Societies get the crime they deserve.
—Ancient criminological proverb
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PART I
ANTECEDENTS
1596–1907
The starless night was as dark as a black dog. The small fishing village of Trepassey, located on the southern tip of New-found-land’s Avalon Peninsula, was tranquil in the pre-dawn hours, on the twenty-first day of June, in the yeare of grace one thousand seven hundred and twenty.

But amidst this early morning solitude, a dark cloud of treachery hung over the town and a foreboding wind of menace blustered into the harbour, fiercely pitching the sloops, schooners, and brigs out of their slumber. Before the sunne had broken over the horizon, the calm of the somnolent village was shattered by the hellish uproar of a grande ship coursing through the long slender reach of the harbour “with Drums beating, Trumpets sounding, and other instruments of Musick, English Colours flying.” It was the sloop Royal Rover. And as she brazenly sailed into the dusk-veiled harbour, much unease and terror was stirred amongst the newly awoken townspeople who realized immediately what violent squall had broken their calm midst.

Pirates!

Standing on the quarter deck of the marauding vessel, below death’s flagg flying at the topmasthead, was a tall, nut-brown figure attired in the most resplendent of finery — a rich crimson waistcoat and petticoat breeches, with gold braid, a red feather in a broad-brimmed hat that sat aloft his tarry locks, and a gold chaine wrapped ten times around his neck, with a diamond-encrusted cross, once destined for the King of Portugal, dangling in the middle. He laid bare a cutlash in the hollow of one hand, and at the end of a silk bandolier flung over his shoulders he carried two pistols. The sea-roving Turk at the helm of the infectious ship was none other than Black Bart, renowned navigator and true sea dog who went into the cannon’s mouth willingly, not for want of riches, but from a yearning for roving and adventure; for the wayward Captain was apt to say, “A merry life and a short one, shall be my motto!” And that destiny would grant him!

He was borne John Roberts in 1682 in the wee village of Castle Newydd Bach, a dreary blemish to be found on the southern slopes of the Preseli Hills in Wales. He would later change his name to Bartholomew, but, to his victims and enemies alike, he was known as Black Bart. Despite his errant ways
later in life, he was not delivered into the vagabond class, but was sired from respectable, land-owning parents. "On the cusp of his teenage years, he was, when the young, curly sable haired, John Robert, with sable eyes, went to sea as a cabin boy." He returned to the land, but conditions were poor, and "this olive-skinned broad-shouldered young man, who be fortunate enough to stand more than two yards tall, possessing good natural parts and personall bravery, returned to the sea," whereby during the time of the Spanish Succession, betwixt the yeares one thousand seven hundred and two and thirteen, he served in the Royal Navy. His battle-hardened maritime expeditions granted John the skills of a highly proficient seaman, navigator, and natural leader of men. Nevertheless, at the end of the war, John Roberts, now 31, found himself without a vocation.

Dreaded flag of the pyrate ship Royal Rover

Roberts’ days as a sea raider began in the yeare of our lord one thousand seven hundred and nineteen, whilst serving as third mate on a slave ship captured by the tallowy pyrate Howell Davis. In the force of the moment, and with little recourse, Roberts and other crew members were press-ganged into service aboard the wicked pyrate ship. When Davis was killed whilst attacking the town of Principe off the Guinea coast, Roberts was elected captain of the buccaneer vessel, “as he had none of the appearance of a man who sailed before the mast; but seemed like a mate of skipper, accustomed to be obeyed or to strike.” For reality and in truth he loathed this wretched calling, but the extremity of want that whet his appetite for escapades and exploits overcame his trepidations, and thusly accepted the honour— evidently concluding, “since he had dipp’d his hand in muddy Water, and must be a Pyrate, it was better being a Commander than a common Man.” His life was now forever cast in the free trading commerce of the sea, without the folly swaddles, just as the Angel of Death created it. His first order as captain was to raze a select few homes of Principe as an act of revenge for the killing of Howell Davis.

Unlike the typical swashbuckling corsair, Roberts hisself was a prudish, fastidious, and pious man by disposition and custom. He dressed like a proper gentleman at all times, even in battle. Nèer a vice ever threatened the sanctions of his piety; instead of playing cards, rolling bones, or cavorting around the barrel getting bowsy from drinking sittyated grog, he was wont to sit in his cabin alone, sipping tea and reading his Bible. Intoxicating liquor never touched his lips. He also expected the same of his crew, whom he loomed over as strict disciplinarian, not simply to impose order on the ship, but in his preferment that they be warded from the tempests of sin and idleness. Those roundhands not on duty were made to retire at nine bells every night. Women were never permitted to board his ships and the penalty for blowing off the groundsails with the gentler sex was death by dancing the hempen jig. His collection of cloyers were strictly forbidden from gambling aboard his vessels, and a man could be flogged for uttering a swear word or a blasphemy. In religious matters, all hands were expected to gather on deck every night to say prayers and Roberts ensured the Sabbath was strictly observed as a daye of reste. Any crew member who nicked from the company would hath his nose and ears split and thenceforth would be marooned. He tolerated no fighting on board; any quarrels were to be settled ashore by duelling with drawn pistols or through the brandishing of cutlasses. Roberts personally issued a standing invitation to any disgruntled swaddler to settle their mutual disagreement in a duel. No man ever took him up on this challenge; for despite his modest countenance, the Black Pyrate was one “of the most wickedness men that God ever allowed on the sea.” He ordered his pyrate knots to treat their victims
equally roughly “in order to make them discover their Money, threatening them every Moment with Death, if they did not resign every Thing up to them.” Black Bart was indeed “the mildest manner’d man that ever scuttled a ship or cut a throat.”

The two and twenty merchant vessels in Trepassey’s harbour were easy prey for the Devious Captain’s calculating mind, his troupe of terrifying troubadours and the thirty-two cannons and twenty-seven swivel guns of the Royal Rover. As the Black Vessel flew into the harbour, it met with little resistance from the blubbering lubbers aboard the ships anchored in the harbour who, for want of courage, “all quitted upon Sight of the Pyrate.” One by one, Bart and his crew of forty-five swaggering skulks boarded the victim vessels. With a swarm at every turn, the cast of clapperdogeon cutthroats looted each one bare, and afterwards, the saucy sea robbers set the ships ablaze in a fire so spectacular, some say it outshone the aurora borealis. With musketry in hand, and without feare of resistance or molestation, the maritime raiders then went ashore to gull and gut the homes and plantations of Trepassey “like madmen, who cast firebrands, arrows and death,” forcing the poor villagers to deliver up their meagre possessions.

Throughout the day, the seafaring whip jacks remained in the harbour, raiding, stumping, and burning all manner of vessels that had the misfortune to sail in. By the time the sunne had descended from the cobalt sky, the scarlet scoundrels had plundered and burned to the cinder more than thirty ships great and small. “It is impossible particularly to recount the Destruction and Havock they made here,” Daniel Defoe wrote in the yeare one thousand seven hundred and twenty-four, “burning and sinking all the Shipping, except a galley from Bristol, and destroying the Fisheries, and Stages

Captain Bartho. Roberts with two pyrate ships, viz. the Royal Fortune, in the foreground, and the Ranger to the left, with captured prizes off the coast of Guiney, 1721.
of the poor Planters, without Remorse or Compassion; for nothing is so deplorable as Power in mean and ignorant Hands, it makes Men wanton and giddy, unconcerned at the misfortunes they are imposing on their Fellow Creatures, and keeps them smiling at the Mischiefs, that bring themselves no Advantage."

Ever solicitous to find a superior vessel, and never one to disregard his good fortune, Black Bart seized and refitted the reprieved Bristol galley, after being greatly impressed by the cut of her jib, her statuesque masts a pleasure to the eye, and her canvas sails both hearty and supple; she was enough to retract the breath of any seaman worthy of his salt, and that being enough for the now-smitten and coquettish Captain, he proceeded to mount her helm. He affixed twenty-eight new guns to his newest conquest, stocked her hold with provisions looted from his Trepassey adventure, coated her bottom below the waterline with a mix of tallow, red lead, and sulphur to allow her to slip through the waters well, and topped all this off by christening her the *Royal Fortune*. After making himself master of the harbour at Trepassey for a fortnight, and having now plundered near one hundred and fifty boats and twenty-six ships at Trepassey and St. Mary's, and being fully satisfied with the execution of his old bold stratagem at New-found-land, Bart ordered his ships to beat out and stand to Ile Royale (known to later generations as Cape Breton Island), whence many French fishing boats rendezvoused, and where he was already renowned as *le jolie rouge* (the “pretty man in red”).

Thereupon and thenceforth, he swept the coast like a hungry hawk, flying a “bewildering variety of flags” as he once scribed, “to confuse our adversary as to our intent” and then, at the last moment, unveiling the black Jolly Roger to the horror of his confused quarry. With much helter skelter, he took six more sails, one being even more spectacular than the *Bristol Galley* and this twenty-six-gun ship would become the next *Royal Fortune*. With a ballast full of bustle on deck, armaments, supplies, and Bart’s personal furnishings were transferred to his newest flagship. The leader of the sea gypsies also press ganged frightened fishermen into his family of freebooters, thereby and forthwith providing more complement to his strength. Those who resisted the entreaties to sign aboard were slaughtered with an unremorseful veracity so that they would never be tempted to tell tales. Reports were hastily made to His Majesty in Britain that some of the Frenchmen “were whipped nigh unto death.” Other poor swabs were hood-wink’d, shackled, and heaved overboard; had their ears docked; or were encased in fetters and hung aloft from a yardarm by the hands or feet and used for target practice. As he left this scene of devastation and death, the Captain of Darkness now had as many as four hundred sea dogs under his command, a band of barnacled badgers large enough for three ships. To accommodate them all, he captured and fitted two more prizes for his piratical depredations, the *Great Ranger* and the *Little Ranger*.

The Arch Rouge steered a course due south and took more English prizes off the New England coast, the most lucrative being the *Samuel*, bound to Boston, about eleven weeks from London and ten from land’s end, which he fell in with on the thirteenth of July one thousand seven hundred and twenty in the Latitude of Forty-four, Thirty or Forty Leagues to the eastward of the banks of New-found-land. The *Samuel* was filled with merchants and nobility, all of whom were ripe for the smoucheing and they submitted to their captors without hesitation. The *Boston News-Letter* of the twenty-second day of August one thousand seven hundred and twenty recounted the gloomy story “whereof the sloop being accosted and taken by two pyrate vessels, viz., a ship of twenty-six guns, and a sloop of ten, both commanded by Captain Roberts, having on board about a hundred Men, all English.” Foregoing the pretence of any proper formality or negotiations of terms, the bastard brigands boarded their victim vessel and their first act of debauchery was “to strip both Passengers and Seamen of all their Money and Cloths which they had on board, with a loaded Pistol held to everyone’s breast ready to shoot him down, who did not immediately give an account of both, and resign them up.” Next, the salty swig-men clambered below deck where they “tore up the Hatches and entered the Hold like a Parcel of Furies, and with Axes and Cutlashes, cut
and broke open all the bales, Cases, and Boxes, they could lay their hands on.” Chests full of baubles and trinkets would be undubbed “by shooting a brace of Bullets with a Pistol into the Key-hole” and then turned out alow and aloft. Any wares that were brought on deck, but not favoured as booty by the scurrilous scallywags, were not returned to their rightful place in the hold, but were jettisoned. If any attempts were made to overpower the sea robbers, the merciless captain threatened to fire his pistol into the ship’s magazine so they would all goe “merrily to Hell together.” The oceanic miscreants were now flush in the pocket having fork’d the Samuel’s culls to the tune of eight or nine thousand Pounds Sterling worth of the choicest goods and, still insatiated, they stripped the Samuel of every article of value to the profligate pyrate ships: sails, cordage, guns, ground tackle, compasses, binnacle, and hogsheads full of gunpowder.

Whilst the sea glaziers debated the virtues of scuttling the Samuel, they spied a sail in the distance and so left their ravaged victim afloat and shabd off in pursuit of their new prey, which they halted by pouring a well-placed broadside into her, and she proved to be the Snow from Bristol, bound to Boston. The scurrilous scabbies boarded and grappled the victim ship and “because he was an Englishman, they used the master in a cruel and barbarous manner.” Two days later, the dastardly dells swagged the Little York of Virginia, and the Love of Liverpool. “In three days they captured three other vessels, removing the goods out of them, sinking one, and sending off the other two.”

Roberts and his ravenous rogues then made haste for the West Indies, wantonly cloying and destroying ships encountered along their path. When landfall was made at Martinique in January, one thousand seven hundred and twenty-one, the evil plotter hatched a diabolical scheme. A Jack was hoisted atop the main mast, the traditional signal of a vessel desirous to trade, and how the sea swine did fob the many merchants and traders, who sailed up to the disguised pyrate ship to barter, and in doing so were surprised with much malice and forcibly deprived of their cargo and supplies. Whilst in the West Indies, Roberts also over-mastered a French man-of-war, carrying fifty-two guns, which he commandeered and renamed the Royal Fortune. Aboard the ship, the Lord of the Cannons discovered, with much glee, the Governor of Martinique, who was taken prisoner and then hanged by the neck until he was as dead as old Oliver Cromwell. The sadistic sea trotter thence displayed his distaste for the people of the West Indies by designing a jaunty new flag that showed a figure of hisself brandishing a cutlash in his right hand with each foot standing atop a skull. One skull had written beneath it the initials “ABH” (A Barbadian’s Head). The other had “AMH” (A Martiniquain’s Head).

Black Bart’s tribute to the people of the West Indies

In June of one thousand seven hundred and twenty-one, with great aplomb and abandon, the sea-rovign riff-raff arrived off the coast of Africa, whence they went hard with their watery prey and tooke four more sails, keeping one and renaming her the Ranger. On the coast of Liberia, the Pyrate Commander took the Onslow, with a cargo worth nine thousand Pounds Sterling. Having again put out from land, he sailed his private navy to the Ivory Coast and took at least six more prizes and then raided eleven slave ships, which he ransomed for eight pounds of gold dust each. One captain refused to submit to this extortion; in retaliation, Bart ordered the ship to be burned to the cinder. Eighty slaves were on board at the time.

The rampaging ruffian was now such as a threat to British trade that he was zealously pursued by the
Royal Navy and pyrate bounty hunters. The most dogged and determined of his dispatched shadows was Challoner Ogle, the commander of the British man-of-war Swallow. On the fifth of February in the year one thousand seven hundred and twenty-two, the Swallow caught up with the pyrates near Cape Lopez in Gabon. Ogle took a trick from the pyrate captain’s own book and disguised his ship as a Portuguese trader. Bart took the bait and gave chase. The Swallow pretended to flee, but once out of sight, she slowed to a crawl to allow the pyrate ship to draw near. “Upon her coming up to the Swallow, the pyrate hoisted the black flag, and fired upon her; but how greatly were her crew astonished, when they saw that they had to contend with a man-of-war.”

Bart was never one to swallow the anchor. Thusly, he put on “the most expensive garments in his wardrobe, made of magnificent red damask, he hung several fine pistols, handsomely carved, from his shoulders, and placed around his neck a costly solid gold chain, from which a cross of diamonds was suspended. As a finishing touch he donned his gala hat with a red peacock feather.” He forthwith ordered his mongrel crew to break out the cutlasses and pistols, prime the cannons, batten down the hatches, and grope up the dingle. The fighting commenced and the “cannonading was terrific, with neither side gaining the advantage. Scuppers ran red with blood. Hoarse cries mingled with the thunder of artillery and small arms. Powder and smoke drifted over the heaving vessels. It was a desperate and bloody engagement.” As the barrage reached a fevered intensity, a cry of anguish and pain was heard from the brigand captain. “He had now, perhaps, finished the fight very desperately, if death, who took a swift passage in a grape shot, had not interposed, and struck him directly on the throat. He settled himself on the tackles of a gun” and, within a moment’s breath, was no more. It was on this, the tenth day of February in the year of grace one thousand seven hundred and twenty-two that the life of Black Bart — notorious pyrate, scourge of the seven seas, brother of the blade, the buccaneer with whom “the devil himself would have been afeared to go to sea with” — was ended.

When the pyrate crew realized the conclusion of their leader had come to pass they jettisoned his expired body, “scarlet damask, white plumes, and all” to be forever entombed in Davy Jones’ Locker. This was in accordance with a standing command made by Captain Roberts that his body never be allowed into the hands of his enemies, dead or alive, lest he were forced to be “hanged in chains from a gibbet on shore.” Deprived of their captain, the crew of the pyrate vessel surrendered to Captain Ogle, upon which a celebratory chorus of huzzahs was sung by his victorious soldiers with much gaiety. The captured turks were shopt in irons and prosecuted in a special Assize, the likes of which had hitherto never been seen in the annals of pyrate history: one hundred and sixty-nine men were charged, forty-five of them free negroes. In excess of fifty men were condemned to the gallows, from whence they all swung to the Paddington frisk. The death of Black Bart — the most successful pyrate of all time who, betwixt one thousand seven hundred and eighteen and twenty-two, sniped and stripped more than four hundred prizes, surpassing any and all others of his yoke — was a symbolic end to what many have deemed the Golden Age of Pyracy.

**THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE DEEP**

It can be said that the first criminal organizations in North America were pirates operating off the eastern seaboard. To be able to hunt down and pillage their victims, pirate ships required many of the essential trappings that would come to define organized crime: a reliance on violence, a nose for profitable opportunities, a code of secrecy among the conspirators, access to black markets to sell their stolen wares, and connections with the political elite to protect and even sanction their predatory activities. Most importantly, a pirate ship demanded a large crew. Pirates captured and plundered their prizes by outnumbering and overpowering the victims, so ships that could carry large crews were preferred. Other pirate captains operated a fleet of smaller sloops or brigs, which were favoured because of their speed and stealth. Regardless of the size of their vessels, pirate captains had to constantly...
enlist crew members, often at sea. Most of these recruits joined willingly. Others were forced into their new occupation at the point of a cutlass or a pistol.

Large crews were necessary because pirate ships relied on intimidation to frighten their quarry into compliance. And while the sight of a fully manned deck and a well-armed hull of a pirate ship was often enough to quell any foolhardy resistance by victims, the most potent purveyor of terror was the pirate flag. Whenever a pirate ship was ready to attack, the Jolly Roger would be hoisted at the top of the mainsail to signal the pirates' intentions and to scare victims into submission. Hundreds of years later, similar tactics would be adopted by the Hells Angels and other motorcycle gangs, by donning their menacing “colours” to intimidate “citizens.” The Hells Angels trademark winged-head death skull insignia is nothing more than a latter-day version of the pirates’ skull and crossbones.

