

Dillinger's Happy Hunting Ground



(Tribune photo.)
MELVIN PURVIS

(Continued from page one.)

A bullet fired into the back of his head killed Dillinger. Dead men make no revelations. His own story of the alliances bought in Indiana and elsewhere, with the loot of his holdups, remains untold. In part it is suppressed. Several times the Indiana state administration has gone through the form of opening an investigation. It has never finished one.

One inquiry was begun in the fall of 1934 when McNutt was running his candidate, Sherman Minton, for the United States senate. Nothing much happened, and after election day the whole matter was allowed to drop.

The first chapter in the life of Dillinger begins with his birth in 1902 and ends with his parole from the Michigan City prison in May, 1933.

His birthplace was a farm twenty miles southwest of Indianapolis. His father, industrious and of good character, took him as a boy to that city. After some years the family moved to Mooresville in Morgan county. There John Dillinger's crime career began.

In the summer of 1924 he and an accomplice, Ed Singleton, held up a merchant, Frank Morgan. After beating him severely they seized \$555. Both were identified and arrested. In September, when Dillinger was tried, he offered one excuse for his deed—that he was drunk. Judge Joseph W. Williams sentenced him to ten to twenty-one years in prison. Singleton obtained a separate trial and a change of venue, pleaded guilty, and got off with a much lighter punishment.

This, it has been held, embittered Dillinger against society. Certainly he was an unruly inmate at the Pendleton reformatory, where he was first sent. It has been brought out that he engaged in "gambling, fighting, and destroying property" there. The records of the former governor, Harry G. Leslie, show that he twice tried to escape and that a year was added to his sentence for these attempts.

Once Dillinger applied to Governor Leslie for parole. He did not get it. Leslie recognized his unfitness for a return to normal life. He ordered the young criminal, as an intractable, transferred early in 1929 to the Michigan City penitentiary.

There Dillinger met the hardened lawbreakers who were to become his accomplices in an amazing series of terrible crimes. He associated closely with them. He planned his and their futures. His record included several demerits—for gambling, for cooking in his cell, for visiting other convicts' cells, for having a razor in his possession.

A new appeal for parole was made in the spring of 1933. McNutt, elected governor in 1932, was building up the political machine that still weighs upon the people of Indiana. He was gathering dictatorial powers for himself and legalizing the notorious Two Per Cent club, which forces state employees to contribute to the Democratic party slush funds.

But McNutt was not too busy to sign a parole for Dillinger. The executive order was issued on May 23. In many respects this was a remarkable document. It related that "John Dillinger was convicted in the Circuit court of Allen county, Indiana, on Dec. 26, 1930, charged with conspiracy to commit a felony and assault and battery with in-

tent to rob, and sentenced and committed to the Indiana reformatory for a term of ten to twenty-one years."

Further, it mentioned that the trial judge recommended, in a lengthy statement, that clemency be granted, and that the state commission on clemency, "after careful investigation," recommended parole.

At the time, and in view of the documents on which it was based, the governor's action appeared to be of a routine nature. It was much later when it was discovered that some of these documents were extremely misleading. Dillinger was (let it be remembered) sentenced in 1924, not 1930; Allen county is more than a hundred miles from Morgan county. Dillinger's record as a trouble maker was minimized.

The only explanation ever made by McNutt and his cohorts was that there had been clerical errors. It was also brought out that warnings about the prisoner's character were ignored. H. W. Claudy, a deputy warden at Michigan City, a Republican holdover, stated later that he had written two letters opposing the parole. Dillinger, he said, was manifestly a dangerous criminal.

When the quoted reference to Judge Williams' statement became public the jurist protested that his stand had been misrepresented. He declared and proved that he had recommended leniency toward Dillinger only if the record justified clemency. McNutt continued in his effort to shift blame to the judge. He even maintained that the court had dealt inequitably by giving Singleton a light penalty and Dillinger a severe one. Although Judge Williams showed that Singleton had not been tried before him, the governor made no retraction.

