

Histo4ry 225

Re: Nat Brandt, The Man Who Tried to Burn New York(1986)

History of Robert (Rob) Cobb Kennedy and the Confederate attempt to burn down the greater part of New York City in November 1864.

Early bio. stuff on Kennedy. He was a southerner. Flailed out of West Point after two years. Drifted for a time until the poutbreak of the Civil War. Joined up immediately with a Louisiana unit as a commissioned officer. (Lt.) He was wounded at the battle of Shiloh.

Made his way to Toronto where he was in touch w/ Jacob Thompson and the Reb secret service.

See xeroxed pagges 65-69; and 70-75

New York's vulnerability to fires. The city ws nearly razed three times by fire. In September 1776 at the time of the Revolutionary war fired destroyed many buildings along Broadway. The "Great Fire" of 1835 that blazed for 19 hours and took out about 700 buildings. Then again in July 1845, when 300 buildings were destroyed.

He notes the general disorganization, lack of water-pumping equipment, and the competition among the rival volunterr fore companies made up mostly of rowdy lay-abouts.

Notes that city was a haven for Southern refugees. There were anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 Southern refugees in the city at the time of the incendiariism. New York City was a political haven of anti-Republican and strong anti-Lincoln sentiment. Governor Seymour was a peace Democrat and Fernando Wood, the ~~mayor~~, was an opportunist who played Copperhead politics. NY city had a strong Copperhead element.

*Tammy Hall*

See xerox pages 88-91 Should deal with the outline of the NW Confederacy scheme laid out by Thompson in Canada.

This was to be tripped at the time of the November 1864 elections to frustrate Lincoln's reelection and the prosecution of the war.

See xeroxed pagges 95-99.

After Lincoln's reelection and the failure of the NWC plot to get off the gorund. Reason: That Union counterintelligence had word of the plan and sent General Butler with a compliment of Union troops to the city to prevent any efforts to sabatoge the elections. The New York Copperhead elements got cold feet and withdrew from the plot.

This left Rob Kennedy and a handful of Confederate operatives alone in NY. They decided to go ahead w/ the firing of the city. Brandt notes that as they were making their plans they were learning about Sherman's intentions of marching through Georgia and waging war against the entire southern population. This only sharpened their resolve. Indication of the growing viciousness of this destructive

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Might want to connect this terrorism with early attitudes about the way the war should be fought from Royster's Destructive War. They learned of Sherman's orders to 'forge liberally' and orders to destroy mills, houses, cotton gins, etc. Appeared in the NY TIMES.

The plot was hatched on Thangsing Day. Each of the six men had for hotels assigned to them. The thing that saved the city was the failure of the terrorists to supply oxygen to the starting fires-- "Greek Fire"--phosphorous in a carbon matrix. the "Greek Fire" was prepared by a chemist in Washington and brought to New York. The fires were started in hotel rooms but windows were not open and so after the fire started smoldering in the bed cloths and piled furniture it sputtered out in most cases. No one lost their life. And the declared damage was about \$10,000.

See xeroxed page 110 for the hotels on the "hit list."

What did Richmond know of the plot. Apparently Richmond was well informed and made no effort to stop it. Brandt notes correspondence bet. Thompson in Toronto and Benjamin in Richmond. Richmond denied, of course, any connection with the scheme.

The remainder of the book deals with the Union's efforts to catch the conspirators. Kennedy was caught when he returned to the states in an effort to get back to the Confederacy and the war. He was tried and found guilty and sentenced to be hung. He was executed at Ft. Lafayette in New York City on May 25, 1865. The following day General Kirby Smith surrendered his trans-Mississippi Army. This makes Rob Kennedy to be the last Reb soldier executed by the Federal Govt. in the Civil War. (Was he executed after Wirz?)