

# How to Get to Escape from Prison

**George M. White, once Notorious Bank Robber, Tells How He Paid \$40,000 for His Liberty.**

A colossal system of extortion, black mail and wholesale robbery that makes the average prisoner a novice by comparison.

FROM the chief of the famous band of safe robbers who were convicted and imprisoned in 1917 comes an extraordinary story of bank robbery and prison life, given exclusively to this magazine. According to police records and prison experts George M. White, the author of this record, when operating under the name of George Bliss was at the head of the great bank burglar combination in the country. He was Napoleonic in his originality and daring. Among others, he was intimately associated with Mark Shimburn, a bank robber of world wide fame. Under their direct command were "Fairy" McGuire, "Charlie" Bulard, "Dave" Bartlett, "The March," "Big John" Brady, Simmons and "Sandy" McCormack—seven of the most expert crooks in America.

Shimburn, a German crook, reached New York in 1861, lived in expensive hotels and got acquainted with the gamblers and thieves of the town. One of the first of the powerful criminals to join his band and become his confidential adviser was George Bliss, the author of this article.

First came the robbery in New Hampshire of the Walpole Savings Bank, April 21, 1862. Next came an attempt to rob the bank at St. Albans, Vt., in 1868. Then the Delaware, Lackawanna and Hudson Canal Company's safe was robbed of \$20,000, but the exploit that immortalized the New York police was the robbery of the Ocean National Bank of a million and a quarter of dollars. Still, it was the later comparatively small bank robbery affair up in Barre that caused White, alias George Bliss, to be captured, convicted and sent to prison.

Bliss was a man of great intelligence, amazing resources and ingenuity. No enterprise was too great for his genius and daring. When Shimburn once broke away from his guards in prison, he rushed through an open door and into the woods, doubled back on his pursuers and escaped. The feat was made possible by Bliss. He was a master craftsman. He bought up detectives, saying nothing of high prison officials. He had relays of horses strung along the road all the way from New Hampshire to Boston. Picked men armed to the teeth were in charge of the animals at every point. On these horses Shimburn rode at breakneck speed to the seacoast and escaped to Belgium.

Such is the character of the Yankee bank robber who was always a gentleman, and finally reformed, went into business and is now a respectable citizen with letters of thanks and recommendation from the government for his services in finding stolen United States Treasury note plates and

you want anything, give me the word. Then, quietly locking the door of the dark cell, he disappeared, leaving me to wonder whether it was a trick or whether he was really the friend he professed.

"A fortnight later one of the contractors looking over a lot of wagon axles that I had turned said: 'You are doing best rate. Presently we will let you be more by yourself.' Then I knew that a strong influence was at work in my behalf. I might explain that we had already laid plans for escape, but found many obstacles in the way. One day Kingsland, who had previously served a term in Sing Sing, said our chances of getting away from that institution would be far better, and so we asked our New York friends to have us referred to Sing Sing.

"Charlie King, an old friend of Kingsland, came up, saying that one of the prison inspectors had been approached and that at the next monthly Board meeting an order would be issued for my transfer and later a gambler and politician would obtain the transfer of Kingsland.

"Perhaps the worst of the prison system is the character and make-up of a large per cent of the officials and employees. Men without experience or training for such positions falling in other pursuits for lack of ability manage to obtain fat positions through political pull. The greater a man's rascality the greater the grafter's influence in office.

"If the reader had seen as I have men strung up by the thumbs hanging in rows until blood burst from their skin in their agony he would get some idea of the brutality of New York's infamous prison system.

"Such was the condition of affairs when we entered Auburn. We were told in brutal tones to take off our hats and face the wall. We were ordered to clean ourselves in a repulsive bath room that had not been scrubbed in months. They gave us miserable towels and clothing. Some of the garments were in rags, some too large, others too small. Suffering acutely with rheumatism, I asked the privilege of keeping my heavier underwear and was told that we do not make be assessed, not you. Understand you are nothing but a convict; you own nothing, not even the hair on your head.

"While we were hurrying into our rags as fast as possible the keeper yelled, 'Are you convicts asleep? This is no Fifth Avenue hotel. Hurry up and get out.' Such was our introduction to Auburn

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"I soon began to realize what an old time prisoner meant when he said I knew nothing of the prison life of a man with no money, friends or a political pull did not last long without big money back of him. In a few days a friendly keeper informed me that myself and Kingsland were to be sent back to Auburn. It required no prophet to explain what this meant. It was a bid for graft. Something had to be done at once.

"To make a long story short, it was decided that I would have to pay \$20,000 to get back to Auburn. I learned that the warden was anxious to get us all out of the way. The official said that if I remained, even carrying ball and chain, I would escape some way. Nothing remained but to pay the \$20,000. The terms were imperative—\$10,000 now and the remainder to be paid after we escaped.