That was how John Dillinger slipped unnoticed through the gray walls and started into the second period of his career.

Not long was he satisfied on the parental acres. He set out to prove his viciousness. With two old pals of prison days, Hilton Crouch and Harvey Copeland, he started robbing banks. Inside a month he had hit three,



(Associated Press photo.)
Dillinger poses with the wooden pistol (in his left hand) he said was used in the Crown Point escape.

at Daleville, Montpelier, and Indianapolis. Indiana was paying the price for his release. The loot was \$36,000, for the time being a satisfactory working fund.

He remembered the bad men in the Michigan City cells. On Sept. 10 he tossed three pistols over the walls. The wrong men got them and turned them in. A few days later Dillinger forwarded seven more pistols to his pals. They went in a shipment of merchandise consigned to the prison shirt factory. This time there was no slip-up. The package was not examined by guards. It was opened by Walter Detrick, a Dillinger conspirator. He distributed the guns, and on the 26th the ten ferocious convicts shot their way to freedom.

Among them were four who were more vicious than the rest. Their names were Harry Pierpont, John Hamilton, Charles Makley, and Russell Clark. All were to go to the bitter end with Dillinger. Only one, Clark, is still alive, serving a life term in prison. The other three died violently.

This evasion shocked the United States, even though the background of the Dillinger parole

Record of Outlawry and Politics in Indiana

was unknown. The governor, who was even then being referred to as "Emperor McNutt of Indiana," tried gracefully to kiss away any criticisms. He said that "in the spring, when the sap begins to flow, the boys want to get out."

Other Indiana folk were not so complaisant about this new deal in springs. Former Governor Leslie told why it was easy to get hardened felons out. McNutt, granted dictatorial powers by a subservient legislature, had dismissed an expert warden and had replaced him with an inexperienced man. Also, Leslie pointed out, he had removed sixty-nine of the 120 Michigan City guards—all men of experience—and had replaced them with political appointees.

Then the governor promised a full investigation. He would appoint an impartial commission to investigate. None was appointed. The prison board of trustees gathered and made a report. It whitewashed the administration. As a gesture one man was fired. That man was Claudy, the Republican who had wanted to keep Dillinger in. He had dared the administration to make a real investigation of the break.

After forwarding the pistols to his friends in Michigan City, Dillinger went back to his robbery work. He knocked over a bank in Pennsylvania and two in Ohio, at Dayton and Bluffton. But some efficient Ohio policemen were after him. Even before the convicts escaped he had been apprehended. With almost absurd ease he was seized in the home of a woman friend in Dayton.

Charged with the Bluffton holdup, he was locked in the jail at Lima, O. He was still there on Oct. 13 when three men walked into the office of Sheriff Jess Sarber. They said they were deputy wardens come from Michigan City to take Dillinger back. The sheriff asked for their credentials.

"Here they are," said one man.

The three drew pistols. Shots were fired. The sheriff fell dead. The killers were Pierpont, Makley, and Clark. They freed Dillinger and five minutes later all were speeding back to the havenland of Indiana.

That killing made Dillinger the No. 1 public enemy. He and his gang had inaugurated the greatest reign of criminal terror in American history. With his men he raided the police stations at Auburn, and Peru, Ind.

In Indiana there arose a clamor for the calling out of the militia. Dillinger contemptuously took his cutthroats into the Central National bank of Greencastle on Oct. 23 and fled with \$75,000. A little later the crew dodged into Chicago. Success made them greedy. On Nov. 20, reinforced by two new members, Copeland and Leslie Homer, they raided the American Bank and Trust company of Racine, Wis., and got \$27,000.

For weeks after that the gang used Chicago and its suburban area as headquarters. They narrowly escaped capture several times. Dillinger himself, it appears, spent some of this period in East Chicago, Ind., where he had friends.

On Jan. 15, 1934, he went with Hamilton and Pierpont into the First National bank of East Chicago. While the others handled the bank force and gathered up \$15,000, he stood at the door with a machine gun.

