

## Sidedoor (S10E03) – CSI: Southern Pacific

**James Morrison:** Hey there, Sidedoorables. Sidedoor producer James Morrison here. I'm usually behind the scenes working on episodes, but Lizzie Peabody's currently on vacation, so I'll be guest hosting this episode. Don't worry though, she'll be back for the next one.

**James:** This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm James Morrison.

**James:** It was the fall of 1923 when the sheriff of a small Oregon town got word of an explosion. Something had gone wrong, very wrong, with Southern Pacific train number 13 just as it was going through tunnel number 13.

**Chelsea Rose:** *Tunnel 13 in the Siskiyou Mountains is in a really rugged and really beautiful part of the boundary between Oregon and California.*

**James:** This is Chelsea Rose, director of the Southern Oregon University Laboratory of Anthropology. She says the tunnel is at the crest of the mountains, right before a massive descent into California.

**Chelsea Rose:** *And so when the inspectors would have shown up at the scene, they would have been in this beautiful mountain backdrop, but it would have been absolute chaos.*

**James:** The train was carrying both passengers and freight, but there was a single car at the center of this chaos—the US postal car.

**Chelsea Rose:** *This car was, like, blown to smithereens on parts of it, and there was a confetti of letters and checks and whatever else people mailed at the time just probably scattered all over the landscape from when the blast happened.*

**James:** Deputies on the scene found the car twisted and bent, the paint melted and blackened. They also found three bodies: the train's engineer Sidney Bates, the brakeman, Coyle Johnson, and fireman, Marvin Seng. But investigators soon discovered something surprising: these men weren't killed by the explosion—they'd been shot. It was clear this was an attempted robbery. What wasn't clear was whether the bandits had stolen anything. They'd used so much dynamite to blast open the mail car door, they had blown up everything inside of it, and they killed US postal clerk Elvyn Daughtery, who was also inside. Investigators were determined to find whoever did this.

**Chelsea Rose:** *It was a pretty violent crime. Train robberies weren't that uncommon, but I don't think they usually ended in the death of four innocent men.*

**James:** But the deputies on the scene didn't even know how many people they were looking for. The train tunnel was dark, and none of the witnesses could say how many people they saw or what they looked like.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *There's no clear idea of where did they go? Who were they looking for? How many people are they looking for?*

**James:** Lynn Heidelbaugh is a curator at the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum. She says investigators quickly found a trail of clues. The robbers had left behind the detonator they used to ignite the dynamite. They'd also left behind a gun—a Colt .45 with the serial number filed off—empty knapsacks, and little pads that they had stuck to the bottom of their shoes and covered in a tar-like substance.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *Something that would have been used to try to cover tracks if they were expecting to be running from dogs.*

**James:** These clues weren't much, but they were all deputies had to help them find these would-be robbers turned murderers who had escaped into the vast Oregon wilderness. This time on Sidedoor, the story of how US postal inspectors set out to find the people responsible for this crime—what's been called the Last Great American Train Robbery. It was one of the most extensive manhunts the country had ever seen, and one of the first to use modern criminal forensics to track down old school outlaws. That's the next stop, after the break.

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**James:** There's such a fear around the number 13 that there's even a word for this. It's called triskaidekaphobia. It's why you won't find a 13th floor on a hotel, and it's why Friday the 13th is considered to be an unlucky day.

**James:** But whoever tried to rob Southern Pacific train number 13 must not have been a triskaidekaphobic—at least not at the time. Because they had robbed the train just outside tunnel number 13, and now with a good 13-hour head start, the police were hunting them through the normally tranquil mountains of Southern Oregon.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *The search is on very quickly, rapidly, and is organized.*

**James:** That's the Smithsonian's Lynn Heidelbaugh again. She helped curate a centennial exhibition about the investigation of this robbery, and she says time was of the essence. With every minute that passed, the culprits got one step closer to freedom.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *There were bloodhounds all over. They were flying planes too low to the ground trying to find these people.*

**James:** Kate Winkler Dawson is a professor at the University of Texas in Austin. She says people in the area were scared, and putting pressure on the sheriff to catch whoever did this. And even though local law enforcement had evidence, they weren't really sure what to do with it.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *I would say 'investigator' is a very loose term for this area. It's rural Oregon. There's a sheriff and there's deputies, but these are not groups of people who are used to investigating this kind of a crime.*

