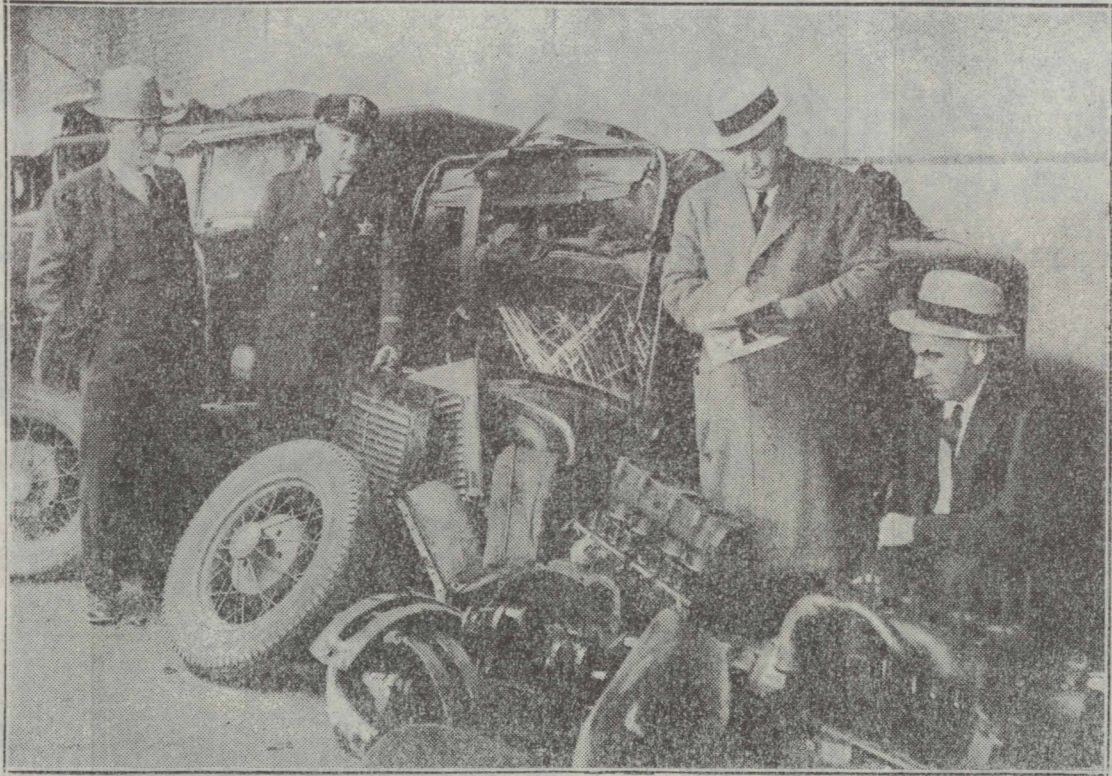


ILE THEFT RINGS



"The gang has one or more 'plants' or 'hideouts,' garages . . . used for changing numbers and stripping . . ." Detectives are shown inspecting a stripped car in the garage of a gang which was raided recently.

ney's net Mr. Courtney makes this reply: "If you had spent more time trying to persuade your boy to go straight, there would be no need for spending time trying to persuade me to be lenient. The days of treating automobile thievery as a boyish prank have ended in Chicago."

Speedy trials have been the rule in the special automobile branch of the Municipal court. The statutory charge of larceny of an automobile,

had an unenviable police record. He had been sentenced to the St. Charles reformatory, had escaped and returned in a stolen car to free three of his hoodlum pals. They then hired out as 'clouters' for a gang.

"He told me that few of the 'clouters' carry guns, which they call 'sticks,' but that the other members of the gang usually were armed. The 'clouter,' banking on getting off in court on the 'first offender' plea, or because of his youthfulness, knows that if he is caught with a gun his chances are spoiled.

