

History of Leroy Harris, Recently Released from Prison — Remarkable Criminal Who Robbed Post Offices from Connecticut To Illinois — No One Knew a Cent Was Missing - Scheme Discovered By Accident

January 8, 1898, The Daily Times-Herald, Dallas, TX -- In the criminal history of America there are few parallels to the case of Leroy Harris, a convict recently released from the Joliet prison.

Harris was the originator of a novel plan to rob the government, by concocting a scheme for swindling the post offices of the country that was so skillfully carried out that he had obtained some \$4,000 of Uncle Sam's money before any one knew a cent was missing. It took six days to carry out the plan and when he drew the last money, he had apparently done everything he had planned and had abandoned the work, leaving, as it seemed, not a clue to his identity.

Harris visited the little town of Noroton Heights, Conn., where a credulous general storekeeper was also the postmaster. He made the postmaster believe him to be an inspector of the money order department.

The postmaster and storekeeper was the leading citizen of the place as well. A few days before the arrival of Harrison in the town, that section had been visited with a severe Atlantic snowstorm. All the farmers had been "snowed in," and Saturday was the first day they had reached the village in any great numbers. So it happened when Leroy Harris reached the office and store, the postmaster was doing a rushing business.

He found time, however, to hear Harris' story. Harris told the postmaster he was an inspector and exhibited several imposing looking official documents to show that what he said was true. The purpose of his visit, he said, was to close the money order business of the Noroton Heights post office because it was doing such a small business. The postmaster said it was a matter of indifference to him whether the money order portion of the office was continued or not, and that at any rate, he could not spare time from his mercantile business to check up with the inspector. He, invited him, however, to go into the office and do the business himself. This was just the opportunity Harris wanted. He did as he was invited. He checked up the business, packed up the blank money orders, advices, special department envelopes, and the office stamp, and officially declared to the store full of folk that the money order department of the Noroton Heights post office was closed. This news spread quickly in the town and had become old when some one of the patrons of the office received a money order, and the postmaster received the advice, which tallied with it. The order was presented for payment, but the postmaster refused it, said he had no money to pay it, and besides his office was not a money order office. The patron uttered a kick and insisted on having his money and worried the postmaster so much that he finally wrote to Washington, explaining all the circumstances, and requested them to remove their "dod gasted" old post office from his store. In this way, the swindle was first discovered.

While this was going on, Leroy Harris was most diligently employed. He filled out the money orders, payable to himself, and forwarded the advices to 15 different post

offices between New York and Chicago` Harris made out some 40 orders for \$100 each, the highest amount for which an order can be drawn, and in all the advices inserted the clause waiving identification.

He forwarded the orders in department envelopes and then started out to collect them. The offices on which he had drawn orders were sprinkled on the map in every state from Connecticut to Illinois. Orders- were drawn on Fort Wayne and Valparaiso, Ind.; Decatur, Joliet, Peoria and LaSalle, Ills. Five days after his departure from Noroton Heights, Harris presented himself at the LaSalle post office and asked payment on two orders for \$100 each. The LaSalle postmaster " did not have the money to pay them both. He paid one, however, and Harris waited for the office to take in enough to pay the other order. Shortly after noon on the next day, he received the money for the second order, and almost at the same hour, Captain Stuart, chief inspector at Chicago, was notified of the swindle on the credulous Noroton Heights postmaster.

Stuart instantly telegraphed to all money .order offices, asking if any one had received Noroton Heights advices. He learned that two orders had just been cashed in LaSalle. He went there by fast train, learned all the facts he could and then put the secret service men on the hunt for the criminal. Harris walks with a slight hitch or. limp, and the department added to its description of him, "One of his legs is shorter than it ought to be."

The secret service men were soon on a hot hunt for every ex-employee of the postal department who was known to have a leg that was shorter than it really ought to be. It was learned that a man with such a leg had formerly been chief clerk at Station L in New York. He could not be found. The description tallied exactly, and he was tracked and finally run to earth at Buffalo, but was not captured until after a fight. Harris was arraigned before the United States commissioner, and when asked to stand up and hold up his hand to be sworn, he flashed a big revolver and held the court and officers at bay while he backed out of the room and darted into the street. Harris got away and skipped to Canada, but was after-ward arrested at-Niagara Falls and taken to Chicago, where the United States court convicted-and sentenced him. to a five-year term at Joliet prison. When arrested, Harris had nearly \$2,000 concealed on his person, which was taken from him by Inspector Stuart. Harris recently brought suit against the inspector to recover this money, claiming it was not the money stolen from the government, but the case was decided against him. ~-'