**James:** Short of leads, they leaned on an age-old tactic for finding a suspect: they made a list of the area's former criminals, known drug users, basically anyone with a bad reputation.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *They had a county that had ne'er do-wells, as any county would, and they started kind of gathering those people up and questioning them.*

**James:** So they sweated the usual suspects, looking for anyone with a flimsy alibi. But they came up short. Then reinforcements arrived. Outside law enforcement flooded into the area from all over. The Southern Pacific Railroad Company sent their chief special agent Dan O'Connell up from San Francisco. The post office sent their top special agent as well: chief of the US Postal Inspector Service.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *Aided by a local postmaster and some other postal inspectors.*

**James:** This new wave of officers, agents and postal clerks searched the nearby woods, and they stumbled across a remote cabin nestled between the fir trees.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *And in this cabin, they find a pair of overalls.*

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *And the federal investigators examine the overalls, and they see a substance that looks to them like mechanic's grease.*

**James:** The investigators fanned out into nearby auto repair shops to chase their lead: anyone who could have owned a pair of greasy overalls.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *And they go to a couple of different shops, I believe, and shake down a mechanic who they forced to put overalls on and they sort of kind of fit, but not really. And they put this poor guy in jail.*

**James:** But it became clear pretty quickly that the only thing this mechanic was guilty of was being a little bit greasy. They weren't his overalls, and he wasn't their guy. Investigators were at a loss. They needed a break in the case—a name, a description, anything to give them a clue to who they were looking for. And then Southern Pacific special agent Dan O'Connell had an idea. Why not reach out to Oscar Heinrich?

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *Southern Pacific had used Oscar Heinrich, who was this forensic scientist in Berkeley, in the past, with some of the train robberies that they had.*

**James:** Forensic science was still pretty new at this time, but Oscar Heinrich was already gaining a reputation in the field.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *He was billed as the Wizard of Berkeley. America's Sherlock Holmes. People said he was brilliant.*

**James:** Kate recently wrote a book about Heinrich titled *American Sherlock*. She spent hours pouring over his old journals, and she says it was clear that he had an obsession for detail.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *Each line of each of these journals detailed every penny that he spent in meticulous detail. So five cents for butter on this day, 12 cents for petrol on this day.*

**James:** Being a trained chemist with an acute attention to detail made Heinrich a keen forensic investigator. And if you're not sure what forensic science is, think of shows like CSI. They use science and labs to investigate the tiny, even microscopic evidence a criminal leaves behind: fingerprints, skin cells, hair and blood. It was a totally different type of investigation than law enforcement in the '20s were used to. And they didn't like it one bit.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *Forensic scientists in the early 1920s were really looked at askance by law enforcement because they felt like these guys in these white jackets were undermining them.*

**James:** Police in those days wanted to catch the bad guys by chasing down hot tips and kicking down doors. They didn't want some professor in a lab making them look silly by proving them wrong or finding something they had overlooked—which is exactly what Heinrich did.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *He spent 24 hours that day in his lab straight, down in the basement.*

**James:** He meticulously poured over everything—the dynamite detonator, the Colt .45—but it was the pair of greasy overalls that he really honed in on.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *Because when he read the report from the federal government that said this was grease on a pocket, he thought this doesn't seem very likely. And he did a couple of interesting things.*

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**James:** Heinrich chipped some of the dried grease off the overalls and put it on a microscope slide, placed it under the lens, and the real truth quickly came into focus.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *And he recognized that it was the pitch from a fir tree—so not grease, pitch from a fir tree.*

**James:** Not just any fir tree, but the types of trees found in Western Oregon. The trees lumberjacks are hired to cut down. So he called O'Connell and said, "Hey ..."

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *"Unless this mechanic who's in jail is also someone who cuts down trees for a living, this is not likely to be your person."*

**James:** And Heinrich was just getting started. He had nailed the overalls to a door. He knew lumberjacks cuffed their pant legs, so he rolled up the bottom of the legs. And then he found a pair of lumberjack boots and he placed them beneath the cuffed legs to get a good idea of their culprit's height.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *He said that this was somebody who was around 5 foot 10, not much taller, someone who was under 165. He also said that, you know, this is somebody who is likely left handed because the way that somebody buttons their overalls wears at a certain kind of angle, and so he could tell that.*

**James:** An average height and weight lumberjack in the Pacific Northwest. I mean, that was sort of helpful, but O'Connell had expected more from the American Sherlock. So he was like, "Okay. Well thanks anyways, Oscar." And then Heinrich was like, "Okay, well hold on, I'm not done yet."