The master pirate had to be a ruthless warrior, a competent sailor, and an astute navigator and tactician in order to locate and track down lucrative prey, as well as a disciplinarian who could keep order among a rough, unruly, and potentially mutinous crew. To help ensure order while at sea, pirates were among the first organized criminals to implement rules, regulations, and a code of conduct, a practice that would be emulated by such 20th-century criminal descendants as the Italian mafia, the Chinese triads, and outlaw motorcycle gangs. Before departing shore, a pirate captain and his crew often drew up the articles of a ship that had to be obeyed by all on board. Contravention of these rules could mean confinement in the ship's stockade, banishment on a desert island, a taste of the cat-o'-nine-tails, other forms of gruesome torture, or even death. Some common articles of one rule-bound pirate ship commandeered by John Phillips in the 1720s included the following:

1. Every man shall obey Civil Command. The captain shall have one full share and a half of all prizes.
2. If any man shall offer to run away, or keep any secret from the Company, he shall be maroon'd with one Bottle of Powder, one Bottle of Water, one small Arm and shot.
3. If any man shall steal any Thing in the Company, or gain, to the value of a Piece of Eight, he shall be maroon'd or shot.
4. That Man who shall strike another whilst these Articles are in force shall receive Moses Law (that is 40 stripes lacking 1 on the bare Back.).
5. That Man that shall snap his Arms or smoak Tobacco in the Hold without a Lanthorn, shall suffer the same Punishment as in the former article.
6. That Man that shall not keep his Arms clean, fit for an Engagement, or neglect his Business, shall be cut off from his Share and suffer such other Punishment as the Captain and the Company shall think fit.
7. If any Man shall lose a Joint in time of an Engagement he shall have 400 Pieces of Eight: if a limb, 800.
8. If at any time you meet a prudent Woman that Man that offers to meddle with her without her consent shall suffer present death.

Crews of pirate ships often had to undergo a hazing ritual that, like the military, was used to forge a cohesive squadron of mercenary combatants that was necessary if a pirate ship was to overtake a prize or to survive a sea battle. For pirates, the traditional “crossing the line ceremony” — the point at sea where a vessel intersects the Tropic of Cancer, just south of Florida — marked the beginning of ceremonies that would allow a crewman the privilege of becoming a member of the brotherhood of the deep. This spot in the hemisphere was not just a symbol; it was also the point of entry into the most profitable fishing ground for the pirate ship: the treasure-laden waters off the coast of South America and the Caribbean. Captain Woodes Rogers, the commander of an English pirate ship in the early 18th century, used a common initiation ritual called “ducking at the yard arm,” which was both simple and symbolic: “Hoiste 'em halfway up to the yard and let 'em fall at once into the water.”

Like their modern-day criminal counterparts, pirates were wholly concerned with financial gain. Piracy held out the promise of an income that far exceeded the meagre wage of the merchant seaman or fisherman. A few of the most successful pirate captains were able to live a life of luxury, and even buy their way into nobility with the riches they harvested.
from their unlawful ventures. Available to the pirate was a number of revenue-generating opportunities; the most common, of course, was to rob ships of their cargo. Port towns were also targeted, not only for their valuables, but to refit ships, re-stock supplies, and to recruit crew members. Pirates were also known to use extortion, such as blockading harbours and trade routes and then charging a fee for any merchant vessel that wished to pass.

The great age of piracy coincided with the colonization of the New World between the 15th and the 18th centuries. Not long after the Spanish and the Portuguese began to explore and lay claim to South America, pirates were attacking and looting their vessels, which were filled with gold, silver, and other precious metals. Most of these pirate ships sailed from English and Caribbean ports, often with the blessing of the British monarchy. While a ship carrying gold or silver was the pirate's greatest prize, other commodities were highly sought after, including liquor from the old country, fur from New France, cured fish from Newfoundland, and spices, sugar, fruits, tobacco, and molasses from the West Indies. In addition to their cargo, ships that fell victim to pirates were often stripped bare of their sails, navigational equipment, weapons, and anything else of value.

In order to dispose of their seized bounty, some pirates were part of a network of black marketers. These mercantilist “fences” included prominent merchants and traders, including some from nobility, who sold or bartered stolen goods and captured ships. As Michael Woodiwiss writes in his book on organized crime, piracy was an occupation that was “well protected” by the economic and political powers of France, England, and other European countries. “Pirates could not have carried on their trade without the support of merchants, gentlemen and officials, especially admiralty officials, and measures taken against such abettors of piracy were for the most part ineffective, since all too frequently those responsible for executing the law were themselves notorious offenders.”

The aristocratic patron of many English pirates during the latter half of the 16th century was the English robber baron family the Killigrews. Sir John Killigrew was the vice admiral of Cornwall and the royal governor of Pendennis Castle, also located in Cornwall. In the years between 1560 and 1582, his wife, Mary Killigrew, was a Lady under Queen Elizabeth I. Together, the Killigrews were the secret financiers and brokers for syndicates of pirates that sailed the coast of Great Britain. They regarded these pirates as their agents-at-sea and even provided them with a safe haven in the waters that lay inland from their castle. The larcenous activities of the Killigrew family were not conducted entirely behind the scenes; they also had a reputation for plundering ships that had the bad luck of sailing too close to their Cornwall fortress.

In addition to their links with leading merchants, many pirates operated with the sanctioning of the sovereign of their native lands. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), hundreds of privately held ships were commissioned by Her Majesty. In fact, many of the English pirates that plied their trade during the 1600s began as “privateers” with licences issued by the Queen empowering them to seek out and rob merchant ships belonging to enemy countries, most notably Spain. Privateering was a form of commercial warfare that was directed, not toward an enemy’s military, government, or territory, but against their trade. Through hit-and-run tactics that would become the hallmark of guerrilla warfare centuries later, privateers became a potent weapon in a kingdom’s arsenal during wartime. While violence and intimidation would still be key tactics in privateering, as historian Carol MacLeod writes, “perhaps the one thing that could be said for privateers was they attempted to keep bloodshed to a minimum. They were more interested in plunder than murder.”

Commissioned by the Crown through “letters of marque,” these mercenary commerce-raiders sailed on armed, privately owned ships that acted either as a substitute for, or an adjunct to, a state navy and attacked the ships of enemy nations at virtually no cost to the sovereign. Under British law, any prize captured by a privateer had to be taken to the Court of Admiralty, which had jurisdiction over civil matters arising from actions committed on the high seas. If the Court declared a prize to be a legitimate catch — called a “condemnation” — it was auctioned off to the highest bidder and the proceeds divided between the Crown, the lawyers and magistrates involved in the condemnation trial, and the owner of the privateer vessel. The
captain and officers of the private ship would share in the owner's cut and anything left over went to the crew (all of whom joined under the assumption of "no prey, no pay"). Because the remuneration and functions of a privateer captain and crew were closer to that of a pirate ship than a naval vessel, the distinction between pirates and privateers was imperceptibly blurred and many consider privateering as nothing more than legalized piracy. The semantic difference between the two was that a privateer sailed with the official blessing of his government to capture and loot merchant ships, while the pirate ship plundered independent of any government.

Many privateers readily became pirates during peace time when their private warships no longer had legal standing, or when it simply suited their interest. Because of her indiscriminate issuing of letters of marque, Queen Elizabeth was responsible for a deluge of English privateers and pirates at the end of her reign. Sir Francis Drake, the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe, is perhaps the most famous of all the privateer-cum-pirates. Although letters of marque forbid privateers from attacking towns, Drake captured a fortune through his many larcenous raids on gold- and silver-laden Spanish settlements in South America. In 1572, Drake raided the town of Nombre de Dios on the island of Dominica, stealing silver bars from the governor's mansion. A few months later, he paid an unwelcome visit to Cartagena in Panama, where his ships sailed away with as much as 30 tons of gold and silver and an untold sum of money paid as ransom by the town to avoid being razed by the invaders. Drake epitomized the government-commissioned mariners who operated in that grey area between privateer and pirate, explorer and vanquisher; he was revered in his home country as a daring naval hero, a brilliant navigator, and a visionary explorer, but was vilified by his Spanish enemies as El Draque (the Dragon).

**THE PIRATES OF AVALON**

The first pirates to come into contact with Canada sailed off the coast of Newfoundland during the early part of the 16th century. Like other seafaring pioneers, what initially drew pirates to Newfoundland was the fish. It wasn't long after John Cabot's 1497 discovery of the great cod stocks off the Grand Banks that opportunistic thieves began preying upon the cargos of fish that were now being regularly harvested, salted, and shipped back to Europe. The earliest record of a pirate ship off the Grand Banks was in 1517. The *Mary Barking* and the *Barbara*, two British ships that had been outfitted for the Newfoundland fishery, reportedly turned to piracy as soon as they arrived in the New World. Perhaps the most famous of the 16th-century pirates operating in Newfoundland waters was Jean Ango, a French shipowner, merchant, and adventurer who became notorious for attacking English and Portuguese ships off the coast between 1516 and 1520. Sailing as an explorer and privateer under a letter of marque issued by French king Francis I, Ango was said to have amassed a private fleet of seventy ships, which he used for exploration and to harass ships that flew the English, Spanish, or Portuguese flag. He sailed to Newfoundland sometime in 1516 and upon arrival he built the port of Havre de grace, the chief harbour in Newfoundland for the French and Ango's main base of operations for the next five years. His private squadron of armed vessels provided protection to French ships fishing off the coast, which included attacking, pillaging, and sinking non-French vessels operating in the area. With Ango's help, France was able to establish its early dominance in the New World.

The next recorded instance of piracy off the Newfoundland coast occurred in 1523, when an English captain named Cook robbed several French ships loaded with fish. In 1546, Jean Francis, the master of a French fishing ship, reported that an English pirate had stolen a load of cod that had been freshly caught off the Grand Banks. In 1582, two English gentlemen, Sir Henry Oughtred and Sir John Perrot, raided Spanish and Portuguese boats fishing off the coast of the Avalon Peninsula. A year later, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the English explorer who set in motion the hunt for the Northwest Passage and the settling of America, travelled to Newfoundland for the purpose of annexation on behalf of Queen Elizabeth. Many of the crew members Gilbert hired had a nefarious past and volunteered for the trip to escape prison terms or even execution. While many were experienced sailors, their employment turned out to be ill advised as the crews of at least two ships mutinied and plundered a
number of French and Spanish fishing vessels in Bay Bull harbour in Newfoundland before returning to England. Richard Clarke, the captain of a fishing vessel based at St. John's, complained how the French commodore, Michel de Sance, had sailed into the harbour in 1596 with three ships and began robbing Clarke's vessels, taking the captain and his crew prisoner for nine days. In 1597, Captain Charles Leigh visited St. Mary's Harbour where he found three Basque and two French fishing ships. After a bitter fight, he captured one French vessel loaded with fish.

By the early 1600s, Newfoundland was home to numerous coastal villages and played host to hundreds of migratory fishing boats. The profitable fishing industry, a growing reservoir of manpower, an evolving infrastructure to service and supply seagoing vessels, and a strategic location astride the navigation route between Europe and the New World, combined to establish St. John's and other harbours along the Avalon Peninsula as major outposts for ships from all over Europe. This bustling maritime activity also made the coast of Newfoundland a prime hunting ground for pirates, who found easy pickings among the merchant ships that came to trade or to be refitted before setting out on the long journey across the Atlantic. Pirate ships also came to Newfoundland to rest, repair, pick up supplies, and conscript seamen.

Soon, the main draw of Newfoundland for pirates lay, not in the plundering of ships or the tiny villages that dotted the coast, but as a staging area for excursions into the more profitable waters of the Caribbean and South America. This bustling maritime activity also made the coast of Newfoundland a prime hunting ground for pirates, who found easy pickings among the merchant ships that came to trade or to be refitted before setting out on the long journey across the Atlantic. Pirate ships also came to Newfoundland to rest, repair, pick up supplies, and conscript seamen.

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Pirates also found Newfoundland to be a safe haven in that there was little fear of being captured since there was no government, no constabulary, no courts, no military, nor even a militia at this time. The myriad inlets and fishing villages, the erratic coastline, and the many coves also provided numerous hiding places for pirate ships, not to mention temporary storehouses for their ill-gotten booty (which has given rise to many a tale of treasure still buried along Newfoundland’s craggy shores).

THE PIRATE ADMIRALS

Following the end of England’s war with Spain in 1603, many British naval officers and privateers found themselves unemployed. As a result, some turned to piracy. One of those was Peter Easton, who would go on to become the most successful and feared of the 17th-century pirates. The piratical pursuits of Captain Easton took him from the English Channel to the French Riviera, Africa, the Spanish Main, the Caribbean, and Newfoundland. Easton raided both English and foreign vessels with a fleet of armed ships that at one time was said to be forty strong. His cunning was so remarkable that despite the efforts of the British Admiralty, he was never captured. Although no portrait survives of the man referred to as the “Pirate Admiral,” he has been described “as a dark man of authentic build and medium stature.”

Easton hailed from a fabled English family whose ancestors fought in the Crusades. He visited Newfoundland as early as 1602, when England was still at war with Spain, under a commission issued by Queen Elizabeth to take three British warships to protect the Newfoundland fishing fleet from Spanish attacks. Bestowing responsibility over British navy vessels to a private sea captain was an early indication of Easton’s naval prowess. When James I succeeded Elizabeth in 1603 as King of England, he promptly ended the war with Spain, decreased the size of the Royal Navy, and revoked letters of marque given to English privateers. Stranded in Newfoundland with no source of income, Easton turned to piracy.

By 1610, the next time information on Easton is available, he was being described by his contemporary, Captain Henry Mainwaring, as a “notorious pyrate.” With his private army of sailors, including
some recruited from Newfoundland docks, Easton sailed back to England, where he stationed his fleet at the mouth of the Avon River. From there he extorted ships moving into and out of the Bristol Channel by demanding a fee for their safe passage. Easton’s services had been secured by the Killigrew family, who financed his trip back to England and took a cut of the money Easton was able to wring from merchant vessels. After a while, Bristol merchants petitioned the Earl of Nottingham, the Lord Admiral of King James’ navy, for help and he responded by commissioning Captain Henry Mainwaring to capture Easton.

Like his nemesis, Mainwaring was a brilliant seaman. Born in Shropshire, England, in 1587, he was the second of four sons and two daughters of Sir George Mainwaring of Cheshire. Henry attended Oxford and upon graduation at the age of fifteen, he worked as a trial lawyer. But the call of the sea was too strong for young Henry and, after a short stint as a sailor, he applied to the King for a letter of marque to prey upon Spanish ships. Although England was at peace with Spain at the time, his commission was approved, with the stipulation that he confine his raids to the New World. At the helm of the Resistance, a small but fast and well-armed ship of 160 tons, Mainwaring set sail for the West Indies. As he neared Gibraltar off the coast of Spain, the captain ignored his king’s directive and began to attack any and all Spanish ships he could find. He had now crossed that fine line that separated the privateer from the pirate. His skills as a navigational tactician, his tenacity in pursuing his prey, and his violent broadside bombardments of enemy ships made him infamous among Spanish merchant vessels. Despite his impertinence towards the King’s orders, his aptitude on the sea could not be ignored by the British Admiralty and, in June 1611, at the age of only twenty-four, he was deemed worthy for the post of Captain of St. Andrew’s Castle, a fortress located near Southampton. That same year, he received a commission from the Lord Admiral to proceed against pirates infesting the Bristol Channel.

While Mainwaring was scouring the Channel for pirates, Easton had already set sail for the Coast of Guinea in Africa where he robbed Spanish and English ships of ivory and gold. From there he sailed to Newfoundland, arriving in 1611 with captured prize ships in tow. Easton established a fortress at Harbour Grace — the port founded by Jean Ango — and from there he began attacking ships and harbours along the coast from Trinity Bay to Ferryland. While Easton remained in Newfoundland until 1614, his main interests lay to the south. As he was stealing cargoes of salted fish and red wine from French and Portuguese vessels off the Newfoundland coast, Easton was also capturing ships, conscripting sailors, stockpiling arms and ammunition, and refitting his vessels in anticipation of setting sail to the Caribbean where he could prey on Spanish treasure.

Once in the Caribbean, Easton successfully attacked Moro Castle on the Spanish colonial island of Puerto Rico. While the capture of this supposedly impenetrable fort (which had previously withstood a siege by Sir Francis Drake) contributed to Easton’s budding reputation for invincibility, the daring raid was not conducted for glory, but for profit. At that time, Puerto Rico was a vast source of gold, which was Easton’s real object of desire. Among the ships accompanying Easton on his triumphant return to port in Newfoundland was the Spanish galleon the San Sebastian, which was said to have held the greatest treasure ever to have been captured from the Caribbean.

When Easton landed back in Newfoundland, he found Harbour Grace in the hands of a squadron of five French Basque warships, which had captured his fort during his absence. The enemy fleet, led by the largest ship, the St. Malo, engaged Easton, who was aboard the San Sebastian. With military precision, Easton captured or sank each of his adversaries, including the St. Malo, which sunk after being forced onto a small islet near the entrance to Harbour Grace. The Pirate Admiral then landed and recaptured his fort. Legend has it that the forty-seven men Easton lost in the battle are buried in unmarked graves at Bear Cove, just north of Harbour Grace, in a site appropriately named “The Pirates’ Graveyard.”

In June 1612, John Guy arrived in Newfoundland to take up his post as the first governor of the English colony, which he established at Cupid’s Cove. A letter from Guy to John Slany dated July 29, 1612, reported on Easton’s activities at Harbour Grace, a scant 15 miles by sea from the new colonial settlement:
Because the proceedings of one Captain Peter Easton, a pirate, and his company since, are most fit to be known, before I touch our plantation business, you shall understand what they have been unto this time. Until the seventeenth of this present, the said Captain Easton remained in Harbor Grace, there trimming and repairing his shipping and commanding not only the carpenters of each ship to do his business; but hath taken victuals, munition, and necessaries from every ship, together with about one hundred men out of the Bay, to man his ships, being now in number six.

As Guy noted, Easton remained in Harbour Grace until July 17, preparing his ships, reinforcing his fort, and recruiting men. That summer he invaded harbours along the Newfoundland coast with a fleet that was described by Sir Richard Whitbourne in his 1622 book as “ten sayle of good ships well furnished and very rich.” Easton plundered thirty English vessels in St. John’s Harbour and robbed French, Portuguese, and Flemish fishing vessels at Ferryland. The total damage inflicted by Easton on the fishing fleets was estimated at £20,400. As part of these latest raids, Easton recruited or forced into his service some five hundred men.

During the same raids, Easton captured Sir Richard Whitbourne, who had been sent by the King to help colonize the New World and who would later be appointed governor of a colony in Newfoundland. Because of the heavy losses being suffered by merchants and fishermen from piracy, Whitbourne was also instructed to establish a court under the British Admiralty to prosecute captured pirates. This would be the first English court of law established in the New World. By Sir Richard’s own account, he was held hostage by Easton for eleven weeks “and had from him many golden promises, and much wealth offered to be put into my hands as is well known.” Easton tried to persuade his prisoner to join him as his first lieutenant, but Whitbourne refused and admonished his captor “on the wickedness of piracy.” This lecture seems to have borne fruit, as the Pirate Admiral made an entreaty to Whitbourne to arrange a royal pardon for him. Easton instructed Whitbourne to tell the King that, if pardoned, he would return to England peacefully and abandon his life of piracy. If no pardon were forthcoming, he would continue to sail the high seas on his own terms.

While Whitbourne was in England advocating on behalf of the man he called “that famous Arch-Pirate,” Easton was moving his headquarters from Harbour Grace to Ferryland. Located on one of the easternmost points in North America, Ferryland boasted a harbour that was closer to shipping lanes and also provided greater security should the King or other forces decide to send a fleet against him. Easton built a fortified palace on Fox Hill, which overlooked the harbour and had a panoramic view of the ocean in every direction. He also kept his fleet of ships nearby in case of attack.

