

Careful Crooks and Careless Drivers

Auto Thieves Steal \$100,000 in Cars in 1922.

ONE DARK night last year a small auto truck was driven into the alley behind the Philadelphia branch of the largest manufacturers of automobile ignition locks in the country. There was a quick manipulation of keys, handled expertly, and a back door of the establishment was open. A large folded sheet of cardboard was handed from the car and taken inside.

The cardboard, when unfolded, was an exact reproduction of the safe which stood under lights in plain view of the front window. It was but the work of seconds to set it up as a screen in front of the safe, and a safe cracker went to work on the combination in comparative security from interruption. In the meantime his companions unbolted a machine weighing hundreds of pounds from its moorings in the dark recesses at the back of the shop, and carried it out to their truck.

There was an almost unnoticeable explosion as the safe, which had proved stubborn, was blown; a hasty sorting of its contents; and the cracksmen, disregarding apparent valuables, carried a heavy volume out to the car, which was driven rapidly away.

Thus was perpetrated one of the most daring and disturbing robberies in the history of American crime.

Missing a Rich Haul

It was aimed at no petty loot, such as two or three million dollars in bonds or currency. It was intended to place at the mercy of the criminal element of the country automobiles with a value of hundreds of millions of dollars.

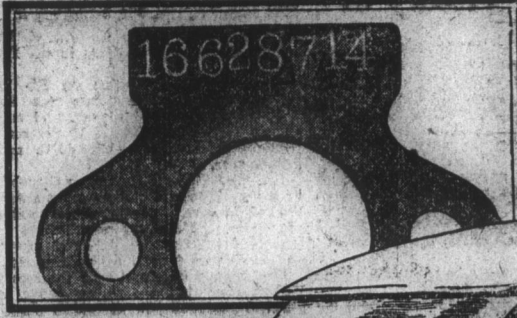
The machine stolen was one of a half dozen in the United States used in making keys to the ignition locks on 80 per cent of the high grade automobiles manufactured. The book sought in the safe contained the code letters and numbers of each of these locks. Simply by looking at the number on the lock of any of these cars, and tracing down that number in the code book, keys duplicating the owner's could be manufactured.

Possession of these keys would not only make the actual stealing of these cars more simple, but would aid the organized bands of thieves greatly in disposing of stolen cars without suspicion.

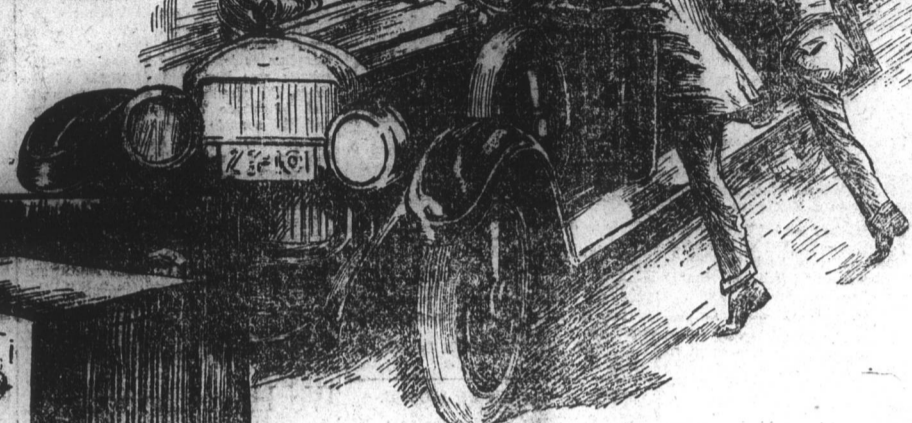
The whole ingenious plot, to which the best brains of the criminal profession had evidently been dedicated, failed because a clerk in the ignition lock establishment disobeyed orders. Strict instructions had been issued that the code book, with its almost incalculable value, should always be locked in the safe when not in use. The safe had been locked for the night when this clerk, working late, went to put it back. Fearful of a reprimand for not having replaced it earlier, he did not telephone one of the heads of the establishment to return and open the safe, but trusted to luck to get it back next day without observation, and tucked it on a high shelf. Luck was not only with him, but with the establishment and the country's automobile owners. The "code book" which the thieves blew open the safe to obtain turned out to be an accessory catalogue.

