

Gangs and the Gangsters as They Pass From View



HARRY the YAT, A FAMILIAR GANG TYPE.



MONK EASTMAN, ONCE A GANG LEADER, NOW A RESPECTABLE CITIZEN WHO WON HIS WAY BACK BECAUSE OF HIS FINE WAR RECORD.



OWNEY MADDEN, A WEST SIDE GANGSTER, NOW IN JAIL FOR MANSLAUGHTER.

Cowardice Matches Viciousness in Criminals Whose Black Deeds Stand Out in Underworld History

This is the first of a series of three articles in which the full history of the gangs and gangsters of New York, from the earliest days, will for the first time be told.

By HERBERT ASBURY.

THE gangs and gangsters who flourished in varying degrees in New York city for almost a century, reaching the height of their power and strength in the palmy days of the Bowery and Chinatown and during the rule of the crooked politician, constituted an interesting and a sinister phase of city life, largely because they and the conditions which were responsible for their being were fundamentally preventable.

Essentially creatures of circumstance and the logical outgrowth of the conditions and influences with which they were surrounded, the gangsters all through the history of New York have kept pace with their environment. As the dives and resorts were allowed to increase in numbers and in depravity, so did the gangs and the power of the gangsters multiply and grow; and as the moral crusades of the early part of the present century succeeded in closing the dives, and as politics became a little less crooked, the gangs dwindled in membership and in criminal activity.

Gangster's Courage a Myth.

Much has been written about gangs during the last twenty-five years, and in a great deal of it the gangster has been held up as a brave and skilful plunderer and murderer, spectacular and crafty. But police officials who know the gangsters say there was nothing brave or spectacular about the gangster. Crafty he was, to be sure, and a long practice in picking pockets, or robbing drunken men, or blowing safes, or using knives and revolvers had made him skilful. But he was really anything but brave. When he killed, nine times out of ten it was from the shadow of a dark doorway, or he slipped up behind his victim and knocked him out with a blackjack or a piece of lead pipe. He killed from behind. He plundered, but usually he plundered those who could not afford to complain to the police because they themselves were crooked, and those who knew that it was of no use to complain, because the police were controlled by the crooked politician, and the politician had election day uses for the gangster.

There are very few instances where gangsters have stood toe to toe with their victims and killed them in fair combat, except, perhaps, in the old days when the only weapons used by the gangsters were fists and clubs and brick bats. With few exceptions the police have always been able to worst them in fights. There have been few gangsters with sufficient nerve to face a cop's nightstick. The way the gangster fought was to hide in the darkness of a doorway and when his enemy passed stick him in the back with a dirk, or else pump a few bullets into him and then run.

kept alive the dives there used every means of getting a livelihood that could be conjured up by a perverted brain. When stuss and poker and other gambling games were running wide open on the East Side it was their favorite pastime to hold up the owners of the game. They levied blackmail on the merchants and peddlars of their territory, they held up and robbed the dives and saloons owned by members of opposing gangs, they were pickpockets, footpads, left workers and a great many of them were that lowest of all thieves, the "lush-worker"—a man who lays in wait for drunken men and robs them. Many of them were Fagins, that is, they trained boys to pick pockets, and some years ago, at the height of the gangster's power, the police estimated that no fewer than a hundred men in New York had from twenty to thirty boys picking pockets for them and turning over the proceeds of the robbery.

Many Modern Fagins.

And an excellent idea of the manner of men the gangsters were may be gained from the fact that at least 90 per cent. of them lived largely on the earnings of women of the streets. There were few gangsters who did not have at least one woman walking the streets for them. Some of these women were pickpockets and shoplifters, also, and such was their mental peculiarities that the woman rarely failed to hand over to her man, her gangster, the proceeds of every robbery she committed—provided he beat her often enough.

Police records, and the newspaper stories of the gangsters and the gang fights, show that a great many of the murders among the gangs were over women—usually occurring when a woman tired of some particular gangster and cast her lot with another. Such noted gangsters as "Spanish Louis," "Crazy Butch," one of the most famous of the Fagins of his time, and Bill Harrington, owed their deaths primarily to their women.

What the police thought of the gangster is well summed up in a statement made back in 1912 by George E. Dougherty, when he was Deputy Commissioner of Police. "The gangsters," he said, "are the vilest and meanest criminals we have to deal with. They are vicious, cowardly and repulsive creatures, who rob the poor, levy tribute on the gamblers, and rob the unfortunate women of the streets. They are a disgusting lot."

Yet there have been a few of them, such men as "Eat-'em-up" Jack McManus, Bill Ellison and Monk Eastman, who were brave men and willing to stand toe to toe and fight with anybody. Such men as these, so far as the police ever knew, never lived on the earnings of women, although they did practically everything else that was criminal. But after all gangsters such as these were the exception that proved the rule.

