history. Dozens of agents have been working in vain for ten years to find him. He is known only by his Treasury Department file number: Mister 880. What is his masterpiece of counterfeit art, his bill of choice? Is it the one hundred dollar bill? No. The fifty? No. The twenty? No. The ten? No. The five? No. Surely not... surely not the one dollar bill? Yep.

In the late summer of 1938, an elderly widower named Edward Mueller found that he was in need of money for the support of his dog and himself. He was a man of simple tastes, and the dog was an undemanding mongrel terrier. Mr. Mueller had for many years been a superintendent in apartment buildings on the upper East Side. Living in the basements of these buildings, he and his wife had raised two children, a boy and a girl. By the time Mrs. Mueller died, in 1937, the children had grown up and gone off to homes of their own. The son had a job and was doing well; the daughter had married.

After the death of his wife, Mueller moved out of the basement that had been their last home together and rented a small, sunny flat on the top floor of a brownstone tenement near Broadway and Ninety-sixth Street. He and the dog took possession of it in the spring of 1938. Feeling that he was too old to be a superintendent any longer, Mueller tried for a while to make a living as a junkman. He was sixty-three at that time and was gentle, sweet-tempered, and strongly independent. Only five feet three inches tall, he had a lean, hard-muscled frame, a healthy pink face, bright blue eyes, a shiny bald dome, a fringe of snowy hair over his ears, a wispy white mustache and hardly any teeth.

He bought a pushcart second-hand and, accompanied by the dog, roamed the neighborhood when the weather was good, picking up junk in vacant lots and along the river front under the West Side Highway. He went about his work in a leisurely manner and always looked happy. Sometimes he stopped to talk to strangers who wanted to talk, and at other times he carried on fragmentary, one-sided conversations with the dog that trotted at his heels. He was able to sell some of the odds and ends he picked up to wholesale junk dealers, but before many months had gone by, he began to realize that he wasn't making enough to live on, and that if he didn't do better his savings would soon be gone and he would be destitute.

When his son and daughter visited him, and when he went to see them, Mueller said that he was getting along all right and didn't need a thing. For a full half century, he had depended only on himself, and he had the flinty pride of an elderly man who had worked hard since he was a boy of thirteen and had never asked help from anybody. The life he had lived had been a respectable and law-abiding one. Everybody who had ever known Mueller would have said that he was probably the last man in the



world to try to make money dishonestly. That was exactly what Mueller did, however. In November, 1938, he became a counterfeiter of one-dollar bills. He continued to look happy and kept on living on a modest scale in the sunny, top-floor flat, cooking his own meals, doing his own laundry, walking his own dog, and making his own money. When he needed cash, he stepped into his kitchen and turned some out on a small, hand-driven printing press he had set up in a corner next to the sink. Then, with his pushcart and his dog, he would go out into the streets, pick up his odds and ends of junk, and pass one or two of his counterfeit bills. For ten years, he passed them at the rate of forty or fifty a month, dividing them equitably among the storekeepers of his own neighborhood and storekeepers in other neighborhoods around New York. During that period, the United States Secret Service conducted a manhunt for Mueller that exceeded in intensity and scope any other manhunt in the chronicles of counterfeiting. The Secret Service called him Mr. Eight Eighty, and then Old Mr. Eight Eighty, after the number of the file kept on him at Secret Service Headquarters, in Washington, for in those years they knew him only by the bills he passed.

At the buildings in which Mueller had worked as a superintendent, he was highly thought of by his employers and by the tenants who occupied the apartments over the basements in which he and his family had lived. He had done his work efficiently, with good-natured gravity, and had given the impression of being thoughtful and occasionally a dryly humorous man. Once a lady tenant asked him to see if he could fix her child's electric train, the toy having stalled late on Christmas Eve. He looked it over, went down to his basement home and got some tools and came back upstairs. Sitting on the floor near the Christmas tree in the tenant's living room, he silently went to work on the train. "Hate to bother you with such a silly thing," the tenant remarked. Mueller looked up at her, grinned, and asked gently, "If it is a silly thing, why did you buy it?" The tenant could think of no answer to that, and she stood there while Mueller went on working.

After a moment, he looked up, grinned at her again, and said, "If it is out of order, it should be fixed." He fussed with the toy for a few minutes more and then turned on the current. The train ran around the track satisfactorily. The tenant thanked him and tipped him five dollars. She never forgot the incident. Speaking of it recently, after more than twenty years, she said, "He made you feel that he was thinking serious thoughts all the time and that he was dignified, while you yourself were empty-headed and frivolous, but he was an awfully good superintendent."

Until the summer of 1938, Mueller seems to have made only two noteworthy attempts to become anything more than a good superintendent. In June, 1905, when he was a young man, he sent blueprints for a new kind of camera to the Eastman Kodak Company and received a letter informing him that the company didn't think his invention was commercially practicable but complimenting him on its "extraordinary ingeniousness." Mueller kept the letter and showed it, with diffident satisfaction, to friends and acquaintances. He still had it when he moved into the top-floor flat in 1938. It was frayed and yellowed with age, and he would hold it carefully when he showed it to his new neighbors.

Mueller told these neighbors that he had also invented, when he was a middle-aged man, a Venetian blind that would roll up and down like a window shade. "You didn't have to pull a string this way and that way to make her go up and stay up," he would say. "You'd just give her a twitch, like you do a window shade, and she'd go up and stay up. Or you'd just pull her down, and she'd stay down. It was simple, my Venetian blind." When the neighbors asked him why he hadn't made a fortune out of it, he would explain that the people who manufactured Venetian blinds thought that his wouldn't be profitable.

“They told me it was simple and clever, mind you,” he would say. “One young fellow who ran a factory over in Jersey nailed her onto the wall of his office when I went to see him, and then he kept pulling her up and down and saying, ‘I’ll be darned!’ but he thought it would cost too much to manufacture it. I remember exactly what he looked like, rolling my Venetian blind up and down, there in his office. He was a fat young fellow and he had on a blue suit and a white shirt. That shirt had a soft collar on it, and the collar had little buttons on it that held the corners of the collar onto the shirt.”

Mueller usually interspersed such talk with short silences, during which he grinned at his listeners, as he had grinned at the lady tenant on the Christmas Eve twenty years earlier. Because he had lost most of his teeth by 1938, his grin was striking.

“Mr. Mueller had a toothless grin if I ever saw a toothless grin,” one of his neighbors remarked recently. “When he grinned, he looked kind of foolish, but when he wasn’t grinning, he looked nice, and’ he looked smart.”

Another thing that impressed people who knew Mueller at that time was the fact that his mongrel terrier had no name. He was plainly devoted to the dog, and they used to ask him why he didn’t name it. The explanation he gave contains another hint of the peculiar mold of his character. He said the dog didn’t need a name. He would grin and ask mildly, “What good would a name do the dog? When I talk to him, he knows I’m talking to him, don’t he? And I know who he is without calling him by some made-up name, don’t I?”

Mueller was delighted when people admitted that although his point of view was unusual, there was certainly some sense in it. When Mueller came to the conclusion that his junk business was a failure and that he needed an additional income, the solution he devised for his economic problem was out of the ordinary for a man of his age, disposition, and background, but the way he conducted himself as a counterfeiter was perhaps characteristic of him as an individual.

Although he became in a sense the most successful American counterfeiter of modern times, he put on no airs and he made no change in his standard of living. His son and his daughter, as well as his neighbors, were unaware of what he was up to. The first counterfeit bill he passed on his fellow-citizens, in 1938, was a very bad copy of a one-dollar bill. When his career as a counterfeiter came to an end, in 1948, he was still turning out the same crude dollar bills from the same kind of inferior plates, on the same hand-driven printing press in the same corner of the same kitchen of the same top-floor tenement flat, and he never turned out more counterfeit dollars than he needed to support his dog and himself.

