



# They Call Him the Fur Detective



BY GEORGE W. GROH

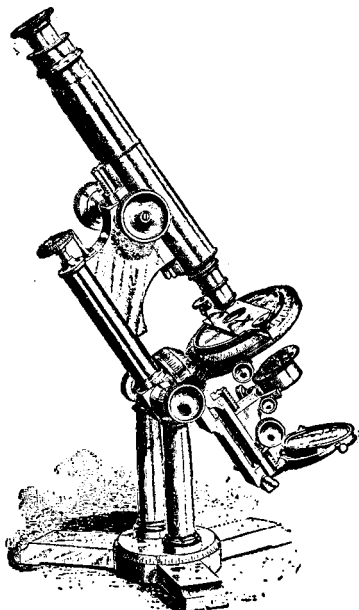
IN LOS ANGELES recently, a shoplifter snatched a mink coat from a department store rack, stuffed it down the front of his over-sized trousers, and waddled swiftly toward the door. He reached the street and disappeared in the crowd before an alert store detective could head him off.

When he was picked up for questioning two days later, the shoplifter assumed an air of injured innocence. He had disposed of the coat by that time, of course, and he knew that the store detective's hasty and uncertain identification wasn't good enough to stand up in court. As to the shoplifting trousers, he still had them on. But that, he thought, was safe enough. You can't

convict a man because he wears his pants two sizes too large. He was so sure of himself that he threatened to sue for false arrest.

Things stood like that when the harassed store manager put in a call to Max Bachrach 2,500 miles away. Bachrach asked a few questions, issued instructions, and sat back to wait. A few days later, he produced the missing evidence without stirring from the New York office and laboratory where he works.

When Bachrach explains it, the solution seems simple enough. He sent for the trousers, turned them inside out on his laboratory workbench, and scraped them carefully with a fine-toothed comb. He examined the



scrapings under a high-powered microscope and found tiny shreds of mink fur which had rubbed off on the garment. Confronted with that evidence, the astonished shoplifter promptly confessed.

The case of the overstuffed trousers is only one of many in Bachrach's career. Bachrach, however, is not a detective. He's a fur consultant, a man who tells breeders and dealers how to run their business, and he's so good at it that he can charge up to \$500 for a consultation. But to police, FBI agents and insurance investigators, he's known also as a man who can take a single tuft of fur and wring from it secrets that will solve a crime.

His science involves measurements and calculations which are fantastically exact. Starting with a strand of unknown fur, he may cut off a cross section  $1/5,000$ th of an inch thick. He magnifies this sliver 150 to 200 times, studies the size and shape of the basic cells, and compares the result with 5,000 samples or "fur fingerprints" which he keeps on file. That tells him what kind of fur he's working with. Very often he can also determine whether the animal was wild or tame, where it lived, what it lived on, and how it was killed. Finally, by applying one or more of some 600 chemical tests, he can retrace the steps in which the fur was treated and processed.

Police made use of Bachrach's knowledge when a young woman was raped and murdered in Penn-

sylvania's Pocono Mountains. The principal clue consisted of fur hairs found on a suspect's clothing. Bachrach identified them as nutria, the fur of a South American rodent, and found that they matched with a fur collar which the woman was wearing when she died. That clinched the case and led to a conviction.

On another occasion he broke up a fur forgery racket in New York. The swindlers took ranch mink, touched it up with chemicals and dyes, and sold it as black diamond mink worth half again as much. The retouch job fooled even the fur dealers, until one suspicious dealer asked Bachrach for a lab report. He spotted the phony as easily as you and I would spot a penny painted silver to pass for a dime.

BACHRACH's own story, however, is more dramatic than any case history in his files. This plump and balding laboratory wizard is a man who found success through failure. Stranger still, he's a self-taught scientist who holds his most imposing diploma from a public high school. The quality of his self-instruction may be judged from the fact that he now lectures regularly at a New York university, holds positions of honor in three scientific societies, and serves as the fur industry's technical advisor to such bodies as the U.S. Customs Division, the Federal Trade Commission and the National Better Business Bureau.

Bachrach began his career 50 years ago as the boy with a broom in a New York fur and hide company. He advanced to office manager while still in his early 20's, then founded his own firm. Along the way, he made a discovery that was to change his life. Old-timers in the business could tell one fur from another, Bachrach observed, but they couldn't tell you how they told. They relied on a combination of instinct and experience which took years to acquire.

Bachrach figured there must be a better way. He searched the libraries for a book on the subject, and didn't find one for the very good reason that it hadn't been written. What he did find was a promising lead. Scientists thought it might be possible to identify both human and animal hair through microscopic observation.

