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JOURNALIST AND HOAXER: WILLIAM FRANCIS MANNIX AND THE LONG HISTORY
OF FAKED NEWS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Mass Communication

in

Theanship School of Mass Communication

by
Madelyn K. Duhon
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2015
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ABSTRACT

William Francis Mannix was a colossal hoaxer, journalist, criminal, and literary forger. He most famously fabricated “Memoirs of Li Hung Chang” (1913); sent sensational dispatches from Cuba during the Spanish American War that were published in the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Press*, and other reputable papers; and is suspected of forging love letters written by Abraham Lincoln, published by the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1929. Mannix is representative of a type of journalist at the turn of the nineteenth century. At that time elements of the press were striving for professional respectability and embracing ethical standards. Historians have held these publications up as standing apart from the sensational press. In fact, even the best publications were tied in with journalists like Mannix. This thesis attempts to consolidate the threads of Mannix’s life, putting his career into the larger journalism context it illuminates.

INTRODUCTION

William Francis Mannix, William Grant Leonard, Captain William Mannix, Captain William Manning, William Grant Morris, Waldo E. Burr, Norman B. Courtenay, Carl von Ressingler, Carl von Ressengler, Prisoner No. 50138 of the Sing Sing Penitentiary.¹ Many names; one man.

William Francis Mannix, the one correct name, was a hoaxer, journalist, criminal, and literary forger. He was a habitual liar and one of America's most notable literary forgers in history. He most famously fabricated "Memoirs of Li Hung Chang," a book published in 1913 purportedly derived from manuscripts written by the Chinese official. It is his best-documented forgery, written while he was imprisoned in jail. Much of the material originally appeared in the *New York Sun* and the *London Observer* before being turned into the autobiography. This scarce antiquarian book still sometimes appears in used book shops. Before and during the Spanish American War, Mannix wrote sensational dispatches of field adventures with Spanish troops and insurgents. In reality he was fulfilling his job as a foreign correspondent in the bar room of a hotel in Havana, Cuba. These dispatches, all faked, were published in the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Press*, and other conservative papers of the time. In 1915, the *Independent* published his two interviews with Yuan Shi-Kai, President of the Chinese Republic, both faked. Some suspect Mannix as responsible for forging a collection of love letters written from Abraham Lincoln to Ann Rutledge published by the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1929. His forged articles, dispatches, memoirs, biographies, and diaries focus on obscure, hard-to-verify characters. His non-fabricated material was often too dull to catch any reader's attention.

Mannix, who lived from about 1870 to 1920, is representative of a type of journalist at the turn of the nineteenth century. Historians assumed certain newspapers to be scrupulous at the time, but even these strayed. Even during the Spanish American War, the *New York Times* was considered conservative.² It's reporting of the Cuban rebellion is described as "sober," although Mannix's dispatches were not.³ The *New York Herald* exemplified "the type of a good

¹ "Names Used By Mannix." List generated by the Brechers, Box 3. Brecher Collection. Ruth E. and Edward M. Brecher Collection on William F. Mannix; 1950-1965, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

² Campbell, Joseph W. *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001.

³ Krauss, Clifford. "The World; Remember Yellow Journalism." *New York Times*, 15 February 1998.

conservative paper” because it presented the “unvarnished” truth and gave prominence to news of business and politics.⁴ It, “like all others of its type,” voiced and lead “middle class-intelligence.”⁵ The *Evening Post* was “a splendid example of the higher type of paper.”⁶

As many as one hundred thousand people hoped to make a career in journalism at the end of 1880.⁷ Cheap, inexperienced reporters were easily replaceable. In New York City, more than 500 people were employed on a non-permanent basis by newspapers.⁸ In the late nineteenth century, an apprenticeship system was often implemented to train journalists, requiring beginners to complete a probationary period, paying them for whether and how much of a story was published.⁹ Newly hired reporters seldom received systematic instruction on work standards.¹⁰ There was a broad agreement on a journalist’s standard work practices and conventions of behavior.¹¹ Rules governing how one could acquire news varied by paper. Some newspapers permitted reporters to assume false identities or bribe sources.¹² The *New York Sun* and *New York Evening Post* prohibited those practices, but one reporter who worked for both papers, Irvin Cobb, said reporters should learn the “academic” rules to not only obey them, but also when and where to “intelligently” break them.¹³

The yellow press was often criticized for sensational irresponsibility, especially during the Spanish American War. Yellow journalism can be defined as the “sneering pejorative” associated with newsgathering misconduct, a “derisive shorthand for denouncing journalists and their misdeeds, real and imagined.”¹⁴ Journalism historians examined this period of yellow journalism as a time of “extravagant experimentation” that “ultimately gave birth to the staid, inverted pyramid style.”¹⁵ Historians of newspaper sensationalism concentrated on the yellow

⁴ Rogers, James Edward. *The American Newspaper*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1909.

⁵ Rogers, *The American Newspaper*, 52.

⁶ Rogers, *The American Newspaper*, 121.

⁷ Sumpter, Randall S. "Practical Reporting": Late Nineteenth-Century Journalistic Standards and Rule Breaking." *American Journalism*, vol. 30, no. 1, Winter 2013, pp. 44-64.

⁸ Smythe, Ted Curtis. *The Gilded Age Press, 1865-1900*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003.

⁹ Fedler, Fred. *Lessons from the Past: Journalists' Lives and Works, 1850-1950*. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 2000.

¹⁰ Sumpter, *Practical Reporting*, 51.

¹¹ Sumpter, *Practical Reporting*, 54.

¹² Sumpter, *Practical Reporting*, 55.

¹³ Cobb, Irvin S. *Exit Laughing*. Indianapolis, New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941.

¹⁴ Campbell, *Yellow Journalism*, 25.

¹⁵ Roggenkamp, Karen. *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2005.

journalism of the 1890s, but sensational journalism had its origins much earlier than this.¹⁶

Faking news existed since the beginning of journalism. It was not a new phenomenon.

By the 1890s, “faking” was so common, a trade journal editor complained: “Not one in a hundred of these paragraphs is anything but pure fiction, coined at the point of the writer’s pen.”¹⁷ Exclusivity, something Mannix excelled in, was prized. A news editor said, “It is the goal of every reporter to get a scoop. The item that you land in your paper before any competitor gets it is a scoop.”¹⁸ Some journalists established careers on credible, expert reporting. Others took an easier route, adventurers and dramatics looking for fame and money.

After “The Memoirs of Li Hung Chang” was determined to be a fake, it was reprinted as fiction in 1923. This edition began with a 70-page preface, titled “The Story of a Literary Forgery” by journalist Ralph Delahaye Paine Sr. “The Story of a Literary Forgery” was a brief biography about Mannix written by Paine. Paine and Mannix knew each other well. They were fellow journalists at one point. Paine did not like Mannix for reasons that will be explained later. Even after this republishing, Mannix has gone down in history the same way he lived his life – a shadowy character. No one has been able to track down all of his fake works. Few people have tried to study Mannix, to figure out who he was, and why he did what he did. One slight exception would be Edward and Ruth Brecher, writers for *Reader’s Digest*, *Colliers*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, etc. The Brechers studied Mannix for more than ten years, attempting to trace his elusive tracks. They ultimately did not complete their goal of analyzing his psychopathic personality. Ruth died in 1966, Edward in 1989.

I traveled to the Princeton University Library’s Department of Rare Books and Special Collections in Princeton, New Jersey, to study the Ruth E. and Edward M. Brecher Collection on William F. Mannix. This is an unprocessed collection of information gathered for a biography. I analyzed more than 1,500 pieces of correspondence, newspaper clippings, microfilms, birth, marriage, and army records, and documents relating to Mannix’s background, forgeries, and psychopathic personalities. To complete this thesis, I read extensively on literature covering the Spanish American War, the Lincoln-Rutledge letter hoax, literary and journalism hoaxes, journalistic standards, and the professionalization of journalism.

¹⁶ Crouthamel, J. L. and Andrew Jackson. “James Gordon Bennett, the ‘New York Herald’, and the Development of Newspaper Sensationalism.” *New York History*, vol. 54, no. 3, 1973, pp. 294-316.

¹⁷ Sumpter, *Practical Reporting*, 58.

¹⁸ Koenigsberg, Moses. *King News: An Autobiography*. Philadelphia, New York, F.A. Stokes Company, 1941.

I also examined content the Brechers did not generate. Discovered in the papers of Martin Egan papers in the Pierpont Morgan Library archives in New York, New York, were two notable letters. On November 30, 1914, Egan wrote to “Mr. C.D. Jameson of Washington, D.C.:

“I know absolutely nothing about the man concerning whom you wrote me but shall endeavor to get some lines on him. He and his book have excited a good deal of curiosity...”¹⁹ Egan was at one time a correspondent for the Associated Press. His wife, Eleanor Franklin Egan, was a journalist and foreign correspondent with expertise on China. This letter references “Memoirs,” which they were probably interested in. The next letter, dated January 27, 1915, said:

I have been unable to gather anything as to Mr. Mannix, the gentleman of the Li Hung Chang Memoirs, except to obtain in the strict confidence a very straight tip that there is no such person as Mr. Mannix, he being an invention for literary purposes. I am unable absolutely to verify this but possibly the tip will give you the lead that you require. Please treat the thing as confidential as coming from me.²⁰

Mannix’s name appears intermittently in newspapers for his frequent arrests, escaping prison, and jumping bail. He is mentioned rarely or briefly in literature about the Spanish American War. He supposedly interviewed Salvador Cisneros Betancourt, president of the Cuban Republic the insurgents had formed, at a hideout in the mountains.²¹ In fact, Mannix hyperbolized his dispatches so greatly he enraged government officials, who then commanded his expulsion.

Interestingly, in the Brecher collection I found a letter from one of Edward Brecher’s friends, Max Lowenthal, requesting “Mr. Frank Parks of the White House” to search through the Secret Service’s files for information about Mannix and his many aliases:

One of my friends is planning a book on a wholly non-contentious, non-political subject. He wants to write about a famous forger many years ago who operated under many aliases, sold fake documents to magazines...My friend is having difficulty in tracing all possible data on this man.

It occurs to me that the Secret Service may have files on this man under one or more of his aliases. Would you ask Matt whether he thinks it would be inappropriate for me to ask Jim Rowley whether he can get any data on this fellow from the Secret Service. All this

¹⁹ Martin Egan to C. D. Jameson, November 30, 1914. Martin Egan Papers, The Pierpont Morgan Library Archives, New York City.

²⁰ Martin Egan to C. D. Jameson, January 27, 1915. Martin Egan Papers, The Pierpont Morgan Library Archives, New York City.

²¹ Brown, Charles H. *The Correspondents' War; Journalists in the Spanish-American War*. New York, Scribner, 1967.

relates to a man long since dead, and the information is merely of a criminal, non-political nature.²²

There was no record of any of Mannix's aliases in the Secret Service files or archives.²³

This thesis attempts to consolidate the threads of Mannix's life, putting his career into the larger journalism context it illuminates. In the first chapter of this thesis, I will describe journalistic standards and foreign correspondence at the time Mannix was at work. I will explain the assumption of reputable papers of the time and how that can be proved false. As Mannix was not a sole operator in the field of forgeries, I provide two case studies of similar people. The second chapter outlines his life, establishing what we do know about him. I describe several defining episodes of his life – his many arrests, his drinking, his marriages. The third chapter is about his reporting during Spanish American War and an example of one of his forgeries, “Appeal to the American People.” The fourth chapter focuses on his fabricated writings, specifically “Memoirs of Li Hung Chang,” articles about Chinese leader Yuan Shih-Kai in the *Independent*, and diaries about Joseph Bonaparte, elder brother of Napoleon Bonaparte. The fifth chapter will examine the claim that Mannix was responsible for the forged Lincoln letters in the *Atlantic*. I wrap up this thesis with the conclusion that positions Mannix as an example of a kind of reporter in his time – a kind that was not so much an aberration as historians have claimed, but a type that has persisted even up to today. Fake news, the cause of concern among American journalists today, has roots deep in our history. If we define the period of modern journalism as from 1840 to 2000, we find that well into the modern era journalists struggled to figure out what good journalism was. When they did generally agree on principles, they struggled to meet them.²⁴

²² Max Lowenthal to Frank Parks, June 27, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hamilton, John M. and Tworek, Heidi J. S. “The Natural History of the News: An Epigenetic Study.” *Journalism*, 2016, pp. 1-17.

CHAPTER 1. FICTION, JOURNALISM, AND THE MASS COMMUNICATION MARKETPLACE

“There will, of course, always be news fakes as long as there are dishonest journalists with axes to grind, and dishonest news sources who can impose on credulous reporters.”

–Frank Luther Mott, historian and journalist.¹

Why spotlight Mannix? Mannix represents of a type of journalist during the turn of the nineteenth century. Parts of his career will always lie in dark recesses, as he wanted it. Mannix was not the only literary rogue of the time or a solitary outlier. At the height of his career, the press was struggling for equilibrium. Journalism was undergoing dramatic change. The yellow press is often singled out for sensational irresponsibility, but foreign correspondence was a work in progress. The discipline of journalism, which was reporting news based on Western belief systems, rose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² The professional model valued ethics and professional solidarity.³ Mannix’s career illuminates a larger journalism context, showing a breach in the values of this model. His writings were sensational, descriptive, and sometimes completely made up.

Penny papers, which made their debut in the 1830s, were cheap, sensational, and designed to appeal to readers neglected by the six-cent commercial papers.⁴ Prior to penny papers, American newspapers reflected the ideological interests of political parties. From the rise of the penny press the ideal of objectivity initially emerged. The 1830s marked a revolution in American journalism - news triumphed over the editorial and facts over opinion. Penny papers invented the modern concept of news by seeking out and including foreign, domestic, national, and local political news, along with police reports, and news about social life. Papers no longer relied on money from political parties thanks to increased advertising revenues and circulation. Penny papers claimed political independence to attract a larger audience.

Penny papers displayed an interplay between storytelling and news briefing, fact and fiction. Penny papers specialized in “outright humbugs and hoaxes,” as literary hoaxes were a

¹ Mott, Frank Luther. "Facetious News Writing, 1833-1883." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, no. 1, 1942, pp. 35-54.

² Nerone, John. "The Historical Roots of the Normative Model of Journalism." *Journalism*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2013, pp. 446-458.

³ Hamilton, John M. and Tworek, Heidi J. S. "The Natural History of the News: An Epigenetic Study." *Journalism*, 2016, pp. 1-17.

⁴ Crouthamel, J. L. and Andrew Jackson. "James Gordon Bennett, the 'New York Herald', and the Development of Newspaper Sensationalism." *New York History*, vol. 54, no. 3, 1973, pp. 294-316.

way “to create a spectacular story – and guarantee spectacular circulation figures.”⁵ Newspaper hoaxes created a community of readers, “reveling in the heady thrill of choosing for themselves whether or not to believe.”⁶ Historian Helen Hughes (1940) asserted that the penny press assumed functions previously performed by gossip and folk tales; readers did not necessarily believe everything they read.⁷

One of the first and most bizarre newspaper frauds in the United States was the infamous Moon Hoax of 1835, perpetuated by the *New York Sun* and reporter Richards Adams Locke. The Great Moon Hoax was a series of articles about fictional lunar discoveries. The articles convinced readers and even some scholars that there was a civilization of bat-like, human-like creatures living on the moon's surface.⁸ The first installment of the 18,000-word serialized story, published August 25, 1835, only hinted at these findings, which were revealed on the front page of the paper over the next five days.⁹ The first article purported to be an extract from *The Edinburgh Journal of Science*, claiming Sir John Herschel, one of the world's greatest astronomers,

discovered planets in other solar systems, has obtained a distinct view of objects in the moon, fully equal to that in which the unaided eye commands of terrestrial objects at the distance of one hundred yards, has affirmatively settled the question of whether this satellite be inhabited and by what order of beings.¹⁰

The telescope used to look at the moon was massive, weighing 14,826 pounds and equipped with a 24-foot lens.¹¹ On the second day, the *Sun* revealed that Herschel discovered lunar vegetation, tiny moon bison, and a blue unicorn.¹² On August 28, 1835, the *Sun* announced moon-dwelling bat-people were seen. These creatures were naked, four feet tall, with “wings composed of a thin membrane without hair.”¹³ The final story solemnly reported that astronomers had left the

⁵ Roggenkamp, Karen. *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2005.

⁶ Tucher, Andie. *Froth & Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America's First Mass Medium*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

⁷ Hughes, Helen MacGill. *News and the Human Interest Story*. Chicago, Ill., The University of Chicago press, 1940.

⁸ Castagnaro, Mario. "Lunar Fancies and Earthly Truths: The Moon Hoax of 1835 and the Penny Press." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts-An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2012, pp. 253-268.

⁹ Thornton, Brian. "The Moon Hoax: Debates About Ethics in 1835 New York Newspapers." *Journal Of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2000, pp. 89-100.

¹⁰ *New York Sun*, 25 August 1835, p. 1.

¹¹ Thornton, *The Moon Hoax*, 92.

¹² *New York Sun*, 26 August 1835, p. 1.

¹³ *New York Sun*, 28 August 1835, p. 1.

telescope lens facing the eastern horizon overnight; the rising sun burned a 15-foot hole in the telescope's lens, so the *Sun* could not print any more findings.¹⁴ The *Sun*'s circulation increased from about 4,000 daily sales to more than 19,000.¹⁵ Few readers realized the "discoveries" were fictional.¹⁶ Even the *New York Times* and *New Yorker* "were taken in."¹⁷ Early in September, Locke admitted he made the story up. The *Journal of Commerce* ran a story announcing the story was a hoax, but Locke's career was not affected.

Readers did not appear to resent this trick and accepted the hoax in good nature.¹⁸ Readers of the time did not have "fixed expectations about what news was as a commodity or assumptions that it needed to be reported objectively."¹⁹ Fact and fiction blended on newspaper pages. Hoaxes were a standard part of journalism. The culture of hoaxes appeared as early as the 1830s, but existed even later on. Hoaxes were not confined solely to sensational papers.

The line between a journalistic hoax and journalistic fake is fine. The distinction does not depend on objective criteria or the writer's intention, but the reader's reception of the story.²⁰ If an amusing story fools no one, it is a good hoax. If a front page story fools everyone, "it is a fake, and highly reprehensible from the point of view of ethical journalism."²¹

Scholars argue an emerging discourse of truth formed and emerged throughout the nineteenth century. Journalists of the late nineteenth century "were convinced that writing was a commodity craft within an efficient literary market" and simultaneously attempted "to reserve a space for artistic creativity in that increasingly regimented marketplace."²² As the century progressed, so did the quest for facts. Editors took pride in speed and accuracy.²³ Technological inventions, such as the steam press, quickened the printing process. From 1870 to 1900, the number of American daily newspapers increased from 400 to more than 2,300.²⁴ Total daily

¹⁴ Thornton, *The Moon Hoax*, 92.

¹⁵ O'Brien, Frank. *The Story of the Sun*. New York: Appleton, 1928.

¹⁶ Hilton, John L. "Lucian and the Great Moon Hoax of 1835." *Akroterion*, vol. 50, Dec. 2005, pp. 1-21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ Emery, Michael C. and Edwin Emery. *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1988. See also Mott, Frank Luther. *American Journalism; a History, 1690-1960*. New York, Macmillan, 1962.

¹⁹ Castagnaro, *Lunar Fancies and Earthly Truths*, 253-268.

²⁰ Mott, *Facetious News Writing*, 46.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 18.

²³ Schudson, Michael. "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism." *Journalism*, vol. 2, no. 2, Aug. 2001, pp. 149-170.

²⁴ Ward, Stephen J. A. *The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path of Objectivity and Beyond*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.

circulation skyrocketed by more than 10 million, from 3.5 million to 15 million.²⁵ The telephone, typewriter, and telegraph expedited the recording and dissemination of news.²⁶ Newspapers of the 1890s were larger, eight to sixteen pages long.²⁷ Three pages of an eight-page paper could be devoted to advertising.²⁸

Mannix personifies an interplay between fiction, journalism, and the mass communication marketplace that existed at the time. He took advantage of the ever-increasing need for news.

Interviewing was common by the 1870s. It was a “practice oriented more to pleasing an audience of news consumers than to parroting or promoting a party line.”²⁹ Even as late as the 1890s, news items did not or rarely identified sources or specify how information was collected. In her historical analysis of journalistic standards in nineteenth-century America, Dicken Garcia says, “This in itself says something about standards and values at the time.”³⁰

Adolph S. Ochs purchased the struggling *New York Times* in 1896. He stated it would “give the news impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of party, sect or interests involved,” instead of competing with yellow journalism.³¹ Major competitors of the time were the *Herald*, *World*, *Journal*, *Tribune*, and *Sun*.³² Ochs tilled “his own corner of the journalistic vineyard.”³³ The *Times* slogan, “All the News That’s Fit to Print,” was a war cry as the newspaper fought for a footing against the *Herald*, *World*, and *Journal*.³⁴ Ochs’ disdain for scandal and sensation was displayed through the *Times* advertising: “It does not soil the breakfast cloth.”³⁵ It was marketed as the premier example of respectable news delivery.

That same year, “in the bawdiest days of yellow journalism,” the newspaper “began to climb to its premier position by stressing an ‘information’ model, rather than a ‘story’ model, of

²⁵ Baldasty, Gerald J. *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

²⁶ Bent, Silas. *Ballyhoo; the Voice of the Press*. New York, Boni and Liveright, 1927.

²⁷ Dicken Garcia, Hazel. *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

²⁸ Dicken Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-century America*, 91.

²⁹ Schudson, *The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism*, 156.

³⁰ Dicken Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-century America*, 67.

³¹ Quoted in Tift and Jones, *The Trust*, xix.

³² Davis, Elmer H. *History of the New York Times, 1851-1921*. New York, The New York Times, 1921.

³³ Bent, *Ballyhoo*, 164.

³⁴ Davis, *History of the New York Times*, 199-200.

³⁵ Brown, *The Correspondents' War*, 19.

reporting.”³⁶ The newspaper emerged “as the golden child of informational reportage.”³⁷ The editorial content of the newspaper was described as constant, regardless of times of adversity or prosperity: “In 1851, in 1871, in 1884 and in 1921 it was a sober, conservative, dignified paper, always American, with its special position in the esteem of readers who valued sobriety of discussion and intelligent and balanced judgment.”³⁸ The editorial page “never muddies the water,” wrote Silas Bent, journalist and author, in his most famous work, “Ballyhoo” (1927), a critical survey of newspaper practices.³⁹

Schudson (1978) outlined two types of journalistic systems that operated in the 1890s: the information model and the story model. The information model was associated with fairness and objectivity. This dichotomy is too stark and simple. Reporters complained about their editors, saying, “Reporters were to report the news as it happened, like machines.”⁴⁰ Competition caused newspapers to “satisfy public standards of truth, public ideals of decency, and public taste in entertainment.”⁴¹ Reporters believed “it was their job both to get the facts and to be colorful,”⁴² but organizational pressures forced an attachment to facts. In her scholarly examination of new journalism, Roggenkamp, an expert in American periodical studies and print culture, declared: “When a newspaper proclaims that it prints fact and fact alone, it removes from its audience the burden of critical perspective – a perspective that could serve as a check for anything other than accuracy and truth within the paper.”⁴³ The *New York Tribune*, *Post*, and *Times*, conservative papers which “caviled so violently in editorials against the crimes of the yellow press,” cannot be cleared of the charge of irresponsibility.⁴⁴

Mannix was not a sole operator in the field of forgeries. I provide two case studies of similar characters. The first story was told by Oswald Garrison Villard, proprietor of the *New York Evening Post*, one of the most respectable papers at the time, in his autobiography “Fighting Years: Memoirs of a Liberal Editor.” Villard wrote many articles and books criticizing

³⁶ Schudson, Michael. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books, 1978.

³⁷ Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 123.

³⁸ Davis, *History of the New York Times*, 177.

³⁹ Bent, *Ballyhoo*, 167.

⁴⁰ Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 77.

⁴¹ Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 70-71.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴³ Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 135.

⁴⁴ Brown, *The Correspondents' War*, 445.

journalists and newspapers, for his “regard for journalistic morality was profound and adamant.”⁴⁵ He tried to “wake up the American daily press to its professional responsibilities.”⁴⁶

Edgar Bellairs, the subject of the first story, began his career with the *Evening Post* in 1898. Villard, then managing editor, said Bellairs evidently came from a good family and was a noncommissioned officer. Bellairs “wrote badly” but Villard “licked his articles...into shape.”⁴⁷ Villard printed a series by Bellairs on chain gangs in Florida, where Bellairs claimed he had served as an overseer. When the Spanish American War began, Bellairs requested an appointment as a correspondent with the army. He received it because of his alleged military experience. He went to Florida on behalf of the paper. One article, prominently displayed, was about his travels to Cuba on a fisherman’s boat. It came with a large expense bill, including “the cost of one mule eaten when other food ran out.”⁴⁸ An editorial staff member noticed the latitude and longitude Bellairs reported of his location in Cuba placed him in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. It was discovered Bellairs never left the United States! He was paid off and dismissed.

Bellairs went to work for the Associated Press under manager Melville Stone, partially due to his prior credentials. “I should have denounced him to Stone but it never occurred to me to do so,” Villard said.⁴⁹ Bellairs worked for the Associated Press in Santiago, Chile, and Havana, Cuba, reporting about Major General Leonard Wood, Military Governor of Cuba. Stone heard rumors about Bellairs having a criminal record. Before Stone probed into Bellairs’ past, General Wood vouched for his character, assuring that Bellairs was “the victim of malice and was wholly trustworthy.”⁵⁰ In 1902, Stone discovered the truth about Bellairs and let him go.

Sometime later, Bellairs visited Villard. Villard confronted him, saying, “Just one moment, before we shake hands let’s clear up one point. Am I shaking hands with Ernest Gerald Bellairs, or Ernest Elaine Cheriton, or E. Ellaine, or E. A. Cameron, or Charles Ballentine?”⁵¹ Bellairs was stupefied, dramatically throwing his hands in the air then collapsing into a chair “as if stricken,” asking “*Oh, my God*, have you heard that awful lie?”⁵² Bellairs continued, “Give me

⁴⁵ Angoff, Charles. “Oswald Garrison Villard and the Nation: A Memoir.” *The Antioch Review*, vol. 23, 15 July 1963, pp. 232-240.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁷ Villard, Oswald Garrison. *Fighting Years: Memoirs of a Liberal Editor*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939.

