

THEN AND THERE
 HISTORY TOLD AS IT WOULD BE WRITTEN TODAY
 By IRVIN S. COBB
 Original Houdini Tells How He Did It

Harry Houdini was not the first of the handcuff kings. There was Sixteen-String Jack, an English malefactor, who seemed to be able to wriggle loose from manacles as fast as his jailors could forge 'em for him and who finished his days encumbered with chains weighing pound for pound almost as much as he did. There was the even more famous Jack Sheppard, whose exploits in getting out of Newgate and incidentally out of shackles, gave him a London notoriety which his career as a petty criminal would have earned for him.

Long before Houdini's day there was a lock-picker and a jail-picker and a jail-breaker who set a mark which never has been equalled, and this man in his struggles for liberty against seemingly unconquerable odds was actuated by an indomitable purpose which stamps him as one of the most unique figures of his own time or, for that matter, of any time.

Earon Trenck was born in 1725, of Austrian descent, at Konitz in Germany. He was the son of a Prussian general, and before he fell into disfavor in high places had distinguished himself as a courtier and as a soldier. He had been a favorite with that tyrannical but brilliant ruler, Frederick the Great, the ancestor of the living ex-kaiser—from whom the present descendant acquired his delusions of Divine Right, without having inherited either the military abilities or the genius for statecraft which his imperial forbear possessed. This young nobleman, Trenck, dared to have a love affair with Great Frederick's sister, the Princess Anne. For his presumption the royal brother of his sweetheart determined by rigorous captivity either to kill him or to drive him insane. For upwards of ten years Trenck was tortured with darkness, with semi-starvation, with solitude, and most of all with ponderous irons. How, through that whole decade he kept his wits, his bodily endurance and his courage, and how he broke out of his bonds and his dungeons seemingly at will, makes a memorable chapter in history.

FROM his own autobiography—one of the most remarkable human documents, I think, that ever was written—and from contemporary accounts of his incredible achievements, we get a graphic likeness of Baron Trenck at the time he falls into disfavor with his autocratic overlord, the Great Frederick. He is enormously wealthy. His courage is known in every military camp in central Europe. He has a brilliant mind, a handsome face, a powerful and graceful body. He is of noble descent. He has friends in high places and he had powerful enemies there, too. You could search the continental courts of the period and find nowhere a more dashing figure than Baron Trenck. But it will be eleven years later, when he has emerged from his living tomb and has written down the epic of his captivity, before the world will know him for one of the most resolute, the most resourceful, the most indomitable beings that ever lived in any age.

First, for seventeen months, he is kept in strict solitary confinement at Glatz. Then under heavy guard he is removed to Magdeburg, on the borders of Saxony, and lodged in the citadel of a medieval fortification, gloomy and dark. His keepers think they'll hold him fast here. If there is any guarantee of security in stone walls seven feet thick, in massive iron bars, in double gratings, in high palisades outside, their confidence is justified. Their charge is buried in a lower casemate, on bread and water—one jar of water, one and one-half pounds of coarse soldiers' bread every twenty-four hours.

Trenck declines to be vanquished either by the processes of slow starvation or by the rigors of his prison place. Promptly he sets to work to dig out. With his bare hands he pries loose the iron strips which bolt his bed to the solid masonry of the floor. By persuasion and by promises of reward he corrupts certain men among the soldiers who have been told off to watch him. They agree to aid him in escaping across the boundary into Saxony; but as for getting out of his cell, that is his own job.

Using his bits of scrap iron for tools, he removes the bricks of the partition which stands between him and an adjoining corridor. To do this he must first scrape off the coatings of lime from this wall, which, as he says, had perhaps been whitewashed a hundred times, and then, after each bit of excavating, must replace the powdered grit so as to defy detection by his guards. Very simply he describes the process:

"I formed a brush with my hair, then wetted the lime and rubbed it on the wall, against which I applied my warm naked body until it was quite dry and of a piece with the rest."

Wasted Labor. He hides the removed debris in his bed and at night lies on it, with only a thin mattress between him and its rough irregularities.

In one brief casual paragraph he describes how, after persevering for six months, he practically is ready for his jail-break. He has tunneled through many yards of masonry. By bribing his sentries he has secured a knife, a file, and writing paper. He has smuggled out letters advising his sister and certain of his friends of his design and bidding them to be ready to stand by when the hour comes.

On the very night of his intended flight, disaster befalls. King Frederick has visited Magdeburg, and by his orders another prison has been prepared in the Star-Port, as it is called, on the opposite side of the city. Without warning, three officers enter his casemate. Hearing them at the door he has barely time to secrete his precious knife on his person. They shackle him hand and foot, blindfold him, lead him out, put him in a coach, and ride with him across the town.