The conditions under which the gangster flourished and came into being made him stunted mentally, physically and spiritually. Few of them were big men physically, and some of the most famous of them all, such as "Humpty" Jackson, who carried his pistol under his hat, were crippled, Jackson had a hunchback,

sickly, whining and wheedling, but a had man with a gun—so long as he could shoot from the cover of a doorway. It has been estimated by the police that the average gangster is not more than five feet and four inches in height and 130 pounds or so in weight. In many instances the gangster became a criminal simply because he had nothing better to do. This is proved by the fact that the establishment of clubs and community houses and places of that sort in a gang territory has almost always resulted in a clean up of the district so far as gangs are concerned.

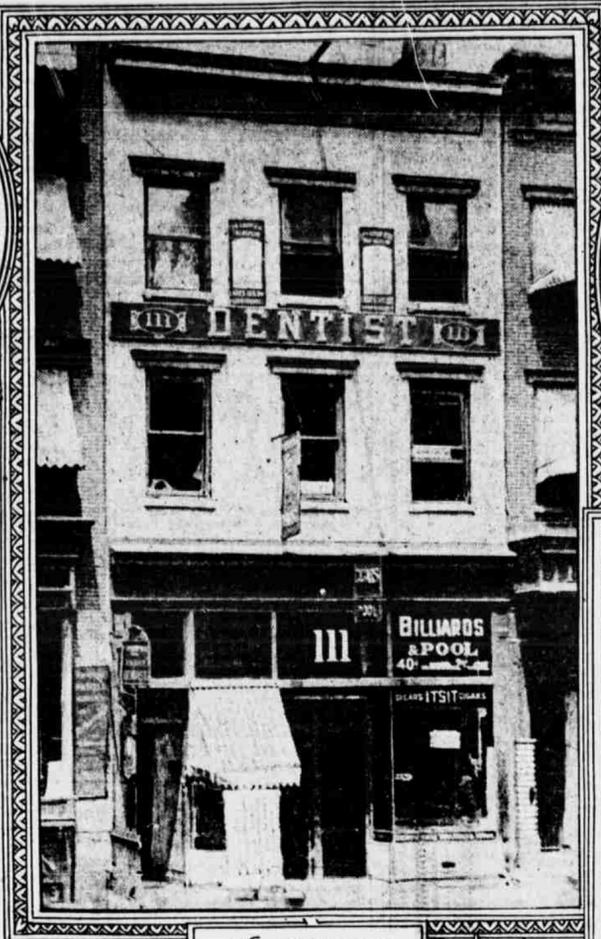
Roughly, the gangs of New York may be divided into three periods, those of the Irish, the Italian and those of the "Triethmen" when they

died or were murdered in gang fights else to do loafed on the street corners, rushed the can for beer and fought at the drop of a hat. They were in evidence principally around election time, when they voted a dozen times each and then did strong arm work at the polls for the politician who had them under his wing and gave them protection. Most of their fights were among themselves and with the police, and in those days the gangsters would stand up and fight regardless of the cop's nightstick. Their principal weapons were clubs and fists and brickbats.

But the gangs that followed these old time bands introduced a little more refinement and a little more depravity into their work. They began to use the pistol a bit and they could be hired to do loafed on the street corners, rushed the can for beer and fought at the drop of a hat. They were in evidence principally around election time, when they voted a dozen times each and then did strong arm work at the polls for the politician who had them under his wing and gave them protection. Most of their fights were among themselves and with the police, and in those days the gangsters would stand up and fight regardless of the cop's nightstick. Their principal weapons were clubs and fists and brickbats.

murder. They became past masters in the art of maiming an enemy by such gentle methods as gouging out an eye or biting off an ear or doing all manner of things to his anatomy. But still they let the general public pretty much alone and confined their meanness for the most part to rival gangs. The gangs in which the Italian element predominated, which came later, introduced the knife into gangland and it soon became the most popular weapon. They used the pistol also, and later these weapons became so well liked and possessed such obvious advantages, that the hatchet men of the Chinese tong abandoned their ancient implements of killing and used the tools of the "white devils."

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The HESPER CLUB A FAMOUS HANGOUT OF GANGMEN.



