

Taking a trip back to Unholy Toledo

BY MARY ALICE POWELL / SPECIAL TO THE BLADE

Glass City Garters, Gambling, Gangsters, and Gin is the intriguing title of a bus tour sponsored by the Toledo History Museum.

Narrated by Donna Christian Rehfeldt, president of the museum, the two-hour bus tour follows the footsteps and gunshots of the gangsters who were prominent in the 1920s and 1930s.

Besides learning about the city's gangsters and their illegal businesses, the bus ride travels through much of the city, into the warehouse district, to the Old West End, and to Point Place.

According to Donna's research, there was one saloon for every 300 citizens, a total of 584 saloons and less than 300 churches.

Prostitution, in addition to gambling and rum running, is a dark chapter in the under belly of Toledo's history. The area that is between Lafayette and Washington streets was an area called The Resort, but it is better known as the Tenderloin District, where prostitutes operated out of 35 houses. Prostitutes were licensed by the city making it a legal business.

Other than pertinent facts, Donna shares interesting stories about individual gangsters. She also points out buildings that figured into the gambling and bootlegging scene that are now other businesses.

Bootlegging was a main income, according to Donna. 500 gallons of gin were made daily and some was transported to Canada by Dart boats that were manufactured on North Summit Street.

Donna kept the story alive with fascinating facts of the time when such gangsters as Yonnie Licavoli and the Purple Gang and Jack Kennedy ruled the city's gambling, bootlegging, and other illegal enterprises.

The story of Jack Kennedy begins in downtown Toledo and ends with his death in Point Place.

Donna describes Kennedy as a local Toledo boy who was very charismatic. He owned The Studio Club where history records when police or other gangsters arrived, the band played a Louis Armstrong song "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You," warning Kennedy of possible trouble.

Kennedy's story continues in Point Place and Edgewater where he was shot. The story is that Jack and his new girlfriend walked to the neighborhood store for groceries. When they learned their milk was sour, they made a second walk to the store. A car pulled up and two men got out and shot Kennedy. The girl was pushed out of harm's way.

The Villa, a restaurant and gambling hall, is now the popular restaurant, Angelo's Northwood Villa on Dixie Highway in Michigan.

The bus stopped in front of the old Post Office on 14th Street long enough for Donna to tell us about the biggest robbery in Toledo history. In February, 1921, more than \$1 million was stolen by local hoodlum, Joe Urbaytis, and his gang.

Donna's knowledge stems from 40 years working in the history department at the Toledo Lucas County Library. She recommends two books by Kenneth Dickson, *Something for Nothing: Gambling in the Glass City, 1910-1952* and *Nothing Personal, Just Business: Prohibition and Murder on Toledo's Mean Streets*.

Donna was also instrumental in founding the Toledo History Museum in 2011. It was first at Milmine-Stewart house on Collingwood. It moved to 425 N. St. Clair St. in the Valentine Building.

The next tours are Sept. 14 and Oct. 19. The price per person is \$35 or \$30 for Museum members. To obtain tickets, go to www.toledohistory.org.

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