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *He decided he wanted to do a last minute kind of search of all over the overalls to see if there was anything else that he could find.*

**James:** And when he did, Heinrich noticed this thin little pocket on the breast of the overalls, a handy spot just big enough to hold a pencil and really not much else. It was so small that he hadn't given it a second thought on the first pass. But now he thought, "Hmm, maybe there's something in there." So he grabbed a highly specialized forensic tool ...

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *He used a crochet hook, which probably came from his wife Marion, and he stuck it inside and out came this little tiny piece of paper that was balled up and dried.*

**James:** The tiny little piece of paper had clearly been washed and dried countless times.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *He can't read it. It's small, and he thinks about how am I going to be able to open this?*

**James:** But Heinrich was a trained chemist so he got all chemist on it. He grabbed a solution from a nearby shelf.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *And he uses the steam from the chemical to open up the paper, and he's at a point where he's able to read it. And it's a receipt for a registered letter, and he has the number to be able to locate where this came from.*

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *It's stamped right on there: Eugene, Oregon.*

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *So this is a huge break, a huge break for investigators.*

**James:** A man named Roy DeAutremont had sent \$50 to his younger brother Hugh in New Mexico. The US postal inspectors had their suspect, but who was Roy DeAutremont? Postal inspectors started interviewing people, and quickly learned that Roy had been living in Southern Oregon at the time of the robbery. His brothers Ray and Hugh were there as well.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *Ray and Roy are twins of a family of five boys. Their next in age is Hugh.*

**James:** The DeAutremonts grew up in the Midwest. Their father had left when they were still young. The five boys moved regularly with their mother, and by the late 19-teens they had settled in New Mexico.

**Chelsea Rose:** *They're living in poverty, they're kind of having a hard time, and Ray decides to head west.*

**James:** Chelsea Rose again. She says when Ray was around 19 years old, he went to work in a shipyard just across the Columbia River from Portland.

**Chelsea Rose:** *And this is when there was some kind of violent outbreak, and it led to a bunch of arrests.*

**James:** Local law enforcement had raided the shipyard to crack down on labor activists and socialist agitators. In the years after World War I, nearly half of all states had enacted anti-labor statutes to punish union organizers—which is what Ray was.

**James:** When Ray came to Oregon, he joined the labor organization, International Workers of the World, advocating for workers' rights and fair pay. And that had put a target on his back

when police started busting unions in the area.

**Chelsea Rose:** *Basically they raided his house. They found all his, you know, propaganda material and that red card, and that was enough to send him to jail.*

**James:** Ray was given a choice: give up the names of other labor organizers or spend a year in jail. Ray refused to betray his union brothers and was sent to prison. When he was released, he didn't come out with a 'let bygones be bygones' sort of attitude.

**Chelsea Rose:** *He came out hot. That definitely kind of colored the way that he spent the next couple of years.*

**James:** Now Roy DeAutremont had moved to Oregon to be with his recently-released twin brother Ray. It was the Roaring Twenties, and the economy was in an upswing. But even though it seemed like everybody was getting their piece of the pie, Ray and Roy struggled to get theirs.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *And so there's a whole context of this economic and social instability at this time. It's not just the Roaring Twenties, this is really quite a challenging time for people.*

**James:** Roy had to leave his job as a barber when he started losing his eyesight, and Chelsea Rose says both brothers had mental health issues that made it hard to find work.

**Chelsea Rose:** *Ray really suffered with depression, and Roy would later be diagnosed with schizophrenia.*

**James:** They bounced from job to job, trying to make ends meet. And in the early summer of 1923, their younger brother Hugh came to join them in Oregon. He had just graduated from high school and was only 19 years old. His older brothers Ray and Roy were now 23. The three of them decided they needed steady work, so they rolled up their sleeves and they turned to the one industry in the Pacific Northwest that was always hiring.

