

village view

by Andrea Leonard

This is Part II of an article concerning hidden services banks provide their customers and the community. The story began in mid-1977 when unusual activity in a customer's account aroused suspicions of personnel in the Osterville Office of Cape Cod Bank and Trust company.

It was nearly a year from the time Mrs. Rosamund Fuller, Loan Officer at the Osterville Branch, first became concerned that Special Investigator Frank F. Burns, Office of the Commissioner of Insurance, 100 Cambridge Street, Boston, presented the case to the Grand Jury on March 21st, 1978. A true bill was returned with twenty-four indictments against Keneally and Vicini, principals of the Yankee Insurance Agency of Sandwich, Mass.

When police appeared at their office with a warrant for the arrest of the agents, only one could be found, the other had skipped town. At a later date, however, he surfaced in San Francisco where he was apprehended and returned to Barnstable. The two men, who were subsequently found guilty, face up to five years in prison.

One of the bank's depositors has lost nearly \$10,000; many other people have been cheated of smaller but significant amounts of money.

Had it not been for the vigilance and persistence of Mrs. Fuller and Mrs. Rodriques, their scheme might have netted many thousands of dollars more to these white-collar criminals who preyed upon the helpless and attempted to sate their unquenchable greed by sucking dry the financial resources of the trusting and the innocent.

Had it not been for modern computer systems, even the watchful care of dedicated bank personnel could not have proven positively the activity of the various accounts involved.

This case is not a single isolated incident. Other attempts to defraud have been foiled as well. For example, one depositor habitually keys his checks, indicating by a simple code the amounts for which they are written...under ten dollars, under a hundred, or under a thousand dollars.

An alert Hyannis Office teller, familiar with that customer's code, recognized an altered check, written for five but raised to fifty dollars when he noticed the code was inconsistent with the amount of the check.

At another time a fraudulent check which had been certified was caught in the Osterville Office even though it appeared to be perfectly good. The check was in the amount of ten thousand dollars. Only a trained person, constantly on the watch, could have spotted the fraud and prevented the consummation of the transaction. As a result of the teller's quick action, participants in a stolen-car ring are serving jail terms.

Con-artists today work small-town banks like our local ones. They know small banks have fewer sophisticated techniques for fighting crime. Big city banks are film-monitored, patrolled by armed guards, and require identification of all customers. Employees make no attempt to recognize individuals or learn people's names.

Smaller banks like those on the Cape, on the other hand, train their personnel to know who depositors are and to recognize signs of trouble in each customer's account. It's these personal touches that make banking on Cape Cod friendly and agreeable.

People who victimize the unwary, the elderly, and the innocent are a sharp lot. They are smooth, sophisticated and suave. They are excellent actors, pretending to care about the people they mark to dupe. And they choose unerringly, aiming for the weakest, those least able to defend themselves.

Even though a victim may eventually suspect he's being taken, he finds it difficult to escape. He may become frightened since veiled threats may be made. Once he becomes doubtful, he presumes he's dealing with a criminal. It's natural to be apprehensive about criminals.

Furthermore, a person who begins to believe he's been taken in by crook may find himself on the defensive, ashamed of his own ingenuousness and participation. His inclination is to hide what he recognizes too late as stupidity in allowing himself to be tricked. A person who's been taken advantage of and exploited hates to admit it. He wants to convince himself his doubts are groundless, and therefore hides from himself the painful truth. He dreads being made a laughing-stock.

Bankers, family attorneys, police officers, reputable professional men and women who may have been in business for many years, including most insurance agents, are all people who've proven their integrity. They stand ready to help protect the gullible. They consider it their duty and a public service to keep a weather-eye cocked to recognize attempts to defraud.

Obtaining proof isn't easy for a bank when all the pieces must be put together from its own records. A bank can do an even better job with the cooperation of its depositors. Should you suspect you've been cheated, or should you be considering an investment about which you may have qualms, go for advice and help to those you know you can trust.

They won't belittle you. Every effort will be made to help you. You'll be understood and your situation will be appreciated; these are people who are well-versed in the many ways

others can be victimized. Don't be afraid of them. They are there to help you. Perhaps, if you've delayed in asking their advice, they won't be able to help you recoup your losses; but they can prevent you from experiencing even greater ones.

Banks are more, far more, than a place to keep your money until you're ready to spend some of it. Local bank personnel know and want to know each of their customers; they care what's happening to every one of us; they worry about us when we're in difficulty.

It's good to know there's a vigilant army of people in our banks who form an extension of the law-enforcement branch of our government. To be safe from evil forces, we need all the protection and safeguards we can muster.

All of us.