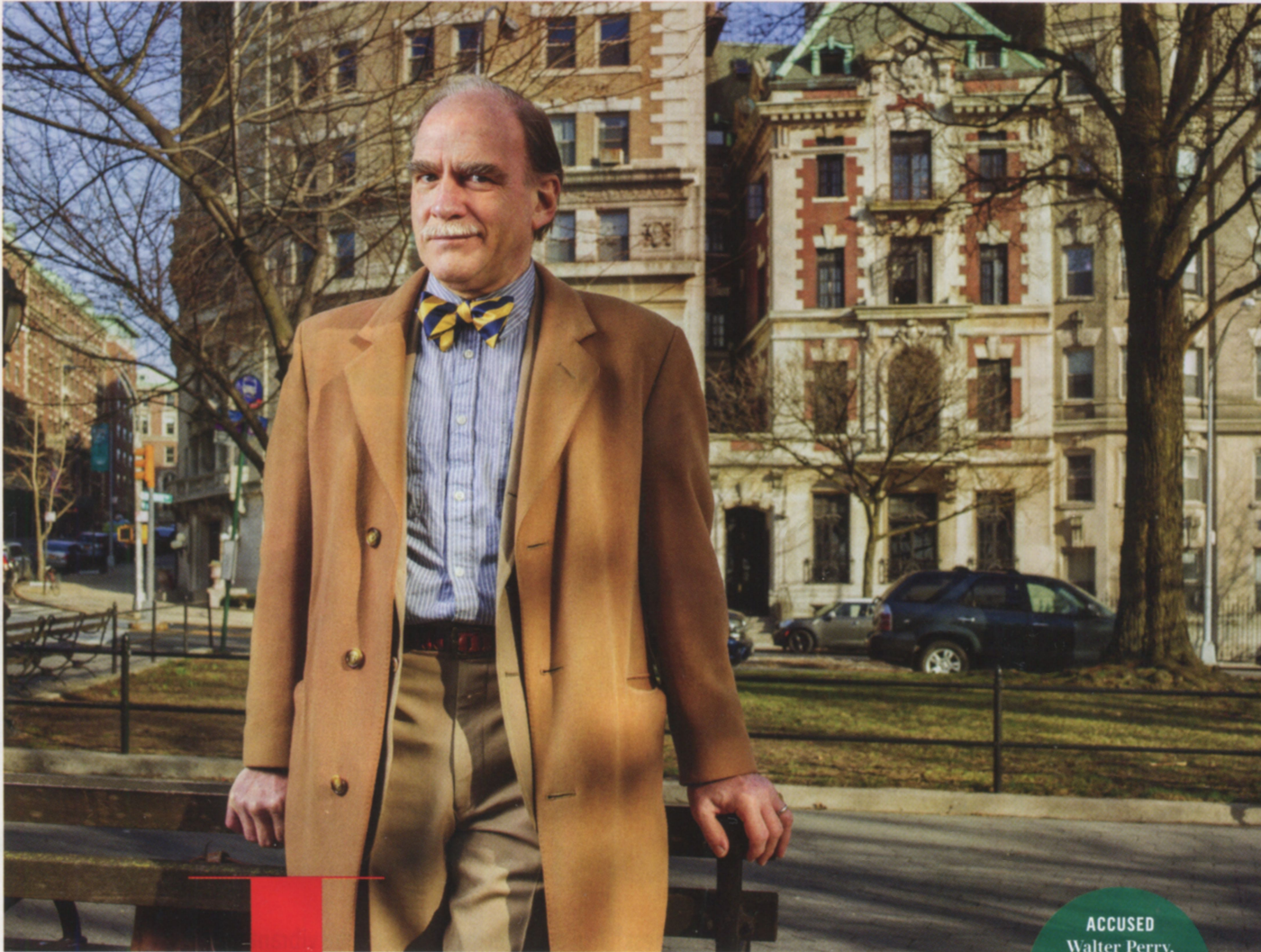


HALL OF SECRETS

After devoting much of his life to Saint Anthony Hall—Columbia University's secretive high-Wasp society—Walter Perry was convicted of stealing \$650,000 from its coffers. Did he betray his club, or was something else at play?

