

January 15, 2020



Gangster In Our Midst—available at local bookstores, [Amazon](#), [Walmart](#) & [Barnes & Noble](#)
Website: www.bettybrandtpassick.com
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BettyBrandtPassick/>
[Twitter@BBPCOM](https://twitter.com/BBPCOM)

E-mail: bbpassickauthor@comcast.net

Gangster Blog

Teaching: “Writing a Memoir” (workshops)

Whether you want to write a memoir 50 pages or 400 pages (like mine), I learned a lot from writing my family’s history and am willing to share this information with YOU and/or your organization. Instruction includes: Research, Interviews, Personal Stories, Genealogy, Photos, Permission to Use, etc.



Reserve your space now at one of the below workshops, or **schedule** a workshop in your community.

— **Saturday, Feb. 29, 10-11:30 am**, Oakdale Library, 2300 N. St. Paul Dr., N. St. Paul, MN, 651-486-2208

— **May (TBD)**, Bremer County Historical Society, 402 W. Bremer Ave, Waverly, IA, (319) 352-1309

Original Culture Wars Began in the 1920s

Probably every community in America has a piece of folklore similar to the one a few old-timers from Fairbank, Iowa still repeat.

The story is about the day the battle between Catholicism and Protestantism came to a head in the middle of the Main Street bridge.

Many decades later, it’s uncertain on which version of the bridge the alleged event occurred: the 1871 arch bridge, which had been built too low and had to be replaced in 1896 by an arch bridge, or the steel bridge built in 1906, though, during flood stages, was still overtaken by the Wapsie river and took out the sidewalks. To solve this problem, the roadway and boardwalks were eventually raised.

(cont.)



‘Three Fingers’

Book Comment:

“I just finished **Gangster....** I’m from Oelwein so a lot of the names in the book were so familiar! I really enjoyed it! I can’t wait to read the sequel.”

— Barb Bennett

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(cont.)

The story continues... The Catholics, who largely lived on the west side of the river, built the Immaculate Conception church in 1868. Protestants residing on the east side of the river built churches there: Lutheran (org. 1868), Baptist (org. 1859), and Methodist (org. 1864). While the Lutherans operated a Christian Day School, the majority of the town children attended Fairbank Public School built in 1855. This school—as were all public schools in America—was injected with an evangelical and sectarian spirit.

It took a while for the Catholics to create a sweeping and parallel system to teach their own dogma. In 1896 construction of the first school-convent, built next to I.C. church, was completed, offering primary, intermediate, and upper classrooms—the latter grades prepared students to take their examinations for teaching certificates. Both schools in Fairbank were now located within the same block. Back to the story... One day, several of the children walking home at the end of the school day began to engage in religious taunts, which led to a brawl in the center of the bridge.

It's not hard to imagine the feasibility of such an exchange. My family attended St. John's Lutheran Church in Fairbank during the 1950s-60s, where I learned Martin Luther, previously a Catholic monk, in 1517 had published his 95 Thesis (grievances), calling for 'purification' of the Roman Catholic Church. He became known as the founder of Protestantism. Lutheran dogma decreed all Catholics were going to hell for making the Pope their spiritual authority and for worshipping Mary, instead of Jesus Christ. (I always assumed the same things were being taught by the Catholic priest and nuns about us Protestants.) More comments I heard from within the Fairbank community at large questioned whether Catholics could be loyal to their adoptive country and to the Pope.

The story's conclusion: Ultimately, the town's forefathers put a policy in place whereby Catholic children would walk on the south side of the bridge and Protestant children, on the north side. This would solve the religious tensions in the community.

As it turned out, the 'bridge story' is but one among many stories depicting how culturally and politically America was unraveling at the turn of the 20th century.

I included this story in my historical novel, *Gangster in Our Midst*, the true story of the gangster who came to Fairbank during Prohibition and remained off and on for the next 60 years.

Prohibition (1920-1933) would be remembered for the breadth of criminality across America; also as an era of bitter cultural conflicts, pitting religious liberals against fundamentalists, nativists against immigrants, and rural provincials against urban cosmopolitans.



Photo: Howard Durham, historian, Fairbank, Iowa

**Coming! Sequel
to Gangster in
Our Midst:
Spring 2020!**

Author Events

— **Sat., Feb. 29, 10-11:30 am** —
“Writing a Memoir”, Oakdale Library, 2300 N. St. Paul Dr., N. St. Paul, MN

— **May, 2020 (pending)** —
“Writing a Memoir”, Bremer County Historical Society, 402 W. Bremer Ave, Waverly, IA

— **2020 (pending)** — Book Signing, Decades, 25 South Frederick, Oelwein, IA

— **2020 (pending)** — Author Event, Landmark Commons Retirement Community, 1400 Maxhelen Blvd., Waterloo, IA

— **2020 (pending)** — Cicero Public Library, 5225 West Cermak Rd., Cicero, Ill

Book Readings

— **Tues., Jan 28, 7-9 pm** —
Evolving Artists Showcase (LAUNCH PARTY), 260 Wentworth Ave., West St. Paul, MN

Radio Interviews

— **Jan-Feb (pending)** — Ian Johnson, CHAT AND SPIN RADIO, United Kingdom