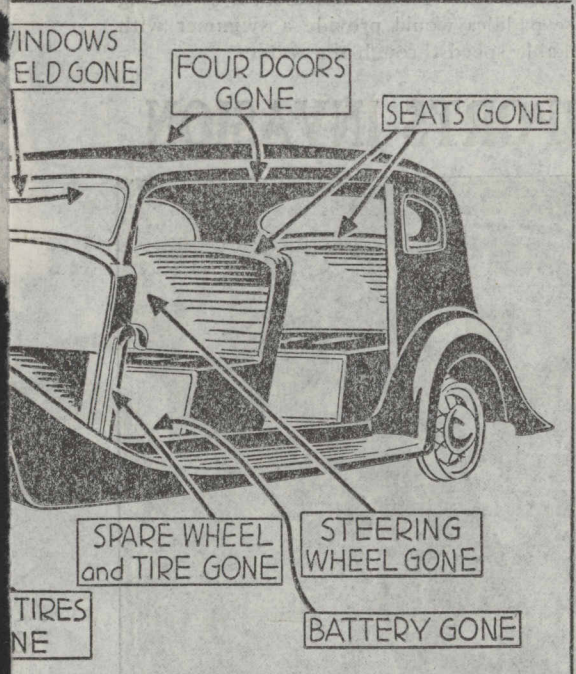
"Clouting" Fee \$15 to \$20
 "The trained and experienced 'clouters' are paid from \$15 to \$20 for each job, but there is no set price. This boy said he had little fear of the police, especially the automobile squad men, whom he called 'peanut squads.' He had been chased by police squads many times, he said, but never had any difficulty in getting away. On one occasion, he said, he got far enough ahead of the pursuing squad to make a complete U turn and passed the squad a moment later, going in the opposite direction on the same street!

"Uniformed policemen he called 'heat,' private detectives 'private heat,' and as a compliment to me he called the state's attorney's office 'real heat.' He said that most of the automobile 'clouters' of his acquaintance eventually became stickup men."

The fact that the boy described by Mr. Courtney was willing to talk about himself and his offenses is indicative of a vast change in the attitude of auto thieves. At the beginning of the present campaign, but less frequently now, youthful suspects invariably maintained a stolid silence.

"To the question, 'Whom did you steal this car for?' the answer was always, 'For a guy named Gus,' said Mr. Courtney. "When we asked him where he had met Gus the reply usually was, 'Halsted and Madison streets.' To all other questions the answers were either 'I don't know' or 'I don't remember.'"

One circumstance which has aided the state's attorney's staff has been the unpreparedness of the suspected thieves for the severe grilling they receive. In recent months, since the word went out to the underworld that "heat was on the auto racket," suspects have been better prepared, but,



which the gang "strippers" quickly remove. Usually this is done in five hours. Experts tear down a car in five hours.

which carries a penitentiary penalty, is invoked by Mr. Courtney in all cases where it is applicable. Auto thieves now are aware that if caught they have no chance of getting a light sentence on a "misdemeanor" charge. For the first five months of 1934 the automobile theft court handled 1,733 cases. Of these 537 were held to the grand jury. Convictions were obtained in 337 cases, and the remaining 839 cases were either nol-prossed, stricken with leave to reinstate, or the defendants were discharged.

Auto Thieves "Change Tune"

As soon as the automobile thieves realized that the state's attorney meant business, the demeanor of prisoners brought in for questioning changed, Mr. Courtney said. They no longer showed the same belligerent scorn of former days. The younger men showed real fear of receiving a penitentiary sentence, and for that reason voluntarily supplied information involving uncaught members of the ring. In doing so they hoped for leniency. Mr. Courtney narrated his experience with one hardened "clouter," typical of the automobile thieves of today.

"This boy," he said, "although only 17 years old,



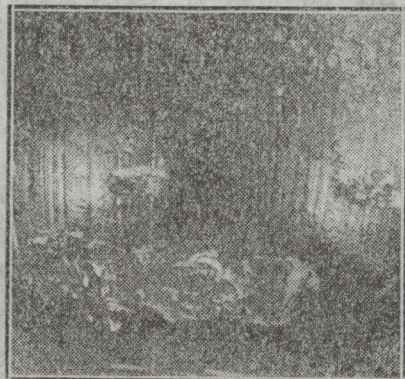
rs, or 'brains,' of the rings. Scores of stolen automobiles and thousands of dollars' worth of stripped parts were recovered in one of the raids. Many of these young men are of high school age.



