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## 1903—Car Barn Bandits

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*Chicago Tribune, November 23, 1914*

# Murder—WILL IT ALWAYS OUT?



The Slayers Kill a Man for \$50.



The Car Barn Murder and Robbery.

*"In Most Cases* **IT WILL,**"

*Says Ex.-Gov. Deneen.*

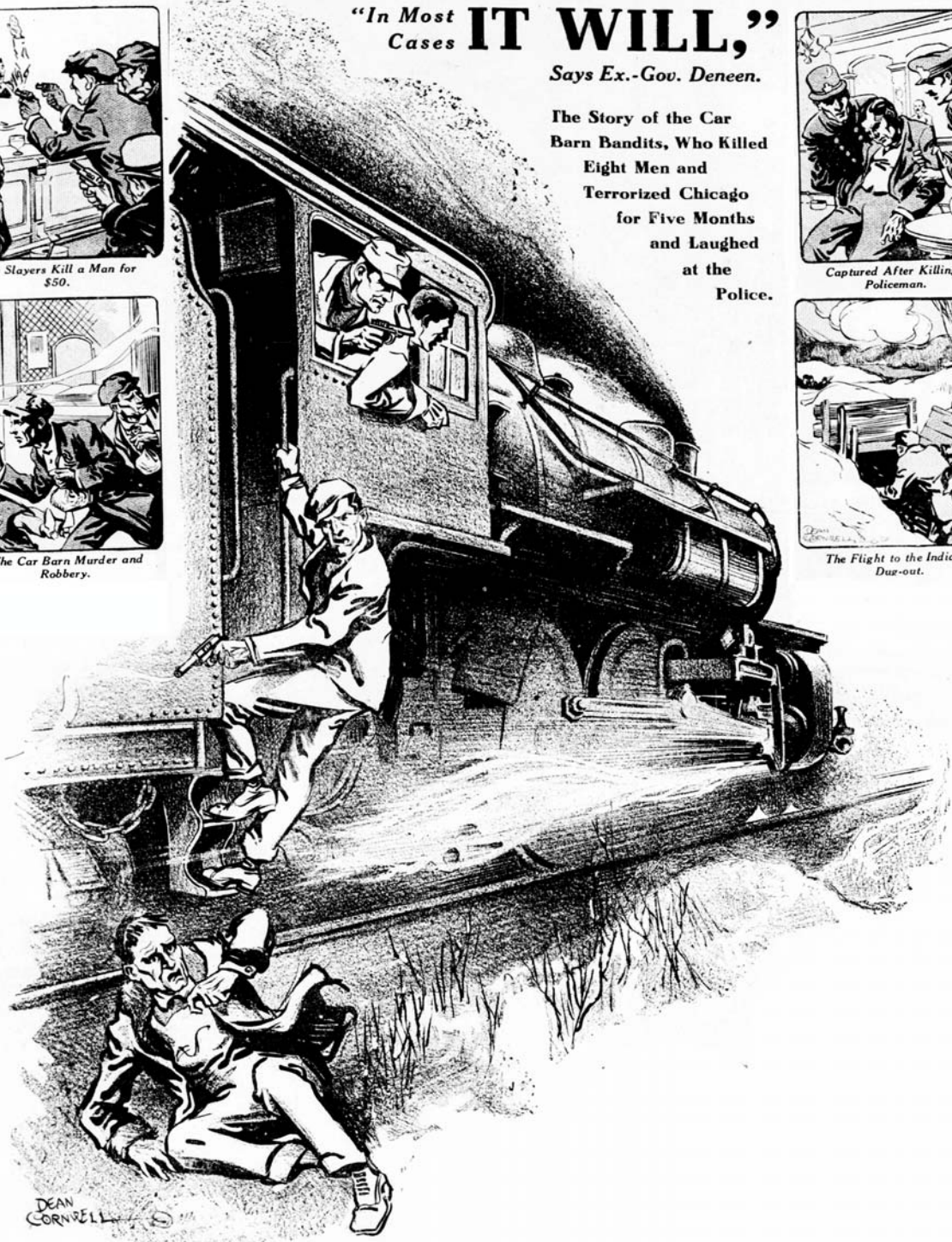
The Story of the Car Barn Bandits, Who Killed Eight Men and Terrorized Chicago for Five Months and Laughed at the Police.



Captured After Killing a Policeman.



The Flight to the Indiana Dug-out.



DEAN CORNELL

The Eighth Victim—and How He Died.

WILL MURDER OUT?

