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Arrest in Hyde Museum Robbery Attempt

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SOUTH GLEN FALLS, NY —An elaborate plan to steal \$50 million in art treasures from the Hyde Museum in Warren Street got fouled up by holiday traffic this week, police said. The alleged attempt to commit what would have been a major art theft failed, according to police, when the alleged would-be thieves were delayed because of heavy traffic and got to the museum eight minutes after it had closed.

South Glens Falls Police Chief Richard Noonan said his department arrested two men on felony charges of kidnapping in the bizarre case. Arraigned in Moreau Justice Court were: Brian Michael McDevitt, 20, of 55 Orchard Road, Swampscott, Mass., who had been known locally for several months as Paul S. Vanderbilt of 500 Park Ave., New York City, and Michael B. Morey, 30, of 12B John Clendon Road, Queensbury. Both men were ordered held in Saratoga County jail without bail for a court appearance next week.

Police did not release many details of the scheme but information from other sources combined with police reports indicated the theft of one of the finest small-museum art collections in the country had been plotted for a number of months. McDevitt had visited the Hyde on several occasions, and, sources said, had been in this area since at least last spring. Posing as a free-lance writer and a member of the wealthy Vanderbilt family, sources said, he made several visits to the museum.

At one point, sources said, he "donated" three IBM electric typewriters to the museum and promised to get a computer system. Questioned about the typewriters, which museum officials discovered had been rented in New York [City], his response reportedly was to arrive at the museum in a Rolls-Royce, complete with uniformed driver, to take the typewriters back. Glens Falls police, the state police Bureau of Criminal Investigation and the FBI have been involved in the case ever since museum officials became suspicious.

Meanwhile, McDevitt, using the Vanderbilt name, continued to live in the Lake George area as well as spending time at a home in Glens Falls. Police report Monday evening someone called Federal Air Express and asked that a truck be sent to a garage at 22 Saratoga Ave., South Glens Falls, to pick up a package. Police said the suspects had rented the garage from its owners. A van driven by Mary ----- W-----, 26, of Watervliet, arrived late Monday. When the driver left the van to pick up the package, she was allegedly confronted by a man with a gun who forced her back into the van and made her drive to Oakland Avenue in Glens Falls, which runs parallel to Warren Street and behind the Hyde Collection. She was handcuffed, her mouth and eyes were taped, and she was knocked out by an ether-soaked rag. Police said the van was then driven up to the museum but it had closed for the day and the suspects could not enter, so they left and drove around the area. Shortly after 8 p.m. Monday, the woman and the van

reportedly were abandoned. The frightened woman then drove back to her main office at Albany County Airport and told her supervisor what had happened to her. State police at Loudonville then were alerted, and they notified South Glens Falls police, who had jurisdiction since the kidnapping occurred there.

Chief Noonan said he immediately began to investigate with Sgt. Kevin Judd of his department, BCI Investigator James Babcock and Glens Falls Police Detective Guy R. Fiore. Police arrested McDevitt at 2 p.m. Tuesday in Glens Falls and he was later arraigned on a charge of kidnapping. Morey was arrested at 8 a.m. Wednesday at his home, and later that day arraigned on the same charge.

Police said the investigation is continuing and other charges, including conspiracy to steal valuable Hyde art pieces, may be lodged later. Meanwhile, it was learned the suspects were armed with a pellet gun and carried a quantity of ether and rags, apparently to use once they entered the museum. One police official said the plan "could have worked if they had gotten there before the museum closed."

Reportedly, the plan was to take much of the Hyde's art treasures in the Federal Express van. Early indications of the total value of what might have been loaded in the truck were estimated at between \$30 million and \$50 million, probably closer to the higher figure. Several residents said they had met McDevitt, posing as Vanderbilt. He had driven around Glens Falls in a Bentley automobile, rented a Rolls Royce from time to time, and spent large sums of money. At one point, it was learned, McDevitt had a person arrested after the person came here from Massachusetts to try to collect money from him.

One person told The Post-Star that McDevitt represented himself as a writer who had published in such national magazines as Harper's. It was learned he had made visits to City Hall and had tried to obtain plans for the Hyde from an office there and had sought information about the museum's sophisticated alarm system, saying he was planning to donate a large sum of money to the Hyde but only if the place were secure.

Police agencies said since the investigation was continuing, they did not want to comment on McDevitt, but several acknowledged they had known about him and there had been inquiries made of the Vanderbilt family in New York which revealed he was an imposter. "There was no doubt they had planned this for a long time," a police official said Wednesday. "If they hadn't been delayed by the holiday traffic they might have pulled it off." Fred Fisher, director of The Hyde, confirmed he had spoken to McDevitt several times, that he had passed himself off as a writer and as a Vanderbilt, and that Fisher became suspicious of him and had notified police.