

# Country Constables Are Quick on the Draw



Sheriff Homer Sylvester (at left with gun) shows how he captured Alfred Power and Robert Suhay, two New York gunmen, at Plattsmouth, Neb. (Associated Press photo.)

## Rural Police No Longer "Hicks"

By FRANK CIPRIANI

**A** TOUGH nut was Merle Vandebush, escaped convict, kidnaper, bank robber. He not only flouted the written laws of three states and the federal government but snapped his chubby fingers at police—all police. New York's finest, the G bureau's smartest, and sundry other enforcers of the law always found him a wriggle ahead, snakily slithering out of their grasp.

Utterly contemptuous of the men following him, Tough Man Vandebush, wanted for an assortment of crimes, mostly bank robberies, on Feb. 25 of this year drove into Katonah, N. Y., with two pals, George and Anthony Rera, cousins. The three promptly raided the Northern Westchester bank there and emerged with \$17,826. They sped away in their coupe. To fool pursuers, who naturally would be looking for three men in a car, Vandebush and George Rera hid in the rear baggage compartment leaving visible only one man, Anthony Rera, the driver.

Over in North Castle, ten miles away, Sergt. John A. Hergenhan and Patrolmen W. Gerald Hendricks and William Orman received a radio flash of the crime, warning them to watch for three men in a coupe. The three hurried to the main highway and waited. They halted the first coupe to appear. The driver was Anthony Rera. He answered their questions politely. He said he was out for a ride.

Rera seemed to be a harmless citizen and might have been waved on but for the fact that Policeman Hendricks possessed more than an ordinary amount of curiosity—and suspicion. He scanted to the rear of the car. He casually lifted the compartment cover. He hastily slammed it shut with an exclamation of surprise. In the brief instant he had raised the cover he had seen something.

He had gazed into the muzzles of two revolvers.

Hendricks drew his gun; his partners, sensing something eventful, overpowered Driver Rera, and a few minutes later Vandebush and George Rera, unwitting prisoners in their own trap, peacefully surrendered.

And thus was captured the na-

tion's then current No. 1 public enemy, Merle Vandebush, prison breaker, kidnaper, bank robber. The important point about his arrest is this:

Vandebush, considered one of the worst bad men in the country, who time and again thumbed his nose at the finest police in the nation, was captured by country cops.

Not so long ago policemen such as Hendricks, Hergenhan, and Orman were derisively referred to as "hick cops" by their snobbish blue-coated brethren in the large cities. This appellation is now passe.

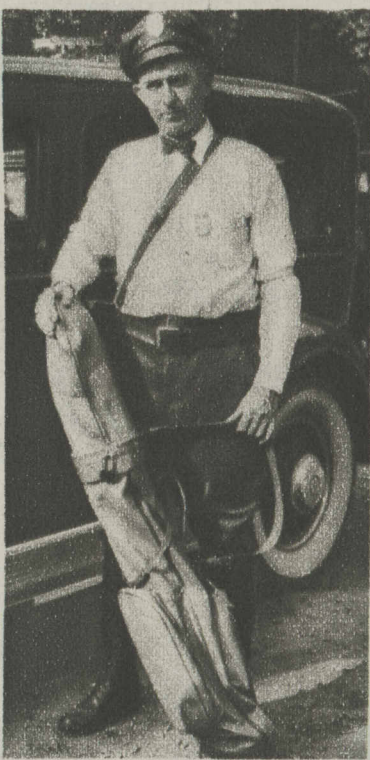
As the Colt "made all men equal" several generations back, the radio and other modern crime detection and prevention devices have made all policemen equal. This is not to say a great inequality had always existed. Indeed not. The Dalton boys were brought to earth by small-towners forty-five years ago. Harry Tracy reached his trail's end in battle with similar foes thirty-five years ago. More recently John Dillinger and Roger Touhy learned the law's potency through the medium of what both were chagrined to call "hick cops."

And only a few weeks ago two New York gunmen, Alfred Power and Robert Suhay, had a taste of the same stuff. Their story still is fresh, but not too fresh to retell as a mighty fine illustration of what happens when big-city outlaws collide with rural law enforcers.

Like Merle Vandebush, Suhay and Power on March 8 held up a Katonah, N. Y., bank, getting \$18,000. New York police and federal agents went after them, the G-men because the bank was a national bank. Suhay and Power fled to Topeka, Kas., where they later began receiving mail at the general delivery window of the post-office. G-men trailed them and on April 16 trapped them in the post-office. Suhay and Power shot their way out, fatally wounding Agent Wimberly W. Baker. Suhay was wounded.

