

Allen Pinkerton

Allan Pinkerton , born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1819, emigrated to Chicago. He was

America's first "private eye." A man of many contradictions, he was a conservative

who strongly opposed slavery, a very cautious man who risked his life capturing criminals,

a militant labor organizer who suppressed the labor movement, and fought for women's

rights to be detectives.

During his twenty-eight year career as a private detective, Allan Pinkerton and his

agency investigated over a thousand crimes. Pinkerton was involved in many dramas

of the nineteenth century. Work and the Underground Railroad became his life.

The

Pinkerton's fed and sheltered fugitives in their own home. Pinkerton was a very moral

man and despised slavery. The crisis over slavery brought the nation to the brink of the

Civil War. The South demanded a guarantee that slavery would continue in the states

where it was already established and permitted to spread to the Midwest and West. The

South also wanted the North to return any slaves who fled there via the Underground

Railroad. The North wanted to stop the spread of slavery. In 1850 the Fugitive Slave Act

was passed, which made it a federal crime for slaves to run away and a crime for anyone

to assist them. Allan Pinkerton could be arrested and imprisoned for his involvement

in assisting the slaves.

When the war began, Allan Pinkerton would finally combine his detective skills with

his abolitionist beliefs. Allan Pinkerton protected Abraham Lincoln against southern

radicals, who demanded the Union be dissolved and the Southern states form an independent

government. They hated Lincoln because they feared he would abolish slavery. In 1861,

Pinkerton uncovered a plot to assassinate President Lincoln. Pinkerton , with his top agents,

posed as Southern sympathizers and found themselves within the conspirators.

As a spy

in the their midst, the plot was uncovered. As President Lincoln changed trains in Maryland on February 22, he would be shot. Some of the guards protecting the President were also Southern radicals. At the same time there was another plot to blow up the train carrying Lincoln. Once the train was destroyed, they would cut the telegraph wires and blow up bridges and train tracks to prevent Northern troops entry into Baltimore. If President Lincoln was killed, there would definitely be a civil war. Pinkerton acted quickly and changed the original trip plans. They would leave immediately, two days early. Although the President made it to Washington safely, Southern rebels in Baltimore attacked the railroad. War was inevitable. Washington was filled with spies and Pinkerton approached the President, offering to create a secret service to uncover and arrest the spies. Lincoln would not agree. George McClellan, an old friend of Pinkerton's, wanted him to set up a military intelligence operation and send agents into the South. Pinkerton assigned himself and traveled as E.J.Allen, a Southern rebel. The information he gathered helped McClellan win several minor battles in the Ohio Valley when war broke out. In 1861, Pinkerton received devastating news. The Northern Army of the Potomac had been defeated at Bull Run in the first major battle of the Civil War. Pinkerton's most challenging opponents was Rose O'Neal Greenhow, the South's most productive and effective spy. She concealed information that thwarted the attack by General George McDowell at Manassas, outside of Washington. Pinkerton realized Rose Greenhow, "the Southern Rose," presented a great danger and had to be arrested. A Union army captain was arrested leaving her home, carrying a vital military map of gun ports. Pinkerton and his agents uncovered many military plans that she had obtained to aid in the Southern war effort. She had a network of spies, including many women. After her arrest and release from prison, she traveled abroad, raising money for military support. Returning from Europe, her boat capsized and she drowned. Pinkerton used his own sons, sending them as spies into the South. Robert,

fourteen,
was sent in an air balloon with agents to locate and count enemy troops.
William, sixteen,
posed as a Confederate soldier behind enemy lines, carrying back information to his father.
Although Pinkerton excelled as a detective, he lacked military intelligence. He often overestimated the strength of the enemy. Because of McClellan's trust in his friend, the North lost many victories and the war continued.
McClellan's position as fighting general was terminated by the President, due to his losses. When McClellan was relieved of his duty, he chose to run for President on the Democratic ticket. Pinkerton quit his job as the head of the secret service and military intelligence in support of his friend's campaign. Even though he was no longer with the secret service, he still worked for the government by investigating merchants who were cheating them by selling faulty military supplies.
When the war ended, Allan Pinkerton returned to Chicago to build up his private investigation business. On April 14, 1865, President Lincoln was assassinated. Allan Pinkerton was not there to protect him.
The end of the Civil War did not bring peace to America. There were continuous outbursts and gangs were formed to rob trains. Pinkerton and his agents pursued the outlaws with vengeance, the most famous being the James brothers.
In 1869, Allan Pinkerton suffered a stroke, but fought the paralysis. A new battlefield emerged in the 1870's in the coal mines, steel mills, and factories. The workers were treated like slaves, and fought back. Pinkerton was employed to end these organizations, to infiltrate, gather evidence, and convict them. A strike broke out in a steel plant, ending in fatalities. Pinkerton's reputation was seriously damaged.
Allan Pinkerton died in 1884. He was a legend, gaining an international reputation for crime solving and protection. When the F.B.I. was founded, it was modeled after the Pinkerton's National Detective Agency.

