



Episode 804, Story 3: Spybook

Gwen Wright: Our last case investigates the secrets recorded in this little black book, and the world of domestic spying during the dark days of World War I. April 6th, 1917: the United States enters the First World War. Outraged by the sinking of the Lusitania, and fearing German sabotage on the home front, many Americans support President Wilson's decision to join the fight against the Kaiser. But a large number feel betrayed, having voted for Wilson the previous November on his campaign slogan that he had kept the United States out of that European conflict. How will the nation's fledgling intelligence service thwart a German foe determined to attack the United States on its own soil? And how will they deal with an anti-war movement that includes some radicals who may want to bring down the U.S. government? Now, a small memo book has surfaced that may uncover secrets from this explosive era.

Bob Brady: I know this book is full of secrets. I just don't know what they are.

Gwen: I'm Gwendolyn Wright, and I'm headed to Southampton, Pennsylvania, to meet Bob Brady, and see what he has.

Bob: This is it.

Gwen: Oh, let's see. Bob tells me that the notebook dates from the period of American involvement in the First World War, and belonged to his great-grandfather, John H. Brady.

Bob: It runs from November of 1917 to around February of 1918. It's got notes -- there's one in particular right here. Take a look at that one.

Gwen: "January 22nd, went into Winnie's room, got a number of papers that would not be missed and took a loan of one."

Bob: Right away you say, hmm, something doesn't seem right here.

Gwen: Tell me, what do you know about your great-grandfather?



Bob: Not a heck of a lot, but we have a multi-generational shot where here's John H. Brady here. His son William. And then his son Thomas who is my father. We also have a business card, John H. Brady and take a look at that.

Gwen: He was an inspector in the military intelligence section of the War Department. Tell me, what do you think this is, Bob?

Bob: I actually believe it's a spy book. If you notice in here there are several entries where it says "pro German."

Gwen: I tell Bob that there had been multiple incidents of German sabotage in the United States during the war, and fear of German sympathizers was running high. So Bob tell me exactly what you'd like for me to find out?

Bob: What I'd love to know is, was he really a spy? And what significance this book played?

Gwen: This is going to be an intriguing story I think, whatever we find out. So, what do we have here? Most of it is typewritten, but in different colors of ink. It's tabulated alphabetically. Here's an entry in which someone has been reported for having an argument in a bookstore in which he seemed pro-German. He's watching a number of different people. Here's one, "We will have the Dictaphone in tomorrow, January 26th, listened on dic until 6:40 p.m. and followed them to a dinner." So he's basically bugging their room and following them. This book is full of names, but one jumps out. Emma Goldman case? Now Emma Goldman was a well-known anarchist at this time. She was against the war and the government considered her a dangerous extremist who wanted to bring down the American state. Wow, there's a whole section of the book devoted to the Goldman case. Including this entry, Goldman, Louis Weitzenkorn, Ms. Winner organizing committees of five all over country for killing men from President to District Attorney. Whatever these "committees of five" might have been, they certainly seem menacing. I've never heard of Weitzenkorn or Winner, but it sounds like he might be onto a major threat. The notebook says "Louis Weitzenkorn runs verse and prose called Guillotine in the *New York Call*." The Russian born Goldman was a supporter of the 1917 communist revolution in the Soviet Union, and she agitated for similar kinds of change in the United States. When she was young Emma Goldman subscribed to an anarchist philosophy called "propaganda of the deed" which advocated acts of



political violence in order to inspire the masses and bring about revolution. Goldman and other radicals fell under suspicion for their opposition to U.S. involvement in the First World War. They argued that it was a capitalist conflict, and principally a boon to business interests. In one instance, opposition to the war had turned violent. In July, 1916 a massive bomb exploded at a war preparedness parade in San Francisco. Ten people were killed. Forty wounded. The men convicted of the bombing were associated with radical labor groups.

It's little wonder that Brady and the intelligence services were keeping an eye on Goldman after the U.S. finally declared war on Germany in April 1917. But I'm not finding anything about the committees of five, or a murder plot.

