

Oral Histories of Dillinger's Crime in Greencastle, Indiana



At this corner in October 1933 the Dillinger gang robbed one of the two major banks in Greencastle, Indiana. In 1990-1991 one of my former students—an English instructor named Monty Records— interviewed residents of Greencastle about the robbery. The texts of his interviews are reproduced in this document, along with news accounts of the crime. The corner is at the intersection of Jackson and Washington Streets on the courthouse square.

Monty's interviews were originally done for a project on Hoosier Legends in an ISU folklore study by Dr. Ron Baker.

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR.

GREATEST MORNING AND SUNDAY CIRCULATION IN INDIANA.

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TUESDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 24, 1933.

Entered as Second-Class Matter at Post Office,
Indianapolis, Ind. Issued Daily and Sunday.

TELEPHONE RILEY 7311.

WEATHER FORECAST:
Rain, Slightly Warmer.

THREE CENTS.

GREENCASTLE GUNMEN GET \$75,000

The Indianapolis paper incorrectly identifies the Greencastle bank. The correct name is the Central National Bank.

Harry Pierpont is correctly identified as a member of the gang who knew Greencastle well. The paper was also right to assume that the gang had earlier set Dillinger free from the jail in Ohio. This is the first report in the capital city of the robbery that had taken place on Monday afternoon.

In the 1930s many banks closed at 3pm during the week.

The Putnam County sheriff's office was across the street from the Central National Bank. The sheriff was Lewis Alva Bryan.

Greencastle is about halfway between Indianapolis and Terre Haute.

[Special to The Indianapolis Star.]

GREENCASTLE, Ind., Oct. 23.—Four unmasked robbers marched into the Citizens National bank shortly before closing time this afternoon, turned submachine guns on workers and customers, gathered up \$74,782.09 in cash and bonds, and escaped.

Two of the robbers were identified tentatively as escaped convicts and two others are believed to be men whom officers have hunted in connection with a Lima (O.) slaying and jail delivery.

Although posses started search for the quartet immediately, no definite trace of them was found.

Postal Funds Taken.

The robbers entered the bank at about 3 o'clock and went calmly about the execution of their raid. They guarded six bank employees and six customers and forced the cashier, Harry Wells, to open the vault for them after they had stripped the counters of cash. They crammed the bonds and cash into sugar sacks.

During the robbery Hugh Hammond, local distributing agent for an oil company, entered the bank. One man relieved Hammond of the \$300 he carried.

A \$330 postal deposit being made by Elmer Sellers, post office clerk, was snatched up as he stood in line at a teller's window.

Walks Into Machine Gun.

Rex Thorlton, grocery manager, walked into a bandit during the robbery and found a machine gun muzzle in his ribs. He hesitated at the command to line up with the other victims and the robber said: "Get moving. We haven't got all day."

Having finished looting the vault, the men lifted the sacks of loot to their shoulders and left deliberately, walking to their car in a path kept clear of bystanders by a machine gunner at the door.

The bandit car, a large Studebaker sedan bearing Ohio license number A63-617, sped east through the business district, but was halted in flight at the city limits by a Pennsylvania freight train. The car was whirled about and cut back west through the residential district, traveling south on the Manhattan road.

Trailed by Motorist.

The speeding automobile nearly rammed one driven by Charles Crawley, poolroom proprietor, early in the flight. Crawley, suspicious of their actions, started in pursuit, kept close behind them in the race through the city but was outdistanced in the open country. He said he saw three men crouched in the tonneau, and a "big man" driving.

Bertillon photographs of known

ROBBERY VICTIM.



HUGH HAMMOND.

criminals tonight were shown to persons in the bank at the time of the holdup. From the collection of pictures they picked out the following as resembling closely the members of the holdup gang:

Harry Pierpont, escaped convict.

Walter Deitrich, escaped convict.

Harry Copeland, paroled convict sought in connection with the slaying of Sheriff Jess Sarber of Lima, O., and the robbery of the State bank of Massachusetts avenue in Indianapolis.

John Dillinger, desperado delivered from the Lima jail at the time Sheriff Sarber was killed.

Police Raids Recalled.

Pierpont and Dillinger are familiar with the lay of the Putnam county land, local residents said. Pierpont once worked at a factory in Fern, community near here, and Dillinger has relatives in this county, it was said.