The key-making machine has never been recovered, but it is useless without the book. The thieves mailed the catalogue back with a polite note of regret.

The failure of this gigantic plot did not prevent thieves stealing \$100,000,000 worth of automobiles in the United States last year, according to a careful computation made by the statistical department of the Aetna Life Insurance Company—a figure which is increasing at a rate which staggers the imagination.



The lower row of figures was invisible until treated with heat and acid.



increase in police departments. As the number of cars which each policeman must guard grows larger, the number of stolen mounts and the percentage recovered dwindles.

There has been a tenfold increase in automobiles in ten years. This year will see 3,500,000 automobiles manufactured. As compared to such growth, police departments are almost stationary.

"If you leave your bank roll leaning against the curb, somebody's going to pinch it," is a summary of the situation by a thief, now in a New York State prison, who stole \$2,000,000 worth of cars during 20 years of operation. He boasts that there is no type of lock or safety device which

he has not outwitted. He admits a preference for cars not locked—and there are plenty left that way—but made it a point to foil all of the locksmiths during his career, just as a matter of professional pride.

Laugh at Locksmiths

Gasoline feed pipe locks, steering wheel locks, chained wheels, transmission locks—they are all pie to the experienced man, he avers. When he took a fancy to a particular car, protected by half a dozen or so assorted locks, his crew of huskies drew alongside with truck and trailer, like any honest working men, and trundled the "disabled" prize away under the eyes of the law. He did it once too often, but it worked for 20 years.

The next move is to get the stolen goods to a friendly garage, of which there are dozens in every large city, and remove all identification marks, scraping the number from the body and filing the number from the engine. New numbers are impressed over the old with steel dies, the body repainted and tires changed, possibly, and the car is ready for market. If of a common make it is often sold where stolen. If conspicuous, it is shipped elsewhere. In rare cases stolen cars have been sold back to the owners.

A small investment, a quick turnover, and a big profit, with mighty little risk. No wonder this is a business which is pressing bootlegging for importance.

Last year 7,107 cars were stolen in New York City, and 3,220 recovered—the lowest rate of recovery on record. In 1918 there were 8,340 cars stolen, and 2,578 recovered. In this one city an increase in cars permanently lost from 762 to 3,887 in five years! These figures are in the possession of the Aetna Life Insurance Company.

Borrowing Cars for Banditry

These cars permanently lost were the grist of the professional thieving organizations. They are traveling other streets, in altered guises. The cars recovered were largely "borrowed" for banditry or joyriding. Your up-to-date bandit seldom walks. He goes about his business in somebody else's gasoline buggy. In the fracas in which he engages his license number is frequently taken, and this clue is of course run down, leading to John Smith, banker and church member. Smith's car is found by a roadside, usually the worse for wear.

It used to be a penitentiary offense—in some sections an offense rewarded with informal hanging—to steal a \$50 horse. Now six months in jail is heavy for stealing a \$5,000 car. That is one reason why automobile theft is on the increase.

But the big reason is that stealing an automobile is so easy, and capture is so unlikely. Automobiles recovered does not mean apprehension of the thieves. The recovered cars are almost always deserted.

Revealing Erased Numbers

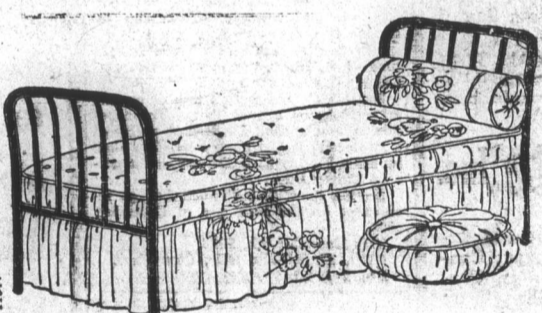
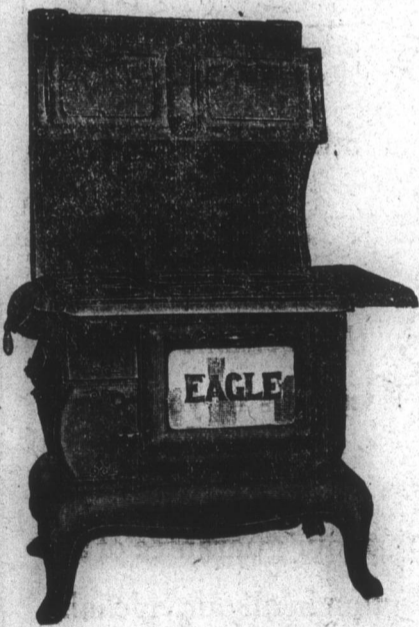
A real step toward detection of disguised cars, turned back into the channels of trade, has been made by perfecting a process for making visible identification numbers that have been filed away from metal surfaces. The professional thief's first step is always to file away the numbers placed on the engine by the manufacturer and stamp new ones in their places. This is done so skillfully that only an expert can detect that a change has been made, and the mere detection of a change does nothing toward identifying the car.