When Whitbourne arrived in England to inquire about Easton’s pardon, he found that one had already been granted to the pirate in February 1612 by the King, who had scented the possibility of sharing in some of Easton’s riches. By 1614, Easton still had not received his clemency, which only re-affirmed his commitment to piracy. In March of that year, Easton did hear from one of his scouts in the Caribbean that Spanish treasure ships were preparing to sail for Spain by way of the Azores, a set of islands located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, about 1,500 kilometres from the Portuguese mainland. Easton quickly prepared to set sail so he could lie in wait at the Azores. He knew that the Spaniards could take any one of a dozen routes through the Azores, so upon arrival he shrewdly deployed his fleet of fourteen ships in a wide arc to the west and south of the islands, covering the different possible paths that could be taken by the Spanish convoy. His strategy met with great success; the Spanish fleet sailed directly into his dragnet and, before long, Easton was cruising towards the Barbary Coast with four treasure ships as prizes.

In 1614, when word got back to England that Easton was now operating out of Newfoundland, Captain Mainwaring was commissioned five ships to hunt him down. By the time he arrived in Conception Bay on June 4 of that year he had eight ships under his command (the additional three were either captured en route to Newfoundland or belonged to independent
captains who fell in with Mainwaring). After docking in Harbour Grace, Mainwaring found that the King’s most famous fugitive had eluded him once again. After taking possession of Easton’s old fort at Harbour Grace he refitted his eight ships and recruited more crew members. (In a letter to the King written some years later, Mainwaring lauded Newfoundland as the world’s best station for refitting ships.) While still commissioned to capture Easton, Mainwaring’s revamping of his fleet appears to have less to do with his original mandate and more to do with his own personal enrichment, as he began raiding vessels along the Grand Banks, stealing wine from Portuguese ships, and snatching fish from the French. On September 14, 1614, Mainwaring and his private army of four hundred mariners departed Newfoundland for Europe, having with them stolen goods valued at approximately £5,400. In his letter to the King, Mainwaring tacitly acknowledged his piratical ways, but assured His Sovereign that he only attacked vessels belonging to His Majesty’s enemies. He also pronounced that into the trade of piracy “he fell not purposely but by mischance,” and once in the trade, his goal was to serve his King and country.

Mainwaring was welcomed back to England and even offered a pardon by King James I — if he agreed to give up piracy. Mainwaring consented, and to show appreciation for his own clemency, he wrote one of the first discourses on pirates entitled Of the Beginnings, Practices, and Suppression of Pirates, which he presented to the King in 1617. Now a respectable citizen, the corsair–turned–king’s courtier sailed for Dover where he rescued a Newfoundland trading fleet captured by pirates near Gibraltar. In 1618, he was knighted and, three years later, he was elected to Parliament as a member for Dover. Ending his career as a vice-admiral in 1639, Mainwaring fought for King Charles I in the English civil wars, spending whatever fortune remained to him from his days as a pirate in the losing battle against Oliver Cromwell. Because of his loyalty to the deposed King, Mainwaring was removed from Parliament in 1646. He accompanied Charles into exile in Jersey where he lived the short remainder of his life in poverty. He died less than two years later and was buried in an unmarked grave in St. Giles’ Church in Camberwell.

Peter Easton fared considerably better in his retirement from piracy. After he divided the Spanish treasure among his crew, he disbanded his fleet, renounced his life of crime, and sailed off with a personal fortune estimated at an astounding £2 million. His destination was Villefranche in Savoy, near the present Principality of Monaco, which was then a French free port for pirates. Because of his considerable wealth, Easton was cordially received by the Duke of Savoy, who invited him to settle there. Easton accepted the offer, purchased a palace, and acquired the distinguished title of Marquis of Savoy. Upon learning that the Duke of Savoy actively courted the riches of Easton, Sir Richard Whitbourne wrote, “Thus in that somewhat free and easy time a pirate owning ten good ships rich with gold, and full of fighting men, was evidently a personage who sovereign princes were by no means to snub.” Whitbourne also describes how Easton “covered himself with glory” while serving as an officer under the Duke of Savoy during his raids on the Duchy of Mantua. Among Easton’s many accomplishments was his skill in “laying guns,” which was such, “that a few shots by him produce more effect than most gunners produce with many.” Easton added to his affluence by marrying into a wealthy French family and sired children of his own, and their descendants live on the French Riviera to this day. Easton remained with the Duke of Savoy until 1620, after which history fails to record any further details of his life.

THE ENEMY PLUNDERED, RUINED, AND FIRED

Although not as famous or successful as Peter Easton or Bartholomew Roberts, numerous other pirates plied the seas off the Newfoundland coast during the 17th and 18th centuries. After serving as a gunner on an English naval ship, John Nutt, who settled in Torbay, Newfoundland, with his family in 1620, was another ex-navy sailor-turned-pirate. In the summer of 1621, Nutt and several others seized a French fishing boat, fit her out as a pirate ship and, over the next two years, raided fishing and trading boats along the coast. Nutt and his crew then sailed back to England and fenced much of their bounty through the Killigrews. Before he left for England in 1623, he wrote a letter to John Eliot, the vice admiral of Devon, who had been or-
ordered to arrest him. Nutt offered to pay Eliot £300 for a pardon, and although Eliot agreed to petition the King on his behalf, he secretly harboured plans to capture Nutt.

Eliot accepted the pirate's invitation to his ship to discuss the pardon, and according to Eliot's 19th-century biographer, Sir John Forster, “The first thing he saw, on reaching the pirate's deck, was that Nutt, even while the negotiations for his submission were in progress, had made prize of an English merchantman, a Colchester ship with a cargo of sugar and timber.” When Nutt was separated from his crew, Eliot seized the opportunity and had him arrested and imprisoned. Nutt was tried as a pirate and sentenced to be hanged, but was spared the gallows by the intervention of England's secretary of state, George Calvert. As the first Lord Baltimore, Calvert was responsible for establishing a colony in Newfoundland for King James I, who had awarded him the Province of Avalon in 1621. In a clemency letter written on behalf of Nutt in 1623, Calvert acknowledges the help he received from the condemned man in protecting his plantation from pirates, “Wherein I have no other end but to be grateful to a poor man that hath been ready to do me & my associates courtesies in a plantation which we have begun in Newfoundland, by defending us from others which perhaps in the infancy of that work might have done us wrong.” Calvert’s letter of support may have also been prompted by his fears that the reciprocal arrangement — whereby Lord Baltimore tolerated Nutt’s pirate activities in return for a cut of his ill-gotten gains — would be exposed. Thanks in part to Calvert’s intervention, Nutt did obtain his pardon in 1623. After he was released from prison, he returned to the sea to loot and pillage, this time under a letter of marque issued by the king to attack French merchant ships.

Meanwhile, back in Newfoundland, Lord Baltimore was experiencing troubles with French pirates. In 1628, the Marquis de la Rade, commanding three ships and four hundred men, raided St. John’s and other English settlements along the Avalon Peninsula. In retaliation, Calvert seized several French vessels that were berthed in Trepassey. In 1629, when a French pirate captured a number of ships during a raid on the fishing community of Cape Broyle, Calvert ordered one of his armed ships to give chase. The French pirates were captured and brought back to Ferryland to face justice. Lord Baltimore left Ferryland soon thereafter.

In 1637, Sir David Kirke was appointed governor of Newfoundland and, in 1639, he settled in Ferryland. Kirke was an English privateer who, in 1628, had captured Nova Scotia and Quebec from French forces in the name of King Charles I. On his way home, he looted a French fleet of eighteen ships in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence carrying supplies to New France. For his heroics, Kirke was awarded with a royal charter giving him absolute control over Newfoundland, which he abused by instituting new taxes and levying tolls on all fishing boats, the proceeds of which went into his own pocket. “Becoming governor of Ferryland meant only one thing to Sir David Kirke,” Frank Galgay and Michael McCarthy wrote in their book Buried Treasures of Newfoundland and Labrador. “He could now legally rob every settler and summer fisherman who came to the Southern Shore area. His taxes were high and he collected without mercy.” As a result, he amassed a personal fortune and, in 1639, moved in the manor that Lord Baltimore had built for him and his family. Kirke was dismissed from his post in 1651 for violating his charter by keeping the tax revenue he collected. He returned to England where he was found not guilty of the charges, but was imprisoned after successfully being sued by Lord Baltimore’s heir for illegally seizing his estate in Newfoundland. Kirke died in prison in 1654, but his wife and family were allowed to return to Ferryland, and were still living there in 1673 when Captain Jacob Everson of the Netherlands captured and sacked the settlement.

By the halfway point of the 17th century, Dutch pirates had become the new scourge of Newfoundland's colonies. Between 1652 and 1674, England and Holland went to war twice and the conflicts inevitably spilled over to the protectorates of both nations. In June 1665, a year after the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam (present-day New York City) surrendered to the English, Holland’s Admiral De Ruyter raided St. John’s and other ports, looting and burning ships and stealing shore equipment. In 1673, the year the Dutch recaptured New Amsterdam, Captain Jacob Everson and his fleet of four ships and 152 guns returned to
Newfoundland. On September 4 of that year, he laid siege to settlements along the Avalon Peninsula. English captain Dudley Lovelace, who was a prisoner aboard one of the Dutch ships when the harbour of Ferryland was attacked, wrote, “the enemy plundered, ruined, fired, and destroyed the commodities, cattle, household goods, and other stores” belonging to the inhabitants. “They also took away 4 great guns, the fort being out of repair, and no commander upon the place.” The next day, thirty fishing ships “were burned in the harbour, and as much fish as the ships could carry away, taken. They also forced the inhabitants to send 6 hogs, and one bullock, to each ship.” On September 9, “the Dutch went unto William Pollard’s house, 3 miles distant and plundered him of 400 quintals of fish, provisions and household stuff amounting to £400 sterling. They likewise burned at that place 40 Fishing boats, the house, warehouses, etc. belonging to the fishery in that harbour, besides several English prizes.”

The Dutch continued towards St. John’s, but it was saved from capture by forces organized under the command of Christopher Martin, who had spent seventeen years as vice admiral of St. John’s. Despite a militia of less than thirty men, Martin was able to maintain a defensive battery at the entrance to the harbour by extracting six cannon from his vessel, the Elias Andrews, and constructing an earthen breastwork at the entrance of the narrows leading into the harbour. Martin and his followers also stretched a heavy iron chain from south to north through the harbour. After trapping the Dutch ships in the narrows of the harbour, several were burned to a cinder by shallops and dories that were filled with combustibles, set on fire, and steered towards the Dutch invaders.

Despite the relative calm that followed their successful defence against the Dutch, the British colonies in Newfoundland were subject to numerous attacks from French troops and privateers before the end of the century. In 1689, England and France were again at war. The French authorities, who had established a fortified beachhead in Newfoundland at their main fishing port in Placentia Bay thirty years earlier, sent out small bands of soldiery and privateers to loot and destroy English settlements. In 1690, an English privateer ship commanded by Herman Williamson plundered Placentia. The French retaliated by their own assault on Ferryland and the Bay of Bulls. In 1692, the English Navy attacked Placentia Bay.

The battle over Newfoundland took a decisive turn towards the French around 1696 when Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville, a soldier, ship’s captain, explorer, trader, colonizer, and privateer was asked to lead a charge against St. John’s and other British settlements along the Avalon coast. D’Iberville was born in Ville-Marie (present-day Montreal) and baptized there in 1661. He was the son of Charles Le Moyne de Longueuil who had come to New France in 1641 and settled at Ville-Marie where he worked as an emissary to the aboriginals on behalf of the French government. Charles was also active in the fur trade, which made him one of Montreal’s wealthiest citizens when he died in 1682. Like most of his eleven brothers, Pierre took part in numerous incursions against English posts in North America, and it was because of his many military successes that he was tapped to lead French forces in their attempt to capture Avalon from the British. According to historian and biographer Bernard Pothier, this command coincided with d’Iberville’s own ambitions, which were becoming increasingly commercial in nature. During his patrols of the North Atlantic as a sea captain in the early 1690s, d’Iberville was well aware of the lucrative fishing opportunities that could be realized by controlling the Avalon coastline. As a privateer, he was also promised a share of the profits of any cargo captured and “even before leaving France d’Iberville had hoped to market 200,000 quintals of cod.”

D’Iberville’s novel offensive strategy against St. John’s was to shun the traditional sea attack, where he would face formidable cannon batteries, and approach the town from its unfortified landward flanks. Meeting some 50 miles south of St John’s, d’Iberville’s troops, along with another French detachment, marched north to the English capital, and captured it on November 30, 1696. After setting fire to St John’s and demolishing the English fisheries along the eastern shores, d’Iberville’s soldiers successfully laid siege to the rest of the coastline. Over the next four months, the French divisions destroyed thirty-six settlements, killed two hundred people, and took another seven hundred prisoner. By the end of March 1697, almost
all of Avalon was in French hands. Because of his impressive victory, d’Iberville was able to satisfy his mercantilist ambitions and, as Pothier writes, spent at least “two months in Placentia marketing the cod and other booty he had amassed, and supervising the fishery he had organized on his own account, using not only his own men but prisoners from the English fishing settlements as well.” Profiteering always appeared to be d’Iberville’s overriding ambition, which left one French governor convinced that he “has his interests and his trade much more in view than the king’s service.”

Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville

Between 1696 and 1705, the French and English continued their assaults upon one another in Newfoundland and many of these battles were between private navies. The British Navy’s postponement of an attack on the French stronghold at Placentia left it up to English privateers, who boldly descended on the bay and captured a third of the French fishing fleet. As a result, France surrendered and England took control over Newfoundland for good. French authorities commissioned d’Iberville to take the fight against the English elsewhere in the New World and, in early 1706, he was commanding a squadron of twelve warships and two thousand soldiers and privateers. His most decisive victory took place on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, which fell into his hands after only a day’s battle. As his biographer recounts, “Once again, as in so many of d’Iberville’s previous campaigns, there was much bad faith and ruthless looting; by the time the French departed on 22 April, Nevis, the garden of the Caribbean, had been completely desolated.” D’Iberville did not enjoy the fruits of his Caribbean conquest, as he died shortly after his victory. Accusations that d’Iberville used his military position for personal profit culminated with a French military commission that convicted him posthumously for theft and embezzlement and even demanded his widow make restitution for her husband’s ransacking of Guadeloupe.

DEAD CATS DON’T MEOW

Between 1702 and 1713, the European powers continued their running battles, this time over the succession to the Spanish throne. In the New World, the fighting not only pitted the British against the French in the north, but also the British against the Spanish in the south. As part of Britain’s war effort, Queen Anne commissioned approximately one hundred privateer ships, which reportedly captured two thousand French and Spanish vessels. As a result of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht that ended the war, the British were given full possession of Newfoundland, as well as Acadia (later renamed Nova Scotia), and the fur-trading posts in Hudson Bay. The end of the war had another consequence: it unleashed into the waters of the New World a legion of unemployed privateers, naval officers, and regular seamen. The result was a titanic outburst of piracy that would terrorize parts of the western hemisphere for the next forty years.

Unlike previous British “gentlemen” pirates, such as Easton, Mainwaring, or Drake who had military backgrounds and came from patrician families, many of the privateers commissioned by Queen Anne were men of lesser birth and distinction. Devoid of any military education or discipline, and conditioned by the predatory profiteering that came with the privateer vocation, the pirates that emerged following the war were far more ruthless, indiscriminate, and violent. Their prey was any merchant ship that sailed the bustling trading routes between European
countries and their outposts in the New World. The pirate ships also benefited from a well-established privateering infrastructure in North America, which included shipbuilders and outfitters, armament suppliers, black-market buyers for the proffered booty, and sailors well schooled in high-seas thievery. As Philip Gosse wrote in his 1932 book, *The History of Piracy*, "Willing volunteers were to be found at most of these ports, the favourite recruiting ground, as before, being Newfoundland." Bartholomew Roberts was perhaps the most famous of these postwar pirates, although he had numerous contemporaries and competitors, including Henry Morgan, Anne Bonny, Blackbeard, and Captain William Kidd.

One pirate based out of Newfoundland during these postwar years was Alphonsus Kelly. Described as a “red-bearded giant of a man,” the Irish-born Kelly operated out of Conception Bay, although he reportedly robbed ships as far south as the Caribbean. Kelly was conscripted into the British Navy as a young man but deserted for a life of piracy. Before long, he was the captain of his own pirate ship with a reputation as a merciless thief who punished hapless victims by lifting them over his head, cracking their spine across his knee, and throwing their broken bodies overboard. Legend holds that Kelly buried his treasure on a small island in Conception Bay, in a spot that can be found at the tip of a large boulder’s shadow that is cast only during a short period of time in the late-afternoon sunshine. Kelly was eventually tracked down and either captured or killed by the Royal Navy before he could enjoy his gold. The small parcel of land is today known as Kelly’s Island because of the legend that Alphonsus Kelly’s ghost still haunts anyone brave enough to venture near the spot where the treasure is buried.

Another exemplar of the new breed of pirate was Eric Cobham, whose viciousness was rivalled only by that of his wife, Maria Lindsay. Both shared a sadistic streak that prompted such villainous acts as tying the captain and crew of one prize to the windlass and then using them for target practice. Born in the English Channel port of Poole, Cobham was practically raised on the sea and turned to crime at a young age. By his late teens, he was part of a group that smuggled brandy from France to England, which ended with his capture, flogging, and a two-year prison term. After his release, he began working at an inn, but quickly reverted to his old ways, robbing a wealthy guest of his gold coins. After fleeing with the loot, and leaving an innocent innkeeper to hang for the theft, he made his way to Plymouth where he bought a small ship. Cobham then recruited a crew from the local port and set sail to begin his new career as a pirate.

His first victim was an aboriginal merchant ship sailing in the English Channel and carrying an estimated £40,000 worth of gold and other cargo. Reluctant to share his new-found wealth, Cobham revealed a side that epitomized his career as a pirate. He scuttled his ship, drowned the crew, and then somehow made it to the French Mediterranean where he sold the stolen cargo on the black market. Afterwards, he returned to Plymouth, bought a new ship, and assembled another unsuspecting squadron of seamen. It was also here that he met Maria, who agreed to accompany him to North America. Together they sailed to Newfoundland and established a base on the western coast of St. George Bay. From this secretive and strategic location, they had easy access to the fur-trading ships in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which they attacked with abandon. It was also a mere two days’ sail to the coast of Cape Breton and Nova Scotia, prime hunting grounds for pirates in search of trading ships.

For at least the next ten years, Cobham was able to evade capture, in part because of his policy of sinking his victims’ ships and leaving no survivors. Cobham’s creed as a pirate was captured in a catchphrase he supposedly liked to repeat: “Dead cats don’t meow.” His strategy appeared to have paid off as he never was caught and accumulated enough riches to retire to an estate in France. Cobham was even appointed as a French magistrate, a position he held for twelve years. But even amongst the landed gentry, Cobham could not resist the lure of an easy prize when it sailed in his direction. While aboard his ship off the French coast, Cobham encountered an unarmed vessel bound from the West Indies to England. With his servants pressed into pirate duty, Cobham captured the ship and murdered the officers and crew. He then sailed the ship back to Bordeaux where she was auctioned off along with her cargo.

He and Maria gradually became estranged, in part because of her bouts with depression and alcoholism.
One day her body was found in the shallow waters at the bottom of a cliff near the couple’s seaside estate in France. Suicide was suspected as her body contained a fatal dose of laudanum, a popular painkiller cocktail made up of sherry wine, herbs, and opium. The leap over the cliff may have been added for good measure. Cobham died a natural death a few years later. On his deathbed he made a lengthy confession to his priest, insisting that his story be published. His wishes were carried out, but Cobham’s respectable and law-abiding heirs effectively suppressed the revelations about their disreputable heritage by purchasing and burning all copies of the book.