"Then, after another conference with some officials, the deal was ratified, and the iron knocked off our ankles. Things became peaceful about the prison, and we heard no more of being sent back to Auburn.

"We found ourselves in favor again and our laws very agreeable. Though no plan for an immediate escape was in sight, we did not despair, and I turned my wife to arranging for a second flight. Our main carrying arrangements were working full time, and we could get letters in and out of the prison without difficulty or delay. My family were living in New York, and among my lively stable vehicles there was a two seater carriage which I thought just the thing to aid me in escape. I had it re-

built, with a large box or space framed beneath the rear seat large enough for a man's legs. He drove himself in. One Saturday afternoon in the month my carriage appeared with a driver in livery on the box flourishing his whip over a spanking team of horses. A gentleman called the 'captain' sat on the seat. The gentleman with a permit to visit the prison alighted and entered the office, leaving the driver, Shimburn, to go to the warden's stable asking for the water for the horses. The stable crew turned out in full force, and Osborn asked them to sample some of the 'captain's' whiskey. The warden smiled and headed the line for drinks. That no one might see them, they repaired to the stable office, and in a short time were as quiet as lambs, deeply under the influence of the best whiskey money could buy. When all was quiet I chanced that way, boarded the vehicle, raised the back seat and disappeared in the chamber beneath.

"The carriage and whiskey served us well. Little did I think when I bought the two-horse stable two years before, at a cost of \$2,000, that it would be the means of giving me a swell ride out of Sing Sing. The carriage remained in the prison stable yard for ten or fifteen minutes, while Osborn was distributing the rest of the whiskey among the men. Then at a signal Osborn says, 'I must drive to the office and get the gentleman I left. You may keep the job boys, and drive what's left.' Lying in the bottom of the carriage, under the seat, I could hear all that was said. The carriage remained at the front entrance nearly fifteen minutes, while the driver exercising the horses a bit on the pavement. At last the gentleman came out, resumed his seat in the carriage, and away we went down and the macadamized road for New York.

"My position under the seat was somewhat cramped, and I was glad when we reached a secluded spot my change my prison garb for the clothing of a citizen. After some rapid driving we reached New York early in the evening, and again I was under our family roof in West Twenty-first street.

"Four days after my escape from Sing Sing a quartet of men in middle life were seated in a private supper room in Delmonco's. Two prison officials, my backer and myself made the quartet. These State officers had come to get the \$15,000 contin-

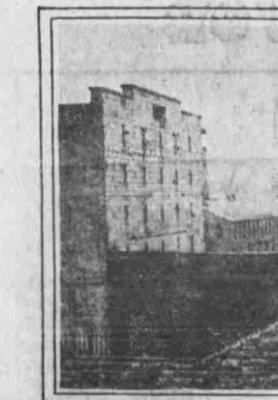
gent money. To meet this payment for not sending Kingsland and myself back to Auburn and allowing us a clear field to escape from Sing Sing my wife, through the aid of a business firm, placed a \$5,000 mortgage on our residence, in West Twenty-first street, and the balance was made up from the sale of a block of bank stock.

"It was surprising to observe as we sat around the table in Delmonco's how courteous and quiet these gentlemen were outside of their prison garb. One would never imagine them the bulldozing rascals I had lately known at Sing Sing. They were told over the wine and I could scarcely believe that these men had been my masters in Sing Sing—I mean masters not only of myself but of the prison in general and all its inmates, especially the blackguards who, of course, I could not have been forced to pay the money legally. It was a debt of honor and had to be paid, and I have never regretted how the officials directly or indirectly had the money to the officials directly. It was given to my backer and he made the payment.

"During our conversation over Delmonco's wine I learned that my escape had not been discovered until the night lock up. Then a half dozen staid men were questioned, but they were still drunk and had to be kept in their cells twenty-four hours to work off their legs. I suppose that they were the drunkest men known in Sing Sing for years.

"I continued to reside in New York, living openly like any other citizen, looking after my various business interests without molestation. In July, 1922, Governor Dix granted me a pardon at the special request of United States Attorney General George H. Williams, then in General Dix's cabinet. The pardon was granted in consideration of valuable information furnished to the Treasury Department in Washington regarding the whereabouts of the good government bond plates that had made the government great trouble with a loss of hundreds of millions of dollars to the public. My services were considered so important that Colonel Whiteley, then chief of the Secret Service, favored the pardon. They had had instructions from the Solicitor of the Treasury to spare neither time nor expense in recovering the plates. My pardon is said to be the only one ever granted by a New York Governor to an escaped prisoner while still at large and an unexpired term to serve."

Max Shimburn



One of the watch towers - Sing Sing -

felling a vast conspiracy for flooding the country with bogus money printed from genuine government plates. This man was known as Williams, and it cost him \$40,000 to escape. How he did it is graphically told.

