

Chambers had delivered "briefcases full of Treasury and State Department documents." Crane also showed agents the Leica he had used. But he had never met Hiss or any other sources. They were simply names to him, jumbled loosely in his mind.²

Another disappointment was Felix Inslerman, who had photographed the pumpkin film. The FBI tracked him down in upstate New York. Now employed as an engineer with General Electric in Schenectady, he had left the underground years before. Still, he would not cooperate. The grand jury summoned him on seven occasions in the winter of 1949, with no luck. When reporters asked the cherubic witness if he was the same Felix who had filmed the spy papers, Inslerman, smiling enigmatically, said, "Let's put it down to coincidence." Not until 1954 did Inslerman divulge the facts of his underground career. Even then he could shed no light on Alger Hiss's role. The photographer had never met the man.³

The government had one potentially crucial witness, Hede Massing, who had told first the FBI and then the grand jury that in 1935 Hiss had tried to recruit her contact Noel Field into Hiss's own apparatus. According to Massing, she and Hiss had discussed their competition one night at Field's apartment. Hiss denied the incident had occurred, and Field fled to Prague in May 1949, weeks before the trial opened.⁴ In any case, Massing might well be kept from taking the stand since her recollections, whether true or false, did not specifically address whether Hiss had handed State Department documents to Chambers.

Meanwhile the FBI put Chambers through an intensive regimen of interviews, from January through mid-April. The sessions were held in Foley Square, the trial's venue. (After some debate the bureau agreed to reimburse Chambers's travel expenses, a twenty-two-dollar round trip from Baltimore to Manhattan.) His chief interrogators were two of the bureau's best, agents Tom Spencer and Frank Plant of the major case squad in New York. The self-deprecating Spencer, who described himself as a graduate of "Marshall Law School over Webber's"—Webber's was a restaurant in Cleveland—had been the chief interrogator of Elizabeth Bentley and was a legend to his colleagues, "the best agent I ever saw," said one. Plant, like Spencer, had pursued Nazi agents during the war. He had also worked on the Gerhart Eisler deportation case and was "a walking archive of the identities, features and peculiarities of Soviet agents."⁵