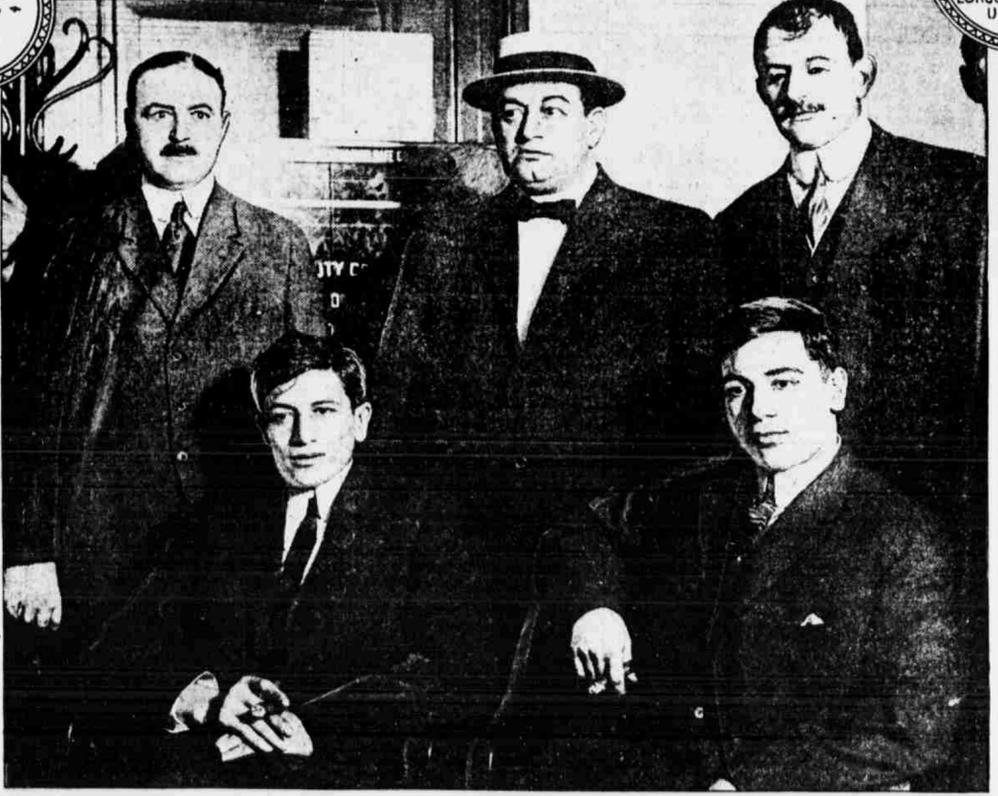
BIG JACK ZELIG, KILLED WHILE A GANG LEADER.



EAT EM UP JACK McMANUS.



PAUL KELLY, NOW PAUL VACARELLI, ONCE A NOTED GANGMAN, NOW REFORMED AND HEADING THE LONGSHOREMAN'S UNION.



Lefty LOUIE and GYP the BLOOD, TWO of the MURDERERS of HERMAN ROSENTHAL, and NOTORIOUS GANGSTERS.

Price Lists for Killing and Maiming Show How Cheap Human Life Was Held by Notorious Law Breakers

In long circles such up to date methods as turning on the gas while their victims were deep in the pleasures of an opium sleep. That was the way the killers of the Hip Sing Tong got rid of "Big Mike" Abrams, a noted gangster and opium fiend, whose great delight it was to beat up Chinamen. The Italian gangs of today are more or less quiescent, although there are still plenty of them up in Little Italy and in Mulberry Bend.

The gangs that terrorized the Bowery and Chinatown for almost fifteen years and won many a notable election victory and whose decline started when the Committee of Fourteen began closing the dives in the neighborhood of Chatham Square were led by Jews and Irishmen. These gangs used the pistol and the knife, one as well as the other, and besides that they slugged with blackjacks and leadpipe, they gouged out eyes, they cut throats and they used poison and gas. There is even one instance where a gangster, wishing to rid the earth of a rival, accomplished his purpose by introducing a live and poisonous snake into the rival's bed, although where the gangster got the snake the records say not.

The Gangster's Price List.

But the plundering methods of the gangs have ever been the same. They lived off crooked politics, receiving money for voting a score and more times and for using strong arm methods to keep decent citizens from voting. They would do any sort of criminal job for hire. Murder was cheap and maiming was cheaper. It was possible to get a man killed for ten dollars, although if the prospective victim were prominent enough to make it likely that there would be any activity by the police the price ran as high as \$100 and on rare occasions \$500. Some years ago the police had a price list, supposed to be in the handwriting of "Elihu" Ryan, a noted gang fighter and killer who flourished about 1900 or thereabout. This list had the schedule of prices for killings and maimings:

- Punching—\$2
- Both eyes blacked—\$4
- Nose and jaw bust—\$10
- Knocked out (knocked out with a blackjack)—\$15
- Ear chawed off—\$15
- Leg or arm broke—\$10
- Shot in leg—\$25
- Stab wound—\$25
- Doing the big job—\$100 up.

That is exactly the way it was written in Mike Ryan's notebook, and later on it has been said that he added another item, that of \$10 for the gouging out of an eye.

Cost of Murder Falls.

But in 1912 murder was a bit cheaper. In that year the police captured a gangster who gave them what he said was a schedule of prices that his gang charged for doing various things like maiming and killing. This is it:

- Slash on cheek—\$1 to \$10.
- Shot in leg—\$1 to \$25.
- Shot in arm—\$5 to \$25.
- Throwing a bomb—\$5 to \$50.
- Murder—\$10 to \$100.

It was in the year 1915 or thereabouts that a gangster known as "Yoske" Nigro, whose real name was Joseph Topolinsky, introduced the idea of poisoning horses. He organized a gang and made tremendous profits by hiring out to various truckmen and others to poison the horses of their rivals. In time there came to be three