Counterfeiting is a prehistoric form of gainful skulduggery. The idea of money was conceived somewhere on the other side of antiquity, and so was the idea of counterfeit money. The idea of money is older than the idea of counterfeit money, but older, perhaps, by no more than a few minutes. There is evidence of the use of both the genuine article and the counterfeit article in the earliest recorded civilizations, and it has been established that primitive tribes had both good money and bad money before there were any civilizations to record. It seems that immediately after certain people realized that they could easily make tokens to represent cumbersome property, such as collections of animal skins and stores of foodstuffs, certain other people awoke to the fact that they could just as easily make tokens to represent the tokens that represented the cumbersome property. The two ideas are so closely related that they are practically twins, and, like the products of the ideas, they are hard to tell apart. If it were not for counterfeit money, the story of money might be simply beautiful. As it is, the pattern formed by the fateful entwining of money and counterfeit money is intricately grotesque.

Among all the rogues in history, no class has been more persistent than counterfeiters, and only thieves have been more numerous. No penalty for the crime has ever been devised that had any conclusive effect on the obstinacy of counterfeiters or on the popularity of counterfeiting. Civilized people with money they hope is valuable have always possessed a fierce abhorrence of money they know is worthless, and their treatment of counterfeiters has come close to being savage. Until comparatively recent times, by thinking up and carrying out punishments for counterfeiters, civilized people went about as far as they are likely to go in that direction. Some of the earliest counterfeiters laboriously clipped coins around the edges and passed the clipped coins on to their fellow-citizens. Then they manufactured counterfeit coins, using the valuable metal they had clipped to make a thin coating for them. To discourage this kind of thing, some of the earliest sound money men laboriously clipped counterfeiters around the edges, beginning with their ears and going on from there. During the formative period of the Roman Empire, the ears of counterfeiters were cut off and the counterfeiters were also deprived of their citizenship rights. Later on, the noses of Roman counterfeiters were cut off, along with their ears and their citizenship rights. By the time the Roman civilization reached its apex, the hands, feet, noses, ears, and citizenship rights of counterfeiters were clipped away one after another, and the same counterfeiters were then forthrightly castrated. What was left of them was thrown into an arena full of hungry lions. Unclipped and uneaten counterfeiters of that era of civilization do not seem to have been deterred by the threat of these penalties.

As Roman civilization declined, counterfeiting became increasingly popular and was taken up by people in all walks of Roman life. Following a course that had been experimented with in earlier civilizations, counterfeiting was carried on by many respectable individuals and eventually by the State itself. Senators, lawyers, physicians, merchants and empire-builders from the best Roman families were caught counterfeiting. Emperors who believed in a sound currency unhesitatingly fed these leading citizens to the lions, after they had been deprived of their citizenship rights and otherwise clipped. When Nero became emperor, he found the idea of counterfeiting inviting and, in his imperial position, was carried away by the wonderful simplicity of it. The bizarre design formed by the mixture of money and counterfeit money reached a kind of decadent perfection under Nero. Using the government mints, he brought about a synthesis of the two opposing ideas. He turned out worthless leaden replicas of good silver coins in such great quantities that the Roman monetary system collapsed and many civilized Europeans went back to the barter system.

With minor variations, this preposterous cycle has been repeated many times since the fall of the Roman Empire. During the Renaissance, after a counterfeiter had been thoroughly clipped, his eyes were gouged out and he was then drawn, quartered, reassembled, and burned at the stake. Monarchs grew accustomed to having some of their most trusted courtiers and some of their most respected civic and religious leaders brought before them as convicted counterfeiters. On the whole, they punished these fellows almost as severely as they punished common counterfeiters, showing only occasional flashes of leniency. When, for example, the Abbot of Messenden was caught making and passing counterfeit coins, King Edward III stipulated that he be hanged and drawn but, in view of his calling, not clipped or quartered. Henry VIII, like Nero, went in for counterfeiting as the head of the state, and so debased his currency that it collapsed. Various kings of France ruined their currencies in the same way. Through the ages, counterfeit money has caused the downfall of one monetary system after another, with the result that nations have periodically given up the idea of money and have gone back to the barter system. Civilized people have nevertheless been inclined to think of money as a civilized idea and have been amazed whenever they have discovered that uncivilized people had money.

Tacitus records the fact that the barbarous Goths and even the undeveloped, loose-lipped Franks had monetary systems, although they lived in wooden huts and didn't have slaves. Tacitus writes about this in the tone of a dumfounded historian. The Pilgrims who landed in New England thought money would be something new to the Indians. When they found that the half-naked, red-skinned aborigines, using their primitive beads, had conceived and developed the idea of money, and seemed to be devoted to it, they were flabbergasted and, according to some memoirs, aggrieved.

The tribulations of the early white settlers in New England were multiplied by the fact that while certain Indians had been engaged in establishing a monetary system based on wampum, certain other Indians had been engaged in hacking at that monetary system by making counterfeit wampum. The Pilgrims were accustomed to biting coins and ringing them vigorously on cobblestones to make sure they weren't counterfeit. The Indians were accustomed to spitting on strings of blue wampum and rubbing the shell beads vigorously to make sure that they were the hearts of genuine quahog clamshells and weren't just pieces of cheap white sea shells that had been dyed blue with the juice of wild huckleberries by Indian counterfeiters.

In the beginning, the Pilgrims didn't know how to detect counterfeit wampum and the Indians didn't know how to detect counterfeit coins. In spite of their privileged upbringing, the Pilgrims were at a disadvantage. Either because they hadn't had much money or because they had thought they wouldn't need it in a place like America, they had brought very little of it with them. There was a shortage of both genuine and counterfeit coins in early Colonial times, whereas there was an abundance of both genuine and counterfeit wampum. Wampum was therefore enthusiastically adopted by the Pilgrims as the medium of exchange. The Pilgrims soon found themselves stuck with fathoms of counterfeit wampum that rascally Indians had passed on them. When the Pilgrims tried to pass it back, even the most ignorant Indian would look at it, spit on it, rub it, drop it on the ground, fold his arms, and shake his head. In time, the Pilgrims and other early colonists learned to spit on wampum and rub it, in order to make sure that it was the real quahog. In a flurry of naivete, they passed a sheaf of anti-counterfeit-wampum laws.

Following the Roman pattern, the legal penalties for Colonial counterfeiters were at first mild. In 1647, for example, the General Court of Elections in Their Majesties' Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations ordered that "if the Indians shall offer to putt away upon exchange or barter their false peag string beads [wampum] for good, and warrant it to be so, and it be found otherwise, it shall be confiscated to the Public Treasury."

This measure appears to have put the savage red men in their place, but it wasn't long before some of the frailer white men began making counterfeit wampum on a scale that Indian counterfeiters had never envisioned. The first glass beads presented to the Indians of New England were designed to look not like glass beads but like wampum, and they were accepted as wampum by both undiscerning Indians and undiscerning palefaces. In the beginning, the white counterfeiters got this counterfeit wampum from England, where it was made in undercover factories. Later, they established undercover glass-wampum factories over here. What penalties were meted out to these counterfeiters is not known, but it is a matter of historical record that the chaos they created caused the collapse of the wampum currency.

By 1690, paper money, in the form of bills of credit, was being used in place of wampum. In the same year, counterfeit bills of credit were being used in place of genuine bills of credit. The use of money and the counterfeiting of it retained most of their traditionally weird aspects. The first recorded trial of

counterfeiters on this continent took place in Rhode Island in 1704. Among those convicted of knowingly passing counterfeit bills of credit was Peregrine White, Jr., a son of the Peregrine White who was born aboard the Mayflower on its first trip over and is generally called “the first native white American.” Young Peregrine told where he had got the bad paper, pleaded guilty, testified for the prosecution, and got off with a fine and only three months in jail. Of the others, who were found guilty of printing, as well as passing, the fake bills of credit, one was sentenced to “sit in the pillory for one hour on a lecture day, and then and there have one ear cut off [and] to suffer twelve months’ imprisonment.” Counterfeiting in America had, by these primeval steps, reached the clipping stage. The penalty for it was swiftly raised to two ears per counterfeiter, and heavier prison terms were imposed, along with longer stretches in the pillory. Counterfeiting increased. Soon Colonial counterfeiters were publicly whipped after both ears had been cut off and they were then nailed to the pillory instead of being allowed to shift around while sitting in it. By this time there were many women counterfeiters. Some of them were grandmothers of the daughters of the American Revolution. They, too, were whipped, but instead of their ears being clipped, their heads were shaved. Still later, Colonial counterfeiters, no matter who or what, were hanged. Counterfeiting became even more popular. The currency based on bills of credit collapsed.