**Chelsea Rose:** *The '20s is kind of a time where the lumber industry is really booming, so I think it would have been pretty easy to find a job in the different lumber camps, which they did.*

**James:** The brothers found work at a lumber camp in Silverton, Oregon. But they weren't well suited for the dirty and physically demanding work of cutting down trees. They were fairly small men, around five and a half feet tall, thin and well groomed, by some accounts. They spent their evenings in the lumber camp thinking of other ways to fund their future, flipping through dime novels and comic books that glorified Prohibition-era criminals like Al Capone, or the exploits of famous train robbers of the old Wild West. Chelsea says this appealed to the brothers. They felt like they could never get ahead, that the game of life was rigged against them. And in an unjust society, it was the outlaws who were the heroes.

**Chelsea Rose:** *So this is kind of an era where this Robin Hood kind of, you know, portrayal of these robbers was around, and this really captivated them in an era where they felt kind of discouraged by their prospects.*

**James:** While the brothers read their stories of famous criminals taking whatever they wanted, a train whistled in the distance. A train nicknamed The Gold Express.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *And they were convinced that this was a train that had a lot of gold and of course had money in it also and valuables.*

**James:** They decided in that camp that they were going to pull off one big heist, big enough to get their lives on track forever.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *So they were pretty convinced that this was going to be a huge amount of loot for them if they were able to pull it off.*

**James:** But the DeAutremont brothers never could have guessed just how hard it is to actually rob a moving train. Still ahead, the brothers feel the heat from one of the oldest and most feared federal law enforcement agencies ever: the US Postal Inspector Service—I'm serious. You did not want to mess with the postal inspectors! We'll have more on that after the break.

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**James:** In the late fall of 1923, the manhunt for the DeAutremont brothers was well underway, thanks to the clues provided by Oscar Heinrich. Chelsea Rose says Southern Pacific and the US Postal Service threw all their resources into catching the brothers.

**Chelsea Rose:** *It was the biggest manhunt of its kind at the time and, you know, of course, they didn't know how long it would take, but they printed ultimately over 2.5 million wanted posters ...*

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *... in Spanish, French and multiple other languages.*

**James:** The Smithsonian's Lynn Heidelbaugh again. She says this was an international manhunt, spanning nearly every continent. There was no escape, and a healthy reward for whoever caught the brothers.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *And we're talking about several thousand dollars for each suspect.*

**James:** In today's money, each brother's bounty was worth about \$100,000. That's more than a quarter million dollars if you could catch 'em all. But the manhunt wasn't just 'Wanted' posters.



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The US Postal Inspector Service was hot on the trail of the brothers, and the postal inspectors were essentially like the FBI of that time period.

**James:** The FBI had only been around for a few years in 1923. There was no CIA or ATF. The US Postal Inspector Service was pretty much the main federal law enforcement network at the time. In fact, the Postal Inspector Service is the oldest federal law enforcement agency—older than America itself even. The first postal inspector was appointed by Benjamin Franklin to essentially inspect the mail and make sure it got delivered. But in the 19th century, criminals realized just how much money was being sent through the mail. Train cars and stagecoaches carrying mail became hot targets for robbers. Postal inspectors started carrying weapons to protect the mail. Even ordinary mail carriers had guns in the 1920s.

**Chelsea Rose:** *Because stagecoach robberies and stuff like that, carrying mail, they had been a target historically for things like gold or valuables that were traveling in that way.*

**James:** Lynn says criminals feared postal inspectors, who kept a low profile and were known for catching their guys.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *They have, in the early 20th century, been referred to as 'the silent service.' They were there and working this extensive postal network in trying to ensure the safety of the mails, but they weren't sort of seeking that limelight.*

**James:** The US postal inspectors weren't just silent, they were also patient, unrelenting. When they put up 'Wanted' posters for the DeAutremont brothers in 1923 and nothing happened, they doubled down. The next year, more posters, a bigger bounty. Still, nobody in custody.

**James:** Years had passed, and the world had likely forgotten about the robbery of Southern Pacific train number 13. But even if everyone else forgot, the postal inspectors didn't. In the spring of 1927, nearly four years after the robbery, they sent out a brand new batch of 'Wanted' posters. And then they got a hit.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *And the tip comes in from Thomas Reynolds, that he had served with a private who's going by the name of James Price, and had been serving with him in Manila, Philippines.*

**James:** This sergeant, Thomas Reynolds, had recently been transferred from Manila to the United States, and he was working at an Army prison on Alcatraz Island. While he was in the prison he spotted a 'Wanted' poster that stopped him in his tracks. On the poster, he recognized the man he knew as James Price, but when he looked closer, he saw that James wasn't James at all. His name was actually Hugh, Hugh DeAutremont.

