

Montevallo Historical Press

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Press Release

New Book Tells The Story Of A Great American Detective Agency

Author John Velke Clears The Air, Transforms Thugs Into Heroes

Montevallo, Alabama – March 1, 1998 – *Baldwin-Felts Detectives, Inc.*, a recently published book by John A. Velke, is the first full-length account of a famous turn-of-the-century detective agency. Over 20 years of meticulous research is evident in this hardcover book about early private detective work in the United States. Filled with details of many famous criminal cases, and the techniques detectives used to solve them, it is a must read for all true crime buffs.

The Baldwin-Felts agency, based in Virginia, was regularly hired by coal mine owners and railroads to act as their private police force. Misportrayed in books and movies for decades, the agency is probably best known for its involvement in the Matewan Massacre of 1920, in which seven Baldwin-Felts agents were killed after peacefully evicting miners from their rented housing. Author Velke uses primary source material and eyewitness accounts to debunk once and for all the popular version of this tragic historical event.

Interestingly, the role of the detective agency in ferreting out German secret agents in the United States during World War I is described for the first time. Chapters on the Hatfield & McCoy feud and the shooting-up of the town of Brownsville, Texas, by soldiers belonging to the United States Army provide readers with an uncommon glimpse of the private detective's place in the history of American law enforcement.

Included also are details regarding early investigative techniques and the development of certain types of forensic evidence. Although his role has not been widely recognized until now, William G. Baldwin was a key figure in the adoption of the fingerprint method of identification in the United States. Velke also tells the story of the role rabbits played in the identification of blood stains as evidence.

A Virginia newspaper, the Roanoke Record, described Detective Baldwin in 1890 in this fashion: "Gentlemanly in manners, quiet in demeanor, slenderly built, he is the last man who would be taken for the famous detective who has faced the pistols and Winchesters of the most desperate mountaineers and killed and captured some of the most notorious desperadoes of the age." Now, more than a hundred years later, Velke writes an informative and entertaining account of men who performed dangerous work in dangerous times.

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Baldwin-Felts Detectives. Inc. Written and published by John A. Velke. 310 pages; includes 12 pages of photographs, 6 appendices, endnotes, bibliography, and a comprehensive index. Library quality binding, 6.25 x 9.25 inches, printed on acid free paper.

Available for \$30.00 + \$5.00 shipping from Montevallo Historical Press, Inc., Davenport, Iowa. Ohio residents should add 6% sales tax; Iowa residents should add 7% sales tax.

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