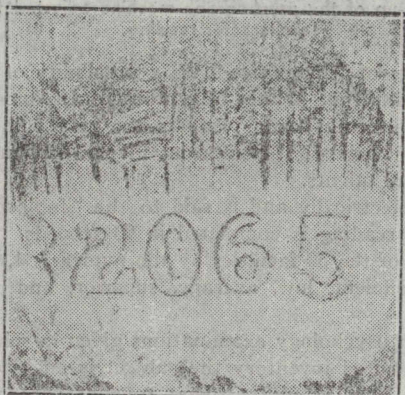
"The boy . . . dumped the car into the drainage canal . . . state's attorney's police went to the indicated location and pulled the mud-caked car out of the water. Deep quarry pools, too, long have been favorite spots for dumping automobiles. . . ."

on the other hand, so have the men of Mr. Courtney's staff.

In addition to the voluminous files of questionnaires and other records, Mr. Courtney and his staff are aided by a system of accurate charts, kept scrupulously up to date, which show the down or up swing of the automobile theft rate, the number of cars stolen each day and where, and maps of the city of Chicago, changed each month, showing the places where cars were stolen and the places where cars were stripped. If the map shows that more cars were stolen in a certain police district in July than there were in June, Mr. Courtney calls on the police captain of that district for an explanation. He also demands improvement. Most often the theft rate in that district shows a decrease for the following month. This does not indicate necessarily that the captain concerned was inefficient, but it does show that a constant and forceful reminder from the state's attorney gets results.



Motor block on which the number has been obliterated.



Same block after number has been "raised" with acid.

The records of the automobile theft staff also show that a number of the cars reported stolen each day were in reality merely left somewhere by the owner, who then forgot where his car was parked and concluded it had been stolen. These cases are termed "voids" by the state's attorney's office, but they are included in the daily figure for cars stolen and thus affect the theft rate.

The fact that many automobile owners, in financial straits, have dishonestly disposed of their cars in order to collect insurance is not new. It has been going on for years, but the number of such cases greatly increased during the depression. At the beginning of the campaign Mr. Courtney publicly announced that the police would make a house-to-house check of every private garage in the city in search of stolen cars. Next day literally hundreds of cars, covered with dust from standing idle in a garage for months, were found parked throughout the city. In many cases automobile owners who wanted to dispose of their cars and claim the insurance did business with one of the organized theft rings. For a price, usually a percentage of the insurance, the gang would take the car and dismember it beyond recognition, putting the wrecked parts in one of the gang "graveyards."

Canal as a "Graveyard"

A recent case, in which a suburban chief of police was involved, was typical of an old method of getting rid of unwanted cars. This official hired a "clouter" to steal the car of a friend. The boy did so and dumped the car in the drainage canal. When he confessed at the state's attorney's office he told the location of the car. State's attorney's police, checking the truthfulness of his story in all its details, went to the indicated location and pulled the mud-caked automobile out of the water. Deep quarry pools, too, long have been favorite spots for dumping automobiles.