*“ In most cases, it will,” says former Gov. Deneen*

*—even when crime is committed with stealth, in secrecy and darkness, and in the most lonely and unfrequented places. A fact without a clew to it is impossible, and no ingenuity on the part of the criminal can destroy all traces of his connection with his crime, even when committed under conditions most favorable to the building up of fictitious defenses.*

*But the most noticeable feature of the class of crimes with which the car barn murders are associated is the publicity sought in their commission. These crimes seek no concealment. The criminals apparently court publicity and set the law and its officers at defiance.*

*The same violent outbreaks against the peace and order of society have been exemplified recently in the automobile robberies and murders occurring in Chicago and in Paris.*

*This change in the methods of crime calls for something more than detection. It emphasizes the need of dealing with the causes of crime and seeking means for their eradication. It raises vital questions of heredity, environment, education, training, and law enforcement for the protection of the individual, the home, and the community, and should beget effective efforts to remedy conditions which produce such evil results.*

Eight men killed for \$2,500! That's the record of the four murderers, known as the "car barn bandits," who for five months terrified Chicago's citizens and laughed at Chicago's police.

The public career of this quartet began on July 3 and ended on the night of Nov. 21, 1903. It was a moving picture of robbery and murder by daring and cruelty. Four youths—Gus Marx, Pete Neidemeyer, Harvey Van Dine, and Emil Roeski—products of the slums, created a reign of terror that excited Chicago probably more than any other wave of crime in its history.

"Who will be the next victim?" was the question of almost every man and woman old enough to appreciate the danger.

"Who were the murderers?" There was no means of telling in what locality their murderous automatic pistols would shriek their next song of death.

On the evening of July 4, when L. W. Lathrop and Martin Doherty, two employes of the Chicago and Northwestern railway, were busy at their work at the Clybourn Junction station when two masked men entered the building and commanded them to throw up their hands. Doherty complied, but Lathrop showed fight. He was shot, but not fatally wounded. The holdups took \$70 and escaped.



*The Automatic Trio Plus One*

*Gustave Marx, Harvey Van Dine, Peter Neidermyer and Emil Roeski*

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### **Human Life Taken for \$50.**

Six days later a young man walked into a saloon at 1820 North Ashland avenue and ordered a glass of beer. Proprietor Ernest Spires and a man named Otto Bauder were the only persons in the saloon.

Spires served the beer. The young man lifted the glass to his lips. As he did so two other men entered the place and leveled automatic pistols at Spires and Bauder, ordering them to raise their hands above their heads. Bauder bolted for the side door. He was instantly shot dead. The three men got less than \$50 from Spire—\$16 each for taking the life of a human being.

The police arrested scores of suspects, but failed to throw any light on the mystery. It was established, however, by the statement of Lathrop, Doherty, and Spires that at least four men were responsible for the railway station crime and saloon murder.

Working almost within range of police guns, the murderers did not "lay low.

" The night after the killing of Bauder two members of the quartet locked Louis Cohen, a bartender in Greenberg's saloon at Robey and Addison streets, in an ice box and robbed the cash register of \$25.

On the night of July 12 the same pair walked boldly into the saloon of Charles Alvin, at Sheffield avenue and Roscoe street, and held up the proprietor and four patrons at the points of their automatic pistols. One held the five victims at bay while his companion in crime searched them. They collected \$125, backed out of the door, and escaped their plunder.

Again the police rounded up almost every suspicious character in the city. Again they failed to capture either of the bandits.

### **Police Department at Standstill.**

A week went by. People thought the murderers had left the city. Men and women began to breathe more freely. The police department was at a standstill. It worked like an automation, without purpose, without a clew.

And the morning papers of July 20 chronicled in detail the fifth consecutive crime of the quartet within two weeks, Peter Gorski's saloon at 2611 Milwaukee avenue had been robbed the previous night of less than \$5. Gorski, alone at the time of the holdup, had attempted to hide behind the counter. He had been shot in the head, serious but not fatal wounds being inflicted.

The first day of August found the bandits again active. On that night Ben La Cross was sitting at a table in his saloon at 2120 West North avenue playing cards with his friend, Adolph Jennsen. Two men walked in. La Cross looked up and rose. From the guns two flares spat. Two days later La Cross and Jennsen were dead. With their lives they had paid the penalty of having \$64 between them.

And with no clew. The police redoubled their efforts, but to no avail.