In 1772, Colonel Philip Schuyler made a speech before the General Assembly of the Province of New York in which he proposed that “paper money be backed with the devices of an all-seeing eye in the clouds, a cart and a coffin, three felons on a gallows, a weeping father and mother and several small children, a burning pit, human figures poured into it by fiends, and a label with the words ‘Let the Counterfeiter Rot’ The Assembly decided that it would be too expensive to put all that on the back of a piece of paper money.

It did authorize money with “‘Tis Death to the Counterfeit” boldly printed on the back. Counterfeiters found it easy to reproduce this simple phrase, and lightheartedly did so. The new currency soon collapsed. Counterfeiting caused the disintegration of various other paper currencies, both before and after the American Revolution.

During the Revolution, the British Government used its own printing presses for counterfeiting and flooded America: with spurious Continental dollars. Its intention was to create a financial panic, which, it was hoped, would stop the Revolution. The most memorable result of its effort was the expression “not worth a Continental.” Counterfeiting is still going on in this country, but it is no longer as profitable or as popular as it used to be. It is not widely regarded as a practice that will cause the collapse of the present American monetary system.

Contemporary counterfeiters, when they are caught, are usually sent to federal penitentiaries, where only their hair is clipped. One reason for the decline of counterfeiting in the United States is that it is now extremely difficult and fairly expensive to make bad American money that looks and feels anything like good American money. Another reason is that it is just about impossible for an ordinary counterfeiter to stay in business very long without being caught by the United States Secret Service.

The Secret Service is responsible for protecting the nation’s Presidents from assassins and the nation’s currency from counterfeiters. It is made up of conscientious and overworked men who carry out their duties quietly, anonymously, and with an efficiency that approaches omniscience. Since the fiscal year 1948 only \$137,318 out of the \$27,902,858,000 of American money in circulation was discovered to be counterfeit. The Secret Service is the all-seeing eye in the clouds that Colonel Schuyler wistfully

dreamed of in pre-Revolutionary days. In 1948, Secret Service men seized \$2,948,437 in counterfeit money before the counterfeiters who made it were able to put it into circulation.

When a man is a counterfeiter, the temptation to make a whole lot of money, and to make it fast, is more nearly irresistible and seemingly more easily gratified than it is in any other line of work, honest or dishonest. Counterfeiters are greedy men when they take up counterfeiting or else become greedy men soon afterward.

Old Mr. Eight Eighty's lack of greed was unique and indicated a restraint on his part that bordered on asceticism. When the elderly counterfeiter passed his first counterfeit dollar bill, at a cigar store on Broadway near 102nd Street, in November, 1938, the proprietor -- a busy man, who ran the store without assistants -- didn't look at the bill or feel it carefully when he accepted it.

That afternoon, he took it to the neighborhood bank as part of his day's deposit. A teller detected it. He deducted one dollar from the cigar-store proprietor's deposit slip and told him the law required that the bank turn a bad bill over to the Secret Service.

In keeping with the efficiency of this branch of the Treasury Department, a Secret Service man questioned the proprietor of the cigar store the very next day. The proprietor said that he had no idea who had slipped him the counterfeit bill. Although he was frequently interrupted by customers, he received from the Secret Service man a full course of instruction in the detection of counterfeit bills and was told to call the traffic cop on the corner if anybody tried to pass another one on him.

Mr. Eight Eighty's dollar bill was sent to the Secret Service Headquarters, where it was given a routine going over by some students of counterfeit money in the Secret Service laboratory in the Treasury Building and then sent on to the technical laboratory at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing for full analysis.

Before it can wear out, all United States currency that is not destroyed or hoarded eventually is turned in to the Treasury. Counterfeit money is usually detected by individuals or banks and turned over to the Secret Service before it reaches that stage. The Secret Service laboratory has a file on every series of counterfeit bills that has ever come to its attention. Most of these files are marked "Closed," which means that the counterfeiter who made the plates from which the bills were printed is in a federal penitentiary, or, having served his sentence, is being checked up on from time to time by the Secret Service, or is known to have stopped making counterfeit money, or is known to be dead.

The files marked "Open" contain the products of counterfeiters who are still active and for whom the Secret Service is looking. The men in the laboratory can tell one counterfeiter's work from another's almost as surely as fingerprint experts can tell one fingerprint from another.

Practically all counterfeit paper money these days is produced by a photoengraving process. The counterfeiter takes photographs of both sides of a genuine bill, makes engravings from them, and from the engravings prints his counterfeit money. Genuine money is printed from hand-made steel engravings.

These engravings are by first-class artists. There are today only five or six artists in this country who can draw with an engraver's tool on a piece of steel a portrait that is as warm and lifelike as the portrait of George Washington that appears on dollar bills, or the portrait of Abraham Lincoln on five-dollar bills, or those of other great Americans on larger bills. In these portraits, the hair and/or whiskers look

real, the faces possess verisimilitude, and the eyes have the highlights and shadows of open, living, human eyes.

The artists who draw these portraits and the craftsmen who produce the intricate designs elsewhere on the bills make an honest living working for the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Counterfeiters' attempts to copy the portraits and decorations on modern United States currency by working freehand with an engraver's tool on a piece of steel have invariably resulted in counterfeit bills that are easier to detect than those made by the photoengraving process.

In the entire period since a national currency was introduced, in 1863, only one counterfeiter has turned up who was a good enough artist to copy a genuine bill with any success by the freehand method, but he didn't try to do it with an engraver's tool. He worked with a camel's-hair brush on paper, drawing a single hundred dollar bill at a time. His name was Emanuel Ninger. He was known to the Secret Service men as Jim the Penman until he was caught by them in 1896. His method was to place a genuine hundred-dollar bill under a piece of glass and put a strong light beneath it. He would then trace the outlines of the portrait and other designs on a piece of paper of the right size. Then, with magnificent draftsmanship, he would copy the portrait and the designs, using only his camel's-hair brush and his own green and black inks. Like the artists who work for the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, he was a genius in his way, and his counterfeit bills were works of art in their way. They were so nearly perfect that banks accepted them.

Jim the Penman's first counterfeit bill went through many hands and was detected as a counterfeit only when it was examined by the Secret Service after it had been turned in at the Sub-Treasury in New Orleans. The Secret Service looked for Jim the Penman for many years and caught up with him, at last, in Jersey City. Secret Service men followed him around for a few days and then arrested him in the act of getting one of his hundred dollar bills changed in a New York bank. His camel's-hair brush and his paper and ink were confiscated, and he was sent to a federal penitentiary. He made only a modest living by passing his works of art. He could have earned much more than that by helping the Bureau of Engraving and Printing make genuine money, but there was, as he explained, something about counterfeiting that appealed to him.

Counterfeiters have found that the portraits, as well as the subtle shadings of the borders and other features of United States currency, lose much of their clarity and liveness in the photoengraving process. In order to produce even a fair plate, a counterfeiter must first make a photograph of the bill and retouch it by hand, strengthening as best he can the fine lines that would otherwise be lost when the engraving is made. Striving for an unattainable perfection, the counterfeiter then usually tries to etch in on the plate some of the lines and shadings that didn't, in spite of the retouching, come through clearly.

This freehand work makes the finished counterfeit bill look a trifle more nearly genuine, but to the men who work in the Secret Service laboratory it also gives each series of counterfeit bills a distinctive quality. This helps them in their efforts to tell counterfeiters apart and, in time, to catch them.