Another pirate active in Newfoundland waters in the first part of the 18th century was John Phillips. Born into a family of English shipwrights, and later working as a carpenter himself, Phillips immigrated to Newfoundland in 1721 to work in the island’s thriving shipbuilding industry. Before his ship touched shore, however, it was captured near the Grand Banks by the pirate Anstis. Carpenters were always in high demand among sea-going vessels so Phillips’ life was spared on the condition that he sign on as part of the crew. Without much in the way of options, he agreed. Soon after Phillips came on board, Anstis and his crew applied for amnesty, which was granted by the King and all returned to England. Still yearning to travel to the New World, Phillips boarded another ship bound for Newfoundland and arrived at Placentia in the spring of 1723. He began work as a fish splitter on a shore crew, but it wasn’t long before he became bored with the stationary life. Along with fifteen others, Phillips conspired to steal a ship and then set sail under a pirate’s flag.

The night of August 29, 1723, was chosen for the heist, but when Phillips arrived at the pre-arranged meeting place, he discovered that only four of the other conspirators had shown up. Despite the short crew, the five decided to carry out their plans and made off with a merchant schooner. After renaming her the Revenge, and voting to have Phillips serve as captain, the newly anointed pirates began raiding fishing fleets up and down the coasts of Newfoundland. In less than a year, the Revenge had captured dozens of English and French vessels, some of them heavily armed. With new recruits from the captured prizes, the pirate ships then sailed to the West Indies, where they cruised throughout the winter and added to their bounty. In early 1724, while still in the West Indies, one of Phillips’ original co-conspirators, named Thomas Fern, and a small crew absconded with a recently captured prize. Furious, Phillips relentlessly chased them down. Fern and his crew were captured and prosecuted aboard the Revenge. In keeping with the articles to which he swore an oath, Fern paid the maximum penalty; when the Revenge next touched ground, Fern was taken ashore, tied to a tree, and shot.

In the spring of 1724, Phillips began to make his way back to Newfoundland to repair his vessel and take on a new crew. Before he reached shore, the pirate captain was betrayed by some new members of his existing crew, who launched a violent mutiny. Those on board who refused to take part in the uprising were killed along with Captain Phillips, who fell victim to a blow to the head from a broadaxe. The seditious crew members then decapitated their former captain and attached his head to the main mast. The remainder of his headless body was thrown to the sharks. After taking control of the ship, the pirates changed course for Boston and, upon arrival, turned themselves in to the authorities.

**PULCHRUM SCELUS: PRIVATEERING AND NOVA SCOTIA**

By the mid part of the 18th century, Nova Scotia would surpass Newfoundland as British North America’s centre for seafaring thieves and, for the next seventy years, it would be both a victim of and a staging ground for pirates and privateers during times of war. Between 1750 and 1815, Nova Scotia was at the front and rear of naval battles staged off the Atlantic coast during a succession of wars involving her colonial master. The Seven Years War (1756–1763), the American Revolution (1775–1783), the Napoleonic Wars (1793–1811) and the War of 1812 (1812–1814) all touched the shores and people of the colony. In turn, these wars spurred the greatest mobilization of private navies in Canadian history. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in private capital was raised, hundreds of privateering ships were launched, and thousands of seamen were recruited as part of Nova Scotia’s contribution to the British war-making machine in the New World.
Privately owned vessels sailing out of Halifax, Liverpool, Shelburne, and Annapolis Royal roamed the North Atlantic, and even ventured as far south as the Spanish Main in search of French, Spanish, and American merchant ships. “Privateering was an essential element to marine warfare,” Maritime historian Dan Conlin wrote, “especially in colonial theatres like Nova Scotia, where it was seamlessly integrated with normal commerce and complemented state navies such as the Royal Navy.” A privateering cruise from Nova Scotia began when merchants, risking their own capital, petitioned the colonial governor for permission to launch a ship in search of prizes. Private ships of war sailing out of Nova Scotian harbours and other British colonies operated under strict regulations established by the Crown. No vessel could officially go prize hunting without first obtaining a letter of marque from the governor. Before a letter could be issued, a surety had to be posted by the ship’s owners. The amount would be based on the number of men the ship carried, and was usually between £1,500 and £3,000. A regular account of captures and proceedings had to be kept in a logbook and any valuable information obtained by the privateer about the enemy had to be recorded and reported to the Vice Admiralty Court. All prisoners were also to be turned over to the court. Privateers were forbidden to kill in cold blood, torture, maim, inhumanely treat, or ransom any prisoner.

Privateering ships from Nova Scotia were usually converted from merchant or fishing vessels, although in some cases ships were specially built for the unique demands of piracy. Most of the private warships were small schooners, which were valued for their speed and resemblance to enemy merchant ships. Because of their small size, however, they could only accommodate a limited number of men and armaments. This meant that privateers had to rely on cunning, stealth, duplicity, quickness, and the element of surprise to be successful. A few privateering ships relied on size and brute force and some weighed as much as four hundred tons, carried upwards of one hundred and sixty men, and were armed with as many as twenty carriage guns that shot variously sized cannonballs weighing between 4 and 12 pounds. Some ships also carried “swivels,” movable cannons mounted on rails that fired buckshot at close quarters to repel boarders or to cover the rush of their own attack. Other common armaments and supplies on board a privateering ship included: bullets, grapeshot and gunpowder; cannon charges (flannel bags stuffed with gunpowder); paper, wax, and sheet lead for making gun cartridges (each of which was handmade by rolling a lead ball and a charge of powder in paper that was sealed with wax at both ends); pistols and muskets; sweet oil and blacklead for gun lubricants; matchrope and priming wires for the cannon and muskets; grappling hooks, grapnel chains, and boarding pikes for seizing a vessel after running alongside her; cutlasses, lances, and hatchets, for hand-to-hand fighting; and handcuffs for captured prisoners.

The owners and captains of privateering ships actively recruited crewmen through newspaper advertisements, by glad-handing in the local taverns, and by “crying the town,” which consisted of parading up and down the main street with bells ringing, drums beating, horns sounding, and flags flying. One typical ad for the schooner Revenge, which solicited volunteers for privateering expeditions against Yankee merchant ships and their French allies during the American Revolution, appeared in the Nova Scotia Gazette on January 12, 1779:

“THE REVENGE.”

Captain James Gandy, who has been on several cruises and has met with great success.

All gentlemen volunteers:

Seamen and able-bodied landsmen who wish to acquire riches and honour are invited to repair on board the Revenge, private ship of war, now lying in Halifax Harbor, mounting 30 carriage guns, with cohorns, swivels, etc., bound for a cruise to the southward for four months, vs. the French and all H. M. enemies, and then to return to this Harbor.

All Volunteers will be received on board the said ship, or by Captain James Gandy, at his rendezvous at Mr. Pround’s Tavern near the Market House, where they will meet with all due encouragement, and the best treatment.
Proper advance will be given.

God Save the King.

Crews of Nova Scotian privateer ships averaged between forty and fifty men (as compared to naval crews of several hundred or more) and most were manned by locals, including experienced fishermen. Among the most important of the crew members were the prize masters, who were responsible for sailing captured enemy vessels back to port, while the mother ship continued her search for more victims.

Privateering in Nova Scotia began in earnest around 1756 with British excursions against the French during the Seven Years War. In the summer of that year, Britain declared war on France, a formal declaration that allowed British colonial governors to issue privateering licences. In the fall, instructions from the King were received by colonial officials in Halifax that authorized letters of marque to be issued. For British military strategists, the best way to strike at France was not in Europe, but at sea and in her colonies abroad. The strategic location of Halifax meant that for the first time, the small maritime city would be thrust in the middle of a large-scale international war.

During the course of this embroilment, fifteen privateer ships were armed and fitted out at the Halifax port, most of which sailed against French merchant ships in southern waters. The most famous of these was the Musketo, which was owned by Halifax merchant traders Joshua Mauger and John Hale. Commanded personally by Captain Mauger (who had been variously engaged as a fisherman, merchant, distiller, slave trader, smuggler, and Halifax’s largest shipowner), and with eighty crew members aboard, the 120-ton schooner sailed on her first cruise in November 1756. The destination of the Musketo was the richest hunting ground in the hemisphere, the West Indies. Once it entered the region, the Musketo wasted little time in capturing a prize. Flying a French flag as camouflage, she overtook a large merchant ship, which she halted with cannon fire. The ship, however, was not French, but the Patience of Amsterdam, which was carrying sugar, coffee, coca, and other articles from the Dutch island of St. Eustatia. Despite its Dutch registry, Captain Mauger did not free the ship. He suspected that the cargo of the Patience was French property and, if this could be proved in the Vice Admiralty Court, she could be claimed as a legitimate prize. His suspicions were bolstered after seeing a crew member of the captured vessel hurl a bag overboard, which Mauger assumed was filled with invoices and other papers indicating that the Patience was carrying French goods.

In order to secure a confession, the privateersmen ignored their commission, which forbade any form of inhumane treatment, and applied thumbscrews on various upper and lower appendages of six of the Dutch crewmen to persuade them to talk. Despite receiving no confessions of the kind, Mauger commandeered the ship and had it sailed home in the hope it would be condemned as a French prize. Back in Halifax, the court ruled that a portion of the cargo was French property and could be confiscated and sold at auction. However, the vessel and the rest of the cargo were deemed to belong to the Dutch and were released. The court also convicted Second Officer John Crowley and the shipmaster, Matthew Pennell, of torturing members of the Patience’s crew. Both were ordered to pay a fine and the court costs of the tortured sailors.

The next great surge of privateering activity on the eastern seaboard began with the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1775. The upper hand in the war was quickly gained by the rebel colonies, for the Continental Congress and individual American colonies began commissioning privateers as soon as the fighting began. As the Loyalist sympathizer George E. Nichols wrote in 1908, “Our opponents had not been inactive, for in the state department of the United States are 1,624 privateer bonds issued at that time, 548 of which are credited to the State of Massachusetts, and 571 to the State of Pennsylvania.” Before the end of 1776 alone, nearly 350 prizes had been taken by American privateers, causing English insurance rates for merchant ships to increase by 25 percent. By the end of the War of Independence, the impressive armada of American privateers captured more than three thousand British merchant ships.

Large and well-armed American privateering ships cruised as far south as the Caribbean, while
smaller schooners harassed enemy fishing and merchant fleets off the coasts of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. As early as April 1775, rebel whaleboats captured a British schooner off Martha’s Vineyard. On September 13, 1775, Simeon Perkins, who resided in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, wrote in his diary, “Capt. Snow’s fishing schooner comes in, and report that there was a small schooner alongside them last night and told them my brother, Capt. Mason and Mr. Gideon White are all taken by American Privateers. That there is a great number upon the shore, and that they have taken near 20 sail about the Head of Cape.” At Cape Forchu, in Yarmouth County, the crews of two armed Yankee vessels took townspeople prisoner and captured four vessels as prizes. At Cornwallis, located on the shores of the Bay of Fundy, some thirty armed men travelled up the river in whaleboats and robbed the house of Stephen Best, stealing everything of value, including £1,000 in cash.

In the autumn of 1775, the Continental Army received information that two English brigs were sailing from the British Isles to Nova Scotia with a cargo of arms and ammunition. General Washington ordered two armed privateer schooners from Beverly, Massachusetts — the Hancock, commanded by Captain Nicholas Broughton, and the Franklin, commanded by Captain John Selman — to intercept the British ships. The two American schooners headed to the Strait of Canso, but missed the ammunition brigs. Refusing to return empty handed, the American privateers attacked and robbed local fishing boats and then sailed to Saint John’s Island (now Prince Edward Island). When they arrived at Charlottetown’s defenceless harbour on November 17, a raiding party threatened to set fire to the town. The colony’s attorney general, Phillips Callbeck, met the intruders at the town wharf in the hope of appealing to their better judgement. “Not having heard that the rebellious Colony had fitted out Privateers,” he later wrote, “I judged them to be Pirates; by their Conduct, they were actually such.” Captain Selman ordered Callbeck on board his ship where he was held hostage, while other American crewman began breaking into houses and stores and stealing their contents. Among the victims was Callbeck, whose home was deprived of its furnishings, liquor, food, clothing, and his pregnant wife’s jewellery. In a letter written January 5, 1776, the attorney general expressed his outrage over the anguish suffered by his wife: “These brutal violators of domestic felicity have left her without a Single Glass of wine, without a Candle to burn, or a Sufficiency of Provisions of the bread-kind; most of the furniture of her house taken away, & for what I know all of her Cloaths.” Even more frightening, as the attorney general put it, the “blood-thirsty” rebels then “sought Mrs. Callbeck for the purpose of cutting her throat” because she was the daughter of a well-known Boston Loyalist. Fortunately, they failed to find her, and instead turned their attention to the colonial governor’s mansion. After two days of ransacking Charlottetown, the American privateers departed with Callbeck and Thomas Wright, the surveyor for the colony, as hostages.

Halifax was also a favourite target of the revolutionary forces due to its vibrant trading ports, well-established shipping routes to New England, and the easy access that Yankee ships had to the province’s coastal communities. Many of the American privateers easily pounced on unsuspecting merchant ships while eluding capture by hiding in the many nearby coves or concealing themselves in the dense white fog that often hung along the coastline. “The Coasts hereabouts swarm with little privateers from New England,” fumed one outraged Halifax native in 1776, “which getting into creeks and shoal water where men of war cannot follow them, do a great deal of mischief.” The September 30, 1776, edition of the Boston Gazette reported on the mouthwatering inventory of one British merchant ship captured while en route to Halifax: “200 tierces of pork, 231 barrels of beef, 270 firkins of butter, 169 barrels of oatmeal, 11 tierces of beef, 1 crock of butter, 25 sacks split peas, 25 boxes candles, 30 boxes of soap, 20 barrels pork.” Less than a month later, two American privateers, the Montgomery and the Eagle, intercepted another British merchant ship, the Property, which was bound from Haiti to Halifax. She also proved to be a valuable prize, “yielding 9,000 gallons of rum, 6,000 weight of sugar and supplies of cotton, wool, flour and coffee.”

Liverpool, located near the southeastern tip of Nova Scotia, was also besieged by American privateers as it served as a stopping place for fishing vessels proceeding to Newfoundland’s Grand Banks and fur traders heading into and out of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.
Simeon Perkins noted in his diary entry for September 13, 1776, that Captain Snow, another Liverpool resident, told him his fishing boat was trailed by a small American schooner and that other local ships were taken by American privateers. On October 11 of that year, Perkins noted that American privateers had “taken away 5 sail of ships, brigs, etc. Burnt; sunk and destroyed 5 or 6 more, and taken some things out of stores.” Five days later, Perkins lamented the ongoing losses suffered at the hands of the American ships: “This is the fourth loss I have met with by my countrymen, and are altogether so heavy upon me I do not know how to go on with much more business, especially as every kind of property is so uncertain, and no protection afforded as yet, from Government.” On October 23, he documented in his diary the “fifth loss I have met by the privateers.” At the end of November, Perkins wrote that in his coastal town, the New Englanders “are much engaged in privateering, and very successful.”

To make matters worse, with the British navy preoccupied with fighting the Continental Forces, Nova Scotia had little protection. According to John Dewar Faibisy, who studied the impact of American raids on Nova Scotia during the American Revolution, this left much of the province dangerously open to American pirates, who “lacked legal authority and indulged in wanton plunder” and “constantly violated their instructions by committing illegal acts in Nova Scotian waters.” The result was “a tidal wave of Yankee raiders” along the shores of Nova Scotia. “With no adequate defences to halt them, myriads of Yankees descended upon the shore towns of Nova Scotia. Canso on the Eastern Shore, Maugerville on the Saint John River, Liverpool on the South Shore — numerous settlements received nocturnal visits from the heartless New Englanders. They entered harbours, rivers and coves, committing various depredations on land, burning vessels in port and at sea seizing valuable prizes.” The infestation of American privateers was so bad that, on December 5, 1775, Nova Scotia’s lieutenant-governor Arbuthnot proclaimed martial law throughout the colony.

Although paling in comparison to the number of American privateers, colonial authorities in Nova Scotia granted at least seventy-five privateering licences to Loyalists, who ended up capturing more than eighty American vessels during the revolutionary period. One of the first privateer ships launched from Nova Scotia during this time was the Enterprise, a schooner financed by Liverpool businessmen. The largest shareholder was Simeon Perkins who invested £147, a contribution motivated in part by revenge for the loss of his vessel, the Bouncing Polly, to an American privateer. Born in Connecticut on February 24, 1735, Perkins moved to Liverpool where he would eventually become one of town’s leading citizens. In 1772, he received a commission as lieutenant colonel in the militia and would later become a justice of the peace and a member of the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia. The Enterprise — which was commanded by another Yankee-turned-Loyalist, Captain Joseph Barss, who came to Liverpool from New England in 1761 as a boy of eleven — enjoyed immediate success, capturing twelve prizes in her first cruise.

Simeon Perkins
February 1777, the Revenge set sail with the Halifax Bob and, by May of that year, the pair had captured at least ten prizes. In March of that year, after learning American privateers had taken a Liverpool schooner with “two great guns,” Simeon Perkins commissioned Joseph Freeman “to muster under arms 15 of the militia, or more if need be” to catch the culprits. At the time, Freeman was a sergeant in the local militia, and “a strict seaman who mustered his crew aft every Sunday morning and read aloud a selection from the Bible and certain rules of the British Navy.” Freeman was successful in recapturing the schooner, but this small victory did little to deter American sea raiders. On May 20, 1778, Perkins wrote in his diary, “a number of the Privateers’ men came on shore, and ravaged and pillaged a number of the houses and stores. Broken open my store, and robbed me a number of things, which I represented to the Captain, but had no redress, or scarcely an answer.”

Privateers were now on the front line in the navy battle between the King and the rebel colonies. On July 10, 1780, just outside Halifax harbour, the colonial privateer brig Resolution was engaged by an American counterpart called the Viper, which carried twenty-two guns and 130 men. Both vessels suffered great damage and loss of life; eight men aboard the Resolution were killed while her adversary lost thirty-three men. In the early-morning hours of September 13, 1780, Simeon Perkins was awoken with news that two American privateering schooners, with between forty and fifty men, had landed in Liverpool Bay and captured the small fort at the mouth of the harbour, taking the officers, soldiers, and other occupants prisoner. Perkins, his son, and three members of the local militia took up a position on a road they knew the privateers would have to travel on their way to town, which was their ultimate destination. The mini militia ambushed the American privateers, and after the two sides traded gunfire, the rebels retreated to the fort. But Perkins and his men were able to capture their commander, Benjamin Cole. With the full militia now assembling to attack the fort, Perkins offered Cole a deal: His life would be spared if the American invaders relinquished the fort and quit the harbour within twenty-four hours. Cole agreed and after being released, assembled his men from the fort, boarded their ships, and sailed away. Upon their departure, the American privateers spied a small private ship of war from Halifax and began firing, killing one man and wounding two others.