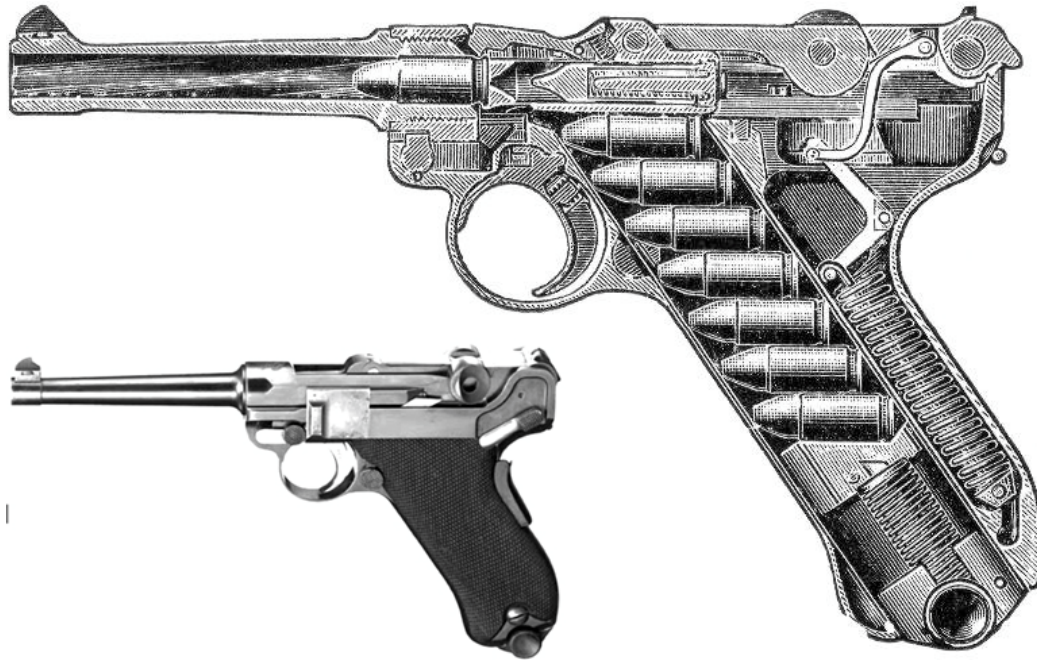
On Aug. 30, at 3 o'clock in the morning, J. Johnson, a Chicago street railway company motorman, was sleeping in a chair in the car barn at Sixty-fifth and State streets. William Edmund, Frank Stewart, and Henry Biehl were balancing the day's receipts in the office adjoining.

Suddenly Johnson was awakened from his dreams by a volley of shots in the office. He rushed into the next room and took in the situation at a glance. One of Chicago's mysterious murder quartet was shooting through a side window from without. Two others were shooting from the door, through which they had forced an entrance with a sledge hammer. All leveled automatic revolvers!

Johnson witnessed his first—and last—murder scene. As he stood gazing in dumb agony at the body of Stewart and the wounded, unconscious Edmund and Biehl, sprawled on the office floor, he was murdered in his tracks. The murderers escaped with \$2,2500.



The mystery was no nearer solution than it was when, two months before, these four degenerates had begun their career of plundering and killing.



*The pistols used by the "Automatic Trio" were Georg Luger's American Eagle 7.65 Parabellum caliber (.30 Luger in the U.S.) Model 1900. These pistols were used by a variety of buyers, including American lawmen such as Stringer Fenton, Texas Rangers and outlaws. The Colt .38 Automatic had not been perfected at this time.<sup>1</sup>*

#### **First of Quartet Captured.**

Over two months later Herman Schuettler, now first deputy superintendent of police, then captain at the Sheffield avenue station, was informed that a young man, out of work, was a constant frequenter of questionable west side resorts. He had a hard, brutal face, the informant went on, shifty and cunning eyes. He was spending money on women and drinks with a prodigal hand, and had, while morbidly drunk, exhibited an automatic revolver.

Schuettler immediately took action. The murder quartet had invariably displayed the same type of gun. He detailed Detectives John Quinn and William Blaul to "get him." Quinn and Blaul searched the city for days and finally located the man with the "hard, brutal face" in Greenberg's saloon, the same place which two of the murder quartet had held up in July.

Blaul and Quinn entered the saloon simultaneously—Blaul from one side, Quinn from the front. The bandit, identified as Marx, pulled his gun and shot Quinn dead. Blaul grappled with him, threw him on the floor, and yelled to the bartender—who had ducked under the bar when the shooting began—to telephone the station. For ten minutes Blaul struggled with Marx, but managed to hold him on the floor until the wagon came.

