

BENJAMIN BOYD

Fulton's Most Notorious Criminal

By Barbara Mask

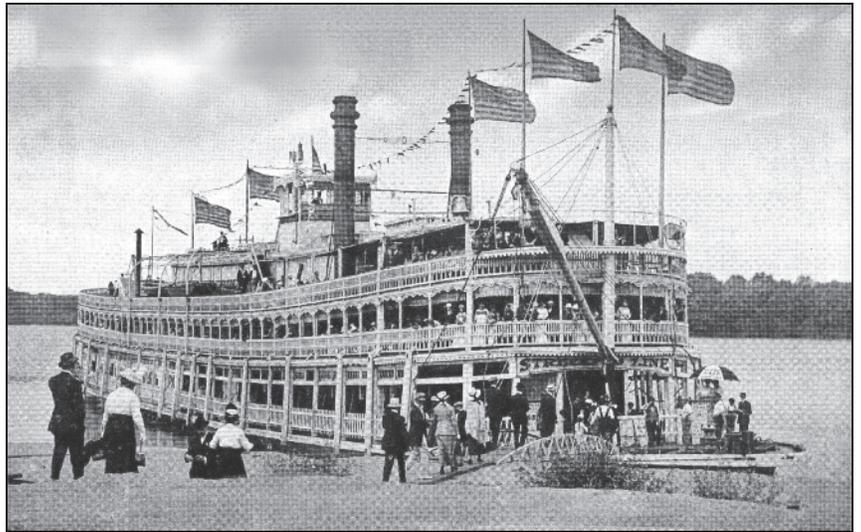
PART ONE

Benjamin Boyd and his wife, Almarinda, arrived in Fulton on September 24, 1875 and moved into a house on 13th Avenue. The arrest a month later, made in Fulton by the Secret Service on October 20, 1876, would have national and ghoulish consequences.

The couple arrived in Fulton on the steamer, Diamond Jo, which was the most famous of the Diamond Jo Steamboat Company coming up the river from Le Claire, Iowa. Their possessions had been stored in the Startzman Warehouse on Fulton's busy riverfront. This was a storage-forwarding business. Later, it was purchased by J. C. Snyder & Son whose business was located south of the Startzman warehouse on the corner of First Street and Tenth Avenue. The Fulton Journal reported that Boyd signed the receipt for his freight at the warehouse using the name of B. W. Wilson. He told Startzman that he wanted to rent a farm in the spring. He didn't appear as a farmer because of the gold rings that he wore and a gold watch fob draped across his vest. His freight consisted of two mattresses, one bedstead, a bundle of carpet, a bundle of pipe, a stove, a sewing machine and six chairs. There were also four boxes of unknown content. Mr. Wilson, as he referred to himself, rented the house from Dr. Daniel Reed. He and his wife "put up green curtains at all the windows and remained aloof from the neighbors."

BOYD: THE ENGRAVER

Boyd learned the skill of engraving from his father and his talent was noted by Ned Kinsey, also of Cincinnati, Ohio, the best-known counterfeiter at the time. Under Kinsey's influence, Boyd cut his first counterfeit plate when he was 21 years old. By 1860, he was respected as the finest engraver. One of his plates for a \$50 bill was so close to the real thing that there were 6000 bills in circulation. In 1865, Boyd married a beautiful young woman names Almiranda Aikman. She was 9 years younger than Boyd, and also came from a family of well-established counterfeiters. Together, using assumed names in various small towns and cities in the Midwest, they could set up their equipment and flood the area with the phony bills and then relocate to another community.



The 'Diamond Jo' Steamer dropped off and loaded passengers on Fulton's levee. Boyd and his wife arrived in Fulton on September 24, 1875.



Their possessions were waiting in the Startzman Warehouse. (Center building)