Let us quote the baron here—certainly his story is as graphic a one as we could ask for.

"At length the coach halted; I was conveyed from it into my new prison, the cloth was loosened from my eyes. Two black, diabolical-looking smiths armed with a fire-pan and hammers presented themselves to my view and I saw the floor covered with ponderous chains!

"Immediately they began their work; my feet were bound with heavy chains to an iron ring driven into the wall; this ring was raised three feet

from the floor so that I could move about two paces to the right and left. An iron girdle as broad as my hand was locked round my naked body, to which was chained a thick iron bar, two feet long, at the opposite ends of which my hands were fastened in heavy iron rings bolted and riveted over my wrists. I was left sitting in gloomy darkness upon the wet floor.

"By degrees I accustomed myself to my chains. I learned to comb my hair and even to tie it with one hand. My beard I plucked out; the pain was terrific."

But Trenck does not succumb to everlasting gloom. Neither that noisiness, nor the misery of bearing half his weight in dead iron, nor the seeming hopelessness of his situation can break that dauntless spirit. With in a day after reaching the Star-Port he is contriving means to remove and replace his fetters at will. He hammers the iron pers of his handcuffs until the blood streams from under his nails, but eventually the rivets become loosened and he may free both wrists.

By main strength he snaps two links of the chain which binds him to the wall, and to hide the break, ties the severed ends together with a scrap of hair ribbon. He wrests away the short chain which fastens his arm-bar to his iron belt. When his keepers call, he is squatted on the floor, apparently hobbled at wrist and ankle and waist. But no sooner is the door closed behind them than he has the use of his limbs.

Defiance Against Odds. In less than forty-eight hours he has accomplished these seemingly impossible undertakings. He goes straightway to a yet more herculean task. Within the space of the next six hours he has, with his knife, dug the wood from about the lock on the inner door. He decides that, given a whole day, he probably can master the bolts of the three remaining doors. On the Fourth of July he begins the task. Read what he says:

"This, with great labor, I accomplished but found it more difficult as everything was to be done by groping in the dark. Soon my fingers were all wounds, the sweat streamed on the ground and the raw flesh hung bleeding to my hands."

Nevertheless he perseveres. The fourth door has been attacked; its tough oak has been whittled through when the knife snaps, its blade falling through the hole into the ditch of the lofty rampart on beyond.

"It is utterly impossible to describe my weariness. My blood dyed the walls and the floor, and but little remained in my veins. My wounds pained me; my hands were stiff and swollen with my excessive labor; I have been without sleep; I had scarcely strength to stand upright. As soon as it was noon and the head keeper came with his men, they found me standing opposite the inner door, a most frightful figure, covered with blood, like a desperado. In one hand I held a huge brick, in the other my broken knife, and I cried out, 'Keep back! Keep back! Major, shoot me. No man shall enter. I will slay fifty of you, ere one gets in!'"

A parley follows. Finally Trenck capitulates on condition that he is to have better treatment. The pledge is given, only to be broken. As soon as he gives up, his irons are renewed; this time they are heavier and stouter than before.

He does not despair, though. In this man's nature there is never any thought of surrender. He wins over a grenadier of the fortress and this man slips him a file. With it he files his fetters, hiding the cut places with dough which he has moistened in spite and then coated with earth.

He fabricates a screwdriver from a ten-inch nail pried out of the floor. He unscrews the grating at his window and with smuggled wire he makes a false grating identical with the original but removable at will. By grinding his arm-bar against his own tomb stone he forms a chisel with which he gouges through nine inches of three-ply oak flooring. Burrowing like a mole, he has penetrated several yards of the sandy loam upon which the building stands before he once more is detected.

A Fresh Attempt. His head keeper vows that this time he will render the prisoner helpless. After renewing Trenck's former shackles, the jailer brings smiths who weld about his neck an iron collar an inch thick and four finger breadths in

width. From this huge necklet, a heavy chain extends down the baron's front to his ankle shackles. Two shorter chains join the collar to his wrist fetters. He is woven into a veritable net of ironmongery.

A certain Lieutenant Sonntag, an under officer of the garrison, is won over by Trenck's fortitude. Sonntag has false handcuffs made which Trenck substitutes for the others. He brings a file, too, and soon Trenck disencumbers his burdened body of all his bonds excepting the necklet and his pendent chains. These he dares not remove. Through Sonntag's good offices he obtains sausages and wine; until now his sole fare, even in his illness, has consisted of dry bread and water.