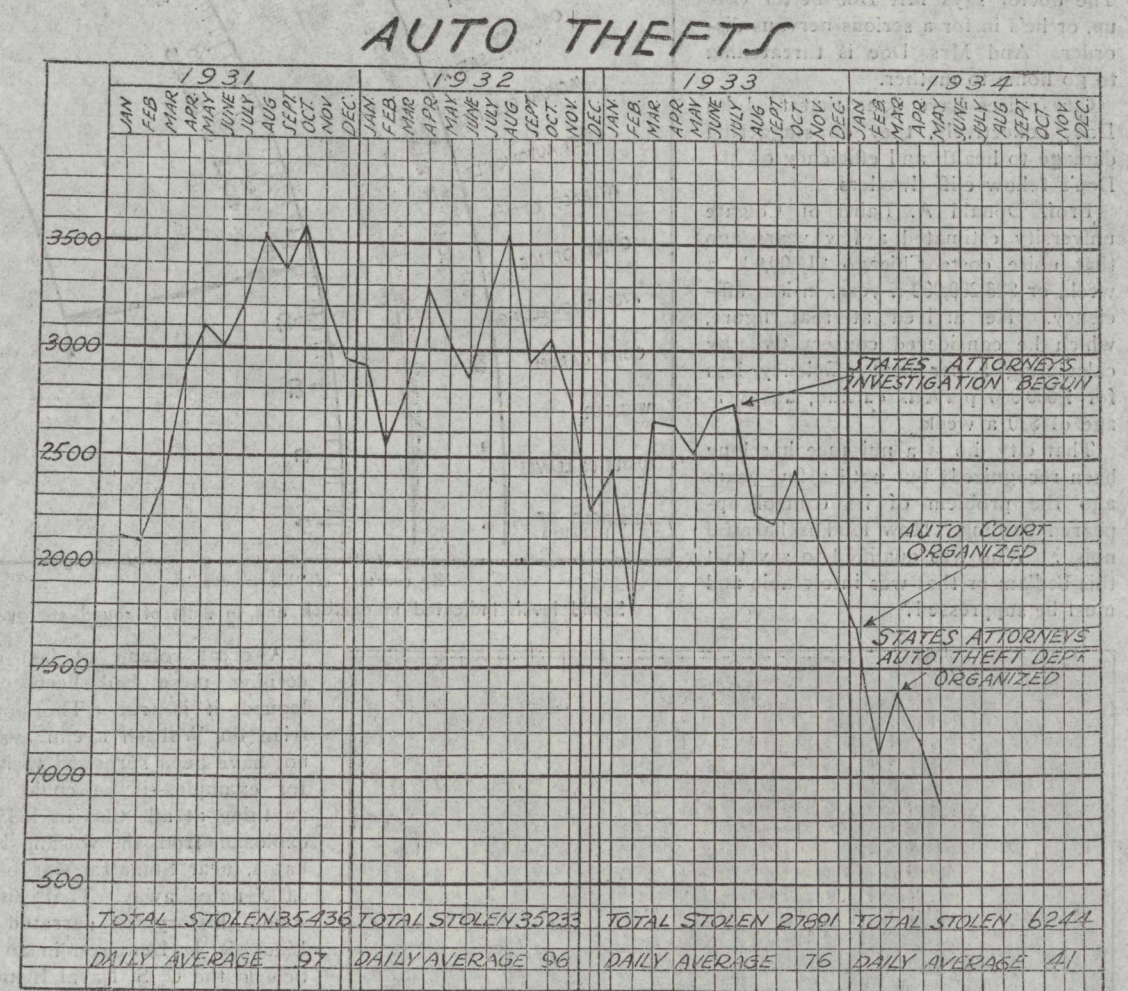
Following Mr. Courtney's expose of the number of "stolen cars" parked in private garage hideouts, scores of persons voluntarily came in to confess and to offer repayment of the insurance money they had collected.

Mr. Courtney estimates that the campaign of his office has cut down the number of cars stolen daily by 50 or more. On June 30 it was announced

