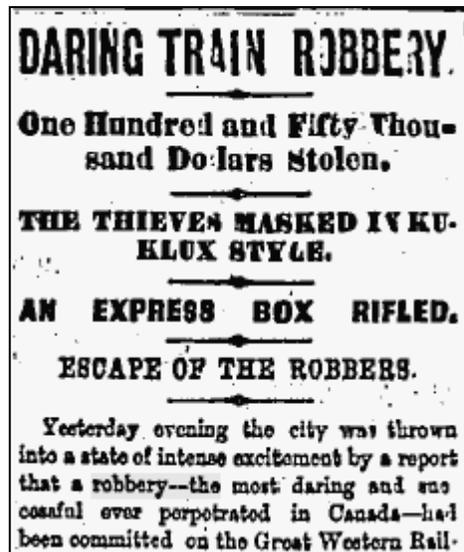


## *The Darker Side: A Dubious Distinction (Train Robbery of 1874)*

By Suzanna Elmazi



*The Daily Globe,  
November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1873*

Four other men arrived simultaneously through the front door of the baggage and express car. Two men seized the baggage-man Montgomery; he was gagged, tied and thrown to the ground. The other two men swiftly attacked the express messenger, Dundon, who was an employee of the American Express Company. Dundon had not noticed their entry into the car as he was occupied "counting his money and making up his accounts." Dundon tried to resist but was quickly "knocked senseless", bound and gagged, before he could retrieve his revolver. The perpetrators then seized the keys from Dundon's pocket and opened the iron safe. According to newspaper accounts, the thieves "took everything to their liking".

The investigation commenced immediately, but with few clues. The baggage porter stated that he saw some men standing by the train upon its arrival at Port Credit, but had not seen them upon departure. When the train was inspected, it was discovered that the bell rope between the engine and the baggage and express car had been deliberately severed. It was suspected that one of the culprits cut the line before the train was en route, either at Hamilton or at Port Credit. As a result, no alarm could have been triggered.

Nothing like this had ever happened in Canada before. On the evening of Friday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1874, the American Express Special, a train travelling along the Great Western Railway, left the Hamilton Railway Station at 5 o'clock in the evening, and arrived, on time, at Port Credit. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, until the train arrived at Union Station missing some \$150,000 worth of money and valuables, and with two employees gagged and bound.

The perpetrators had worn carefully crafted disguises; white smocks drawn over the entirety of their bodies and holes cut out for their eyes mirrored the dressings of the Klu Klux Klan. One man, presumably the guard, came from the rear door of the baggage and express car. His

role was to allow for no escape from the baggage and express car, either forward to the engine or to the rear and the passenger cars.



*The Daily Globe,  
November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1873*

Montgomery, the baggage man, and Dundon, the express manager, each had a slightly different version of the culprit's escape; Montgomery relayed that the culprits had jumped from the train as it slowed down on the outskirts of Toronto near the crossing of the Etobicoke Creek, while Dundon indicated that they jumped from the train near the Stanley Barracks (CNE grounds).

Despite a vigorous investigation, the perpetrators were never caught. The events created "more than usual excitement" amongst the public and even inspired many "heroic" citizens to aid in the search.

Toronto police detectives and Toronto Township (historic Mississauga) constables attempted, in vain, for several weeks to track down the thieves, without success, and indeed without any leads. It was believed the one man may have cut the bell rope alarm while the train was stopped in Hamilton, and that the robbers had entered the train, hidden and unseen, when the train had stopped in Port Credit, and then exited the train as it passed through the Lakeview area of historic Mississauga. The culprits were never caught, and the money and valuables were never found. The question remains: who undertook this brazen heist, the first such train robbery in Canada, and were they residents of historic Mississauga? In part and in a fashion, Mississauga has the dubious distinction of being home to the first train robbery in Canada.