

February 20, 2020



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

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Gangster Blog

Confirmed (new) Book Events/Festivals (4)

— Sat., Mar. 31, 9 am- 7 pm, DSM Book Festival, Capital Square, 400 Locust St., Des Moines, IA

— Sat., Jun. 6, 1 pm., “Writing a Memoir” (We Are Eight—workshop) , Bremer County Historical Society, 402 W. Bremer Ave, Waverly, IA

—Mon., Jun. 8, noon/5:45 pm, (Gangster in Our Midst—author talks) Rotary Club/Lions Club at Decades, 25 South Frederick, Oelwein, IA

Book Club Read (1): Jane’s Book Club (Woodbury, MN) — download free [study guide](#) posted on my website.

Prohibition Divided America, too

Reverend A. Van Benschoten was a character in *Gangster in Our Midst* (2017), loosely based on a Fairbank Baptist church pastor of the same name.

I chose him as the ‘religious authority’ to pass by the Main Street Opera House one evening in 1929, just as “the house emptied and movie-goers swarmed the boardwalk.”

The pastor initially strikes up a conversation with Walter, a local farmer, and his young son Leonard (neither are Baptist).

“I walk my dog most evenings and pass by this way...part of my job as spiritual leader of my flock. I say: ‘Every coin spent on seeing a movie puts money directly in the pocket of the devil,’” the pastor says.

His church members know, if seen departing a movie house, he/she can expect a stern rebuke from their pastor.

The conversation then turns political, about the harm done to America from passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution. (cont. p2)

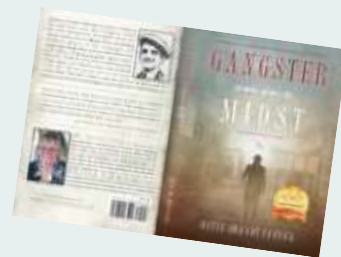


‘Three Fingers’

COMING!
Sequel to
Gangster in
Our Midst:
Spring 2020!

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Prohibition Divided America, too (cont.)

Many Americans had believed Prohibition would usher in a new era. When crime and violence would drop. When prosperity, good health and happiness would rise. It had been a beautiful dream. But it turned into a nightmare.

“Where does America go from here?” the reader hears the two men thinking. “Surely the nation is on the threshold of cancelling Prohibition.”

The pastor departs for home as Walter and Leonard observe the last stragglers emerging from the movie house, a cluster of animated high-schoolers, followed by Louie La Cava, a Chicago gangster who had begun frequenting the town since marrying an area girl years earlier.

Walter is amazed. Parents—some who were his dear friends—had again allowed their children to see a movie with La Cava.

Walter thinks of La Cava ‘...the tasseled corn stalk in a field of the unpollinated. The fox in the hen house. A shard of glass at the feet of barefoot children.’

He believes his neighbors are good people, smart. But instead of curing social ills, Prohibition had spawned organized crime, corruption, and disdain for law observance even among ordinary Americans.

The reader is left to wonder whether America will be able to unify on the issue of Prohibition, as Walter and his son, too, head home.

The 1976 *Fairbank Times Bicentennial Newspaper* committee published a short history of Fairbank’s Free Will Baptist Society, posted at www.BettyBrandtPassick.com (see “Historical Fairbank, Iowa”).

The (real) Rev Alfred “Alf” Qualiffe Van Benschoten served Fairbank Baptist church between 1924-1929, and the previous four years at Horton Baptist Church in Waverly, Iowa, who provided a family photo from the church’s 150th anniversary book. Rev. Van Benschoten died in 1977 at age 85 and was buried at Willow Lawn Cemetery, Plainfield, Bremer County, Iowa. He was survived by his wife Dolly, two sons and two daughters.

Fairbank Baptist church membership has dwindled to under a dozen individuals over the years. Perhaps there are those who yet recall the Rev. Van Benschoten family.



Free Will Baptist Society, org. 1859, and parsonage.
Photo (top): Howard Durham, Fairbank, Iowa historian



Author Events

(January-June, 2020)

Writing Workshops:

— **Sat., Feb. 29, 10:30-11:30 am** — “Writing a Memoir” (We Are Eight-workshop), Oakdale Library, 1010 Heron Ave North, Oakdale, MN, 651-430-0504 ([registration](#))

— **Sat., Jun 6, 1 pm** — “Writing a Memoir” (We Are Eight-workshop), Bremer County Historical Society, 402 W. Bremer Ave, Waverly, IA, 319-352-1309

Book Festivals

— **Sat., Mar. 31, 9 am- 7 pm**, DSM Book Festival, Capital Square, 400 Locust St., Des Moines, IA

Book Readings/Signings

— **Sat., May 9 & 16, June 20 & 27 (pending)** — (Gangster in Our Midst-book signing) Sweet Reads Books and Candy, LLC 407 North Main Street Austin, MN, 507-396-8660

— **Spring (pending)** — (Gangster in Our Midst-Book Signing) Decades, 25 South Frederick, Oelwein, IA

— **2020 (pending)** — (Gangster in Our Midst-author talk), Cicero Public Library, 5225 West Cermak Rd., Cicero, Ill