⁴⁸ Villard, *Fighting Years*, 160.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵² *Ibid.*

time, give me time and I'll prove my innocence," to which Villard retorted, "You can do that now. Why not roll up the sleeve of your coat and show me that you have no anchor tattooed on your right arm?"⁵³ Bellairs refused to roll up his sleeve, where an anchor tattoo marked him as a criminal. Bellairs left, assuring Villard that he would return and disprove the charges, but he never did.

According to Villard, Inspector Thomas Byrnes, head of the New York City detective department from 1880 until 1895, wrote about Bellairs in his book, "Professional Criminals of America." Villard confronted Bellairs with this record. According to Byrnes, Bellairs' real name was Charles Ballentine. Bellairs had:

visited every country on the face of the globe and the number of his victims runs into the thousands. The most successful part he plays is that of a society confidence man. The best families in England, France, and Canada have been taken in by his suavity.⁵⁴

Before his time at the *Evening Post* and *Associated Press*, Bellairs had been arrested in New York and sent to Tampa, Florida, where he was wanted for forgery. He had been sentenced on December 23, 1891 to seven years on the chain gang.

The *New York Sun* wrote a short editorial about Bellairs asking, "Who is this man?" with the evident intention of printing his record the next day. Villard said, "They were mad as hornets when I spoiled their game" by publishing the scoop first.⁵⁵ Villard saw Bellairs years after his exposure in the United States. Bellairs was a special correspondent for the *London Times*, "under what name I do not know."⁵⁶

The second story came from Melville Stone. In 1876, Stone and others founded the *Chicago Daily News*, another reputable paper of the time. The *Chicago Daily News* "virtually invented the ideal of a quality, professional American foreign news service."⁵⁷ Stone was general manager of the Associated Press for 26 years and for more than half a century "a tireless reporter."⁵⁸ When he became manager of the Associated Press in 1893, he said, "The business of news gathering and purveying has fallen into private and mercenary hands.... There can be no

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Villard, *Fighting Years*, 161-162.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cole, Jaci and J. M. Hamilton. "A Natural History of Foreign Correspondence: A Study of the Chicago Daily News, 1900-1921." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2007, pp. 151-166.

⁵⁸ "Melville E. Stone: A Brief Sketch." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1908-1984), no. 4, 1934, pp. 459-466.

really free press in these circumstances. A press to be free must be one which should gather the news for itself.”⁵⁹

Ross Raymond, the subject of the second story, was an attractive young man with journalistic ambitions. In 1876, Raymond requested employment from Stone at the *Chicago Daily News*, proving himself as an energetic, competent employee.⁶⁰ Raymond suddenly resigned and disappeared for a few months. He appeared in Baltimore, Maryland, then disappeared again. During this time, Raymond had been working for the *Philadelphia Times* and the *New York Herald*.⁶¹ He married a girl then deserted her. The next Stone heard of Raymond was for an arrest in New Orleans, Louisiana. Then, unexpectedly in 1882, Stone received a cable message from Cairo, Egypt, signed by Raymond, describing an important battle. Thus, the *Chicago Daily News* printed a graphic story of the battle even before the London papers. Months later, Raymond appeared in Chicago again, refused to accept payment for his valuable message from Egypt, and then disappeared. Two years later, Raymond wrote to Stone from India, where he was editing the *Pioneer*, an English paper. More months of silence followed.

Raymond’s real name was Frank H. Powers.⁶² Under one alias, he was a brilliant, well-paid journalist. Under another alias, he was an accomplished criminal with a record of swindling, forgery, and blackmail.

Here is one example of Raymond’s criminal success. He visited the Hotel Bristol in Paris, a place where royalties habitually stopped. He introduced himself as the “avant-courier of the Khedive of Egypt” and said the Highness would be arriving late that evening and it was the Highness’ birthday.⁶³ He requested a dinner for the incoming royal party and selected a menu of rare delicacies.⁶⁴ “With perfect nonchalance,” Raymond told the hotel manager he must select a suitable souvenir for each guest.⁶⁵ He asked for jewelry to choose from. He picked more than thirty pieces to put in the hotel safe and sent the rest back to the jeweler. He then requested for the jewelry to be sent to his room so he could affix the recipient’s name to each piece. He slipped out of the hotel with the treasure. Raymond had no relation with the Khedive and it was not the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 464.

⁶⁰ Stone, Melville Elijah. *Fifty Years a Journalist*. Garden City, N.Y., Toronto, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1921.

⁶¹ Stone, *Fifty Years a Journalist*, 68.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Khedive's birthday. Years later, his identity was discovered, but he was in prison. He was never punished for this crime.

Raymond settled in London, England, earning his income by writing for American newspapers. He successfully swindled money out of two men and was sentenced to ten years of hard labor. The wife he had deserted believed he had a form of insanity. As long as he avoided alcohol, he led an honorable life. Given one glass, he would "instantly set about swindling someone."⁶⁶ During these binges, he would buy expensive suits, go to costly rooms at the best hotels, order priceless champagne, and "all alone, indulge in an orgy."⁶⁷ When these ordeals were over, he would return to his newspaper work and slave tirelessly.

Historians and journalists have idealized professional standards. Journalists tried to develop standards but there will always be outliers. "It must be admitted that there is a gap between the ideals and the performances of newspapers," Bent said.⁶⁸ "News standards, like conventions of morality, are subject to change."⁶⁹ What makes Ross Raymond, William Francis Mannix, and Edgar Bellairs notable is that they were hired by exemplary papers of the time. Even the better papers hired dubious journalists. We often do not associate modern journalism with unscrupulous characters, but they existed and operated in plain sight. Mannix operated in New York, Pennsylvania, Idaho, Hawaii, Massachusetts, California, Cuba, Canada, and no doubt other places as well. This study will show how Mannix is representative of a certain kind of journalistic character and show how far reaching he was.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Stone, *Fifty Years a Journalist*, 70.

⁶⁸ Bent, Silas. *Newspaper Crusaders; a Neglected Story*. New York, London, Whittlesey House, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1939.

⁶⁹ Bent, *Ballyhoo*, 39.

CHAPTER 2. FOLLOWING A TRAIL OF WORTHLESS CHECKS

“To establish the vita of a villain who toward the end of his life sank into oblivion appears to be not quite an easy task.”

-Albert G. Hess, sociologist and professor of criminology.¹

William Francis Mannix’s biographical account is “so mixed with fraud and genius, stirring the imagination and the incapacity to see the truth, much less tell it,” Hess said.² Even the simplest facts about him are quite elusive or have been lost in time. Attempts to consolidate his life either failed or never reached completion. For years, the Brechers tried to trace his tracks, to figure out how and why he operated. Edward Brecher said:

Indeed, I could not have anticipated that throughout the next two decades of Ruth’s and my life together, William Francis Mannix would remain our abiding preoccupation and quarry or that today, five years after Ruth’s death, that ingenious scoundrel Mannix should continue to haunt me.³

Dr. Doremus Scudder was a friend of the Mannix family during their time in Hawaii and pastor of the Central Union Church in Honolulu. He said Mannix “affords the most interesting psychological study, in some respects, that I have ever come across.”⁴ Scudder’s brief, unpublished essay, “A Picturesque Literary Fraud – A Study in Abnormal Psychology,” about Mannix was discovered in an old, abandoned trunk.⁵ Ralph D. Paine, victim of Mannix’s exploits and fellow journalist, wrote a considerably biased account of Mannix in the republished edition of “The Memoirs of Li Hung Chang.” It is with these puzzle pieces, along with newspaper records and personal accounts of Mannix that I attempt to consolidate his life.

One thread remains common throughout Mannix’s life – his elusiveness. Even his birthdate is contested. No records of a birth certificate exist. A fire destroyed birth records in Malone, New York, the small village where he was born.⁶ There are no baptismal records at the local church. Mannix rarely gave the same birthdate twice. His birthplace also varied capriciously in sworn statements such as passport applications and army enlistments. In 1898, Mannix applied for a passport, swearing he was born in Malone, New York, on October 9, 1870,

¹ Hess, Albert G. Draft of “Crime Potentials of Conforming Subcultures: The Case of Francis William Mannix.” For presentation at the twenty-first annual meeting of the New York State Sociological Association, Eisenhower College, October 13, 1973. Unpublished manuscript.

² Forbes, Esther. “A Hoax and Its Perpetrator.” *Boston Evening Transcript*, 2 February 1924.

³ “Brecher, p. 8 – 9,” written by Brecher. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

⁴ Scudder to Paine, September 18, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁵ Brechers to Mrs. Ralph D. Paine, September 30, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁶ Brechers to Mrs. Thomas Dunphy, January 22, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

with permanent residence at the time as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with the occupation as writer. In 1904, his brother testified in court that Mannix was 32 years old, making his birth year 1872.⁷ A newspaper article gave his birthdate as October 15, 1870.⁸ His death certificate states that on August 31, 1920, his age was 46 years old, 10 months, and 21 days. This makes his birth date October 9, 1873. We know very little about his childhood or the first twenty years of his life. We do know he began his career as a malefactor at a young age. He had a job sending the names of guests at hotels to newspapers for which he was paid space rates.⁹ He was caught reporting the same guests at several hotels.¹⁰ On May 8, 1886, he enlisted in the New York National Guard, where he stayed until November 17, 1887. Records show he was 18 when he enlisted; date and place of birth were not required. He was probably about 15 years old. Another notable characteristic was his affinity for using and re-using a variety of pseudonyms. His second marriage was conducted under a false name. He even tried to pass a fraudulent check on the minister who performed the wedding ceremony. Mannix operated under various aliases all over the United States, sporadically appearing and disappearing.

Mannix was blue-eyed with brown hair and stood almost six feet tall.¹¹ He gave off the “aspect of a soldier of fortune” with his martial mustache, strong jaw, and scar on his chin that suggested he “courted war like a mistress.”¹² “I think he was quite proud of his looks, his figure, build, and making a fine appearance and impression,” Ruth, his second wife, said.¹³ This is for certain - Mannix was personable, handsome, and intelligent. His passport, issued in 1898, described him as having a high forehead, strong chin, medium mouth, prominent nose, light complexion, broad face, blue eyes, and dark hair. Seaver Miller, life-long resident and former mayor of Saranac Lake, New York, remembered Mannix as good looking with an athletic build and popular. Mannix was always immaculately dressed, looking as if he had “just stepped out from a band-box.”¹⁴ He liked to frequent the best hotels, restaurants, and cafes while surrounded

⁷ *Boston Herald*, 18 February 1904, p. 4, col. 4.

⁸ *Washington Evening Star*, 10 January 1896.

⁹ Forbes, *A Hoax and Its Perpetrator*.

¹⁰ Brecher to Dozier, September 2, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹¹ Hess, Albert G. “The ‘Memoirs’ of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation.” *Renditions*, vol. 15, 1981, pp. 155-167.

¹² Hess, *The “Memoirs” of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation*, 161.

¹³ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, December 31, 1952. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁴ Seaver Miller to the Brechers, February 8, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

by congenial companions. “He had lots of influence, liked front seats, a wonderful extemporaneous speaker, [liked] to go up and meet celebrities,” Ruth said.¹⁵

Ruth described Mannix as “the old-fashioned husband to conduct, handle all the business, and keep business matters to himself, provide, and his wife take care of the family, home, and household, and be a wife, and mother, unworried by business matters.”¹⁶ He was “the entertainer” with “wonderful conversational ability.”¹⁷ “I am glad I appreciated him so much, and loved him so loyally. Only death could have separated us,” she said.¹⁸

“I still think if Will Mannix had lived in the age of progress he might have distinguished himself in a more profitable way, but judging from his escapades like Hitler he failed,” a family friend said.¹⁹

Mannix’s aunt said the five or six Mannix boys only had a grammar school education, but they all learned how to set type. Presumably uneducated in the formal sense, Mannix told people he had a bachelor’s degree from Trinity College, Dublin, a master’s degree from Oxford, and a law degree from Stanford.²⁰ He founded several newspapers during his career: the *Independent* in Malone, *Adirondack Pioneer* in Saranac Lake, *Hennepin County Herald* in Minnesota, and *Pacific Pathfinder* in California.²¹ His resume boasted that he wrote for the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Press*, *Washington Star*, *Century Magazine*, and others.

“He was clever – in fact, he was often brilliant, and he had the most amazing imagination of anyone I ever knew,” Miller said.²²

He could write up an ordinary incident in such an attractive manner that everyone would want to read it. But while it was delightful to read it was often so embellished it was difficult to tell just what was fact and what fiction.²³

“I’ve often wished to see what he wrote before he was 40, tho, before I met him. I’ve never seen a scrap,” Ruth said. “He had nothing, recovered nothing he had done when and after I met him....He had such an imagination. I was happy when he labeled fiction as fiction. He got a

¹⁵ Ruth Mannix to the Brechers, December 31, 1952. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁶ Ruth Mannix to the Brechers, January 3, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁷ Ruth Mannix to the Brechers, December 31, 1952. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Carlisle to Brechers, August 21, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

²⁰ Brecher to Dozier, September 2, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

²¹ Brecher to Johnson, December 26, 1952. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

²² Miller to Brechers, February 8, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

²³ Ibid.

lot second hand and a lot was legitimate. But he had a family to make a living for and he did it with his pen.”²⁴

In 1890 or 1891, Mannix started the *Independent* in Malone, acting as “editor, typo, and devil.”²⁵ This small weekly newspaper was short-lived. Mannix then went to the tiny village of Saranac Lake, about 45 miles south, in the early spring of 1892. At the time, the village was a cosmopolitan community, “drowsy” and “stodgy.”²⁶

“I shall never forget the way he approached me for a ‘touch’ of his scheme,” Miller said.²⁷ Miller was passing a store, and “Billy, who was a stranger to me” was standing in front.²⁸ Miller heard footsteps rapidly approaching him. Then he felt a hand gently grasping his shoulder.

A very pleasant voice exclaimed: “I know who you are. You are Walter Rice. My name is Mannix, and I am here to start a newspaper. This town is ripe for it, and it will glue it on to the map so fast that nothing can pull it off.”²⁹

Mannix proposed to issue a sheet “so full of life that it will be a weekly song and dance in every Adirondack home.”³⁰ Mannix requested two dollars, promising Miller he would soon see a newspaper sold on Main Street. Miller gave him the money, “for who could resist this most plaintive appeal.”³¹

Mannix founded Saranac Lake’s first newspaper, the *Adirondack Pioneer*. The paper served socially prominent vacationers and tourists that frequented the scenic area.³² He secured several hundred subscribers before even having an office. The paper attracted attention as he became widely known around the region as a vigorous writer.³³ When he first began the paper, it was printed in the nearby city of Plattsburgh, New York. Mannix eventually purchased a press, employed two or three assistants, and then the paper was printed in the village.³⁴

²⁴ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, January 3, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

²⁵ “Sketch of Mr. Mannix.” *Washington Evening Star*, 10 January 1896, p. 7.

²⁶ Miller to Brechers, July 2, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

²⁷ Miller to Brechers, February 26, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Hess, *The “Memoirs” of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation*, 160.

³³ “Handwritten notes from unidentified paper, with a Malone, NY, Jan. 30, 1904 dateline,” written by Brecher. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

³⁴ Miller to Brechers, February 8, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

The income from this small country weekly newspaper “could not stand the demands made upon it by the fastidious Mr. Mannix.”³⁵ He sold the paper, yet almost immediately, the *Saranac Lake Herald* appeared. This paper featured interest and local news, and interestingly, many advertisements that had previously appeared in the *Pioneer*. The first and likely only issue was dated December 4, 1894. Mannix introduced his new journalistic effort in the opening edition:

The *Saranac Lake Herald* makes its bow in the journalistic field with this issue. It has come upon the invitation of the people of this wide-awake village because a live, newsy, ever-hustling journal is wanted in this heart and center of the great Adirondack region. The *Adirondack Pioneer*, founded three years ago by the editor of this paper, is dead. And it outlived its usefulness. After a time, coming into the hands of Plattsburgh parties, it lost its go-ahead spirit and seemed to forget its original object. It had no pronounced views of its own, was issued semi-occasionally, and when it did appear, the news of the town was conspicuously absent. The blame cannot be laid at the door of our village. It was controlled by Plattsburgh parties who had no further interest in the enterprise than to make all the money they could without much effort.³⁶

The new owner of the *Pioneer* quickly purchased the *Herald*, obviously to avoid competition. Whether Mannix was going to maintain the *Herald* is unknown, but based on his antics, he likely published this threat for quick, easy cash.

Residents of Saranac Lake were taken aback when invited to a free temperance lecture at the town hall to be given by Mannix. They did not consider him a drunkard. “It was no doubt true, however, that much of his income was spent in company with convivial associates,” Miller said.³⁷ Mannix was dressed immaculately in a Prince Albert suit with a white flower in his lapel. He delivered a brilliant lecture to a filled hall. He pointed to himself as a reformed drunkard, an awful example of what alcohol would do to a man. Mannix told the story of how he came to sip his first drink. His father had sent him to weed a large bed of onions. On the way, he met a friend who offered to help. When they reached their destination, his friend took a pint of whiskey from his pocket. Mannix declaimed, “We drank that whiskey – and we weeded those onions – and we onioned those weeds – and when we had finished, there were neither weeds nor whiskey – nor were there any onions.”³⁸ He gave a toast to pure, cold water to close the lecture.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Miller to Brechers, February 8, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

The next excitement Mannix gave the town was when he stopped a private car on the railroad line, getting a free ride to New York City. He had planned to take the train to the city, but once he got to the station he realized the last train was gone. He found out a special was coming through Saranac Lake from Lake Placid, New York, but it was not stopping. When he heard the train approaching, he stepped onto the center of the tracks. He flagged it by frantically waving his handkerchief. The train stopped. He climbed on board. The owner of the train was furious, but a member of the party reported that before the train reached Albany, New York, the two men were conversing together in the most friendly and cordial manner.³⁹ After boarding, Mannix immediately called for a drink and got it.⁴⁰ Another version of the story reports that after Mannix boarded he was asked, "What is the matter?" to which he responded, "Nothing, I only want to go to New York."⁴¹ Mannix left Saranac Lake during the summer of 1895 "to fame, if not to fortune."⁴² Miller received a copy of "The Memoirs of Li Hung Chang" from a friend in 1923 with a note that said, "With fond remembrance of the old 'Billy Mannix days,' before the illustrious rascal began his career as a literary pirate and forger; and yet, he was a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy!"⁴³

Around 1894 or so, Mannix supposedly arranged to go to Japan as a war correspondent, securing a passport for this purpose.⁴⁴ He did not go and no record of this passport has been found. In 1895, Mannix was in New York City as a reporter for the *New York Recorder*. He resigned in order to go to Cuba.⁴⁵ He was next heard of in Havana, Cuba, writing about the Spanish American War. The *New York Times* and the *Philadelphia Press* published his histrionic dispatches. He wrote articles about how he crossed military lines into rebel territories, observed bloody battles, and interviewed rebel leaders.⁴⁶ Spanish authorities ordered him to leave the island for entering insurgent lines against government orders. News about his expulsion appeared in the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Press*, and other papers. Allegedly, Mannix refused to leave

³⁹ Miller to Brechers, February 8, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁴⁰ "William Mannick Makes Quiet Escape from Montreal Detectives." *Watertown Daily Standard*, 11 December 1907, p. 4.

⁴¹ *Watertown Daily Times*, datelined "Malone," 12 February 1908.

⁴² Miller to the Brechers, February 8, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Sketch of Mr. Mannix." *Washington Evening Star*, 10 January 1896, p. 1.

⁴⁵ "Sketch of Mr. Mannix." *Washington Evening Star*, 10 January 1896, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Hess, *Crime Potentials of Conforming Subcultures*, 3.

voluntarily Cuba, stating, “He would leave the island only as a prisoner on a Spanish ship of war.”⁴⁷



One of Mannix’s alleged papers, the *Hennepin County Herald*, was issued in Long Lake, Minnesota, for about six months around 1900. Mr. W. L. Hursh, Long Lake native, said Mannix was there around 1900 or 1901, but did not know where he came from or where he went.⁴⁸ The *Herald* was printed upstairs over Hursh’s cousin’s store. Mannix lived there for six months or less, selling out of the print shop.⁴⁹

Both Roger Stubbs, the local historian, and August Hehl, a retired butcher, recalled Mannix as a great drinker.⁵⁰ Hehl told a story exemplifying Mannix’s penchant for drink. Mannix often rode with Hehl and Hehl’s father in their meat wagon because Long Lake was an isolated town with no livery stable and Mannix had no other transportation. Hehl’s father would take loads of meat to the nearby city of Minneapolis to sell. Before one trip, Hehl told Mannix he could ride along. In the middle of the winter, at four in the morning during minus 35-degree weather, Mannix arrived at Hehl’s to make the trip “because he had been out of liquor for a while and was so anxious to get stocked up.”⁵¹ There was no liquor store in Long Lake. Two hours into the trip, they arrived at Golden Valley, a community halfway to Minneapolis. There was a liquor store there, the nearest one to Long Lake. Mannix stopped to pick up a supply of liquor. He stayed there until he found a ride back.

Mannix did not have clothes suitable for the bitter Minnesota winters, but “the cold didn’t seem to bother him.”⁵² Hehl described Mannix as about 30 to 35 years old and dressed better than most of the men in the little town. No one could figure out why Mannix had come to Long Lake for he did not seem to be the type to live in such a quiet, isolated village.

According to David Scanlan, owner of a hotel Mannix resided in while at Lake Bonaparte, New York, in 1907, Mannix was:

adored by everyone, always a perfect gentleman, a fascinating brilliant guy,
handsome...very close mouthed about own affairs, never mentioned family, friends,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Minneapolis Report on William F. Mannix,” written by the Brechers. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Second Report on William F. Mannix,” written by the Brechers. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁵¹ “Minneapolis Report on William F. Mannix,” written by the Brechers. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁵² Ibid.

other contacts – might never have had a past at all. ... He was a whizz with a pen – in ten minutes he could imitate your hand so you couldn't tell it from your own writing.⁵³

Contrarily, Ralph D. Paine said Mannix was “abnormal and rotten to the core.”⁵⁴ He continued:

I fought my own fight with rum and knew many sorts of men in my time, and the seamy sides of life, but I never encountered anyone like Mannix. The worst crook is loyal to his pals, as a rule, and has a certain code of conduct. Mannix was beyond even this pale.⁵⁵



In September 1910, Mannix met Ruth Wheeler in Idaho. He introduced himself as William Grant Leonard. He then wrote letters to her every day or two. “I saw him only the second time after that when I capitulated and we were married. You may say the third time - - was all I saw him before we were married,” Ruth said. “I learned to know him largely through his letters.”⁵⁶

“It doesn't matter what wasn't true, like he was a Presbyterian and his true age, but the powerful love and depth of feeling and aspirations. Something that could move mountains, a sincerity, and good background,” Ruth said.⁵⁷ Before they were married, Mannix had told her he was Presbyterian and four years younger than he was.⁵⁸ Ruth hesitated to marry him because of his alcoholism, but finally did so to reform him.⁵⁹ On December 31, 1910, Ruth Wheeler and William Grant Leonard were married in Boise, Idaho, by Reverend Charles L. Chalfant, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church.

“Making a mortal enemy of my aunt, I stood by him when she begged me to leave such a character. I left her home for him (to my doom, she thot.),” Ruth said. “I stood by him, worked with him toward our future, and that was the end of the trail of checks and the beginning of our good life.”⁶⁰

Ruth knew little to nothing about his life or writings before they met in 1910. “Evidently nothing lasted, all evaporated without a trace,” she said.⁶¹ She knew he had briefly worked as a

⁵³ “1907: Scanlan's story of the summer at Lake Bonaparte,” written by Brecher. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁵⁴ Paine to Scudder, September 25, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, January 3, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, December 31, 1952. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁵⁹ Scudder, Doremus. “A Picturesque Literary Fraud – A Study in Abnormal Psychology.” Unpublished manuscript. Collection of Ruth E. and Edward M. Brecher.

⁶⁰ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, January 8, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁶¹ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, January 3, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

store manager, but he fell in love with the store owner's daughter, lost his job, forged a check, and escaped.⁶² When they met, he had nothing.

"He loved me so much he literally swept me into marriage against my will. I was not easy for him to get, but no wife could have been more loyal afterward," Ruth said. "I stood by him completely loyal and loving, with faith and knowing his goodness and greatness and depth of feeling and ability to make good. He was superior to so many and to so much."⁶³ They moved to a ranch about 20 miles outside of Portland, Oregon, in February 1911, where they lived for about nine months.