In their getaway Power and Suhay wrecked their car near Sabetha, Kas., after which they imposed themselves on Joe Garver, a farmer. He was forced to call Dr. Sam Hibbard to treat Suhay's wound. The New Yorkers then kidnaped the physician in his own machine. They ejected him a few miles out. He hitch-hiked to Sabetha; Garver did likewise. They notified Town Marshal P. M. Crawford. The marshal immediately broadcast an alarm.

Up at Plattsmouth, Neb., sixty miles from Topeka, Sheriff Homer Sylvester and Deputy Cass Sylvester, his brother, peace officers of all Cass county, received the alarm. They had had nothing more exciting to do than to look out for chick-



Motorcycle Policeman Harry Ward, a rookie, who captured Roger Touhy and his gangsters near Elkhorn, Wis. The golf bag was the gang's ammunition magazine. (Tribune photo.)

for some fancy work. They drove to a highway spot eight miles south of town and waited. At 10:30 p. m. a car answering the description of Dr. Hibbard's, and bearing two men, passed northward. The Sylvester brothers followed.

The two men stopped on the edge of Plattsmouth to examine a highway sign. Sheriff Sylvester and Deputy Sheriff Sylvester drove up and with the nonchalance with which they might arrest a hen-roost thief ordered the suspects to "Get out and throw up your hands."

The men looked out into the yawning muzzles of two shotguns and into two pairs of determined eyes. They got out. They not only threw up their hands but threw down their guns. They were Suhay and Power.

Scanning the voluminous records of important arrests accomplished by rural, small-town, or small-city police, one stops short at two outstanding instances—Dillinger and Touhy, both of recent memory.

John Dillinger and his band of Indiana desperadoes ran wild in the greater Chicago metropolitan area in 1933 and 1934. They followed their prison delivery at Michigan City with a series of bold bank robberies and murders. Late in January, 1934, after a \$20,000 bank robbery and the murder of a policeman in East Chicago, Dillinger and three of his most desperate men, Charles Makley, Harry Pierpont, and Russell Clark, headed west. They settled in Tucson, Ariz., population 33,000.

## Heroes of Hinterland Trap Big-City Bad Men

An extraordinary circumstance, a fire in their hotel, revealed them to Tucson police. One squad seized Makley on the street. Another, led by Policeman Chet Sherman, nabbed Clark in a rented house with his woman, Opal Long. He put up a terrific battle against Sherman, but to no success. Three rookie cops—ex-cowboys—captured Pierpont. They didn't even bother to search him, which was a mean trick on Pierpont, a killer, for when he finally stood in the police station, surrounded by five policemen, he attempted to draw one of three pistols concealed on his person. But he dropped his gun in a chill as five pistols were shoved into his face. The Tucson police were quicker on the draw than he.

Only Dillinger now remained at large, but Police Chief C. A. Wollard and fifteen men soon cornered him entering a house with Anne Martin. Dillinger whirled as Wollard accosted him, and tried to start action with a submachine gun. But he saw what Pierpont elsewhere had seen, only more of it—fifteen guns menacing him from every angle.

"My God!" wailed Dillinger. "I'll be the laughing stock of the country, letting a hick-town police force get me."

He should not have felt so bad, for Tucson's police rank with the best, and his humiliation should have been nil in comparison with Roger Touhy's seven months earlier. Touhy, a gangster leader and kidnaper on Chicago's northwest side, justly merited a certain distinction, not only because he defied big-city police generally but the mighty Capone gang.

On June 19, 1933, an automobile crashed into a pole near Elkhorn, Wis., bringing to the scene Harry

town authorities got their man, although at the cost of a life.

The list of small-town law triumphs over desperadoes is unending. In 1928 the late Eugene (Red) McLaughlin, Chicago gangster, tried to batter his way out of the hands of Hayward, Wis., authorities with a wrench, but didn't reckon with Mayor Thomas McClaine, who stopped him with a shot and later remarked, "Red McLaughlin's just another bum to me."

On March 16, 1932, Clifford Edwards, Leslie Stanley, Eddie Morris, and Earl Jeffries imprisoned thirty-eight employees and patrons in the City National bank of Clinton, Ia. (population 25,000), and escaped with \$100,000, only to be captured immediately afterward by Clinton police and sentenced to prison within the week.