Again he breaches the floor and through the earth beneath the foundation he bores with his bare hands a passage thirty-seven feet long leading towards a cross-gallery in the principal rampart. This operation takes him six months. When he is within arm's reach, almost, of freedom, with but six feet more of soil to be excavated, a sentry on the ramparts hears the rattle of the chain dangling from Trenck's throat. The captive manages to regain his cell and slip into his other irons before the chief jailer bursts in on him. The filed places in his fetters are not discovered, nor is his tunnel found, so the stupid commander decides that the sentry has been mistaken. The warden, though, thinks up a fresh torture. He gives orders that day and night at intervals of a quarter of an hour Trenck shall be visited and if found asleep shall be forcibly awakened. This dreadful system prevails until a more humane governor succeeds Trenck's old oppressor.

Writing on Pewter. The successor suffers the prisoner to have more light and more air. But since a guard stands at the door to observe him, Trenck cannot resume his tunneling. But he finds employment and incidentally a method of communicating with his friends in the outer world. Here's how he does this, as told in his own words:

"Having light, I began to carve with a nail on the pewter cup out of which I drank, satirical verses and various figures, and attained so much perfection that my cups were considered as masterpieces both of engraving and invention, and were sold as rare curiosities. . . . I grew more expert and spent a whole year in this employment. The officers made merchandise of my cups and sold them. Their value increased so much that they were now to be found in various museums throughout Europe. There is another remarkable circumstance attending these cups. All were forbidden, under pain of death, to hold conversation with me or to supply me with pen and ink; yet, by writing what I pleased on pewter, I was enabled to inform the world of all I wished and to prove that a man of merit was sorely oppressed. I attained the art of giving light and shade and, by practice, could divide a cup into thirty-two compartments as regularly with a stroke of the hand as with a pair of compasses. The writing was so minute that it could be only read with glasses, yet I could use but one hand, both being separated by the rigid bar, and therefore must a cup be held between my knees while I labored."

Another year passes thus and yet another. Trenck wins over certain officers and certain common soldiers. Secretly they give him aid by furnishing tools for digging. An ingenious device occurs to Trenck. He makes two different openings in his floor. One hole he hides; at widening the other he purposely makes so much noise that a sentry becomes alarmed and calls the governor, who comes and finds on the floor a great heap of sand. The second opening is nailed fast and convicts wheel away the sand. No one except those in the conspiracy guessing that most of it has been taken from the still concealed working.

He continues to delve underground, aiming always to break through the earth outside the walls. When victory is almost within his grasp, an accident almost costs him his life. He describes it thus:

"While mining under the foundation of the rampart I struck my foot against a stone in the wall above, and it fell down and closed up the passage behind me. I began to work the sand away from the side, that I might obtain room to turn round, but the small quantity of air soon became so foul that a thousand times I wished myself dead, and made several attempts to strangle myself with my hands. My sufferings were incredible; I passed full eight hours in this distraction of horrors. . . . I made a desperate effort, drew my body into a ball and turned round; I now faced the stone, which was as wide as the whole passage. My next labor was to root away the sand under the stone and let it sink, so that I might creep over, and by this means, at length, I once more regained my dungeon."

This terrific exertion makes Trenck very ill. Months pass before his strength and his will power are restored to him. From now on, while he digs, he hangs a knife about his neck so that if again entombed alive, he may end his miseries by suicide.

For the sixth time his undertaking fails; chance defeats it. For the seventh time, it fails. Undismayed he is planning an eighth attempt to win his liberty when word reaches him that his unrelenting enemy, King Frederick, is dead. Hope of pardon grows stronger, and eventually he is released after eleven years of such incredible experiences as probably no other man ever endured and lived to tell the tale of afterwards.

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Interesting N. Carolina Items

Richmond County Receives \$452 for Mother's Aid; Other County News

RALEIGH, Nov. 5th—"Consolidation of counties, suggested as a means of combining administrative units and thereby reducing operating costs, will probably not be accomplished by the 1931 session of the General Assembly and, if it comes, will develop over a period of years as a result of urgent need for the lowering of county costs and therefore tax rates," said Governor O. Max Gardner, relative to the suggested combinations of counties in the State.

"Too much sentiment is attached to names of counties and county seats that would lose their identity, and too many office holders and politicians would oppose the movement for it to get over now, even though it would doubtless result in more efficient and economical operations of county affairs," said Governor Gardner.

He does feel, however, that there will be a movement, probably successful, in consolidation of various administrative units, mentioning especially the combinations of counties into a school unit, under one administrative head. Suggestions have been made that this also extend to jails and prison farms for small counties, as well as county poor homes, and it is considered likely that an act permitting such combinations will be passed.