By JOHN SEDGWICK



ACCUSED
Walter Perry, former St. A's board president, across the street from the fraternity.

It was nearly midnight and drizzling outside Columbia's Saint Anthony Hall fraternity, and I was trying to sneak into its annual Halloween party. Before me, the building's giddy Beaux-Arts façade glowed in the lamplight. I was keen to move among the beautiful young things as they writhed to a D.J.'s beat. But mostly I just wanted to get inside.

I had come with an out-of-towner who was genetically St. A's—"Probably the 10th or 12th member in my family," he told me, conveying the tone of the place, then adding nervously,

"Just don't use my name."

He had arrived wearing New York black, no costume, but I had brought along an owlish mask, the closest thing I could find to the scarlet number in the Venetian-orgy scene in *Eyes Wide Shut*. I'd heard the stories: about the rivers of alcohol, the stacks of 20s by the backgammon board, the supposed drug use, the hot tub on the roof, the beauties reared back against the antique billiard table. An Asian slave was rumored to be kept in the basement to do

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laundry for what is referred to as The Membership. As part of their initiation, new members were said to be required to buy and then burn a plane ticket to China.

As my friend pressed the front doorbell, I peered through the glass into a deep, dimly lit foyer that led to some stone steps. There was the creak of an opening door, then a soft tread. A young woman with dark, Pre-Raphaelite hair came toward us.

"No Comment"

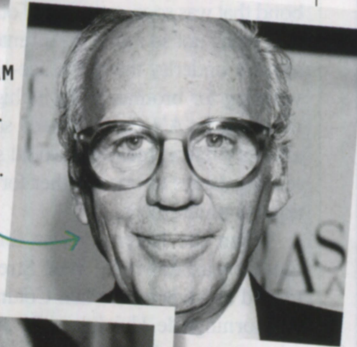
It is fitting to enter St. A's in disguise, for nothing here is quite as it appears. I had come to investigate a crime that may seem like something out of the game of Clue. But the scandal created an uproar in the Hall that has tarnished its image, caused heavy soul-searching among some members, and led to prison time. The crime? Grand larceny, inside job. Upwards of \$650,000 stolen by the genial, erudite Walter Perry, a devoted member with a Ph.D. in classical Greek whose heavy eyebrows, slim mustache, and glittering eyes suggest a kindly but perhaps unreliable uncle. By universal agreement, Perry kept the Hall together with Krazy Glue for three decades, serving as chief undergraduate officer, then as a trustee, and finally as president of the board, often doubling as treasurer and secretary when those gentlemen failed to show up. He worked out of a small office off the front hall at St. A's, just inside the doorway. For all this time, Perry says, he was the resident historian and keeper of the secrets; a bill collector; a scrutinizer of accounts; a fixer for several varieties of "girl trouble"; and a chauffeur for the alcoholically disabled.

Then there was the matter of the 362 checks Perry wrote to himself on a Saint Anthony Hall account, which led to an internal investigation and ultimately to criminal prosecution, the outcome of which landed Perry in the Ogdensburg Correctional Facility, in upstate New York. Did he steal the money? When I asked him, his face tightened, like that of a prizefighter about to deliver a punch. "It wasn't there!" he told me firmly. "The whole question is absurd." He insists that the finances of the organization were so tight that, if he had stolen \$650,000, the organization's bills couldn't have been paid and he would have set off alarms all over the place. Perry maintains he has said the same thing every time he's been offered a chance to confess his guilt in exchange for leniency, and then has gone on to say a lot more, with elliptical baroque flourishes. A better answer might just have been "No." This is not Perry's way, however, and that,



E. DIGBY BALTZELL
Who coined the term "Wasp" (University of Pennsylvania).

LEWIS LAPHAM
Editor and author (Yale University).



STROBE TALBOTT
Journalist and diplomat (Yale University).



WILLIAM "BULL" HALSEY
Wartime fleet commander (University of Virginia).

