

September 4, 2019



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

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## *Gangster* Blog

### *Joint St. Paul Police- Book Event*

Ed Steenberg, president of the St. Paul Police Historical Society, has invited me to present “A Young Girl Remembers Living Next Door to John Dillinger” on **Thursday, Oct. 17, 10:30 am**, at the substation on 389 Hamline Ave. N. in St. Paul.

The majority of my author talk will be about Helen Matteson Browne, who passed away in April at age 99.

Just a young girl when her family moved into St. Paul’s eastside in the early 1920s, she ended up living next door to some of the country’s most notorious gangsters, including John Dillinger. A couple of Helen’s stories were included in *Gangster in our Midst*.

Space is limited for this event... Let me know if you are planning to attend so I may inform the H.S. how many guests to expect.

### *The “Wiltse Family of Strawberry Point”*

The Wiltse family of Strawberry Point, Iowa played a prominent role in the early history of the village of Fairbank—the town upon which *Gangster in our Midst* (2017) is based. Actually, this immigrant family left a legacy in both communities.

— **Sun., Oct 20, 7 pm**, Wilder Foundation, 123 W. Mission St., Strawberry Point, Iowa

### *Attn. Teachers: “Writing for the joy of it”*

I’m in the process of scheduling my first “**Writing for the joy of it**” event at a St. Paul AFSA school. My talk will invigorate students to write...journaling, stories, and short books. Together we will create a handout for them to take home... a tool to keep them writing!



### **“Three Fingers”**

### **Bulletin Board**

#### **Current Projects (2):**

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

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2017

## The Murder of Phoebe Jane Vigoletti

Sensational gangster murders captured headlines of newspapers across America at the turn of the Twentieth Century.

Shadowy criminal organizations like the Black Hand gang, a group that had existed in Italy, used threats of violence and murder in an attempt to extort wealthy Italian-Americans.

A threatening letter and a coal-blackened handprint was frequently left on a victim's door, though symbols varied greatly in design.

Frankie Yale (also known as Francesco Ioele or Frankie Uale) was in his early twenties when he became Big Boss of the Italian colonies in Brooklyn and New York's east side, then director of the first Black Hand gang in America. In subsequent years, hundreds of Black Hand gangs, organized locally, sprung up throughout the country.

Even Oelwein, Iowa, with its major railroad hub and population of 7,000, had its share of activity by the Black Hand.

The community was one of three major settlements of Italians in Iowa, drawn by the rail yards and shops of the Chicago Great Western Railroad. By 1915, 500 Italians called Oelwein home, according to the Oelwein Chamber of Commerce.

In her book, *Iowa Unsolved Murders: Historic Cases*, Nancy Bowers cites two shocking murders attributed to the Black Hand in Oelwein.

Phoebe Jane Vigoletti, a 46-year-old Italian homemaker, was strangled in her home in 1926. Someone broke down the back door and strangled her with a rope. The kitchen showed signs of a violent struggle. Her body was removed from the house, taken across the back yard, hoisted over a fence, and dragged or carried a considerable distance, then dumped on the same site as that of an unnamed Italian male, who was stabbed 84 times in 1919.

Both murders have remained cold cases, a strong indicator of how much people feared retaliation by members of the Black Hand.

Murders like Vigoletti's fed the doctrine of Nativism in the United States—resulting in a widespread attitude that rejected alien persons, or culture, and led to xenophobia, the irrational fear of foreigners leading to racism and ethnic conflict—when all Italians became stereotyped as killers.

Americans pressured Legislators to bar them from coming into the country. The Immigration Act of 1924 effectively closed the 'Golden Door' to America to Italians—even though the vast majority of those immigrating were good, honest working people and not criminals.

I interviewed Italians from Oelwein as part of my research for *Gangster in our Midst* (2017). All were children when first hearing conversations among Italian adults about the Black Hand. "We're not gonna pay for protection!" one recalled his father had said.

Eventually, the thugs were run out of town.



## 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

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

— **Thurs, Oct. 17, 10:30 (new)** — St. Paul Police Historic Society (substation), 389 Hamline Ave. N., St. Paul

— **Sun., Oct 20, 7 pm** — "Wiltse Family of Strawberry Point," Wilder Foundation, 123 W. Mission St., Strawberry Point, IA, (563) 933-4615

— **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 — MWA-MW Writers Retreat September 2019, Moon Beach Camp - UCCI487 Moon Beach Ln, Saint Germain, WI

— **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

— May (first weekend), Time: **TBD** — Torque Fest

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

### Pending...

Date/Time: **TBD (new)** — Buchanan County Police Historical Society, Independence, Iowa

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

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

Date/Time: **TBD** — 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

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