The Mannixes then moved to Honolulu, Hawaii, first staying briefly in Portland, Oregon, then San Francisco, California, before embarking on a steamship. During their time in Portland they "quite by accident" went to hear Rodney "Gypsy" Smith, the famous evangelist and preacher.⁶⁴ In one of several spontaneous religious reformations, Mannix decided to convert. He spoke with the Baptist minister of Portland and was baptized by immersion the next day.⁶⁵ "I was with him in all he did, rising with him, and becoming baptized with him the following day, although I had received infant baptism and was baptized when I came into the Methodist church," Ruth said.⁶⁶

The Mannixes arrived in Honolulu on November 10, 1911. When Mannix arrived in Honolulu under the name of Leonard, he presented commendatory letters from two pastors to Reverend Doremus Scudder of the Central Union Church. These letters may have been faked, but then again perhaps they were not. Scudder befriended the Mannixes during their year or so in Honolulu. "I suppose I was his best friend, helping him out of difficulties, seeing him through a jail experience and the like," Scudder said.⁶⁷ A few weeks after the Mannixes arrived, they moved into the house next to Scudder. "They seemed to be of very restricted means, their furniture of the meagerest description, their baggage limited to a very few trunks and their

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ruth Mannix to Scudder, August 21, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Scudder to Paine, September 18, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

housekeeping extremely primitive,” Scudder said.⁶⁸ Mannix was hired as a reporter for the *Honolulu Advertiser* around the beginning of 1912.⁶⁹

The first indication of anything wrong was the “detection of strong taint in the breath of the husband, coupled with evidences of alcoholic unsteadiness in his mental processes.”⁷⁰ Mannix was beastly drunk when Edmund, his first son, was born. Scudder took intimate care of Mannix for the next few days. At the time, Mannix learned his father died. He showed Scudder the obituary notice. Scudder said this also “involved a confession that his real name was not William Grant Leonard but William Francis Mannix.”⁷¹ Mannix vaguely explained this as a pen name related to something shady that had transpired in Wyoming or Colorado, which had necessitated his flight to Idaho where he met Ruth.⁷²

Scudder persuaded Mannix to enter a sanatorium for anti-alcoholic treatment in March 1912. Ruth “breathed freely in hope of his permanent cure.”⁷³ The churches were holding a series of union evangelist services, which Mannix attended. At the end of a meeting, Mannix rose, confessed his sins, and announced himself converted. A week or so later, he “went on a prolonged tear, begged or borrowed every cent he could for alcohol,” and forged a check.⁷⁴ He passed the check off on a saloonkeeper for booze and landed himself “dead drunk behind bars.”⁷⁵ He was sentenced to one year in the local jail.

Shortly before this arrest, Ruth discovered Mannix’s real name was not William Grant Leonard. She was horrified. She asked Scudder to write Chalfant requesting him to issue a substitute marriage certificate bearing the correct name. Scudder wrote to Chalfant with the request, describing Mannix’s deceased father as a man of property with the very highest character.⁷⁶ He said Mannix was “something of a disappointment, having at times been addicted to the intemperate use of intoxication. He is a very brilliant newspaper man and can earn his living with ease anywhere.”⁷⁷

⁶⁸ Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 1.

⁶⁹ Mannix, William Francis and Ralph Delahaye Paine. *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*. Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923. See also Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 1.

⁷⁰ Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 2.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Clues to Mannix’s Portland, Oregon, Period or Periods,” written by Brecher. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁷³ Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁶ Scudder to Chalfant, March 25, 1913. Box 1, Brecher Collection.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Chalfant wrote back:

Mr. Leonard is wanted here [Boise] for forgery and if the detectives can ever get him, he will probably be dealt with according to law. He is wanted in Oregon for the same crime I am informed and I presume the change in his name has some connection with hiding from the past or scheming something for the future. Mrs. Leonard is entirely innocent with the exception that she refused to help the officers of the law in their effort to locate him that he might be brought to punishment.⁷⁸

Chalfant said he could not legally change the marriage records. He recommended Ruth and Mannix to be married again under Mannix's true name. He finished the letter with, "P.S. Leonard certainly went the 'limit' when he tried to pass a worthless check on the preacher for his marriage fee."⁷⁹ Scudder thanked Chalfant for the information about Mannix's criminal career, saying,

I am not surprised, for he served a sentence here for forgery which was softened to "gross cheat" in order that he might not lose his civil rights by being convicted of a crime committed when under the influence of liquor, and one of such a character that it would never have been committed if his brain had not been fuddled.⁸⁰

When Mannix entered jail in April, his and Ruth's finances were in deplorable shape. Bills poured in from the mainland and all over town in.⁸¹ Meanwhile, their child almost died. Edmund weighed less at six weeks or two months than at birth. In June, Ruth moved into a cottage where she was kindly cared for by neighbors. Edmund was "saved by the ministrations of a healthy Kawaiahao Seminary cow."⁸²

According to an odd, unlabeled scrap of paper found in the Brecher collection, on April 10, 1912, Mannix allegedly attempted to commit suicide by hanging himself in his jail cell, but a fellow prisoner, a Korean who had also attempted suicide by hanging a few days before, cut him down.⁸³ This seems improbable due to his nature, for during his time in jail, he was given every opportunity to rise up and pay his debts. The jailor took a deep interest in Mannix, affording him every opportunity for work. The creditors were kind. He set about retrieving his fortunes with "splendid industry."⁸⁴ The governor sent Mannix a typewriter because "he felt sorry for this fine

⁷⁸ "Clues to Mannix's Portland, Oregon, Period or Periods," written by Brecher, p. 2. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁷⁹ Chalfant to Scudder, April 19, 1913. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁸⁰ Scudder to Chalfant, April 30, 1913. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁸¹ Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 3.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Untitled, filed with "Houghton-Mifflin Correspondence," presumably written by Brecher. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁸⁴ Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 3.

young man who just happened to forge a check while on a binge!”⁸⁵ Mannix wrote newspaper articles, bringing in modest returns.

When Mannix had entered jail, Scudder advised him to become as familiar as possible with the Far East, especially Japan and China. Mannix told Scudder he had visited China in 1900 or 1901 and had briefly interviewed Li Hung Chang, a Chinese politician, diplomat, and general. “The statesman had captured his imagination,” Scudder said, “and he was ready to follow my suggestion.”⁸⁶ Scudder loaned Ruth his library card and explained the case to the librarian. The librarian agreed to let Ruth to check out materials concerning China. Mannix “greedily devoured it all.”⁸⁷

Months later in September, Scudder found Mannix in “high fettle.”⁸⁸ Mannix told Scudder he had written a short story about the life of Li Hung Chang for the *New York Sun*. He was paid five hundred dollars and was cleared of his debts. The *London Observer* had gotten in touch with him and wanted him to double the size of his story for one thousand dollars. “The man seemed entirely cured of his alcoholic habit,” Scudder said. “He was in the way of self-support, able to pay his obligations and gave promise of becoming a useful member of society.”⁸⁹

The governor pardoned Mannix on October 15, 1912. Mannix’s next alcoholic binge was in January 1913. Frightened, Ruth fled to a neighbor’s house. On March 18, 1913, she sailed off to the mainland with Edmund. Once left to himself, Mannix repented and went after her on March 21, 1913.⁹⁰ They rejoined in San Francisco. After a few weeks, they bought a country place in Los Gatos, California. Scudder concluded his correspondence with Chalfant:

The Leonards have left Honolulu and I hope they will start in to do well in their new home. He braced up, paid all his debts in this city and left town with something like a thousand dollars in his pocket. There is no doubt that he is able to earn a living, and earn it well, if he will stick to work. I hardly think we shall hear much of them in the future.⁹¹



⁸⁵ Brechers to Atkins, January 8, 1960. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

⁸⁶ Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 4.

⁸⁷ Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁹¹ Scudder to Chalfant, April 30, 1913. Box 1. Brecher collection.

The mother of William Francis Mannix once said to her husband, "We have yet to have our first quarrel, but when we do, it will be over Will Mannix."⁹² According to a relative, Mannix was "brilliant in many ways but added nothing to the joy of his parents and brothers."⁹³ The family dreaded his visits because he would borrow money or forge checks.⁹⁴ When his father could not sleep at night, his mother would say, "I know you've heard from Will today."⁹⁵

Between his stints in jail, Mannix stood on the lecture platform, posing as a temperance orator and evangelist.⁹⁶ He was more than a petty swindler bumming from jail to jail. He was charming, bold, inventive, and intelligent, necessary traits to pull off his many exploits. "Billy was a rare bird," Miller said. "There seemed to be blended into his diversified makeup a craving for the spectacular. He wanted to be infamously famous - - to use a somewhat paradoxical expression. But with all his crooked ways and tricks that were vain."⁹⁷

Around 1900, Mannix might have been in Boston, Massachusetts, as a reporter for the *Boston Post*. He created a sensation by attempting to secure service at leading hotels without wearing his coat. He was met with refusal at each hotel. He wrote up his experiences, which caused him to be dubbed the "Original Shirtwaist Man."⁹⁸ For several years after leaving Boston he was wanted for allegedly leaving behind bad checks.⁹⁹

Mannix enlisted in the army in 1900, probably to escape from inquisitive police. He was supposedly sent to the Philippines and then to China. After being discharged in Peking, China, in 1901, Mannix was next seen in San Francisco, California. "Once more he was adrift but with grandiose ambitions of making a fresh start in journalism on the Pacific Coast where his record had not yet caught up with him," Paine said.¹⁰⁰

"I married a very poor man," Ruth said. "He'd get drunk, lose, come up a new man, rise higher, one drink meant a spree - - two men he was, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Wrote checks only

⁹² "8/14/51, Interview with Mrs. Dumphy, WFM's aunt, 8/11/51 in Plattsburg, N.Y.," written by the Brechers. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁹³ Mrs. Dumphy to Mr. Brecher, January 19, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁹⁴ Dorothy Mannix DeLaire to the Brechers, March 16, 1954. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁹⁵ "8/14/51, Interview with Mrs. Dumphy, WFM's aunt, 8/11/51 in Plattsburg, N.Y.," written by the Brechers. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁹⁶ "Biography of Wm. F. Mannix." *Watertown Daily Times*, 12 February 1908.

⁹⁷ Miller to Brechers, February 26, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁹⁸ "Man Who Tried to Bunco Bates Held." *Boston Post*, 30 January 1904.

⁹⁹ "Mannix Accused of Forging Sec. Cortelyou's Name." *Boston Journal*, 29 January 1904.

¹⁰⁰ Paine, Ralph D. "Introduction: Story of a Literary Forger in *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*," edited by Mannix. Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923, xxvii.

when drunk.”¹⁰¹ Mannix’s drinking rampages usually ended with him in jail. Sociologist Albert G. Hess believed Mannix’s unsteady lifestyle and habitual drinking was caused by personality disorders.¹⁰² His arrests were not directly connected with the sphere of the press. His self-image, “whenever manifested, appears as that of a journalist or editor,” thus, “it is probably justified to assume that the values and norms of the journalistic world played an important part for him.”¹⁰³ There is not a shred of evidence that any of his prison terms served as a deterrent or led to any reform at all. The incarcerations did not even keep him from pursuing his career as a forger!

Here is a list of his coast-to-coast rap sheet.

- January 28, 1904: arrested for forging checks in Boston, Massachusetts
- February 17, 1904: sentenced to two years in jail
- September 14, 1905: arraigned for forgery in Malone, New York, pled not guilty because of insanity
- September 14, 1905 to December 21, 1905: presumably in the county jail
- December 21, 1905: sentence suspended, permitted to go on parole
- November 26, 1906: arrested in Watertown, New York, for obtaining goods under false pretenses and issuing a bogus check
- January 25, 1907: released from Watertown jail
- February 14, 1907: arrested in Watertown for forgery committed in Schenectady, New York
- February 19, 1907 to June 10, 1907: in county jail
- December 8, 1907: arrested in Montreal, Canada, for obtaining jewelry from Tiffany’s under false pretenses, was to be extradited to New York but escaped from the police station
- February 5, 1908: re-arrested in Montreal for attempting to cash a forged check
- March 4, 1908: indictment for grand larceny in the second degree
- April 1908 to May 1909: in Sing Sing Penitentiary in Ossining, New York
- July 24, 1909: paroled and disappeared
- 1912: Served eight months in jail for fraud in Honolulu, Hawaii

¹⁰¹ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, January 3, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁰² Hess, *Crime Potentials of Conforming Subcultures*, 10.

¹⁰³ Hess, *Crime Potentials of Conforming Subcultures*, 11.

Here are the details of this list.

In 1903, Mannix was working in Wayzata, Minnesota, editing a weekly paper. Lacking cash, he wrote to several governors of states whose borders he would have to cross to get to Boston. He posed as his own son, a Harvard undergraduate student. The letters varied but all asked assistance on a college research project.

Mannix went from Minnesota to Indiana, where he swindled two men out of twenty-five dollars each. In Indiana, Mannix had “worked” the men in the governor’s office by starting correspondence with them, posing as his son in early January of 1904, asking for information to be used in a college debate.¹⁰⁴ Mannix then wrote to the governor thanking him for the favor to his son. In his gratitude, he said his son would soon pass through Indianapolis on his way to college and deliver a piece of the Chinese wall.¹⁰⁵ Another letter came from Mannix with a twenty-five dollar check and a request for the money to be turned over to his son. On January 18, 1904, “the son” arrived with a section of the wall in a handsome brass case.¹⁰⁶ The governor was out of town, but his secretary accepted the gift and endorsed the check, which was then cashed at the Secretary of State’s office. The check was on the People’s National Bank of Wayzata, Minnesota, which did not exist.¹⁰⁷ “The section of the Chinese wall looks like a stone from some jail wall,” Secretary Lockwood declared.¹⁰⁸ Mannix also swindled a man out of twenty-five dollars after tricking him with a worthless manuscript.¹⁰⁹ Mannix promptly disappeared. He was next heard of when he was arrested in Boston.

Mannix was arrested in Boston on January 28, 1904 for defrauding Governor John L. Bates of Massachusetts and Secretary George B. Cortelyou of Washington, D.C. Mannix forged Cortelyou’s name on a check in Boston earlier that month and least two more in Washington.¹¹⁰ “The arrest of Mannix in the East shows that his operations have been wide. The game is a new one and could be accomplished only by consummate skill in making the representation,” proclaimed the *Indianapolis News*.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ “Local Victims of the Gifted Mr. Mannix, Jr.” *Indianapolis News*, 30 January 1904, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ “Sharper Picks the Governor For Victim.” *Indianapolis Star*, 30 January 1904, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Indianapolis Star*, 13 January 1904.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Shirley Fisher to Mrs. Jacob L. Weintz, August 31, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

¹¹¹ “Local Victims of the Gifted Mr. Mannix, Jr.” *Indianapolis News*, 30 January 1904, p. 5.

During the testimony, letters from police officials throughout the West were read; they wanted to prosecute Mannix for small peculations if he was released.¹¹² He denied ever having been in trouble before or being in cities where the police said he was wanted.¹¹³ His father recommended confinement in a sanitarium.¹¹⁴ His brother testified that he had not seen Mannix in eight years.¹¹⁵

When Mannix was first called to the stand, he appeared very calm. He spoke in a low voice, audible only to those within a few feet. He testified that while in Cuba he was thrown from his horse and injured his head.¹¹⁶ Since the accident, he was addicted to alcohol. As he continued with his story, he weakened, and tears filled his eyes.¹¹⁷ His counsel pled for leniency. On February 16, 1904, Mannix was found guilty. The next day he was sentenced to two years of hard labor at the Deer Island House of Correction in Boston Harbor. While imprisoned, he studied law and said he intended to become a lawyer.¹¹⁸

Mannix next appeared in Malone as “the model of gentlemanly propriety” until checks forged in his father’s name appeared.¹¹⁹ He was arrested. He was arraigned on September 14, 1905 for forgery in the second degree. He pled not guilty because of insanity. The judge appointed a commission to examine his mental condition. On the commission was Dr. Robert H. Hutchings, Superintendent of the St. Lawrence State Hospital, a well-known psychiatrist, and two Malone physicians. The report, short and to the point, declared Mannix sane, “one of the most charming and cultured gentlemen with whom it had ever been their pleasure to spend an afternoon!”¹²⁰ The commission found him “not only witty but also brilliant as a conversationalist;” that closed the lunacy incident, so Mannix had to serve time.¹²¹ On December 21, 1905, the sentence was suspended. Mannix went on parole.

Mannix worked as a reporter for the *Malone Evening Telegram* after he was released, publishing a few articles. He then went to Schenectady, New York, where he probably was from December 1905 to April 1906.

¹¹² *Boston Journal*, 18 February 1904, p. 6.

¹¹³ “Soldier Forger Gets Two Years.” *Boston Herald*, 18 February 1904.

¹¹⁴ “For Forgery. Mannix Sentenced to a Two-Year Term.” *Boston Globe*, 18 February 1904, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ “William Mannix Given Two Years.” *Boston Journal*, 18 February 1904.

¹¹⁶ “For Forgery. Mannix Sentenced to a Two-Year Term.” *Boston Globe*, 18 February 1904, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ “Biography of Wm. F. Mannix.” *Watertown Daily Times*, 12 February 1908, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ “Mannix Proposal,” written by Brecher, p. 64. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

¹²¹ “Biography of Wm. F. Mannix.” *Watertown Daily Times*, 12 February 1908, p. 3.

During the summer of 1906, Mannix “remained in the vicinity” pretending to do newspaper work.¹²² In the fall he went to Watertown, New York.¹²³ In November, he “touched” a jeweler for a pin and gold watch.¹²⁴ Mannix told the jeweler he was expecting a check for one hundred dollars; as soon as it arrived he would pay for the goods. By late November 1906, the jeweler realized Mannix was tricking him and swore out a warrant for Mannix’s arrest. Mannix was picked up and the goods were recovered. He admitted there was no check to pay for the goods. The police then found out Mannix had given another jeweler a bogus check for three dollars and twenty-five cents. At first Mannix gave his name as John, but this check was signed with his real name.¹²⁵ He was given 59 days in jail. From November 26, 1906 to January 25, 1907, Mannix was probably in the county jail in Watertown.¹²⁶ During his incarceration, he professed to have reformed and converted to the Christian faith.

After serving his sentence, Mannix gave a temperance lecture at a church on the curse of drink and how he would never touch it again. He was described as inspiring and convincing.¹²⁷ He gave more lectures for about two weeks. The local newspaper shared that despite a storm, Mannix preached with “a most enthusiastic meeting of prayer and song” to a congregation and prisoners in a building filled to capacity.¹²⁸

Mannix became prominent in missionary work. He was advertised in the papers “extensively as a specimen of the reformed man.”¹²⁹ It was this notoriety that led to his undoing. The police in Schenectady heard about his lectures and saw the opportunity to secure Mannix for forgeries committed months prior.¹³⁰

On February 15, 1907, Mannix made headlines again. His evangelistic career was cut short. He was arrested for forgery in Watertown and brought to Schenectady for trial to face a warrant from April 1906. When Mannix had first arrived in Schenectady the year prior, he

¹²² “William Mannick Makes Quiet Escape from Montreal Detectives.” *Watertown Daily Standard*, 11 December 1907.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Watertown Daily Times*, 15 February 1907.

¹²⁷ John B. Johnson to Brechers, July 24, 1965. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹²⁸ “At Mission and Jail W. F. Mannix Preaches to Congregation and Prisoners.” *Watertown Daily Times*, 12 February 1907.

¹²⁹ “William Mannick Makes Quiet Escape from Montreal Detectives.” *Watertown Daily Standard*, 11 December 1907.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

worked as a street car conductor then at General Electric Works under E. E. Lucas.¹³¹ His boss He had boarded with a man named Edward S. Muir. In April of 1906, Mannix had asked Muir to cash a check for ten dollars, which Muir did with no hesitation.¹³² The check was drawn against the Union National Bank and was signed by E. E. Lucas. When the check was presented to Mr. Lucas, he refused to pay it, pronouncing it a fake. In the interim, Mannix had disappeared. Muir swore out a warrant for him.

The next that was heard of Mannix was when the police chief learned he was in Watertown conducting evangelistic services. The warrant for his arrest had been issued April 6, 1906, but Schenectady authorities had not known where to look for Mannix. They learned of his whereabouts through reports of his reformation and mission work. During Mannix's trial, he said "he would take his medicine like a man and that it would not affect his reformation."¹³³ An attorney from Watertown went to Schenectady to help Mannix out pro bono, for "in his opinion it would thwart the ends of justice to confine Mannix in jail."¹³⁴

On February 19, 1907, Mannix was indicted on the charge of forgery in the second degree and initially plead not guilty. From February 19 to June 10, 1907, he was in the Schenectady county jail. During this incarceration, he continued his reform work among the prisoners, impressing the sheriff.¹³⁵ The district attorney received many letters from people in Watertown and also a visit from one of the leading ministers, all speaking in favor of Mannix.¹³⁶ Frank Tobin, editor and manager of the weekly newspaper *On the St. Lawrence*, vouched:

There is real reformation in the case of William F. Mannix...At the time of his arrest he was doing good work among a class of people that only one of his experience can...He is only wanting an opportunity to lead a better life.¹³⁷

A Christian volunteer and friend of Mannix also wrote to the district attorney:

I have had many months experience in YMCA work here in our county jail and, out of many many cases of so called conversion, I think Mannix's to be the only genuine case I

¹³¹ "Evangelist Mannix Accused of Forgery." *Schenectady Daily Union*, 15 February 1907, p. 5.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ "Won't Stop Reformation. W.F. Mannix Arrested for Forgery, Says He Will Take His Medicine and Will Yet Make Good." *Watertown Daily Times*, 15 February 1907.

¹³⁴ *Schenectady Daily Union*, 10 June 1907, p. 3.

¹³⁵ *Watertown Daily Times*, 6 February 1908.

¹³⁶ *Schenectady Daily Union*, 10 June 1907, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Frank Tobin to Walter Briggs, May 25, 1907. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

ever knew, and I believe that we will be glad that we tried to give him a chance, when we see his future life.¹³⁸

On June 10, 1907, Mannix pled guilty. The judge suspended the sentence and gave Mannix “a lot of good advice.”¹³⁹

According to the local newspaper, Mannix was reinstated in his job as a reporter for the *Watertown Times* and “worked for about ten minutes.”¹⁴⁰ He was hired in the morning. Shortly after noon he was sent to report on a wedding. Late that afternoon he was found drunk. On that same day, a large sum of money was taken from a church. Mannix had been seen in the vicinity and was arrested on suspicion. He was allowed to go on the promise that he would leave Watertown.¹⁴¹

Mannix spent the summer of 1907 in upstate New York at Lake Bonaparte working on stories about Joseph Bonaparte, ex-king of Spain, with Annette Savage, a Quaker.¹⁴² He also wrote “Famous Shots of Recent Wars,” published in the *New York Herald* on July 28, 1907. Dead broke and about to be arrested for purloining jewelry, on November 30, 1907, Mannix sent a telegram to Richard Watson Gilder of *Century* magazine pleading for a 100 dollar advance, erratically saying, “Just back from Paris Find some new and surprising material here absolutely unknown before Will you help me get hold of it by advancing one hundred dollars same will apply on article price or be refunded.”¹⁴³ Gilder declined the invitation. Mannix disappeared.

Right before this disappearance, Mannix had written a letter to Tiffany & Company Jewelry Company of New York from Carthage, New York, signed as W. Franklin Mannix. He requested the newest edition of the Blue Book, an annual showcase of Tiffany’s finest pieces. He requested several specific items, including a small diamond ring for his daughter.¹⁴⁴ He provided three men as financial references. He sent a second letter requesting a nice silver watch suitable for a young man at college.¹⁴⁵ “I want it to be tasty; and if you can include an appropriate chain – silver, gold, or fob – please do so. I will trust your judgment,” he wrote with presumably no

¹³⁸ Earl E. Couch to Walter Briggs, May 14, 1907. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

¹³⁹ *Schenectady Daily Union*, 10 June 1907, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ “Wm. F. Mannix is Again in Custody.” *Watertown Times*, 6 February 1908.

¹⁴¹ “William Mannick Makes Quiet Escape from Montreal Detectives.” *Watertown Daily Standard*, 11 December 1907.

¹⁴² Brecher to Paine, September 1, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁴³ “Mannix Proposal,” written by Brecher, p. 67. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

¹⁴⁴ Mannix to Tiffany & Co., November 14, 1907. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

¹⁴⁵ Mannix to Tiffany & Co., November 25, 1907. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

plans to pay for the items.¹⁴⁶ He said these presents were for his children coming home from college for Thanksgiving. On November 30, Tiffany's received a telegram from Mannix saying, "Goods received watches unsatisfactory."¹⁴⁷ On December 1, Mannix stalled further, saying the goods are nice, "so nice in fact that we have yet been unable to make final selections."¹⁴⁸

Mannix showed all of the goods to his friends, saying one person, "one of the wealthiest men if not the wealthiest in this town," asked Mannix to get the best diamond ring bargain that Tiffany's had. Mannix finished the letter asking for a ring, size eight and a half, "with as big a white stone as possible."¹⁴⁹ Two days later, he asked for a deadline of December 18 to pay for the goods.¹⁵⁰ The credit manager at Tiffany's finally realized something was afoot. He wrote to Mannix politely requesting the immediate return of all the jewelry. Mannix must have realized his time was running out, hence the prior telegram to Gilder.

On December 8, 1907, Mannix was taken into custody in Montreal, Canada, on the complaint of an officer from the Jewelers Protective Association.¹⁵¹ He was wanted to answer a charge of obtaining jewelry by false pretenses from Tiffany's. About 700 dollars of jewelry was found in a valise in his room in a boarding house.¹⁵²

When the police brought Mannix into the station, he requested to sit in the detention room instead of the cells. Mannix "seemed a nice kind of fellow" so his request was granted.¹⁵³ The detective watching him went into an adjoining office to write a report of the robbery and was absent for two or three minutes. Mannix strolled right out the building. He was gone for a few minutes before his absence was realized. In that short space of time "he disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him."¹⁵⁴ Officials thought he was playing a joke or hiding. Mannix had walked out of the detective office, through a corridor of the cells at the police headquarters, through the office of the central police station, then out into the street while humming a tune to himself. People noticed him leaving but paid no attention. He did not appear hurried, so they

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Mannix to Tiffany & Co., November 29, 1907. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

¹⁴⁸ Mannix to Tiffany & Co., December 1, 1907. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Mannix to Tiffany & Co., December 3, 1907. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

¹⁵¹ "Made A Quiet Escape, Prisoner Coolly Walks Out of Detective Headquarters." *Montreal Gazette*, 10 December 1907.

¹⁵² "Wm. F. Mannix is Again in Custody." *Watertown Daily Times*, 6 February 1908, p. 8.

¹⁵³ *The Montreal Gazette*, 6 February 1908, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ "Made A Quiet Escape, Prisoner Coolly Walks Out of Detective Headquarters." *Montreal Gazette*, 10 December 1907.

assumed he had been at the detective office to make a report. Mannix left his overcoat, hand baggage, and thirty-five dollars in cash.¹⁵⁵

Two months later, on February 5, 1908, Mannix was arrested in Montreal again while trying to cash forged checks.¹⁵⁶ An officer employed by the Jewelers Protective Association had traced him from New York to Ogdensburg, New York, to Prescott, Ontario, and finally Montreal. At the police station, he gave his name as Richard James, said he was a machinist, and that his home was in New York.¹⁵⁷ He would not admit who he was, but the detectives recognized him.¹⁵⁸ He was extradited to Watertown to answer the charges made by the Jewelers Protective Association.

