

W. J. BURNS DEAD; FAMOUS DETECTIVE

Former New Yorker Stricken at
His Home in Sarasota, Fla.,
at the Age of 70.

ONCE SECRET SERVICE HEAD

Career Began in 1885 With Unrav-
eling of Tally-Sheet Forgeries
in Ohio Election.

SARASOTA, Fla., April 14 (P).—
William J. Burns, world-famed de-
tective, died at his home here to-
night.

Mr. Burns, who was 70 years old,
suffered a heart attack. Death re-
sulted within a short time.

He had been here since last Fall.
During the last five years he had
spent his Winters in Sarasota. He
also had a home in New York.

William John Burns as a detective
was a figure in the annals of inter-
national crime equal, if not superior,
in renown to his romantic compeers
of fiction—Sherlock Holmes, M.
Lecoq and Arsene Lupin.

A master in the methods of in-
trigue, his career in the detection
of crime began with the exposure of
the Ohio tally-sheets fraud in 1885
and extended through his incum-
bency as director of the Bureau of
Investigation—familiarily known as
the "Secret Service"—of the Depart-
ment of Justice, from 1921 to 1924.
Through this period of years—years
in which crime became a "system"
of large domestic and international
proportions—Mr. Burns was connect-
ed in some manner with most of the
important mystery cases in this
country, and, as the head of an in-
ternational detective agency, traced
the activities of criminals and
"rings" throughout the world.

Born in Baltimore on Oct. 19, 1861,
the son of an Irish merchant tailor,
young Burns was taken by his par-
ents at an early age to Columbus,
Ohio, where he was educated in pub-
lic schools and business college be-
fore joining his father in business.
He delighted in solving puzzles and
had the opportunity to gratify his
taste on a large scale when his
father became Police Commissioner
of Columbus and he was allowed to
assist the department in a private
capacity.

First Success as Youth in Ohio.

His first marked success came with
the solution of the tally-sheet for-
geries in his State by which a group
of men were trying to place a Sen-
ator in the Ohio Legislature. His
local fame was so immediate, since
the best trained investigators in the
State had failed on the case, that the
service of young Burns was sought
by many firms. He accepted an in-
vitation to assist in the unraveling
of the "arson mystery" in St. Louis,
and soon obtained the conviction of
Jim French, a man who had ter-
rorized the city for months and was
implicated in so many cases of arson
that even the police had lost count of
them.

In 1889 Burns received the offer of
a position in the United States Secret
Service, and upon his acceptance, was
appointed to the headquarters at St.
Louis. In his new position, the young
detective took particular interest in
the apprehension of counterfeiters.
After a series of minor successes he
achieved national fame in 1896 with
the solution of the "Costa Rican
case," in which a group of Central
American revolutionists were at-
tempting to discredit their country
and gain funds by counterfeiting
Costa Rican money in the United
States.

Mr. Burns also went to work
against a famous counterfeiting gang
with headquarters presumably in
New York. By dint of ingenuity he
was able to land Bill Brockway, head
of the gang, who had prepared him-
self for his nefarious trade by study-
ing chemistry at Harvard University.
He followed the apprehension of
Brockway with the disclosure of an
active group in Philadelphia which
was engaged in turning out Monroe-
head silver \$100 certificates through
tracing the source of the bills to two
men in prison.

Assigned to Land-Fraud Cases.

The golden age of Burns's career,
however, came in the first decades
of the new century. In 1903 he re-
signed from the Secret Service and,
on appointment from Secretary
Hitchcock of the Interior Depart-
ment, went to take charge of the
Oregon, Washington and California
land-fraud cases. These swindles,
which were resulting in the loss of
several millions of acres of govern-
ment lands, had been an apparent
enigma to other government agents,
but Mr. Burns, on sifting the facts
thoroughly, established that several
Federal, State and city officials were
implicated, including Senator John
H. Mitchell of Oregon.

After this success Mr. Burns was
called to San Francisco, where a ré-
gime of graft and political corrup-
tion under the "boss," Abe Ruef,
was in ruthless control of municipal
affairs. His investigations covered a
period of three years, during which
he resorted to all the tricks of his
trade, including the method of
"counter espionage," to obtain final
evidence and a subsequent conviction
of Ruef, former Mayor Schmitz and
sixteen members of the city's Board
of Supervisors.

His most glowing acclaim, however,
came with the apprehension of the
McNamara gang, members of the
National Association of Structural
Iron and Bridge Workers, who were
proved to have been responsible for
the blasting of the office of The Los
Angeles Times on Oct. 1, 1910.

Advocated Use of "Common Sense."

Throughout his career Mr. Burns
always maintained that "there is no
such thing as mystery if you will
only use a little common sense." As
a result of his success in the Mc-
Namara case he was generally hailed
as "the greatest detective, certainly
the only detective of genius, whom
this country has produced."

In 1909 Mr. Burns joined with his
son, the late George E. Burns, in es-
tablishing the Burns National Detec-
tive Agency, which later became in-
ternational in its scope and through
which he solved thousands of private
and public mysteries. He was prom-
inent in the Atlantic City and De-
troit municipal graft cases in 1912,
had a part in the investigation of the
murder of Herman Rosenthal in New
York in the same year and was out-
standing in presenting evidence to
prove the innocence of Leo Frank in
Georgia in 1914. In the latter in-
stance he was almost killed by a mob
in Marietta, Ga., when he went there
during the height of the agitation.

In 1921, after his activities in
vainly attempting to solve the Wall



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WILLIAM J. BURNS.

Street explosion of Sept. 16, 1920, he
was appointed by Attorney Gen-
eral Daugherty as director of the
Bureau of Investigation, succeeding
William J. Flynn. In this office Mr.
Burns had charge of many investi-
gations, including an inquiry into
the activities of the Ku Klux Klan
in 1921. On his acceptance of the
post he resigned his position as head
of the Burns Agency. On his re-
tirement from the post in 1925 he
was mentioned as a possible Police
Commissioner for New York.

Sentenced to Fifteen Days in Jail.

After the discovery of shadowing
of the jury in the Fall-Sinclair crim-
inal conspiracy trial in 1927, Mr.
Burns was convicted of complicity in
contempt of court and sentenced to
serve fifteen days in jail, but was
freed by the Supreme Court in June
of this year when it was found that
the overt act was missing so far as
he was concerned.

Mr. Burns was frequently afoul of
the law himself in his activities,
being charged on many occasions
with activities in violation of citi-
zens' rights. In the McNamara case
he was marked by many as an
enemy of organized labor; and in
1917 he was found guilty of commit-
ting a misdemeanor for entering a
law office in this city and copying
letters which he turned over to J. P.
Morgan & Co.

His views and opinions on the sup-
pression of crime and the mainte-
nance of efficient police service were
widely accepted and he was regarded
as an authority on the subject
throughout the nation.