**Chelsea Rose:** *I think really, it's just bad luck for Hugh that he was the first one to get caught.*

**James:** With his brothers still on the lam, Hugh went on trial alone in Jacksonville, Oregon.

**Chelsea Rose:** *And this was a media circus. This is like a spectacle that Southern Oregon had probably never had before and probably hadn't since. I mean, the spotlight was really on them and he was kind of a celebrity.*

**James:** The media portrayed Hugh as a patsy, an impressionable youngster who went along with his older brothers. Public opinion was on his side, but his luck ran out when one of the 12 jurors died during the trial.

**Chelsea Rose:** *There are some accounts that say his lawyer had wanted to have an alternate before this, but Hugh was too superstitious to have 13 jurors because the crime, of course, involved Train 13 and Tunnel 13, so he—they didn't have an alternate. And so when this juror died unexpectedly, the judge had to throw the case out.*

**James:** The publicity surrounding Hugh's trial swept across the nation, and the postal inspectors issued a whole new batch of 'Wanted' posters to capitalize on the momentum—a move that paid off, because someone in Ohio saw one of these posters and recognized a pair of twins they knew as the Goodwin brothers. It turned out these twins were actually Roy and Ray DeAutremont, although they looked a little different.

**Chelsea Rose:** *Ray, who changed his appearance a little bit, he dyed his hair, I think he even had a tooth removed to try to change the shape of his face a little bit.*

**James:** All three brothers were now sitting in jail together. Ray and Roy watched Hugh's second trial unfold as they waited for their first trial to start. It only took the jury in Hugh's case 90 minutes to return with their verdict: guilty of first-degree murder. The sentence, life in prison. That was the good outcome. Ray and Roy could see the writing on the wall. Public opinion had shifted dramatically since Hugh was first captured. They weren't celebrities anymore, they were cold-blooded killers. Crowds were calling for vengeance.

**Chelsea Rose:** *This is really still the era of public hangings, and I think that the public just really thought that it would kind of culminate in a big public hanging.*

**James:** Hugh's case had given the twins a good look at the evidence they were up against. Heinrich's findings hadn't just told investigators who to look for, he had given them an airtight case for a conviction.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *I think it became very clear with the overalls, and certainly with his discovery of the receipt for the certified letter, you know, it was pretty solid evidence. If he had not found that receipt, I think it would have been a pretty shaky case.*

**James:** With their lives literally in the balance, Ray and Roy pled guilty to avoid the death sentence.

**Chelsea Rose:** *And the brothers also get, like, back-to-back life sentences, and none of them are supposed to ever be eligible for parole.*

**James:** As part of their plea, Roy wrote a highly-detailed 100-page confession, and this is where everyone finally learned exactly how the brothers had plotted and schemed and executed their perfect robbery.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *It was very Bad News Bears. These guys did not know what they were doing.*

**James:** Just days before the robbery, Hugh was driving the designated getaway car when he crashed smack-dab into a cow, utterly destroying their escape vehicle. Meanwhile, his older brothers had tried to scope out the tunnel ahead of time but were seen skulking around. As they were running away, Roy bashed his knee and he could barely walk and they barely escaped.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *So it was a comedy of errors, and really all of this should have foreshadowed for them just a terrible series of mistakes that was going to happen.*

**James:** But the brothers decided to go through with the robbery anyway. The brothers thought they had an airtight plan: they knew the train had to check its brakes at the top of the mountains, right before entering Tunnel 13 and then dropping down into California.

**Chelsea Rose:** *They basically weaponized the landscape in a few ways. They took advantage of the fact the train had to slow down, and that made it vulnerable and they could access it. But also, it made for a pretty quick getaway, because they could run basically in any direction, and they're in really rugged wilderness. In fact, it's still really rugged today.*

**James:** Their plan was to hop on the train as it slowed for its brake check, force the engineer to stop it, and then they could shoot their way into the mail car and steal whatever gold or other treasures were inside. Just in case, they brought a bag of dynamite to blow open the mail car door. They disguised themselves as railway workers, and waited for the train to arrive at Tunnel 13 just around one o'clock in the afternoon.

**Chelsea Rose:** *Ray was at the south end of the tunnel, sometimes called the West Portal, and the other two went to the other side.*

**James:** Ray stood alone at the entrance of the tunnel nervously chain smoking cigarettes, hoping everything would go according to plan. Hugh and Roy waited at the end of the tunnel for the train's engine to emerge.