On May 11, 1908, Mannix's father telegraphed the editor of *Century* magazine, asking:

Some time ago I understand that my son William F. Mannix was engaged doing work on the Century Magazine. Will you please inform me if such work or any part of it, has been done. I would be pleased also if you could furnish me with his present address as it has been some time since hearing from him.¹⁵⁹

From about April 1908 to May 1909, Mannix's address was Ossining, New York, as Prisoner No. 50138 in Sing Sing Penitentiary. On July 24, 1909, Mannix was paroled. He then apparently jumped parole and disappeared.¹⁶⁰



In 1915, Mannix purchased a five-acre prune-and-apricot ranch in the Los Gatos hills near San Jose, California, naming it "Oakcrest" for a large, ancient oak on the property.¹⁶¹ On September 5, 1917, Mannix was appointed to the army. He was honorably discharged less than a month later. The Mannix family moved to Astoria, Oregon, at the beginning of 1918. They lived on 20 acres of pasture, raising loganberries and strawberries, and selling eggs. They had four children: Edmund, born in 1912, Margaret, born in 1913, Homer, born in 1915, and William Clark, born in 1918.¹⁶² Mannix was a journalist for the *Morning Astorian*.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ "William Mannick Makes Quiet Escape from Montreal Detectives." *Watertown Daily Standard*, 11 December 1907.

¹⁵⁶ "Wm. F. Mannix is Again in Custody." *Watertown Daily Times*, 6 February 1908.

¹⁵⁷ "New Yorker Who Escaped from Police Headquarters Two Months Ago Recaptured Yesterday." *Montreal Gazette*, 6 February 1908, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ E. J. Mannix to Richard Watson Gilder, May 11, 1908. Box 3 and 4. Brecher Collection.

¹⁶⁰ "Clues to Mannix's Portland, Oregon, Period or Periods," written by Brecher, Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁶¹ Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Brecher to Miss Whitehill, April 11, 1951. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁶² "Mannix Family Vital Statistics," written by Brecher. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

¹⁶³ "WFM 1920 Aug. 31," written by Brecher. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

On August 31, 1920, Mannix died of acute perforating ulcers in Astoria. An autopsy was not conducted. “It was a shock that nearly took me,” Ruth said. “I seemed in a daze a long time at home.”¹⁶⁴ “Major William Francis Mannix, prominent Astoria editor and advertising man, who for the past 20 months has been identified with the Morning Astorian as editor and advertising manager, died suddenly,” his obituary in the *Astoria Budget* said.¹⁶⁵ “He was a good comrade, a generous friend and a valuable citizen. He was gifted above the average man and his talents won him recognition denied to most. He will be missed but he will be remembered.”¹⁶⁶

Ruth’s hands were full with four young children. Mannix had left them deeply in debt. After applying to receive a pension as a widow, she learned with horror that he had a prior wife.¹⁶⁷ A special investigator came from Washington, D.C., to tell her that Mannix had a previous marriage 21 years before he married her. She was not his legal widow. She could not receive a pension without proving the first marriage ended in divorce. She consulted lawyers to no avail.

Mannix’s first known marriage was with 21-year-old Agnes Murphy in 1889. The beginning of their relationship was rocky; shortly after their engagement quarreled and the wedding bells were postponed.¹⁶⁸ On July 1, 1889, they were married by a Catholic priest in Malone. The marriage certificate stated his age as 20, but presumably he was not yet 19. They had one daughter, Catherine, who was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1890. She died of cholera at the age of three months and was buried in Malone.¹⁶⁹ Mannix left Agnes quickly after. What happened to her is unknown.

¹⁶⁴ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, January 3, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁶⁵ “Major W.F. Mannix Dies Suddenly This Afternoon at St. Mary’s Hospital.” *Astoria Evening Budget*, 31 August 1920.

¹⁶⁶ *Astoria Evening Budget*, 1 September 1920.

¹⁶⁷ Brecher to Johnson, December 16, 1952. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹⁶⁸ Carlisle to Brechers, August 21, 1951. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

¹⁶⁹ “Vital Statistics: Death, Death Certificate, New York State Department of Health,” notes written by Brecher. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

CHAPTER 3. FORGERIES FROM CUBA

U.S. readers were exposed to a large amount of foreign news during the Spanish American War.¹ The island of Cuba offered “a thrilling supply of heart-rendering tales,” a common theme in newspapers as the conflict unfolded.² Even though the war with Spain only lasted a little more than three months, its brevity did not equate to scanty press attention.³ News coverage about the war was unprecedented and newspaper readership was high. Journalist Silas Bent called this war an “architect of a gargoyle journalism.”⁴ Sensational stories were not confined to a few newspapers; they circulated nationally thanks to organized syndicates. Publishers “splashed foreign news onto their pages with sensational headlines” in “circulation battles.”⁵ According to Charles Brown, author of “The Correspondents’ War: Journalists in the Spanish-American War,” an exhaustive study of the role of the American press at the time, correspondents held “extraordinary roles,” as “never, before or after, were correspondents so conspicuous for audacity and daring - and interference in matters not their business.”⁶

Some scholars argue the telegraph turned a correspondent “who analyzed news into a stringer who just relayed facts.”⁷ The high transmission expense forced journalistic writing to become “lean and unadorned.”⁸ Schudson disagrees, saying, “far from cohering around a telegraphic center, the language of dashing correspondents from Cuba just before and during the Spanish American War were personal, colorful, and romantic.”⁹ The telegraph was harnessed to manipulate the news into “coordinated spectacle.”¹⁰ Editors spent exorbitant amounts of money on dispatch boats, correspondent salaries, telegraphic wire fees - anything that worked to capture

¹ Blanchard, Margaret A. *History of the Mass Media in the United States: An Encyclopedia*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998.

² Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 95.

³ Sweeney, Michael S., et al. “Weighing the Costs: The Scripps-McRae League Reports the War in Cuba.” *American Journalism*, vol. 31, no. 2, Spring 2014, pp. 213-235.

⁴ Bent, *Ballyhoo*, xiv.

⁵ Blanchard, *History of the Mass Media in the United States*, 227.; Dicken Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-century America*, 185.

⁶ Brown, Charles H. *The Correspondents’ War: Journalists in the Spanish-American War*. New York: Scribner’s, 1967.

⁷ Schudson, Michael. “The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism.” *Journalism*, vol. 2, no. 2, Aug. 2001, pp. 149-170.

⁸ Carey, James. *Communication and Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

⁹ Schudson, Michael. “Toward a Troubleshooting Manual for Journalism History.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 74, no. 3, Autumn 1997.

¹⁰ Carey, Craig. “Breaking the News: Telegraphy and Yellow Journalism in the Spanish-American War.” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2016, pp. 130-148.

and transmit events into the spectacle of war news.¹¹ Writers and illustrators were able to sensationalize the news through “acts of imaginative reconstruction” because the telegraph only provided broken up, shortened bits of information.¹²

Except for two short railroads running from Neuvas to Puerto Principe and from Santiago de Cuba to Cristo, virtually no lines of communication existed in Cuba.¹³ Men travelled by horse. Spanish military authorities banned reporters from war zones. Cuban propaganda and Spanish censorship added to the difficulty of finding news. Correspondents reported frequent battles, but in reality, battles were rare with few casualties.¹⁴ Editors could not easily supervise foreign correspondents nor did they have the knowledge to second-guess them.¹⁵ Foreign correspondents were treated as “independent experts, free to make judgments.”¹⁶ Few people could afford to travel to foreign lands, or even knew someone who did,¹⁷ thus readers did not have the background “to fill in a context to make bare facts comprehensible.”¹⁸ Mannix took full advantage of this “golden age of the foreign correspondent,”¹⁹ claiming to write dispatches from the war zone.

Mannix was a creative fellow with ambition to match. Edward Brecher called Mannix “what the layman would call a psychopathic liar.”²⁰ In 1895, Mannix was in New York City as a reporter for the *New York Recorder*, a Sunday weekly. One of his assignments was to cover activities of the New York branch of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, also known as the “Junta.” The Junta was the general legation of the Cuban “Republic” abroad.²¹ The organization worked to assist Cubans with material and moral aid.²² The anti-Spanish Junta employed propaganda to cultivate the growth of pro-Cuban sentiment.²³ Its efforts were designed to attract attention in the

¹¹ Carey, *Breaking the News*, 134.

¹² *Ibid.*, 140.

¹³ Rea, George Bronson. *Facts and Fakes about Cuba*. New York, G. Munro's sons, 1897.

¹⁴ Brown, *The Correspondents' War*, 25.

¹⁵ Schudson, *The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism*, 163.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Hamilton, John M., Coleman, Renita, Grable, Bettye, and Cole, Jaci. “An Enabling Environment.” *Journalism Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2006, pp. 78-93.

¹⁸ Schudson, *The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism*, 164.

¹⁹ Brown, *The Correspondent's War*, vii.

²⁰ Brecher to Dozier, September 2, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

²¹ Auxier, George W. “The Propaganda Activities of the Cuban Junta in Precipitating the Spanish-American War, 1895-1898.” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 19, Aug. 1939, pp. 286-305.

²² *Ibid.*, 287.

²³ *Ibid.*

United States to the Cuban insurgents. One tactic was promoting filibustering expeditions, which were unauthorized military expeditions into Cuba conducted to support the revolution.

Mannix's ebullience and journalistic prowess was displayed through this beat. He wrote extraordinary stories of filibustering trips, such as that the Junta's undercover exploits included large-scale shipments of arms and men to Cuba. These activities, illegal to Spain, were glowingly described. Perhaps the hearts of the Junta leaders warmed toward this enthusiastically partisan young reporter. In one particular article, Mannix reported about a "diplomatic delegate" of the Cuban revolutionary party and two other prominent men who looked "after the interests of the young Cubans" arrested for violating neutrality laws.²⁴ Mannix allegedly spoke with Horatio S. Rubens, a Cuban exile and active member of the Junta then based in New York City.

I shall never forget the enthusiastic scene when that small band of brave Cuban left... The courtroom and corridors were pushed to suffocation, and the crowd... was enormous. As my countrymen left the courthouse they were cheered, and everyone wanted to shake hands with them. The public sentiment has been aroused. The *Recorder's* editorials have been very encouraging to us and the Cubans gratefully appreciate the sympathy the American press has shown.²⁵

Mannix quietly suggested to the Junta that his accounts in the *Recorder* were winning friends in New York City, so "if only he could get to the island would his accounts of rebel activities in the hinterland there win friends in the United States for the revolutionary cause."²⁶ Simultaneously, Mannix approached Señor Baldasano, the Spanish consul-general in New York, implying it would be beneficial for Spain to have an unbiased, truthful correspondent in Cuba.²⁷ The Spanish minister to the United States, Señor Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, was consulted. He authorized Baldasano to pay for Mannix's fare to Cuba, a decision he later regretted.²⁸

Mannix resigned from the *Recorder* and set sail for Cuba in November 1895. He arrived in Cuba with "letters from the United States State Department and from officials of the State of New York as well as from President Cleveland."²⁹

Mannix produced vivid reports. Whether his dispatches were true or bogus is unknown.

²⁴ "More Fighting in Cuba." *New York Recorder*, 4 October 1895.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Mannix Proposal," written by Brecher, p. 35. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

²⁷ "On the Expulsion of Mannix. Minister Dupuy de Lome Gives His Version of Facts and Comments." *New York Times*, 7 February 1896, p. 5.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Mannix's Movements." *Philadelphia Press*, (n.d.).

He dramatically described crossing military lines into rebel territory, watching bloody encounters between insurgents and Spanish troops, and interviewing rebel leaders.³⁰ In particular, he reported a rousing “appeal” to the American people by the insurgent President of Cuba, Salvador Cisneros Betancourt. He sent articles through the lines of Spanish censorship with “enviable regularity.”³¹ Many other correspondents could not “get copy through or to even get upon Cuban soil for that matter.”³² Special *Journal* correspondent Grover Flint spent four months with the army of General Máximo Gómez, commander-in-chief of the Cuban Army. He wrote a graphic book about his experience, “Marching With Gomez” (1898), complaining of his inability to get his dispatches over the lines.³³

Other correspondents sent back dull, routine stories datelined “Havana.” Mannix wrote from “In the field, near Caimito” (with the rebel army) or from “Cuban executive headquarters, Cubitas,” hundreds of miles away from Havana. One such dispatch began: “Havana, Cuba, Dec. 11 – Your correspondent was a witness to the fight on the Remedios Road, between the villages of Iguara and Taguasco, in the province of Santa Clara, Friday morning last.”³⁴ This eyewitness account told how rebels ambushed a Spanish army’s mule train. Mannix gruesomely described, “The 200 mules and their attendants crushed together, and animals and men were trampled to death under the hoofs of 2,000 cavalry horses.”³⁵ The fierce fighting was done with “rebel machete and Spanish sabre being wielding with terrible effect at close quarters.”³⁶

Mannix filled newspapers with stories about “resolute, barefoot patriots; and of the resourceful, dedicated ex-slave troops led by the intrepid black giant, General Maceo.”³⁷ Antonio

³⁰ Hess, Albert G. Draft of “Crime Potentials of Conforming Subcultures: The Case of Francis William Mannix.” For presentation at the twenty-first annual meeting of the New York State Sociological Association, Eisenhower College, October 13, 1973. Unpublished manuscript.

³¹ Legate, Virkler A. “Book Hoax Recalls How North Native Fooled Public in 1907.” *Watertown Daily Times*, 31 December 1953.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Journal*, 2 September 1897. Flint’s book appeared in December 1897. See also Wisan, Joseph Ezra. *The Cuban crisis as reflected in the New York press (1895-1898)*. New York, Columbia University Press; London, P.S. King & Son, 1934.

³⁴ *New York Times*, 15 December 1895, p. 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Hess, Albert G. “The ‘Memoirs’ of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation.” *Renditions*, vol. 15, 1981, pp. 155-167.

³⁷ “Mannix Proposal,” written by Brecher, pp. 35-36. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

Maceo was a guerrilla leader, second-in-command of the Cuban army. Mannix's articles were written with a "wealth of circumstantial detail and color."³⁸

A fellow correspondent sarcastically recounted Mannix's dispatches:

Where others had failed, this intrepid correspondent had passed the Spanish cordon and was riding with the flying columns of Gomez and Maceo. He was present when a crack Spanish regiment was ambushed and cut to pieces in the battle of Saratoga. He had visited the headquarters of the Provisional Government secreted in the mountains. He had crossed the *trocha*, that formidable barrier of blockhouses, trenches, and barbed wire, with the black cavalry of Maceo and had witnessed headlong charges with the machete.³⁹

On January 1, 1896, an article in the *Philadelphia Press* signed by Mannix, can be summarized by its dramatic headlines:

Cuban Forces play the torch...Heavy losses by Americans on the war-harassed island...Big Estates laid waste...A Spanish cry for aid to save Puerto Rico and the Island...Army falls back to Matanzas...Spanish forces on the defensive...Campos returns to Havana and his future course is in doubt...The Cortes may send 50,000 more troops.⁴⁰

Mannix burst into print again on January 10, 1896 with a vivid story to grip readers. He wrote "On board the steamer Dauntless, Yucatan, Jan. 2" describing "the dangers faced by a young volunteer for Cuba Libre."⁴¹

The *Philadelphia Press* published an interview between Mannix and Ramon O. Williams, United States Consul General to Cuba on January 17, 1896. Americans were fearful of being attacked by rebels in Havana, but Williams said it was not necessary to have an American warship there. General Martínez Campos, a Spanish officer, verified Mannix's statement, giving full assurance that Americans would be protected if Havana were attacked.⁴² Campos was Captain General of Spain's forces in Cuba. "The American newspapers seem to delight in bolstering up the rebel cause by editorials and false news reports," Campos said.⁴³ Mannix signed this article and most of his *Philadelphia Press* material as "William F. Mannix."

³⁸ Paine, Ralph D. "Introduction: Story of a Literary Forger in *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*," edited by Mannix. Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923, xii.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Library of Congress Material. *Philadelphia Press*, from February 21 to March 15, 1896," notes generated by the Brechers. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁴¹ *Philadelphia Press*, 10 January 1896, p. 1, p. 3.

⁴² "Campos Full of Confidence. The General Explains His Movements to a 'Press' Correspondent." *Philadelphia Press*, 17 January 1896, p. 2.

⁴³ Ibid.

In a dispatch in the *Army and Navy Journal*, datelined Havana, January 6, published January 18, signed by “Wm. Francis Mannix,” Mannix began by outlining false claims about the Cuban and Spanish armies:

Various estimates, most of them purporting to be authentic, have been published in the United States with regard to the strength and character of the Cuban revolutionary army. Some of these estimates, emanating from Spanish sources, have been ridiculously small, while, on the other hand, the zealous agents of the revolution have given to the public figures that are greatly exaggerated.⁴⁴

Mannix called himself a special representative, “desiring to give all the facts and form a nearly correct estimate.”⁴⁵ He claimed to have “gained access to the official Spanish data in Havana,” “personally visited all the provinces of the island,” “seen and figured for himself,” and spoken with Cuban and Spanish commanders in different districts.⁴⁶

In this story, he described the rebel and Spanish troops in extreme detail. “It certainly is very near the truth to say that at present in the field engaged fighting Spain’s army of 110,000 men are 32,000 Cubans,”⁴⁷ he vouched. He explained:

About 2,000 of the rebel infantry have the best Mauser rifles, most of them captured from the Spanish troops. The remaining 3,500 have a remarkable assortment of arms – Remington, Springfields, Marlins, shotguns, old breech-loading muskets and various weapons dating from ancient days. Every infantryman carries a machete. Because of the great diversity of firearms and the numerous calibers, ammunition to suit is hard to obtain, and there have been but a comparatively few deaths in the Spanish ranks caused by bullets. The machete has thus far done the principal work, and it is superior, as handled by the Cubans, to the bayonet of the Spaniard.... There are no tents, not even for Gomez and Maceo, and these officers, as well as many of the soldiers, sleep in hammocks swung from the trees. The great majority of the army, however, are well supplied with rain coats, and in these they lie upon the ground. They are exposed to frequent rains, but apparently do not mind it, and not a soldier makes a change of position, even though it pours upon him while he sleeps.⁴⁸

On January 20, Mannix sent a lengthy dispatch to the *Philadelphia Press* with the dateline: “In the field, near Caimito, Province of Havana, Cuba.”⁴⁹ It was printed January 26,

⁴⁴ “Cuban Revolutionary Army.” *Army and Navy Journal*, 18 January 1896.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “Cuban Revolutionary Army.” *Army and Navy Journal*, 18 January 1896.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “WFM Cuba. 1896,” written by Brecher, Box 3. Brecher Collection.

also appearing in the *New York Times*. Mannix bragged about how reaching rebel lines from Havana was not very difficult:

Immediately after leaving the city you are halted by the Spanish outposts and your military passport examined. A little further on and you are halted for a second time. So it goes until perhaps you have passed a half dozen lines. Each time you imagine you are to be shot, for the sentry appears thoroughly frightened as he raises his piece to the shoulder and cries out, after you have answered "Vive Espana!" for you to advance singly. Even though you are upon an open road and with open fields about he commands you to come up to him alone, and you wonder how, under the circumstances, you could do anything else. Sometimes the sentry cannot read and, although he thinks from the looks of your papers you are all right, he marches you to the nearest officer in command of that district... Then, if you are thirty miles from Havana, they become suspicious and demand your reasons for desiring to go further. It is always well in such an emergency to know the name of some higher officer beyond, and inform your questioner that you are to join his command...the little "bluff" works and you are allowed to proceed.⁵⁰

In the no-man's land between the two armed forces, machete-carrying cutthroats called "plateados" robbed and killed for profit. Mannix purportedly witnessed a murder:

The plateados appeared in the thin cane about 200 yards away. A victim had fallen into their hands, and in plain sight of the house they felled him to the ground with stones, finished his life with machetes, and, robbing him of his clothes, departed. It was not a sight such as would tend to increase the desire to proceed further in that direction.⁵¹

Mannix pressed on fearlessly. The plateados did not carry firearms and he "was well provided with the latter, and rode a good horse."⁵² He rode to meet Gomez and the rebel army. He was met cordially. "I am pleased to welcome an American newspaper man, but I don't know what I would do to an American Congressman who might come to my camp," Gomez reportedly said with a chuckle.⁵³ Gomez asked for news from Havana to which Mannix replied, "Campos has gone."⁵⁴

There was a chorus of exclamations and the rebel commander-in-chief stood erect. "It cannot be true," he said, and then after studying several moments in silence he added: "Yes, I rather expected it to be true."

⁵⁰ "Gomez's Fine Tribute to Campos." *Philadelphia Press*, 26 January 1896.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

“You see,” he went on, after a pause, “Campos did not want this war. He abhors bloodshed and does not like to see men meet in mortal combat. But even more repulsive to him would be the employment of such methods such as the Spanish Government, and the people of Spain for that matter, have been clamoring for. They wanted him to treat and fight the Cubans not as men, but as dogs to be shot down in the streets or murdered in dungeons.”⁵⁵

Campos resigned as Captain General of Cuba in January 1896 and was replaced by Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau. Gomez allegedly gave a tribute to Campos, which Mannix presented:

It is a sad day for Cuba that Martinez Campos leaves. More than that, it is a dark day for Christianity and civilization....Indeed, I love Martinez Campos. All Cubans love him, for it was his hand that stayed the blood-thirstiness of Spain. He wanted peace; peace with honor, not peace with crime and barbarism. But the pressure was too great, and the grand old commander was compelled to give way....

He lacked the desire to shoot, hang and imprison men indiscriminately. He lacked desire to break up homes and scatter misery and ruin abroad. His loyalty to Spain cannot be questioned: but he was more loyal to his God and his manhood.⁵⁶

“General Gomez seemed much affected by his own words,” Mannix wrote.⁵⁷ Gomez went on:

It is not from a military point of view that we are sorry. He was the most efficient general Spain could have placed in command of her troops, and for that reason we should rejoice. But as men we cannot, for we loved and respected him. We regret because the change will mean more bloodshed and misery for Cuba....

But the Spanish Government must beware. Spain cannot ride rough-shod over Cuban hearts...⁵⁸

Mannix dramatically concluded the article by asking Gomez if he intended to attack Havana.

“That remains to be seen,” Gomez said.⁵⁹

When Campos was replaced by Weyler in February 1896, considerable space in newspapers was devoted to Weyler’s military record, character, and policies.⁶⁰ Weyler antagonized the already hostile press with his efforts to stiffen censorship.⁶¹ He was regarded as “the very incarnation of Spanish cruelty.”⁶²

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Gomez’s Fine Tribute to Campos.” *Philadelphia Press*, 26 January 1896.

⁶⁰ Wisan, *The Cuban Crisis as Reflected in the New York Press (1895-1898)*, 193.

⁶¹ Ibid., 194.

⁶² Ibid., 203.

On January 29, the *Philadelphia Press* published a story under the byline of Mannix about Antonio Maceo's daring marches, which "astonished the Government, and Spanish officers for the first time during the present struggle are paying compliments to a rebel leader."⁶³ More than 300 men were slaughtered in a battle and rebels captured a train. Mannix undermined other reports, saying, "Communication between Pinar del Rio and this city is almost completely severed, and the reports published yesterday and today of battle in the vicinity of the provincial capital are wholly unreliable. The exaggerations are so apparent and inconsistent."⁶⁴



Mannix whipped up an exciting story of his alleged first trip to interview Salvador Cisneros Betancourt, president of the insurgent provisional government. He described an audacious journey half the length of the island to Republic capital on the peak of Cubitas Mountain. Did this capital truly exist or did Mannix make it up? This is contested and was later debated by Congress.

Mannix described his travels: he went from Havana to Nuevitas on a steamer. Nothing Mannix wrote indicated he was American. He dressed as a typical Cuban; he wore a linen suit and Panama hat. He met a Cuban agent who supplied information on who he should meet at Puerto Principe. He took the train to Puerto Principe, luckily without having to show his passport. He found a guide; on their trip they were halted several times, but the guide paid off the guards.⁶⁵ They trekked through the almost impregnable mountains to where the insurgent headquarters were hidden.

Once at the destination, Mannix was greeted by Cisneros. When Mannix remarked that the difficulty of the trip was not conducive to Americans coming often, Cisneros replied, "Oh, it's not them that we want to keep away, but the Spaniards, you know."⁶⁶ According to Mannix, all of the government departments were on a little hideaway on a plateau. Dynamite for guerilla warfare was made there. He found their communication system consisted of about 60 carrier pigeons capable of bringing news all the way from New York City. The president made a long speech, saying he "desired to express through the Press his kindest regards and deepest esteem

⁶³ "Maceo's Daring Enthuses Cuba" *Philadelphia Press*, 29 January 1896, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "Library of Congress Material, *Philadelphia Press*, from February 21 to March 15, 1896," written by Patience Daraud. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

for President Cleveland and the American Congress and people.”⁶⁷ Mannix expressed these regards after his next trip to visit Cisneros.

According to Mannix’s subsequent dispatches, Cisneros sent a messenger through Spanish lines, despite great risk, to hand Mannix this secret message:

I have an important document for you. Meet me at the headquarters anytime after February 4. You will be compelled to exercise great caution since the account of your late trip has been published. Should you not to averse to a long saddle ride, I would suggest that you take the steamer to Puerto Padre, beyond Nuevitas, and from that point meet our party at Las Tunas, just across the border in the province of Santiago de Cuba... The person who presents this note to you will direct you to our party at whatever place it may be, but if you respond without delay you will be enabled to join us at the place already mentioned.⁶⁸

Mannix accepted the invitation, filling column after column with his alleged adventures.

On February 10, 1896, the *Evening Star* published “Cuba’s Appeal, President Cisneros to the American People,” accompanied with a handsome image of Mannix, written from the “Cuban Executive Headquarters” in Cubitas on February 4. In the prolonged struggle of the Cuban people for freedom from Spanish colonial exploitation, this “Appeal to the American People” was the first proposal for the United States to come to Cuba’s aid against Spain. There had been suicidal Cuban rebellions against Spanish rule for years, but none had won recognition from the United States.

