

With The Fervor Of A Missionary, A Former Prosecutor
Helps Track Down Those Who Would Steal Our Heritage

HISTORY'S POLICEMAN

By **KIM MARTINEAU**
COURANT STAFF WRITER

WARRINGTON, Pa. — The antiques in Robert Goldman's law office could outfit a small museum. A Teddy Roosevelt campaign poster hangs above his desk. Wooden billy clubs, British bobby helmets and an oil portrait of an admiral from the Spanish-American War clutter the far wall. Engraved in a bronze plaque by the door are Roosevelt's words: "Aggressive fighting for the right is the no-

blest sport the world affords."

If any motto sums up Goldman's passion for recovering stolen history, this is it.

With a drooping mustache and wire-rimmed glasses, Goldman bears more than a passing resemblance to his swashbuckling hero, TR. The former prosecutor is the latest character to ride into a map caper that the FBI has spent the last year untangling.

E. Forbes Smiley III, a disgraced map dealer from Martha's Vineyard, pleaded guilty

in June to stealing nearly 100 rare maps. But at least one institution is convinced he took more. The British Library has reached across the Atlantic to Goldman's law firm in a northern Philadelphia suburb. Goldman will try to shake loose more information before Smiley's sentencing next month, while the library still has leverage.

Goldman, 53, doesn't know much about maps. But as a fed-

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eral prosecutor, he helped track down \$150 million in stolen artifacts. The finds include gold body armor looted from a Peruvian tomb, a feathered war bonnet belonging to Geronimo and the Colt revolver Roosevelt waved as he led his Rough Riders into battle.

Goldman has silver hair, intense blue eyes and an athletic build. His mornings begin by mucking the stalls on his farm in Bucks County; he and his wife, a high school gym teacher, live in a 1770s farmhouse and raise horses, sheep, chickens, six border collies and one peacock. Two dogs, Scout and Boo, are named after protagonists in "To Kill a Mockingbird."

At the moment, he's reading "The First Crusade," which charts the origins of the modern conflict between the West and Islam. The book has reminded Goldman of an idea he stumbled across once for a "U.S. Secretary of History" to counsel warmakers. "If someone says, 'Let's invade Iraq,' someone else should be at the table who says, 'Are you aware of what happened to the British in the early 1900s?'"

Under the sealed window blinds in Goldman's office, a globe from the world's colonial era tilts on its axis. As he turns the colorful sphere, he calls out the anachronisms: "French Indochina" for Vietnam, "Italian East Africa" for Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia.

Fascinated by the past, he has also watched history unfold up close. Last year his brother-in-law, John O'Connor, landed the biggest scoop since the Watergate leaks that brought down President Nixon. A lawyer in San Francisco, O'Connor unmasked Deep Throat in Vanity Fair, infuriating the Washington Post reporters who had hidden the identity of their anonymous source for decades.

This year Goldman left his government job to work exclusively on art crime, a beat he describes with a missionary's fervor. To him, the artifacts are a link to the past. A chill runs down his spine when he can restore an item to its proper historical context. It gives him a "quiet sense of immortality."

In several ways, Goldman, the lawyer, and Smiley, the map dealer, are alike. Both were educated at elite schools: Goldman at the University of Virginia, Smiley at Hampshire College. When Goldman graduated, he considered becoming a history professor. Smiley



JOSEPH KACZMAREK / AP

AS A FEDERAL PROSECUTOR, attorney Robert Goldman, above, helped track down \$150 million in stolen artifacts. He has left his government job to work exclusively on art crime, including the theft of rare maps by Martha's Vineyard dealer E. Forbes Smiley III.

out of divinity school after one year.

They share a passion for art, antiques and American history. But that's where the similarities end. Over eight years, by his own admission, Smiley looted more than \$3 million in old maps drawn at a time when European ships sailed the world searching for new trade routes.

While Smiley was pulling and cutting maps from old books and dusty collection drawers, Goldman was working with his longtime partner, FBI Agent Robert Wittman, to track down stolen paintings, Revolutionary War rifles and other bits of purloined history.

One of Goldman's recoveries was a jewel-encrusted sword given to Gen. George Meade during the Civil War. The citizens of Philadelphia presented the sword to Meade in thanks after Union forces won the pivotal battle at Gettysburg.

A janitor at the Historical Society of

lusion with an electrician who bought it, with dozens of other looted museum pieces, to display in his home. In legal briefs that read like a history term paper, Goldman spun a story around the sword, quoting historians and statistics from the PBS documentary "The Civil War."

His tie loosened at the neck, in the style of a high school history teacher, Goldman banged his fist on the table as he recited one excerpt from memory. "Teddy Roosevelt said a true historian will bring the past before our eyes as if it were present," he intoned. "He will make us see as living men the hard-faced archers of Agincourt, and the war-torn spearmen who followed Alexander down beyond the rim of the known world."

A judge sentenced the electrician and janitor to four years in prison — double what the sentencing guidelines called

\$200,000 sword into a priceless symbol of courage, self-sacrifice and national unity.

George Newman, a Philadelphia lawyer who represented the janitor, still thinks the punishment outweighed the crime. "You would have thought it was a gruesome murder case, with the amount of anger and angst," he said.

Greed, fraud and outsized egos drive the art crime world. That didn't stop Goldman and his old partner from having some fun. When Wittman went under cover to buy the gold Peruvian body armor, he told the smugglers he was working for "El Hombre del Oro," a collector with a discerning eye for gold. The government seized the armor once the smugglers got it to Philadelphia but waited until booking to deliver the punch line: The "Gold Man" was an assistant U.S. attorney.

In another clandestine operation,

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ROBERT GOLDMAN
ATTORNEY AND ART CRIME EXPERT

its copy of the Bill of Rights. George Washington sent the document to the state in 1789 but at the end of the Civil War a Union soldier snatched it from the state capitol and sold it to a collector in Ohio. A Connecticut antiques dealer, Wayne Pratt, bought the document in 2000 with New Haven real estate tycoon Robert Matthews. The pair paid \$200,000 and tried to sell it three years later for \$5 million, but instead walked into an FBI sting. Pratt agreed to donate his claim to North Carolina, while Matthews continues to fight for ownership in federal court.

As a collector, Goldman understands the temptation to cross the line. He has found some of the thieves he sent to jail personable, endearing even. "Collecting is a passion that blinds the conscience and steals the soul," he likes to say.

His own collecting began in college, after his sister gave him an engraved portrait of Teddy Roosevelt for Christmas. Since then, he has amassed a Roosevelt library of more than a hundred books, plus numerous tchotchkes — from a Roosevelt cigar box to the bronze moose paperweight sitting on his desk, a reminder of Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party.

At one auction, Goldman narrowly lost the bid to buy a gun used by a would-be assassin to shoot Roosevelt in the chest in 1912, during his unsuccessful campaign for president. The gun came with the bullet-torn speech that was inside Roosevelt's coat pocket.

"That would have been a nice piece," he said, wistfully.

At his hotel in New Haven, Goldman sat down for breakfast on Monday with Peter Barber, an expert on medieval maps at the British Library, to talk about the library's missing maps. After a hearty omelet breakfast, they strolled into the August heat, bound for a grueling day of talks with federal authorities. For now, they and the other librarians have agreed not to talk about the case.

Smiley will be sentenced in federal court on Sept. 21.

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