

HOW CONSTITUTION GOT STORY OF FRANK'S DEPARTURE WHEN GOVERNOR, SHERIFF AND OTHER OFFICIALS COMBINED TO KEEP COMMUTATION SECRET UNTIL MONDAY AFTERNOON

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Live Wire Reporters Have Exciting Night, But Win Out Over All Obstacles

Readers of yesterday morning's Constitution, who sat over their rolls and coffee and calmly perused the coldly conservative type that conveyed the news of Leo Frank's commutation, saw in the lines of the story only the usual newspaper routine of an important story served at the breakfast table in the unvaried manner that countless stories have been served since journalism gained recognition as civilization's most indispensable institution.

But the exciting drama that underlaid the Frank story was, perhaps, as intense as the hurried flight of the famous prisoner, spirited from jail under heavy guard and carried upon a journey that placed him just as the sun began to climb into the eastern sky before the portals of the prison in which he is doomed to spend the remainder of his natural years.

The underlying story of the Frank commutation was enacted by the newspaper men who covered it for The Constitution, and, in spite of the elaborate and painstaking effort to keep the action secret from a waiting public, managed by wit, ingenuity and hard labor to do their duty to the reading public whose interest they nightly serve.

THE NEWSPAPER DRAMA.

The newspaper drama was enacted in the dead hours of the night. The main center of activity was the county jail, from which the prisoner had been spirited through a subterranean passage almost beneath the very noses of the newspaper men who had, since nightfall, kept expectant vigil.

But there were other points of interest to the enactment, one of which was the home of Governor John M. Slaton.

Despite the fact that Governor Slaton last Friday had made the announcement that he would not deliver his decision until either Monday or Tuesday, vague, though persistent, rumors prevailed that Frank would be shipped from the jail and carried to Milledgeville before the time set for the executive's verdict.

It was reiterated Sunday afternoon that no decision would be forthcoming until Monday, at least—possibly not until Tuesday morning. The reporter in charge of the Frank story wrote his first edition story to the effect that the governor would probably make his report late Monday afternoon. This ran through the earlier editions.

A confidential tip, however, arose from one of the innumerable secret sources that are perpetually cultivated by the modern newspaper that Frank's sentence had been commuted, and that he would be stolen from the Tower and rushed in an automobile at midnight. The trained newspaper man never overlooks the barest possibility—takes no chances.

FRANK CHATTING WITH VISITORS.

A vigil was instituted at the Tower. The reporter in charge of the story went at 9 o'clock into the interior of the jail to see for himself if Frank was there. The prisoner, in a nervous mood, sat chatting with a dozen visitors. A squad of deputies loafed around the outer corridor of the prison. This, however, was no positive evidence of a proposed journey with a prisoner, as augmented jail staffs had been frequent during the past weeks.

At 10 o'clock, the deputies began to thin out, strolling leisurely away, bidding chummy good-nights. At 10:30, an effort was made to get in touch with Governor Slaton. The butler announced the governor would not return until 11 o'clock. Repeated attempts following that time to get the home of the governor on the phone proved to no avail. Twice the operator declared that the receiver had been removed from the hook, and that it was useless to ring any longer.

From 11 o'clock the atmosphere around the jail was surcharged with an element of foreboding. It is the newspaper man's "hunch," on which he often relies to gain startling success. Strange whisperings among the remaining deputies, and a conversation between Sheriff Mangum and a short, thick-set man, neatly attired and wearing a natty straw hat (afterwards found to be Transfer Guard Patterson), excited a growing suspicion that something was not only coming off, but was due soon.

At 11 o'clock the man assigned by The Constitution to the jail was reinforced by three additional reporters. They had barely reached the prison when the two oaken doors leading to the interior of the prison were suddenly closed for the first time in the recollection of any of the reporters familiar with the jail "run."

WIRES TO JAIL DISCONNECTED.

The suspicions of the newspaper men crystallized into definite conclusion. Frank was being removed from the Tower!

But how?
The only entrances were the side way

and the front door! At least these were all known to the public or the reporters.

An effort was made to telephone The Constitution office to send a man the short distance to the Terminal station. It was futile! The wires to the jail had been disconnected.

The telephones, in accordance with the elaborate system of secrecy, had been put out of commission for the time being.

The jail keeper and his assistant, with the remaining deputies, maintained attitudes of commendable calm; they knew nothing! Soul-stirring entreaties would not urge them to permit a reporter in the interior of the jail in violation of the rule that prohibits visitors after 10 o'clock. The same rule applied to information.

At 11:35 o'clock a high-powered automobile, brass glistening beneath the street lamp, and evincing preparedness for a journey, pulsed slowly up the opposite side of the street, rolled idly past the jail and stopped in the enveloping shadows near-by. A suit-case sat conspicuously in the tonneau. Two men were in the front seat. This ruse deceived the attention of the reporters.