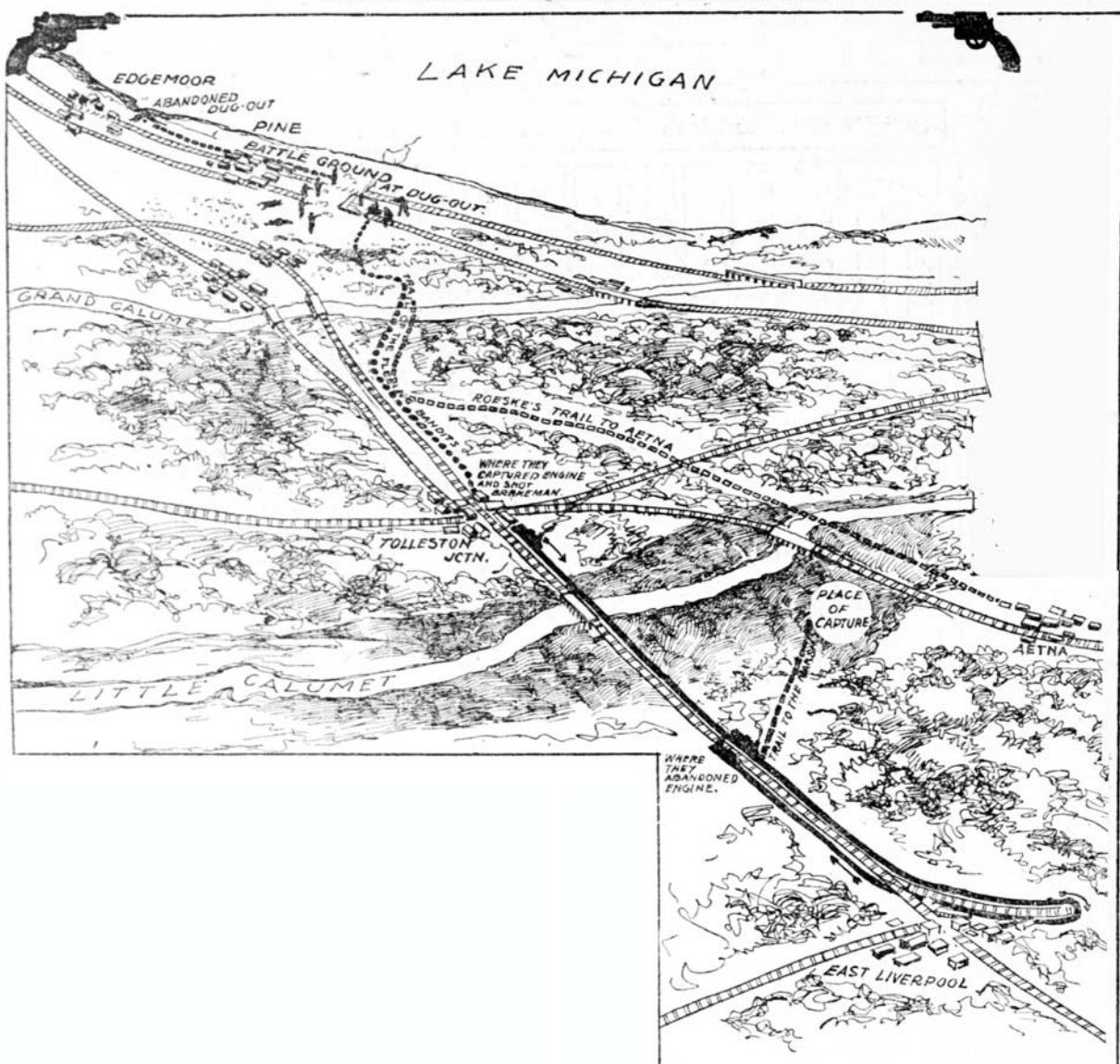
After Marx had been placed behind the bars the question immediately arose as to why he had so fearful of arrest that he would kill a policeman to evade it. The next week was spent in investigating Marx and his record. It was learned that he had been a member of a gang that had formed themselves into a "gun club." Neidemeyer, Roeski, and Van Dine were found to be members of this "club," along with Marx. This "gun club" story was published with pictures of the gang. Neidemeyer, Roeski, and Van Dine fled from the city. Schuettler then got a hunch that Marx was one of the car barn bandits, and commenced to give him the third degree. It was to no avail. Marx wouldn't "cough."

Confessions after the battle with the three fugitives, when they had been captured and brought back to Chicago. The trio thought Marx had “peached,” and he was told that they had “peached.” Finally one of them broke down, and pretty soon they were bragging about their individual work of murder and the whole story came out.

This battle in Indiana was a thrilling climax to the quartet’s murderous record. When they left Chicago, they took refuge in a dugout.

On Thanksgiving day, their supply of provisions being exhausted, they crawled from their retreat and went to the store at Clarks station, where they bought food. In this store at the time was Henry Reichers, a school teacher, who had seen the pictures of the murderous trio. He recognized these men and lost no time in communicating his information to the Chicago police. Schnettler detailed a posse of eight detectives, led by Joseph Driscoll and Matt Zimmer, to make the capture.

### CAR BARN BANDITS AND TERRITORY WHERE THEY MADE “LAST STAND” AND SURRENDER.



Graphics from the November 28, 1903 edition of the Chicago Tribune

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**The Law Comes Into Its Own.**

Snow had fallen when the detail found the abandoned cellar, only to learn that their prey had escaped. They rested that night at a farmhouse, taking up the trail early the next morning and following it in the snow. They came upon an old dugout near Miller station.

Around this cave they formed a semi-circle. Cupping his hands, one of the posse called upon the murderers to surrender. A second later two automatic revolvers were thrust from the cave and a deadly volley of shots answered the command. Driscoll was mortally wounded; Zimmer was seriously wounded.