“Three weeks ago your correspondent came to Cubitas mountain, the seat of the rebel government of Cuba, for the purpose of interviewing Mr. Cisneros-Betancourt, president of the Cuban republic,” Mannix began. “Because of the extreme care and watchfulness maintained at Cubitas, lest a Spanish spy or an assassin might gain the rocky heights, one would naturally believe that the chief executive of the republic would not dare venture abroad.”⁶⁹

For this supposed second trip, Mannix met Cisneros sixty miles away from the Cuban headquarters, accompanied by a small band of troops. They rode horses to the headquarters.

When Mr. Cisneros reached the summit he found the home garrison drawn up to receive him. A volley from the rifles told those back at headquarters that he had arrived and the little cannon that three weeks ago boomed welcome to an American correspondent now

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “Cuba’s Appeal.” *Evening Star*, 10 February 1896.

⁶⁹ “Cuba’s Appeal.” *Evening Star*, 10 February 1896.

boomed again and again like renewed peals of joy at the return of the man upon whom, with Gomez and Maceo, the hopes of the republic rest.⁷⁰

“Once again in the little cottage, which we must call the ‘Executive Villa,’” Cisneros and Mannix conversed.⁷¹ “Here is the document I promised you,” Cisneros said.⁷² He commanded Mannix to “give it to the press of the United States and ask them in the name of liberty and of Cuba, to publish it to the American nation.”⁷³ The “Appeal” began:

The infant and struggling Republic of Cuba appeals to the grand and powerful Union of American States.

Undoubtedly, this action is most unusual in the history of nations, but because of the international standing of the Cuban Republic, more correctly because it has no recognized place among the powers of the world, are we thus compelled to appeal informally, and through the medium of the press directly to the people.

Indeed, it is that international standing which we are now seeking, that we now ask the American nation to give us and that we pray it will see fit to grant in the name of liberty and justice.

Why do we ask the American people alone to hear us, and why do we not address this document to the entire world? The answer is well known. We call to the people who have themselves suffered oppression and felt the iron heel of the tyrant. We call to the nation of heroes who threw off the slavish yoke and who signaled the downtrodden of the earth that the beacon light of liberty in America would never grow dim, but would throw its rays across the oceans to strugglers for freedom on other lands.

We call to the nation that has ever greeted with open arms the honest exiles from far and near; the nation that gave hope to Poland and succor to Ireland; the nation that drove monarchy from Mexico and Hawaii, and so nobly and faithfully shielded our Southern sister, Venezuela.

To whom would we appeal if not to America? To what land if not that of Washington, of Jefferson, of Monroe, of Jackson, of Grant, of Blaine, of Cleveland and the immortal Lincoln?⁷⁴

The “Appeal” was also published in the *Philadelphia Press* that same day.

Congressional debates were held; senators argued if proof that an organized insurgent government existed, such as newspaper reports, was valid. This was an important factor in deciding whether to grant belligerent rights to the Republic of Cuba. Weeks after publishing, the authenticity of the “Appeal” was debated in the halls of Congress. Mannix’s colorful dispatches were used as proof that the rebels had an organized government. John Tyler Morgan, Alabama’s

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Cuba’s Appeal.” *Evening Star*, 10 February 1896.

senator, presented the letter allegedly written by Cisneros to prove the insurgents had a civil government.

On March 16, 1896, Senator Hale interrogated Morgan. The amusing parts are included here.

Morgan: Has the Senator read that most interesting account of the peregrination and wanderings of the correspondent of the *Evening Star* in trying to find this nebulous capital, in which he entirely failed?

Morgan: Captain Mannix?

Hale: Yes.

Morgan: Is that the name – Captain Mannix?

Hale: Does the Senator believe that there exists at the place which he has named anything that is in the form of a representative government?

Morgan: I do.

Hale: Does he believe that at this place, at this small village which the correspondent either did not find or barely found, there exists any such legislative body, any such judicial tribunal, any such head of the army... Does the Senator believe that any such conditions exists in Cuba today, or has existed for the last year?

Morgan: I supposed I had the floor for the purpose of explaining this paper and making some remarks upon it. But I find I am here only for the purpose of answering questions like a school child at a kindergarten.

Hale: It is not my fault if the Senator appears like a school child who ought to be questioned. It is not my fault ---

Morgan: No; I will come at the Senator about that and put him on his answer to questions. When he got up here he asked me if I had read an article published in the *Evening Star*, in which its correspondent had wandered all through Cuba and had failed to find the capital.

Hale: Or barely found it.

Morgan: No, sir. In the first question the Senator put to me he said Captain Mannix had failed to find it. Then, when he found that Captain Mannix, whose story he read just as well as I have, did find it, and not only found it, but afterwards returned to it and was treated with great hospitality and kindness while he was there, and had to march for miles on foot, meeting with many guards, in order to get there – when he found that he says perhaps Captain Mannix found it, and if he did it was some miserable little village or place, one, perhaps, that a decent government had not any right to be at.

Hale: I took the Senator's words about a village. It is a very small place. There is no doubt about that.

Morgan: It is a small place.

Hale: With that interruption, I am not going to worry the Senator any longer.

Morgan: The Senator does not worry me. He is worrying---.⁷⁵
The two senators then argued over interrupting each other.

When questioned about the “Appeal’s” legitimacy, Crosby Noyes, publisher of the *Star*, said:

The authenticity of the Cisneros manifesto furnished to the *Star* by Captain Mannix is unquestionable. Had there been any manner of doubt about its authenticity it would never have appeared in the *Star*. All the internal evidence and all we know of our correspondent’s undoubted facilities for communication with the insurgents confirm this and other important information concerning the doings and sayings of the Cuban leaders.⁷⁶

During one debate, Mannix was described as “man of great capacity and ability and high character.”⁷⁷

The “Appeal” claimed that the Cuban government was fully established: “Covering considerably over one-half of an acre is the civil branch of our authority, with regularly appointed governors of different sections....Here in Cubitas are the head officers and chief departments of the Republic.”⁷⁸ Illinois senator John Palmer argued: “That government is purely a nominal one. It has no fixed jurisdiction over a single township in Cuba. It is a fugitive government.”⁷⁹ He continued, “When we propose to intervene...It does not mean war with insurgents to protect our interests. It means war with Spain.”⁸⁰ Morgan then emphasized:

Yet the truth is, as is shown by reports made and published...from Captain Mannix, who visited the place on two occasions, that there has been from the outbreak of the revolution a permanent capital in Cuba, at Cubitas, on the top of the mountains at the eastern end of the island. It has never been changed, it has never been attacked, and it has never been approached by the Spaniards. It is the place from which justice is administered and the civil law is executed in its protection of the rights of property, life, and liberty.⁸¹

After further discussion, another senator, Mr. Allen, said:

I do not think that we are required to have any more evidence before us than has been furnished us by the Department of State and has been furnished by us by the press of the country. It is true that possibly we must discount a certain portion of the reports which come from the scene of action; but he would be a bold man who would stand in the Senate to-day and say that a state of war does not exist in Cuba. Are we to stand here

⁷⁵ “Congressional Record – Senate. #2829.” March 16, 1896. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁷⁶ “Congressional Record - Senate. #3075.” March 23, 1896. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Cuba’s Appeal.” *Evening Star*, 10 February 1896

⁷⁹ “Congressional Record - Senate. #3075.” March 23, 1896. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ March 16, 1896. Congressional Record – Senate. #2829.

until the Spaniards cut the throats of the Cubans, and until the bloody events pass into the permanent history of the country before we take any notice of what is transpiring there?⁸²



In a private letter from Havana dated January 29, published in the *Philadelphia Press* on February 6, 1896, Mannix wrote:

I am informed that I am blacklisted at the Palace and that any more side trips will be the cause of my being invited to seek other lands. Still, I must make at least two more before I go, for I am not here seeking improved health. I will guarantee you during the next two or three weeks (if I am allowed to remain that long) some very good and important matter.⁸³

Spanish authorities decided to make an example out of Mannix for communicating with the insurgents. Mannix was ordered to leave Cuba. He was charged with communicating with rebels, crossing Spanish lines, and interviewing Gomez and Cisneros.⁸⁴ This was not a surprise. His interesting and graphic accounts had attracted wide attention. Spanish authorities had been suspicious of him for some time.⁸⁵

According to an article on February 5, 1896 in the *New York World*, "Capt. William F. Mannix, correspondent of the *Army & Navy Journal* and of the *Washington Star*, has been ordered by authorities to leave the island. A protest against this action has been sent to Sec. Olney by Consul-General Williams."⁸⁶ The *New York Times* published "The Expulsion of Capt. Mannix. Little Can Be Done by the State Department in the Matter" on February 6, 1896, saying,

The attempt to exclude an American citizen from foreign territory is usually a serious matter, and authorities acquainted with international law do not hastily resort to this extremity in punishing those they regard as offenders against local notions of law and order.⁸⁷

A dispatch from Mannix dated February 5 appeared in the *Washington Evening Star* and *Philadelphia Press* on February 10: "Am ordered from Island, and will be taken to Key West by a warship Saturday morning."⁸⁸

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Mannix Told the Plain Truth. Reason Why Spaniards Ordered 'The Press' Correspondent to Leave Cuba." *Philadelphia Press*, 6 February 1896, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *Washington Star*, 14 February 1896.

⁸⁵ *Philadelphia Press*, 6 February 1896.

⁸⁶ *New York World*, 5 February 1896, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *New York Times*, 6 February 1896.; *Philadelphia Press*, 6 February 1896.

⁸⁸ "1896 WFM Cuba," written by Brecher. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

Mannix's graphic stories gave the American public a different view of antics in Cuba. They contrasted information from Spanish government-approved channels. "He began to write letters absolutely untruthful and altogether false to the American papers – letters which were undoubtedly furnished to him from insurgent sources," said Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, Spanish minister.⁸⁹ De Lôme no doubt regretted funding Mannix's fare to Cuba:

The Spanish government, instead of placing obstacles in the way of newspaper correspondents in Cuba, is desirous of giving reputable and trustworthy correspondents every opportunity to see the true condition of affairs there, but they must, of course, comply with the requirements of war. It is my opinion that Mannix is something of a crank.⁹⁰

Spanish authorities were angry because Mannix wrote "true and unbiased reports of the real conditions in the island of Cuba," Tomás Estrada Palma, representative of the Cuban government, said.⁹¹ "The Spanish authorities make a pitiable confession of weakness in expelling the correspondent of 'The Press' from Cuba," lambasted the *Philadelphia Press*. The newspaper said his dispatches were fair, temperate, and accurate, containing:

nothing which could interfere with military operations, and the only possible objection which could be made to them is that they have been truthful... The Spanish cause has reached a condition in which nothing is as dangerous to it as the truth.⁹²

The *New York Times*, which had previously not identified Mannix by name, revealed on the front page that the expelled "Capt. Mannix" was their correspondent.⁹³ It is not known where his Captain's rank came from. Some of the dispatches he sent the *New York Times* were only signed as "W."⁹⁴ His relationship with the *New York Times* is relatively unknown.⁹⁵ On February 12, 1896, the *New York Times* published a story sent "via Key West to Escape Censorship at Havana."⁹⁶ This article also named Mannix as their correspondent:

The representatives of the Spanish Government in Cuba have ordered the summary expulsion from the island, Wednesday, of William F. Mannix, the correspondent of the *New York Times*.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *Philadelphia Press*, 6 February 1896.

⁹³ *New York Times*, 10 February 1896, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Rea, *Facts and Fakes about Cuba*, 164.

⁹⁵ Hamilton, John Maxwell. *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009.

⁹⁶ *New York Times*, 12 February 1896.

This action is taken because the matter which Mr. Mannix has forwarded *The Times* through various sources has not been pleasing to the military authorities. The press censor feels that Mr. Mannix has not been courteous in submitting his letters and cable messages so that the statements of fact and truth therein contained might have been expunged. Cable messages were received here to-day saying that *The Times* had published a letter containing an appeal to the people of the United States signed by Salvador Cisneros-Betancourt, President of the Cuban Republic. This with the recent publications of the interviews with Maceo and Gomez has apparently made the authorities decide that Mr. Mannix is a dangerous man.

The first direct intimation that his presence on the island was not desirable reached Mr. Mannix last week through Ramon O. Williams, United States Consul General to Cuba. Mr. Mannix was told that he must take his departure Wednesday, Feb. 5. He asked for time in which to make his preparations for leaving and to consider the matter.

After seeking advice from some of his friends and acquaintances, Mr. Mannix decided to defy the authorities, and filed with Mr. Williams a formal protest addressed to the Secretary of State. He said that he would not leave Cuba except as a prisoner on board a Spanish man-of-war. The Spanish authorities agreed to send him to New Orleans on board the Alfonso III., cruiser.

Mr. Mannix attempted to have the matter straightened out. It was stated at the Consulate that the Spanish Government was clearly in the wrong, as Mr. Mannix claimed, and that war measures could not be applied in his case, as officially no war exists in Cuba....⁹⁷

Mannix offered to be imprisoned for a month or two if the United States government would make his expulsion a test case, but the government did not protest the expulsion.⁹⁸ Mannix was deported to Key West, Florida, where he was greeted by a throng of Cuban exiles “who made the welkin ring with shouts of ‘Long Live Mr. Mannix!’ ‘Long Live the *Philadelphia Press!*’”⁹⁹

Mannix’s expulsion became a “*cause celebre*.”¹⁰⁰ This sanction against an American correspondent was considered an infringement on the rights of a free press.¹⁰¹ He was a “public character, a martyr to his own fearless passion for sincerity.”¹⁰² The front page of the *New York Times* proclaimed:

The sacrifice of Mr. Mannix will simply stimulate the ten or a dozen men who will desire to take his place. The fact that they will be exposed to the danger of capture and harsh

⁹⁷ “Spain Against Light.” *New York Times*, 12 February 1896.

⁹⁸ *New York Times*, 12 February 1896, p. 1.

⁹⁹ “Mannix Proposal,” written by Brecher, p. 46. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

¹⁰⁰ Hess, *The “Memoirs” of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation*, 161.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Paine, Ralph D. “Introduction: Story of a Literary Forger in *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*,” edited by Mannix. Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923, xiii.

treatment may not dissuade men from trying the experiment. News that is so carefully guarded must be worth the getting.¹⁰³

Enrique Dupuy de Lôme recounted how Mannix got to Cuba:

Mannix came to Consul General Baldasano very well introduced as a newspaper man last fall, and asked assistance to go to Cuba to send reliable news to a syndicate of newspapers which had agreed to take his letter but would not advance money. Under guarantee that he would send unbiased reports, I authorized the Consul General to pay for his fare to Cuba.

After Mannix got there, in November or December, he wrote back announcing that he was trusted by the rebels, and offering his services as a spy to furnish the Consul General with confidential reports about the insurgents' plans.

I instructed the Consul General to decline the offer most emphatically, which he did, as we had no need for American spies in Cuba. Mannix immediately began to send lies to the papers here, and, as they were published, the authorities in Havana expelled him, as they had a perfect right to do. In paying Mannix's fare to Cuba, it was not contemplated to influence his reports, as can be shown by his subsequent letters offering rebel information.¹⁰⁴

"If the information sent by Mr. Mannix was not true or if it contained too much matter calculated to encourage the insurgents, that is the fault of the Spaniards and not of the correspondent," wrote the *New York Times* following his expulsion. "If the Spaniards are making a good campaign, correspondents who are free to roam as they are inclined, will be as apt to send accounts of Spanish victories as of Cuban successes."¹⁰⁵

Fidel G. Pierra, spokesman of the Cuban delegation in the United States, said the following to a *New York Times* reporter:

The correspondent has been telling the truth. He has been confirming what we have said here for a long time. The Spanish authorities do not like the truth, and therefore they will not tolerate him.

The correctness of the reports of Mr. Mannix is shown by our advices. We have known that the whole eastern part of the island was practically in the hands of the Cubans, and that our Government was well organized and recognized by the people. The fairness of the reports has attracted much attention.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *New York Times*, 12 February 1896.

¹⁰⁴ "On the Expulsion of Mannix. Minister Dupuy de Lome Gives His Version of Facts and Comments." *New York Times*, 7 February 1896, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ "Cuban Reports Checked." *New York Times*, 13 February 1896.

¹⁰⁶ *New York Times*, 13 February 1896, p. 5.

The *New York Times* then published on the front page: “Cuban Reports Checked...Expulsion of Mannix Regarded as Unjust and Useless.”¹⁰⁷ This was a dispatch from Madrid, Spain, reporting that Weyler announced no permits would be issued to reporters or correspondents of foreign newspapers to accompany the Spanish army.¹⁰⁸ Weyler’s decision to not permit reporters to accompany troops was reported with anger and provoked sharp criticism.¹⁰⁹ Newspapers vigorously protested against this interference. This policy resulted in the expulsion of several newspaper men after Mannix, including James Creelman, Special *World* correspondent, in May.¹¹⁰ Creelman’s expulsion was also blamed on his exposé of Spanish atrocities. Two weeks after Mannix, *Journal* correspondent Charles Michaelson was arrested for entering rebel lines without permission.¹¹¹ Thomas Dawley, artist for *Harper’s Weekly* magazine, was imprisoned in Havana, charged with communicating with rebels.¹¹² *Journal* correspondent Bradley T. Johnson was ordered out of Cuba; he claimed to “almost had a duel” with a Spanish officer.¹¹³

Mannix was “a bigger hero than ever.”¹¹⁴ Editors “dipped their pens in vitriol and denounced Spanish rule in Cuba more furiously than ever.”¹¹⁵

The ruse worked until Mannix was accused of inventing his accounts. According to Paine, a fellow correspondent, Mannix’s actual headquarters were the bar of a hotel.¹¹⁶ Mannix spent his time “surrounded by Cuban cutthroats and loafers who could easily furnish him with many mad tales and rumors.”¹¹⁷ “Comfortably sprawled at a table, with a drink at his elbow,” Mannix had “concocted all those thrilling, persuasive narratives of battles and forays and marches.”¹¹⁸ Allegedly, Mannix forged the “Appeal to the American People” at the hotel bar

¹⁰⁷ “Cuban Reports Checked.” *New York Times*, 13 February 1896, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ *New York Times*, February 13, 1896.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Wisan, *The Cuban Crisis as Reflected in the New York Press (1895-1898)*, 194.

¹¹¹ *Evening Post*, 25 February 1897.

¹¹² *Herald*, 3 June 1897.

¹¹³ *Journal*, 16 July 1897.

¹¹⁴ Legate, Virkler A. “Book Hoax Recalls How North Native Fooled Public in 1907.” *Watertown Daily Times*, 31 December 1953.

¹¹⁵ Paine, Ralph D. “Introduction: Story of a Literary Forger in *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*,” edited by Mannix. Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923, xiii.

¹¹⁶ Paine to Scudder, September 25, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹¹⁷ Legate, Virkler A. “Book Hoax Recalls How North Native Fooled Public in 1907.” *Watertown Daily Times*, 31 December 1953.

¹¹⁸ Paine, Ralph D. “Introduction: Story of a Literary Forger in *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*,” edited by Mannix. Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923, xv.

without ever having met Cisneros or having established contact with the rebels. The “Appeal” bore the signature of Cisneros, but did Mannix actually write it? It was never unmasked as a forgery; the Brechers theorized Cisneros never disowned it because “it was precisely the appeal he would have made if he had access to the American press, and if he had thought of the idea.”¹¹⁹ Whether his dispatches were true or bogus is unknown; it is contested, but it is important to note his “Appeal to the American People” was validated in Congress.

George Bronson Rea, field correspondent of non-yellow *New York Herald*, published a book outlining and denouncing fake and exaggerated reports sent back to the United States by foreign correspondents, “based on issues created by their own imaginative brains.”¹²⁰ “The American public has been grossly deceived by many of the correspondents sent to Havana as representatives of our leading journals,” Rea wrote of the Havana press coverage of 1895 and early 1896.¹²¹ Rea briefly mentions Mannix, exposing him for completely making up people and places in dispatches.



During the Spanish American war, Mannix befriended Pennsylvania’s governor, Daniel Hastings. Mannix was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Third Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment and “swaggered around grandly in uniform.”¹²² He enlisted on July 2, 1898 and was mustered out with company on October 22, 1898.¹²³ For reasons unknown, Mannix reported on his military records that he was born in Boston, not Malone. The military company, the Hastings Hussars, never left the city.¹²⁴

Following his expulsion from Cuba, Mannix became a reporter for the *Philadelphia Press*. “In spite of the inevitable attacks upon his character, Mannix remained undaunted. He truly must have put the spell on at least one of his editors,” Paine said.¹²⁵ Mannix won the confidence of the Cuban Junta in Philadelphia and gained permission to join a filibustering expedition. Paine and Mannix went on an expedition together, Paine for the *New York Journal*, Mannix for the *Philadelphia Press*. After one unsuccessful expedition from Florida, Mannix

¹¹⁹“Mannix Proposal,” written by Brecher, Box 3. Brecher Collection.

¹²⁰ Rea, *Facts and Fakes About Cuba*, xix.

¹²¹ Rea, *Facts and Fakes About Cuba*, 236.

¹²² Hess, *The Memoirs of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation*, 161.

¹²³ F. A. Weber to Edward Brecher, July 5, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹²⁴ Paine to Scudder, September 25, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹²⁵ Legate, Virkler A. “Book Hoax Recalls How North Native Fooled Public in 1907.” *Watertown Daily Times*, 31 December 1953.

“lost his nerve, showed a yellow streak, and quit via Key West.”¹²⁶ Paine entrusted Mannix with his photographs for the *New York Journal*, which Mannix then sold to the *Philadelphia Press*, “a characteristic Mannix trick.”¹²⁷ Mannix remained in Key West, Florida, for a brief period of time, writing fictitious stories. Paine said:

It was impossible for him to be truthful, loyal, grateful, or decent. This is really an unbiased verdict, for I have long since ceased to feel any resentment. He appeals to me as a object of pity, a man who might have made good if there had been in him a sense of moral responsibility.¹²⁸

Mannix’s career with the *Philadelphia Press* was short-lived. Not long after he was hired, he was assigned to investigate a bank embezzlement. He identified the wrong bank, which was immediately stormed by its creditors. The bank sued the *Philadelphia Press* for libel.¹²⁹ Mannix was fired. He could not find another newspaper job in the East. According to Paine, Mannix became a book agent and forged names on subscription orders to collect commission. He then allegedly passed a fraudulent check on an army officer stationed, fled Philadelphia, married a girl in New York, and deserted her.¹³⁰ “He was ready to bite the hand that fed him,” Paine said. “No trick was too despicable. He would cheat a prostitute out of her earnings or try to sell some bogus bit of news to an editor who didn’t know him.”¹³¹

Paine described Mannix as:

a most extraordinary personality. We used to forgive him and tolerate him, and yet we all knew him through and through as utterly contemptible. A wonderful gift of gab: A persuasive liar who perhaps deceived even himself. He had a streak of sentimentality, more or less mushy, and felt very sorry for himself. Cowardice barred him from being a successful criminal. I should call him a moral defective unable to go straight in any respect. I am trying to think of some good to say of him. He was a friend until he saw some way to take advantage of one and then he was ready to cheat and lie without compunction.¹³²



¹²⁶ Paine to Scudder, September 25, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Paine, Ralph D. “Introduction: Story of a Literary Forger in *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*,” edited by Mannix. Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923, xvii.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Paine to Scudder, September 25, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

¹³² Paine to Scudder, September 25, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

At the end of the nineteenth century, there was overwhelming public criticism of yellow journalism. Yellow papers did not hesitate to exaggerate facts and use fake interviews.¹³³ It is important to note Mannix's dispatches were published in non-yellow papers. The *New York Times* was considered conservative.¹³⁴ It's reporting of the Cuban rebellion was "sober."¹³⁵ By no means was Mannix the only questionable reporter on the *Times* at the time.

A content analysis of 10 newspapers during the seven months prior to the war in April 1898 showed that yellow, conservative, and mixed papers all gave significant amounts of coverage to Cuba.¹³⁶ Notably, conservative papers ran the greatest number of stories about Cuba, not the yellow papers.¹³⁷ "Newspapers are made to sell; and for this purpose there is nothing better than war," wrote Edwin Lawrence Godkin, American journalist and newspaper editor.¹³⁸ Foreign correspondence was very much a work-in-progress. Scholars theorized then disproved the yellow press caused the war, but it was found that sensational and conservative newspapers created an enabling environment for war.¹³⁹ Even some of the most respectable papers were reckless.

¹³³ Dabbous, Yasmine T. *Blessed Be the Critics of Newspapers: Journalistic Criticism of Journalism 1865-1930*. Doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, August 2010. Retrieved from LSU Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection.

¹³⁴ Campbell, Joseph W. *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001.

¹³⁵ Krauss, Clifford. "The World; Remember Yellow Journalism." *New York Times*, 15 February 1998.

¹³⁶ Hamilton, John, et al. "An Enabling Environment," 87.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹³⁸ Godkin, Edwin Lawrence. "The Growth and Expression of Public Opinion." *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 81, January 1898, pp. 1-15. See also Godkin, "Diplomacy and the Newspaper." *North American Review*, vol. 160, May 1895, pp. 570-579.

¹³⁹ Hamilton, John, et al. "An Enabling Environment," 88.

CHAPTER 4. MENDACIOUS MEMOIRS, INTERVIEWS AND DIARIES

“In the history of literature, a special corner has always been reserved for the great literary forgers.... We believe Mannix deserves a place in the history of literature.... He is the only American who really stood at the top of the sorry profession of forgery,” wrote Ruth and Edward Brecher.¹

William Francis Mannix’s colorful career took him around the world. He was constantly travelling and always in trouble. In 1907, he was in Lake Bonaparte, New York, writing fictitious stories about Joseph Bonaparte, king of Spain and elder brother of French emperor Napoleon I.