Was it true that the tip, in all respects, was authentic, and that Frank was waiting behind the oaken doors for a dash to the waiting machine and thence to Milledgeville? A taxi-cab was brought to the jail, and engines kept running in readiness for a dash in pursuit.

HOW SHERIFF ELUDED NEWSPAPER MEN.

A reporter sent to reconnoiter the adjoining premises encountered a nightwatchman of an adjacent building. He had seen a group of men, headed by Sheriff Mangum, emerge from one of the network of alleyways in the rear of the jail, run to a waiting automobile and hurry away up East Hunter street in vicinity of the Terminal station.

A reporter was hastened to the Terminal station. He arrived in time to find a number of station officials who had seen a man resembling Frank board the Central of Georgia train for Macon. A policeman was positive it was Frank. He recognized a number of the deputies who escorted the prisoner to the Terminal.

The Constitution men were sure that Frank was en route to the state prison, but there was no authentic confirmation of it.

Substantiation, at all costs, must be had. Time was fleeing and the hour of going to press approached with inexorable rapidity. One reporter was sent between midnight and 1 o'clock to scour the vicinity of the Terminal station, another to police headquarters, one was left at the jail and a fourth was dispatched to the home of Judge R. E. Patterson, chairman of the prison board, who, when reached, stated he knew nothing of the commutation, and that he suspected Frank was sleeping soundly in the Tower.

EVEN MRS. FRANK DID NOT KNOW.

All the members of the prisoner's counsel were asked. None of them knew of the governor's action. Even Mrs. Frank, the prisoner's wife, did not know that Frank had gone. Never in the history of Georgia's prison system had such a perfect system of secrecy been thrown around an action.

That The Constitution penetrated it and served it at your breakfast table at exactly the time you have been furnished news for the past forty-seven historical years, is an epoch that will glow brilliantly in southern journalistic annals.

While the others scurried to varied sources the reporter in charge of the story sped in a taxicab to the country home of the governor on Peachtree road, at Buckhead. The trip was made in less than 15 minutes. The home was reached at 1:15 o'clock. The taxicab rolled up the curving roadway to the very edge of the building, its bright lights illuminating the attractive home.

For fifteen minutes the reporter and a companion rang doorbells, knocked upon the woodwork and sought in varied other fashions to arouse recognition from the governor. When this proved unavailing the harsh-sounding Klaxon horn on the taxi was resorted to. Its loud noise penetrated the very depths of the surrounding woodland, from which returned resonant echoes. Still no response came from within.

The taxi was rolled to the rear of the building so that its lights might reveal the figures of the reporter and his companion, thereby eliminating danger of being accidentally shot for burglars, although there was little of this peril, due to the fact that the modern burglar works along more noiseless lines than those pursued by the newspaper man.

Still, the story depended upon it and there were no chances to be taken.

BUTLER FINALLY AROUSED.

Creating an alarm with their voices, the two men eventually succeeded in arousing the butler, who lives in the rear of the home. His response revealed the fact that there were occupants within. Less than a moment later the lights were switched on in an upper veranda, and the large form of the governor, clad in pajamas and holding a rifle in his hands, was disclosed.

"I am a reporter for The Constitution; Leo Frank is supposed to be on his way to Milledgeville. Will you please tell whether or not he has been commuted?"

"I will not speak to you," replied the governor from his lofty position, his voice echoing back from the depths of the woodland valley, and showing an unmistakable resentment of the midnight intrusion.

"But the public wants to know—

the entire nation wants to know. Will you please answer 'Yes' or 'No,'" he rejoined.

"But I am sent to find whether or not you have given your verdict. I hate to obtrude at this hour, but there is no alternative, on account of the fact that it is a midnight development."

"Insist all you please—I will not speak to you."

"But, governor, if Frank is now safely on his way to Milledgeville—surely no harm can be done by disclosing your action at this time!"

The entreating voice of the newspaper man, bathed in the light of the taxi's lamps on the graveled surface of the roadway, went up to meet the irate tone of the governor upon the elevated veranda.

"Am I to take it," he continued, "by your refusal to talk, that you have acted?"

"You can take nothing for granted—I will not speak to you," came from the governor, who withdrew, thus ending the conversation.

NIGHT WATCHMAN SAW FRANK.

Nearby the jail, to which he returned, he discovered a night watchman who had positively seen Frank, would have sworn it was Frank. This and a great deal of other evidence had dissolved the secrecy of the flight. By the time the paper had started to press, The Constitution's Macon correspondent, who had, by telephone, been put upon the scent, flashed the telegraph editor that Frank stopped there and had taken an auto for Milledgeville.

Newsboys were summoned and within but little more time than it takes to tell, the story of Frank's journey was being rumbled off by the giant Moes in the basement.

The squad of reporters, assembled upstairs, mopped beady brows and commented interestingly over the night's incidents.

It was all in a night's work.