ST. A'S NATION
Historically, the chapters at elite schools have produced an impressive list of members.

as much as any crime, may be what got him into so much trouble. It may also be why nobody believes him, making Perry about the loneliest man on the planet. "Everybody has left me," he says. "Everybody."

But everybody is not always right. Being a secret society, the Hall initially declined to respond to any specific questions about the case, instead furnishing a one-page official statement followed by a two-page legal reiteration. At my request a loyal brother tried, through a St. A's intermediary named John Dawson, an investment adviser with LDR Capital Management, to interest members of the board of trustees in speaking to me. Daw-

son replied that the whole Perry business was "very sad," but no. When I called Dawson directly, he replied "No comment" to each of my questions.

Here were some of the questions I had: What happened to the two boxes of financial records—potentially exculpatory material that Perry says disappeared from his office—when the case broke? Is it true that two board members arranged, over Perry's objections, to get a third member onto the board, creating the coalition that ultimately led to the audit that in turn resulted in *The People of the State of New York v. Walter Perry*? And why, after everything Perry had done for the Hall, did the Hall send the matter to criminal court rather than to civil court, where the fraternity would have had a shot at quietly getting back its money?

And there was something else. The Hall first took the matter to Manhattan district attorney Robert Morgenthau, in 2008, but the office issued no indictment until Cyrus Vance took office, two years later. The son of a former secretary of state, Vance had attended Groton School, as did Perry and his younger brother, Proal. Vance had once been close to Proal—who is a wine importer in the Fort Lauderdale area—and had always been friendly to Walter. Until "the cops showed up at six A.M.," Perry recalls bitterly, to roust him out of bed, arrest him, slap him in handcuffs, and take him to the Tombs, a jail in Lower Manhattan and one of the more miserable places on earth.

A Sacred Bond

There are other Saint Anthony Halls, about a dozen of them, most notably at Yale and M.I.T., but Columbia's is the first, the alpha chapter. It is the model for the raucous, hyper-elite Hamilton House in *Gossip Girl*. Drawn from the same source, all St. A's chapters follow more or less the same practices. Members call one another Brother (or, now, Sister), timing weekly meetings to the slant of the sun; installing hidden rooms in their elegant chapter houses; calling the true president, his name known only to members, "Number One," and the titular president "Number Two"; and ending most get-togethers with the members insentient and horizontal. Details of the rituals are closely held, but at Princeton they are said to involve an oath of loyalty to a hooded figure known as the Most Noble Archon, along with the recitation in Latin of a vow from Scripture, with the speaker agreeing to give all his possessions to the poor. (St. A's members have not been known to follow through.)

Saint Anthony Hall was founded in the

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mid-19th century by a 15-year-old English schoolboy, Edward Forbes Travis, who had come to Columbia with an odd fascination for St. Anthony the Great, the gnarled fourth-century mystic who wandered the Egyptian desert and inspired early monks with his soul-purifying asceticism. In 1847, on the saint's feast day—January 17—Travis introduced a friend to certain rituals he'd brought from England. The two students forged a sacred bond that was soon extended to others, the appeal being not so much the invented mysteries as what underlay them: the age-old collegiate yearning for bromance. In its high-Victorian moment, St. A's also cultivated something of a literary flavor: members would spend hours reading essays to one another for general critique or amusement.

When the fraternity was founded, Columbia was down by Wall Street. Then it moved to Midtown. When Columbia moved to Morningside Heights, a St. A's man got advance word, because he was a Columbia trustee, and, on the cheap, snapped up a very desirable piece of property on Riverside Drive with a Hudson view. The jaunty clubhouse was designed by another Saint Anthony Hall member, Henry Hornbostel, who also designed the Williamsburg Bridge.