When Mr. Eight Eighty's first counterfeit dollar bill was examined at the Secret Service laboratory, it was found to be unlike any other counterfeit bill, of any denomination, in the files. There was no open file of dollar bills, because in the late nineteen-thirties no counterfeiter besides Mr. Eight Eighty considered it worth while to make a business of turning out dollar bills. Even in the closed files, which go back to the earliest days of counterfeiting in the United States, there weren't many cases of counterfeit dollar bills. A new "open" file was set up. At first, the counterfeiter was known among

Secret Service men as Mr. Eight Eighty, but in a few years his case achieved the distinction of being the oldest of the open cases in the Secret Service files, and it was then that they began calling him Old Mr. Eight Eighty. During the ten years they looked for Mr. Eight Eighty, they arrested and convicted other persons on counterfeiting charges and seized \$3,458,235 in counterfeit money before it got into circulation. The hardest man they ever tried to catch was Old Mr. Eight Eighty.

The lengths to which counterfeiters have gone in trying to outwit the modern American monetary system is exceeded only by the lengths to which the Secret Service has gone in unmasking modern American counterfeiters. In their time, Secret Service men have caught residents of New York's Chinatown who bored tiny holes in the edges of gold pieces, dug out most of the gold inside, and refilled the hollowed coins with cement or mud. They have caught counterfeiters who minted, in portable mints they carried around in their automobiles, fairly good-looking pewter fifty-cent pieces. They have caught counterfeiters who shaved Lincoln's portrait off the fronts of genuine five-dollar bills, replaced it with a conveniently proportioned likeness of a New York judge that had appeared on some campaign leaflets, and, after raising the numerals and lettering, passed the bills in the jurist's own neighborhood as twenty-dollar bills. Secret Service men have posed as counterfeiters and as wholesale buyers of counterfeit money, and have by other hazardous means broken up ring after ring of mass-production counterfeiters with influential underworld connections. They once put two especially persistent counterfeiters behind prison bars and afterward found that they were going right on counterfeiting behind the bars.

Most of the counterfeiters the Secret Service men have caught, or have ever heard of, were extraordinarily clever craftsmen. Old Mr. Eight Eighty was so inept that his counterfeit one-dollar bills were laughable if they were even casually looked at or felt. His clumsily retouched portrait of

Washington was murky and death-like. His border work and his numerals and lettering were botched. The paper he used was an inexpensive bond paper that can be bought at any stationery store. Old Mr. Eight Eighty kept passing the things, though, and he passed them at what the Secret Service considered a hideously humble rate. None of his fellow citizens ever looked at or felt his dollar bills when he passed them. They were, after all, only dollar bills. When people discovered that they had been stuck with them, they were, it seems, taught a lesson only to the extent that the loss of a dollar ever teaches the average American a lesson. Long before the Secret Service men caught up with Old Eight Eighty, in the spring of 1948, and arrested him in the kitchen of his sunny, top-floor tenement flat near Broadway and Ninety-sixth Street, he was, besides being known to them as Old Mr. Eight Eighty, generally recognized by them as the most exasperating counterfeiter of all time, and the least greedy.

The Secret Service search for Mr. Eight Eighty began in a modest manner that was in keeping with the denomination of his counterfeits. Within a month after he passed his first bad bill forty more of them had turned up. Most of them were detected by New York banks, and in some cases the banks were able to identify the depositors. They were painstakingly investigated by Secret Service men. None of them seemed to be counterfeiters, and none of them remembered who had given them the bills. A map of the metropolitan area was put up on a wall of the New York office of the Secret Service especially for Mr. Eight Eighty, and every time one of the bills was traced back to a storekeeper or whoever else had presumably received it direct from the counterfeiter, a red thumbtack was stuck into the map to show the location. After a time, the red thumbtacks indicated that most of the bills had been passed on the upper West Side of Manhattan—a section of approximately five square miles, with a population of almost a million.

A duplicate of File No. 880, which had been established at Secret Service Headquarters, was set up in the New York office as a matter of course. The initial entry in this file, which was to become one of the bulkiest in the archives of the Secret Service, was a routine memorandum sent out from Washington to Secret Service offices all over the country after Mr. Eight Eighty's first counterfeit bill had been examined at the Secret Service laboratory. This memorandum, which was witheringly critical of Mr. Eight Eighty's craftsmanship, read as follows:

CIR. #880 : 12-1-38

This opens your file on this new counterfeit.

New York reports the appearance November 19th of new counterfeit \$1 Silver Certificate, 1935 Series; check letter "K"; face plate No. 1371; back plate No. 601; serial No. K70025356A; W. A. Julian, Treasurer of the United States; Henry Morgenthau, Jr., Secretary of the Treasury; portrait of Washington.

This counterfeit is printed on one sheet of cheap quality bond paper from crude photo-etched plates. The portrait is poorly executed against a black background which fails to show any line work. The left eye is represented by a black spot. A heavy line forms the lower lid of the right eye, which is almond-shaped. Washington's right shoulder blends with the oval background and is devoid of any shading. Faulty etching gives a soiled appearance to the lower part of Washington's shirt front. Reproduction of small lettering, particularly the titles, is ineffective, some of the letters being illegible. In the word "Washington," under the portrait, the letters are misshaped and otherwise crudely outlined; The seal and serial numbers are printed in dull indigo.

The design and text of the seal are poorly etched. The figures comprising the serial number are thicker than the genuine and printed more heavily. The highest serial number, printed to date, on genuine notes of this series and denomination is S92,144,000A. The highest face plate number on genuine \$1 notes to date is 975, which is 396 less than the face plate number on the counterfeit. The back of this counterfeit, printed in dark green, is of better workmanship than the front. In some places, the vignette has been retouched by hand to obtain depth for weak spots in the design. This is particularly true of the large word "ONE" in the center.

(Signed) FRANK J. WILSON Chief, Secret Service

The New York office was headed by James J. Maloney, whose title was supervising agent. At the end of five years of the search for Mr. Eight Eighty, Mr. Maloney went to Washington as assistant chief of the Secret Service and he became chief in 1947 (before Old Eight Eighty was caught). Toward the end of 1939, when the search for Mr. Eight Eighty had been going on for a year, Mr. Maloney noticed, with a slight sense of irritation, that Mr. Eight Eighty's craftsmanship was growing even worse. On the latest bills that were turning up on Mr. Maloney's desk, the word "Washington" under the portrait of the first President was spelled "Wahsington."

The counterfeiter had evidently been dissatisfied with the lettering on the bills and in trying to improve it had transposed two of the letters. This made the bills look more implausible than ever, and Mr. Maloney and his agents began to feel more foolish than ever. They regarded this glaring flaw in Mr. Eight Eighty's bills as one of the most exasperating angles of the case. Secret Service men sometimes grow interested and even excited when they match their wits with those of a clever counterfeiter. The

hint of the careless, heavy handed, flubdubbing personality they received every time they saw one of those “Wahsington” bills made their inability to get anywhere with the search for him almost unbearably provoking.

The more Mr. Maloney and his staff of agents in New York thought about Mr. Eight Eighty, the more outlandish his character seemed. At the end of the first year, the man had passed only five hundred and eighty-five of his bills, which meant that he was earning less than two dollars a day as a counterfeiter. They had never before heard of such a counterfeiter. Early in the search for him, they had given up the hope that he was a mass-production’ man, with underworld connections, who might try to make a killing by passing a good-sized wad of his stuff all at once. When Mr. Eight Eighty’s bills began to appear, the agents had called in a number of reformed counterfeiters and had them look at the new bills. These experts just laughed at the idea that any experienced member of their profession would try to get by with such a botched bunch of the queer. This confirmed the opinion of the Secret Service men that Mr. Eight Eighty was an odd character—a crank or crackpot who was doing what he was doing as a sort of screwy hobby, or perhaps only to annoy the Secret Service.

The red thumbtacks in Mr. Eight Eighty’s map at the Secret Service office continued to indicate that the counterfeiter was passing most of his bills on the upper West Side of Manhattan. The bills turned up in all sorts of other places, though. Some of the horrible “Wahsington” bills were being carelessly accepted by banks and passed along to other banks. The Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond spotted one and was able to determine from its records that a bank in Baltimore had sent it south with a batch of good bills.