Dillinger was closely connected with the sensational escape of ten convicts from Indiana state prison on Sept. 26, and would have helped shelter the fugitives if he had not been arrested in Ohio shortly before the break, officers believe. They are of the opinion that he was delivered from the Lima jail by part of the prison fugitives.

Today's holdup came on the heels of police station raids in two Indiana cities in which formidable arsenals were seized from officers. Within the last few days heavily armed men entered police headquarters at Auburn and Peru and rifled the gun cases. The loot included machine guns, rifles, sidearms, tear gas guns and cartridges, and bulletproof vests. These raids have aroused the fears of Indiana law enforcement officers that the gangsters are preparing to perpetrate a series of desperate crimes and today's foray was viewed as one of the first expeditions.

"Will Continue Democratic Finances

to Mediate Dispute Between Members Makes Decision.

which has caused a long drawn-out Paul V. McNutt and R. Earl continued "for the present" to collect

announced place for consultation before returning to the Democratic



**Professor Turk
was a young
teacher of
Spanish at
DePauw in
1933. He
taught at the
school for 40
years and died
in 1999.**

Legend

Laurel H. Turk, age 88
Retired College Professor, Protestant, Anglo-American
Greencastle, Ind. Collected at informant's home
Collected 8-7-91

He [Dillinger] entered two doors [at Central National Bank], and then there's a space of about eight or ten feet and another set of doors. After he got through the second set, here was Makley standing on the inside with a gun in his hand. He said, 'get to the back.' Pierpont was standing just ahead of that counter with a sub-machine gun. They said, 'get back, get back'; I went back. There must of been a dozen other people, bank people, and two or three others who were in the bank at the time that Dillinger's gang came in. Dillinger was going through the cages, and the fourth man, I'm not sure who he was They had us all herded at the back, and they, Edith Browning, I'm not sure what her capacity was in the bank, was upstairs with a Miss Gilmore who had her [safe deposit] box open They [Dillinger's gang] must of been in there ten or fifteen minutes. In due time, after they robbed the tellers cages, one of them, and I'm not sure which one it was, came back and told Harry Wells to open the cash box. He had to get a key from his desk; it seemed to me he took an hour to get his key to open the cash box, but he did, and they had some sacks, took the cash; I'm not sure what it was, Probably fifty or seventy-five thousand. Anyway, they cleaned the cash drawer. In the mean time, they were parked in a big black sedan, right down below the bank on the left side of the bank. This was on Jackson street. One of the tellers, Bill Stiles, slipped out of the back of the bank, went across the street to a hardware store, got a bunch of tacks, carpet tacks, which he took over and through

under the wheels of this car. Well anyway, they went out the front door. As they went out the front door, Rex Thorlton, who's the manager of the A & P store, was coming in with a deposit. One of the others hat fell off, and Rex reached down to get it, polite as he was. The fellow conked him with his pistol. They got in their car, turned to the right, and went along the south side of the square, and went out Bloomington street. Of course I didn't see it, but this all came out later. There was a train on the track, so they had to cut across Berry street, and they took the Manhattan road. Nobody knows how far they ever went. We had the R.O.T.C. unit still here at Depauw, and soon as the word got out, Captain Keapt took a few of the boys who were in the R.O.T.C. and drove around through this part of the country. Of course they never found them. They [Dillinger's gang] had been seen in town earlier in the day They [bank officials] didn't close the bank down [after the robbery]. They just went over to the other bank and got money.

Herold Truslow Ross taught speech at DePauw from 1927 to 1960 and died in 1994. Monty spells his name as "Harold," but DePauw archives list him as "Herold," as does his obituary in the Indianapolis Star on July 20, 1994.

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Obituaries

Herold T. Ross had been DePauw professor, activist

Services for Herold Truslow Ross, 99, Greencastle, a professor emeritus at DePauw University and a leader in senior citizens organizations, will be at

He was a charter member and incorporator of the Putnam County Chapter of the American Association of Retired Persons, serving as presi-

Legend

Harold Truslow Ross, age 95
Retired College Professor, Protestant, Anglo-American
Greencastle, Ind. Collected at informant's home
Collected 8-11-91

