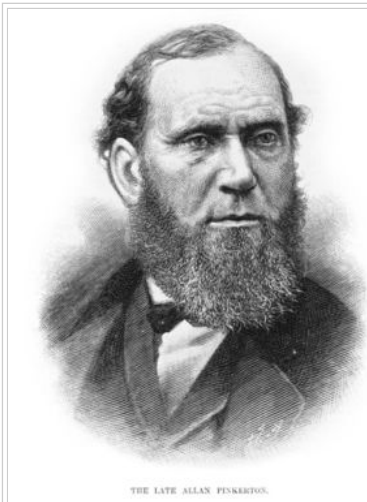


Allan Pinkerton

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Portrait of Allan Pinkerton from *Harper's Week*

Allan Pinkerton (August 25, 1819 – July 1, 1884) was a U.S. detective and spy, best known for creating the Pinkerton Agency, the first detective agency of the United States.

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Early life and career

Pinkerton was born in Glasgow, Scotland, to William Pinkerton and his wife Isabell, in 1819. The location of the house where he was

born is now occupied by the Glasgow Central Mosque. A cooper by trade, he was active in the Chartist movement as a young man. Disillusioned by the failure to win universal suffrage, Pinkerton emigrated to the United States in 1842, at the age of 23. In 1849 Pinkerton was appointed as the first detective in Chicago. In the 1850s, he partnered with Chicago attorney Edward Rucker in forming the North-Western Police Agency, later known as the Pinkerton Agency. Pinkerton's business insignia was a wide open eye with the caption "We Never Sleep." As the United States expanded in territory, rail transportation increased. Pinkerton's agency solved a series of train robberies during the 1850s, bringing Pinkerton first into contact with George McClellan and Abraham Lincoln

Civil War

Prior to his service with the Union Army, he developed several investigative techniques that



Pinkerton (left) with Abraham Lincoln

are still used today. Among them are "shadowing" (surveillance of a suspect) and "assuming a role" (undercover work). Following the outbreak of the Civil War, Pinkerton served as head of the Union Intelligence Service in 1861–62 and foiled an alleged assassination plot in Baltimore, Maryland, while guarding Abraham Lincoln on his way to his inauguration. His agents often worked undercover as Confederate soldiers and sympathizers, in an effort to gather military intelligence. Pinkerton served several undercover missions under the alias of Major E.J. Allen. Pinkerton was succeeded as Intelligence Service chief by Lafayette Baker. The Intelligence Service was the forerunner of the U.S. Secret Service.

Postbellum

Following Pinkerton's service with the Union Army, he continued his pursuit of train robbers and also sought to oppose labor unions. In 1872, the Spanish Government hired Pinkerton to help suppress a revolution in Cuba which

intended to end slavery and give citizens the right to vote.^[1]

Pinkerton died in Chicago, Illinois, on July 1, 1884, as a result of infection after biting his tongue when he slipped on a sidewalk. At the time of his death, he was working on a system that would centralize all criminal identification records, a database now maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Pinkerton is buried in Graceland Cemetery, Chicago. He is a member of the Military Intelligence Hall of Fame.

Legacy

After his death, the agency continued to operate and soon became a major force against the young labor movement developing in the United States and Canada. This effort tarnished the image of the Pinkertons for years. They were involved in numerous activities against labor during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including:

- The Homestead Strike (1891)
- The Pullman Strike (1894)
- The Wild Bunch Gang (1896)
- The Ludlow Massacre (1914)
- The La Follette Committee (1933-1937)

Many labor sympathizers accused the Pinkertons of inciting riots as a means of keeping employment or for other nefarious purposes. The Pinkertons' reputation was harmed by the organization's protection of replacement workers and business property of the major industrialists, including Andrew Carnegie.

In popular culture

- Pinkerton was so famous that for decades after his death, the word *Pinkerton* was a slang term for a private eye. Due to the Pinkerton Agency's conflicts with labor unions, the word *Pinkerton* remains in the vocabulary of labor organizers and union members as a derogatory reference to authority figures who side with management (in the

opinion of the union).

- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in his novel *The Valley of Fear*, described an adventure in which the main figure was a Pinkerton agent on undercover.
- Dashiell Hammett, author of *The Maltese Falcon* and pioneer of the hard-boiled detective literary genre, worked for years as a Pinkerton agent before becoming a successful writer.
- In the later James Bond novels, Felix Leiter works for a detective agency called Pinkerton's.
- In the novel *Girl in Blue* the main character is an operative for Pinkerton.
- A children's book series titled "Pinkerton" features a mystery solving dog.
- In an episode of the 1966 television series *The Time Tunnel* Allan Pinkerton is played by R.G. Armstrong in which, he is guarding president elect Abraham Lincoln and foils an assassination attempt with the help of the show's protagonists. A somewhat fictionalized version of a real event.
- In the Elton John song *Ballad of a Well-*

known Gun from the Tumbleweed Connection album, Bernie Taupin writes about an outlaw who is finally found as the Pinkertons inspect his train baggage.

Writings

Pinkerton produced numerous popular detective books, ostensibly based on his own exploits and those of his agents. Some were published after his death, and they are considered to have been more motivated by a desire to promote his detective agency than a literary endeavour. Most historians believe that Allan Pinkerton hired ghostwriters, but the books nonetheless bear his name and no doubt reflect his own views.

- *The Expressman and the Detective* (1874) (available online here)
- *The Detective and the Somnambulist; The Murderer and the Fortune Teller* (1875) (available online here)
- *Professional Thieves and the Detectives* (188?)
- *The Railroad Forger and the Detectives*

- (1886)
- *Claude Melnotte as a Detective, and Other Stories* (1875)
 - *The Mollie Maguires and the Detectives* (1877)
 - *Criminal Reminiscences and Detective Sketches*
 - *Cornered at Last: A Detective Story* (1892)
 - *Thirty Years a Detective* (1900)
 - *A Double Life and the Detectives* (1885)
 - *The Spy of the Rebellion* (1884)
 - *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives* (1878)
 - *Claude Melnotte as a Detective* (1875) (available online [here](#))
 - *A Life for a Life; or, The Detective's Triumph* (1886)
 - *Allan Pinkerton's Unpublished Story of the First Attempt on the Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1866)
 - *Bucholz and the Detectives* (1880) available at Project Gutenberg
 - *History and Evidence of the Passage of Abraham Lincoln from Harrisburg, Pa., to Washington, D.C., on the Twenty-second and Twenty-third of February,*

1861 (1868)

- *Mississippi Outlaws and the Detectives; Don Pedro and the Detectives; Poisoner and the Detectives* (1879)

See also

- American Civil War spies

References

1. ^ **Allan Pinkerton: The First Private Eye.** James Mackay Review author[s]: Stephen H. Norwood, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 85, No. 3. (Dec., 1998), pp. 1106-1107.

External links

- University of Chicago's library database
- University of Toronto's library database
- Detailed profile of Pinkerton
- Allan Pinkerton, in The Scotsman's Great Scots series
- A Brief History of the Pinkertons

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