

Little Tales of Robbery

By Morris Van Veen

II.

THIS is the story of John Gottlieb Wendel, a cruel despot. Born in Egypt or Turkey? . . . No, no, right here in New York.

John Gottlieb II, was the son of John G. Wendel, who laid the foundation of an \$80,000,000 land value ownership, 95 per cent. of which was located in New York City. When the last of the family, Ella Wendel, died in 1931, the estate was receiving \$2,000,000 a year. This poor little woman was unaware of her vast fortune. In her last years her only interests were a dog, named Toby, and 125 old trunks.

John G. Wendel I, was a partner in the fur and real estate deals of John Jacob Astor. John G. Wendel had a vision that if he invested in lots along Broadway, or streets adjacent thereto, his and his children's fortune would be assured. He knew, of course, that the community neglected to collect the annual increment, created by population. When he died in 1851 he left \$3,000,000 to his family.

Some 68 years ago, as a lad I was located at 180 Broadway. Directly opposite me was the office of John G. Wendel II, 175 Broadway. Even on bleak days he wore an old alpaca coat with one pocket ripped out, and carpet slippers. In later days I saw him with shoes having two-inch soles, and a straw hat with a pencil protruding. Many a time I have seen him go down the beer basement under Benedict, the Jewelers, 171 Broadway, and order a ham sandwich and a glass of beer, and lay down 10 cents.

Now after 68 years the only change on this block has been the removal of an iron staircase which led up to the parlor floor of 175 Broadway; no doubt a city ordinance compelled the removal.

It was about this time that the John G. Wendel II, edict was proclaimed, "*Never sell, never mortgage, never improve.*" And all lessees of his properties besides paying the rent, were forced to pay taxes as well.

When it was rumored that the Hudson Tube was to be placed one block west of 175 Broadway—the Wendel property—those "on the inside" besieged him to lease, sell, or rent, but he said "No" to the most flattering offers. He wouldn't have the tube there; the land was finally condemned by the State. He fought the issue bitterly, but the public interests won this time, and a beautiful and most

useful structure was built on the site. Millions from outside New York City now enjoy its convenience.

I now move you up to the area bounded by 35th and 40th Streets, Broadway and Seventh Avenue, nearly all of which Wendel owned. For 65 years a lumber yard has been located in this congested district, peopled by the women's clothing industry. Majestic buildings surround this yard, which would disgrace a mining town.

Mr. J. E. Gilbert, who built 501 Seventh Avenue, made an offer to continue an addition that would cover the lumber site—the Wendel property. He was prepared to build a \$7,000,000 structure, but was defeated in his purpose. Now opposite this site of Gilbert's attempted venture, from 1389 to 1409 Broadway, between 38th and 39th Streets, is a block of shanties occupied by the Regal Shoe Store and sundry small shops. The block, if given a shove from either end would fall to the ground. The late A. E. Lefcourt, a great builder in this locality, offered to put up an \$8,500,000 building, but Wendel again said "No"—he refused to build higher than six stories, because he opposed furnishing elevators to tenants.

It is now about 1913. At the northwest corner of 50th Street and Broadway there was for many years an unoccupied building of five or six stories. An individual, who wanted to locate a business there, called in his realtor. The latter, after diligent effort, secured the leasehold. The entrepreneur was to pay \$50,000 a year rent for 21 years, and all taxes, repairs, and renovation. One of the important things that the lessee desired was an electric sign to cost \$25,000. The contract had been awarded; it was to be the greatest electric sign in the city. When the realtor and the lessee read the lease, they discovered that the contract for the sign was not included. Whereupon the realtor returned to Wendel, and tried to impress him with the importance of the sign. Wendel leaned over, took the lease, and to the realtor's consternation, tore it to bits.

Imagine the chagrin of the realtor whose four months' effort had been in vain; also the exchange of recriminations between the sign maker and the prospective lessee; a great deal of labor and material had gone into the sign.

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try as well as many colleges and universities have brought thousands of people to an acceptance of his ideology and an understanding of his corrective proposals.

The problem now at hand is to broaden the public understanding of this ideology, and carry it into reality. The movement must accept the conditions at hand; it must recognize that people are afraid of change, and that its task is one of leading all kinds of people with varying viewpoints and experiences and ideals. The demands

of people are factors which must be respected, right or wrong, and which cannot be changed either by ignoring or ridiculing them. People must be worked with—not against, and each segment of the transitional bridge must have the support of the people, or will fall.

Taking evident existent evils as a basis for the movement towards a free market economy in all its aspects, I offer this concept of effective and expedient Transitional Aims as segments of the bridge to an ideal society, in the following chart:

WORLD PROBLEMS IN PERSPECTIVE (READ ACROSS THE PAGE)

PRESENT CONDITIONS	INTELLIGENT TRANSITION	ULTIMATE AIMS
International power politics and World War II.	World Federation, patrolled by an International Quota Force, having no jurisdiction over national internal affairs.	World democracy with an international Bill of Rights.
Tariffs, franchises, patents, special privilege and monopolies, including monopoly of natural resources.	Reciprocal trade agreements, patent law revision, anti-trust enforcement.	A Free Market Economy.
Anti-social lobbies and political pressure groups.	Education of the people in their functions, rights and responsibilities in democracy.	True representation through Initiative, Referendum, and Proportional Representation.
Tax policy which discourages private enterprise and curtails production and consumption.	Abolition of hidden taxes; adoption of taxes based on benefits received and ability to pay.	Elimination of taxes; restriction of government revenue to the collection of socially created annual lease-value of land.
Indifferent and haphazard development of communities and highways caused by land speculation.	Restriction of the use of land in accordance with the recommendations of county and other authorized Planning Boards.	Achievement of the best social usage of land.

The author welcomes criticism and suggestions.

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Now I take you to the mansion erected about 1857, where the Wendels lived and died, 452 Fifth Avenue, northwest corner of 39th Street. Up to the day Ella Wendel died there were no electric lights, or any of the modern conveniences. In fact, the bathtubs were put in years after the building was erected. Here John G. Wendel II reigned supreme, and his word was law. None of the opposite sex was permitted to see his sisters. However, Mr. L. A. Swope married one of them. Another sister ran away when she was close to 50 years old, and upon her return, John G. barred her entrance. Her threats to bring him to court frightened him and he was forced to give her shelter. Two other sisters died in an insane asylum.

A couple of my acquaintances, seeing the possibilities of 452 Fifth Avenue, the northwest corner of 39th Street and Fifth Avenue, as a business location, called on the married sister, Mrs. Swope, and offered \$1,000,000 cash for a leasehold of 21

years on a lot about 54 by 100 feet. A \$2,000,000 building would be erected on that part of the premises which was the carriage way. The annual taxes on the land and building would be paid to the city by the lessee. If after 21 years the lease was not renewed, the building would then belong to the Wendels.

Mrs. Swope thought the proposition was reasonable, and submitted it to her sister, Ella. Ella replied: "How dare you consider such a proposition! We need that spot for our dog, TOBY to play on."*

In this tale of psychopathy, society was denied a total of \$17,500,000 of production—useful and beautiful new buildings, which would have provided work for people all over the world; denied because we failed to observe the principles of justice and equity.

* Toby's play-yard is now the site of the modern Kress ten cent store.—ED.