**Chelsea Rose:** *Before the brothers even reunited together, everything had started to go totally wrong. [laughs]*

**James:** When the train emerged from the tunnel, the engineer, Sidney Bates, saw Hugh and Roy chasing after him. He pushed the throttle wide open, speeding up the train. Roy, with his recently-injured knee, hobbled after the train, barely making it aboard and losing his gun in the process.

**Chelsea Rose:** *Because I guess they were trying to get the train to stop at the end of the tunnel, and he hopped on the train and lost his gun.*

**James:** Mail clerk Elvyn Daughtery had heard all the commotion, and locked himself inside the car with a pistol. The brothers tried shooting the hinges, but they just couldn't get the mail car door open.

**Chelsea Rose:** *So that's when they brought in the dynamite. Roy supposedly was the one that ended up using the dynamite, and instead of just, like, one stick or a little bit, he used, like, every piece they had, and so he way overcorrected, and that's why the whole mail car was blown up.*

**James:** Their payday, the money, the gold that was supposed to be their ticket for a better future, it was a pile of smoldering ruins.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *They desperately were on hands and knees with all the smoke and the flames trying to find any kind of loot, and they couldn't.*

**James:** Smoke filled the train tunnel, blocking out any light. They demanded train engineer Sidney Bates pull the train out of the tunnel so they could see, but he refused. While they were arguing with the engineer, brakeman Coyle Johnson ran from the back of the train to help. When he popped out of the smoky tunnel, the brothers thought he was trying to shoot at them.

**Chelsea Rose:** *So they shot him in the gut, you know, kind of in a panic. But he wasn't shooting at them, they just heard some random noise.*

**James:** At this point, the brothers realized just how wrong everything was going. They had blown up their loot—if there was any ever to begin with. And they had killed two men. Worse still, they had two witnesses: the engineer, Sidney Bates, and the fireman Marvin Seng. Historians disagree on whether the brothers had ever planned to kill anyone but at that moment, they decided they weren't going to leave any witnesses. and they shot Sidney and Marvin.

**Chelsea Rose:** *When the coroner looked at the bodies, they were clear they had their hands up. So they were really shot in cold blood at the time.*

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**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *I don't think they intended to kill anybody. I certainly know they didn't intend to blow up the one car that they needed the most, which was the US postal car. I think they were probably pretty horrified at the end of it when they were done.*

**James:** The DeAutremont brothers had sat in a lumber camp planning a heist that they thought would set them up for life, and in a way they were right. The robbery had earned them each a life sentence. While in prison, Roy became increasingly violent.

**Chelsea Rose:** *And eventually he was sent to the state mental hospital where he was lobotomized. And supposedly it wasn't successful, if that operation ever is considered successful. He was basically catatonic, and he lived out his days in that facility and he didn't really have much of a life after that point.*

**James:** None of the brothers were ever supposed to get out of prison, but Hugh turned out to be a model inmate. He published an award-winning magazine that earned him the nickname "Dean of Prison Journalism." He was paroled in 1958, but shortly after his release, he was diagnosed with stomach cancer.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *And he died shortly thereafter within a couple of months.*

**James:** Ray was a model inmate as well, and was paroled as well in 1961—nearly 25 years after being caught. As he was being released, he told a reporter, "Well, one thing's for sure: for the rest of my life I will struggle with the question of whatever possessed us to do such a thing." He and Roy both died in the early 1980s, almost 60 years after the robbery.

**James:** Now, 100 years after the robbery, Chelsea says it's important to try to understand the impact this crime has had, and to remember the victims.

**Chelsea Rose:** *That's actually one of the saddest parts of this story, is how the victims, even today, continue to be lost. And, you know, it's understandably hard to compete with the excitement of a criminal gang and this global manhunt, but I wish we knew more about them.*

**James:** For instance, postal clerk Elvyn Daugherty ...

**Chelsea Rose:** *He left a young family, including a really young son. He was supposed to go on a vacation to do some duck hunting in eastern Oregon after the crime. So that's, you know, kind of a sad insight into his life that he never got to do that.*

**James:** Fireman Marvin Seng was only 23 years old—roughly the same age as the DeAutremonts when they killed him. And it was a day before Brakeman Coyle Johnson's 37th birthday. He wasn't even supposed to be working that day.