The *New York Call* is the newspaper mentioned in John Brady's notebook, and its pages are filled with opposition to the war, and the Selective Service Act, which instituted the first military draft since the Civil War. Well here's the back page of the *New York Call*. January 19, 1918. And here's The Guillotine. Ah, and The Guillotine column has a by-line of Louis Weitzenkorn. This is very sentimental poetry right alongside the angry, even violent image of the guillotine. In essence, The Guillotine seems to be nothing more than a poetry page in a socialist newspaper. The editors were quite open, even announcing their meetings. There's certainly nothing illegal: the main crime is bad poetry. The National Archives' branch in Manhattan holds government employee records. Here he is. Brady, J. H. He lived in Brooklyn. March 26th, 1919. So that's after the end of the war. He tenders his resignation as an agent connected with the plant protection section of the military intelligence. So that means that he was watching over various factories.

Here's a series of letters. Someone named Charles Dresser is complaining that Brady wrongly investigated him for being pro-German. Nonetheless, Brady's superior says the man has no grounds for a complaint. Emma Goldman gave some her most passionate speeches in the legendary great hall at the Cooper Union. Historian Chris Capozzola has written about the government's response to radical threats during World War One. Here is the little book that I told you about. This belonged to a man named John H. Brady who worked for the Military Intelligence Division. Now tell me a little bit about that organization within the government.

Chris Capozzola: Well the Military Intelligence Division is part of the War Department. And they did investigations on the home front of anything that they thought would interfere with the war



effort. Now part of the reason that the U.S. Army is investigating individual citizens on the home front is that there isn't a big federal agency to do this. What becomes the FBI doesn't really exist yet, only has a few dozen agents in it.

Gwen: Now you're mentioning the home front. This is just at the point that the United States has entered World War I. Was there an expansion of both the power of these intelligence organizations and the things that they were allowed to do?

Mr. Cappozola: Yes. So as soon as the war begins about a month later, the U.S. passes the Selective Service Act, which authorizes conscription and the draft. And in that is a series of regulations that say that people who oppose the draft speak out about it or act to obstruct it can be arrested and imprisoned. And people who are opposed to the war effort and particularly those who are not citizens of the United States find themselves really under the gun.

Gwen: He seems to feel that Emma Goldman was involved in a conspiracy to assassinate the President. Does that make sense to you?

Mr. Cappozola: Well, I don't know of any plot to assassinate the President, but just as soon as the Selective Service Act was passed, she and Alexander Berkman formed a group called the No Conscription League.

Gwen: In addition, Alexander Berkman, Goldman's lover, had served 14 years in prison for the attempted murder of the Carnegie Steel executive Henry Clay Frick in 1892. So, Chris says, it's not at all surprising that the No Conscription League attracted scrutiny.

Mr. Cappozola: They had meetings which were attended by thousands of people. They were also attended by agents of the Military Intelligence Division to investigate and hear what was being said. It was only around for about six weeks before she and Berkman were arrested. The term pro-German was a very loose and capacious term that could include all kinds of opposition to pretty much everything. Anyone who expressed a dissenting opinion could find themselves labeled a pro-German and ending up in John Brady's book.

Gwen: And therefore to be pro-German was to be anti-American.



Mr. Cappozola: That was the assumption, yes.

Gwen: Well you'll see under Goldman that he mentions two individuals Louis Weitzenkorn and Ms. Winner who were part of The Guillotine. Have you ever heard of them?

Mr. Cappozola: No I haven't heard of them or that organization, but The Guillotine certainly would have been something that the government would have taken very seriously just from its name alone. They seem to be active socialists and it also notes that Winner was active as a suffragist as well.

Gwen: (laughs) Well, that was obviously very dangerous.

Mr. Cappozola: That was also considered dangerous at that time, yes.

Gwen: The Emma Goldman papers are archived at U.C. Berkeley, one of my alma maters. Associate Editor Barry Pateman has made a career of studying anarchist history and literature.

Barry Pateman: Gwen, welcome back to Berkeley.

Gwen: Thank you.

Barry Pateman: Let's have a seat.

Gwen: So Barry here is John Brady's notebook that I told you about. Now if you look under "G" you'll see there's a large section on Emma Goldman. There's a mention in here of something called the committees of five. What was that?

Barry Pateman: Ah, committee of five. There was a belief in some intelligence circles that throughout America there were groups of five men and women, who on the order from Emma Goldman would lead a fierce assault on American democracy. They would assassinate the President. They would assassinate governors, all sorts of public officials. And they were simply waiting for the word to come.



