

Grand Opening of Little Mystery Box

By Jack Viets

A safe deposit box that supposedly contained a mysterious packet belonging to the dead driver of the Greyhound "gamblers' special" in which 13 persons died near Sacramento 14 months ago was opened yesterday in a small Wisconsin bank.

"It created a helluva stir in our town," reported Willis Miller, editor of The Star Observer in Hudson, Wis. "The place was swarming with TV cameras and newsmen.

"A helicopter brought in some attorneys and people kept walking and driving by the bank."

Inside the First National Bank, a handy bank official armed himself with an electric drill and descended into a basement vault with Superior Court Judge Joseph W. Hughes of St. Croix county.

At precisely 1:30 p.m. — the time set by the judge — the drill began to whine against the lock of the box rented by W.B. Lee, a shadowy figure who has been trying to keep the contents of the box secret with court actions, letters and telephone calls he claimed he was making from London.

Lee had contended unsuccessfully through his attorney, Robert Milavetz of Minneapolis, that his box contained only a will and some love letters that were his very personal and private property.

And he said he had never

met the bus driver — Douglas Fay Moore of Hayward — and had never received "a thick-brown envelope" from him as Greyhound attorneys and insurance investigators had suspected.

The drill ground through the lock. The judge looked through the box and walked back upstairs to face attorneys for Greyhound, representatives from the Sacramento County Coroner's office and Moore's family.

"There was nothing in the box pertaining to Douglas Moore," he said.

"We came all this way for nothing," said Moore's sister, Joyce McGowan of Hayward, who had journeyed to Hudson with Moore's mother.

Later in the day, Milavetz talked briefly to The Chronicle about the mysterious W. B. Lee.

"It's all right now," he said. "It's out and he's going to change his cover anyway."

W. B. Lee, he said, is really Dimitri C. Tchkotoua, the son of Prince Nicolas Tchkotoua, a member of the royal family from Georgia — now part of the Soviet Union — who managed to escape during the Russian Revolution.

The family were social lions in San Francisco until the mid-1950s, when they moved to Lausanne, where his mother, the former Carol Marmon, the only daughter of Indianapolis millionaire

auto manufacturer Howard C. Marmon, died in 1966.

His client speaks eight languages, he said, and has what Milavetz conceded is "a very sensitive" post with the U.S. government.

Milavetz said his overseas client believes he got caught up in the Greyhound intrigue because the annual letter from the Wisconsin bank about the safe deposit box he had rented there since 1960 was apparently filched from a Berkeley Post Office box he also maintains.

"My client thinks someone who had something against Greyhound started this hoax."

But the attorney said he plans to continue his \$500,000 invasion of privacy suit for "my client" against Greyhound.

Tax collectors, telephone company investigators, narcotics agents and big bank sleuths were also in attendance when the box was opened yesterday, he noted.

"His right of privacy was really violated."

"We've heard some wild ones about W.B. Lee," said a Greyhound official yesterday, "but we haven't heard the one with the Russian prince angle yet."

Greyhound faces \$40 million in damage suits resulting from the crash of Moore's gamblers' special.