

Swords and daggers stolen from Truman Library

# Library Sword Heist Still Baffles Police

By James Kindall  
 A Member of the Staff

Somewhere in the United States, or possibly abroad, a collector, clad in a smoking jacket and sipping an expensive liqueur, sits in a vault deep in the bowels of his mansion and smiles.

On a wall in front of him is the object of his satisfaction. It is an exclusive array of three swords and two daggers worth nearly \$1 million.

He seems transfixed by the gleaming rubies, emeralds and other twinkling stones embedded in the golden scabbards and hilts of the items. One of the diamonds alone is worth \$200,000, and the dazzling display contrasts with the rich dullness of gold and milk-white pearls.

The scenario may be a bit dramatic, but it could well be true.

"That's the theory," said Sgt. Al Hainen, an Independence police detective and one of several law enforcement officers who have worked on what has to rank as one of the most intriguing and frustrating jewelry heists in area history.

It was exactly six months ago on a chilly March morning in Independence that three ceremonial swords and two daggers, gifts to President Harry S. Truman from Saudia Arabia and Iran and all but one encrusted with numerous precious stones, were stioen in a daring dawn robbery from an exhibit at the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.

The effort was miniscule; the reward staggering.

It went this way: Thieves walked up the front steps of the library entrance, smashed in a small, low-placed window, ran the few steps inside the library foyer to the prize display, shattered the glass with a blunt instrument, grabbed the booty, made a quick, futile effort to delay library guards by chaining some double doors nearby (apparently they accidentally locked a padlock on a chain with which they were going to block the doors before they could get the ends together), darted out the window to a waiting car, and sped away.

Time elapsed: 45 seconds.

The theft was unprecedented in the history of presidential libraries and the largest heist in recent memory in the area.

Now, half a year later, authorities investigating the case have no swords, no daggers, no precious stones, few leads and much grief. A \$5,000 reward has been offered for information which would lead to the recovery of the jeweled swords and daggers, and \$1,000 has been offered for information leading to the recovery of any one of the items.

"The reward program sponsored by the Truman Library frankly has not been very productive at all, and that's puzzling," said a local spokesman for the FBI. "You'd think the word would get around."

Where the word normally gets around after a crime of this magnitude is that mythical place known as "on the street," i.e., those circulating either in criminal circles or on the fringe.

Because there apparently has been no street talk, authorities suspect that the burglary may have been set up—contracted for—to add to the booty of a rich collector.

"Whoever did it is awfully closed-mouthed about it," said Hainen. "Assuming it was a contract job, that means it was professional and those people got paid and are not going to say anything."

"Now if it was somebody that stole (the items) to pull the diamonds and jewels out and melt the gold down and sell it, there would be some street talk someplace," he added. "We just don't have any of that, and that's why the theory that it was a contract job seems more plausible."

There are such persons in the world, collectors who desire an item so much they are willing to have it stolen to add to their treasures, a spokesman for the FBI in Washington said.

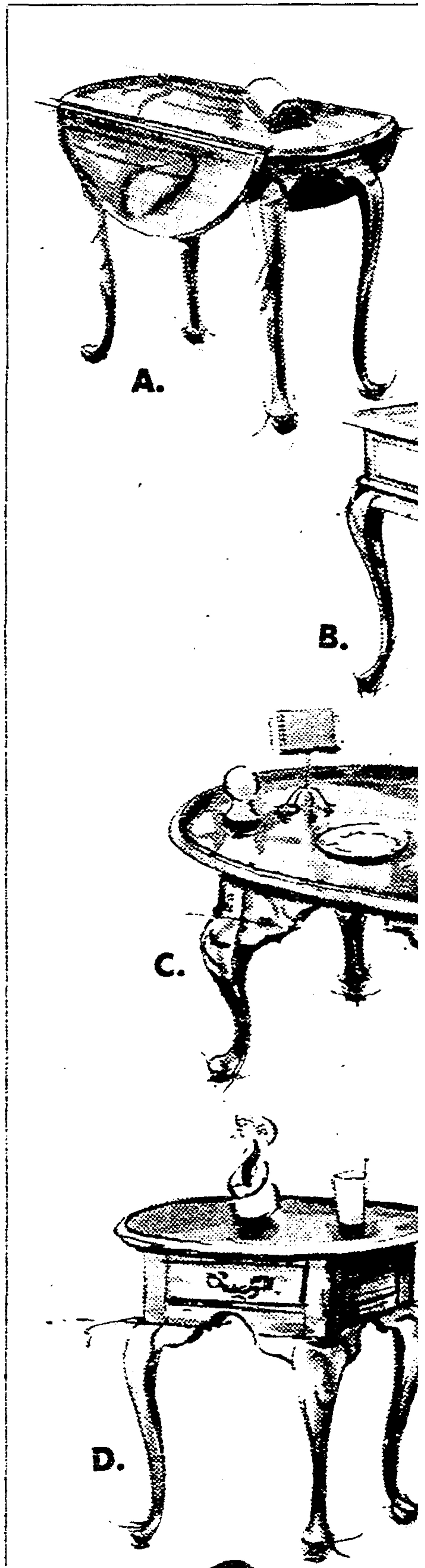
"The person who would contract for such a thing would either be a wealthy collector who felt that he needed a piece bad enough or a fence or broker who, in his dealing with persons who are collectors, would find out that he could get his hands on a certain piece to sell to one," the man said.

There are professional big-time burglars who do contract to steal certain items. A few years ago the FBI broke a burglary ring, centered in Philadelphia, that specialized in robbing cities in southeastern states, the spokesman added.

The men flew into a city, hit the spots that were most lucrative and sent the take back home by air freight, he said. They would watch the package at the terminal for awhile to make sure it was not under surveillance and, when convinced it was safe, pick it up.

The other scenario formed by authorities is the more depressing of the two: The burglars gouged out the precious stones, melted down the gold and took what they could get in cash from a fence.

The reason it is the more depressing is that, once jewels are removed, unless they are identifiably large or singularly shaped stones (which the burglars probably would cut up for that alone), they are virtually impossible to trace, the FBI man said



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