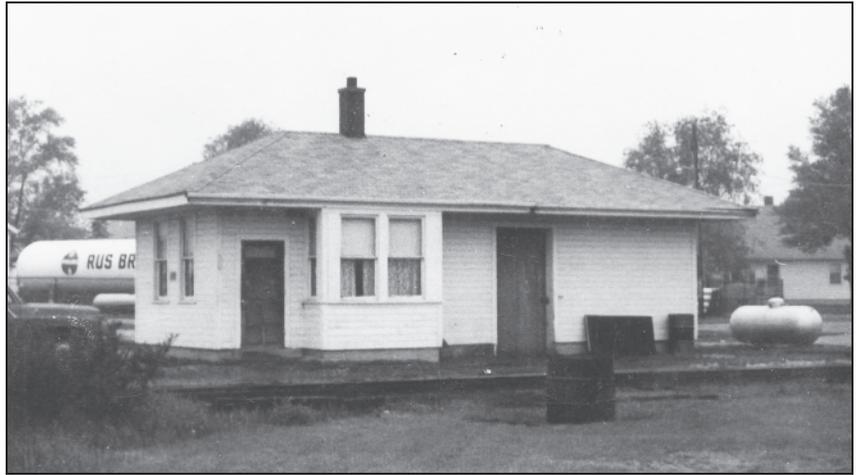


Where was this house???

NORTH SIDE OF 1000 BLOCK OF THIRTEEN AVENUE

Where was the house? Researching Fulton Journals and reading Wayne Bastian accounts from Fulton residents relating the recollections of the ‘notorious’ criminal location has led to these assumptions.

The Fulton Journal articles state that Mr. Wilson (Boyd) rented a house on the north side of Thirteen Avenue from Dr. Daniel Reed. It was previously lived in by William Kitchen. The Journal reported a description of the house following Boyd’s arrest that, “the house was a large two-story and attic house on the north side of Prairie Street (13th Avenue). E. W. Dutcher lived in the 1000 block of 13th Avenue (house burned in the late 1870s and he built the house at 802



This is a more recent photo of what was the Milwaukee (Western Union) Depot. It was the last stop for Boyd in Fulton after federal agents arrested him for counterfeiting.

11th Avenue in 1880; later, and now owned by the Machamer family). Dutcher, who was living on the south side of 13th Avenue, wrote of watching the Secret Service agents perform surveillance work on the hill up from Boyd’s rented home during the afternoon of October 21, 1875; the arrest was made at 4:00. Dutcher wrote to the Journal in 1915 recalling that day and said that, “the Presbyterian minister, Rev. D. E. Wells, had made a call and departed less than one-half hour before the government men swooped down.”

Patrick P. Tyrrell and two other government men entered the house without incident and arrested Boyd, alias B. or D. or C. Wilson, and his wife, Almirinda, on the charge of counterfeiting. There had been two other men seen coming and going from the house but they were not present when the arrest was made.

The agents confiscated the evidence, which was incriminating, as Boyd was nabbed processing a counterfeit \$20 bill when apprehended. “Search of the house brought to light plates for \$100 and \$1,000 bills and about \$7,000 of the finished counterfeit bills,” according to Bastian’s report of the Boyd arrest.

The agents took the Boyds and the evidence to the Milwaukee Depot (then owned by the Western Union Railroad). Detective Tyrrell bought tickets to Springfield because he didn’t realize that Fulton was in the Chicago region. Upon orders from chief of the United States Secret Service, Elmer Washburn, the agents and prisoners boarded a train to Chicago where they awaited trial.

While they were waiting for the train in the local depot, Boyd sent a telegram to a person unknown that stated, “Bob is dead.” It is assumed he was indicating that he had been captured. This was only one indication that the criminal activity here in Fulton was linked with other counterfeiting activity in the State of Illinois and in the United States. The Federal agents raided several sites in and around Centralia, IL on the same day. The loot confiscated in that raid amounted to \$150,000 in fractional currency. The fortunate arrest, however, of the day was of Benjamin Boyd in Fulton, IL. He was the master engraver and his compulsory withdrawal ‘out of business’ broke up the counterfeiting circle that had become so successful, and was a threat to the fragile banking industry in the 1870s following the Civil War. Most of their bills were made to look like bank notes and Boyd’s technical skill were so good as to defy expert scrutiny.

BOYD’S CRIMINAL BACKGROUND

Benjamin Boyd started criminal activity early in his adulthood. He was arrested in Davenport when he was he was 25 for engraving counterfeit plates. He served a prison term in Fort Madison, IA. He moved to St. Louis and found a new market to peddle his bills. Mrs. Boyd was arrested shortly after they arrived in St. Louis.

Judge Blodgett ordered Boyd’s imprisonment to be carried out in the penitentiary in Joliet for a term of 10 years of hard labor. He declined Boyd a new trial on February 18, 1876. This is not the rest of the Benjamin Boyd saga. Part Two covers, “the Rest of the Story.” It will reveal a dastardly attempt to desecrate a national treasure.