The members of the band had committed other crimes and were captured and sentenced to Auburn Prison. A few days later the leader set about a plan for escape. The main thing was to get themselves transferred to Sing Sing, which was the head-quarters of political graft, powerful men in New York, deep in politics and crime.

**The Story of Escape**  
The narrative is told by George M. White, alias Williams, alias George Bliss, who, with "Tall Jim" and Joe Kingsland, alias Howard, found himself in March, 1917, in the Watertown (N. Y.) jail, charged with attempting to rob the bank of the little village of Adams, N. Y., for which they received a ten year sentence in Auburn Prison.

"Tall Jim" was the only son of a country hotel proprietor. Although a bright young man and a favorite at home, he was a natural crook and began his downward course so early in boyhood that on becoming a man he became a burglar and received a twenty year sentence to Clinton prison. After serving five years the man was pardoned, through his father's influence, chiefly because of his youth and engaging personality. He promised to lead a new life and abandon his old associates. Then a position was found for him in a New York bank and he seemed on the road to prominence and honor. Unfortunately, however, he was in his blood. He turned robber again and was sent to the Columbus (Ohio) prison, for ten years, only to make a sensational escape and disappearance.

Kingsland, another bright boy, had a similar record. He became a skillful thief, but he was too reckless and was finally captured and sentenced. Thus the band entered Auburn together and in that institution the story begins. George M. White tells it—

Prison. A week later I saw my own hair, coat and trousers, which they had taken from me, on the person of one of the guards.

"After they had cut our hair with horse clippers and shaved our faces with razors and swipes of lather and a dull razor we were locked up in cells until the next day. Our fare was ordered to clean ourselves in a repulsive bath room that had not been scrubbed in months. They gave us miserable towels and clothing. Some of the garments were in rags, some too large, others too small. Suffering acutely with rheumatism, I asked the privilege of keeping my heavier underwear and was told that we do not make be assessed, not you. Understand you are nothing but a convict; you own nothing, not even the hair on your head.

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Auburn Prison front and yard



The meeting at Delmonco's for the settlement

"This was cheering news, indeed. One of the men explained his own embarrassment. 'He said: 'We're already short of food, I am now supplying half a dozen officers and contractors with the grain that I am stealing from the warden's supply. Because of this the warden is making a sick. However, I suppose the extra horse will not make things much worse, but please do not ask for grain to supply the doctor's barn in the village. It's bad enough to feed his horse at the prison stable. We poor convicts are trying to reform, but if we were expected to do more than our share of cleaning from the warden's stable it will be hard for us all round, and besides we will lose our jobs.' The grain held out, however, and it was not long before we were feeding not only the doctor's horse at the prison stable but two of the doctor's horses in the village.

"In a few days I was sent for, given a new suit of clothes, and made ready for the trip to Sing Sing. Another prisoner to be transferred was a New York convict, a saloon keeper and Tammany ward hater, who had deserted to the Young Democracy. His political enemies put up a job on him. They got a shag to drop a watch into his pocket and the property was found and he was convicted and sent to Auburn. We reached Sing Sing on the night train and had good accommodations in a stables. My pal a five hundred dollar diamond ring, and for \$100 more he obtained the position of hall waiter.

"I was lucky to escape contract work, even at a cost of \$20,000. I was now living in the hospital, and had leisure enough to arrange plans for escape. It was necessary to arrange with some trusty man, a permanent resident of Sing Sing village. Such a man was found. I paid \$50, and he became my contact, carrying my letters back and forth from the prison. I learned that my pal a five hundred dollar diamond ring, and for \$100 more he obtained the position of hall waiter.

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"On learning of my capture my backer begged that I be not subject to the terrible punishment usually given to captured prisoners—beaten up by the warden's men. 'Well, if we let your man off,' was said, 'we'll have to do the same for the rest of the gang.' Finally a compromise was agreed on, and our punishment reduced to three days in the dark cells with ball and chain and an assignment to the quarry gang. To work with the stone gang was punishment indeed.

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Main Prison Yard - Sing Sing

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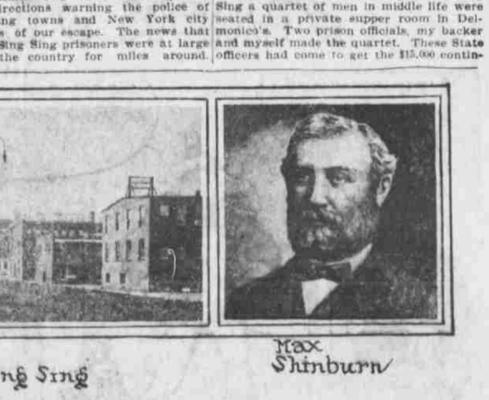
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