Elimination of county road boards or commissions, and placing county road construction, maintenance and supervision back in the hands of the county commissioners, is one of the plans that is being studied and will be the subject of a report by the government experts engaged in studying methods of reducing costs and increasing efficiency in State and county administrations.

The 100 counties of the State fall into two general classes, 56 of them handling their roads through the county commissioners and 44 by special road boards, four of the latter having township or road districts within the county. Richmond county's roads are handled by the county commissioners.

Differences of opinion exist as to which method is more efficient and economical and the proposal for a change will doubtless find many opponents as well as proponents. But it will doubtless be up for consideration.

A North Carolina lawyer recently wrote to a State office here asking for copies of several laws enacted by the General Assembly, asking, among others (for a copy of the "Austrian Ballad Law." He was sent a copy of the Australian Ballot Law, of course. Yes, he was a white man.

Although the highway fund for counties from the one cent additional tax placed on gasoline by the 1928 General Assembly amounted to slightly more than \$2,500,000 last year and is estimated at the same figure this year, plus the \$500,000 special fund to counties, doubt is beginning to arise as to whether the fund will reach that figure, due to the decrease in use of gasoline and the increased refunds made on non-highway gasoline using machinery.

Indications of the extent of the decrease are shown by the drop for the first three months of the present fiscal year, which was \$151,741.46, as compared with last year, when the amount was \$3,381,936.36 from the five-cent tax. The allocation of the \$3,000,000 to the counties is made on a basis of area and population and will be the same for all counties, unless the drop in tax gasoline revenues carries the total below 3,000,000. Last year the amount

was above that figure, due to collections for a month or more from the preceding year, and this year all of the counties had a small credit balance from last year.

North Carolina received \$203,433.60 in receipts from hunting licenses for the past fiscal year from 1,275 non-residents hunters, \$27,908 with State-wide licenses and \$96,328 who secured licenses for one county only, in addition to \$5,423 from fur dealer licenses. Forsyth county led with \$7,849.50 in total game receipts and Guilford was second with \$7,754.25.

Governor Gardner has addressed a letter to presidents of local bar associations, clerk of Superior Court and chairman of Boards of County Commissioners, asking them to confer and advise him by November 30 as to the needs for special terms of court in their counties for the spring term, 1931, naming the date, length of term desired, and whether civil or criminal, in order that the calendar may be made out for special judges.

The second installment of the State school equalizing fund, amounting to \$1,330,500, will be sent to the 53 participating counties October 28, the first installment of \$1,141,000 having been sent September 10. The total of the two installments, \$2,471,500, is a little less than half of the almost \$5,000,000 allotted from the \$5,250,000 equalizing fund by the board.

Richmond county's first installment was \$11,080, and the second, to go out October 28, will be \$12,000, a total of \$23,080 of the year's total of \$47,319.46 allotted to the county. The balance will go out in two installments, one before and the other after the Christmas holidays.

Auditing costs for outside audits of county government operations in North Carolina counties were greatly reduced last year, as compared with previous years, due to improvements made in county accounting methods under the new laws, Charles M. Johnson, secretary of the county government advisory commission, announces, following reports from the counties.

The total costs for the 75 counties making audits for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1930, exclusive of reports of three small counties, was \$75,763.65, as compared with costs of \$164,868.49 for two years before. The costs of audits for a year ago amounted to \$203,878.79, as compared with 204,581.92 for three years ago. Two year comparisons are made because in many of the counties membership of boards of county commissioners change and the audits made for the change years are more extensive generally.

Value of Governor Gardner's "live-at-home" program, inaugurated last year and stressed unceasingly, was admirably demonstrated in the exhibits at the State Fair last week. The judges of agricultural products reports marked improvement was noticed in the quality of products displayed this year and in all exhibits the improvement in seeds and sires was marked.

While the prices of cotton, tobacco and peanuts, principal cash crops, are low, thus reducing very much the amounts of money received by the growers, the food and feed crops were increased the past season, the State-Federal crop reporting service estimating the increase in value at fully \$16,000,000 in the State. This, it is pointed out, is the salvation of the North Carolina farmers, saving for them the \$16,000,000 which they do not have to spend for food and feed in the amount of home-grown products.

Because the movement has thus proved its value, Governor Gardner believes that North Carolina farmers, and those in other states as well, will grow next year an increased amount of food and feed products, increasing the yield by fully 10 per cent through improved seeds without a corresponding increase in production costs.