The Baltimore bank didn’t know who had passed the bill on it, and its deposits for that year accordingly sagged in the amount of one dollar. The same thing was happening to other banks. Scores of individuals, as well, had that year casually accepted Old Eight Eighty’s bills and gaily passed them along to other individuals without looking at them, and as a result some of the bills were turning up at banks as far away as Atlanta and Denver. One caught the eye of a careful teller in Seattle. The Secret Service dismissed the thought that Mr. Eight Eighty was traveling around the country passing these bills himself. They didn’t see how he could afford to do that on his profits.

As a student of counterfeiting, Mr. Maloney was aware of the truism that the interest of the average man in the look and feel of a piece of currency increases in direct ratio to the size of the bill he happens to be looking at or feeling. Even people who know nothing about how to detect counterfeit money usually look twice at a hundred-dollar bill and perhaps rub it between thumb and fingers before accepting it in return for something’ they know is worth a hundred dollars. Anybody who encounters a thousand-dollar bill looks at it longer and feels it more carefully.

Bank clerks and other professional handlers of money are rarely fooled by bad bills, but the smaller a bill is, the more likely they are to fail to look at and feel it. Thousands of circulars describing Mr. Eight Eighty’s bills were sent out to banks by the Secret Service during the first year of the search for him. Banks soon stopped accepting them, but individuals kept on taking them and stuffing them in their pockets or pocketbooks without a glance. Toward the end of 1943, when five years had gone by, Mr. Maloney’s office had collected twenty-eight hundred and forty of Mr. Eight Eighty’s dollar bills. This averaged out to less than two a day. The red thumbtacks on Mr. Eight Eighty’s map were by now spread all over New York and its environs. Some of his bills had been passed in Brooklyn, in Jersey City, in Queens, on Staten Island and in the Bronx, as well as on the upper West Side and in other areas of Manhattan. An inspection of the map indicated that there was a vague suggestion of a

concentration of thumbtacks in one particular section of the upper West Side, the center of which was Broadway and Ninety-sixth Street. Those of Mr. Maloney's agents who went to that neighborhood to investigate storekeepers and others who they thought had received the bills direct from the counterfeiter were instructed to visit other storekeepers in the neighborhood and give them circulars describing Mr. Eight Eighty's bills and a course of instruction in how to tell them from genuine bills. Several thousand storekeepers in the section had been visited by Secret Service men by the end of the fifth year of the search. As a consequence of this extensive trap-setting, about a dozen New Yorkers were caught in the act as they passed Mr. Eight Eighty's bills, but they all successfully established their innocence.

The dismal task of looking for Mr. Eight Eighty did not, of course, exclusively occupy the New York Secret Service men during those first five years, but Mr. Maloney remembers that he used to find himself thinking about Mr. Eight Eighty at all sorts of odd moments, and especially when he was trying to relax. Under his direction, several big professional counterfeiting rings in New York and New Jersey were broken up, a good many hundreds of thousands of dollars in counterfeit money was seized before it got into circulation, and scores of counterfeiters and passers were arrested and convicted. Before Mr. Maloney went to Washington, in November, 1943, he proved that he and his men could catch even a counterfeiter of fifty-cent pieces, provided such a counterfeiter exhibited a touch of human weakness. If Mr. Eight Eighty had tried to make just a small killing-passing, say, five hundred of his bills in one New York neighborhood in a week instead of ranging all over the upper West Side, with numerous excursions to other regions, and passing only one or two a day, Secret Service men think he would have been nabbed with ease. At the time of Mr. Eight Eighty's ascendancy, some fairly good-looking pewter fifty-cent pieces were beginning to appear around the country, and everything about them--the craftsmanship and the accepted method of passing a batch of them in one place in a hurry--indicated a professional ring.

One of the makers and passers of these half dollars drove from New York to New Rochelle one day and began going down the main business street buying cheap cigars, shoelaces, and other inexpensive bits of merchandise unloading his phony half dollars as fast as he could: Somebody detected one and called the Secret Service in New York. The Secret Service called the New Rochelle police. The man was arrested before he got out of New Rochelle. He had fifty-six of the pewter half dollars in his pockets and a thousand more in his car.

This comparatively easygoing counterfeiter was named Edward John Wellman. The Secret Service discovered a lot about him. He was indicted, was released on a twenty-five-hundred-dollar bail, and was shadowed for weeks. Like most professional counterfeiters, he never went anywhere directly. His method of getting somewhere was to cross a street, walk through an apartment house to the back yard, climb a fence, take a subway local, change to an express, ride uptown, ride back downtown, take a taxi to Central Park, walk rapidly through the zoo, row a boat across the lake, ditch it on the other side, take another taxi, duck through another apartment house, and then go to his destination. The Secret Service men stuck with him most of the time and picked him up again whenever they lost him. They hoped that he would lead them to other members of the gang Mr. Maloney was convinced he was a member of. When the day set for his trial came around in August, 1941, it turned out that he had skipped bail and vanished.

Mr. Maloney and his men knew by this time that Mr. Wellman lived a carefree life. Whenever he had money, he went to the horse races, and when he was broke, he went ice skating. He was a personable

middle-aged man, an Estonian by birth, an unlucky horse-player, and an accomplished ice skater. When he began to glide and pirouette, other skaters would slow up, or stop altogether, to watch him. He was known at all the ice-skating places in and around New York. He picked up pocket money at some of them from time to time as a skating instructor. He was jolly with the children and had a courtly manner with the ladies. Descriptions and photographs of him were sent by the Secret Service to all race tracks and all skating rinks, and a little over three months after he skipped bail he was arrested at the Tropical Park race track, in Florida. He had been passing pewter fifty-cent pieces all over Miami and vicinity and betting on the races with his profits. In his car, the Secret Service found seven hundred and eighty. nine phony half dollars, thirty-five pounds of pewter, a bottle of silver chloride, a can of sodium cyanide of potassium, some silver that he used for plating the coins, and the other paraphernalia he required to turn out finished fifty-cent pieces. He could make them without even getting out of his car, a 1941 Buick.

Mr. Wellman was put in jail in Coral Gables to await extradition to New York, but he soon unlocked his cell door with the mainspring of an alarm clock he had brought in with him and was on the loose again. A month later, he was recognized by a New York Secret Service man at the Flushing Meadow Park Skating Rink, where he was dazzling everybody with a whizzing glide to the center of the ice that ended in a triumphant pirouette. As he came out of the pirouette, he was arrested and taken down to Mr. Maloney's office. He realized that he was in for it this time, and he talked freely. The ice-skating counterfeiter was a member of a ring, as Mr. Maloney had thought all along. Three other Estonians, all expert in the use of portable pewter half dollar sets, were arrested within a week. Along with Mr. Wellman, they were sent to a federal penitentiary.

When the Wellman case was finished, Mr. Maloney and the Secret Service agents of the New York office felt rather elated for a few days. Then another measly batch of Mr. Eight Eighty's "Wahsington" bills was laid on Mr. Maloney's desk. He knew by then that he was going to the city he had begun to think of as Wahsington, as assistant chief, and he had a talk with John J. McGrath, who was to succeed him here. Mr. McGrath outlined some ideas for stepping up the search for Mr. Eight Eighty. Mr. Maloney promised to help him get all the backing he needed from headquarters. Mr. McGrath did intensify the search to a remarkable degree, but by the time the Secret Service caught up with Mr. Eight Eighty, Mr. McGrath had himself become assistant chief in Washington and Mr. Maloney was the chief. When the teletyped word came from New York that Mr. Eight Eighty had at last been arrested, his plates seized, and his kitchen printing press dismantled, Mr. Maloney sent a teletype message back to New York that, for a Secret Service man, was somewhat emotional. "These developments please me very much," it said.

When the most intensive manhunt in the history of counterfeiting came to an end, early in 1948, it turned out that the object of the manhunt had not been trying to hide. The circumstances of Mr. Eight Eighty's capture proved to be as exasperating to the Secret Service men as everything else about the case had been. Fate, rather than Secret Service men or any other men, interrupted the career of Old Eight Eighty.

