

A SORRY END TO CHIEF'S CAREER JURY FINDS HART GUILTY OF STEALING \$2.6 MILLION

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A federal jury delivered **a** sad last chapter Thursday **to** the extraordinary, uplifting story of William Hart, the poker-faced coal miner who rose **to** become the first black police chief of **a** major U.S. city.

In its 51st hour of deliberation after **a** 51-day trial, the jury convicted former Detroit Police Chief Hart on four counts of stealing almost \$2.6 million from the city he had sworn **to** serve and protect 40 years ago.

Hart's lawyer, Thomas Cranmer, said an "appeal is likely."

Hart, 68, became the most significant city official **to** be convicted in **a** string of federal investigations and prosecutions dating back **to** the mid-1970s, shortly after Coleman Young became Detroit's first black mayor.

While Young, who has never been charged with **a** crime, and other local leaders have accused federal officials of racism and politically motivated prosecutions, the Hart verdict inspired mostly sadness that such **a** distinguished **career** had reached such **a sorry end** .

"The jury has spoken," said Young, who named Hart chief in 1976. "I would not presume **to** put myself in the jury's place. I regret what has happened. **As far as** I'm concerned, Bill Hart was **a** good man and **a** good cop.

"He rendered good and faithful service **to** the people of Detroit."

Most members of the jury wouldn't talk about their deliberations. One juror, however, insisting on anonymity, told the Free Press: "We went over every piece of evidence -- all the testimony. We listened **to** everything and looked at all of it. . . . It was so hard. You get **to** know all these people so well and there was all that arguing.

"I'd never do it again. It was so stressful."

The jury -- 10 women and two men, three blacks and nine whites, one Detroiter and the rest from across southeast Michigan -- reached its verdict at 4:07 p.m., in its eighth day of deliberations. **As** U.S. District Judge Paul Gadola assembled the lawyers, his courtroom quickly filled **to** bursting with reporters, federal officials and the just-plain-curious who had watched the enormous case presented since January against Hart.

Even **as** the verdict was read, Hart maintained the rock- steady demeanor that first served him **as a** dynamite man in western Pennsylvania coal country. Not **a** twitch betrayed the emotions of the "the man of 1,000 faces," **as** Hart was known in his days of record-setting arrests **as** an undercover cop.

Hart was convicted on four criminal counts of theft and tax evasion, but acquitted on three others.

He remains free on bond while awaiting sentencing Aug. 4; Hart faces **a** probable prison term of about five years, said U.S. Attorney Stephen Markman.

The verdict came five days before the 40th anniversary of the day Hart joined the police force. He had little **to** say about it.

"All of it is legal stuff and I'm not **a** lawyer," Hart said at his Detroit home. "Well, it's over. That's all I can tell you."

Hart was convicted of two counts of embezzlement from the police secret service fund and two counts of income tax evasion. In one embezzlement count, he was charged with diverting about \$1.3 million **to** dummy companies set up by swindler Kenneth Weiner, **a** former civilian deputy chief Hart appointed. In the other, Hart was charged with stealing about \$1.3 million by writing checks **to** cash.

The jury cleared Hart of conspiring with Weiner **to** steal the funds. And while they convicted him of tax evasion for 1986 and 1987, they found him not guilty of evasion for 1985.

He also was cleared of witness tampering for allegedly asking his longtime mistress, Andrea Henry, **to** lie before **a** federal grand jury investigating him.

Hart remains on paid suspension from the department.

Hal Helterhoff, special agent in charge of the Michigan FBI, which investigated the case, said the verdict showed Hart "clearly had his hand in the public cookie jar and looted it of over \$2.5 million."

Markman said the convictions "represent **a** personal tragedy for an individual who served our community with real distinction."

He added, however, that Hart "was responsible for diverting more than \$2.5 million in taxpayer funds from the people of the City of Detroit, funds that were dedicated **to** fighting crime in the City of Detroit -- **a** city desperately in need of such resources."