Durgey and Marr, defunct brokerage firm here, had assets of \$118,953.16 and liabilities of \$447,667.59, a deficit of \$328,714.73,

the auditor's report filed with the clerk of Wake Superior Court, shows. This is in addition to the report of a shortage of "not less than \$236,000" in the Tucker estate, of which Carey K. Durgey, one of the partners, was executor and trustee. The firm has been placed in the hands of receivers and the Wachovia Bank and Trust Co. succeeded Mr. Durgey as executor of the Tucker estates. The partners, Mr. Durgey and S. Wade Marr, are both under eight criminal indictments for embezzlement from customers of the firm.

Trapping of fur-bearing animals in 15 western North Carolina counties has been prohibited for two years, by order of the Department of Conservation and Development, following petitions from these counties, which are seeking to greatly increase the number of animals and later re-establish the fur industry on a large scale. The counties included are Buncombe, Clay, Cherokee, Graham, Swain, Jackson, Haywood, Madison, Yancey, Henderson, Transylvania, Polk, Macon, McDowell and Mitchell.



PICK'S TOPICS
By John E. Pickens

Use your bricks to build your town, not to throw at one another.

The hunting season started this year with more men hunting for jobs than for game.

"Dangerous Days in Europe." Headline. A sub-title would be: "Dangerous Nights in America."

"BEES" (With apologies to Joyce Kilmer. Note: A bee dies when it stings.) I think that I shall never see An insect dreaded as a bee, A bee whose piercing sting is prest Against my arm or head or chest; Who swarms sometimes and clouds the sky

And then sits down above the eye; A bee that buzzes o'er my head And makes me wish that he were dead,

Who whistles away the lonely hours And intimately lives with flowers; Rimes are made by fools like me, But it takes a sting to kill a bee.

When a citizen is killed at home we want a hanging. When he is killed in a foreign country we demand an apology.

The dries get drier all the time, the wets get wetter still; and ne'er the twain shall meet I guess, though at least not yet—until; real temperance is brought about, by some means not now seen; so I am neither wet or dry, if you get what I mean.

The Brazilian revolution may not accomplish much more than help American radio announcers to pronounce Rio de Janeiro.

Ours is a government by the people who vote, of the people who do not vote, and for the people whether they vote or not. But isn't it nicer to have a little say about it?

Scientists are both interesting and helpful, but none ever has told the world what good there is in a common house fly.

The horse and the mule have practically disappeared from the highway from the highways, which are now lined up with a good many silly asses.

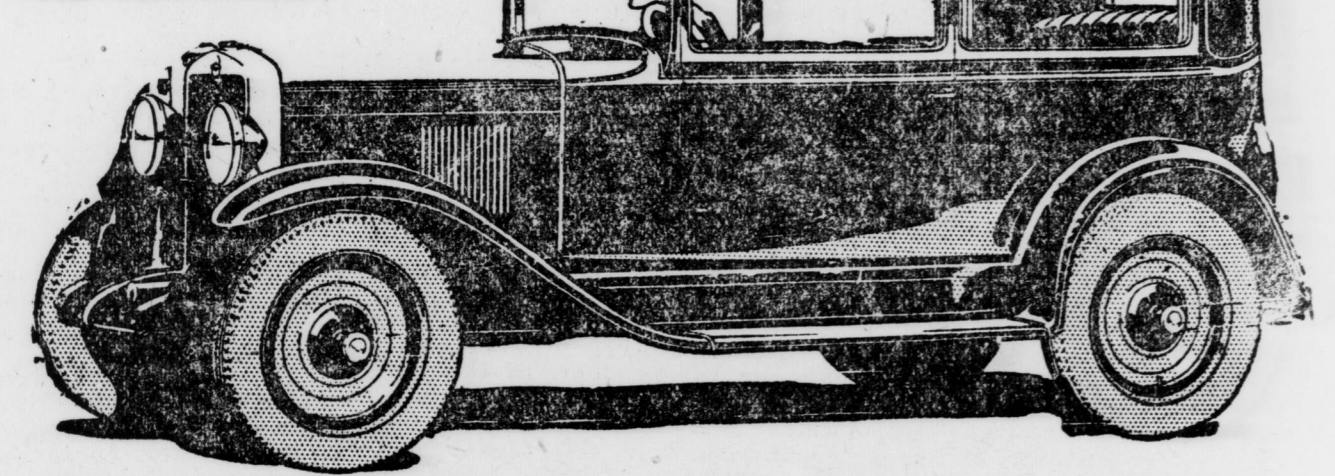
If "Pensacola" does mean "cool thinking," it certainly was the right ship to send down to Brazil to protect American lives.

That Colorado football player who made 35 touchdowns when a report got out that he had smallpox was lucky. The next time he might try b. o. or halitosis. "Even the best players wouldn't tackle him.

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