Despite the increased security provided by Nova Scotian privateers, local militias, and the Royal Navy, American rebels continued to plunder various towns throughout the colony. In June 1781, rebels from five Yankee schooners ransacked Lunenburg and then extorted £1,000 from local citizens on the threat of burning the town to the ground. On July 22 of that year, Simeon Perkins was informed that forty gunships had been amassing off Cape Sable during the past few days. The same day he wrote in his diary that two privateer shallops had landed in Liverpool where they invaded the home of one resident, killing “his Oxen, 4 hogs, 12 Sheep, & 9 Lambs” and stealing “Sundry Goods out of his House, Molasses, Butter, Cheese, Pots, Kittles &c. besides the Cable & Anchor to his Shallop, all her Rigging, & Some Sails &c.” In August 1781, two rebel privateer ships, with a contingent of eighty men, sacked Annapolis Royal, capturing the town’s blockhouse, looting homes and businesses, and holding townspeople prisoner in the ditch surrounding the local fort. Upon departing, the rebels carried away John Ritchie, the solicitor general. American privateers also ransomed colonial prisoners and prizes they captured. On November 8, 1781, Snow Parker was taken by an American privateer who, according to Simeon Perkins, “ransomed his shallop & Cargo for £40. Mr. Samuel Mack Some Days ago also ransomed his Cargo of Lumber on board Lowdowick Smith for 30 or £35. This Custom of Ransoming Shallops I fear will be a great Disadvantage, as the Privateers will now Insist upon either a ransom or that they will Distroy them, as they find the People are Able to ransom.”

As with pirates of centuries past, the coastal waters off Newfoundland were also a cruising ground for American privateers and other British enemies. In 1779, the brig Triton was taken by an American privateer while fishing on the Grand Banks. On October 3 of that year, another British merchant ship sailing along the Grand Banks was taken by a Spanish privateer. In 1782, word reached the people of St. Mary’s that an American privateer was cruising in the bay and had captured a ship that had just recently departed from the town. The privateer ship was the Hazzard, with a
crew of twenty-four. Upon hearing the news, twenty-
two men from the town armed a local fishing sloop
with six carriage guns collected from the other ships
in the harbour and set out to engage the enemy. They
came upon the privateer after she had just sunk three
fishing vessels. Following a brief engagement, the
American privateer surrendered and was sailed back
to St. Mary’s as a prize. The governor of the colony
was so impressed with the bravery of the local men
that they were given the proceeds of the sale of the
captured ship to divide amongst themselves.

**THE LIVERPOOL PRIVATEERS**

By 1784, the hostilities between America and Britain
had subsided and, for the next ten years or so, relative
calm prevailed over what was left of the British colonies
in North America. In 1793, the calm was broken as
Napoleon began his charge across Europe and declared
war on Great Britain, plunging the colonies back into
war mode. Before long French privateers and frigates
were cruising along the coast of Nova Scotia. On April
16, 1793, a proclamation issued by Nova Scotia’s gov-
ernor, John Wentworth, appeared in Halifax’s
*Royal
Gazette* extolling His Majesty’s loyal subjects to apply
for letters of marque to “prevent any mischief which
otherwise they might suffer from the French” while
doing “their utmost in their several stations to distress
and annoy them by making capture of their ships, and
by destroying their Commerce.” In return, the “owners
of all armed ships may rest assured, that His Majesty
will consider them as having a just claim to the King’s
share of all French Ships and Property which they
may make prize of.”

It wasn’t until 1796 that the first Nova Scotian
privateer ship was commissioned, but the *Royal Edward*
quickly proved her worth that year by capturing
a lucrative prize in Jamaica. The ship, a Spanish
schooner named *Nostra Signora, del Carminio*, was
fair game as Spain had entered the war as an ally of
France. On November 13, 1796, Captain John Berlinder
of the *Royal Edward* wrote to the ship’s owner from
Kingston, Jamaica:

> On the 8th inst. off Jamaica, according to your
instructions, and the authority given to me by
his Excellency Sir John Wentworth, I brought
too and captured the Spanish schooner *Nostra
Signora, del Carminio*, valued at about 18,000
dollars; and brought her in with me to this
Port; which appears to me to have given the
inhabitants much uneasiness, there having
been no accounts of a Spanish war arrived at
this place. However, I have detained the vessel,
not having any doubts on my mind of the
propriety of my conduct.

Between the years 1797 and 1803, Nova Scotia’s
lieutenant-governor issued privateering licences to more
than two dozen vessels, including the *Adamant, America,
Asia, Caroline, Charles Mary Wentworth, Commerce,
Duke of Kent, Eagle, Earl of Dublin, Eliza, Flora, Fly,
Frances Mary, General Bowyer, Hunter, Jane, Jason, Lord
Nelson, Lord Spencer, Nelson, Nymph, Phoenix, Princess
Amelia, Rover, Sisters, Sir William Parker, Swallow, and
Tartar*. The period starting with the Napoleonic War
and ending with the War of 1812 would become Nova
Scotia’s golden age of privateering.

For much of this time, Nova Scotia’s privateering
activity was based in Liverpool. Located on the
estuary of the Mersey River, Liverpool was founded
in 1760 as a fishing village, but soon became better
known as a logging town. Milling the spruce and the
pine trees from the surrounding virgin forests also
helped transform Liverpool into a major shipbuilding
centre. The harbour would also become one of Eastern
Canada’s most important shipping ports. Yet, the
lumber, shipbuilding, and shipping industries would
soon be surpassed in importance and notoriety by
another trade that would truly distinguish the small
town. For Liverpool would become the launching pad
for many of the province’s most legendary privateers.
There would be so many privateer captains in town,
Francis Freeman Tupper noted, that “on a propitious
day the chambermaid who emptied the slops out the
upstairs window might flush a convoy of them at any
time. With any luck she might be able to get three and
even five captains at one shot.”

When the captains were not dodging the effuse
of sharpshooting chambermaids, they were piloting
such storied privateering vessels as the *Lord Nelson,
Lord Spencer, Duke of Kent, Charles May Wentworth,
Rover, and Liverpool Packet*, all of which sailed from
Liverpool. As historian Janet Mullins notes, “the Liverpool privateersmen were of excellent stock, all leading citizens of their community, well and favourably known to British naval officers of the time. When the wars were over, many filled positions of honour as members of parliament, judges, ship-owners, and merchants.” The most famous of the local privateersmen was Enos Collins. Born in Liverpool in 1774, Collins received little of a formal education. Instead, he was reared on the sea. At the age of eleven he was a cabin boy on one of his father’s fishing boats and was master of his own trading ship before he was nineteen. He served as first mate on the *Charles Mary Wentworth* in her first privateering cruise launched at the end of the century, and as the leader of numerous long-boat excursions against enemy vessels, he seldom returned empty handed. Later in his life, when he was asked to reminisce about his adventures as a privateer, he coyly replied, “You will observe, sir, that there were many things happened we don’t care to talk about.” His influence as a privateersman, and the considerable wealth he accumulated from this profession, was made not while a sailor, however, but as an investor. His knack for seizing profitable opportunities during wartime first became apparent during the Peninsular War (1808 – 1814), which was fought on the Iberian Peninsula with the Spanish, Portuguese, and the British forces on one side and the Napoleonic French on the other. When Collins learned that the British army was desperate for provisions during a battle near the Spanish city of Cadiz, he dispatched three ships, loaded with food and other supplies, across the ocean. The ships made it through to the British troops and the cargo was sold at a substantial profit.

Collins later became a leading Liverpool merchant and shipping magnate and was a major shareholder in what is considered the greatest Nova Scotian privateering ship of all time, the *Liverpool Packet*. Collins eventually moved to Halifax, where he consolidated his fortune through a number of investments and by founding what would eventually become the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. He would also become controversial in his later years, in part because he used his considerable influence to overrule elected officials who voted on policies that went against his business interests and because he opposed democratic reforms in the colonies as well as the creation of the Dominion of Canada. Leaving an estate estimated as much as $9 million, Collins was reputed to be the richest man in British North America when he died in 1871 at the age of ninety-seven.

The first major venture of the Liverpool privateers began on December 18, 1798, when a letter of marque was granted to the *Indefatigable*, which set out in pursuit of the French privateer ship *La Minerer*, with sixteen guns and 125 men. After an engagement of an hour and a half, in which the French vessel was “much shattered,” according to a 1799 newspaper account of the battle, the *Indefatigable* emerged as the victor. Her prize was $60,000 in coffee and sugar, which the French ship had just seized from an English merchant vessel. Another privateer ship to sail from Nova Scotia during the Napoleonic War was the *Charles Mary Wentworth*. Built in Liverpool in 1798 by local investors, the 130-ton brig was named after the son of Nova Scotia’s governor. With sixteen cannons and a capacity for more than eighty crewmen, she became one of the most fearsome warships ever to sail from colonial Nova Scotia. On
August 15, 1798, the Charles Mary Wentworth began her first cruise under the reliable command of Captain Joseph Freeman. Along with his officers that included Thomas Parker, Joseph Barss, Jr., and Enos Collins, Freeman commanded a crew of sixty-seven men and four boys, far more than needed to handle a ship this size, but necessary to overpower victims and steer prizes back to port. Cruising the West Indies, the Wentworth spent the days in pursuit of Spanish and French vessels. On this her first voyage, she took two prizes. One of these, the Spanish brigantine Santisima del Carmen, bound from Havana loaded with cocoa, cotton, and sugar, was captured on September 4 and arrived at Liverpool on September 11. The cargo was auctioned off for £7,460, while the vessel itself fetched £871.10. The other prize was the American brig Morning Star, which had been captured by French forces.

On her second cruise to the West Indies, which began February 3, 1799, the Wentworth was accompanied by two schooners, the Fly and the Victory. On March 24, the Spanish brig Nostra Seignora del Carmen was steered into Liverpool harbour by prize master Lodowick Harrington and his crew after capturing her off the island of Tortuga, just north of St. Kitts. Filled with wine, brandy, dry goods, and other articles valued at more than £10,000, the cargo took three days to auction. In May, the Wentworth made port with four Spanish prizes in tow. As reported by the Royal Gazette on May 21, 1799, these prizes included a "brig of 14 guns, and 140 tons burthen, laden with Wine, Brandy and Flour; a coppered bottomed schooner of 140 tons burthen, mounting 6 guns, laden with Cocoa; a schooner of 60 tons, and another of 40 tons, coasters, laden with dry goods and sundry other valuable articles." The cargo of the four ships grossed £16,000 at the subsequent auction and "warehouses along the Liverpool waterfront and that of Halifax where much of it was eventually sold were full of cocoa, oil, wine, brandy, dry goods, molasses, sugar and all the other commodities common in the West Indies trade."

No sooner had the Wentworth returned to Liverpool than her owners began to think about her next cruise. They also decided to fit out the captured Nostra Seignora del Carmen as a colonial privateer ship. Every bit the equal to the Wentworth, the newly christened Duke of Kent was 194 tons with three masts. After refitting, she boasted twenty carriage guns, including ten 9-pounders, thirty small arms, twenty barrels of powder, thirty-eight rounds of grapeshot, one hundred cutlasses and a crew of ninety-six men and boys. At sunrise on June 19, 1799, the Charles Mary Wentworth was put out to sea and headed south. Ten days later, the Duke of Kent followed, striking what Simeon Perkins called "a "Very Warlike appearance." At the helm of the Duke of Kent was Captain Thomas Parker. By July 8, the pair had captured a French schooner called the Josephina, carrying die wood and tobacco. On the night of July 17, under cover of darkness, Lieutenant Joseph Barss, Jr. and eighteen men sailed aboard a cutter to a small, fortifed island controlled by the Spanish off the coast of Venezuela. They were successful in destroying the gun battery, but in the attack, Lieutenant Nathaniel Freeman was killed by a musket ball. Upon learning the news, Simeon Perkins reflected in his diary, "It was the only Gun fired, and they could not tell whether it was the Enemy or their own people. It is heavy News to his poor wife. She is much distressed & almost beside herself." On July 24, the Nova Scotian privateers captured a Spanish schooner, the Nostra Senora del Carmen, with a cargo of indigo and cotton.

In a letter dated August 12 to his Nova Scotian investors, Simon Perkins, Joseph Barss, Sr., and Snow Parker, the commander of the Duke of Kent, Captain Thomas Parker, made the following report while at sea:

I am happy to embrace So good an oppurtunity to give you short detail of my proceedings Since I left Liverpool, after a passage of 19 days I arrived Safe of the Island of St. Christophers. the Reason of my falling so much to the Eastward, was mainly owing to the Constant Westwardly winds being in [illegible]. I maid the Island of St. Bartholomies. I then thought proper to Replenish our Water, and accordingly bore away for St. Kits. At 12, Came too in old Roads. I had the Rigin Sett up, and Water filld. mean time I went to Basseterra, and Veary luckily got a Linguist, a young man that understands the French, and Spanish tongues, veary well, who, I find, to be of great
Service to us. Having filled our water and being all ready, at 11 P.M. 21st, I got under way, and steered for Moona Passage. A running down the Island of Porto Rico the 23rd, at 4 A.M. fell in with and captured a small sloop, said to be from St. Croix, but on strict examination the Capt., and Supercargo confess that it was Spanish property, and delivered it up to me as such. His boat being a shore, and not sufficient ballast on board the sloop, I thought it prudence not to send her to Nova Scotia.

[... ] from thence I proceeded to the passage, where I saw several sails, but none of them a prize, but one small Spanish boat. She being of no consequence, I let them have her again. I stretched on to the southward, and on the 27th, A.M., discovered a sail. Gave chase, at 3 P.M., came nigh enough to give him a shot, but unfortunately we carried away four top mast, which obliged us to give up the chase. Afterwards I learnt that she was a French privateer from Curacoa, bound to Gardalope. I then proceed to the southward, brought too on the 31st, a small Spanish sloop. She being empty, I dismissed him. The 2nd day of August I made the main, discovered the town or Lequirs 5 leagues distance. Lay off, and on, on the 4th at 6 A.M., discovered a sail. Gave chase at 5 P.M. was obliged to give up the chase. She being under cover of the batteries in Liquira. At 3 P.M., the 8th, discovered a sail a running down. I immediately gave chase, and gave him a gun. I found him to be an armed brig. It came on dark. We lost sight of him. At 9 P.M., being close in with the land, discovered at sail, and, supposing it to be the brig, gave chase, and prepared for action. At 10 came within hail. She not giving a direct answer, I gave her a shot, she steering for the land, and it being very dark, and within half a mile of the land, I sheared close a long side of him, and ordered him to wear amidiately, or else I would give him an other shot, and sink him. He then wore round and stood from the land. I sent my boat on board, took chaire of him, and brought the capt.

On board, he said that he was a dian [Dane?], but with the help of my linguist, found him to be a French man. I kept him on board all night, and after strict examination, I could not know him from any place but Barsalona, bound to Leguiria. His secon (as he called him), was a French man and all the rest of the crew, with some passengers, were Spaniards. He still persisted to be very bold, and daring in respect of claiming the vessel, and cargo. But his secon informed me that he had destroyed some papers, and when he saw that we were a going to land him according to his own request to the leeward, he offered the prize master, Mr. Thos. Burnaby, 6000 dollars if I would release the vessel. I then went on board, in order to land the prisoners. Mr. Burnaby informed me of the capt’s offer. He then came to me, and in presents of Mr. Burnaby, W.C. Maning, and Mr. McLeod, offered to me the same sum, as a ransom, and to pay the money by 10 of the clock, the next morning if I would release the vessel, which I refused, knowing all these circumstances to be in my favour. I insisted on his going to Halifax, with the vessel, but he refused, thinking to make an affidavit man of his secon. He accordingly authorized him as his attorney to act for him, and took his leave when the boat returned. He expressed himself in these words. I know the vessel will be condemned, and I will be left destitute, and begged me to land him, and gave me a certificate that it was his particular request. Which I granted. Sent the boat on shore, with him, with a message to the capt. To come off, but he did not come. Knowing the evidence on board, which I send you, to be sufficient, I maid sail to the northward, in company with the prize. At 3 P.M., the 10th, discovered two sails coming up a stern in chase. I lay under easy sail, ordered the prize to range a head, and prepared for the action. At 4 P.M. the head vessel, being a brig, came up with pistol shot. I up courses. She, seeing that, wore round. I ammediately
did the Same, and gave here Seaveral Shot. he hoisted an English Ensign, and Pennant. But halld them down the third Shot that I gave him, and Still Kept Runing from us. we gained on him Veary fast, but taking a Squall, our Ship water logged, which obliged me to take in Sail for a Short time, which gave him the advantage of Rainging a head for us. at 5 P.M., he tacked Ship to the Nortward, at which time the other Vessel made all Sail, and Stood to the Southward. he being a grate Sailor, and making Short tacks, obliged me to quit the Chace for the Preservation of our Prize. by what information I Can get, She was a Brig belonging to Curacoa, 14 guns, and 150 men, and the other I Supposed to be his Prize, as I heard Guns, the day before. at 10 A.M., the 11th discovered the Island of Neavs, Continuing our Course to the Northward. I am veary Sorry to enfrom you that we have lost 2 french privateers, mainly owing to our Ships being Crank, not having Sufficient balast, and that of the Right Kind, which Shelfurne will Real the Benefit off, but in every other Respect She answers my expectations, and I am in hopes that you Shall hear from me again Shortly. I have Infomation of Seaveral Spanish Vessels, which I hope to fall in with.

I have had no information of the Wentworth at yeat, but hope to fall in with her dayly. having notheing more to add in particular, after my best Respects to all my owners, I Subscribe myself, Gentlemen, yours,

Simeon Perkins, Esq. )
Joseph Barss, Esq. )
Thos. Parker
Capt. Snow Parker, Esq. )

The *Duke of Kent, Charles Mary Wentworth, and Earl Spencer*, from a modern drawing by C.H.J. Snider
P.S., —I have wrote these few lines in hast for fear of being obliged to part Company with the Prize Schooner, Lady Hamond, who, I have not the least doubt, but She will be a good, and Lawfull Prize. I was informed by the mate that She has more property on board than the invoice Specifies. that She has to the amount of 22000 on board.

The Duke of Kent did meet up with the Wentworth on August 16 in Mona Passage, a shipping lane running between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. The two returned to Nova Scotia together with three captured French schooners. They also brought with them the Lady Hammond, the "Prize Schooner," which Parker mentioned at the end of his letter, a Danish ship carrying cargo worth an estimated £22,000. In October of that year, Perkins and his partners outfitted the Lady Hammond and re-named her the Lord Spencer, after the First Lord of the Admiralty. A month later, with Joseph Barss, Jr. commanding, the Lord Spencer was sent her out on a voyage to the West Indies and the Spanish Main with the Charles Mary Wentworth and Duke of Kent, with Thomas Parker and Joseph Freeman commanding each ship, respectively. On December 17, the Wentworth took her first sail on this cruise. In a letter dated December 24 1799 and postmarked St. Kitts, Captain Parker informed his Nova Scotian agents, “Nothing Remarkable Occurd on our Passage till the 17th Inst. In the Morning Discovered a Topsail schooner Under Our Lee. Imediately gave Chase, and at 1 P.M., had the pleasing Satisfaction of coming up with, and Recapturing, the Schooner Betsey, Ownd at New Providence, from Charles Town, S.C., bound to Martinique.” On board the Betsey were fifty-one hogsheads of tobacco, 58,000 cypress shingles, and four African slaves. Parker also reported that the privateer Lord Nelson “fell in with a Privateer Schooner of Sixteen Guns & 140 Men, about 2 Degrees to the Windward or Antigua, who Engaged five Glasses, had 2 men killed, & 5 wounded, his spars, and Riggen veary much shattered.” On December 29, the Lord Spencer had a brush with a French privateer and three of her men were wounded in the exchange of broadsides and musketry fire. During the same voyage, the Lord Spencer captured two prizes, but then struck a reef, forcing her crew to be rescued by her privateering cohorts.