Hart told federal investigators much of the missing cash went **to** police informants through **a** covert operation code-named 82-1, and **to a** top-secret operative, Sylvester "Banjo" Chapman. But Hart's explanations and Chapman's testimony came up more than \$1 million short, even by the most liberal accounting of the secret service fund.

Laura Hart, who testified in defense of her husband about their frugal life-style and stashes of cash, held hands with her brother-in-law, Lorenzo Hart, and Police Insp. Judy Dowling **as** the verdict was announced. She left court arm-in-arm with her husband.

In addition **to** laying bare the Hart's family finances and Hart's three extra-marital affairs, the trial was an extraordinary expedition into the inner workings of the Detroit Police Department and the private life of its top cop.

Witnesses told of cash bundles tumbling from the Harts' kitchen ceiling. The **chief's** three girlfriends recounted his lavish gifts, the stacks of cash he left on their night stands, fur coats, trips and concert tickets he bought for them.

Hart also was portrayed by his closest associates **as a** bumbling and inept administrator who blindly signed whatever paperwork was placed before him.

Federal prosecutor Craig Weier gave the jury the striking image of Hart **as a** man who ordered cash from the secret service fund like ordering **a** sandwich **to** go. Ranking police officials testified how they hustled **to** headquarters **to** cash checks for the chief, or were roused from their homes at night and on weekends **to** get necessary endorsements.

The trial also revealed secret police squads doing political investigations and special favors.

During the 1980s, **as** the city was being overrun with crack cocaine, top investigators were ordered **to** protect Mayor Coleman Young's niece, Cathy Volsan Curry, for three years while she was running around with some of the city's most notorious dope lords, including Richard (White Boy Rick) Wershe.

The secret service fund, personally controlled by Hart, was established **to** fund undercover operations and **to** make narcotics buys.

But according **to** witnesses, while Hart was writing \$1.3 million in checks **to** cash and funneling **a** like sum **to** Weiner, street officers were running out of drug "buy money," and **a** key witness in **a** police murder-for-hire trial faced eviction from his safe house because the department was in arrears on his rent.

In the former **chief's** defense, Laura Hart testified she managed **to** squirrel away thousands of dollars in tin boxes hidden around their modest St. Aubin Street home.

She testified that she worked household financial wonders with home-sewn clothes, do-it-yourself repairs, and Depression- bred thrift and self-reliance.

But Laura Hart stumbled badly on cross-examination when prosecutor Patrick Foley grilled her about taking the police jet **to** visit her daughter's family in California.

Other defense witnesses tried **to** explain Hart's cash horde **as** poker and gambling winnings from his days **as a** sergeant and lieutenant. The irony of Hart, the department's premier anti- gambling cop, raking in thousand-dollar poker pots was not lost in the prosecution summation for the jurors.

Defense lawyer Cranmer said he had difficulty understanding how Hart could be cleared of conspiring with Weiner **to** steal money, but then convicted of stealing the money that allegedly went **to** Weiner.

"Those are inconsistent," he said. "The same for the '85 tax count."

Despite Hart's demeanor, Cranmer said that "Chief Hart is **a** person with **a** great deal of emotion, even though it doesn't always show. Obviously, this was **a** tremendous blow."

Caption: Photo Color WILLIAM ARCHIE, RICHARD LEE, PATRICIA BECK and HERMAN T. ALLEN

: Defense attorney Thomas Cranmer addresses reporters after the verdict Thursday. "Obviously, this was **a** tremendous blow" **to** his client, he said. Prosecutor Stephen Markman said the former police chief diverted more than \$2.5 million from **a** city "desperately in need of such resources." Defense attorney Thomas Cranmer addresses reporters after the verdict Thursday. "Obviously, this was **a** tremendous blow" **to** his client, he said. Prosecutor Stephen Markman said the former police chief diverted more than \$2.5 million from **a** city "desperately in need of such resources."

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