"Don't miss any of that dough," he commanded Hamilton. "There's a policeman outside, but I'll take care of him."

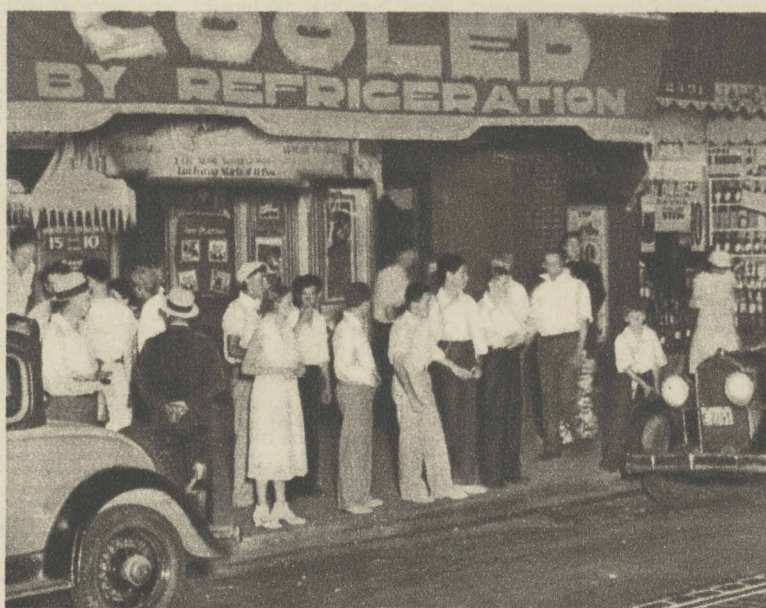
When the time was ripe Dillinger went forward, pushing a bank official ahead of him as a shield. The policeman, William P. O'Malley, would not fire, fearing he would kill the banker. Dillinger's gun spat. O'Malley fell dead.

Hamilton was wounded in this affray. Nevertheless the three bandits escaped. Ten persons at least had seen them and were able later to identify Dillinger. Leaving Hamilton in a hideout, the boss killer fled to Arizona. With him went his Lima deliv-

ers, Pierpont, Makley, and Clark, and three women.

They arrived in Tucson on Jan. 22. Three days later all were captured. The men surrendered without firing a shot. The women were also taken into custody. That should have been the end of the Dillinger career. Three states sought to extradite the outlaws. Wisconsin wanted them for the Racine job. Indiana pleaded to be allowed to try Dillinger for the O'Malley murder. Ohio wanted the three killers of Sheriff Sarber. Governor Moeur of Arizona ruled in favor of Indiana, with an understanding that the Hoosier state would cooperate with Ohio.

Dillinger, who had confided to Sheriff John Belton that he had \$100,000 cached away and "could get it as soon as I reach Indiana," was lifted into a plane on Jan. 30. With him were Deputy Sheriff Carroll Holley of Lake county, Indiana, and Chief of Police Nicholas Makar of East Chicago. Holley is a cousin of



(Tribune photo.)
The Chicago north side movie house near which Dillinger was shot.

Mrs. Lillian Holley, whom the Democrats of Lake county had made sheriff.

The trip to Chicago was uneventful. But the reception accorded the champion gangster at the airport here was colossal. By actual count eighty-two Chicago policemen were present to quell any uprising. So were twenty-nine policemen and deputies from Indiana.

With an escort worthy of a visiting prince and a motorcade several blocks long, Dillinger was hauled to the Crown Point jail. Just before he went to bed John Dillinger posed for a picture. With him stood Prosecutor Robert G. Estill, who had obtained an indictment charging him with murder, and Mrs. Sheriff Holley. The prosecutor was in the middle, the lady was on his right, and the calm Dillinger was on his left.

Such a chummy picture! The Dillinger right arm rested on the Estill shoulder, and Estill's left hand was thrown around the killer's neck.