By the time she was sold in 1800, the Charles Mary Wentworth had captured eleven enemy vessels as well as a Spanish island and fort off the coast of Venezuela. Nova Scotian historian Dan Conlin believes she may have been “the first warship ever built, crewed and commanded by Canadians” and more than covered her costs through the prizes she brought back to auction. Years spent in southern infested waters made the Wentworth leaky and slow, however, and she was able to make only one capture on her fourth cruise. The next time the Wentworth was put to sea it would be as an ordinary merchant ship. During a violent storm in 1802 she capsized and sank, although no lives were lost.

Joseph Freeman would continue his privateering ways in the War of 1812, commanding the Sir John Sherbrooke, the largest private commerce raider ever to sail from a Nova Scotia port. His son John would also enter his father’s profession during the same war as the first commander of the Liverpool Packet. Joseph Barss, Sr. would establish himself as a leading figure in Liverpool commerce and also became a representative in the colony’s House of Assembly. After suffering
the ignominy of steering the Lord Spencer into a reef, Joseph Barss, Jr. would redeem himself during the War of 1812 by becoming the most successful Canadian privateer of all time. Following the Napoleonic War, Thomas Parker continued seafaring, mostly by piloting merchant ships to and from Liverpool. On October 27, 1805, Parker piloted the ship Lylly into the Liverpool docks. Waiting for him there was Simeon Perkins, who described his friend as “very much elivated with the prospect of gitting home and particularly as it was his Birthday.” Unhappily, “the Scene was Soon changed!” A violent wind confronted the brig as it was docking and “She was under a whole foretopsail fore Sail & Mainsail one or two Staysails which appeared to me too much Sail. When they were nearly up to the Fort Capt. Parker fell overboard and was drowned.” In his diary entry for that day, Perkins solemnly reflected, “how uncertain is Life. Such providences are Loud Calls and teach us the great Necessity of being prepared to meet our God.”

**THE BATTLE OF THE ROVER**

*The strange privateer clearly meant business — fighting business.*
—Thomas Raddall, *The Rover*, 1958

At the southern tip of Nova Scotia, at the mouth of the Mersey River, where they feared God and beseeched the protection of King George, there lies a small port, which by some is called Liverpool, but is more aptly known by the designation “Privateering Capital of British North America.” It was in this small town, we are told, that the *Rover* was being built as a private ship of war during the winter of 1799 and spring of 1800. The financial sponsors of her creation were the Liverpool merchants Simeon Perkins, esq., Snow Parker, esq., and William Lawson, esq.

On 2 June 1800, the one-hundred-ton brig sailed on her first cruise with Captain Alexander Godfrey at the helm, a crew of fifty-five at his side, and fourteen 4-pounder guns at the ready. Seven of these guns were placed at each side of the ship’s waist and positioned through ports in her bulwark. Each bulwark also had many row-ports for the 25-foot oaken oars used to propel the *Rover* on those days devoid of wind or when she was in a tight spot. The *Rover* returned to port a little more than a month later with three prizes. All were American ships captured previously by the French. On her second voyage, the *Rover* left with forty-five men and boys. Little did the crew know that their brig would become engaged in one of the most storied battles ever to involve a Canadian sea hawk. On this battle, I have endeavoured to provide all the information of this fine excitement that can be gathered from the official records, and from the personal, albeit modest, account by Captain Godfrey himself.

While cruising near Cape Blanco on the Spanish Main, 10 September 1800, the *Rover* gave chase to a Spanish merchant ship, and was able to drive her to the nearest shore. Knowing the Spaniards were trapped, the crew of the *Rover* prepared to board. But Captain Godfrey quickly realized the tables had been turned; for closing in on the *Rover* was a Spanish squadron of four warships, assembled by the Spanish governor at Puerto Rico. The squadron was well prepared for armed conflict; the lead ship Santa Rita mounted ten 6-pounder cannons, two 12-pounder carronades, a timber beak at the bow for ramming enemy vessels and a crew of one hundred seamen and twenty-five marines. Each of the three armed gunboats that accompanied her carried at least twenty marines as well as slaves, who manned the long oars.

The commander of the Santa Rita had sent out a small merchant ship as bait and after the *Rover* bit, the warships positioned themselves between their quarry and the open sea. The *Rover* was now trapped, and her imperilment became more grievous when the wind died to a weary draught, eliminating any hope that the *Rover* could out sprint her opponents. The Spaniards closed in on the Liverpool brig like sharks coming in for the kill.

Godfrey knew he was in for the fight of his life. He barked orders to his crew to prepare for battle. The gunners took their position alongside the cannons, four men to each gun. Each seaman
was issued a cutlass, a pistol, or both. The young powder monkeys carried canisters of gunpowder, grapeshot, and fuses for the cannons; the master-at-arms and his corporals loaded and primed their muskets; pikes were placed along the ship’s edge to slow the enemy’s boarding party.

The Spanish fleet moved ever closer to the Rover under the cover of cannon fire from their bow guns. Godfrey ordered that fire be returned from the two guns at the stern of the brig. But he ordered his larger cannons to remain silent. By biding his time and holding back his full arsenal, he was gambling that the Spaniards would think that the Rover had little firepower.

“Look, cap’n,” said Lodowick Harrington the master gunner urgently, “there’s a mob o’ men on that schooner’s deck, and a squad o’ soldados in each of those galleys, not countin’ the black men at the oars. You let ‘em get much closer and they’ll try to board us.”

“That’s what I want,” Godfrey replied. “Better than a gun fight at this range.”

“You’re goin’ to let ‘em board us?” Harrington cried.

“I’m going to let ‘em think they can,” replied the captain.

Outnumbered and outgunned, Godfrey’s plan was to outmanoeuvre the Spanish war vessels as they neared by swiftly swinging his ship around to the starboard of the Santa Rita through the force of his twenty-four oars. He would then order a volley of cannon fire to be unleashed at close range. Nine-pound cannonballs would be aimed at the sails of the Santa Rita to immobilize her and to allow the Rover’s men to jump aboard the Spanish vessel from the rear. This strategy was a colossal gamble as it gave the Santa Rita the opportunity to draw near to and lay low the Rover through her own overwhelming firepower.

“Remember this,” Godfrey yelled to his crew as the Spanish enemy ships drew near, “if they get aboard of us you’ll have to fight like wildcats if ye hope to see Nova Scotia again. There’s no hope for any man taken prisoner — nothing but hard usage and a mean death at the last. Now get to your stations and keep low. If it comes to a gun fight, the Senor will try to cripple us afore the wind comes on again — he’ll shoot high for our spars and sails. But don’t count on that. Keep down, shoot cool, and reload fast — you’ve got to move like tallowed lightning.”

From the helm, Godfrey waited patiently as the Santa Rita inched closer and closer. Then, when he believed the time was right, the captain ordered his men to engage the enemy with muskets and pistols, while directing his oarsmen to position the ship so her stern directly faced the oncoming vessels. The cannons, well loaded with great and small shot, remained silent, but ready.

The enemy ships were now so close that Godfrey could hear the commander of the Santa Rita order the crew of two of the gunboats to board the Rover. The Spanish marines leaped into action. One boat attacked on the brig’s larboard bow and the other on her larboard waist. Godfrey ordered his own men to continue firing with small arms and the stern guns.

With the gunboats less than 15 yards away, Godfrey made his move.
“Now, lads,” he shouted to his first lieutenant who relied it to the lead oarsmen, “out with your sweeps to larboard — out with ’em! Lively! Lively does it! Now heave! Heave her round to starboard, fast as you can. Heave, I tell you. Put your backs into it! Pull — pull your shoulders off — this is no time for lagging. Come! Round with her. Make that sea boil. Make it boil if ye want to see home again. Ah! Now she moves — she moves! Swing, my beauty!”

With three men at each oar on the larboard side, the Rover’s human pistons began their giant sweeps and in unison, the mighty oaken appendages pulled the Rover around so as to bring her starboard in a position where she could broadside the bow of the Santa Rita with her full artillery.

Godfrey’s strategy was working; the Spanish navy men could not see the oars because of the thick smoke from the cannons. They did not anticipate that their prey could turn so quickly, nor did they expect the heavy arms that had up to this point been cleverly concealed.

With the Santa Rita’s bow and foresail badly exposed, the Rover’s master-at-arms ordered his men to let loose a broadside of cannon fire. The gunners raked the crowded deck of the Santa Rita fore and aft from the starboard, while attacking two of the Spanish gunships with her portside cannons. Before long, a loud crack was heard from the Santa Rita; a 9-pounder from the Rover had struck the foretopmast of the lead Spanish ship, causing her sails and rigging to fall in a heap across her bow.

Godfrey next ordered his oarsmen to shift the Rover and, in doing so, began a broadside against the gunboats, doing great damage and killing and wounding many on board. Godfrey noticed that the cannon fire from the Santa Rita had slackened, and began close action with the schooner. He took advantage of a puff of wind to back the Rover’s head sails and ordered the ship to be steered so that her stern was on board the Santa Rita. Using this as a bridge, Godfrey ordered a boarding charge.

With cannons continuing to fire, the privy-teersmen leaped onto the main deck of the Spanish...
vessel with a flourish of muskets, pistols, pikes, dirks, and cutlasses, some jumping from the stern, others from the bow, still others swinging across on ropes attached to the main mast. A furious battle ensued as cannonballs, grapeshot, and bundle shot blasted from the two combatants; muskets were fired and the sound of steel upon steel was heard as cutlasses brandished by marines and privateersmen ferociously clashed.

Despite the thick plume of smoke, Godfrey could see the Santa Rita was immobile. He also saw the badly mauled Spanish gunboats limp back to the mainland. Victory was his! After a battle that lasted three turns of the hourglass, fifty-three Spanish sailors had been killed and another seventy were taken prisoner. In his own recitation of the battle, Godfrey claimed that not one of his men were killed or even hurt during the conflict.

On 16 October 1800, the Rover sailed victoriously into Liverpool harbour with the disabled Santa Rita behind her. Upon hearing the news of the Rover’s victory against all odds, Simeon Perkins wrote, “We Must Esteem it a Wonderful Interposition of Divine providence. O! that men would praise the Lord for his Goodness and for his wonderfull works to the Children of men.”

As a reward for his gallant leadership in this battle, Captain Godfrey was offered a commission in the Royal Navy, but he declined. In 1803, this “Stirring Capable man,” as Simeon Perkins described him, died of yellow fever while on a trading mission to the West Indies. He was buried near Kingston, Jamaica.

The Rover continued to sail on privateering missions until 1804, but these cruises garnered few prizes. Succeeding Godfrey as commander was Joseph Barss, Jr., who was at the helm until 1803. The final commander of the privateer vessel was Benjamin Collins, but he was forced to relinquish his commission when he was accused of abrogating his letters of marque by making several illegal captures. Following these allegations, the Rover was disarmed and for the remainder of her days she was put to work carrying fish and lumber.

A SAUCY WILD PACKET

The next great spate of privateering activity in North America began when U.S. president James Madison declared war against Great Britain on June 18, 1812. Within weeks of the declaration, investors across America’s eastern seaboard rushed to commission virtually anything that could float. The first American privateer, the 30-ton Fame, was licensed on July 1 and during the course of the war, more than five hundred American privateering licences were issued in her wake. Some of these ships were built expressly to harass British merchant vessels, emphasizing speed, power, and range. While most of the American privateer vessels were large sloops and schooners capable of transatlantic cruises, others were little more than open fishing or pleasure boats. When a tiny 10-ton privateer put into Salem, Massachusetts, with three English prizes in tow, the September 26, 1812, edition of the Niles Weekly Register proclaimed, “It will not much amaze us, bye and bye, if these people go out to fight the enemy in washing tubs.”

As in the Revolutionary War, American naval forces quickly overwhelmed the British colonies and less than a month after war was declared, newspapers were already reporting heavy losses. The Massachusetts-based Newburyport Herald contained the following colonial dispatch from Halifax, dated July 20, 1812:

American privateers are swarming on our coast and in the Bay of Fundy. Hardly a day passes but we hear of captures made by them. A schooner hence to Liverpool, N.S. was taken last Friday near Port Medway. A schooner hence with arms and ammunition for Country Harbour was taken into that harbour on Wednesday last, also a Liverpool Schooner returning from Labrador. Two schooners from Lunnenburg were captured last week and considerable sums of money taken out of them, but the vessels were released. Indeed, so numerous are the privateers around the coast, that we consider it very improvident for any vessels to sail from this port unless under convoy.
There were also many American privateers raiding fishing boats along the coast of Newfoundland. The August 19, 1813, edition of the *Royal Gazette and Newfoundland Advertiser* filed reports on the American privateer *Frolic*, which was active around the Grand Banks:

SCHOONER CAPTURED: Tuesday morning returning to this Port, the Schooner “Hunter,” Captain FERRIS, belonging to Messrs. J & R. BRINE. She sailed the 7th inst. for Sydney and was captured on the 14th off Scatari Island by the American Privateer Schooner “Frolic” and sent in as a cartel. The “Frolic” had taken seven other vessels which she destroyed, among them was the “Jane Gordon” of this Port. She fought the Privateer for two hours and finding all resistance in vain, the Captain and Mate leaped overboard and swam to shore. The Privateer’s men landed twenty-four of the prisoners at Sydney and twenty others were put on board the cartel.

American privateers once again contravened their letters of marque repeatedly by raiding and ransacking towns and kidnapping local residents for ransom. But despite the yarns circulated by Newfoundlanders of Yankee pirates making cannonballs out of their victims’ heads, for the most part the captives were treated amicably. In an 1836 book by the archdeacon Edward Wix, he describes the kidnapping of one Newfoundland woman at the hands of American privateers:

Saturday, 6.— Walked to the First Barrisway, where three families live, and the widow, Anne Huelen, a native, the mother of the settlements. The recollection of this cheerful old lady is unimpaired, and carries her back to the history of the island for the greater part of a century, and this a most interesting portion of the history of Newfoundland,—as it takes in the troubled periods in which the French and American privateers inflicted such incalculable hard-ships on the simple inhabitants of this coast. In 1814, soon after the loss of her husband, she was proceeding with one of her daughters, and her catch of cured salmon, to St. John’s, for the arrangement of her affairs, when she was captured by an American privateer, and carried to New York. Her cargo was sold there by a writ of “venditioni exponas.” She showed me her pass-papers, which were signed by James Monroe, then secretary to the President of the United States. She speaks with lively gratitude of the very humane attentions which were uniformly paid her while she was detained in New York, especially by a Mrs. Sophia Doty, after whom and Mr. Doty, she had two of her grandchildren, Sophia and Elihu, named after her return to Newfoundland. She was allowed, too, very kindly, to buy in her own schooner at the nominal price of one dollar, which a benevolent American put into the poor creature’s hand at the moment, for the purpose of effecting the formal purchase.

While not as quick off the mark as the Americans, the Loyalists launched forty privateering ships before the war ended, although few of these ships were specifically built for this purpose. Instead, captured American vessels, some already refitted for privateering, were purchased at auctions by investors. The American-built ships were not only fast, but their familiar shape and rig design could be used to deceive enemy merchant ships in Cape Cod and Martha’s Vineyard, the favourite cruising grounds for the Nova Scotian privateers.

One of the most unlikely privateer ships launched from Nova Scotia during the War of 1812 was the *Liverpool Packet*. A mere 53 feet in length and weighing only 67 tons, the schooner was a runt compared to most of her counterparts. “A lean-lined thing she was,” wrote C.H.J. Snider in his 1928 book on Nova Scotian privateers, “straight as a gunbarrel, with bold bows, undercut stem and raking keel, and two taunt spars, longer than she was, slanting back so sharply they seemed to be falling over her narrow stern.” The schooner spent the years before the war as a contraband slave ship, trying to evade the Royal Navy after the trade in humans was outlawed in the British Commonwealth in 1807. Upon capture, she wound up on a Halifax auction block in
November 1811. Would-be purchasers scoffed at the puny Baltimore clipper, ridiculing “her small carriage, unorthodox rigging, and the rank smell emanating from her bowels,” the product of the “illicit human cargo that had been so recently stacked like cordwood in her belly.” She was too narrow to accommodate enough cargo to make her profitable, and it was doubtful she could be converted to a fishing boat. For much of the auction, the ex-slaver, “all chewed up like a dog from a street-fight,” solicited little interest. Most referred to her derisively as the “Black Joke.”

Yet, one of the bidders at the auction must have seen something in her that no one else did. Enos Collins, who had recently moved to Halifax from Liverpool, purchased the much-maligned schooner for the sum of £440 on behalf of himself and his partners, Benjamin Knaut and Joseph Barss, Sr. After having her fumigated with vinegar, tar, and brimstone, she was taken to Liverpool and re-christened the Liverpool Packet. She began her new life carrying passengers, mail, and other small freight between Halifax and her new home port, with Captain John Freeman at the helm. Being a man of shrewd reputation, financial means, and with an uncanny knack for turning improbabilities into profitable ventures, some speculated that Collins had other plans for this ship. Whether he anticipated the upcoming war will probably never be known. What is apparent is that once colonial authorities began to issue letters of marque in 1812, Collins had in his possession a schooner that he believed was ideally suited for a new career as a private warship. With the conflict already raging, the Packet sailed to the Halifax dockyard where she was outfitted with five carriage guns. On the last day of August, the Packet hoisted the Red Jack and with a crew of forty-five, provisions for sixty days, and armaments that included two hundred rounds of canister, three hundred of roundshot, four hundred pounds of gunpowder, twenty-five muskets, and forty cutlasses, Captain John Freeman set a course for American waters.

The Packet snared her first victim on September 7, 1812. According to C.H.J. Snider, she laid in wait on Georges Bank, 120 kilometres off the coast of New England, with every sail “tightly furled, so that only the slender spars and low, straight body etched a faint blur against the horizon. All unsuspecting, the 325-ton American ship Middlesex, of six times the Packet’s size, sailed right towards her, on her way to New York.” After the Middlesex and her cargo of coal, salt, and earthenware was captured, she was sailed back to Halifax and brought before the Court of Vice Admiralty for condemnation. The Middlesex was freed, however, when her master was able to prove the authenticity of the British licence he was carrying. On the same voyage, the Packet fell in with the 291-ton Factor, bound from Portugal to Norfolk, Virginia, with a cargo of wine. After firing a cannonball across her bow, Freeman’s crew boarded the victim ship, only to discover that she had already been cleaned out by British privateers sailing on the Hero. A supply of wine was found on board, but when the Factor reached Halifax, the thirsty prize crew had “left little but the bungholes.” The Packet finished her cruise along the New England coast around mid-October, capturing the schooner Polly heading from Charleston to Boston with a load of rice and cotton, the schooner Four Brothers, also on her way to Boston with lumber in her hold, the schooner Union, travelling from Philadelphia to Bath with flour and corn, and the sloop Ambition from Boston to New York. At the end of her first cruise, Captain Freeman parted company with the Liverpool Packet, no doubt satisfied with his take of nine prizes in less than two months.

The Packet left on her second cruise sometime in late October or early November, this time under the command of Joseph Barss, Jr. Like his predecessor, Barss headed straight for New England waters and, by November 22, a Salem newspaper reported that she had already captured at least eleven American prizes. New Englanders seethed over the success of the impertinent Nova Scotian schooner, especially given her temerity in prowling the New England shore and carrying off prizes right from under the noses of American armed forces.