In 1815, after Napoleon was defeated, Joseph Bonaparte fled to the United States. He arrived in New York then settled temporarily in Philadelphia where he scandalously became infatuated with a young woman named Annette Savage.² In the 1820s, on the shores of Lake Bonaparte, he built a hunting lodge where he “savored his time spent in the remote region...describing it to acquaintances as ‘Little France.’”³ He also built a stone house for Savage, his mistress.⁴ Bonaparte left the United States in the 1830s, rejoining his legal wife and family. He left behind Savage and his American daughter, Caroline, but financially provided for them.⁵ “The gleaming lake that he loved has ever since borne the name Bonaparte,” but nothing remains of his buildings.⁶ Bonaparte died in 1844.

Mannix claimed he interviewed David Balmat, the son of John D. Balmat, for articles he was writing about Bonaparte. John D. Balmat had been the caretaker for Bonaparte’s properties in the 1820s. On June 9, 1907, shortly after David Balmat’s death, the *New York Herald* featured a full-page spread titled “Joseph Bonaparte’s Court in the Adirondacks” in the Sunday magazine section. Mannix’s introductory editorial note proclaimed:

Herewith the Herald publishes what is considered to be the most interesting if not the most amazing story ever unearthed in America concerning the Bonapartes. It consists of copious extracts from the diary – concerning which the author of this article is soon to publish a volume – of Count Jean de Balmat, who was the confidential friend of Joseph Bonaparte and who was constantly at his side in his mansion in the Adirondacks when

¹ Ruth and Edward Brecher to Mrs. Doremus Scudder, September 1, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

² Hughes, James. “Those Who Passed Through: Unusual Visits to Unlikely Places.” *New York History*, vol. 88, no. 4, 2007, pp. 454-459.

³ Hughes, *Those Who Passed Through*, 457.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 458.

⁶ Ibid.

the brother of Napoleon, with the exile on St. Helena, dreamed of founding an American empire.⁷

Mannix claimed to have heard the content of this story from Balmat's own lips, but the article did not solely depend on word-of-mouth evidence. Mannix asserted that Balmat possessed:

an almost priceless historical treasure, the confidential diary of his father, the Count Jean de Balmat, close friend and confidant of King Joseph, and participator in the many councils, social and semi-official, which were held on the shore of lovely lake Bonaparte...the diary was accompanied by an amazing collection of letters – including some from King Joseph himself...and others from a previously shadowy historical figure, Joseph's "American wife."⁸

Count Balmat's diary was "a very ordinary-appearing volume of some three hundred and twenty pages, about half of which are still blank, and bound...with untanned deerskin...an almost priceless historical treasure."⁹ Mannix reported the diary and other documents had been bequeathed to the French government for safekeeping, but Mannix studied them before their departure. In reality, the diary was never sent to France, but was in possession of David Balmat's granddaughter and contained none of the marvels reported by Mannix.

The *Herald's* article reported that at Lake Bonaparte, Joseph and Napoleon had "lived, fished, and hunted...and dreamed of an American empire."¹⁰ Bonaparte's "American wife" was described as "a most charming madame whose French is pretty and new."¹¹ In the diary, she was referred to as "the American madame," "the pretty wife of King Joseph," and in only three places: "Madame Bonaparte."¹²

Mannix also submitted an article to *Century* magazine about Bonaparte and his romance with Savage; in the article he wrote they were married. Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *Century*, accepted the article but questioned a statement in it that ex-King Bonaparte had been married to Savage.¹³ To appease Gilder, Mannix wrote back that a fictitious judge:

is here today and he authorizes me to say for him that he will not alone vouch for the authenticity of all the matter I have written upon the Bonapartes in this region, but will make affidavit if necessary to the fact that I am now the sole possessor, in right, of the

⁷ "Joseph Bonaparte's Court in the Adirondacks." *New York Herald*, 9 June 1907.

⁸ "Mannix Proposal," written by Brecher, p. 72. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁹ "Joseph Bonaparte's Court in the Adirondacks." *New York Herald*, 9 June 1907.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Documents Relating To William Francis Mannix and Joseph Bonaparte," written by Brecher. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

major part of the papers relating to the stay of the ex-King of Spain and Naples in Northern New York.

In relation to your question: "Do you not think it is a very doubtful thing to claim actual marriage," I will reply that perhaps it would be more conservative and possibly nearer to the truth to say that Father Scintrome (who is the Catholic priest that visited Joseph at Bordentown) sanctioned or at least witnessed a morganatic marriage such as was quite common between royalty and non-royalty in Europe. Father Turgeon, the French priest who assisted me in the translations of various documents, and Bishops Burke and Grandon – with both of whom I have communicated on the subject – are prone to reject the idea that any Roman clergyman could be found to actually "marry" Joseph Bonaparte to Annette Savage when he was aware that Joseph had been regularly married according to the rights of the Church, and that his wife by such marriage was still living. However, none of these prelates look upon Miss Savage in the light of "mistress." As to this part of the story, Mr. Gilder, I am very willing to be reconciled to your superior judgment and experience and Page 9 of the manuscript submitted may be so altered as to be more conservative.¹⁴

Gilder then apparently asked for a second article about Bonaparte. In his response, Mannix said he was working on a second article concerning "the Bonaparte dream of an Empire in the Adirondacks," which was about a scheme to free Napoleon from his exile to rule over such an empire.¹⁵ He said this second article was "the most valuable document ever published in America on the subject."¹⁶ He added that the articles, plus "all the matter in my possession relating to the Bonapartes in America," would make a book which he would submit to the *Century*.¹⁷ Mannix went so far as to claim that the king of France had invited him to France for a conference:

In another two weeks or so I am going to France, upon invitation of the French President, through the secretary of the Academy; and the matter that comes to hand there will be submitted to *The Century* before other disposition is made of it.¹⁸

The Century advanced money to Mannix before "apparently discovering how badly they were being taken."¹⁹ Their correspondence came to an abrupt close. Ironically, several years before Gilder paid Mannix for a fake article, Gilder had criticized commercial journalism, declaring:

the most deplorable thing about the present conditions of journalism is that young men fresh from college, who go to work on these sensational papers attracted by high pay,

¹⁴ Wm. F. Mannix to R. W. Gilder, August 29, 1907. Brecher Collection.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Mannix to Johnson, October 2, 1907. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Wm. F. Mannix to Mr. Johnson, October 2, 1907.

¹⁹ Legate, Virkler A. "Book Hoax Recalls How North Native Fooled Public in 1907." *Watertown Daily Times*, 31 December 1953.

suffer degeneration in character under pressure to produce what is demanded by cynical employers.²⁰

Years later, when Mannix was being investigated for another literary hoax, the *Watertown Daily Times* revealed the *New York Herald's* "Joseph Bonaparte's Court in the Adirondacks" as a hoax written by Mannix, "who fooled many an editor into printing what generally turned out to be mere fiction."²¹ The article contained revelations from the diary of Count Jean de Balmat; this person was a figment of Mannix's imagination. There is no doubt Savage was Bonaparte's mistress, but she never married him.



Mannix's next forgeries were inspired from his time in China. At the turn of the century, his fortunes were at an all-time low. On August 21, 1900, he enlisted in the army in Boston.²² He served as a private in the Ninth Infantry of the United States regular army during the Boxer Rebellion. The Boxer Rebellion was a terrorist uprising in China. The Boxers were a secret society that sought to expel all foreigners and Chinese Christians from China.

Mannix participated in his regiment's main battle, the assault upon the city of Tientsin on July 13, 1900.²³ At the Battle of Tientsin, a multinational force rescued the besieged city, which was protected by a large, thick wall. There Mannix saw "hard fighting" at Tientsin.²⁴ He "suffered untold hardships."²⁵

Mannix wrote a poem, "The Yellow Peril," in commemoration of his time in China.²⁶ He dedicated the poem to his colonel and "gallant" regiment, "whose crowning laurel wreath was their charge at Tientsin, China, during the assault of upon the 'Walled City.'"²⁷ He called the Boxers "imps of hell."²⁸

²⁰ Gilder, Richard Watson. "The Newspaper, the Magazine, and the Public." *The Outlook*, vol. 61, February 1899, pp. 317-321.

²¹ "A Literary Hoax and an Expose of Another." *Watertown Daily Times*. 9 June. Year unknown. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

²² Edward F. Witsell to Edward Brecher, July 17, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

²³ Hess, *The "Memoirs" of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-Translation*, 161. See also Paine, Ralph Delahaye. Introduction: The Story of a Literary Forgery. *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*, edited by William F. Mannix, 1923, 2nd ed., Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923, pp. xix-xx.

²⁴ Paine, *Story of a Literary Forgery*, pp. xix-xx.

²⁵ "Biography of Wm. F. Mannix." *Watertown Daily Times*, 12 February 1908.

²⁶ Brown, Fred Radford. *History of the Ninth U.S. Infantry, 1799-1909*. Houston, Texas, 1909. See also Hess, *The "Memoirs" of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation*, 162.

²⁷ Brown, *History of the Ninth U.S. Infantry*, 810.

²⁸ Ibid.

Mannix tried to cheat his top-sergeant out of two hundred dollars with a story about treasure hidden in China during the war.²⁹

On November 14, 1900, Mannix wrote to President William McKinley from Peking, China, on letterhead of the *Boston Post*, asking:

Having accomplished the object of my enlistment, as stated to the President, in my communication of August 14th, I am desirous of returning to the United States to resume my newspaper work.

Mr. President, it was the desire of the editors of the six papers of the syndicate I represented, to know the feeling of the rank and file of the army... What that sentiment is I have told in my papers. As I had the honor to state in a previous letter to you the soldier of the American army, like the Commander-in-chief, is for the flag and all the noble principles it represents. I was really surprised, Mr. President, at the unanimity of feeling I found prevailing among the men. They knew me only as an enlisted man, who ate, camped, and marched with them. This being the case I regard their expressions as all the more valuable.

Mr. President: May I ask that you honor my request for a discharge with honor at your earliest convenience. I hope to be discharged here in China, with transportation to the place of enlistment.

Thanking you, Mr. President, for your honored consideration in the fact, and...you of my sincere devotion to our country, our flag and party, I have the honor to be your faithful servant.³⁰

Mannix was honorably discharged on March 5, 1901 in Peking, China.



Years later, Mannix told Scudder he had briefly visited China and had interviewed Li Hung Chang.³¹ Li Hung Chang was a politician, general and diplomat. In 1896, when Li was 75 years old, he made a highly publicized trip around the world, visiting Russia, Germany, France, England, and the United States. He lived from 1823 until 1901.

According to Mannix, literary material written by Li was scattered throughout China until 1910 or 1911. Original manuscripts were dispersed over “half a score of cities in China.”³² The material was collected by “a provincial governor of the two Kwangs provinces, Li’s nephew, and

²⁹ Hess, Albert G. Draft of “Crime Potentials of Conforming Subcultures: The Case of Francis William Mannix.” For presentation at the twenty-first annual meeting of the New York State Sociological Association, Eisenhower College, October 13, 1973. Unpublished manuscript. See also Hess, *The “Memoirs” of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-Translation*, 162.

³⁰ Wm. F. Mannix to Mr. President, November 14, 1900. McKinley Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

³¹ Scudder, Doremus. “A Picturesque Literary Fraud – A Study in Abnormal Psychology.” Unpublished manuscript. Collection of Ruth E. and Edward M. Brecher.

³² Mannix, William Francis and Paine, Ralph Delahaye. Editor’s Preface. *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang*. Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923.

deposited in the palatial residence of the late Viceroy at Canton.”³³ Li’s diary had allegedly been found in Canton Province, China, translated into English, and edited by Mannix.

Mannix wrote a series of short stories about the life of Li Hung Chang for the conservative *New York Sun* for five hundred dollars. Installments of “The Memoirs of The Viceroy, Li Hung Chang” appeared as a series in 1912. Previously mentioned in chapter one, the *Sun* first became famous for the Great Moon Hoax of 1835.

The *London Observer* wanted Mannix to double the size of his story for one thousand dollars. The *London Observer* published “The Diary Of Li Hung Chang” from October 27 to December 8, 1912. After the material was syndicated by these two papers, Mannix submitted a book manuscript to two publishing companies: Constable’s in London and Houghton Mifflin in Boston.

To ensure the manuscript’s authenticity, Constable’s submitted the manuscript to two British authorities on China: Herbert Allen Giles, Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University, and Dr. Lionel Giles, Keeper of Oriental Prints and Manuscripts at the British Museum and Examiner in Chinese at Cambridge.³⁴

Houghton Mifflin’s editor-in-chief, Ferris Greenslet, also submitted the manuscript to John W. Foster for Foster to review its validity. Foster was profoundly experienced in international relations and closely associated with Li. Foster had no suspicions about the manuscript. He vouched for its authenticity. He even wrote an introduction for the American edition, saying:

The last one hundred years have produced many men of scholarship, several great generals, a number of statesmen of distinguished ability and success, and a few diplomats of high rank; but no one of these can be singled out as having combined in his person all these attainments in such as eminent degree as Li Hung Chang. Because of his distinction in all these fields of human activity, we should welcome these memoirs, extracted from his voluminous diary, as a valuable contribution to the better understanding of his character and services.³⁵

Mannix grandiosely wrote in his editor’s preface:

With the permission of the Imperial Government nearly two years ago, and the consent of the trustees and heirs of Li Hung Chang’s estate, the great mass of documents and notes were examined, and carefully translated by Major E. Emmet Roberts, a secretary of the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Untitled. Brecher - - Page 4,” written by Brecher, Box 4. Brecher Collection.

³⁵ Mannix, William Francis. Editor’s Preface in *Memoirs*, viii.

late Viceroy, assisted by Drs. Wang, of Peking, and Hsiu-Tsai, the Elder, of Canton. Over one hundred and seventy thousand words of the Viceroy's memoirs were translated and diligently compared; and from this large mass, these notes – comprising the only writings of the Grand Secretary that have ever been rendered into English – are for the first time offered to the public of England and America³⁶

To disguise this literary forgery, Mannix claimed it was a translation. He lengthily described his problems with translating, as well how he selected and dated the material. These meticulous clarifications were made to convey to the reader that translating and editing Li's memoirs was done "with the greatest care, and that the book had to be fully trustworthy."³⁷

Upon publishing in 1913, "The Memoirs of Li Hung Chang" created a sensation. Experts regarded it as an autobiography "of unusual and permanent value."³⁸ The *New York Times* devoted nearly a full page to the book, mostly consisting of quotations. It headlined: "Li Hung Chang's Memoirs Give His Impressions of Us" and "the famous Chinese statesman was a voluminous writer and hoped to be poet laureate of China – dreaded coming to America, but soon changed his views."³⁹ "The book is full of interest, from cover to cover, and not least in those parts which reveal Oriental customs and habits of thinking," the article concluded.⁴⁰

Mannix claimed the book, which was approximately 90,000 words, was derived from more than 1,600,000 English words, which an English and two Chinese scholars had spent two years translating. The book was organized under appropriate headings and arranged chronologically. The largest group of extracts pertained to the viceroy's world tour. It also included Li's literary ambitions; the "autobiography" was interspersed with his poems.⁴¹ Mannix gave the impression he interviewed Li on October 19, 1900.⁴²

Critics were initially favorable of the book. What fascinated critics was how the book seemed "to reflect the personality of Li."⁴³ "The translators have certainly rendered the Chinese into very impressive English. So expressive, in fact, that Chinese scholars at first were in doubt

³⁶ Mannix, William Francis. Editor's Preface in *Memoirs*, lxxx.

³⁷ Hess, *The "Memoirs" of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation*, 166.

³⁸ Metcalf, Henry Harrison and John Norris McClintock. "Books of New Hampshire Interest." *The Granite State Monthly*, vol. 54-55, 1922.

³⁹ "Li Hung Chang's Memoirs Give His Impressions of Us." *New York Times*, 26 October 1913.

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, 26 October 1913, p. 3.

⁴¹ Hess, *The "Memoirs" of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation*, 156.

⁴² Mannix, *Memoirs*, 227.

⁴³ Hess, *Crime Potentials of Conforming Subcultures*, 6.

as to the authenticity of the work,” a book review published in 1914 said.⁴⁴ “Li’s style, even in the translation, is never uninteresting, and his humor adds much to the relish of the book,” complimented O. D. Wannamaker of *The Dial*, a semi-monthly journal of literary criticism and discussion in Chicago.⁴⁵ The book “throws a strong light upon the state of the Chinese Empire and upon some of the obstacles which stand in the way of its civilization,” another book review said. “The book is especially important as showing not only the record of one of the greatest Chinamen of modern times, but also the standard of Chinese public opinion.”⁴⁶ “It was an exceedingly readable book. It reflected great knowledge of Chinese affairs,” an editorial in the *Boston Herald* said.⁴⁷ Mannix’s book was so factual it convinced publishing companies that “here was a rare jewel of literature.... Only after thousands of copies of the book had been placed in circulation did certain small details begin to be questioned.”⁴⁸

An anonymous critic pointed out major discrepancies, published in 1914 in the *American Historical Review*:

No intimation is given that the originals have been published in China or that they are anywhere available for comparison with the translations. The translators are named in such a way in the preface as to render their identification difficult, while the American editor's ignorance of Chinese-revealed in his mistakes in Chinese proper names and by other errors-arouses misgivings as to his fitness for the task of selecting and arranging material of such importance. Some passages occur which are so unlike Chinese modes of expression as to suggest a very free paraphrase of any possible Chinese originals... ignorance or indifference about foreign names may account for his glaring invention in describing incidents in places abroad which he never saw, as Munich and Windsor, Chicago and San Francisco, but it is difficult to account for his declaration that he was present at the bedside of the dying General Ward, who succumbed to his wounds in Ningpo, a town outside of his province. A governor under the old regime in China was never allowed to leave the province where he ruled. Again, he refers to seeing the execution of the rioters at Tientsin in 1870 in company with representatives of the foreign powers. There were no foreigners present at the execution, and Li himself could not have been there unless in disguise-which is utterly improbable. In each of these cases Li's presence would have been known and recorded at the time.... While discrepancies like these require explanation before the Memoirs can be taken seriously as an authoritative

⁴⁴ Treat, Payson J. Review of *Memoirs of Li Hung Chang* by Mannix. *American Political Science Association*, vol. 8, no. 1, February 1914, pp. 119-120.

⁴⁵ *The Dial*, 16 February 1914, pp. 142-143.

⁴⁶ “Memoirs of Li Hung Chang (Book Review).” *Dublin Review*, vol. 154, April 1914, pp. 387-389.

⁴⁷ “A Literary Fake.” *Boston Herald*, 3 December 1923.

⁴⁸ Legate, Virkler A. “Book Hoax Recalls How North Native Fooled Public in 1907.” *Watertown Daily Times*, 31 December 1953.

source for modern Chinese history, the book is not without considerable interest to the general reader.⁴⁹

Several months after publication, a Bostonian named E. B. Drew wrote a letter to the publishers calling attention to a seemingly commonplace entry in the diary. The entry allegedly by Li that Drew found baffling is as follows:

Today my friends took me far out toward the Golden Gate, and gave me my first view of the broad Pacific from this side of the world. I could not believe it was so many thousand miles across. For as I stood there upon those high cliffs at one side of the narrow entrance to the great bay of San Francisco, I strained my tired eyes across the waters, and I thought I could see in the beautiful distance the holy mirage of my native land.⁵⁰

Drew had been with Li on that day mentioned, but in reality, they were actually hundreds of miles away in a hotel in Vancouver, British Columbia.⁵¹ Upon closer analysis, Drew discovered other factual inaccuracies in the book. Two other episodes described in the book that never took place were Li visiting Windsor Castle in England and his attending the execution of the Tientsin rioters in the presence of foreign governments on October 18, 1870.⁵²

Houghton Mifflin launched an investigation and discovered more discrepancies. Mannix could not read Chinese. The alleged translators were figments of Mannix's imagination. The only surviving son of Li, Li Ching-Mai, wrote that he could not remember ever having encountered a Major Roberts.⁵³ Li had never even kept a diary!⁵⁴ "The authors [Major E. Emmet Roberts, Dr. Wang, and Dr. Hsiu-Tsai], with few exceptions, never came into personal contact with my father; and as they gathered their scraps of intelligence chiefly from indirect channels, they give quite a wrong impression as to his personality and ideas," Li Ching-Mai said.⁵⁵ The book's preface, signed by Mannix, was dated Shanghai, December 1, 1912. According to Scudder, Mannix was in Hawaii at the time, living with his wife in a cottage in Manoa Valley.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Review of "Memoirs of Li Hung Chang. Edited by William Francis Mannix, with an Introduction by John W. Foster. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1913. Pp. xxvii, 298.)." *American Historical Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, April 1914, pp. 633-635.

⁵⁰ "Untitled. Brecher - - Page 5 - 6," written by Brecher, Box 4. Brecher Collection.

⁵¹ Paine, *Story of a Literary Forgery*, xxxvii.

⁵² Hess, *The "Memoirs" of Li Hung Chang - the Story of a Non-translation*, 163. See also Mannix, *Memoirs*, p. 178 and p. 39.

⁵³ Hess, *The "Memoirs" of Li Hung Chang - the Story of a Non-translation*, 164.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Li Ching-Mai to C. D. Tenney, June 14, 1915. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁵⁶ Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 6.

In fact, Mannix produced his most brilliant work from a jail cell in Hawaii. It was typed on a typewriter belonging to the governor of Hawaii, given to Mannix during his incarceration so his promising literary career would not be interrupted!⁵⁷ While Mannix was in jail, Ruth had used Scudder's library card to check out everything on China, which Mannix had "greedily devoured."⁵⁸

The two librarians in Hawaii compared the "Memoirs" paragraph by paragraph with the books Mannix borrowed from the library while in jail. This comparison revealed a strong connection between the borrowed books and "Memoirs." Ruth withdrew more than ten books from the Oahu College Library and the Library of Hawaii, including titles such as:

- "Things Chinese" by J.D. Ball (1904)
- "China Under the Empress Dowager" by J.O.P. Bland and E. Backhouse (1910)
- "China and her People" by Charles Denby (1906)
- "Court Life in China" by I. T. Headland (1909)
- "Letters from China" by S. P. Conger (1909)
- "Awakening of China" by W.A.P. Martin (1907)
- "China, Past and Present" by E. H. Parker (1903)

The librarian from the Library of Hawaii provided Scudder with this list of books Ruth checked out.⁵⁹ "Every book I examined yielded interesting parallels and 'Things Chinese' was a rich mine," said Ruth Benedict, secretary of the Central Union Church. "Mr. Mannix seems to have used 'Things Chinese' as a sort of reference book, having drawn it from the library several times."⁶⁰ The librarian said:

Knowing Mr. Mannix and his abilities and having gone over the material there is not a shadow of a doubt in my mind but that he, and he alone with no diary nor material other than that afforded by Honolulu libraries was responsible for the Memoirs of Li hung Chang.⁶¹

"In all his conversations with me Mannix had never referred to his story of Li's life as made up of extracts from the statesman's diary," Scudder said.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth M. Richards to Scudder, September 28, 1916. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁶⁰ Ruth Benedict to Scudder, November 13, 1916. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

⁶¹ Elizabeth M. Richards to Scudder, November 6, 1916. Box 3. Brecher Collection.

He never spoke of any manuscripts that he had gotten hold of. I knew in a general way what stuff he had, saw him at work with typewriter at his desk, and could not well have failed to come...manuscripts such as he alludes to in his book if he had any in his possession. He was not at all secretive and it seems impossible that he should have had these manuscripts in jail.⁶²

Mannix fascinated Scudder. Scudder asked Mannix for information about the newspaper articles, probably for his unpublished essay, "A Picturesque Literary Fraud." Mannix deflected Scudder's request:

I am sorry that I cannot give you the dates of the appearances of the Li Hung Chang Memoirs in the *N.Y. Sun* and the *London Observer*...but we are enclosing one of the Sun issues and will try and get you the others. I am glad to note your interest, but am wondering what you are doing: surely not preparing the Memoirs of W.F.M?⁶³

Mannix continued:

For the next few months it will be necessary for me to dig into article work again, that is, devote at least half of my time to the getting up of news and magazine articles--in order to keep the pot boiling. I want to keep on with my 'literary' work—short stories, essays, and novels, but returns are very slow and in the meantime I must live. So must the family. Mrs. Mannix does not want me to go into regular newspaper work again, anywhere, and I do not know as I myself am anxious to do it.⁶⁴

In August 1914, Mannix submitted a second volume of "Memoirs" to Paul Reynolds, New York agent of Houghton Mifflin Company. It was declined due to the doubts that had come to light about the first volume.⁶⁵ Almost ten years later, Mrs. Ruth Mannix submitted a posthumous novel by Mannix, "The Man of Louvain," which was also declined "although reports say it is a work of great merit."⁶⁶

Under the alias of William G. Leonard, Mannix wrote to Robert U. Underwood, editor of *Century* magazine, on June 1, 1914 that he had 19 parts or chapters, each complete, of a second volume of "Memoirs" to sell for publication.⁶⁷ He probably used this alias because his real name had gained negative attention and he had sold fictitious materials to the *Century* in the past. In the letter, he included the chapter titles of the proposed books, how many words were in each chapter, and promised none of the material had ever been printed before, and it would not be

⁶² Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 4-5.

⁶³ William F. Mannix to Scudder, September 20, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁶⁴ William F. Mannix to Scudder, September 20, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁶⁵ Craig Wylie to Mr. and Mrs. Brecher, September 30, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁶⁶ Craig Wylie to Mr. and Mrs. Brecher, September 30, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁶⁷ Wm. G. Leonard to Robert U. Underwood, June 1, 1914. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

issued in Chinese until after the English edition was fully published.⁶⁸ Mannix brags about the material:

...the Viceroy let wit, humor, common sense and philosophy crop out everywhere. For instance, his 'On the Art of Writing' is full of his inimitable humor and yet contains a store of sound advice that might have quite as much application to the American or European 'scribbler' of today as it had to his country and time. On the other hand, his 'Tribute to the United States' is a splendid outburst of words telling of China's gratitude to America, and is pronounced by such educated and competent Americans and Britishers as have seen the translation to be a masterpiece of prose.⁶⁹



Mannix continued to market his writings on the convincing letterhead of the Pacific Associated Press. The stationery for the Pacific Associated Press displayed branch offices in cities all over the world, from Tokyo to Sydney to Singapore. The letterhead listed William F. Mannix as President, Waldo E. Burr as Treasurer, Carl von Ressengler as secretary, and Wm. G. Leonard as General Manager.⁷⁰ Of course, these men were all one. The Pacific Associated Press was a fake news bureau Mannix managed.