Gwen: Well Brady seems to feel that helping Emma Goldman set this off are two people, Louis Weitzenkorn, Ms. Winner and this Guillotine club. It's in a socialist newspaper and the logo at the top is violent, but mainly it's rather trite poetry.

Barry Pateman: Well, the theory held by some in intelligence is that Emma Goldman was going to give her word to the groups of five in a poem published in this column. Louis Weitzenkorn, Lily Winner would publish a certain poem that was in a certain code known only to these groups of five. This column was going to be the signal for revolution in America.

Gwen: Could this theory have been true? Barry shares a file with me.

Barry Pateman: Here we are.

Gwen: Oh, good. So this is Louis Weitzenkorn? And this is Lily winner? Well what kinds of documentation do you have?

Barry Pateman: We have some that John Brady wrote.

Gwen: Oh, I'd love to see those.

Barry Pateman: We've got one here that is quite interesting. In July, well before the time of this journal, John Brady had actually raided Lily Winner's apartment. Presumably she was seen to be a radical of some type. He says he found her and Louis Weitzenkorn in a compromising position.

Gwen: The documents record an agent obsessed with the need to know everything about Goldman's associates.

Barry Pateman: This is a report typed by John Brady to Lieutenant Campbell his superior. Weitzenkorn or Winner must have moved, he's found them in their new apartment. And he thinks it would be a very good idea for Military Intelligence to rent a room on the same landing. So they can sneak a Dictaphone in and tape their conversation.



Gwen: This matches what's in Brady's notebook.

Barry Pateman: Yes.

Gwen: But had Emma Goldman and the "committees of five" really plotted to kill the President?

Barry Pateman: The Guillotine column run by Lily Winner and Louis Weitzenkorn...

Gwen: What Barry would tell me next would reveal the real story about John Brady's assassination case. Bob this is an extraordinary document that opens up many aspects of American history. Now you'd asked if he was a spy? He was. A domestic spy. His official job was as an inspector of various factories and plants out of the legitimate concern that there could be sabotage. I can give you a copy of his letter of resignation from that job after the war had ended.

Bob: Wow. I don't have anything with his signature on it.

Gwen: But this notebook shows another side of his work. I explain how some Military Intelligence agents believed that the committees of five were anarchist cells plotting violence. That at one signal will rise up, assassinate the President, major public officials and wreck havoc across the country.

Bob: That's incredible.

Gwen: But what about the alleged poetry plot?

Barry: If we look at the Military Intelligence records the whole idea that that there are groups of five in America disappears as 1918 progresses. It's not a topic of memos, memorandums and discussions at all. It's gone. The poems and prose that were published in this column had no hidden meanings. Except in the minds perhaps of the writers who produced them.

Gwen: Although Winner and Weizenkorn were detained, there was no evidence that they had been involved in an assassination plot, and it seems that no charges were ever filed. I tell Bob



that his great-grandfather's diary records the activities of a dedicated agent at the moment our intelligence service expanded dramatically – a time when the ideals of freedom often became casualties of our involvement in the First World War.

Gwen: John Brady was clearly a hard working and loyal American. He wanted to protect his country. But this notebook shows how he and many other people were out of their fear becoming convinced of dangers of subversives everywhere.

Bob: It's scary to think about. Quite frankly I look at this document now differently than I did holding it saying, hey, my great-granddad was a spy. And now I'm thinking wow, I actually hold in my hand a unique document that has a lot of pain in it.

Gwen: Emma Goldman went to prison for two years for conspiracy against the draft law. Upon her release in 1919, she was quickly detained again as part of the notorious Palmer Raids, and deported to Russia. But her time in the communist state was disappointing, and she left in 1921. Soon after she wrote the book *My Disillusionment in Russia*. Goldman was allowed to return to the United States once – as a visitor – in 1934. She died in Canada in 1940. Louis Weitzenkorn would go on to write Hollywood screenplays, and publish a successful play in the 1930s called "The Five Star Final." Its featured character: an unscrupulous investigator. As for John Brady, his remaining years were just as mysterious as his life as a spy. According to family lore, he died of a heart attack while working as a New York City cab driver in the 1930's.