Fate required some human aid after her initial blow-a fire in Mr. Eight Eighty's apartment-had been struck, and she thereupon chose, in a characteristically frivolous manner, nine gawky boys of the upper West Side, ranging in age from ten to fifteen, to deliver the coup de grace. When the Secret Service men at last laid eyes on Mr. Eight Eighty, they found it hard to believe what their eyes told them. The happy-looking little old septuagenarian admitted everything and showed no signs of remorse. He had a provoking habit of answering serious questions with absent-minded and irrelevant loquaciousness.

In the course of his rambling replies, he would pause, look at his inquisitors brightly and gaily, and then grin at them toothlessly. Thus the Secret Service men were confronted, on the one hand, by a prisoner who seemed to be on the verge of senility and, on the other, by a group of material witnesses who were rankly pubescent.

The forlorn and painstaking records of the interviews and other encounters of the Secret Service men with the unbearded boys and with the toothless counterfeiter produce in the heart and soul of any red blooded American an inclination to flip over the pages of the Secret Service files and read about some other case, some episode of the kind for which the Secret Service is justifiably celebrated. This inclination is easily gratified. The solving of counterfeiting cases by the Secret Service is ordinarily like so much clockwork. Even a hasty glance at the other files of the New York office of the Secret Service covering the year in which Mr. Eight Eighty was apprehended fulfills the most romantic expectations. There is, for example, the Soroka case, reassuring in every way, which goes like this:

The New York office learns that an underworld character named Joseph Soroka alias Mousie Joe alias Jersey Joe is trying to dispose of a hundred thousand dollars in first-rate counterfeit money in the respectable denomination of twenty-dollar bills. A teletype message to San Francisco causes a Secret Service man out there (who is not likely to be recognized by any New York counterfeiters) to hop on an eastbound Constellation.

Next day, he is instructed by U. E. Baughman, then supervising agent of the New York office and now chief of the whole Secret Service, to pose as a West Coast gangster who is in the market for a good-sized batch of the stuff. The agent seeks out Soroka at an East Side bar and grill, gets into a conversation with him about the West Coast rackets, buys him drinks, flatters him, and eventually confides in him that he has come East to pick up a wad of the queer. Soroka is cautious. No wool can be pulled over his eyes with ease.

The agent discovers that Soroka admires but has never seen a certain famous upper-bracket racketeer who hangs out at a luxurious cafe in the East Fifties. Another agent accordingly poses as this racketeer, is introduced to Soroka at the cafe by the undercover agent, and, after the undercover agent has tactfully left them alone together, tells Soroka that the undercover agent is an O. K. guy and can be trusted with anything and everything. Soroka enthusiastically starts negotiations with the first agent for the sale of a hundred thousand dollars in counterfeit twenties.

Soroka and the agent become pals. A price is agreed upon--seventy-five hundred dollars in good money for the hundred thousand dollars in bad money. The agent learns who manufactured the twenties and where the counterfeiting plant is. A date is made for turning over the stuff, Soroka brings it in a shoebox to a room in a midtown hotel, where the agent is waiting for him. Another member of the gang comes along with Soroka to be sure he doesn't powder with the pay-off money, which is to be apportioned among the members of the mob. The confederate waits in the lobby while Soroka goes to the room.

Soroka is arrested by the undercover agent as he hands over the shoebox full of twenties, and another agent handcuffs the confederate in the lobby. Simultaneously, still other agents raid the plant, which is in Jersey City. Six more of Soroka's confederates are arrested--photoengravers, printers, passers.

The printing press is confiscated, but the plates from which the twenties were made are missing. One of the confederates confesses that the plates were thrown into the Passaic River from a bridge near Newark after the money was printed. The plates are recovered the next day by United States Navy

divers. The plates check with the twenties in the shoebox. Soroka and his seven confederates are indicted, convicted, and sent to federal penitentiaries. It's just so much clockwork.

There was very little clockwork in the taking of Mr. Eight Eighty. One afternoon in January, 1948, seven of the nine upper West Side boys were fooling around a vacant lot near Broadway and Ninety-sixth Street. There was snow on the ground, and while scuffling in it they came upon an assortment of interesting junk that

had not been in the lot the last time they played there. There were old automobile tires, two or three wrecked baby carriages, some sheets of rusty corrugated iron, a beat-up bird cage, and all sorts of odds and ends that an indiscriminating junkman might have picked up in the gutters and areaways of the neighborhood.

The boys' names, later ferreted out and written down by Secret Service men, were Edward Movel, Teddy Sweeney, Gilbert Medina, Paul Ramos, John Melvin, John Hawthorne, and Richard Bealer. Five of them were around fifteen. Hawthorne and Bealer were ten and twelve, respectively. Burrowing into the snow-covered junk, these two found two zinc engraving plates and about thirty funny-looking dollar bills. Although thousands of American adults had accepted the same kind of bills as genuine during the preceding decade, these two American boys, Hawthorne and Bealer, instantly recognized them as arrantly phony. "Look--stage money!" one of them cried, and the older fellows gathered around. Hawthorne and Bealer were generous. They kept the plates but divided up the stage money with the other guys.

This reasonably lively episode was followed by a dull period, during which the boys played innocent and unprofitable practical jokes on other boys with the fake bills. After ten days of this, young Sweeney's father, one afternoon, happened upon his son and some of the other boys playing stud poker in his cellar. They were using some of the funny-looking money.

The elder Sweeney examined the bills and decided that they might not be stage money, they might be counterfeit. He took them away from the boys and gave them to a desk sergeant at the West 100th Street Police Station. The desk sergeant turned them over to Detectives North and Behrens, of the same station house. Late that evening, North telephoned the New York office of the Secret Service and told the staff man on duty that they had a small batch of what looked like counterfeit dollar bills.

North, who had been understandably bored by the whole business, was flabbergasted by the excited tone in which the Secret Service man replied. "You'd have thought I was Dick Tracy calling in a hot tip to the chief," he said later. The Secret Service man asked him to look at the lettering under the portrait of George Washington on the bills and see how the name "Washington" was spelled. North looked, laughed, and told the Secret Service man that it was, idiotically, spelled "Wahsington." Without waiting to hear any more, the Secret Service man (whose name is not given here because the Secret Service adheres to a policy of anonymity) told North to hold everything, that he or some other agent would be right up.

Three Secret Service men arrived a little after midnight. They went at once to see the elder Sweeney at his home, down the street from the police station. He woke up his son, who told the Secret Service men all he knew--that the bills had been found in the vacant lot near Broadway and Ninety-sixth Street, that Hawthorne and Bealer had kept the zinc plates, and that he didn't know their addresses but could point out the apartment houses they lived in. The Secret Service men decided to let that go until morning.

Shortly after nine that morning, young Sweeney showed two Secret Service men the apartment houses in which Hawthorne and Bealer lived, but they had some difficulty in nailing the boys. It was a Saturday, and they had gone off without leaving word as to where they would be. The Secret Service men followed all the tips that young Sweeney was able to give them, and after several hours nabbed Hawthorne in a playground just south of Ninety-sixth Street. Hawthorne came clean. He had given Bealer a used catcher's mitt in return for full possession of the zinc plates and had afterward traded the plates to Robert Boyle, aged eleven, for a Japanese bayonet. He didn't know Boyle's address, but he could point out where Boyle lived. Boyle was out, but the Secret Service men waited until he came home for a rather late lunch. Boyle made no effort to cover up. He had traded the plates to John Canning, aged ten, for a bag of marbles. And he showed the Secret Service men where Canning lived. Canning had finished his lunch and was on the loose on the upper West Side. He returned home around dusk. He, too, was frank and open about the whole thing. He took the Secret Service men to his room and gave them the zinc plates. He also showed them how he had tried to make some more stage money by painting one of the plates green, turning it upside down on a piece of Kleenex, and jumping up and down on it. The Kleenex money John handed over was a mess, but the plates were in fair condition, and they were what the Secret Service men wanted. They were the plates from which Old Eight Eighty had made all his "Wahsington" bills.