It was around this time that the Americans launched their first determined effort to rid themselves of this irritant. Captain John Upjohn declared at a town meeting in Salem that since all the local privateers were at sea, he himself would lead an attack on the Packet, if someone could supply a vessel. He estimated that seventy men were needed for the mission, a high compliment to the Packet. The schooner Helen was made available and, after being fitted with
armaments and supplied with provisions and a crew, Upjohn set sail. Several days later, he returned empty handed after acting upon erroneous information that the Packet had sailed for Saint John, New Brunswick. “There were dark suggestions of treachery, and hints that some informer’s whaleboat must have carried the warning from the shore to the lurking privateer,” C.H.J Snider wrote in 1928. “But the St. John story was just one of the amusing tales Joseph Barss was continually trying on his involuntary guests. The Liverpool Packet never went there in her life. If the Helen had persisted she would have found the scourge of Salem sooner or later about three leagues off Cape Cod Light.” During the month of December, as the Packet resumed another tour of duty, the Boston newspapers once again decried her success, which entailed twenty-nine captures on this cruise. It was said that halfway through her current mission, the Packet was forced to return to Halifax for fresh hands because almost all of her crew were sailing prizes back to port.

A large part of the Packet’s success may have been the result of her design. As a Baltimore cutter, she had a trim physique, a sharply raked stem and sternpost, and a deep draught, which allowed her to sail close to the wind. Combined with her light weight, she was as fast as any boat on the water, an essential prerequisite for chasing down merchant ships or fleeing enemy war vessels. Her sleek design also ensured great stealth; her topsail measured a mere 16 metres in length, with a hold only 2 metres in height. Her simple rigging also meant that sails could be handled from the deck and hoisted quickly the moment a potential victim appeared. Her design was not particularly suited for long voyages at sea, but she was perfectly matched for cruising coastal waters, which provided her with a rich crop of American merchant vessels that clung to the eastern seaboard. Moreover, her American design enabled her to sail into New England waters like a wolf in sheep’s clothing. One mate of a prize captured in Cape Cod took the Liverpool Packet for an American privateer at first, “for she looked exactly like their Virginia pilot boat, except her having waistcloths” (to conceal her midship guns).

The Packet’s success was also due to her master, Joseph Barss, Jr. Born in Liverpool on February 21, 1878, he was a skilled sailor and navigator who understood the maritime world. His knowledge of the coastlines and weather patterns allowed him to evade enemy forces and capture their prizes. His leadership and strategic thinking were instrumental in the Packet’s success. The Packet was a symbol of the American privateering era, a time when small, fast ships operated off the coast of New England, preying on British merchant vessels during the American Civil War.
1776, he was the second of Elizabeth Crowell and Joseph Barss' fourteen children. Like his father and brothers, Joseph, Jr. spent much of his life at sea, beginning in his early teens. At the age of twenty-one he was already master on one of his father's vessels and a year later he was second lieutenant aboard the Charles Mary Wentworth. In 1799, Joseph, who now cut a dashing figure with his fashionably long hair, thick sideburns, and boyish good looks, was given command of the Lord Spencer. In 1801, he succeeded Captain Godfrey as master of the Rover. For the next ten years, he commanded merchant vessels in the Maritimes, New England, and the West Indies.

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When the Liverpool Packet first set sail in 1812, Joseph, Jr. was second-in-command and a year later he became her master. His appointment was a nod to his leadership abilities, his navigational skills, and his uncanny ability to anticipate potential prey and enemy captors. “Some of the Liverpool Packet's feats of changing position were marvellous,” C.H.J. Snider wrote. “She must have sailed like a witch. No spot was too perilous for Joseph Barss to reach if there was a prize to be made.” In one 24-hour period, he logged 250 miles between one capture at Halfway Rock off Portland, Maine, and another off Point Judith in Martha's Vineyard, all the while being pursued by American warships. Barss forged a naval intelligence system by enlisting the help of other friendly ship captains to alert him to potential prizes or to American warships sent to capture him. Barss' record as commander of the Packet was unequalled among privateers, and his skills as a seaman were duly recognized in November 1812, when he was promoted from master to captain. With his new commission, Barss enjoyed a resplendent Christmas with his family in Liverpool; he had captured twenty-one ships, netting his investors approximately $100,000.

On February 10, 1813, Barss received another letter of marque and, by March, the Packet was back prowling her favourite hunting grounds off the coast of New England. Once again, she did not disappoint her investors; between March 5 and 14, she captured at least ten American prizes, sending seven back to Halifax. While sailing towards the waters off the coast of Maine, the Packet fell in with the Defiance, robbing the large American sloop of her cargo of flour and lumber shingles, as well as her 14-foot ash oars, which Barss kept for the Packet. He also used the captive Defiance as a decoy to help capture the John of New York, a 130-ton brig carrying a cargo worth $20,000. Along with the Sir John Sherbrooke and the Retaliation, the three Liverpool privateer vessels were causing so much disruption to American shipping that marine insurance rates were hiked for American vessels sailing out of Boston and other New England ports.

By April, Boston newspapers were reporting that the Liverpool Packet had captured seven ships that month. In its May 1813 edition, the American Shipping Intelligence paid its grudging respect to the colonial privateer:

The evil genius of our coasting trade has of late changed her cruising ground from Cape Cod to our north shore. About five o'clock on Saturday afternoon she took, near the outer harbour of Gloucester, the schooner Fanny, bound from Boston to the east-ward, having on board a cargo of corn, tar, cordage, etc. On
Saturday morning she took a sloop with wood, and sent her into Gloucester with prisoners. The privateer continued off the harbour until Sunday afternoon, when the inhabitants, provoked at seeing their port thus blockaded, sent out the brig *New Orleans*, manned with smart and experienced men, in pursuit of her, on which the privateer made off. But the brig chased until she got within a mile and a half of her, when it fell calm, and the privateer, by the sweeps (from the *Defiance*’s cargo!) and night coming on, escaped. The brig returned next morning, with no further success than having driven her from the mouth of the harbour. The armed boat *Jefferson* and privateer *Frolic* also sailed from the port in quest of the *Liverpool Packet* but returned, equally unsuccessful.

On May 23, 1813, the *Packet* returned to Halifax with the *Defiance*, the thirty-third prize she had delivered for condemnation. On June 8, she left on what would prove to be her final trip under the command of Joseph Barss, Jr. Three days into the excursion, a sail was spotted in the distance and Barss ordered his crew to give chase. Soon after the pursuit began, the *Packet*’s prey abruptly reversed course and headed in the direction of the hunter. The intended quarry was not a merchant ship at all, but the American privateer *Thomas*, commanded by Captain Shaw. The *Thomas* was at least double the size of the *Liverpool Packet* and heavily armed, with five big guns on each side and four more swivel guns on rails. Clearly outgunned, and with a third of the *Packet*’s crew away in captured prizes, Barss decided to retreat. But the *Packet* was no match for the speed of the Yankee schooner, as a stiff wind filled the large square topsails of the pursuer and cut the distance between the two. As the gap closed, the *Thomas* began to unload her cannons. Barss returned fire and in a last-ditch effort to accelerate, he ordered the heavy cannons to be thrown overboard. The *Thomas* continued to gain on the *Packet*, however, and soon was close enough that Barss was forced to surrender. A first-hand account of the battle and subsequent capture of the *Packet*, from the perspective of a crew member of the *Thomas*, was printed in the *Acadian Recorder* on June 26, 1813:

… at 9 gave chase to a sail, which proved to be a sch. under a press of sail … at half past two [the *Thomas*] commenced firing her stern chasers - at 3 she rounded too and struck her colours - ran along side and ordered her under our lee - in the act of veering she fell on board of us, her men ran forward to bear off — our men thought them going to board us, jumped on board of her at the same time the marines fired a volley of musketry, which killed 2 of our own men on her deck, viz. William Thomas and Patrick Train - and Lewis Peliham on our own deck, The schr. proved to be the *Liverpool Packet*, of 5 guns and 35 men. Capt. Barss, 3 days from Halifax on a cruise.

That same day, the *Thomas* sailed into Portsmouth, New Hampshire, triumphantly towing the enemy schooner behind her. Guarded by New Hampshire militiamen, the manacled prisoners were marched to the local jail, amidst a chorus of jeers and taunts from the assembled crowd of townspeople. As chronicled in one Nova Scotia newspaper, the crew was “treated with great severity by their captors, some of whom were heard to express regret that they had not been put to death at once.” Captain Barss was subjected to particularly harsh treatment, “for he was locked in fetters, and fed on a diet of water and hard tack.” Barss spent several months shackled in a Portsmouth jail, even after his crew members were freed. It was only through the personal intercession of the governor of Nova Scotia, Sir John Sherbrooke, that a prisoner exchange was made. The conditions under which Barss was released required that he never again become involved in privateering against the United States of America.

Upon his release, Barss returned to Liverpool where he began a new career as a merchant trader. In 1814, he took the *Wolverine* (ironically, the former *Thomas*, which was captured by the British in 1813) to the West Indies with an armed ship. According to a Boston newspaper dated October 28, Barss had been recaptured by the Americans, having “broke his parole” and was apparently imprisoned again. Whether this was true or not, the next record of Barss was his return to Liverpool in March 1815. By that time, his seafaring life was at an end, due to ill health. In 1817, he moved...
to Kentville, in Nova Scotia’s Annapolis Valley, with his wife, Olivia, where they bought a farm and raised a family of nine until his death on August 3, 1824, just four years after the passing of his father.

Despite Barss’ capture and subsequent retirement, the lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia was now handing out prizes of marque at a fevered pace, and, by the end of 1813, commissions were issued to twenty-one different privateers from across Nova Scotia. In March, Enos Collins launched two new ships, the Sir John Sherbrooke, formerly the American brig Rattlesnake, which had been captured by the Royal Navy, and the Retaliation. One of largest privateers ever to sail out of Nova Scotia, the Sir John Sherbrooke carried a crew of 150 men, including “many foreigners — Hamburghers, Portuguese, Swedes and other neutrals, whom, the fortunes of war had stranded in Nova Scotia.” She was also the most heavily armed of the Nova Scotia raiders according to C.H.J. Snider: “Eighteen long nine-pounders grinned from her gunports, nine on each side; and she had bridle ports cut in the bows, where two chase guns could be shifted, for firing straight ahead. Eighty cutlasses and boarding pikes hung in racks around her masts. Fifty muskets filled her arms chest.” For a 60-day cruise, the Sherbrooke “put a ton of gunpowder into her magazine, and sixteen hundred rounds of grape, canister, chain, bar, and round shot.” While other privateers went to sea with one anchor attached to a frayed cable, the Sherbrooke had a total of three anchors and four cables.

American privateers were also escalating their raids along Nova Scotia’s shores. The most notable was the Young Teazer, a 124-ton schooner that sailed out of Portland, Massachusetts, which excelled in stealing back American prizes originally taken by colonial privateers. On June 27, after being chased by the Sir John Sherbrooke and the HMS La Hogue, the Young Teazer was cornered in Nova Scotia’s Mahone Bay. Just when the British began to board the trapped ship, she exploded into thousands of pieces, killing as many as thirty-two crew members. Reports of the cause of the blast varied, although there is general agreement that it was deliberate. One version is that an unstable British deserter aboard the Young Teazer, realizing that if captured by British officers he would be hanged, threw a lit torch into the ship’s magazine.

After her capture by the Thomas, the Liverpool Packet was refitted as an American privateer and fittingly rechristened Young Teazer’s Ghost. Following little success during her initial voyages, she was sold and again rechristened as the Portsmouth Packet. But after only a few months under this new name, she was captured off the coast of Maine by the Royal Navy following a 14-hour chase. Now back in British hands, the vessel returned to Halifax, where she was reunited with an old friend. For a second time, Enos Collins and his partners put their faith in the small schooner, purchasing her for the same price they paid two years earlier. On November 25, 1813, another letter of marque was granted to the rechristened Liverpool Packet, which was now under the command of Caleb Seely. Although not as prolific as Barss, Seely was able to bring some fourteen American prizes before the Court of Vice Admiralty for condemnation by the time he retired his commission on October 14, 1814. Lewis Knaut, a prize master who sailed under Seely, was at the helm for the Liverpool Packet’s last voyage, receiving his letter of marque on November 11. By the first week of December, the Packet had sent home three ships before returning to port for the final time as a privateer vessel. During her short life as a commerce raider, from September 1812 to December 1814, that ship C.H.J. Snider called the “saucy wild packet” captured at least sixty vessels — with some estimates as high as two hundred. Thirty to fifty of these prizes were condemned by the Court of Vice Admiralty, bringing in around a quarter of a million dollars after auction. It has been said that her constant raids along the New England seaboard helped revolutionize shipping in the area by prompting the construction of the Cape Cod Canal, so that American merchant ships could avoid future privateers and pirates.

The signing of the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814 ended the last war ever fought between Great Britain and the United States. One of the final Canadian privateering ships actually set sail a month after the treaty was signed, but before the news had reached Nova Scotia. The 132-ton schooner Rolla, which left Liverpool in January of 1815, had her “pick of the privateering profession,” Liverpool historian Janet Mullins wrote. “Fifteen of her crew of forty-five were masters of vessels.” Many would never return home.
On the night of January 13, the ship sank off Martha’s Vineyard during a powerful storm. In the end, “twenty-two wives were made widows and nearly a hundred children were left without a father.”

Although the war accomplished little for either Britain or America, the people of Atlantic Canada realized significant economic benefits from the conflict, more than making up for the disruptions to trade that usually accompanies war. Between 1812 and early 1815, hundreds of prizes where sent home by Nova Scotian privateers. As Faye Kert states in her book *Prize and Prejudice: Privateering and Naval Prize in Atlantic Canada in the War of 1812*, privateering became “a major component of the Atlantic coastal economy. Entrepreneurs and merchant shipowners found an outlet for investment capital that would otherwise have laid idle, experienced seamen found employment, shore-based industries such as shipbuilding, ropemaking, and chandlery prospered, and the courts and auctions provided work for an array of clerks, prize agents, lawyers, and notaries.” Privateering also contributed heavily to government coffers. “Buoyed by wartime speculation, military contracts, a steady supply of prize cargoes, and a populace willing to engage in trade under licence or under cover, the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia prospered.”

Within the context of Canada’s historical and military development, privateering was more than an economic activity; it provided a locally managed defence and offence, especially given the Royal Navy’s neglect of the Canadian colonies during periods of war. As maritime writer Thomas Raddall observed, “The privateers of Nova Scotia were the first warships to be built, owned, manned and commanded on the high seas entirely by Canadians. In them the Royal Canadian Navy had its humble beginning.” For historians Harold Horwood and Ed Butts, “the War of 1812 was Canada’s war of independence when native Canadians, led by small groups of British regulars, fought off the one major attempt to take their country by force of arms.” And it was the privateers, mainly those sailing out of Nova Scotia, who were “the principal line of defence that prevented Upper and Lower Canada, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia from becoming American territories and eventually American states.” Outcapturing their American counterparts by a four-to-one ratio, Canadian privateers “won the war at sea.”

The War of 1812 was the last international conflict in history where private navies played a significant role. By the mid part of the century, most nations agreed to abolish privateering. As naval enforcement increased throughout the 19th century, the pirate ship also became a relic of the past. The last hanging in Canada for piracy took place in Halifax in 1809. A few pirates did manage to linger in North American waters, however. On April 3, 1825, while on board the English sloop *Eliza Ann*, bound from St. John’s to Antigua, Lucretia Parker wrote a letter to her brother in New York that contained the following passage:

We set sail with a favourable wind and with every appearance of a short and pleasant voyage, and not with an incident to destroy or diminish those flattering prospects, until about noon of the 11th day from that of our departure, where a small schooner was discovered standing toward us, with her deck full of men, and as she approached us from her suspicious appearance there was no doubt in the minds of any on board that she was a Pirate; — when within a full yard of us, they gave a shot and our decks were instantly evaded with the motley crew of desperados, armed with weapons of every description that can be mentioned, and with which they then commenced their barbarous work, unmercifully beating and maiming all on board except myself.

Even before piracy and privateering ended, sea-going vessels operating on the fringe of legitimacy were involved in a more lucrative and less dangerous trade: smuggling. Indeed, the international trade in contraband goods would become a mainstay of organized criminal conspiracies throughout Canada. Smuggling would also foreshadow the future of organized crime in Canada and abroad — a reliance on profit-oriented illegal activities that did not prey on people, but was consensual in nature, supplying goods and services demanded by the public. Despite this tactical shift, future organized criminals would have an ample amount of pirate in them.
CHAPTER TWO

OUTLAWS ON THE CANADIAN PLAINS

Bank Robbers, Horse Thieves, Cattle Rustlers, Smugglers, Swindlers, Whiskey Traders, and Other Varmints

OUTLAWS OF THE BIG MUDDY BADLANDS

They terrorized towns and ranches on both sides of the Saskatchewan–Montana boundary leaving behind a trail of death-destined lead, writhing gunsmoke, and empty corrals. Who could stop this violent gang of cattle rustlers and horse thieves known as the Big Muddy Mob?

There was a time when Wood Mountain was real peaceful-like. That was before Red Nelson showed up. I reckon aint nothin' gonna be the same round here agin.

I first saw his large stoop-shouldered, bandy-legged hide propped against the side of the Shamrock Belle Saloon over yonder in Glasgow, Montana. He was lurkin' behind the corner, starin' direct at the jailhouse just 'cross the street. I figgered he was up to no good.

Nelson's bushy-browed eyes darted toward the local jail and watched real intense-like as the sheriff walked out the front and 'cross the street to bend an elbow at the saloon. After the tin horn had pushed himself past the swingin' doors, Nelson done leaped onto his horse and rode up to the hoosegow, with two more horses right behind him. He dismounted, began a-yellin', kicked the door of the calaboose open, and then strode inside like he was Buffalo Bill at one of his Wild West shows. Waitin' fer him inside the jail cell, downright excited, were his pardners, who went and unlocked the cell door with a key made from a tin can. With his desperadoes behind him, old Red glided right past the sheriff's wife real casual-like and even done tipped his hat to her.

After Nelson sprung his gun cusses from their iron quarters the three of them jumped on the waitin' horses and hightailed it out of town. When Sheriff Willis was told about the jailbreak, he done near fell off his bar stool. He ran from the saloon and hopped onto his own horse and with a loud grunt he galloped away, hot on the heels of them escapin' varmints. But before the sheriff could get too far, slugs began explodin' into the ground right in front of his horse. She got spooked and began a-kickin', a-plungin', and a-rearin'. Willis was catapulted clear out of his saddle. After the sheriff picked himself up, dusted himself off, and soothed his bruised ego, he went off and done formed himself a posse. But as he was fixin' to do so, he found out that the town's menfolk were about as scarce as a hen's front tooth. It turned out that a right many of the menfolk, horses, and guns were on the road with Deputy Sheriff Hoke Smith. Some thought this to be right queer. Some say that Hoke was workin' fer Nelson. The deputy sheriff later had to quit when Sheriff Willis found out that he and old Red had bin writin' letters to each other. In one of his letters, Red even asked Hoke fer a loan of money!
News of the daylight jailbreak spread clean through the town and countyside. It was on this hot day in June 1895, that Sam Kelley (a.k.a. Charles “Red” Nelson) become real infamous-like. Kelley was the leader of a ragtag, on-agin off-again assortment of outlaws, crooks, bandits, rustlers, and desperadoes that terrorized towns and ranches on both sides of the Saskatchewan-Montana boundary. The main varmints in the Big Muddy Mob were Kelley, Dutch Henry, and Frank Jones. Kelley was knowed as “one of the wiliest, most dangerous and most wanted outlaws of the Big Muddy.” He could slap leather faster than any gunslinger and was knowed as one of the quickest draws this side of Homer Watson. He could unshuck a pistol so quick-like that it seemed they leaped right from their holsters into his waitin’ hands. Some folk claim he could use his .30-30 rifle to de-horn a steer at one hundert yards. This here Kelley was “a heavy set, incredibly dirty hulk of a man, who ambled, rather than walked.” His face was more scarred than a brave after a Blackfoot Injun war dance and his nose looked like it had bin “sidetracked by an ungracious fist some time in the past.” He could be spotted a mile away because of his wild shock of red hair, red whiskers, and red bushy eyebrows that looked like caterpillars. He was from way back yonder east, Nova Scotia to be exact. But he was no high-falutin flannel-mouth dude. He went west to work as a cowpoke in Montana and after a spell punchin’ cattle, shore enough he done seen dang fit, fixin’ , and all-fire aimin’ to git plumb clean into the life of crime not a downright smart while after arrivin’ yonder there in Montana.

