

# **THE EPISODE OF POKE SOLES**

Victor Speer



# Table of Contents

<u>THE EPISODE OF POKE SOLES</u> .....	1
<u>Victor Speer</u> .....	2

# THE EPISODE OF POKE SOLES

## THE EPISODE OF POKE SOLES

### Victor Speer

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.  
<http://www.blackmask.com>

POKE SOLES was a "shover of the queer." An episode of his life occurred at Erie, following the capture of the women burglars, which reveals now for the first time the story of Tom Hale, a counterfeiter, who subsequently was a side-member of the United States Secret Service. Poke's duties as a shover of the queer were to pass counterfeit money.

"In the winter of 1869 and 1870 some \$20 bills that were queer, appeared in Erie," says Murray. "It was some time after the women burglars had been tried and sentenced. Fred Landers kept a restaurant in Erie, and one day I happened to drop in, and he told me of a fellow who had been in and ordered a light lunch and paid for it with a \$20 bill, and who bought a drink as he went out and offered a second \$20 bill to the bar-tender, who said he could not change it. I looked at the banknote Landers had taken. It was a clever one, but it was queer. My experience with counterfeiters in the special service of the United States was of instant value Landers described the man. I spotted him at the railroad station and got him, but did not find any of the stuff or counterfeit money on him. He simply was a shover, one who passed the money, and he received only a couple of \$20 bills at a time.

"Few classes of crime are organised so scientifically as counterfeiting. The man who makes the plates never does business with the men who pass the money. The plate-maker is an engraver who usually gets a lump sum for his work. Those who print the money are the manufacturers and they sell the queer in wholesale quantities to dealers, who sell to retail dealers, who have their shovers out passing the money. The man I got was a shover. I locked him up and in searching him I found the name 'Tom Hale, New York.' I reported to Crowley and sent a telegram addressed to Hale and reading:

"Come on. I am sick. Stopping at Morton House. Room 84.'

"I made all arrangements with the hotel clerk to get track of any one who called and asked for the man in room 84. No one came. I kept the shover, whose name was Soles, locked up in gaol. Landers and the bar-tender had identified him. A week passed. It was in the winter of 1870 and the trains were blockaded and it snowed and blew and delayed all traffic. On the ninth day a nice looking man walked into the Morton House. It was bitter cold and yet he had no overcoat. He asked for Mr. Soles in room 84. I was in the hotel at the time; the clerk tipped me and I walked over and collared the stranger. I took him down and searched him and locked him up. He had several hundred dollars of good money on him, but no counterfeit money. I intended to hold him while I hunted for his baggage, for at least a man dressed as he was, would have an overcoat somewhere near.

"The next morning Officer Snyder and I went to the railroad station and began, from there, a systematic search for trace of the stranger's overcoat. In the morning we were in the habit of stepping into John Anthony's German saloon for a mug of beer. On that morning Anthony said: 'A funny thing happened yesterday. A nice looking fellow came in and washed his hands and went away leaving his overcoat.'

"Let me see it, John,' said I.

"Anthony produced the coat. In the first pocket in which I thrust my hand I found a roll of something wrapped in a handkerchief. I drew it out and found \$1,000 in counterfeit \$20 and \$100 bills, with coupons attached to the ends. They were such excellent counterfeits that later I passed one at a bank as a joke and then told them of it. I took the coat to the lockup.

"Hello, Hale; here's your coat,' I said.

"All right. Thank you,' said the stranger, who was Tom Hale.

"I said: 'That's your coat, Tom?'

"Oh, yes,' said he.

"Then I hauled out the counterfeit money from the pocket. He then said it was not his coat. I made him put the coat on and it fitted him perfectly. Then John Anthony identified him as the stranger who had left the coat in his saloon.

## THE EPISODE OF POKE SOLES

"Soles was held for passing counterfeit money. He pleaded guilty and was sent to Alleghany for five years. The United States authorities took Hale to Pittsburg, then to New York, and then to Washington. He promised to do everything for the Secret Service Department. He was going to give away the whole counterfeiting business.

"Wood, then chief of the Secret Service, appointed him to the United States Secret Service and sent him to New York. Hale never gave any one away, but a few shovers and small Italians. In the meantime, Wood left the Service. Colonel Whiteley became chief. He sent for Hale and told him he was doing nothing. Hale practically told Colonel Whiteley to go to hell, which showed Hale was not so wise as some people seemed to think he was.

"Finally Hale was arrested and taken back to Pittsburg and tried. Butcher Swope was the United States prosecuting attorney. Hale was convicted and sentenced to fourteen years in the penitentiary. It was proved where he stood in with thieves. Butcher Swope was a cracking good prosecuting attorney, and a hard man after these crooked fellows.

"The last time I saw Tom Hale was about 1884. He was keeping a dime lodging house on the Bowery in New York at that time. He fared far worse in his sentence than did Poke Soles who stood up like a man when he was caught and did his time. I understand Hale never set foot in Erie again and vowed he never would. The most disappointed man was John Anthony, when the owner of the overcoat was found and the \$1,000 turned out to be queer."