

AUTHOR IS NOW IN A REAL BIND

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Until now, Edward Renehan Jr. has been known as the author of six highly regarded history books and former head of the Theodore Roosevelt Association.

Yesterday, in a Garden City courtroom, he found himself cast in a new role: accused thief. Renehan was charged in Nassau County Court with stealing an important Roosevelt letter owned by the association and possessing a forged document designed to cover up the theft.

Prosecutors say that between March 2005 and July 2006 Renehan stole, from the association's headquarters in Muttontown, a letter written in 1918 by TR about the death of his son Quentin in World War I. The letter has since been returned to the association.

Prosecutors say Renehan tried to sell it through the Swann Galleries auction house in Manhattan. At the time, he was the association's acting executive director.

Renehan's attorney, Peter Brill, of Manhattan, provided a glimpse of his defense, saying Renehan was diagnosed last summer with bipolar disorder about the same time his mother died. News of his indictment shocked historians and some Roosevelt family members.

"He has my sympathy," said TR biographer Edmund Morris. "And the Theodore Roosevelt Association has my congratulations on regaining something irreplaceable."

Tweed Roosevelt, a great grandson of TR, said that if the charges are found to be true, they would amount to "a major betrayal of trust. Theft of important historical documents by a trusted employee is disgraceful."

New York-based magazine editor Philip Roosevelt, a first cousin three times removed of the 26th president and TRA board member, said "it sounds completely at odds with the Ed that I have known."

Renehan was released without bail by County Court Judge John Kase. His next court date is April 21.

Renehan, 51, faces up to 7 years in prison after being charged with third-degree grand larceny, third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument: a letter purportedly signed by his predecessor, John A. Gable, transferring ownership of the letter to Renehan.

William Wallace, deputy bureau chief of the Nassau district attorney's Government and Consumer Frauds Bureau, said "the investigation is continuing" to determine whether other artifacts were stolen.

In a separate case, the National Park Service is probing the theft and sale of three letters, two written by George Washington and one by Abraham Lincoln. They were apparently filched from the association's collection at the Theodore Roosevelt birthplace site in Manhattan. Renehan consigned those letters to Swann Galleries in Manhattan, where they were sold for almost \$100,000 over the past few years, according to sources familiar with the case.

After yesterday's arraignment, association president James Bruns said the association wants to retrieve the three letters sold by Swann "plus recovering other items that may be in the defendant's possession."

Brill said he didn't think Renehan had any other items.

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