The various St. A's are like franchises—all the same but all a little bit different. Collectively, they have produced an impressive list of members: Charles Kuralt, of CBS; Lewis Lapham, the longtime editor of *Harper's*; the baseball writer Peter Gammons; the cartoonist Jeff MacNelly—and those are just the ones in the media world. Other members include the diplomat Strobe Talbott, World War II's Admiral William "Bull" Halsey, C.I.A. troublemaker Cornelius Roosevelt, and E.

case to which is hidden behind a secret panel to the three residential floors at the top. St. A's members live there, in rooms that house about 20 people of both sexes. Members eat their meals at St. A's. Two full-time employees are there to serve them, a steward and a cook. There is a library, a well-stocked bar, and a ballroom, whose chandelier graced the cover of the group Vampire Weekend's first album. The financial picture is not public, but a few years ago, when Perry was still in charge, each semester's dues ran to just \$400. The meal plan added another \$1,800 per semester, and the residential fees per semester could run to \$2,200. Despite many efforts, there is little by way of an endowment.

Of late, the Hall has become slightly more multicultural, but for the longest time it was 200-proof Wasp, its 40 or so undergraduate members drawn not just from the elite boarding schools—Andover, Exeter, St. Paul's, Choate, and the Cate School, in California—but from the secret societies of that elite. More than anything else, the distinguishing characteristics of a St. A's member are two: an extremely rich mother and father.

A Little Digging

I know Walter Perry, or at least I think I do. We went to Groton together, where he was two years ahead of me. I remember him as brainy and a little aloof. He was smallish and southern, with an accent you didn't normally hear in New England, and he celebrated Robert E. Lee's birthday every year with cake and candles. I recall an afternoon when we stayed together at the table after lunch—he wanted to show me how he was going to do away with the Pentagon (a popular notion back then). He made a pile of sugar,

I HAD COME TO ST. A'S TO INVESTIGATE A CRIME THAT MAY SEEM LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF THE GAME OF CLUE.

Digby Baltzell, the sociologist who coined the term "Wasp." Unlike the usual campus fraternities, most of the St. A's own their buildings, making them little worlds unto themselves. Think of them, perhaps, as a cross between Skull and Bones and a Princeton eating club, with a large heaping of Society and more than a dash of *Animal House*. It is an open question how much a university can interfere with admission policies at any of the St. A's. At Columbia, the answer seems to be: very little. In New York, the Hall rises six stories, from the mysterious basement crypt (the stair-

bent down, and blew. Then he smiled as he looked up. It may be for this reason that a Groton friend calls him a "shape-shifter." I hadn't seen him again until I bumped into him at a school gathering at the Colony Club, in Manhattan, almost two years ago. I asked him what he'd been up to.

"I've been in prison," he said, above the din of cocktail conversation. He might have said he'd been in California. It was either the neutrality of the utterly innocent or the neutrality of the utterly not innocent. I couldn't quite tell. I didn't pop the obvious question, "What

the hell happened?" Instead, I let it go for a full year, until we met again at the same event and picked up where we'd left off. This time, he offered a few details of his experience—about St. A's and about the Tombs, with its mingling of drug dealers and subway pickpockets, and about the toughs he lived among at Ogdensburg. After that, I had to know more, and I arranged to meet Perry in various places—in the coffee shop of the Gershwin Hotel; near the clock at Grand Central Terminal; at the fourth-floor apartment he shares with his wife, on 157th Street; and finally on a park bench by the Hudson, the nearest he could come to Saint Anthony Hall without violating the terms of his parole.

If I was being played, I was being well played, for I liked Perry—his astounding politeness, his good-humored forbearance, and his astonishingly broad learning. All of our conversations were delightful, a bit like talking to an Oxford don who knows as much about Herodotus as about the unique action of a Remington rifle. I also came to appreciate the fact that, while Perry and St. A's were irreconcilably at odds, they were well matched too, which may be why Walter had made the place his second home, if not his first, for so much of his adulthood. Both aspired to something better, and both worked hard to keep up appearances.

To get at the truth of Walter Perry takes a little digging. To start with, you have to understand his father, Walter Emmett Perry Jr., and to understand him, you need to understand *his* father, Walter Emmett Perry Sr. That first Walter Perry was a Birmingham prosecutor who, in 1957, took on six Klansmen for castrating a black man named Edward Aaron with a razor blade. Two of the men confessed and were given suspended sentences. The other four were found guilty and sentenced to 20 years. "A magnificent old pillar of the law," says our Walter Perry III.