I Didn't know anything about it until noon. I was living next door to a man named Brown. He was vice president of First Citizens Bank. When he came in, he come over and said, 'I'm worried that John Dillinger is in town.' I said, 'what makes you think so.' He said that there had been strange cars parked in front of our bank. [He said,] 'we've got people in our balcony with ammunition if they come. There's going to be some shooting.' [He said,] 'they didn't come in the bank to our knowledge, but that car there worries me a lot.' Well, of course Dillinger didn't raid that bank [First Citizens Bank on the opposite corner from Central National Bank]. They went to the central National Bank, and they went in and took quite a bit. One of the Bankers ran out and some where the car was, and he threw a lot of little nails in front of the car. They got away, and the sheriff and the sheriff's deputy were in the court house. They saw them leave the bank and come up to Bloomington street. An interesting thing: they were stopped at Bloomington street; nobody got close enough to them. They [R.O.T.C.] chased them out on that by-pass to Terre Haute [the Manhattan road]. They were stopped again out there, but somehow they managed to get through. There were a lot of stories of course. Some of the women [in the bank] wanted to jump out the windows. It was a pretty smooth job. I don't know how much he got, but he got quite a bit. Somebody said of the sheriff's son, who was his deputy, why didn't he shoot at them? His answer was: 'would you have chased him,

been shot at?' The R.O.T.C was the brave ones. They did follow him for awhile, but they lost track. You see, Dillinger knew this county. He used the back roads. It was rather interesting.



The above pictures were taken in the Central National bank Monday afternoon and evening, following the robbery of the bank. The upper left scene shows the front of the bank, which was safely guarded by one of the four bandits while his comrades looted the institution of \$75,000.

Lower left—Miss Gladys Hammond, Miss Edith Browning, and Miss Edith Channess, employees. They were all cool under fire during the robbery and continued their work afterwards.

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Center right—Hugh
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Lower right—D
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office with the big
for some time, as

Legend

Edith Browning, Age 84
Retired Bank Clerk, Protestant, Anglo-American
Greencastle, Ind. Collected at informant's home
Collected 11-10-90

I'll tell this story the best I can remember. It was the 23rd of October 1933 about ten minutes till three I saw the people lined up with a man in back of them with a gun I figured if they knew anything about the layout of the Bank, they would know where we were upon the Mezzanine. I didn't want this lady with me to lose her assets, so I . . . grabbed an American flag and wrapped the Safe Deposit Box up in it. Then I put it back in the closet There was this huge car sitting down under the windows . . . I figured there was a man in the car. I didn't want to do anything that would cause anybody to shoot anybody I heard the alarm go off downstairs and people start talking, so I opened the door and went out (from the upper Mezzanine of the Bank). Of course they were gone. We had no idea who had robbed us, so I started down the stairs People began pouring in to see what was going on We were out of cash. But how it happened they (Dillinger's gang) had come in . . . and organized. One of them went up to the window, about the fourth window back, and stuck a twenty dollar bill under there. He wanted to know if it was good. Mr. Mayhall shouted, "Lets take it up to the Cashier," which was at the second window. Instead of that, he just reached up . . . , and he opened up his coat, and there was a sub-machine gun. That was the clue that started the whole thing. Dillinger was at the front. He turned over a little door that went in where the Officers were. There is a door between those two Officers at the two front desks, and he walked by the particular Cages. He put his shoulder, he

Photo of Edith Browning in the middle at the Central National Bank after the robbery (Greencastle Daily Banner, Oct. 24, 1933)

evidently had on breast armor of some kind, protective, and he put his body against that door and mashed the lock flat. He was in the first Cage, and they had a big sack. It was kind of like a pillow case except it was bigger than a pillow case First, he took the people all back to the back, and then he went back and started on the Cage. He pulled out in that first Cage--the Post Office had just made a deposit--and the Teller had put away the bills, and they didn't have the right money put away. And as I remember, there was seventeen dollars and a half or something. When he pulled the drawer out, to get the bills, he set it on top the seventeen and half dollars. So they didn't get it; he covered it up. They took the guns, each one of the Tellers had a gun in his Cage Everything went very smoothly. They left a man at the front door, and as people would come to the front door, he sent them on back There was very little said through the whole thing. Mr. Mayhall wasn't standing where Dillinger wanted him to stand, so he put a gun in his side and pushed him around, so he had a bruise. He got right down in one of the young man's faces and said, "Look at me good buddy so you will know me the next time you see me." They said afterward that police said that he must of had an extra supply of dope because normally he didn't talk that much. But he did do most of the talking. Pierpoint was the best shot of the bunch. He had killed the Warden, and they had gotten him out of the Prison in Lima, Ohio. And he stood with his gun in Mr. Wells' back while he opened the big safe I thing they got more money than

they expected to get I don't think they would have taken all that change because they just had one sack. It was an experience.

