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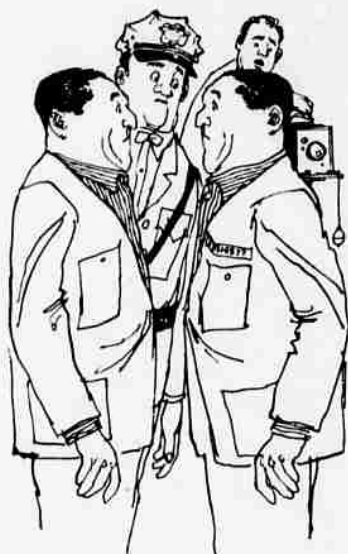


MYSTERY

Double Trouble

Nature created a mystery that baffled prison authorities; its solution helped speed a vital tool of modern criminology

By WILLIAM T. BRANNON



ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN HUEHNERGARTH

THE IDENTIFICATION OFFICER at Leavenworth (Kans.) Federal Penitentiary stared at the prisoner a moment, then looked quizzically at the guard.

"Yes?" he inquired.

"New prisoner," the guard said. "I brought him so you can take measurements and pictures."

"But I've already taken care of that."

"You have?" The guard looked surprised. "When?"

"Almost two years ago."

"Must be some mistake. This man has only been in two days." He glanced at the committal papers. "It says right here it's his first offense."

"Well, that's not right. I distinctly remember photographing him. You're sure he's been here only two days?"

"Yes. I locked him in the cell myself."

The identification officer turned to the prisoner. "What happened? Did you escape and get sent back for something else?"

"I've never been here before," the prisoner said. "You've got me mixed up with somebody else. This is my first offense."

The officer shook his head. "All right, stand here."

He made the usual full-face and profile shots, then took various measurements. "What's your name?"

"George Moss."

"Same as it was last time!" the officer exclaimed. "You're doing life for murder."

The guard spoke up: "The papers say five years for larceny."

Angry now, the officer strode to the files and dug out a record card and a picture, which he held in front of the prisoner. "Do you deny that's you?"

"It sure looks like me," the prisoner admitted. "But it can't be because I was never here before."

The officer laid the record beside the one he had just completed. "Look at these."

The prisoner did. They were identical, except that the offense on one was murder, on the other larceny, and the two crimes had been committed in widely separated places.

"Do you still deny you were here before?" the officer demanded.

"Yes. The picture looks like me and the measurements are the same as mine. But I wasn't here. I don't know how it happened."

Impatiently, the identification officer sent for the warden, who glanced at the prisoner, then looked at the guard.

"Why have you brought Moss here?" the warden asked.

"This is a new prisoner, sir. Just came in two days ago."

"That's a mistake. This man has been here almost two years."

The prisoner squirmed. "Somebody's wrong," he said. "Maybe there's a fellow that looks like me. Maybe he's still here."

"We'll see." The warden summoned a guard to find out if Moss, the lifer, was still in his cell.

He returned in a few minutes. With him was a prisoner who might have been the other's twin.

FOR SEVERAL MOMENTS, they stared at each other in astonishment. It was as if each was looking in a mirror.

Then they compared notes. They had never met before, had not lived in the same section of the country, and were not related.

Having two identical prisoners posed a serious problem for the warden. There was always the chance of a mix-up, the danger that the lifer might be freed at the expiration of the other's five-year term.

Each man was photographed and measured again. There were only fractional differences between them.

Then they were fingerprinted. Despite their close resemblance in all other respects, their fingerprints were entirely different. Their identities were definitely established.

This event took place in August, 1903. Fingerprinting was a new art, and it had not been widely accepted.

But the incident of the identical inmates was one of several unusual cases that led to acceptance of fingerprints as the only infallible means of identification.