No one would say that about his father. Walter Perry Jr. served in the Alabama legislature during the George Wallace years, and, with his barrel chest and booming voice, he could fill the entire chamber with his charm. The charm gradually dissipated as alcohol flooded in.

Walter junior sent "Sticks," as he called his son, to Groton. There was no scholarship—Walter junior just never paid, and the headmaster for a while decided the whole thing was amusing. Walter III woke up to reality the summer he turned 13, when he got out of bed to discover that most of the family's possessions had suddenly been seized by state marshals. Young Walter was stupefied, his father cavalier. Later, in bankruptcy court, the opposing counsel asked Walter junior, "You mean to tell this court you own nothing but the clothes on your back?" Perry replied in his courtliest tones: "Oh no, sir. I do not own these clothes. Or any clothes at all. My wife is simply accommodating enough to



SECRETS?
The fraternity's historic building on Riverside Drive, in Manhattan.

own a selection of clothes in my size which she permits me to borrow from time to time."

To Walter III, his father consisted of "two sets of facts that never touched." One was designed to show his magnificence, the other to demonstrate his absolute lack of net worth. But Walter III could never quite tell which set of facts was the true measure of the man.

The Gray Cloud

Walter's life fell apart when he was thrown out of Groton a few weeks before graduation. He and two classmates were caught in town, a hanging offense in those years of upheaval. Walter regularly made the honor list and was a devoted Grotonian. He'd been admitted to Harvard, but that was off now. He'd have to settle for Columbia, but not before the fabled Harry Coleman, Columbia's dean of students, had him in for a little talk about "his values and purpose in life." Coleman believed in second chances. Incredibly, he'd once been shot five times by a deranged student upset for being suspended because of his grades, but Coleman reappeared at his desk, his arm in a sling, a few weeks later—and never pressed charges. Coleman, a St. A's alum, was favorably disposed toward the studious, well-mannered Walter Perry.

As a Groton boy—Greek ace in need of redemption—Perry was perfect for a high-end frat, but Perry himself wasn't so sure about St. A's. It wasn't exactly a literary society anymore, what with everybody drinking themselves silly. But he took a room on one of the upper floors, acquired a few close St.

A's friends, and gradually made the Hall his home.

He got married a few weeks after graduation, to a former Manhattanville student of distinguished lineage named Mary Gamble Kennard. Walter took Mary to Trinity College, Dublin, where he studied for a Ph.D. in classics with the reigning Homeric scholar at the time, William Bedell Stanford. Back in the U.S., he discovered that the degree wasn't good for much and had to settle for teaching Latin at the Hackley School, in Tarrytown, New York.

Then the fidgets set in. He jumped to a Manhattan securities firm called Laidlaw, which was kept afloat at times by the hefty backgammon winnings of the chairman, Bob Clayton. Backgammon couldn't carry Laidlaw forever, and, in 1983, Perry shifted briefly to the investment firm Rooney Pace, whose chairman would later be indicted in a \$100 million fraud scheme. Perry then teamed up with a partner to buy a small company that developed computer systems to assist foreign firms with regulatory compliance. Fiduciary Automation, it was called. That one clicked, and he made a good bit of money. In 1997 he joined with another St. A's man to get in on the dot-com boom with Net Dot Uniqueness, which offered a database for business transactions. It wasn't actually a dot-com, but come 2001 it imploded all the same.

By then Walter had created a sweet life, with a charming house in Short Hills, New Jersey, four children he'd soon put through college, and a cherished spot in the Social

Register. He had also returned to Saint Anthony Hall, at first just to keep in touch, then to help out, and eventually to do everything imaginable. One of the major draws of the place was John Shurtleff, known universally as Boly, who had attended Groton and was thought to have been a member of the society called the Raven, but such secrets were not to be divulged. At Harvard, Shurtleff had majored in Sanskrit, then settled into life as general counsel for Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield. It's not clear what made so many people wor-

operated computers, doing St. A's business.