When Houghton Mifflin's editors grew suspicious of "Memoirs" in 1916, Mannix answered mail from them using this letterhead and aliases.⁷¹ The publishers wrote to "William G. Leonard," General Manager of the Pacific Associated Press. They sent a copy of Drew's letter, asking for it to be forwarded to Mannix for clarification. They were informed Mannix was in China, working on Li's manuscripts to select material for a second volume.⁷² Mannix was actually in Los Gatos. It was from there he conducted this correspondence under the alias of Leonard. His reply was indignant; he tried to minimize Drew's accusations and evade questions.⁷³

"Memoirs" was never fully discredited until the second edition appeared in 1923. It was re-issued for what it was – a work of the imagination. According to the *Granite State Monthly*, a New Hampshire magazine on history, biography, literature, the book sold for two dollars and fifty cents.⁷⁴ Ralph D. Paine wrote a short biographical sketch of Mannix as an introduction titled

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ William G. Leonard to Robert U. Underwood, June 1, 1914. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁷⁰ William G. Leonard to Robert U. Underwood, June 1, 1914. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁷¹ Nash, Jay Robert. *Zanies: The World's Greatest Eccentrics*. Piscataway, N.J.: New Century Publishers, 1982.

⁷² Hess, *The "Memoirs" of Li Hung Chang – The Story of a Non-translation*, 163.

⁷³ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁴ Metcalf, "Books of New Hampshire Interest, 614.

“The Story of a Literary Forgery.” This replaced Foster’s introduction, which was moved into the portion labeled as fiction. Ruth Mannix described Paine as:

another thorn in my flesh, an arch enemy...doing him [Mannix] harm and his family. [The] way I felt ever since I accidentally saw his book in '24. All I know is that book he wrote [Introduction to Li Hung Chang Memoirs] and art Will and made money doing it against Will. How to tell the wheat from the chaff! Will was wheat, he chaff (false and hurting). Will wrote the stuff. He undid it, after Will was dead and could have no comeback. ‘You [Brechers] tried hard to find the ‘papers’!’ That’s a laugh! Papers, Ralph Payne had none. He made his up or might as well have. He got a lead some way and guessed or fabricated. That’s why I’m so leery and unbelieving. I wanted to buy and burn every copy of that false slander against Will and his memory. I could do nothing but suffer helplessly.⁷⁵

She said Paine defamed Mannix’s name and reputation after his death by publishing the book as a literary forgery without contacting her or her children or considering their feelings.⁷⁶



As far as we know, Mannix never went to China except during the Boxer Rebellion, but he continued to produce more work based on specious experiences in China. In 1914, Mannix sent a copy of “Memoirs” to President Woodrow Wilson with a letter claiming that on a recent visit to China, the President of China Yuan Shih-Kai gave him a personal message to pass on to Wilson. Mannix’s letter to Wilson said:

In the letter which it was privilege and honor to write you some weeks ago, and to which the Secretary of the President made gracious reply, I referred to a message for you from the President of the Chinese Republic, General Yuan Shih-k'ai. It was my hope to be soon in the National Capital when it might be my great pleasure to repeat in person the worlds of the Chinese Executive. But as this now appears to be improbable, I hope you will permit me, dear Mr. PRESIDENT, to write the substance of General Yuan’s remarks.

He said: “If it is your purpose, Mr. Mannix, to go to Washington upon your return to the United States, I wish you would so favor me as to ask for an audience with the President of the United States, in my name, and present to Mr. Wilson the assurance of my sincerest personal and national esteem and admiration. I wish him and his family every joy and blessing of the great Christian holiday season. I wish them sweet blessings in their household. I wish for President Wilson and his Administration the holy guidance of Heaven to the end that the Great Republic, the firm and mighty friend of China, may prosper in wealth, increase in virtue, and remain steadfast in justice for all time.” General Yuan spoke these words in his own beautiful language during the course of my last interview with him on the night of October 9. I made stenographic notes at the time, and promised that I would be all means seek to deliver them in person to the President of the United States. This promise, because of several extremely urgent obstacles, I am, Mr.

⁷⁵ Ruth Mannix to Brechers, January 1, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁷⁶ Ruth Mannix to the Brechers, January 3, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

PRESIDENT, unable to fulfill; and with your kindly permission I take this means of communicating them to you. . . .

It is my expectation to return to China within a few weeks, there to resume my work on the further volumes of the "Memoirs of Li Hung Chang," and it would afford me infinite pleasure to bear a message from the President to General Yuan Shih-K'ai, whose joy upon its receipt would be very great.⁷⁷

Mannix signed the letter, "Your admiring servant."⁷⁸

The following year, Mannix announced Yuan Shih-Kai had entrusted him with another international message, this one addressed (like the message of President Cisneros of Cuba twenty years before) to the American people.

On July 26, 1915, the *Independent*, a weekly magazine published in New York City, featured an article on the front page by Yuan Shih-Kai, President of China, headlined "The Chinese Republic Reports Progress." This was a fabricated interview between the Chinese ruler and Mannix. Mannix wrote Yuan's message in the first person singular.

To establish an air of credibility, the article carried an editorial preface outlining how Mannix had interviewed Shih-Kai at one o'clock in the morning in private quarters in the Forbidden City, "for Chinese officialdom clings tenaciously to the night for the transaction of most affairs."⁷⁹ The interview contained questionable statements such as that Shih-Kai had established Confucianism as the state religion of China. The article also mentions Li Hung Chang, a prominent figure in all of Mannix's bogus works, saying to Yuan Shih-Kai, "America was the only country of the world which denied admittance to our countrymen, it also was the only nation which stood like the Great Wall between China and dismemberment."⁸⁰

Mannix concocted a second interview, this one conducted by his alias Carl von Ressingler. It was published in the *Independent* on November 22, 1915, titled, "The Chinese Republic Will Stand." This interview was another message to the American people.

This article also carried an editorial preface to establish believability. It said the interview began at one thirty in the morning and lasted nearly two hours.⁸¹ This article was presented with "such a fortification of circumstantial detail and ceremony that one could hardly imagine even a

⁷⁷ Mannix to President Wilson, January 14, 1914.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "The Chinese Republic Reports Progress by Yuan Shih-Kai." *The Independent*, 26 July 1915.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "The Chinese Republic Will Stand by Yuan Shih-Kai." *The Independent*, 22 November 1915, p. 303.

professional liar making out such a good case in the presentation of his wares.”⁸² The alleged statements by Yuan Shih-Kai caused American and European experts on the Far East to “sit back and gasp in bewilderment because these statements were diametrically opposed to what the European and American friends of the Chinese president believed to be Yuan Shih-Kai’s ideas on important international problems.”⁸³

The forgeries in the *Independent* were exposed in late 1915 or early 1916 by the Far Eastern Bureau or by the American Asiatic Association, or both.⁸⁴ The Far Eastern Bureau was a newspaper syndicate that took considerable interest in Mannix. The Chinese minister in Washington, D.C., Dr. V. K. Wellington Koo, cabled Peking for information and received a cablegram which said:

You will state on the authority of President Yuan Shih-Kai that no such interview was ever given; that no such person as von Ressingler is known in Peking; that no questions were ever submitted on behalf of the *Independent*...that the whole article is a malevolent fabrication.⁸⁵

The *Independent* article stated that Yuan Shih-Kai answered prepared questions written in both Chinese and English by his personal secretaries, the Honorable Li Chi-tung and Lieutenant-Colonel Semplee, but these people did not exist. Because this interview was published as a leading feature by the *Independent*, “with a reputation to lose, tended to cause it to be accepted as genuine, even among those who are usually thoroughly posted as to what is passing in the Far East.”⁸⁶ The mythical von Ressingler was said to be “active in the columns of other reputable newspapers and periodicals ‘interviewing’ important personages in similarly spurious manner.”⁸⁷



Mannix moved on to falsifying advertising copy. In 1916, he wrote to the National Sweeper Company, makers of vacuum cleaners, from the Pacific Associated Press. He sold them an advertisement about how their vacuum was used in China’s palace. A year later, he wrote a similar letter to the Domestic Sweeper Company. The two companies had recently merged, so

⁸² “Editorial Suggestion: A Gross Fabrication.” *Special China Service*, (n.d.). Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ruth and Edward Brecher to Robert Hill, September 1, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁸⁵ “Editorial Suggestion: A Gross Fabrication.” *Special China Service*, (n.d.). Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁸⁶ “Editorial Suggestion: A Gross Fabrication.” *Special China Service*, (n.d.). Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

the second sale was not consummated. Mannix then contacted the Glidden Varnish Company, makers of “Jap-A-Lac,” a floor finishing product. Mannix had provided Scudder as a reference, and the Foreign Sales Manager for the company wrote to Scudder:

William F. Mannix recently advised us that a great many people in the Orient, including some dignitaries of the highest standing, in fact, the wife of the President of China herself, had spoken to him in terms of the highest praise of our product --- JAP-A-LAC. Mr. Mannix is desirous of writing up a short article, giving an account of these various interviews...⁸⁸

Whether Scudder responded with a positive or negative review of Mannix is unknown, but the two cordially kept in touch.

Mannix periodically asked Scudder for photographs to include with magazine articles he wrote.⁸⁹ “I realize that I am asking a great many favors of you; but this is nothing new, you have never refused to comply, therefore, why should I not keep asking?”⁹⁰

Mannix also wrote advertising copy for the Barrett Company, manufacturers of blacktop road-surfacing material, tarvia. According to Mannix, the Dowager Empress, General Yuan Shih-Kai, and other potentates all swore by tarvia for surfacing the roads of China. He wrote on Pacific Associated Press letterhead from Los Gatos, California, to the Barrett Company:

President Li Yuan Hung gave me this information personally during the course of an interview several months ago on present and prospective trade relations between China and the United States. Then - - he took me to where your product had been used and freely commented thereon [sic]. He told me that he had first made use of Tarvia about his new residence and new office at Hangkow - - his home city, and in which he has immense interests. General Li was enthusiastic in his praise of your products, several of which he has personally ordered applied to his property....

What could be better publicity material than this?...

I was very much tempted to send you a cablegram when the facts were made known to me, but cables cost money and I did not know whether you would thank me for foisting this expense upon you. Then, too, I thought I might have to pay the tolls myself!...

I was surprised (and as an American very pleased) to discover that the Barrett Company had many worthy friends in Hong Kong, Japan, and throughout the Philippines. I saw roads in various places that had long been treated with your materials....

I feel that this material, put into good shape, and given wide publicity, would be a big eye-opener...⁹¹

⁸⁸ Jno. M. Burns to Doremus Scudder, December 27, 1916. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁸⁹ Wm. F. Mannix to Scudder, January 4, 1916. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ George E. Martin to Edward Brecher, September 7, 1950. Extract of letter from Mannix. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

The company purchased 10,000 words of his prose. The fifteen-page pamphlet written by Mannix, “The Avenue of Sublime Peace: Tarvia Gives China’s Forbidden City Its First Modern Highway,” was published in 1918.⁹² The Avenue of Supreme Peace extended “from the Imperial Bridge in Peking’s Forbidden City three quarters of a mile and was described as the only street in China covered with modern concrete.”⁹³ President Li Yuan-hung supposedly gave Mannix an interview and showed him around the Forbidden City where the “tarvia” was being used.

“For many months I have been trying to keep my advertising writing going and have succeeded fairly well,” Mannix wrote to Scudder in 1917.

Then the publishing bee got into my bonnett again and you know the result. That is, I assume that you have received ere [sic] this a copy of THE PACIFIC PATHFINDER, for we did not fail to write your name upon a strong envelope just about five minutes after the first copy was completed. And of course you were surprised to learn that you had been given an editorial position without having ever applied for it. I trust that you were not offended. I simply could not think of putting out THE PATHFINDER without your name attached to it somehow...⁹⁴

Evidently, Mannix named Scudder as part of the Pathfinder without letting him know beforehand.

In 1917, Mannix, “President of the Pacific Associated Press,” authored a 22-page booklet, “In the Eastern Palace,” published by The Kolynos Company of New Haven, Connecticut, an oral care product company. This booklet was a “true story of Kolynos on the world’s frontier.”⁹⁵ Mannix said this product “unlocked the doors of palaces and the smiles of the fairest women.”⁹⁶ Li Hung Chang brought many gifts to the Empress Dowager after his world tour. Mannix claimed, “These were the first foreign articles ever permitted within the sacred confines of the Forbidden City at Peking.”⁹⁷ The Kolynos Dental Cream:

is the first foreign article to be employed in the palace, and it may be said that Kolynos is entitled to claim the honor of having cleansed the teeth of ancient prejudice and silly tradition and made them clean, sweet and modern.⁹⁸

⁹² George E. Martin to Edward Brecher, September 7, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁹³ Hess, *The “Memoirs” of Li Hung Chang – the Story of a Non-translation*, 167.

⁹⁴ Mannix to Scudder, March 3, 1917. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁹⁵ Mannix, William F. *In the Eastern Palace: Being the True Story of Kolynos on the World's Frontier*. The Kolynos Company, New Haven, Connecticut, 1917.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

In the booklet, Lady Li Yuan Hung, referred to as the First Lady of China, recommended the Kolynos to her friends. Apparently the family governess, “who acts also as Lady Li’s companion and secretary,” visited the United States, making many purchases for her employer.⁹⁹ “I think that she brought back a life-time’s supply of Kolynos preparations,” commented President Li “good-naturedly.”¹⁰⁰

Mannix wrote about the difficulty of preparing a magazine article about how the Chinese were using this product. He could not use the name Kolynos, for then it would be an advertisement. He said this synopsis contained “elements of historical and sociological impact; being indications of the advancement of the oldest of the world’s nations in those things which a people were last to change – their personal habits and customs.”¹⁰¹



Mannix forged the diary of Li Hung Chang while serving six months in the Oahu County jail. “He certainly knew how to dress up a tale. His faked incidents were far better done than his accounts of actual occurrences,” Scudder said.¹⁰² He was a genius. His forged diary missed permanent acceptance by scholars only by a hair’s breadth.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰² Scudder, *A Picturesque Literary Fraud*, 11.

CHAPTER 5. LINCOLN THE LOVER

“In matters like this the mind must shut itself against the will to believe.”
—Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*¹

The nature of the relationship between Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, and Ann Rutledge, allegedly his first love, is debated. Historians are unable to agree even on the existence on a relationship between the two. Lincoln met the young, beautiful Rutledge in Illinois in 1831. She died in 1835. Soon after her untimely death, Lincoln fell into a major depression. Historians such as Carl Sandburg credited her death as the source of Lincoln’s “lifelong melancholy,” and over time, “the tale gained force, even though there was never conclusive evidence of any special relationship between the two—no letters or notes between the lovers, demonstrating the nature of their attachment.”²

In 1928, Miss Wilma Frances Minor of San Diego, California, contacted Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the distinguished *Atlantic Monthly*, saying she had a trove of original materials that proved Rutledge and Lincoln had been in love; she had written a manuscript based on this cache of materials.³ The collection of materials passed down through her family for years included:

correspondence between Lincoln and Rutledge—the first letters ever seen in Rutledge’s hand; letters from Lincoln to his fellow surveyor and boss John Calhoun, describing Lincoln’s love for Ann; reminiscences of the relationship from Calhoun’s daughter Sally; an extensive diary kept by Ann’s best friend, Matilda Cameron; a Bible given to Lincoln by Ann, which had his notes in the margins; along with sundry other items.⁴

These treasured relics, letters, diaries, and memoranda provided historical confirmation of the relationship between Lincoln and Rutledge. Sedgwick was initially skeptical. He telegraphed Minor to send the manuscript and photostats of key documents; at first glance, they appeared credible.⁵

Minor was a California native and former resident of New York City and Chicago. She was a short story writer, biographer, novelist, and theater actress with “remarkable ability.”⁶ She

¹ Steers, Edward. *Lincoln Legends: Myths, Hoaxes, and Confabulations Associated with Our Greatest President*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007.

² Bacon, Katie. “An Atlantic Scandal, a tale of one of the most notorious journalistic forgeries of the twentieth century.” *The Atlantic*, November 2005.

³ Peterson, Merrill D. *Lincoln in American Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

⁴ “The Discovery” *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 142, no. 6, December 1928.

⁵ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 292.

⁶ “Wilma Minor: Leading Lady, Frank Minor Film Company,” pamphlet in Box 4. Brecher Collection.

“never did look within a dozen years of her age.”⁷ Ernest Akins, her second husband, described her “quiet sometimes to the embarrassment of a hostess who might wish to ‘whoop up a party.’”⁸

After Sedgwick briefly looked over the manuscript and photostats, Minor and her mother, Mrs. Cora DeBoyer, traveled to Boston to meet with him in person. Edward Weeks, manager of the book division of the *Atlantic*, described Minor as lithesome “with large Hollywood eyes.”⁹ Minor and Sedgwick struck a deal. The magazine would run a three-part series then publish a book. She was paid \$1,500 for the series and a \$1,000 book advance. She was offered \$4,000 for the book manuscript, a remarkable sum at the time.¹⁰ These arrangements were contingent upon proof of the collection’s authenticity.¹¹ She then mailed him all of the original manuscripts so they could be tested.

Sedgwick acted with “extraordinary haste,” publishing four weeks after the original documents began to arrive.¹² He had shown the originals to only one scholar, had not sought expertise from handwriting experts, and had not finished the chemical analysis of the original papers.¹³

The series, “Lincoln the Lover,” ran in three successive issues: December 1928, January 1929, and February 1929. Here is a brief summary of each issue.

In the December issue, titled “The Discovery, a new storehouse of Lincoln material,” Sedgwick described the materials and the magazine’s efforts to verify authenticity. Facsimile reproductions of the letters and diary entries accompanied the Minor’s text, breaking the magazine’s 70-year-long taboo against illustrations. The first of the series of “Lincoln the Lover” by Minor, titled “The Setting – New Salem,” began:

Lincoln’s life in New Salem has been known with a considerable degree of fullness to biographers. But the episode which must have seemed to Lincoln himself to transcend all other experiences in that brief but important period—his love for Ann Rutledge has been the subject of conjecture, confusion, and doubt. Eminent students have denied altogether the reality of Lincoln’s passion for Ann; others have accepted the tradition in general outline.

⁷ Ernest Akins to Mr. and Mrs. Brecher, November 25, 1953. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 292.

¹⁰ Rowe, Peter. “Sex, lies & love letters.” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 2009 February 15. www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-lz1c15lincoln182431-sex-lies-amp-love-letters-2009feb15-htmlstory.html (accessed February 26, 2017).

¹¹ Fehrenbacher, Don E. “Lincoln’s Lost Love Letters.” *American Heritage*, vol. 32, no. 2, February/March 1981, pp. 70-80.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Now it becomes possible to reveal in full light and at first hand the story—so full of tenderness and hope, so tragic in its close—which has hitherto rested on contestable report. Not only did Lincoln and Ann hold each other dear; the actual letters which passed between them remain. We have also a diary kept by Ann's cousin and intimate, 'Mat' Cameron, naively recording her observations of the courtship. With these precious letters and Mat's unstudied diary have been preserved other fresh and valuable memorabilia of Lincoln. We have letters which he wrote to John Calhoun, former Surveyor of Sangamon County, Illinois, who employed Lincoln and was closely associated with him during the New Salem years; a memorandum written by Calhoun's daughter Sally in 1848, embodying her father's recollections of Lincoln and containing characteristic anecdotes; and, finally, books owned and freely annotated by Lincoln himself, which have descended to me. These materials, never before known or published, form a collection of unique value.¹⁴

This set the stage for the series. The article described how Lincoln and Rutledge met at a tavern in 1832. He was “smitten at once,” but unfortunately she was engaged.¹⁵ “Nonetheless, romance blossoms.”¹⁶ They planned to marry although she was still engaged to another.¹⁷ It concluded:

It will then be my privilege to present to readers of the Atlantic the actual letters which passed between Lincoln and Ann—messages precious, unstudied, and moving and the opinions of those who knew and watched them as recorded in their diaries and recollections.¹⁸

The January issue, titled “The Courtship,” was about Lincoln and Rutledge’s courtship. It was richly documented with several letters and diary excerpts. It began:

Before we can enter understandingly into the actual story of the courtship of Lincoln and Ann Rutledge, before we can read in the light of knowledge the letters that passed between them, preserved for us through successive generations and never before known to history, we should acquaint ourselves with the general course of Lincoln's life...¹⁹

Minor emphasized the authenticity of the materials she used to write these articles:

These precious records which have descended to me - letters which passed between Lincoln and Ann, the diary of Matilda Cameron, a memorandum and letters by Sally Calhoun, and a little group of books owned and annotated by Lincoln - have never before been known or published. They make it possible for us to understand and follow in detail

¹⁴ Minor, Wilma Frances. “The Setting – New Salem.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 142, no. 6, December 1928, p. 838.

¹⁵ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 296.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Minor, Wilma Frances. “The Setting – New Salem.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 142, no. 6, December 1928, pp. 838-856.

¹⁹ Minor, Wilma Frances. “The Courtship.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 143, no. 1, January 1929.

for the first time an episode which has baffled historians and tantalized lovers of the human Lincoln as perhaps scarcely another passage in his life has done.²⁰

The third and final article, titled “The Tragedy,” included correspondence between Lincoln and Rutledge before she died and then how her death affected him:

For weeks she hovered between life and death. Finally it became plain that no hope of her recovery was possible. She called for Lincoln, and they had a last interview. When he left her bedside, Lincoln went about saying, “I awfully forbode [sic] she will not get better.”²¹

This article featured a letter Lincoln allegedly wrote to John Calhoun 13 years after Rutledge’s death in 1848, during the sixth year of his marriage to Mary Todd:

Like a ray of sun-shine and as brief—she flooded my life, and at times like today when I traverse past paths I see this picture before me—fever burning the light from her dear eyes, urging me to fight for the right....I have kept faith. Sometimes I feel that in Heaven she is pleading for my furtherance.²²

The collection not only confirmed the two were betrothed; it authenticated the legend that Rutledge was the inspiration for Lincoln’s career.

Critics immediately attacked the authenticity of the articles. Experts sent complaints to Sedgwick, denouncing the material as fake. Others hailed the articles as a result of the greatest literary discovery in years. Carl Sandburg, a Lincoln historian, visited Sedgwick, spent hours poring over the documents, and said, “These new Lincoln letters seem entirely authentic—and preciously and wonderfully co-ordinate and chime with all else known of Lincoln.”²³ Sandburg also said:

If by any reach of the imagination these letters could have been fabricated and faked, it is hard to conceive that anyone playing with so silly a hoax should have the delicacy of imagination, the feeling for poetic unities of character, the ultimate and accurate knowledge of dates, places, circumstances which weave so sure a fabric through these documents.²⁴

“The series of letters and diary entries in the original are impressive. I was deeply moved while looking at them,” Sandburg said. “They called up a story and background... When I scrutinize

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Minor, Wilma Frances. “The Tragedy.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 143, no. 2, February 1929.

²² Ibid.

²³ Fehrenbacher, *Lincoln’s Lost Love Letters*, 70-80.

²⁴ “Historical News and Comments.” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1929, pp. 578-587. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1897910>

original source material of this kind I let my emotions have full play.”²⁵ He publicly supported the series until the second installment was published in January.²⁶

Worthington Chauncey Ford, head of the Massachusetts Historical Society, wrote a note to Sedgwick asking, “Have you gone insane or have I? You are putting over one of the crudest forgeries I have known and must expect criticism.”²⁷ Most vehement among the critics was Paul M. Angle, Executive Secretary of the Lincoln Centennial Association of Springfield, Illinois. He admitted his delight at the opportunity to “put the magazine of the country in the frying pan and cook it brown.”²⁸ “Uncooked and still open-minded,” Sedgwick gathered all of the materials he had received from Minor and brought them to Angle in Chicago, asking Angle to draw up the case against the Minor documents.²⁹

The *Atlantic Monthly* had a prestigious reputation as “a magazine of affairs as well as literature, thereby broadening without diluting its candidly elitist appeal.”³⁰ Sedgwick had purchased the magazine from Houghton Mifflin Company in 1908. It had a monthly circulation of only 15,000 and ran at an annual deficit of \$5,000.³¹ Sedgwick built the circulation to 137,000 by 1928, making the magazine profitable yet still respected.³²

Under historians’ scrutiny, the authenticity of the letters collapsed. The nation’s foremost authorities on Lincoln one by one announced their conviction that the letters were forged. Discrepancies were found in the published works. Denunciations of the letters, and of the *Atlantic* for publishing them, made bigger headlines across the country than the original discovery. “We do not charge Miss Minor or The Atlantic Monthly with forgery,” Angle said in a *New York Times* article.³³ “But we so say that the three items printed in facsimile in the December issue of the magazine were not written by Abraham Lincoln.” An employee who edited the articles and befriended Minor advised her to sue for libel.³⁴

²⁵ “Sandburg Now Doubts the Lincoln Letters.” *New York Times*, 5 December 1928.

²⁶ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 297.

²⁷ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 295.

²⁸ “Fraud.” *Time*, vol. 13, no. 13, 1929, 51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Fehrenbacher, *Lincoln’s Lost Love Letters*, 70-80.

³¹ Ellery Sedgwick Papers, 1898-1969. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

<http://www.masshist.org/collection-guides/view/fa0008> (accessed March 1, 2017).

³² *Ibid.* See also “The Search for Major Mannix: A Picaresque Biography,” by the Brechers. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

³³ “More Experts Doubt Lincoln Letters.” *New York Times*, 8 December 1928.

³⁴ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 295.

Sedgwick “let the series run its course” and asked Angle, “the sharpest of critics,” to write an expose of the fraud which was published in the magazine’s April issue.³⁵ In the resulting article, “The Minor Collection: A Criticism,” Angle scathingly deconstructed Minor’s articles step-by-step with damning criticisms.