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The outward appearance of great precaution taken to prevent a Dillinger break was maintained. Sheriff Holley had thirty-five men to guard him. At times this force was augmented; a full fifty accompanied the outlaw when he went to court to plead to the indictment. His trial was set for March 12.

Prosecutor Estill once requested that Dillinger be transferred to Michigan City for safe keeping. Judge William J. Murray of the Circuit court refused this. He estimated that a hundred men couldn't release the outlaw from such a jail.

By mid-February the whole business settled down to routine, although there were persistent rumors Dillinger would escape. He was allowed visitors, whose permits to see him were signed by Judge Murray. Among the callers were Louis Piquett, shady Chicago lawyer who was to defend the gunman; Arthur O'Leary, investigator for Pi-

quett; Hubert Dillinger, brother of the prisoner, and Evelyn Frechette, John Dillinger's woman.

Another caller was Meyer Bogue. Piquett referred to him as an "alibi witness." This Bogue was an unsavory character. He had been twice in the San Quentin penitentiary in California. He had served a term in the Michigan City prison for jewel robbery and had been let out only a few months before. His record should have been well known in Indiana.

The sheriff asserted that all these visitors were searched; that she personally saw that Evelyn Frechette smuggled nothing in. She added that their conversations with the prisoner had been witnessed by guards.

"Nobody could have taken a gun in," was the sheriff's opinion. Still these were artful people, these visitors. Remember Dillinger had boasted of having \$100,000, and it was known he paid handsomely for every favor shown him. Piquett was his payoff man (this was disclosed later). Evelyn Frechette was a gang moll. Bogue was a slippery criminal who drew no lines of honesty.

With their aid or without, Dil-



(Tribune photo.)

linger walked out of that escape-proof jail the morning of March 3. It happened this way:

A wrinkled old fellow named Sam Cahoon, the only guard paying any attention to Dillinger, unlocked his cell so he could get into an exercise corridor. Swiftly Dillinger slapped something that looked like a pistol into Cahoon's ribs. Cahoon always insisted it was a pistol.

The guard was forced to open doors. He was ordered to call Ernest Blunk, a deputy, who was downstairs. Cahoon rebelled. "You'll have to shoot me, John," he quavered. Dillinger laughed and made the call himself. Blunk, an appointee of Judge Murray, responded.

Blunk saw the pistol and was discreet. He obeyed a command to call Warden Lew Baker upstairs. Baker went and was shoved into a cell with Cahoon. Dillinger and Herbert Youngblood, a Negro prisoner, walked down to the jail office, taking Blunk with them.

Deputies there seemed surprised at the invasion. They were disarmed and Dillinger and his companion took such weapons, including machine guns, as they wanted.

Soon afterward they went outside. Dillinger picked out Sheriff Holley's automobile and drove away, accompanied by Youngblood and Blunk. He had thoughtfully locked the jail from the outside, and Crown Pointers were treated to the odd spectacle of deputy sheriffs at the windows begging somebody to liberate them from their escapeproof jail.

At Peotone, Ill., the two criminals pushed Blunk out. They drove into Chicago. Thousands of police were seeking them. But they had a handicap. The license number of the sheriff's car was broadcast as 679-929; the right number was 674-549. Warden Baker, who gave the information, said that was the number given him.

It was, however, established that some one called Piquett in Chicago five minutes after the break and told him his client was on the loose. That afternoon the lawyer met Dillinger. So did Evelyn Frechette.

From the sheriff's office, from the guards, came a strange story. They said Dillinger didn't



(Tribune photo.)
ANNA SAGE . . . "the woman in red."

have a pistol. He had whittled a piece of wood with a safety razor blade. He had made the stick into the form of a pistol and had darkened it with shoe polish. With this toy he had fooled a jailful of guards. This was incredible. But not more incredible than the rest of the yarn.

The inescapable fact was that Indiana had once again turned the most vicious of American criminals loose on the public. Attorney General Cummings said it was a disgrace. Sheriff Holley said Dillinger was just lucky. James Posey, a Negro prisoner, reported that "everybody knew John was going to get out today."