The depleted posse, exposed to this torrent of bullets, retreated. As they did so the murder trio ran from the cave, shooting as they fled. The detectives returned the fire, two of the murders being wounded, but continuing their flight. The other two elected to remain together, and ran down the railroad track to a little station.

A locomotive, steam up, stood on the track coupled to some cars. Brandishing their automatic guns, the two sprang into the cab, commanding Engineer Coffey and Brakeman Scovin to cut loose from the cars and "beat it" down the track. The brakeman refused and attempted to clinch with one of the murderers. His body was the eighth to be added to the murder string of the quartet.

Engineer Coffey, though a brave man, saw the futility of refusing. He opened wide the throttle. His engine responded and rushed madly careening down the rails. A locked switch forced him to retrace his course. Seeing they were about to be delivered into the hands of their enemies, the two told Coffey to stop his engine. They jumped off and sped across open country.

The telegraph instruments in all the surrounding way stations clicked their message of terror to the operators. The lost no time in spreading the news broadcast. Poses were hurriedly formed in many places.

**Fight to the Last Ditch.**

The electrifying news found its way to a hunting party. This party took up the trail and followed it to a marsh, where the desperate pair of killers were hiding. Deciding to wage battle to the last ditch, they turned with snarls and oaths upon their pursuers.

A shotgun carried by one of the hunters belched its contents into the face of one of the bandits. Blinded by his own blood, he whined to his pal that they give up the fight. They did, and were delivered by the hunters into the custody of the squad of police under the personal command of Schuettler.

Three of the slayers had been rounded up; the fourth remained at large. He had found his way to Ætna. In the station fatigue and exhaustion overtook him. His bravado forsook him. He cursed the automatic revolver, threw it from him, fell upon a bench, and went to sleep. A few hours later he was captured.

The governor of Indiana refused to enforce the extradition laws, and the murderers were brought to Chicago.

Indicted by the grand jury, they were tried early in January, 1904, three of them being condemned to the gallows. The fourth was tried for the murder of Bauder, and was found guilty. There was some doubt, however, as to who had fired the shot that killed Bauder, so he was sentenced to the Joliet prison for life.

Three days before the hanging, one of the murder quartet attempted suicide by swallowing the sulphurated ends of matches and severing the arteries of his arm with a lead pencil. But the law was not to be cheated. Pete Neidemeyer was not allowed to die by his own hand. He and two companions, Gus Marx and Harvey Van Dine, were hanged.

On April 20, 1904, Emil Roeski, the fourth of the slayers, was taken to the Illinois state penitentiary, where he became No. 8744. He will remain a number as long as he lives. He is well disposed, and never has violated any of the prison rules. He labors in one of the departments of the rattan shop of the institution.

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*Chicago Tribune February 5, 1939*

# Chicago's Car Barn Bandits

## Relentless Killers, They Met Relentless Law

By WILLIAM SHINNICK

THERE were three of them, and Jesse James was their only hero. The Chicago of thirty-six years ago, which knew and dreaded them as the car barn bandits, never grew sentimental over them. It recognized them for what they were youthful criminals without redeeming qualities and let the law make an end of them.

An atmosphere of cold ferocity clung to the trio, who had grown up together in a northwest side neighborhood, even when they stood in the shadow of the gallows. They were completely anti-social. They robbed for little sums as readily as for big, and they killed when killing served no purpose.

It was their boast that they had slain thirty-three persons. Doubtless this was an exaggeration. But they certainly murdered eight, and probably at least four others.

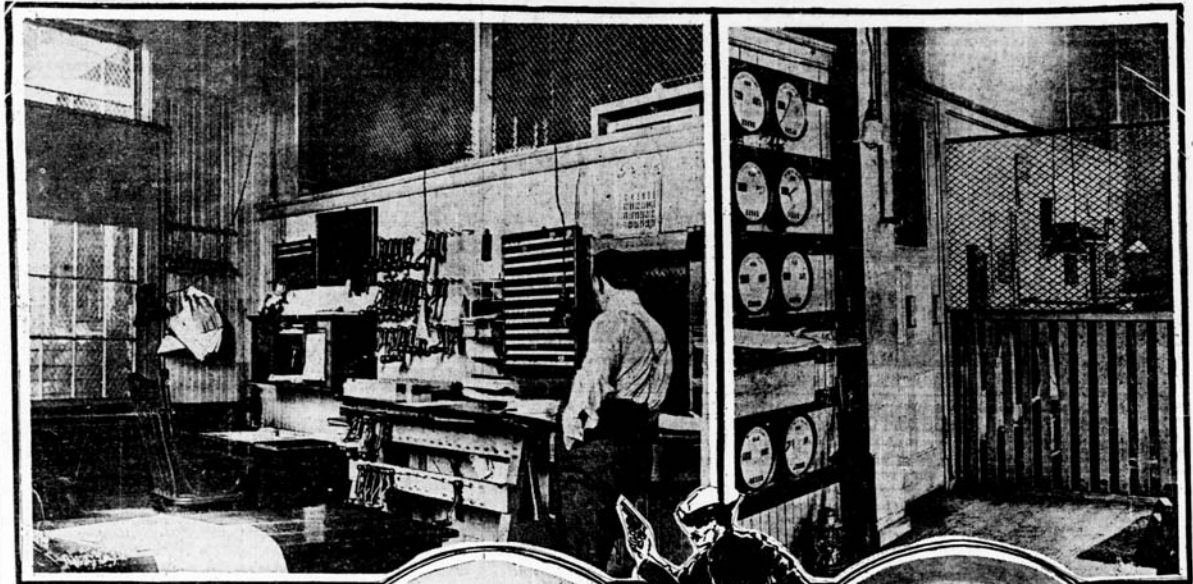
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THE CHICAGO DAILY TRIBUNE: MONDAY, AUGUST 31, 1903.