Recently it was found that the impression left by the original number left an invisible compression in the metal. By applying heat and acids to the surface, this compression was made visible in the form of the original figures. By use of this method the surest safeguard of the thief has been removed, and although the method has only recently come into use, hundreds of cars have already been identified and returned to their owners.

The pedigree of a used car should always be traced by the prospective buyer. The man selling the car may be honest, but one or two steps back of him a thief may lurk.

Bringing to justice the men who are getting rich in this business is the duty of every citizen. The police can't do it all. They have too much else to do. The first step is for the driver—the car owner—to be as careful as the thief.

CLEAN SWEEP FURNITURE SALE



We came to Concord eight months ago and opened a branch furniture store. Since that time we have enjoyed good business, in fact more than we had expected. Now we are going into our new quarters next door to Joe Gaskel, where we will be in shape to serve you better. We have bought our complete stock for the new store. Therefore we can't afford to move the stock we now have on hand.

Come early and get the furniture you need at One-third Off for Cash.

SPRATT BROS.

Forest Hill

Buffalo and McGill Street

World's Biggest Horse Shoe Throwing Tournament at Lake Worth, Florida, in February



The greatest horse shoe throwing contest in the world's history will be the National Mid-Winter Horse Shoe Tournament at Lake Worth, Florida (near Palm Beach) in February. Horse shoe throwers from every part of the land will attend. The invitation was extended to the National Horse Shoe Pitchers' Assn. of America, President Al Atchler and Secretary Walters of the Lake Worth Horse Shoe Club.

Horse shoe tossers are tuning up for the big contest. It is expected that horse shoe throwing will become so popular that even the cannibals in darkest Alaska will learn to pitch shoes, instead of heads. Among the stars who will attend are Mrs. J. E. Francisco, Woman Champion Horse Shoe Pitcher of the World; George

W. May, Akron, Ohio, World's Champion; C. C. Davis of Columbus, Ohio, ex-champion; Frank Jackson, Iowa's star tosser; Harold Falor, Boy Champion of the World; Blain Nuneaker, the 17-year-old "prodigy" of Miami, Fla.; Frank Johnson, Ralph Spencer, Frank Latta and other near champions and ex-champs, including George Johnson, Dr. Witt Doyle, W. W. Wilkerson, Loren W. Baker, Brundage, Spencer and many other.

Among women stars will be Mrs. Annie Lannam, Heimbough, Bristol, Young and Col. It is expected that the world's record game with 63 ringers and 18 doubles, will be broken.

Practically every section of the country was represented at the Cleveland tournament in September. Over 200 competed in the men's contest alone. There were

large entries in the women's tournament and also in that for boys under 15. Nearly all these competitors and many others have signified their intention of being present. Western stars will compete with experts from the New England and Central states. In addition, fans from all over the United States will attend. The Florida State Horse Shoe Pitchers' Assn. will hold their annual meet at Lake Worth at the same time. Secretary C. V. Faulkner is making big preparations. Mayor Clark of Lake Worth and the Board of Trade are preparing a royal welcome for the visitors.

Lake Worth is one of the most beautiful and modern towns on the East coast of Florida and is bound to attract thousands during the big meet, February 18th to 24th, as it is on the line of the Florida East Coast Railway and easily accessible from Northern points.