**Chelsea Rose:** *He was actually just riding as a passenger, and he got involved because when the train stopped, he went to see if he could help. He ended up leaving behind a wife, and they had already lost two children, so you can only imagine how absolutely devastating this would have been for her.*

**James:** Engineer Sidney Bates was a veteran at Southern Pacific.

**Chelsea Rose:** *He was also really active in his community, involved in a lot of different organizations. And he left behind a wife as well. So the ripple effect was pretty extreme, especially for the first few years.*

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *Nobody had a happy ending.*

**James:** Kate has written about countless criminal investigations—murders and robberies, and she says one thing sticks out for her in this case.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *Ultimately, the concern over mental health is what loomed large for me over this story. Not feeling badly necessarily for the brothers, but they were in an untenable position in their lives also.*

**James:** There is a silver lining to all this, though: when law enforcement agencies saw how Oscar Heinrich helped catch the DeAutremont brothers, they warmed up to criminal forensics.

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *I do think that this case accelerated the development of forensics, because once Heinrich used all these tools, you can see people approaching him.*

**James:** And it made criminal forensics a staple of the US Postal Inspector Service.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *Today they have a nationally recognized and accredited forensics lab for forensics analysis.*

**James:** This crime has been called the last great American train robbery.

**Chelsea Rose:** *You know, that's a pretty sexy title, but it really rankles some folks because the more you look into it, it wasn't actually a robbery.*

**James:** Chelsea says it was technically a holdup. I mean, nothing was taken.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *It's not the last train robbery. There are others.*

**James:** And it really wasn't that great, but it did happen in America and there was a train involved, so there is that. And while this case might not be the last anything ...

**Kate Winkler Dawson:** *There were a lot of firsts that happened with this train robbery. I think it is one of the things that spurred the federal government to believe that they needed sort of a centralized agency that would handle federal agents who could be primed to, you know, work on these really big cases.*

**James:** It was also the first time airplanes were used in a manhunt, and it was one of the first modern crime investigations, relying heavily on forensics and technology.

**Lynn Heidelbaugh:** *This is not the 19th century crime investigation. This is using science, this is using communication networks to track these individuals down and bring them to trial.*

**Chelsea Rose:** *And so the case really sits for me in this liminal space between the Old West and the modern age. And, you know, in one way you could say that they went into the tunnel in one era and they came out in another.*

**James:** You've been listening to Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. If you want to know more about this attempted train robbery you're in luck—the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum has teamed up with the US Postal Service and the Southern Oregon Historical Society for a virtual exhibition that marks the centennial of the case. You can find that on the Postal Museum's website. We'll also include a link in our newsletter. You can subscribe at [Sl.edu/Sidedoor](https://sl.edu/Sidedoor). And if you're listening on Spotify, let us know your favorite part of the episode right in the app.

**James:** For help with this episode, we want to thank Lynn Heidelbaugh, Chelsea Rose and Kate Dawson. We'll include a link to Kate's book, *American Sherlock: Murder, Forensics and the Birth of CSI* in our newsletter. If you want to hear more great stories of postal inspector heroes, check out our past episode "[Ponzi's Scheme](#)." You've heard of the scheme, now learn all about the person who started it and how postal inspectors captured the notorious Charles Ponzi.

**James:** And if you want more of *this* train robbery story, Chelsea Rose has just published a two-part series about the train robbery for her podcast [Underground History](#). She gets a lot deeper into the forensics, and I encourage you to check it out. It's really great.

**James:** And if you're a fan of historical true crime stories, look for Kate Winkler Dawson's podcast [Buried Bones](#).

**James:** Our podcast is produced by Lizzie Peabody and me, James Morrison. Our associate producer is Nathalie Boyd. We had additional help on this episode from Amy Drozdowska. Executive producer is Ann Conanan. Our editorial team is Jess Sadeq and Sharon Bryant. Tami O'Neill writes our newsletter. Episode artwork is by Dave Leonard. Our show is mixed by Tarek Fouda. Our theme song and episode music are by Breakmaster Cylinder. Extra support comes from PRX.

**James:** If you have a pitch for us, send us an email at Sidedoor (@) si.edu! If you want to sponsor our show, please email sponsorship (@) prx.org.

**James:** I'm your guest host James Morrison, filling in for the irreplaceable Lizzie Peabody who will be back for the next episode. Thanks for listening.

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