While these Secret Service men were immersed in the juvenile aspect of the case, two others were trying to find out how the plates and the money had happened to be in the pile of junk in the vacant lot. Some clock work appears in this phase of the investigation. After hours of exploratory questioning of people who lived nearby, the Secret Service came upon a piece of information that looked good, and was good. There had been a fire on the top floor of the brownstone tenement at 204 West Ninety-sixth Street a few weeks earlier. The tenement was next door to the vacant lot. The junk in the vacant lot bore evidence of having been scorched. The Secret Service men hurried over to Hook & Ladder Co. No. 22, at Ninety-seventh Street and Amsterdam Avenue, and took Battalion Chief McGowan into a corner of the firehouse for a talk. McGowan had a record of the fire and also remembered it. To use McGowan's phrase, it was of undetermined origin. Actually, of course, it was started by Fate. It had gutted the top-floor flat in the rear of the tenement. The occupant of the flat had not been on the premises, according to McGowan. The flat had been full of junk and McGowan had told his men to expedite their work by throwing it out of the windows into the adjacent vacant lot. There had been no injuries and no deaths, except that an old mongrel terrier in the flat had died of suffocation before the firemen arrived. The superintendent of the building had told McGowan that he thought the dog was twelve or thirteen and probably too decrepit to escape. A curious thing about the dog, McGowan said, was that it had no name. The superintendent's name, he said, was Alexander Flynn.

Flynn received the Secret Service men in his ground floor room. The tenant of the top-floor rear was up there now, he said. His name was Edward Mueller. He had occupied the flat for ten years. Asked how the tenant had reacted to the fire, Flynn told the Secret Service men that he had been upset most about the death of his dog. He had returned to his apartment after the firemen had left. Flynn had gone upstairs with him, and the old man had been plainly bewildered. When he got over the shock of finding the dog dead and his flat denuded, he had said, "Almost everything that was any good is gone." Flynn remembered distinctly that those were his words. The tenant was an independent junk dealer, Flynn went on to say. Since the fire, he had been living with his married daughter, but he came back practically every day and went up to the flat and stood around. Flynn supposed that he intended to occupy it again after it had been repaired. The insurance was expected to cover the cost of that. There was no possibility, as far as Flynn could see, that the fire might have been started by the tenant. Flynn said that there were sometimes rats in the building and expressed the opinion that one of them had got

into a box of kitchen matches or short-circuited an electric wire, or something like that. The Secret Service men told Flynn to come with them. They were going upstairs to talk to the tenant, they said.

Mueller came to the door of the flat when the Secret Service men knocked, and they went in, glanced at the white-haired old man, and turned to Flynn. "Where's the tenant?" they asked. Flynn performed the introductions. "You are the only tenant of this flat?" one of the Secret Service men asked Mueller incredulously. Mueller gave them their first look at his toothless grin and said "Yes." He added th

at there had been a fire in his flat and that the firemen had let his dog suffocate. They shouldn't have done that, he complained mildly. He talked for some time with one of the Secret Service men while the other took a look around. In the kitchen, near the sink, he spotted a small hand-operated printing press. In a drawer in the kitchen, he found a few of the "Wahsington" bills that had been badly smirched in printing and evidently discarded. After both Secret Service men had looked at the press and at the bills, they asked Mueller, with studied casualness, how long he had been making these counterfeit dollar bills.

"Oh, nine or ten years-a long time," he said good humoredly.

"You admit it?" asked one of the Secret Service men.

"Of course I admit it," he replied. "They were only just one-dollar bills." He kept grinning at the Secret Service men. "I never gave more than one of them to any one person, so nobody ever lost more than the one dollar. I gave them all over the city. I went to the Bronx, I went to Staten Island, I went to Queens--the last few years I traveled all around the city, because I never gave more than one of my dollars to any one person."

The Secret Service men asked him if anybody had helped him in his work. He shook his head. They framed many questions on this point, suggesting to him as strongly as they could that somebody must have helped him. The fact was they didn't want to believe that this polite, sweet-tempered old man was the Old Eight Eighty for whom their bureau had searched for nearly ten years. Mueller, still grinning, insisted that he had done the thing all by himself. He told them how he had photographed a real dollar bill with a studio camera he had owned for many years, and he told them how he had made the zinc plates and retouched them by hand. He said he had left the camera at his daughter's house in one of the suburbs after he made the photographs, back in the summer of 1938. It was still there, he said.

Mueller willingly went along with the Secret Service men to their downtown office for further questioning that day, although he said over and over that in his opinion they were going to a lot of trouble about nothing. While other agents went out to his daughter's home, confiscated the camera, and obtained her corroboration of her father's statement that he had left it there in the summer of 1938, Mr. Baughman, the supervising agent of the New York office, listened to a great deal more of Mueller's talk. The better Mr. Baughman and his agents got to know him, the more kindly disposed toward him they felt. They listened to his life history. They heard about the unsuccessful inventions he had worked on during the years when he was an apartment house superintendent. They took down the addresses of a number of places he had worked, and afterward questioned everybody they could find who had known him. That evening, they told him that he could go home and they would get in touch with him later. When he left, he was followed. All he did was head for his daughter's house and go to bed. He was shadowed from then on, but, as expected, nothing came of that.

By this time, Mr. Baughman and his agents had the whole case well in hand. It was obvious that Mueller had lived a respectable life until, in 1938, he suddenly decided to embark on his restrained career as a counterfeiter. It was obvious that he had had no confederates. It was obvious that his daughter, and his one son as well, had had no idea what he was doing, and that he had gone in for counterfeiting in his senescence only to maintain a modest independence. Mr. Baughman had decided to tell the agents who were shadowing Mueller to bring him in, so that the case could be turned over to the federal prosecuting authorities for disposal, when Mueller, followed by his shadows, took the subway to Manhattan and came to see Mr. Baughman of his own accord.

Mueller sat down in Mr. Baughman's office and, hesitantly at first but with growing conviction, began to tell a different story of his counterfeiting. He said he had had a companion in crime. Mr. Baughman was not unprepared for this. People who are accused of having committed a crime by themselves frequently claim that somebody helped them do it. An agent, sitting in a far corner of the office, unobtrusively made a note of everything Mueller said. The gist of his story was that in 1938 he had met a man, a man named Reynolds, Henry Reynolds, it was, and that Henry had said he had plates and a printing press for making one-dollar bills, and so Henry had come to live with him in his top floor flat, and they had made the bills together and passed them together until Henry disappeared, a few weeks before the fire. Mr. Baughman asked Mueller all sorts of questions about Henry, and Mueller gave Mr. Baughman all sorts of answers. After a couple of hours, Mr. Baughman told Mueller that he was glad to have heard this story, and suggested that Mueller go along with one of his agents and see Assistant United States Attorney Thomas F. Murphy, in the Federal Building. It would be necessary for Mueller to be arraigned before a United States Commissioner. Mueller went along, good-naturedly. Mr. Murphy was briefed on the case before he got there. When Mueller was arraigned before United States Commissioner Garrett W. Cotter, Mr. Murphy recommended that the prisoner be released on his own recognizance. After hearing a little about the case, the Commissioner agreed that there was no point in sending the old fellow to jailor even in requiring him to put up bail. Mueller's son and daughter were there, and he went away with them. They had already been told by Mr. Murphy that the government would probably ask a federal grand jury to indict Mueller on counterfeiting charges.

Mr. Baughman went to considerable trouble in the next few weeks to check every statement Mueller had made about Henry. The superintendent of Mueller's apartment house was sure that nobody had ever lived with Mueller. His neighbors in the building were just as positive. Mueller had said he'd met Henry in a certain bar and grill around the corner from his flat, where he was drinking beer. The proprietor of the place knew Mueller and was certain that he had never been in his bar and grill. The proprietors and bartenders of other bars in the neighborhood were certain he'd never been in their places, either. It was widely known that Mueller, the old junk dealer, didn't drink. Mueller had said that the camera had belonged to Henry. His daughter had already made a sworn statement that it had belonged to her father for many years before the summer of 1938. Mueller had said that Henry was a hero in the First World War and that he received a small pension from the government. There was no record of such a Henry in the Veterans Administration's files. Mueller had said that Henry was a member of a certain electricians' union. No such Henry belonged to that union.