Under attack, Minor defended the collection, but the book deal was off. A friend remembered Minor as very sensitive, embarrassed and hurt that the letters her mother had foisted upon her as genuine proved to be fakes.³⁶ “I am most positive that Wilma Frances thought the material was genuine,” Ernest Akins, her second husband, said.³⁷ “It was believed it would have been a best seller as fiction, but Wilma Frances told me she was so positive that the material was genuine that she would never consent for her manuscript to be published as fiction.”³⁸

There was an unprecedented abundance of books about Lincoln published between 1926 and 1933, including biographies, historical fiction, and poetry.³⁹ Perhaps Minor saw an opportunity to profit by jumping on the bandwagon.

Sedgwick “never confessed error nor explained the mystery of the affair.”⁴⁰ No confession, explanation, or apology was ever issued in the *Atlantic*, “for what it learned was too embarrassing for publication.”⁴¹

Minor eventually admitted to writing the letters and Cameron’s diary, but she insisted that the documents had been dictated by ghosts: “Every word written through my Mother as the medium.”⁴² In a confession given in July, Minor said:

Mama at last our faith of a lifetime has led to something. It has been given to us for a divine purpose. On another plane those people (Lincoln and Ann and those other people) must exist. We have talked to many others, our family and close friends, and I said to Mama, Don’t you think I have earned the right to be the channel to tell that real story to the world? Mama said, I don’t know, darling we can try. Mama had always been the medium through whom the spirits had spoken....I then began with a series of questions. I would write out the questions. I would hand them to Mother then in trance; the spirit would come, whoever it might be, and fill out the answer. ...I would die on the gallows that the spirit of Ann and Abe were speaking through my mother and me, so that my gifts

³⁵ Ibid., 297.

³⁶ Marge Austin to Ruth and Edward Brecher, February 15, 1962. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

³⁷ Ernest Akins to Mr. and Mrs. Brecher, November 25, 1953. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 285.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 297.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 297-298.

as a writer combined with her gifts as a medium could hand in something worthwhile to the world.⁴³

Minor disappeared shortly after the forgeries were exposed. She died in 1965.

“Will *The Atlantic* now come forward with an exposure of the antique factory where this amazing hoax was planned and executed?” the *New York Times* wrote. “How were ‘the faded ink, the browned and stained paper, the fragile creases and folds’ reproduced, and by whom?”⁴⁴ The *New York Herald-Tribune* asked, “Who forged the documents? The revelation may in time make another sensational series of articles for *The Atlantic*.”⁴⁵ Newspapers questioned where the inventive and ingenious materials came from. No forger was ever named.

One man thought he knew. Ferris Greenslet, editor of the Houghton Mifflin Company, named William Francis Mannix, for “if Mannix didn’t do it, who else on earth had the imagination – and the audacity?”⁴⁶

Was there a connection between Mannix and Minor? Did Mannix have a relationship with Minor? Did he himself forge these letters? Mannix died in 1920, eight years before the letters were published. The Brechers held onto a hope that he faked his death. They believed “it is even possible that he forged evidence of his death at an earlier time, just as he at various times falsified the date and place of his birth.”⁴⁷

Prior to Mannix’s death, he and Minor and her mother may have all lived in the same part of California.⁴⁸ According to Angle, Cora Mickle DeBoyer, Minor’s mother, lived with several men at one time or another, one of whom is said to have been William Francis Mannix.⁴⁹

Ferris Greenslet remembered the man who sold the “Memoirs of Li Hung Chang” to Houghton Mifflin was named Miner or Minor.⁵⁰ Greenslet was convinced that this man was a link between Minor and Mannix. When Minor visited Sedgwick in 1928 during their initial negotiations, she had mentioned her next book was going to be a biography of the Dowager Empress Tzu Hsi. Tzu Hsi was a central figure in Mannix’s writings as well, looming prominently in “Memoirs.” This is a remarkable coincidence. The similarity in pattern is also

⁴³ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 297-298.

⁴⁴ “The Search for Major Mannix,” by the Brechers, p. 29. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “The Search for Major Mannix,” by the Brechers, p. 30. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

⁴⁷ Brechers to Mrs. Doremus Scudder, September 1, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁴⁸ “Memo for Clarence McClelland,” written by the Brechers. August 30, 1953. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

⁴⁹ Paul M. Angle to Mr. Brecher, June 20, 1950. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

⁵⁰ Craig Wylie to the Brechers, September 30, 1953. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

striking between the Lincoln-Rutledge letter hoax and Mannix's Bonaparte materials, Cuban dispatches, and "Memoirs."

Angle never saw any direct evidence indicating a connection between Mannix and the Lincoln-Rutledge letter hoax, but he thought Mannix might have been the inspiration for it.⁵¹ Mannix's exploits and the Lincoln-Rutledge letter hoax are on par in terms of boldness, cunning, and puckish humor. "I never put much stock in the theory because I always considered Mannix much cleverer than the person who forged the alleged Lincoln letters," Angle said. "Really, that was an awful crude job."⁵²

There are numerous unanswered problems about Minor, adept as she was at weaving fact with fantasy. The Brechers received an anonymous letter that cast Minor in a new light:

CONFIDENTIAL.

Have learned that you are interested in the much married W____ F____ M____. Long ago I knew this strange, unnatural family. They tried to live above their finances. She never mentioned her father. Her step-father was young....

Her brother committed suicide. She tried to keep a close association with her ex-husbands. Why did she keep the name Minor after divorce and use it after remarriage? In the middle forties she was using the name Meredith. I don't know how many marriages before or after that. She posed as a quiet, gentle and ladylike person, in reality she was a selfish, shrewd, scheming, unscrupulous, unfaithful woman. She loved publicity, posed as an actress (Broadway, too), a designer, journalist, newspaper columnist and reporter, etc. Why do I tell you this? I am an eye for an eye person. I am not an ex so I have no face to save, no family to embarrass and no belief in her honey-tongued repentance. I expressed no forgiveness nor promised any friendship. I don't sign my name because you are unknown to me and I take no chance getting mixed up with her.⁵³

The Brechers theorized that she, like Mannix, had been in the business of forgery for years under various names.

⁵¹ Paul M. Angle to Mr. Brecher, June 20, 1950. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

⁵² Paul M. Angle to Mr. Brecher, June 20, 1950. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

⁵³ Anonymous to Brechers, December 11, 1953. Box 4. Brecher Collection.

CONCLUSION

Who was William Francis Mannix and what was his true nature? His friends and enemies provide contrasting reports. He was obviously plagued by alcohol, but was he simply a crook, a deranged writer, or a psychopath? He exhibited psychopathic traits, including lack of remorse evidenced by his repeated criminal offenses, superficial charm, habitual lying, and the ability to manipulate others. Ruth, his second wife, never found out anything about his life before they met in 1910.

“His personality is one of absorbing interest to me,” Scudder said. “Mannix himself told me how he had lost out time and again thru his indulgence in stimulants.”¹ Scudder once said to Paine that Mannix “affords the most interesting psychological study, in some respects, that I have ever come across.”² Paine agreed:

This man is indeed a study. I knew him for six years and intimately. He had an aptitude for journalism and a plausible personality but I recall him as the only man I ever knew without one straight hair in his head.³

Mannix’s pattern of behavior showed characteristics of “the psychopathic liar of genius, who is competent to create great works of art but fails to do so because of some inner quirk.”⁴ Dr. Fredric Wertham, a psychiatrist, suggested the Brechers research “pseudologia fantastic (or phantastica) or psychopathic personality, pathological lying.”⁵ The Brechers studied Mannix because they wanted to shed light on this psychological pattern and contribute to the scholarship of human psychology. In reference to Mannix’s alleged suicide attempt in 1912, the note containing this information also mentioned: “Suicide attempts are a common feature of the psychological aberration from which Mannix suffered; they are very rarely successful.”⁶

In 1905, Mannix was arrested for forging checks in Malone, New York. He pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity. A psychiatric commission examined his mental condition. The commission was appointed by the judge and consisted of the superintendent of the state hospital,

¹ Scudder, Doremus. “A Picturesque Literary Fraud – A Study in Abnormal Psychology.” Unpublished manuscript. Ruth E. and Edward M. Brecher Collection.

² Scudder to Paine, September 18, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

³ Paine to Scudder, September 25, 1915. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁴ Brechers to Mrs. Doremus Scudder, September 1, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁵ Fredric Wertham to Mrs. Brecher, September 20, 1950. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

⁶ Untitled, filed with “Houghton-Mifflin Correspondence,” presumably written by Brecher. Box 1. Brecher Collection.

a psychiatrist, and two local physicians. To procure the psychiatric report took some digging and a little luck. The county courthouse had long since burned down. Many documents had been destroyed. Thousands of documents salvaged from the fire were dumped into large bins in the cellar of the new courthouse. In this cellar in the sweltering heat of a July day, the Brechers spent hours thumbing through countless documents. They dug through more than a quarter of a century's accumulation of unorganized documents that had been dumped in large bins in the new courthouse. "It was obviously a hopeless task and we were ready to abandon it altogether," Edward Brecher said.⁷ The psychiatric report was found at the bottom of a large bin! The report was short and to the point. It declared Mannix sane, "one of the most charming and cultured gentlemen with whom it had ever been their pleasure to spend an afternoon!"⁸ The commission found him not only witty but also brilliant as a conversationalist.⁹

Was he mad or sane? This can be debated. Regardless of his mental prowess, Mannix was not a journalistic aberration. We know he was not exceptional.

Mannix published fake works over at least three decades, from 1890 to 1920. He thrived during a time when ethical standards and journalistic canons were being established. Some journalism professionals demanded and defined standards. Critics mainly attacked sensationalism and yellow journalism between 1880 and 1900.¹⁰ Eager to maintain standards, journalists turned a critical eye at the profession. Edwin Lawrence Godkin, founding editor of the *Nation* and editor of the *New York Evening Post*, criticized the practices of journalists of cheap papers even before the yellow press of the 1890s became prominent.¹¹ Will Irwin, American author and journalist, authored the series "The American Newspaper" in *Collier's* magazine from January to June 1911. These famous critical analyses of American journalism explored the history, role, and excesses of journalism.¹²

The professionalization of journalism increased in tandem with the establishment of university journalism education, journalism codes of ethics, and professional associations.

⁷ "Mannix Proposal," written by Brecher, p. 64. Box 2. Brecher Collection.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Biography of William F. Mannix," *Watertown Daily Times*, February 12, 1908.

¹⁰ Marzolf, Marion Tuttle. *Civilizing Voices: American Press Criticism 1880-1950*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

¹¹ Coyle, Erin K. "E. L. Godkin's Criticism of the Penny Press: Antecedents to a Legal Right to Privacy." *American Journalism*, vol. 31, no. 2, Spring 2014, pp. 262-282.

¹² Hudson, Robert V. "Will Irwin's Pioneering Criticism of the Press." *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1970, pp. 263-271.

During the years Mannix operated, journalism associations and educational standards formed. Journalism had come up with rules. The University of Missouri founded the first American school of journalism in 1908, several years before Mannix forged “Memoirs” and his *Independent* interviews. The American Society of Professional Journalists was founded in 1910, ten years before his death. In Mannix’s time, the press became concerned about hoaxes and subsequently became more effective on policing itself. And yet, hoaxes continued.

When Sedgwick published Minor’s “Lincoln the Lover” series in the *Atlantic Monthly*, he may have been taken advantage of. Historian Fehrenbacher asked, “Why did this veteran editor choose to forgo additional precautions and rush the Minor articles into print?” Fehrenbacher argued Sedgwick was a businessman; he wanted to use the series to promote subscription sales during the holiday season.¹³ The magazine had launched an extensive advertising program to announce the forthcoming publication:

At last after nearly a century during which their existence was always suspected and hoped for, appear the priceless documents which lift the veil shrouding the love affair between Abraham Lincoln and young Ann Rutledge.... This feature alone, the first printing of these documents, will make an *Atlantic* subscription for the coming year a life-long keepsake—and incidentally a most appropriate Christmas remembrance.¹⁴

Perhaps Sedgwick’s rash decision to publish the collection “had something to do with his rather loose editing philosophy, one that in other cases probably benefited the magazine.”¹⁵ He said an editor “should have an open mind, always steering closer to credulity than to skepticism. In any encounter with improbability, he should ‘put on the brakes gently but let the motor run.’”¹⁶ Sedgwick was also charmed by Minor. He was “tempted by the publicity that the publication of such a sensational group of documents would bring to the magazine.”¹⁷

Once the hoax was revealed, the situation was highly embarrassing for Sedgwick. He hardly ever spoke of it. In his autobiography, “The Happy Profession” (1946), he discussed Lincoln but said nothing about the Minor affair.¹⁸

¹³ Fehrenbacher, Don E. “Lincoln’s Lost Love Letters.” *American Heritage*, vol. 32, no. 2, February/March 1981, pp. 70-80.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bacon, Katie. “An Atlantic Scandal, a tale of one of the most notorious journalistic forgeries of the twentieth century.” *The Atlantic*, November 2005.

¹⁶ Fehrenbacher, *Lincoln’s Lost Love Letters*.

¹⁷ Bacon, *An Atlantic Scandal*.

¹⁸ Fehrenbacher, *Lincoln’s Lost Love Letters*.

We have an example that even Sedgwick, early in his career, created news to boost circulation. This occurred during his time as editor of *Leslie's Monthly Magazine*, an American illustrated literary and news magazine (1900-1905). Sedgwick told of this experience in his autobiography and it is summarized here. Sedgwick began:

There are times, or there used to be, when nothing seems to happen.... Once upon a time there were days very quiet indeed. My mind went blank. I went to dinner parties. I scanned the papers. But there was no excitement anywhere, and in the office despondency reigned. It was hard to bear, and my morale suffered visibly. It was then that I was tempted and I fell.... There was no news so I made it.¹⁹

An expert on horses told Sedgwick a theory about breeding horses. He explained that horses deteriorate in size depending on the temperature: "Let horses run wild in the Arctic or the tropics, and a few generations will reduce them to size of ponies."²⁰ Sedgwick proposed to the expert to write a story about how he bred "kittenish horses" with proof, photographs of racehorses at "plaything size" created by camera tricks, for "it might be entertaining."²¹ Sedgwick insisted he wanted a stunt, not a hoax. "Not for worlds would I bridge that gap," he said.²²

The expert wrote up a manuscript. Sedgwick found himself "very nearly convinced that the story was true, so matter of fact it was, so professional... If one of the midget horses of the romance had turned out a centaur it would not have been much more startling."²³

An explorer discovered a herd miniature horses on a tropical mountain in the West Indies. The horses were "the size of Scottish collies, weighing perhaps fifty pounds apiece."²⁴ Three stallions and four mares were brought to a farm in Rhode Island and domesticated. The tale was told with painstaking factual detail, to the point where Sedgwick exclaimed: "Heaven above us! This is too persuasive. Put in just a little fiction."²⁵ A thief was introduced; he was caught running away with a stallion under one arm and a mare under the other. Sedgwick also added a legal attestation from the fictitious "State Committee on Livestock of the State of Rhode Island" to establish authenticity.²⁶ Sedgwick included a seriocomic warning: "We wish,

¹⁹ Sedgwick, Ellery. *The Happy Profession*. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1946.

²⁰ Sedgwick, *The Happy Profession*, 116-117.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

²² *Ibid.*, 118.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

therefore, to put the story clearly before our readers, hoping each will weigh carefully the interesting evidence laid before him.”²⁷

Sedgwick received a torrent of letters after the story ran. No one questioned the story or thought it was a joke. One man even took out a bank loan for his family to travel to Rhode Island to see the tiny creatures. “The stunt was certainly a hoax,” Sedgwick concluded.²⁸

Mannix seemed to be everywhere all the time. This is improbable. His reports came from every nook and cranny of Cuba. George Rea, who was in Cuba, said false reports by foreign correspondents were a rampant problem. He should know, he was a fellow correspondent.

In 1897, the *New York Times* ran a story by Mannix, signed as “W.,” recounting a gruesome scene of machete-hacked innocents left behind by Spanish troops.²⁹ The reporter lengthily quoted the Cuban general-in-charge, putting lines in his mouth straight from a recent comic opera, “The Pirates of Penzance.”³⁰

Mannix reported things he did not see, such as Chinese royalty using certain vacuum cleaners. So did Jack Kelley.

Jack Kelley began his career in journalism in July 1982. He had just graduated from the University of Maryland when he was hired as a news assistant at startup *USA Today*.³¹ Four years later, he became a staff reporter.³²

For two decades, Kelley was a star reporter and foreign correspondent for the publication. In 2002, he was a Pulitzer finalist in beat reporting. He “filed daring stories about surviving a suicide bombing in Jerusalem, watching doomed Cuban refugees set sail for the United States and dozens more.”³³ He parachuted “into nightmarish situations in dozens of countries and emerging with dazzling accounts of life and death.”³⁴ He reported on huge international events such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. He reported from Cuba, Haiti, Russia, and the

²⁷ Ibid., 121.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Hamilton, John Maxwell. *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009.

³⁰ Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye*, 97.

³¹ Rosen, Jill. “Who Knows Jack?” *American Journalism Review*, vol. 26, no. 2, April/May 2004, pp. 29-38.

³² Rosen, Who Knows Jack?, 31.

³³ Tucker, Neely. “Whatever happened to ... the foreign correspondent who made up stories?” *The Washington Post Magazine*, 22 July 2011. www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/whatever-happened-to--the-foreign-correspondent-who-made-up-stories/2011/05/11/gIQAmOvgTI_story.html?utm_term=.b29d3c47a911 (accessed March 1, 2017).

³⁴ Ibid.

Middle East. He held the title of “the most prominent foreign correspondent for the national’s largest newspaper” because “he filed hundreds of stories from all over the globe.”³⁵ To put it simply, “he was a newspaper legend.”³⁶

According to an anonymous *USA Today* reporter, at least 10 staff members had expressed concern over the years about Kelley’s reports, but they were “generally dismissed as rooted in jealousy.”³⁷

After more complaints an investigation was eventually launched. A trio of journalists unaffiliated with the paper led a team of reporters in the review of articles Kelley had written for the paper during his 21-year career there.³⁸ They read more than 700 of his articles, closely examining about 150.³⁹ In 2004, *USA Today* editors issued a statement announcing Kelley had fabricated and plagiarized reporting for years.⁴⁰ After months of investigation, the inquiry team concluded that Kelley:

made up nearly all or parts of 20 stories over a decade, plagiarized more than 100 quotes or passages from other publications, gave speeches that repeated those lies and then orchestrated a cover-up to try to mislead the panel investigating his work.⁴¹

The investigation concluded:

“Any appraisal of how Jack Kelley got away with years of fraudulent news reporting at USA TODAY, despite numerous, well-grounded warnings that he was fabricating stories, exaggerating facts and plagiarizing other publications, must begin with this question... Why did newsroom managers at every level of the paper ignore, rebuff, and reject years of multiple serious and valid complaints about Kelley’s work?”⁴²

³⁵ Rosen, *Who Knows Jack?*, 30.

³⁶ Rosen, *Who Knows Jack?*, 30.

³⁷ Steinberg, Jacques. “A Question of Credibility; Ascent of USA Today Reporter Stumbled on Colleagues’ Doubts.” *New York Times*, 19 January 2004. www.nytimes.com/2004/01/19/business/question-credibility-ascent-usa-today-reporter-stumbled-colleagues-doubts.html?_r=0 (accessed March 1, 2017).

³⁸ Rosen, Jill. “The Rise and Fall of Jack Kelley.” *American Journalism Review*, April/May 2004. <http://ajrarchive.org/article.asp?id=3619> (accessed March 2, 2017).

³⁹ Steinberg, Jacques. “USA TODAY Finds Top Reporter Lied.” *New York Times*. 20 March 2004. www.nytimes.com/2004/03/20/us/usa-today-finds-top-writer-lied.html (accessed March 1, 2017).

⁴⁰ Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye*, 451.

⁴¹ Tucker, *Whatever happened to ... the foreign correspondent who made up stories?*.

⁴² Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye*, 454.

At the time, the newspaper had an average weekday circulation of more than two million readers and was the flagship of the Gannett chain of newspapers.⁴³ It was the nation's largest-circulation newspaper.⁴⁴ Kelley resigned and vanished from public view.

Mendacious behavior of journalists continues today. This thesis puts the issue of fake news in a new light: it is an old problem with new features. Journalism has never been as set as people think it was. There were always people on the fringes. Journalism has seen improvements over the past few decades, but recently fake news has become so prominent it is a buzzword. Journalism ethicists used the term “fake news” to refer to promotional material disguised as news.⁴⁵ The internet caused this term to refer to fabricated news meant to spread virally online.⁴⁶ Now people read their news on the internet and social media, not from a television broadcast or printed newspaper. When the *Atlantic* published “Lincoln the Lover,” Sedgwick was held accountable. Now news consumers do not even know where the information is coming from, if it is verified, or who wrote it. In the past, hoaxes such as the Moon Hoax of 1835, were conducted to boost readership. They were trivial and inconsequential. Now the stakes are higher because the issues are more dramatic. Fake and false information spreads without accountability. This thesis focuses on a certain type of fake news – news that is completely made up. There is a difference between make up news and bad reporting. There are journalists that make mistakes and there are journalists that are complete frauds.

The hegemonic model of journalism appeared in the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, although the journalistic landscape of the time would be foreign to the modern journalist.⁴⁷ This thesis exemplifies several lessons in journalism history: the difficulty of maintaining standards; journalism is always being tested; and this period was not as secure as historians thought.

⁴³ Steinberg, *USA TODAY Finds Top Reporter Lied*.

⁴⁴ Steinberg, Jacques. “Panel Says Poor Standards Allowed Deception at USA Today.” *New York Times*. 23 April 2004. www.nytimes.com/2004/04/23/us/panel-says-poor-standards-allowed-deception-at-usa-today.html (accessed on March 1, 2017).

⁴⁵ Frank, Russell. “Caveat Lector: Fake News as Folklore.” *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 128, no. 509, pp. 315-332.

⁴⁶ Peters, Jeremy W. “Wielding Claims of ‘Fake News,’ Conservatives Take Aim at Mainstream Media.” *New York Times*, 25 December 2016. www.nytimes.com/2016/12/25/us/politics/fake-news-claims-conservatives-mainstream-media.html (accessed on February 15, 2017).

⁴⁷ Nerone, John. “The Historical Roots of the Normative Model of Journalism.” *Journalism*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2013, pp. 446-458.

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APPENDIX

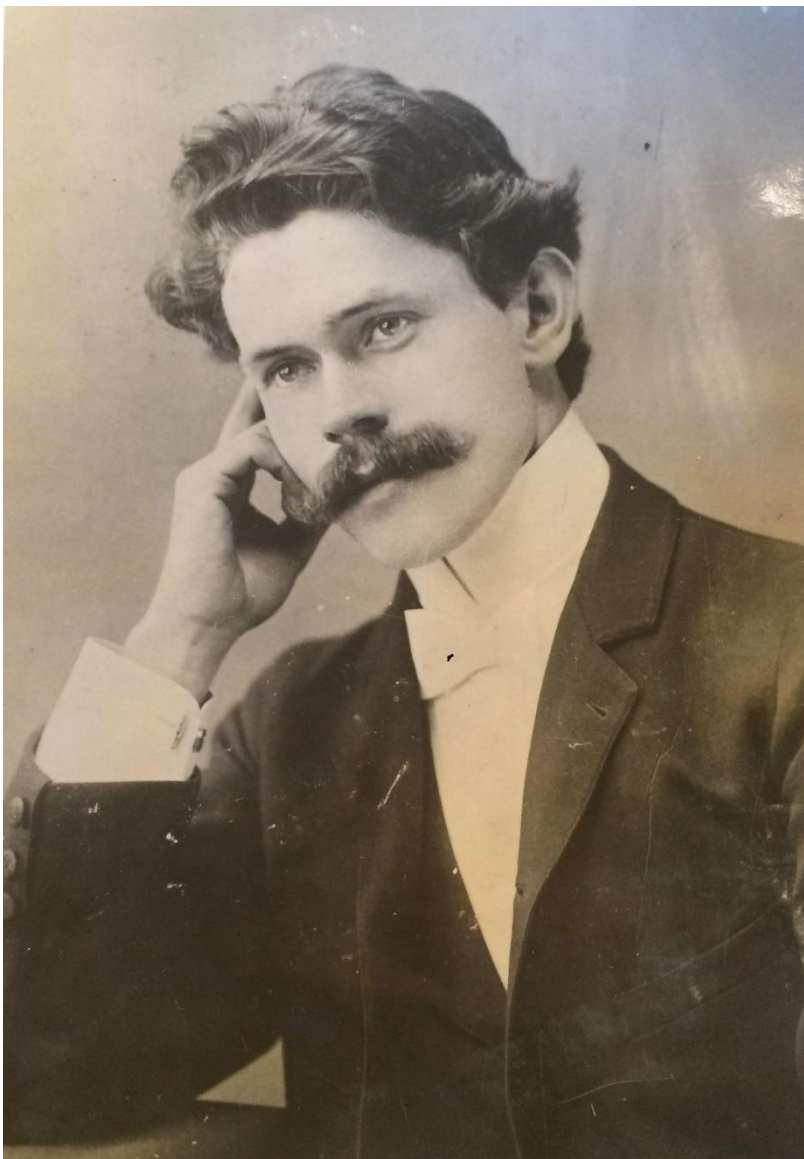


Image 1. This photograph is of William Francis Mannix. Image from Ruth E. and Edward M. Brecher Collection on William F. Mannix; 1950-1965, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Figure 1. Mannix's locations in the United States: Astoria, Oregon; Boise, Idaho; Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Honolulu, Hawaii; Indianapolis, Indiana; Key West, Florida; Lake Bonaparte, New York; Long Lake, Minnesota; Los Gatos, California; Malone, New York; New York, New York; Ossining, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco, California; Saranac Lake, New York; Schenectady, New York; Watertown, New York; and Wayzata, Minnesota.



Figure 2. Mannix's locations worldwide: Havana, Cuba; Montreal, Canada; Peking, China; and Tientsin, China.



VITA

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