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10 ALBUM, Chronicle, Saturday, July 6, 2002

— HISTORY —

A mysterious robber shows up in S. Windham

Part two of two

In July 1881, an attempted robbery at a South Windham store resulted in the wounding and capture of a safe cracker. He was hit at short range by a shotgun blast, and was taken to the workhouse in Willimantic to be readied for burial, but he made a swift recovery.

Nevertheless, he refused to reveal his identity. Local tailor John Bowman repaired the burglar's tattered suit. The diameter of the hole in it was four inches, and many wondered how he could have survived. The suit was made of good material, and had been custommade by Nichol of New

York City. A sample of the cloth and description of the suit was sent to the tailor in order to obtain the burglar's correct name or one of his aliases.

Meanwhile, copies of the photograph of the mysterious robber were sent to the principal police authorities in New England. A Providence newspaperman quickly identified the wounded burglar as the same



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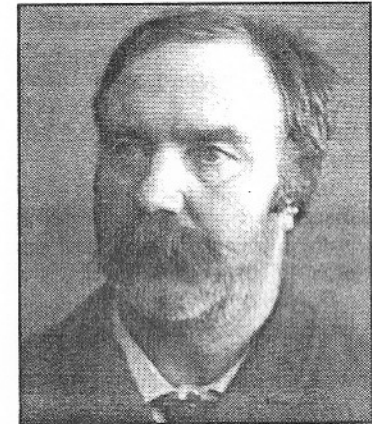
man who had robbed a post office at Kingston Hill, R.I. the previous week. He was identified as the notorious Eddie "Ned" Lyons, a professional criminal of many years standing, well known to the police of New York and Boston as a skilful pick-pocket and adept safe-robber. Pinkerton detectives in New York explained how Lyons had received his scars.

Ned Lyons had escaped from Sing-Sing in 1875, and the following year he and his wife Sophie Lyons (alias Sophie Levy, alias Pretty Sophie), were arrested at Riverhead, Long Island, for picking pockets. Ned Lyons was

sent back to Sing-Sing to serve out his unexpired term, and when he was released in 1880 Lyons had a gunfight with Hamilton Brock the man living with his wife.

The gunfight took place in the Star and Garter saloon at 564 Sixth Ave. in 1880, and Lyons received a bullet scar to his face. Later that year Lyons' ear was chewed off in fight with "Haggerty" a notorious Philadelphia thief and ruffian.

Ned Lyons was one of the "best bank men" in the burgling frater-



Ned Lyons in an 1876
Pinkerton photograph

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nity. Pinkertons from Boston said that since his release from Sing-Sing he has been engaged in many crimes of the South Windham sort, breaking safes in the smaller towns and villages of New York and New England.

Shortly after he was interred at the almshouse, a New York City lawyer, claiming to be an attorney for the burglar's family, visited Lyons.

It was believed the lawyer was in league with the gang, and came in the guise of an attorney for the purpose of getting the lay of the land in order to plan and execute a rescue if the wounded man's condition should admit. Lyons was then removed to the basement of the almshouse for more security.

A preliminary hearing was held

at the almshouse before Justice of the Peace John Manning Hall to enable the prisoner to be put into the custody of the state thus relieving the town of all expenses. Shortly afterwards, Lyons was transported to New York City to face trial.

Meanwhile his wife, under the alias of Kate Larany, was held in Jackson, Mich. on charges of blackmail and assault with intent to kill.

Their son, 17-year-old George Lyons, was the leader of a gang of sneak thieves in New York and was sent to the reformatory at Elmira shortly after his father Ned Lyons was sent back to Sing-Sing. After the summer of 1881, South Windham storeowner James B. Johnson kept a loaded shotgun beneath his counter.