Greencastle's 'Gum Lady,' Edith Browning, dies at 91

Associated Press

GREENCASTLE, Ind. — After decades of bringing smiles to the faces of countless children with her stories and sticks of gum, the "Chewing Gum Lady" has died.

Edith Browning died yesterday at 91. She was known for telling — and retelling — of being in the bank the day John Dillinger robbed Central National on the courthouse square in October 1933.

But Browning will most be remembered for passing out thousands of sticks of Juicy Fruit gum to local youths, a practice that began in 1942 while she was a secretary at Central National Bank and a time when gum was in short supply.

Chicle, used in gum-making, was used in the war effort in World War II.

In Greencastle, Browning became the main chewing-gum supplier after grocers and druggists who were able

to get their hands on the scarce treat agreed to pass it on to her. From her post in the bank, she then doled sticks out to children.

"Everybody knew I liked kids, so the stores saved it for me," she once said.

She thought the end of the war would mark the end of her gum-giving days, but it wasn't to be.

"They were so accustomed to coming in for their sticks of chewing gum that they just kept coming," Browning remembered. "They'd come in the front door of the bank, take the gum out of their mouths and put it in the basket under the counter, and come back and get a fresh stick from me."

Browning estimated that she passed out 100 sticks of gum a week between 1942 and 1967, when she retired. That's more than 130,000 sticks of Juicy Fruit — all paid for by the Chewing Gum Lady.

Funeral arrangements were incomplete.

**Obituary for Edith
Browning in
Louisville Courier
Journal
July 2, 1997**

DePauw Beats Manchester in Home-Coming Day Game

TIGERS REGISTER 13-TO-0 VICTORY

Bradley Scores Twice for
Victors Before Crowd
of 4,000 Fans.

[Special to The Indianapolis Star.]

GREENCASTLE, Ind., Oct. 21.—Touchdowns by Bob Bradley in the first and second quarters gave DePauw a 13-to-0 victory over a scrapping Manchester football team on Blackstock field here this afternoon. The Spartans battled the Tigers almost on even terms during the last two periods.

DePauw's first marker came in the middle of the opening frame when Bradley, veteran right half, crashed through the line for the necessary distance. Miller, husky sophomore tackle, was sent in to kick the extra point by Coach Gaumy Neal. His attempt was successful and the Methodists led, 7 to 0.

Manchester braced in the second quarter, both teams frequently exchanging punts. Shortly before the half ended, however, Bradley squirmed through the left side of the visiting line and ran sixty-five yards for his other touchdown, outracing the Spartan's secondary defense. A forward pass for the additional point failed.

Many Substitutes Used.

During the third and fourth quarters Coach Neal substituted frequently. The second half was also marked by some rough playing as Manchester put up a desperate fight in holding the Tigers at bay. On one occasion in the fourth quarter the upstate gridders rallied on their own one-yard line and kept Depauw's reserve backfield from scoring.

In addition to the offensive work of Bradley, the line plunging of Red Pearce, junior fullback, and the tackling of Volkman, lanky Tiger left end, featured the play of the local collegians. Cordier, right end, and Banet, right half, were outstanding for Manchester. Cordier's long punts kept the Methodists at the other end of the field on numerous occasions. Banet's return to Depauw kicks thrilled the spectators and his defensive work halted several Tigers' drives.

The game was the highlight of Old Gold day, Depauw's annual homecoming, and was witnessed by a crowd of more than 4,000, including alumni and friends of the university.

Summary:
DePauw (13) Manchester (0).
Volkman Left End Yarger
McCullough Left Tackle Stine

- The weekend before the robbery was one of the busiest of the year, with over 4000 people attending the big game for Homecoming between DePauw's football team and the Manchester College team from northern Indiana. There was a lot of money in town, and the Dillinger gang was expecting big deposits to be made at the bank on Monday, October 23, 1933.

Studebaker Sedans of the kind that the Dillinger gang used in Greencastle. Studebakers were manufactured in South Bend, Indiana. The running boards made this car useful for quick getaways by the gang.