Perry's reign was not entirely glorious. It was in fact a near-total pain, because the St. A's members weren't just drunken louts; they were immensely entitled drunken louts. He describes his job as "cleaning up after irresponsible children who haven't been toilet-trained." I'll leave aside his comments about sex and drugs. Many tasks were mundane. One year, the sprinkler system froze, bursting the pipes, because an undergraduate had left the oil bill unpaid.

THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAINT ANTHONY HALL MEMBER ARE TWO: A RICH MOTHER AND FATHER.

ship Boly, but it is plain to see what got to Perry: he was the respectable version of his father.

Boly introduced Walter to a higher realm of Hall mysteries and lured him into them. It was all about the Gray Cloud, a secret cluster of national Saint Anthony Hall eminences so exalted that their names were never written down, but their powers were thought to be unbounded. Boly apparently was the current supreme ruler of the Gray Cloud; before him, the art historian Winslow Ames, of the Boston Amesese, had held the invisible scepter. Someday, Walter dreamed, the job would be his.

Perry could not get enough of Boly. They spoke on the phone every day they didn't huddle in person at the club. When Boly drank himself legless at the Hall dinners, as he sometimes did, Walter would be the one to drive him home. But now that Boly was pushing 80, Perry was dismayed to learn that the Gray Cloud was to be replaced by something called a "policy committee." Was nothing sacred?

Perry's father died in 2001, under shocking circumstances, slamming his car into a bridge abutment at 80 miles an hour. "Eight o'clock on a Sunday morning," Perry says in a kind of trance. "Clear road. Bright sunshine." And no skid marks. Two years later Perry's wife succumbed to cancer. Boly died a year after that. By then Walter had moved to 105th and Broadway to be closer to the Hall, which became home once more. "It was my anchor to the city," he says. "It was also my anchor to youth, to youthfulness." Perry was already president of the St. A's board. Now, in effect, he was also Boly. He married again, to a woman named Lilian Chance. The wedding was held at Saint Anthony Hall, and Perry spent some of the honeymoon in Paris at a storefront Internet café with coin-

Later, when Perry found another one unpaid, he himself drove a check over to the oil company in Queens.

Those 362 Checks

And so it went until the fall of 2006, when the graduate treasurer, Vance Thurston, with whom Perry had been close, sensed that there was something amiss in the accounts. It tells you a lot about how the place was run that Thurston lived in San Francisco and almost never attended the trustee meetings in New York. But no one else would do the job at all. Thurston coped by leaving it to Perry to produce the financial numbers every month. He later told the story at Perry's trial. Thurston had just been diagnosed with cancer (erroneously, as it turned out), and he felt it prudent to add backup signatories to the Hall's various bank accounts. He asked Perry to switch his transactions from the Chase account that Perry primarily used—ending with the numbers 6363—to one of the new accounts so everything could be consolidated. Months went by, and Perry still had not complied. At one point, Thurston tried to get into the 6363 account himself, but he had only Boly's old ID number, and it didn't work. Meanwhile, the Hall got together an audit committee to derive some firm numbers of its own. Perry told Thurston he was furious about that. Some "Young Turks" who weren't really doing any work of their own were undermining him. Finally, in March of 2008, Thurston got word from Chase that the 6363 account was being summarily closed. Thurston called up Perry to find out what was going on, and Perry told Thurston he didn't like the audit committee snooping around. When Thurston insisted, Perry gave him the codes

to the account so he could pull the records.

That's when Thurston found the first check. It was for \$30,000, and it was made out to W. E. Perry, signed by Walter Perry, and endorsed by Walter Perry. There were many more such checks—\$90,000 worth that one year. Ultimately 362 checks were found, totaling about \$650,000.