Governor McNutt made the best of a bad situation for the state. He saw a chance to take the heat off his administration, in disfavor because of the Michigan City break, and shift it to the authorities at Crown Point. All were Democrats, but it was better to let little Democrats bear the burden.

Assistant Attorney General Edward J. Barce went to Crown Point. He said he was going to make a thorough investigation. He insisted there was "indisputable evidence that Dillinger walked out with the assistance of prison attachés."

Later it was reported that Dillinger had paid at least \$10,000 for his freedom and that arrangements for the break were made in a saloon in East Chicago. Barce took cognizance of all these rumors. Once he announced that he was about to seize the three ringleaders. He never did.

A local intra-Democratic party scrap developed in Lake county. Estill engaged a police sergeant, Martin Zarkovich of East Chicago, to help him investigate, and announced that all this wouldn't have happened if Judge Murray had sent Dillinger to Michigan City.

"Why should I listen to a prosecutor who had just finished hugging Dillinger?" demanded the judge.

He called for a special grand jury investigation. He appointed a special prosecutor, Martin J. Smith. The jury held that Dillinger should have been sent, as a parole violator, back to the state prison. Ruling the language scandalous and contemptuous, Judge Murray cited the jurymen for contempt. They apologized and the report was expunged.

It was noticed that Zarkovich



(Tribune photo.)
The body of John Dillinger is carried away in a police patrol.

had been extremely active in presenting evidence to this grand jury. The jury, incidentally, supported the theory that the comic wooden gun cowed the jail guards.

Blunk was tried for aiding Dillinger, insisted that the bandit had a real pistol, and was acquitted. The case against Cahoon was dropped. Official Indiana chose to forget the Dillinger episode.

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Dillinger lived nearly five months after his flight from Crown Point. He was hunted like the wild beast he was. The middle west armed against him and G-men by the hundreds went on his trail. Rewards for a total of \$15,000 were offered for his capture.

With Evelyn Frechette and Hamilton, Dillinger motored to St. Paul and then back to Indiana. On April 8 he visited old John Dillinger at Mooresville. Evelyn came back to Chicago. The two gangsters drove a roundabout route to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. Next they crossed into the heavily wooded lake country of Wisconsin and about April 20 gathered with others of the gang in Emil Wanatka's Little Bohemia resort near Mercer.

Some of the old bunch were missing. Pierpont, Makley, and Clark were in jail in Ohio. Later they were convicted of the Sarber murder. Clark got a life sentence and the others were condemned to death. Pierpont was electrocuted and Makley shot in an attempt to escape—this was not McNutt's Indiana.

After their conviction Pierpont and Makley made a statement.

"Indiana authorities know who committed the Lima murder," they declared. "They made a political issue of our case. They know who were robbing banks while we were in Michigan City. They know who got the money for smuggling guns into the prison. They know, too, why Dillinger got loose just before he was to make a deposition in our case."

Even without this trio Dillinger had company—three or four gangsters and their women.

Federal agents, tipped by Wanatka, surrounded the resort with a hundred men on April 23. Something went wrong. Again the gang shot through to freedom, leaving two enemies dead and four wounded. Hamilton was hurt, and a little later Dillinger killed him and buried the body near Oswego, Ill.

Back in Chicago, the champion gangster enlisted Piquett's aid and had two unethical surgeons lift his face. They nearly killed him with too much ether. His finger tips were altered.

Detectives believe that Dillinger engaged in two major crimes after the Little Bohemia episode. One was the \$29,000 robbery of a bank in South Bend, Ind.; the other the murder of two policemen in East Chicago.

These policemen were shot down May 24 with a machine gun as they approached an automobile at the edge of town. Their names were Lloyd Mulvihill and Martin O'Brien. Why were they killed? Nobody knows officially, but the underworld of East Chicago heard rumor that they had interrupted

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