SCENE OF DOUBLE MURDER AND \$3,000 ROBBERY, TOGETHER WITH TWO MEN KILLED BY CRIMINALS' BULLETS.

[From photographs taken for THE TRIBUNE.]



CHICAGO OFFICE SHOWING WINDOW THROUGH WHICH REPORTEDLY MEN IN PICTURE IS STANDING WHERE STEWART WAS KILLED.

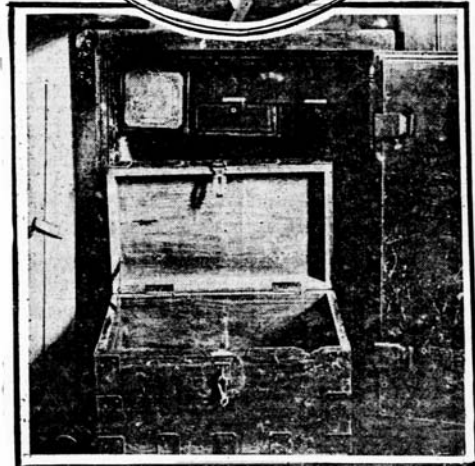
CHICAGO OFFICE SHOWING WINDOW THROUGH WHICH REPORTEDLY MEN IN PICTURE IS STANDING WHERE STEWART WAS KILLED.



JAMES SCHECH



FRANCIS W. STEWART



BOX IN SAFE FROM WHICH CASH WAS STOLEN.

Graphics from the August 31, 1903 edition of the Chicago Tribune

Quiet hung over the car barns at 61st and State streets at 3 a.m. on Aug. 30, 1903. Occasionally a horse-drawn truck lumbered past on the cobblestones. Now and again a car arrived. Conductors quickly turned in their receipts and departed. A few motormen, arriving early to go out on their runs, talked desultorily in a waiting room. One dropped asleep.

Without preface three strangers broke in upon this peaceful scene. Their appearance told their aim. Masks in the form of hoods, made of old underwear cloth, covered their heads and dropped to their shoulders. Slits had been cut in these masks, and sharp eyes glistened above weapons of a new type (the automatic or magazine pistol was not familiar then even to members of the police department).

The first man, who also carried a sledge hammer, walked into the office and confronted three employes. One was a clerk, Francis W. Stewart, who had been tallying receipts and placing the money in a strong box drawer. The second bandit took station at the office window, and the third stood as a sentinel at the door of the waiting room.

"I want that money," said the hammer man.

Later it was recalled that his voice was melodious. But it carried authority. Stewart did not resist. He remained quiet, seated. This did not save him. The man at the window fired at him twice. Both bullets took effect and the clerk fell, fatally wounded.

The gunman continued his shooting. The other two employes, each wounded, fled through an inner door. The window man, seemingly without reason, sprayed bullets recklessly into the walls and ceiling.

Aroused by the noise, the sleeping motorman, James B. Johnson, sat up jerkily. He had not realized what was going on, but the sentinel standing a few feet from him took no chances. He fired. A bullet crashed into Johnson's head and he was killed instantly.

Then more shooting. A general fusillade. The robber in the office dropped the hammer and stuffed all the money he could carry into a sack and his pockets. Much of it was silver, and the total loot was \$2,250. fleeing to the street, still shooting, the masked men ran through a vacant lot.

They had escaped. No one knew what they looked like. Nevertheless the bandits had left clues behind them. There was the hammer, which bore the initials of the Chicago and North Western railroad; and there were copper cartridge shells from the automatic pistols. These were different from the type in general use; yet others just like them had been found at the scene of a double killing in a north side saloon.

A policeman of the Sheffield avenue station, William Blaul, who later was a lieutenant and deputy chief of detectives, became interested in the investigation and after some weeks discovered the identity of the men.