Perry was summoned to an emergency meeting of the board, overseen by Brian Maas, a criminal-defense lawyer since 1986. The board figured it would need that sort of expertise. In the official statement furnished to me, the board maintains that Perry was given every chance "to explain his actions and restore the missing funds." Perry says that he was immediately cut off from contact with anyone at the Hall, and that he would not have accepted the offer in any case, because he wasn't guilty. In his indignation, he declared that the board was complicit in any financial improprieties, and demanded that the board vote "up or down" on whether the Hall should even continue to exist. Instead, Perry was asked to resign from his position as president, which he did. Ultimately, the board was advised by Maas to hand Walter Perry's case over to the D.A.'s office for further investigation. And in May 2011 the Perry case got under way in the New York County Courthouse, in Lower Manhattan.

If a lawyer who defends himself has a fool for a client, that must go double for a non-lawyer who defends himself. In the trial transcript, all 3,500 pages of it, Perry plays the brilliant fool, the man who knows everything about legal theory but nothing about how to ask a witness a simple question. By going *pro se*, as it's termed, Perry wanted to avoid the hammy theatricality of the law in favor of something more intellectually satisfying. Plus, he relished the prospect of facing down his accusers. But it was hopeless.

A dozen members of St. A's testified over the course of the month-long trial, and each landed a heavy blow. But it was Thurston who finished him off by describing in detail the hundreds of checks that Perry had made out to himself. Perry would contend that the 6363 account was always intended to be personal, and that the deposits from the Hall were reimbursements for funds that he himself had put into St. A's to cover its ordinary operations. Aside from \$40,000 he seemed to have paid a contractor to renovate the windows, most of his contributions had dated from the Boly era, when the Hall was run much more like a private house than a proper institution. But the records that might prove his core contention—that the money he took out replaced money he had put in—were the very ones, Perry claimed, that had disappeared from his office.

Unfortunately for Perry, the prosecutor had plenty of information about Perry's spending habits—his hefty American Express-card payments; his memberships in

the Knickerbocker Club and the Downtown Athletic Club; a \$21,000 wedding for his daughter; a \$16,500 wedding ring for Lilian.

When it was time for Perry to cross-examine, after Thurston's testimony, he had to take a moment to collect himself; he was too choked up to speak. During his opening defense, Perry had turned on his accusers, invoking "a coordinated, biased attack against me by members of a cult." And his friend was one of them. It was Perry's only display of grief at the trial, and he never repeated it with me. A brother had taken him down.

Perry was sentenced to two to six years in prison. He served one year at Ogdensburg, up near the Canadian border, then did another year on work release in Manhattan. In November 2013 he was released on parole. For a time he was denied a bank account and a credit card; with his record and at his age, he does not have much chance of an ordinary job. (He has his own business designing software.) The state is demanding \$20,000 annually for 35 years in restitution, and the federal government is after him for back taxes. He has been filing appeals. By way of vengeance he harbors an unlikely ambition, if he can ever exonerate himself, of running against Cyrus Vance for D.A. in 2017.

He must stay away from Saint Anthony Hall. Perry was in Ogdensburg when he received notice that St. A's was planning to drum him out—a ritual, he knew, that involved members putting on robes and then reciting the words that would end Perry's affiliation. Still loyal to St. A's, Perry would not tell me what these words are, but he acknowledged that he was the "custodian of all that ritual and procedure for many years." ("It's your basic bell-book-and-candle excommunication," he told me.) Perry was allowed one last chance

had spent "a lot" of Saint Anthony Hall money without a good explanation, and then got indignant at a demand for restitution, the board believed that it was obliged to take the matter to the district attorney's office. Ultimately, it was the D.A.'s call to prosecute, not the Hall's. As for the idea of a vendetta, the source dismissed that as ridiculous. "Nobody said, 'We want to get this Walter Perry guy. Let's crucify him.'" And, he added, where's the logic? "If I'm sitting on the board of Saint Anthony Hall, and I know Walter Perry knows something really bad about me, the last thing I am going to want to do is turn him in to the criminal authorities."

