

= James " Honest Dick " Tate =

James William " Honest Dick " Tate (January 2 , 1831 ? unknown) was the Kentucky State Treasurer . He was nicknamed " Honest Dick " because of his good reputation and rapport with his colleagues . The nickname turned ironic , however , when Tate absconded with nearly a quarter of a million dollars from the state 's treasury in 1888 . He was never found .

Tate 's thievery was frequently cited during Kentucky 's fourth constitutional convention as a reason to impose term limits on Kentucky 's elected officials . The one @-@ term limit remained in force on most of Kentucky 's officials until the state 's constitution was amended in 1992 to allow the Governor , Lieutenant Governor , State Treasurer and other state officeholders to serve two consecutive terms .

= = Early life = =

James William Tate was born the only child of Nancy (Taylor) Tate and her second husband , Colonel Thomas L. Tate in Franklin County , Kentucky . His father was descended from a Virginia family of Scots @-@ Irish ancestry . His father was a farmer and a veteran of the War of 1812 , and his paternal grandfather was a veteran of the American Revolutionary War . His maternal grandfather was Reverend John Taylor , a pioneer Baptist minister in Kentucky .

Tate received his education in Franklin and Woodford counties and finished his schooling in 1848 . Later that year , at age 17 , Tate began work as a clerk at the Frankfort post office . On 3 June 1856 , he married Lucy Hawkins . On 28 June 1858 , the couple had their first child , a son named Howard , who died at the age of three . The couple also had a daughter , Edmonia .

= = Political career = =

Tate 's political career began with an appointment by Governor Lazarus W. Powell to the position of Assistant Secretary of State for the state of Kentucky in 1854 . A model Democrat , he resigned the post when Know @-@ Nothing Governor Charles S. Morehead was elected in 1855 . Four years later , he was appointed to the post again under Democratic Governor Beriah Magoffin , and supported the Breckinridge wing of Kentucky 's Democratic party during the American Civil War . Though Magoffin resigned in 1862 due to disagreements with the General Assembly , Tate continued to serve under Magoffin 's hand @-@ picked successor , James F. Robinson , resigning again at the end of Robinson 's term in 1863 . From 1865 ? 7 , Tate served as Assistant Clerk to the Kentucky House of Representatives . At the end of his service in the house , Tate successfully ran for state treasurer , a post to which he would be re @-@ elected every two years for the next two decades .

In 1878 , Tate was mentioned in the Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky . The biographer gushed that in 1867 , Tate had " materially contributed , by his personal popularity , to the great success of the Democratic party " adding :

Biennially , since that time , without opposition in his own party , he has been successively re @-@ elected by popular majorities , perhaps exceeding those obtained by any other candidate for office in the State . From these evidences of popularity , it would seem that his lease on the office might be regarded as a fixed fact .

In the gubernatorial race of 1887 , Republican challenger William O. Bradley made an issue of the need to examine the treasury . Though Bradley ultimately lost the race , the idea of auditing the treasurer 's records took root , and the General Assembly began calling for a commission to undertake the audit in the 1887 ? 8 session . Tate claimed to need time to get his books in order ; this effectively delayed the establishment of the commission , but it was ultimately formed .

= = Disappearance and aftermath = =

In the first quarter of 1888 , Tate began a pattern of behavior that would have aroused considerable

suspicion in a man of lesser repute . He began depositing only checks in the state 's bank account , instead of cash , as was usual . In a short period of time , he paid a number of personal debts . On 14 March 1888 , Henry Murray , one of Tate 's clerks , noticed him filling two tobacco sacks with gold and silver coins later determined to be worth about \$ 100 @, @ 000 . He departed for Louisville , leaving a note saying he would return in two days . Again , due to the nature of his job and his perceived record of trustworthiness , nobody found his actions questionable . After a week passed with no word from Tate , it became clear what had happened . Records would later show that , after a few days in Louisville , Tate boarded a train for Cincinnati , and then vanished , leaving his wife and daughter behind .

During the investigation that followed , the state 's ledger , which was almost indecipherable , was found to show Tate giving some state officials loans that were many times left unpaid and advances on their salaries , including an advance of several thousand dollars to Governor Preston H. Leslie in 1872 . Tate had apparently used some of the state 's money to make personal investments in mines and real estate . Governor Simon B. Buckner announced that between his atrocious bookkeeping , his embezzlement and his outright theft , Tate had misappropriated \$ 247 @, @ 128 @. @ 50 from the state 's treasury .

Impeachment hearings followed in the House of Representatives , and the Senate removed Tate from office , convicting him on four counts . A criminal indictment followed . An 1895 case marked " Not to be officially reported " freed those implicated in the scandal from any obligation to repay the state . " Tateism " became synonymous with political corruption in the state , and Tate 's crime was frequently cited at the state 's fourth constitutional convention in 1891 . The resulting constitution expanded the one @-@ term limit that had applied to the governor since 1800 to all statewide elected officials . The legislature and voters adopted a two @-@ term limit for such officials in 1992 .

Despite the General Assembly 's offer of \$ 5 @, @ 000 for information leading to Tate 's arrest , he was never found . Though his family at first claimed they had heard nothing from Tate and presumed he may have committed suicide , his daughter eventually admitted that she had received at least four letters from her father between April and December 1888 . The letters were postmarked from British Columbia (Canada) , Japan , China , and San Francisco . Another witness claimed to have seen a letter to one of Tate 's friends written in 1890 and postmarked from Brazil . That was the last known communication from " Honest Dick " Tate . An article in The New York Times , citing " friends who should know " , claimed that Tate was believed to have died in China in 1890 .