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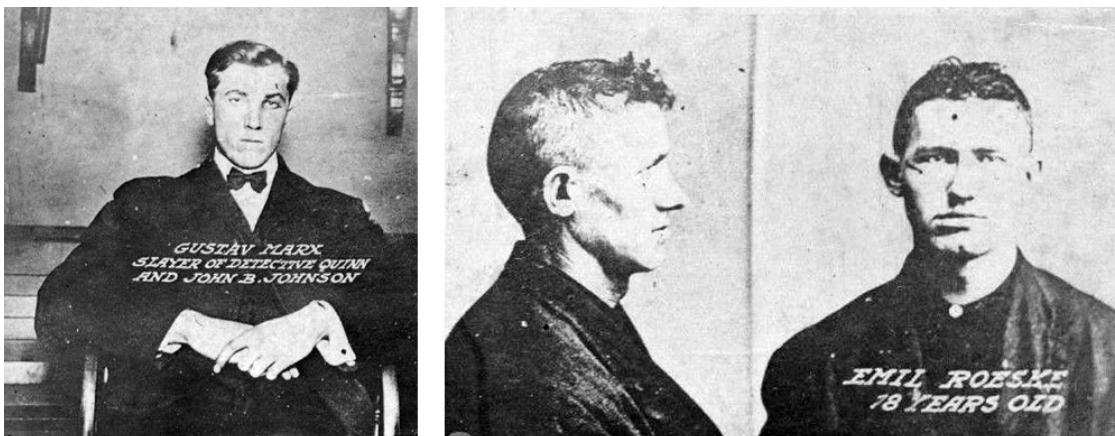
*Chicago Police officers William Blaul and John Quinn (Star #2797)*

There was an element of good fortune in this, a watchman, Paul Karkut, told him that he had seen three young men at target practice in a vacant lot near Belmont avenue and Robey street, and that when they went away he found automatic shells.

Blaul (he is now retired from the Chicago police and working as a state's attorney's investigator) saw the significance of this. Karkut helped him further. He knew the target shooters as young neighborhood toughs. Further, he knew their names—Gus Marx, Peter Neidermeier, and Harvey Van Dine. The sledge hammer clew fitted, too; Van Dine had worked for the North Western. Immediately Blaul and his partner, John Quinn, began a relentless hunt for the trio.

On Nov. 20 the policemen learned that Marx, Neidermeler, and Van Dine would meet the following night in Manny Greenberg's saloon at Addison and Robey streets and go together to an icemen's ball. At 8 p.m. on the 21st, Blaul, looking over Greenberg's swinging door, saw the tall, raw-boned Marx standing alone at the bar.

Quickly adopting a plan of campaign, the policemen entered simultaneously, Blaul from the side door, Quinn from the front. Marx, surprised, whirled about and shot down Quinn, but two bullets from Blaul's pistol struck him. Still he battled on until Blaul, a noted athlete, struck him on the head with a pistol butt and put him out.



*Gustav Marx and Emil Roeski from 1904 stereoviews.*

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Neidermeler and Van Dine, upon learning of the fray, went into even deeper hiding. There was still another murder added to the gang's list, for Quinn died a few hours later.

Marx's wounds were not serious and after they had been dressed he was taken to the Sheffield station.

"I killed Quinn," he growled, "and I'll be hung for it. But you'll get no more out of me."

For more than a day Marx persisted in silence. The police of that era were not gentle. He went through the first, second and third degrees of persuasion. His eyes were so swollen that he could not see. One of his questions, "What time is it?" was repeated so frequently that the police, shrewdly attaching significance to it, deceived him. They told him it was Tuesday morning when it was only Monday morning. He was convinced.

"All right," he said, wearily, "those rats haven't kept their word with me, and I'll talk about them, Van Dine and Neidermeier were with me in the car barns. Neidermeler killed Stewart. I shot Johnson, and Van Dine carried away the money, which we divided in Jackson park. They were with me when Ben La Gross and Adolph Johnson got killed in the saloon.

It was a long confession. Marx told also what he meant by his remark that the others hadn't kept faith. They had all agreed that if one was captured the others would storm the police station and rescue him or die in the attempt. It appeared later that Van Dine and Neidermeier actually toyed with this plan.

But none of their fantastic plots came to fruition and on Nov. 25, when the Marx confession was made public, they understood that their confederate wasn't worth fighting for any longer and fled from the city.

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*Two police with rifles standing at an open door leading into the underground dugout, where the car barn bandits were found hiding near Clarke, Indiana*

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Neidermeier and Van Dine went to the dunes country near Gary, which was much wilder then than now. With them they took another young criminal, Emil Roeski, who was little better than halt witted. They hid in a crude dugout near Clarke, Ind. But they had to have supplies and they were suspected by a country storekeeper when they entered his place.