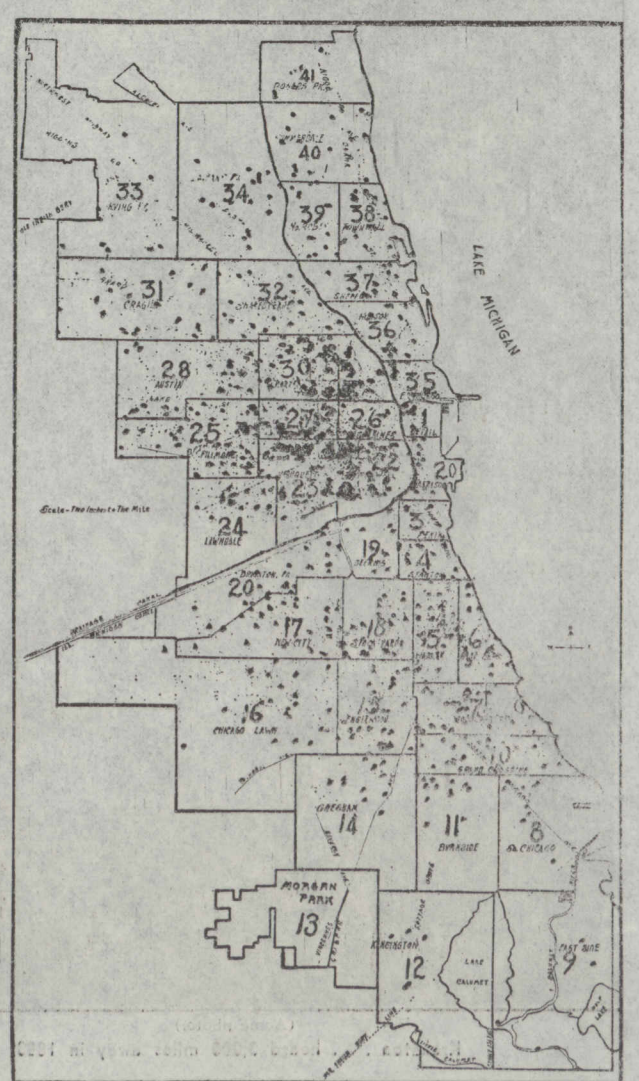
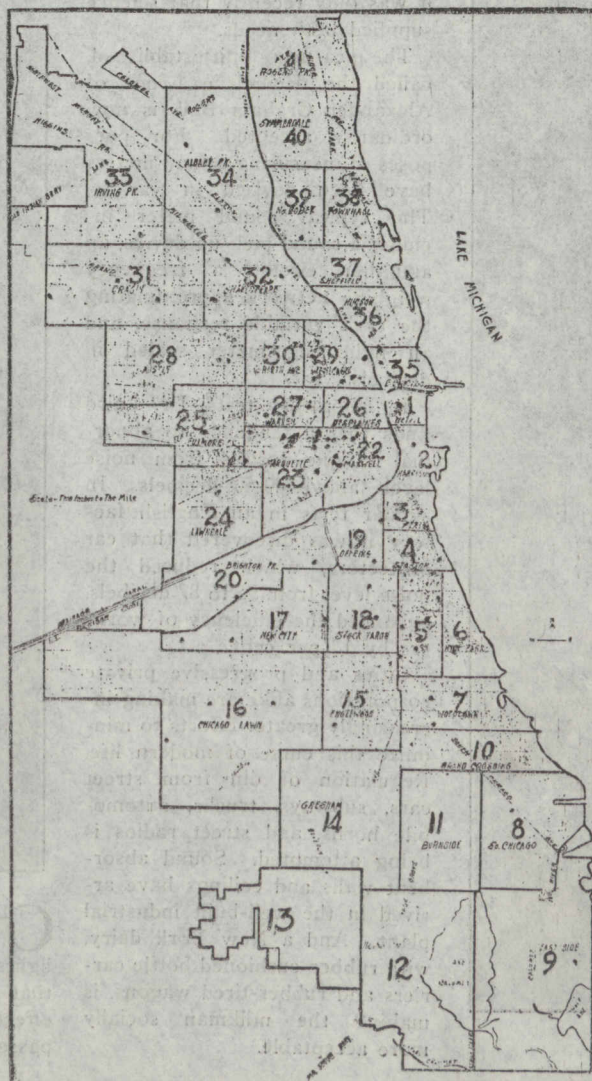
officially that in the period from Jan. 1 to the end of June, 1933, the total number of cars stolen was 14,700. The number of cars stripped was 2,529. For the same period of 1934 only 6,919 cars were stolen and 728 were stripped. Of the cars stolen all but 74 have been recovered. The month of June is considered one of the most favorable months for automobile thieves, because of weather conditions. In 1933 more than three times as many cars were stolen in June as were stolen in the same month

this year. Figures for the corresponding months are: For June, 1933, cars stolen, 2,708; recovered, 2,311; stripped, 498. For June, 1934, cars stolen, 901; recovered, 786; stripped, 82.

A fact which does not show in the automobile theft record, but which nevertheless is directly related to Mr. Courtney's campaign against auto thieves, is that more than 300 crimes other than that of stealing an automobile have been solved through the arrest of auto thieves.



One of the charts by which State's Attorney Courtney keeps an accurate check on the rise and fall of the auto theft rate. Note the sharp drop coinciding with the start of his campaign.



These maps of the police districts of Chicago are changed each month. On the map at the left the dots show where cars were stolen. On the map at the right dots indicate where cars in stripped condition were recovered.