

August 17, 2019



Gangster In Our Midst—available at local bookstores, [Amazon](#), [Walmart](#) & [Barnes & Noble](#)
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Gangster Blog

**For the Mystery Writers of America |
Midwest Chapter**

Newsletter Feature

When did you start introducing yourself as a writer?

I thought of myself as a writer at a young age. By nine, I began telling my family, "Someday I am going to write a book." I didn't know, of course, what I was saying. What does "write a book," after all, mean to a nine-year-old? Still, I thought I had something to say.

In the mid-1950s, our family of ten moved from the farm into a small Iowa town. Farm life had been rich with sights and smells, which my brain translated into what I thought were spell-binding sentences, like when my two older brothers and I walked the two miles home from country school: *Sometimes we raced part of the way home, our books and papers and lunch cans banging against our sides with each stride. Other times we walked gingerly, without a care in the world, kicking pebbles down the road, watching the brief shower of dust evaporate before our eyes. There were pronounced periods of silence, too, times when our brains pondered learnings and contemplated profound thoughts.*

I started introducing myself as a writer in my thirties when I began writing a weekly personal column for my hometown newspaper (for nearly a decade). My first book, a family memoir (400 pages), didn't happen until I retired. It took five years to research and write. A second book came about out of necessity—our church on St. Paul's eastside closed in 2013, and I wrote the church history. My next idea for a book was the gangster who had come to my hometown during Prohibition—and lived there, off and on, for the next sixty years. I published *Gangster in our Midst* in 2017, a historical crime mystery. I'm now writing the screenplay, and researching for a fourth book.



"Three Fingers"

Bulletin Board

Current Projects (2):

I'm writing 2nd in a series of *Gangster in our Midst*—plus the screenplay.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

For the Mystery Writers of America |
Midwest Chapter
Newsletter Feature ... 1
"Gangsters were a topic of conversation in our home over dinner" 2
Author Events 2



“Gangsters were a topic of conversation in our home over dinner”

Ma Barker, Alvin “Creepy” Karpis and “Baby Face” Nelson were all known to lay low in the cottages around White Bear and Bald Eagle lakes in Minnesota.

I was reminded of this fact on Friday, August 9th, at my book signing at Lake Country Booksellers in White Bear Lake. I found a lot of interest in my book of historical crime.

Crooks of the worst class came to the area because of St. Paul Chief of Police John O’Connor’s “layover agreement,” instituted in June 1900. It allowed them to stay in the city under three conditions: that they checked in with police upon their arrival; agreed to pay bribes to city officials; and committed no major crimes in the city of St. Paul. The arrangement lasted for thirty-five years.

In 2010 I interviewed Helen Matteson, who was just a young girl when her family relocated to St. Paul.

“The town was full of gangsters, and they were a topic of conversation in our home over dinner,” she said. “Dillinger slept in an apartment less than a mile away from our home, and I would frequently look up the street toward his building on my way to and from school to see if he was home.”

Plus, Dillinger was in the newspaper all the time. She’d preserved several articles, one from March 13, 1934, wherein FBI agents and police knocked on the door of Lincoln Court Apartment 303 on a landlady’s hunch—and inadvertently stumbled into a gun battle with John Dillinger and Homer Van Meter.

Her family had a personal encounter with gangsters, too. When her father Charlie put out a sign: ROOMS FOR RENT, two men showed up to rent a room. But they only stayed one night. A day later, Charlie found a pretty good sized hole had been sawed out of one corner of the dresser drawers in the room. He believed the men had probably been small-time gangsters who altered the drawer so their machine guns would fit. (Read this story in Gangster in our Midst.)

When Prohibition ended in ‘33, many criminals turned to ransom. Helen recalled the kidnapping by the Barker-Karpis gang of the Schmidt Brewing Company heir Edward Bremer. The FBI conducted a year-long wire tap and determined corrupt St. Paul police were involved in the kidnapping and pocketed some of the ransom.



Helen Matteson,
age 7 (1927)



John O'Connor
during the height of
his power as chief
of police in St. Paul

Photo: c.1912,
MNHS

Author Events

— **Fri. Sept 13, 5-9 pm** — Friday Night History Cruz, Paperbacks Plus Bookstore, 2539 7th Ave E, North St. Paul, MN, (651) 770-0384

— **Tues., Sept. 24, 6:30 pm** — “A Ray of Hope” (Iowa’s Oakdale Sanatorium), Clear Lake Public Library, 200 N. 4th St., Clear Lake, IA 641-357-6133

— Fall/Winter, Time: **TBD** — Lake Time Brewery, 801 Main Ave, Clear Lake, IA, (641) 357-2040

— Date/time: **TBD** — Landmark Commons Retirement Community, 1400 Maxhelen Blvd., Waterloo, IA, (319) 296-7100

— **Sat., Sept., 28, 8:00 — 4:00**, Women of Words 10th Annual Writers’ Conference, Oak Knoll Lutheran Church, 600 Hopkins Crossroad, Minnetonka, MN

— **Sat., Nov. 2, 9 am-3 pm**, “Holiday Open House” Barn Happy, 11310 Univ. Ave., Cedar Falls, IA, (319) 266-0888

— **Fall 2019** — The Center, Corner of 8th and Kingwood Streets, Brainerd, MN, (218) 829-9345

Book Clubs

— **Beancounters**, Burlington, IA

— **Cicero Public Library**, 5225 West Cermak Rd., Cicero, Ill, (708) 652-8084

Book Festivals-Conferences

— Sep 27 at 3 PM — Sep 30 at 11 AM

(new) — MWA-MW Writers Retreat September 2019, Moon Beach Camp - UCC1487 Moon Beach Ln, Saint Germain, Wisconsin

— **Sept 20-Oct 6** — Iowa City Book Festival, 123 S Linn St., Iowa City, IA, (319) 356-5245

— **Oct 11-13** — St. Paul Art Crawl, 308 Prince St, St. Paul, MN, (651) 270-0563

— **Sat., Nov. 17**, 10 am-2 pm — Sterling Lord Writers and Readers Festival, Burlington Public Library, (319) 753-1647

— **April 4, 2020**, 10 am-2 pm (new) — North Iowa Book Bash, Diamond Jo Casino, Northwood, IA

Pending...

Date/Time: **TBD (new)** — St. Paul Police Historic Society, 367 Grove St., St. Paul, MN, 651-266-5573

Date/Time: **TBD (new)** — School District of Mercer, 2690 W Margaret St, Mercer, WI, (715) 476-2154

Date/Time: **TBD (new)** — Iowa Odd Fellows & Orphans Home, 1037 19th St SW, Mason City, IA

Date/Time: **TBD (new)** — Waterloo Public Library, 415 Commercial Street, Waterloo, IA

Date/Time: **TBD (new)** — Waverly Public Library, 1500 W Bremer Ave., Waverly, IA, (319) 352-1223

— Date/Time: **TBD** — Coralville Public Library, 1401 5th St, Coralville, IA, (319) 248-1850

— Date/Time: **TBD** — Musser Public Library, 408 East 2nd St., Muscatine, IA, (563) 263-3065

— Date/Time: **TBD** — Sawyer Co. Historical Society & Museum, County Highway B, Hayward, WI, (715) 634-8053

— Date/Time: **TBD** — James Kennedy Public Library, 320 1st Ave E, Dyersville, IA, (563) 875-8912