Eight detectives were sent to investigate. They found the dugout empty, but in the early snow they saw tracks and followed them to a second dugout west of Calumet Heights. Smoke was coming from its tin chimney. Cautiously the detectives approached, and when the hideout was surrounded Policeman John F. Sheehan cried, "Come out; we're deputies." From the interior was shouted the sinister message, "Come carry us out!"

The door swung open. There was a blast of pistol fire. Detective Joseph Driscoll fell, a bullet in his abdomen. The wound was fatal. Policeman Matt Zimmer, later a supervising captain, was struck on the forehead and right ear in an exchange of shots with Van Dine.

The bandits were too well protected, too handy with their weapons, for the depleted besieging force to overcome them. One man was sent on a handcar to Miller, Ind., where he telegraphed for help. Soon 75 more policemen were on their way.

But while some of his mates were attending Driscoll, the bandits slipped out, crawled through a ravine and walked four miles to East Tolleston, Ind. There Roeski deserted the others. He had no part in the last stages of the battle. Instead he went on foot to Aetna, Ind., fell asleep in the railroad station and was captured.

In a gravel pit at East Tolleston a train was being loaded. The engineer was on the locomotive when Neidermeier leaped into the cab and confronted Albert Coffey, the fireman, and L. J. Sovea, a brakeman.

"Uncouple," he commanded Sovea.

The brakeman hesitated, and doom overtook him. Neidermeier shot and killed him. Then Coffey complied with the order to detach the engine,

"Get out on that main line and go like hell," ordered Van Dine.

Coffey protested that a limited train, westbound, was due soon. The order was repeated and he obeyed. The engine with its unwelcome load sped east. Tragedy was averted, however, when the engineer wired ahead and the wild engine was shunted into a siding at Liverpool. The bandits ran into a cornfield.

There the final act in the drama of blood was staged. The entire countryside had been aroused. Farmers had seized their shotguns and rifles and formed posses that rode the highways in buggies and spring wagons. When they heard Coffey's story they gathered, encircled the field and poured buck. shot freely into the withered cornstalks. The weary fugitives, bird shot, but not seriously wounded, walked out with upraised hands. The hunt was over.

Back in Chicago they vied with Marx in confessing. Some of their tales were palpably false; some were plausible; some were certainly true. The police never believed that they actually killed thirty- three persons; yet they knew they had slain eight: Stewart and Johnson of the car barns, La Gross, Adolph Johnson, and Otto Bauder, another saloonkeeper; Policemen Quinn and Driscoll, and Sovea.

At their trial, which cost the state \$60,000 and lasted more than two months, a vast amount of evidence was produced against the four men, for Roeski was included. He was found guilty of the Bauder murder and sentenced to light imprisonment. Later he was adjudged insane and died in an asylum.

No evidence was offered in behalf of the three principals. Lawyers made eloquent pleas for them, called them unfortunate boys mangled by the police and driven by brutality into making false confessions. But Assistant District Attorney Harry Olson stripped



away the sentimentality when he forcefully voiced the 1r philosophy: “Kill first and rob dead men. Kill the witnesses of your robbery and the law will reward you.”

The sentence of each was to be hanged by the neck until dead.

Perhaps Van Dine softened just a little before he went to death. He turned to religion. “Though I shall die on the scaffold, I hope to go to heaven,” he said piously.

There was no retreat from their hardness by Neidermeier and Marx. Marx died calmly, a sneer on his lip. Neidermeyer, admittedly an atheist, attempted to commit suicide by swallowing matches. In his last moments he snarled at the law. He wouldn't walk to the gallows and deputy sheriffs carried him.



*(Left) Gustav Marx, waiting for his execution at the Cook County Jail.*

*(Right) Crowd gathered on Illinois Street outside the jail on the morning of the car barn bandits' hanging in Chicago. Facade of the Windsor Collar & Cuff Company, Inc., is in the background. The bandits were Gustave Marx, Harvey Van Dine, Peter Niedermeyer, and Emil Roeski. They were responsible for killing Otto Bauder (July 9, 1903), Adolf Johnson and B. C. LaGross (August 2, 1203), John B. Johnson and Francis W. Stewart (August 30, 1903), John Quinn (November 22, 1903), Joseph Driscoll (December 1, 1903) and L. J. Savea. Marx, Van Dine and Niedermeyer were executed by hanging on April 22, 1904.*

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> American Rifleman, July 13, 1918, Page 306.

## Comments



**Jeff Bransky says**

July 13, 2018 at 9:18 am

What's the story on East Liverpool and Aetna? Were they towns?



**Lydia B. Winter Roskey says**

October 4, 2018 at 3:04 pm

My great-grandfather, Charles Albert Feig Winter of N. Albany street, Chicago was involved with the hunting and capture of the men. We even inherited the gun the FBI gave him.

## Leave a Reply

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