Bachrach took night school courses until he had mastered the microscope, then plunged into the enormous task of "coding" the appearance of every fur he could find. While he was at it, he delved into the chemistry of fur. When the research job was finished — and we are hurrying now over ten years of work and study — Bachrach packed his findings into a massive 677-page technical tome entitled *Fur*. He had written the book he was looking for.

Meanwhile, he established a reputation as a shrewd and successful dealer in furs. Then the Depression struck, the fur market toppled, and

Bachrach went broke. A month later, he bounced back as a fur consultant. He had decided that fur prices go up and down, but the market for knowledge is always good.

**B**ACHRACH applies his sleuthing skill to fur business mysteries as well as to crime. There was, for instance, the case of the black possum coat which turned unaccountably red. The young woman who bought it demanded a refund, and the store manager sent the coat to Bachrach for a lab report. He took one look at the garment and fired back a cryptic nine-word telegram as follows: "Ask the lady if she fell in a sewer."

The store manager's next communication was irate in tone. He pointed out that he had sold several hundred of the coats, at \$59.50 apiece, and he was in a bad spot if they all went bad. He wanted to know what happened, and why — and he was not in the mood for a frivolous suggestion. Bachrach assured him that he was entirely serious. "If you pay for advice," he added, "you ought to take it. Ask the lady about the sewer."

As it turned out, Bachrach was very nearly right. The young woman hadn't been in a sewer, but the coat had. She confessed that she was tossing it around in a bit of horseplay when it plopped into an open manhole. The manager was so relieved at the news that he forgave her the small fraud of trying to chisel an undeserved refund.

Like all of Bachrach's solutions, this one was based on special knowledge. He knew that a sewer is the most likely source of methane gas, and he had learned during a previous investigation that methane gas turns possum fur a cherry red.

BACHRACH's biggest case involved the "disappearance" of \$500,000 worth of Persian lamb. The pelts were in excellent condition when shipped from Africa, but they were far gone in ruin when they reached New York only two weeks later. The thick, black, curly wool had been stripped away as though eaten by an army of ants. Buyer, seller, shipper and warehouseman were plunged into a bitter legal battle, and an insurance company called Bachrach in to fix the blame.

He traced the cause of damage — a particular type of mold — and proved that it had formed on burlap. The seller had to make good the loss. He had dried the pelts on burlap frames which were improperly cleaned.

Bachrach's favorite case, however, concerns a damage suit which was never filed. That one began when a New York society woman stormed into an exclusive fur shop with a lawyer following close behind. She exhibited a skin rash which circled her neck like a string of ugly red beads, and said that she got it from wearing her new mink coat. She wanted her money back, and she also wanted a big bundle of the store's money to soothe her feelings of pain and shock.

Bachrach examined the fur and found nothing wrong. He extracted samples of the dye, tested it thoroughly, and got the same result. Still, it was obvious that something had caused that rash. Acting on a hunch, he obtained samples of the woman's perfume, mixed it with chemicals from the coat, and produced a solution so strong that it caused his own skin to erupt. The customer was both edified and mollified. She dropped the damage suit, kept the coat — and changed her perfume.



## *"Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me"*

By CHARLES C. COOKMAN

He never loved the Moscovites;  
He always stood for human rights.  
He was so engrossed in liberalism,  
He plumb forgot his catechism.

# McCarthyism

## VINDICATED

*By Louis Francis Budenz*

WISCONSIN'S town of Ripon is considered of such small consequence that it is not even mentioned in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. This may have come about because that great reference source is more British than American.

Whatever the reason for the omission, it is not a place that can readily be overlooked. Ripon has been the scene of some great episodes in American history. It is the birthplace of the Republican Party, antedating in GOP annals the Philadelphia National Convention of 1856, which nominated General John Frémont for President.

This June it witnessed another act in the American drama when the Wisconsin Republican Convention spoke out in no uncertain terms against the censure of Senator Joe McCarthy and commended him for his fight against Communism.

So pronounced was this verdict that Leroy Gore, originator of the "Joe Must Go" movement, and a darling of the *Daily Worker*, announced that he was leaving the Republican Party of the Badger State because it had taken "McCarthyism to its bosom."

What happened at Ripon may therefore be called a vindication of McCarthyism, and of a number of events which preceded it. After all the frothing at the mouth by certain newspapers and political figures over "the insult to the uniform" in the General Zwicker case, that entire episode was dropped like the proverbial hot potato by the United States Senate. After all the fuming and furor by the Americans for Democratic Action and the *Daily Worker* over the finances of the Junior Senator from Wisconsin, it turned out that the audit of the