Is Walter Perry guilty? I look at him from a certain angle, and I think, Yes, of course. Then I look at him from another, and I think, No, absolutely not. It may be that, like his father, he encompasses two sets of facts that don't overlap. One thing is clear: he did write those checks. But (you could argue) the very obviousness of his guilt may be the clearest proof of his innocence. Was Walter Perry so stupid as to think that nobody would ever notice that he'd cashed 362 checks to himself? Or was this one of those banal cries for help one reads about? Perry has created plenty of spreadsheets with the intention of showing there was no money to steal. Annual revenues during his time amounted at most to about \$300,000, barely enough to keep two people on staff, plus pay for meals, parties, utilities, and maintenance. All the bills are known to have been paid, leaving not much by way of surplus to siphon off. So maybe Perry has a point, though the court did not think so. But he can go on, and I do know that when he starts using the phrase "the ontology of money" I want to drive him back to Ogdensburg myself.

acknowledges a puritanical streak that may not have gone down too well at a frat. If Perry was on both ends of the checks, it may be because of the nature of a shoestring operation he ran largely by himself. It doesn't help that Boly Shurtleff, the one witness who might have understood, is dead.

The Hall, in the end, is a place of secrets. I'd hoped to penetrate some of them that drizzly Halloween night, to see the thing up close. But my friend had it wrong—or perhaps he'd meant to get it wrong. The party had been the night before. The dark-haired woman who answered the door was welcoming, though. My friend acted like a member, and that was good enough for her. I put my mask in my pocket. She didn't care. When I got inside the Hall, I understood that, as is so often the case, exclusivity concealed a certain suppurating shabbiness. Saint Anthony Hall is, by nature, a fraternity, a place for beer kegs, blasting music, hook-ups. It was sparsely furnished with leather couches, a piano that was out of tune, a drab dining-room table. The French windows didn't look out on anything much. Maybe the scene seemed forlorn because there were just two people in evidence, the woman who had let us in and her boyfriend, a smooth, likable guy keen on finance. She intimated that he was the club's "Number One." There was no nimbus of authority around his *GQ* hair. The glory of yesteryear was on the pockmarked walls—an oil portrait of a former club member, an etching of the U.S. Senate, a print of a cricket match. Perry had occupied the tiny office, like a bellman's, off the foyer, trying to make St. A's more than it could be.

The alpha chapter lost a large number of seniors to graduation in 2013 and of late has frankly been pitching "diversity" to replace them. A recent crop includes a Korean, an Austrian, a Mexican, a German, and a former U.S. Marine. The members continue to be people with money. In its newfound desire for "decorum," the club has turned to athletes, primarily rowers. It has also tried to summon its literary heritage at least once a semester. One event included a visit from D. T. Max to talk about his biography of David Foster Wallace, a writer who might well have had sport with St. A's. Other events in recent years have raised money for such causes as research on tick-borne Lyme disease and, according to a Hall summary published in *The Columbia Lion*, "children embroiled in the Arab-Israeli conflict." But the Hall will party on to the 40s swing-band sound of Lester Lanin for its annual Valentine's Day Black-Tie Gala. It remains committed to the core values of "intellectual rigor, literary exercise, secrecy, constancy, and devotion."

That is to say: I hadn't missed anything on Halloween. At Saint Anthony Hall, the party is always last year. □

I ASKED HIM WHAT HE'D BEEN UP TO. "I'VE BEEN IN PRISON," PERRY SAID, ABOVE THE DIN OF COCKTAIL CONVERSATION.

to plead to stay on, and scrawled a long, begging letter in pencil, the only writing instrument he was allowed. His plea was rejected.

"Ontology of Money"

It wasn't until I was deep into the Perry matter that the board furnished me with a "source close to the board" to tell me what the trustees themselves had refused to divulge, namely why it had gone after Walter Perry so hard. The short of it was, the board had no choice. Once it appeared that Perry

Knowing what I do about the mysterious and seemingly inept operation of the Hall, I don't feel my heart warming to that crowd. At Columbia, "St. A's" is sometimes translated as "St. Asshole," and its smugness has earned the scornful envy that is the burden of the young rich everywhere. Could the critical records that might prove "money in" to pay for the club's expenses really have been deep-sixed by people who didn't like Perry's attitude or his pencil mustache? Noting that his wife sometimes calls him Malvolio, Perry