

A Gift of History – Continued

Excerpted from the Diary of Special Agent Thomas M. McDade (1934-1938)

by Thomas L. Fields (1970-2002)

In the January/February 2014 issue of *the Grapevine*, Chris Mattiace wrote of the generous gift to the Society and the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) of Special Agent Thomas McDade's diary given by his son, Jared McDade. On Dec. 9, 2013, I accompanied my wife, Susan Lloyd, who is a member of the Society's Historical Committee, to the NLEOMF gifting ceremony. During discussions with Historical Committee Chair Ray Batvinis, who has a history of being a bit of a "silver tongue," I found myself volunteering to handle the transcription of some 300 pages of handwritten entries in the diary! Within a few days I received two CDs in the mail containing the scanned images of this intriguing journal.

After struggling with varied and somewhat outdated home computers, I developed a system of printing hard copies of each page, preparing a typed draft version of each one, then conducting supporting on-line research to try to ensure proper spelling of Agent's and individual's names, other referenced events such as plays and movies attended and, surprisingly, specifics of a number of high-profile investigations that McDade worked during his career. To that end, I especially want to call attention to the *Faded Glory: Dusty Roads of an FBI Era* Web site managed by Society member Larry Wack (1968-2003). This site contains invaluable information and links on this period of FBI history and the Agents who lived it (<http://historicalgmen.squarespace.com>).

The following is McDade's involvement in a kidnapping investigation that highlights the differences between our criminal justice system now and in the 1930s:

On Sunday, March 24, 1935, McDade was called in to the Chicago office to mail letters and Information Orders to all Hart Schaffner & Marx clothiers to "watch out for Robinson, Stoll kidnapper." This case arose with the Louisville kidnapping of Mrs. Alice Speed Stoll on Oct. 10, 1934. She was released after six days of captivity when the ransom was paid. During the abduction, Mrs. Stoll was reportedly struck and, newspapers said, treated brutally while held in a residence in Indianapolis. On Nov. 30, 1935, at the end of a month-long in-service in Washington, McDade and his former Chicago roommate, Fred Tillman, were sent to Nashville to monitor several wiretaps placed on the phones of the Robinson family and associates

in an effort to locate Thomas Robinson, Jr. This effort, while fruitless, gave rise to one of my favorite diary entries: "February 1, 1936 Saturday, Fred and I received notice our headquarters were changed to Nashville Tenn effective 1-27-36 thus cutting off per diem..." (Per diem, what per diem?)

At midnight on May 11, 1936, Tillman and McDade were informed that Robinson had been arrested that day in Los Angeles and, following a night monitoring the taps for any information from the family, they were ordered to Louisville to assist in interviews of Robinson. Chartering a "Ryan monoplane," they flew to Louisville arriving at 12:45 p.m., "... starved, having had no breakfast." There McDade interviewed a talkative Thomas Robinson, Jr. and went off duty at 6:30 p.m. The next day, May 13, Robinson appeared in Federal Court where he "pleaded guilty and was given a life sentence."

Thereafter, "Tillman & self with agents R. E. Smith & Costello took train with U.S. Marshal & his deputies and left for Atlanta, Ga. with him." On May 14, Robinson and the group arrived in Atlanta where he began serving his sentence. McDade "visited at the Atlanta office ... Wandered around town, saw a movie and had a few beers before getting the train to Nashville at 9:15 p.m." Just another day in the life of an FBI Agent in the 1930s.

For Robinson, justice in three days from his arrest! The Supreme Court later reviewed this case and Robinson was retried in 1943 and again convicted. A detailed article on the second trial was published in a book *Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI* published by Turner Publishing Company, June 1, 1998.

The draft of McDade's diary transcript is now completed. The Historical Committee is making arrangements to make the complete version available to Society members later this year and hopes to also develop a presentation on its highlights for Society events in the near future.



Tom Fields, member of Washington DC Chapter