After his arraignment, Mueller got into the habit of dropping in to see Mr. Baughman and the other agents and chatting with them happily about all kinds of things. They were patient with him, and he felt that they were his friends. On one of these visits, as a final gesture and for the sake of the record, Mr. Baughman suggested to Mueller that he submit to a lie-detector test. He was shown a lie detector, was delighted with the mechanism, and enthusiastically agreed. The test didn't prove much except that Mueller was a very contented old man, with no worries. The operator's report says, in full, "A list of

fifteen relevant and irrelevant questions was prepared. When asked these questions, the subject showed no indications of deception in his respiration, and the deviations from his norm in his blood pressure were not significant enough to lead to the opinion that there was deception. Mueller apparently was not suffering from emotional tenseness or physiological or mental abnormalities, but there was an unresponsiveness which subsequent questioning led the examiners to believe was due to the rationalization of the crime to such an extent that lying aroused little or no emotional disturbance. This was evidenced by his statement that he considered himself to be an honest man, that his admitted passing of counterfeit \$1 bills was a petty matter, as it caused the storekeepers to lose only a few cents."

Mr. Baughman regarded the case of Old Eight Eighty as closed. Mueller had caused the Secret Service more bother and more expense than any other counterfeiter in its history, but neither Mr. Baughman nor any of his agents, even the ones who had laboriously visited the ten thousand storekeepers on the upper West Side, were able to feel anything but sympathy and liking for him. When Assistant United States Attorney Frederick H. Block, who was to prosecute the case against Mueller, asked Mr. Baughman about it, Mr. Baughman gave Mr. Block to understand, as clearly as he could in his position as a supervising agent of the Secret Service, that he thought no useful purpose would be served if Mueller was sent to jail, and that he personally hoped he would get off with a suspended sentence.

It was not until September 3, 1948, that the case came up before Judge John W. Clancy, in the United States District Court of the Southern District of New York. Irving Rader, the attorney representing Mueller, had several long talks with him and found him extremely stubborn about one thing. He had been indicted on three counts: Possessing the plates, passing the counterfeit bills, and manufacturing the bills. Mr. Rader was almost certain that the judge would give Mueller a suspended sentence if he pleaded guilty to all three counts and just forgot about his story of Henry. This Mueller gently but flatly refused to do. He said he would plead guilty to the first two counts but not to the third count. There wasn't much point to this balkiness. He could have been sentenced to as much as fifteen years on either of the first two counts and to as much as thirty years on the first two counts combined. Mr. Rader was unable to persuade him. Mueller would just grin and say, "Henry did the manufacturing." There wasn't much point to this, either. Mueller had admitted ever since he told the story about Henry that he had helped Henry with the manufacturing, and he still admitted this to Mr. Rader. He was therefore admitting that he had collaborated with Henry in the manufacture of the bills, and this, in the eyes of the law, made him guilty of the third count of the indictment. Mueller said he wouldn't plead guilty to it, though, and he didn't. When the clerk of the court asked him how he pleaded, he said distinctly, "Guilty to the first count and second count, but not the third." Mr. Block moved that the third count be marked off the calendar, and this was done.

Mr. Block, a youngish man in horn-rimmed glasses, opened the hearing with a review of the salient facts of the case. He proved to be a good friend of Mueller in his way, as Mr. Baughman had been in his. Mr. Block slipped up, however, at one point of his summary. He said, "He (the defendant) had confined himself exclusively to the manufacture of dollar bills."

Judge Clancy looked at the prosecutor grimly and interrupted him. "He has not pleaded guilty to the manufacturing of bills," said the Judge.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Block hurriedly. "I withdraw that. The only kind of bills that are involved in this case are dollar bills, and the apparatus which was at the defendant's place, the similitude of the plates for the manufacture of dollar bills -- he admitted passing these bills at the rate of about twelve to

fifteen a week for some years.” Mr. Block went on for a few moments more, emphasizing the modesty of Mueller’s counterfeiting operation.

Then the Judge interrupted him again. “Why is he released without bail?” he asked. “Are there some children or somebody else worrying about him?”

“Well, Your Honor,” replied Mr. Block, “after he was arrested -- the fact that he is an elderly man, and it was felt that he was just not going to run away.”

“What do you recommend?” the Judge asked.

Mr. Rader nodded to Mr. Block and repeated the Judge’s question, “What do you recommend?”

“Is that his family -- a married daughter?” asked the Judge, indicating Mueller’s daughter, who was in the courtroom.

“No, he has two children, as I understand it,” said Mr. Block. “He has a married daughter and a son.”

“That is right, sir,” put in Mr. Rader “He is seventy-three years of age,” said Mr. Block.

“Now, my recommendation, Your Honor, is for a suspension of sentence despite the heinousness of the crime in this case, and the reason I recommend a suspended sentence is almost wholly because of the age of this defendant. There is one other consideration that I have in mind, and that is that he has no prior criminal record.”

“I always have dealt rather severely with counterfeiters as a matter of public policy,” said Judge Clancy, “and I think I ought to deal the same way with him now.” The Judge turned to Mr. Rader and asked, “What have you to say?”

Mr. Rader perhaps made a tactical error at this point. He reviewed the story of Henry and argued that Henry had done the actual manufacturing. Judge Clancy was in possession of, and had presumably read a probation report that went into the Henry story in detail and that showed that even if there had been a Henry, the defendant had admitted helping him manufacture the bills. Judge Clancy heard Mr. Rader out and then said, “I think everybody who has anything to do with counterfeiting ought to know before he starts in that business that he is going to jail. I am sorry for a man seventy-three years of age, and I would be sorry if he were fifteen years old or so, but I do not think that is any reason why the people should not be protected from receiving bad money. The man has been committing this crime over a period of years and collaborated in the manufacture, which does not seem to me to be any basis for keeping him out of jail.”

“I want to point out to the court that he is seventy-three years old,” said Mr. Rader.

“I am going to send him to jail,” said the Judge. “There is no way out of that. I will give him nine months, in consideration of his age, on Counts One and Two, to run concurrently.”

All through this, Mueller had stood in the dock. He seemed calm. He grinned, as if to himself, from time to time. He wore a blue shirt and an old, frayed gray suit. He carried a wrinkled felt hat, holding it in both hands and turning it over and over. There were highlights on his pink bald dome, and once, when an attendant opened a window, a puff of fresh air rippled the fringe of snowy hair over his ears.

After the Judge pronounced the sentence, Mueller looked at him briefly, and he was grinning toothlessly as he was taken out of the courtroom by a bailiff.

Mr. Block and Mr. Rader then held a whispered conversation with the Judge. They reminded him of the odd legal fact that if the sentence were changed to a year and a day, the prisoner could be paroled after he had served four months of it, but that as the sentence stood now, he would have to serve the whole nine months. Judge Clancy finally nodded and said to a court attendant, "Bring the defendant back!" The attendant hurried out and reappeared in a moment with Mueller. "Tell him," Judge Clancy said, "tell him it has been requested -- I understand with his consent -- that we make the sentence a year and a day instead of nine months, and (he now addressed the defendant) in that way you may get out in four months. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes," said Mueller, looking at the Judge and still grinning. "I make the sentence a year and a day," said Judge Clancy, and got up and walked swiftly to his chambers.

There was one more detail to be taken care of, and then Mueller was ready to go along to the Federal Detention Headquarters, on West Street. A sentence of a year and a day must be accompanied by the imposition of a fine. When no specific fine is decreed, the fine automatically becomes a nominal one. It was Fate, rather than Judge Clancy, who by this devious means arranged that the fine paid by Mueller to the United States District Court of the Southern District of New York, before he was taken off to jail, was one dollar.