And on Feb. 9, 1926, five Chicago hoodlums had a taste of small-town action in the same locality. On that day Harry Marks, Harry Williams, and Joe Murray snatched Alfred Fairfield and John Redman



Gun moll Bonnie Parker, who with her bad-man companion, Clyde Barrow, was killed by Texas rangers near Gibsland, La.



The bullet-riddled automobile in which Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow died. (Acme photo.)

1892, to be specific—Charles T. Gump, a hardware merchant in Coffeyville, Kas., cried out, "It's the Daltons!" He was pointing to five men riding into town. He was correct. The five were Bob, Grat, and Emmett Dalton and Bill Powers and Dick Broadwell, desperadoes. Town police and citizens, roused by Gump's cry, gave battle. It was a short but furious one. Three citizens, a town marshal, Grat Dalton, Powers, and Broadwell were killed. Bob Dalton was wounded and captured with Emmett. Bob and Emmett later went to prison, eventually were freed and became estimable citizens. Emmett now lives in Los Angeles.

from deputy sheriffs in Clinton after Fairfield and Redman had been sentenced to prison for robbery. They headed across the Mississippi river, to find a vigilante committee of police and citizens awaiting them at Chadwick, Ill. In the gun fight resulting Marks was slain and the others captured.

Not to be overlooked in any list of desperadoes who have fallen victims to country peace officers are the cigar-smoking gun moll, Bonnie Parker, and her bad man, Clyde Barrow, whose depredations covered a dozen states. On May 23, 1934, these two tried to get past a posse of Texas rangers near Gibsland, La., by speeding their car to 85 miles an hour. The rangers fired on them, the hurtling car plunged over a steep embankment, and the posse finished its job by riddling the machine with bullets. The man and the girl were taken out dead.

Hundreds of similar instances may be passed over to select two dusty cases, the finales of Harry Tracy and the Dalton brothers.

Tracy, cool, brave, and fierce, shot his way out of the Salem, Ore., prison on June 9, 1902, killing two guards in the deed. For two months he tantalized—and killed—pursuers. Trapped by one posse, he killed two members; trapped by another, he killed one and wounded a second. He seemed to enjoy shooting his way out of tight spots. All told he killed seven men and wounded five. On Aug. 5 near Creston, Wash., an unpublicized deputy sheriff and four citizens surprised and wounded him. He crawled away into a field, and there, as the law officers closed in on him, committed suicide.

Ten years earlier—in October,



Policemen examine rear compartment of car in which Merle Vandebush and George Rera were concealed when Patrolman W. Gerald Hendricks discovered them. (Acme photo.)

Ward, a rookie motorcycle cop. He found four men, much the worse for drink, and a damaged pole.

Ward questioned them. They answered politely. He told them they had damaged a pole and would have to pay for the damage. They offered him \$200 to forget the unfortunate accident. The bribe offer whetted Ward's suspicions.

He took the four men to the station, holding the driver and letting the three others wander out in search of beer. Then he examined their car. He found guns, plenty of guns. With other policemen Ward speedily rounded up the absentee beer quaffers. They were Willie Sharkey, Edward (Father Tom) McFadden, and Gustav (Gloomy Gus) Shaeffer. The man held as the driver was Roger Touhy.

No tougher quartet of gunmen ever fell into the hands of a lone policeman—country cop or big-city bluecoat.

"And can you imagine the big hick turning down the \$200 we offered him to forget about us?" sobbed Touhy later. Touhy and several of his lieutenants are now serving 99-year sentences in Joliet prison for the John Factor kidnaping.

To return to the Dillinger case briefly. After Dillinger's arrest in Tucson he escaped from the Crown Point, Ind., jail, taking with him Herbert Youngblood, Negro desperado. Youngblood was soon afterward trapped in Port Huron, Mich. He killed Undersheriff Charles Cavanaugh and wounded Sheriff William Van Antwerp, but was slain in so doing. Again small-



The wounded Robert Suhay, big-time gunman who was caught by a country sheriff. (Acme photo.)



John Dillinger and some of his gang (men and girls) are arraigned in Tucson, Ariz., after police of that city trap them. Dillinger is the man in the center. (Acme photo.)



City gunmen who hold up armored trucks on the highways, such as is shown in this action picture from a movie, are more than likely to find their nemesis is some backwoods constable or rookie motor cop who is full of courage and quick on the draw.