One of Kelley’s pardners in the Big Muddy Mob was that ornery critter Frank Jones, a psychotic mudsill of a killer who was more tightly wound than a corset around the belly of Jolly Irene. He had black hair, a dark moustache that sat over a permanent sneer, and a real mean look in his eyes. By the time he hooked up with Kelley around 1899, he was already thievin’ cattle. He was a real hard case and blewed plenty about all them notches on the handle of his pistol. In 1898, Kelley and a hot spur named Frank Webber, stole twenty-one head of unbranded cattle from a ranch near Estevan, Saskatchewan. A group of bounty-huntin’ possemen caught up with Webber and threw him into the old Stony Mountain Pen fer five years. But Jones got clean away.

Other members of the Big Muddy Mob were the Pigeon-Toed Kid, a half-breed named Bloody Knife, James McNabb, Edward Shufelt, Frank Carlyle and four other cowboys that folks only knowed as Parent, Wollett, Duffy, and Birch. Another gunpoke in cahoots with Dutch Henry and Frank Jones was Harry Alonzo Longabaugh. Some folk say that the three of them ran stolen horses from Montana clear across the border into Saskatchewan. Longabaugh also holed up in the Big Beaver district of Saskatchewan a spell after hightailin’ it from a hot-eyed American posse that was chasin’ him cause he done robbed a Great Northern Railway train in Montana on November 29, 1892. He also worked as a cow puncher at the Bar U Ranch near Calgary in 1890. He began bunkin’ there after holdin’ up the San Miguel Valley Bank in Telluride, Colorado, on June 24, 1889. Longabaugh even became a part owner of Calgary’s high-falooten Grand Central Hotel. But he left the business around 1893. Longabaugh aimed to liquidate the pardnership and git his fair share of the profits. After reckonin’ he did not git all the money he had comin’ to him, Longabaugh got plenty mad at his former pardner and cussed his dirty double-crossin’ mangy hide. He paid the scoundrel a final visit and this time he used his Smith & Wesson in the negotiations. His former pardner got the message and gave Longabaugh the rest of his share straightaway. Longabaugh then left Calgary fer good. Real soon after that he saw fit to hook up with another outlaw feller who was named George Parker, but who liked to call himself Butch. Along with a gang of saddle tramps, the two life pardners robbed banks and trains from Washington State all the way to Bolivia. The lawmen named this group of outlaws the “Wild Bunch.” Around these parts, most folks just knowed ‘em as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

The Big Muddy Mob didn’t rob trains or banks. They rustled horses and cattle. They thieved ‘em from ranches on either side of the boundary line and then moved ‘em real quick-like to the Big Muddy badlands where they would hole up fer a right long time, if need be. The badlands is a rocky valley
located just there north of the boundary that separates the south-central part of Saskatchewan from the northeastern part of Montana. From Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan, to the mouth of the Missouri River in Montana, the Big Muddy is plumb full of desolate canyons, rugged buttes, slopin’ ravines, naked cliffs, cavernous craters, and hairpin hogbacks. In some places, the valley is as much as 500 feet deep. Underneath that there rock is layer after layer of geological history that goes back a right smart while; sixty-five million years just about.

The Big Muddy is the most northern station on th’ legendary Outlaw Trail, what gets started in Canada and goes all the way yonder south to Old Mexico. The trail joins together a right many escape routes, hidin’ places, rest spots, and supply stations fer fleein’ bandits that could go this-a-way or that-a-way dependin’ on their fancy. From the Big Muddy in Saskatchewan, the route snakes southward to Miles City in Montana. Then it winds to Deadwood, South Dakota, through the Black Hills country to Hole in the Wall, Wyoming, and then onto Brown’s Park, which squats along the Colorado and Wyoming border crossin’. The trail then done cuts over Diamond Mountain and through an Injun reservation to Robbers’ Roost in Utah. After passin’ through Arizona, the next stop is the Wilson ranch in New Mexico, and from there the outlaw gringos cross the border to safety in Ciudad Juarez in Old Mexico. After a train, bank or stagecoach robbery, the thievin’ long riders would high tail it hell-fer-leather direct to the trail. Most folk think it was Butch Cassidy that organized the trail and made sure it ran clear along a route taken by the Pony Express. That way, it was real close to towns, banks, railroad lines, not to mention the stagecoach routes. He made plum sure there were a station every 10 or 12 miles or so along the trail. At each of them stations, dragged-out horses could be replaced with fresh ones and supplies could gotten from ranchers. Sometimes there was no call to go all the way yonder past the Mexico border. They would just hole up and hide out with ranchers along the trail who were either in cahoots with the bandits or promised to hush up down the barrel of a Winchester. The gun slickers don’t always make a clean gitaway along the trail. But more often than not, Cassidy and his Wild Bunch left them lawmen chokin’ on their dust.

Not far from the Big Muddy, on this here northern side of the border, was Wood Mountain. It became real famous-like when around five hundert braves, one thousand squaws, fourteen hundert Injun younguns, and more than three thousand horses from the Sioux Nation travelled to Canada in 1876 and camped there. They were scoutin’ fer Sittin’ Bull and his tribe, who were retreatin’ from the American cavalry. The troops were real bent on capturin’ em after Sittin’ Bull wiped out General

The legendary Outlaw Trail starts in Canada and goes all the way yonder south to Old Mexico.
Custer’s Seventh Cavalry at the Battle of Little Big Horn in June. Word spread that there was a haven fer the Sioux in the land they called the “Great White Mother” to the north. Major Walsh of the Mounted Police was real accommodatin’-like. He offered Sittin’ Bull a laurel and hardy handshake and told him that his people could stay in Wood Mountain as long as they obeyed Canadian law. The Mounties had set up an outpost at Wood Mountain, but the Big Muddy and Wood Mountain area was too dang large to be patrolled by them there horsemen and it would be a pieceways afore the men in the bright scarlet uniforms and pillbox hats could git control of the region. In the meanwhile, justice was doled out by a six-shooter and the verdict was more often than not death by hot lead.

The Big Muddy was a right fine hidin’ place fer land pirates who had the law hot on their heels. It had plenty of canyons, caves, and gulches that gave cover and a mess of vantage points to spot oncomin’ posses. The right small number of folk livin’ in Wood Mountain meant that the outlaws didn’t have to worry about no tenderfoot, greenhorn, white-collared, yellow-bellied, lily-livered, gol-danged, bush-whackin’ city slicker–turned–homesteadin’ settler with gumption stickin’ his nose in a place where it don’t belong. The Big Muddy was on the Canadian side of the line, so it was beyond the arm of the American lawmen. It was also a right far way from the Mounties’ post at Wood Mountain. Varmints of all kind — cattle rustlers, horse thieves, bank robbers, smugglers, gun slick crews, and whiskey traders — holed up in the Big Muddy Badlands.

In 1874, while pretendin’ to be U.S. marshals, the outlaw Charles Hart and eight of his thievin’ cow punks hid out in the Big Muddy after they robbed three Manitobans plumb out of seven hundert buffalo robes. And the longhorn traders were right fired up about bein’ thieved cause they had just traded fer them furs with some local Injuns! In June 1884, a lone Mountie ran into a group of desperadoes drivin’ a band of stolen horses just south of Wood Mountain. When the gun-jumpy saddle bums saw the scarlet uniform, they dismounted and signalled him to pass. As the Mountie rode near the group of the men, each one dropped to a knee and covered him with a rifle. Shore enough, the redcoat just kept on ridin’.
The favourite target of the Big Muddy outlaws was the Montana ranchers because their thieving critters could cross the line into Canada with the stolen ponies and hole up in the Big Muddy before they tried to sell their stolen heads to Canadian homesteaders. Sometimes, their dang-blasted outlaw roughriders would steal the horses from the Canadian ranchers they did sell ‘em to, take ‘em back to Montana and then sell ‘em to the folks they originally stole ‘em from! One cold day in December 1899, around noon, a few of the cowpokes on the Diamond “C” ranch in Montana were gittin’ ready to chow down. They got their vittles and squatted by the campfire. But then real sudden-like with a whoopin’ and a hollerin’, two riders swooped down on the camp and don’t captured the mess-wagon. The cowpunchers were right scared and leaped onto their own horses and hightailed it out of there with dust and stray bullets flyin’ every which way but loose. One of them cowboys’ horses was shot right out from under him. The cowpokes done knew the shootin’ bandits were Kelley and Jones and knowin’ their reputation they done kept goin’ until they reached Culbertson some 25 miles away.

Sam Kelley knew the caves, grottoes, and gullies of the Big Muddy like a tomcat knows a back alley and he made a hideaway fer himself in two caves that used to be wolf dens. One cave was where the rustlin’ crews bunked down and the other was a stable to hide stolen horses. Kelley was right fond of this spot because it looked out over miles of the valley and the trails used by the Mounties. If the red coats were spotted nearby, the thievin’ bushwhackers had plenty of time to vamoose across to the American side where the Canadian lawmen could not touch ‘em.

Around 1901 or so, the gang was joined by Frank Carlyle. A year afore, the 22-year-old had just moved out of his ma’s house in Toronto to join the Mounted Police. All growed-up now, Carlyle was a right fine candidate fer the life of a Mountie. He stood five feet and eleven inches and weighed 175 pounds. He was built like all them boys of the Mounted Police are built — fer action! He worked as a fireman in Toronto fer six years and then left with a letter from his boss sayin’ he was powerful honest and trustworthy. But he was about as honest and trustworthy as a bunko artist sellin’ snake oil to old widows. Not long after he joined up with them Mounties, the durn fool was forced to resign because of his constant boozin’ and fer becomin’ a saddle buddy to horse thieves.

One of his thieving pardners was that son-of-a-skunk Dutch Henry. Carlyle met Dutch when he moved to Saskatchewan’s Willow Bunch District as a Mountie. Carlyle had already heard about Dutch, and his excitin’ life was real appealin’ to him. Carlyle was introduced to Dutch, and they were right proud to know one another. Folk around Wood Mountain were plumb shocked about how the two took such a right fine fancy to each other. The two began smugglin’ horses across the Canadian line together and when Carlyle’s bosses became suspicious-like, he quit the Mounties. Carlyle brought Dutch into the Big Muddy gang and then Dutch fetched his long-time gun-ugly pardner Edward Shufelt to join up.

Henry Jeouch came to America direct from Germany around the 1860s. Nobody knows who Henry Jeouch is. But say the name “Dutch Henry” and every manfolk, womanfolk, and chillenfolk in these parts will say, “Oh, the horse thief.” Henry never lost that thick Bavarian accent, which is why most folk just knewed him as Dutch (in these here parts folks weren’t learned too much about European geography). He first settled in Texas where he fought Injuns beside Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson at the Battle of Adobe Walls. Dutch was real stocky with a head shaped like a cannonball, blond hair, blue eyes, a crooked nose, and gold fillings on his teeth. He was real funny-like and more popular than a whorehouse on nickel night. He carried a pistol specially made for him that he ordered from Minnesota. It was a .45-calibre Bisley with a 4½-inch barrel and ivory grips that had a steer’s head carved into one side.

In 1888, Dutch moved to Montana to work as a cowpoke. He was plenty known fer his love of the ponies and he once owned a horse named Dude and even decorated his mane with coloured ribbons. One time, Dutch dressed Dude in a white collar and tie, and then got made up in his own best parade chaps and peacocked around Regina playin’
to the gallery! Dutch loved the attention. Besides dressin’ up horses real purdy-like, Dutch was also a plenty good wrangler and some said he could lasso a horsefly at a hundert paces. When he worked as a cowpoke he cared for them there cattle real good; he kept the coyotes away and when he worked the night shift dang burnit if he weren’t heard singin’ them cattle to sleep.

It was not a right smart while after he arrived in Montana that Dutch began thievin’ horses and cattle. In December 1893, he stole some head from a Montana rancher named Conrad Kohrs. Then he sold them head to Andrew Sherry, who done changed the brands and burned in his own mark. In 1898, a sheriff asked Sherry about some of the cattle on his ranch. Sherry told him he bought unbranded cattle from Dutch fair and square and then swore that the brands on the cattle were all his own makin’. The sheriff reckoned that Sherry was a lyin’-snake-in-the-grass and called his bluff. He fetched his rifle, shot one of the cattle plumb dead, and then skinned it near the brand. The inside of the calf’s skin showed the original brand. Sherry’s brand was burned direct over it. Sherry plum got hisself arrested and a price got put on Dutch Henry’s head. A short while after, Dutch done got captured at Culbertson, Montana, and was locked up in the nearby stockade. But Dutch escaped after sweet-talkin’ the deputy sheriff to let him go to the local saloon to borrow money from a friend. While the deputy was waitin’ fer him to come back, Dutch leaped onto a horse and rode straight away without a how-dee-do. While he was on the lam, Dutch crossed into Canada with horses he stole in Montana and hid out fer a spell in the Big Muddy. The Mounties picked up his trail and closed in on him there, but they were turned back by rifle fire. The men in scarlet then surrounded him and played the waitin’ game. After a week, the Mounties sent in a Sioux Injun who caught Dutch fast asleep in a ravine and took his guns away. When he woked up, Dutch was wrassled to
the ground like a steer and was arrested. But he was right soon out of the sheriff’s hotel after his $500 bail was posted by some of his pardners. When Dutch was brought to trial on the cattle thievin’ charges, he packed the courtroom with his renegade horse-stealin’, cattle-rustlin’, tobacco-chewin’ outlaw pals. Turned out, there was no witnesses to testify agin him. Shore enough, the judge reckoned he had to throw the case out.

After he got free, Dutch took a job workin’ as a cow thumper fer J. W. (Dad) Williams, one of the men who posted his bail. Pappy Williams was an old-time Montana stockman who had a real big ranch on Shotgon Creek just outside of Culbertson. Dutch was fixin’ to stay a spell at the ranch, but his onery side plum got the best of him. Y’see, Dutch had a bad habit of thievin’ from folks he knewed, if that don’t beat all. Some said that he liked to make friends, ‘cause it was easier to thieve ‘em than folks he don’t know. In May 1899, Dutch began stealin’ horses from his boss. He would separate a band of horses while herdin’ and take ‘em into Canada to sell. On one drive he stole upwards of four hundred head o’ horses, took ‘em across to Canada, sold ‘em, stole ‘em back, and brought ‘em back to to the U. S. of A. to sell ‘em agin’!

Around 1900 or so, Dutch Henry and Frank Carlyle teamed up with Frank Jones. Shortly after that, a local sheriff from Montana named Griffith received a telegram that a hundred head o’ horses had been rustled near Culbertson. Sheriff Griffith took the train to North Dakota aimin’ to catch them there thieving scoundrels when they tried to unload them critters. He didn’t find ‘em, but he did spot several head with brands what had been worked over. Sheriff Griffith’s posse then galloped to Wood Mountain where they found sixty head of branded American horses. Some half-breeds in the district also claimed they had been held up by Frank Jones and other gun slickers. The half-breeds were tough, but they were downright as scared of Jones. A $1,000 price was put on Jones’ head. His desperado pardners got bounties between $300 and $500.

While on the loose, the gang began extortin’ “insurance” money from ranchers so their cattle didn’t git stolen. It’s what some big city folk might call a “protection racket.” One rancher named Cachot McGillis was brave enough to stand up to them varmints and was fixin’ to go to the Mounties. When Frank Jones found out, he done decided to learn McGillis a lesson. He done rode onto his spread, done looted his house, and done drove off his horses. McGillis got all-fired angry and bellyached to the Mounted Police. When Jones found out about this, he laid in wait fer McGillis at his house “with two guns thronged to his thighs and a bloodlust brew in his brains.” When McGillis returned from the Mountie detachment, he was dry gulched, hogtied, blindfolded, and taken back to the bandits’ hideout, a-kickin’ and a-cussin’. McGillis was forced to work as their personal slave fer a spell. He even had to look after the herd stolen from his own ranch! One mornin’, Jones told McGillis that he had worked off his debt and could return home.

By now, lawmen on both sides of the line were hot after that gang of rustlers and kidnappers. A rancher near the Big Muddy named Frank King had some dry goods thieved from his home. He followed some hoofprints that led from his shack to a cabin and found what was stolen from him. He went to the Mounties, who told King that he better be plum careful about shootin’ off his mouth ‘cause word gets around real quick-like in these here parts and those who did the thievin’ may not take very kindly to folks goin’ to the law. The Mounted Police offered to give him protection when he rode home, but that durn fool said he had enough protection on account of his six-shooter. What King didn’t know was that it was the Big Muddy outlaws who had done the robbin’.

Shore enough, Jones and Kelley found out King ratted on them and one day they ambushed him. After they whupped him and cleaned his plow, they hootied and blindfolded him and took him to their hideout in the Big Muddy where they stripped him naked. Then there outlaws even held a mock trial and shore enough found him guilty and condemned him to death. King may have been blindfolded but knowed full well the sounds of cartridges bein’ pumped into a Winchester when he heard ‘em. He also knowed the sounds of a gun
bein’ cocked and reckoned his time was up. Jones had put his rifle muzzle straight in front of King’s blindfolded eyes.

King was not only sightless he was also mighty deafened, what with all the cockin’ and the pumpin’, leather a-slappin’, gun-hung cowboys a-gruntin’, horses a-rearin’ and sheep a-shriekin’. In spite of all the commotion he did hear a voice with a real thick accent and guessed it was that hornswaggerin’ Hun Dutch Henry that he had heard so much about. King listened real intense-like as Dutch told Jones to put his dang-blasted rifle down and leave King because they were only foolin’ the prisoner about killin’ him. He didn’t knowed that at the time how close he was to buyin’ that big ranch in the sky. But fer the next thirteen days or so, King was the prisoner of the outlaws who amused themselves by trussin’ him up like a Christmas turkey, tyin’ him to a post and seein’ how close they could shoot at him without actually hittin’ him. They even made King build them a corral so they could store their stolen critters. At the end of about two weeks they let him go, without his horse, and practically naked. A vengeful Jones went alookin’ fer him aimin’ to drill the released prisoner, but King was able to escape back to his ranch without no more harm comin’ to him.

Sam Kelley was now startin’ to git plumb tired of life on the run and in 1904 he turned himself in to the sheriff at Glasgow, Montana, who threw his sorry cowhide behind bars. The next mornin’ a group of his old cowpoke pals paid the jailbird’s $4,000 bond. When his case came to trial there sud- denly weren’t enough evidence to convict Kelley of a single crime. That’s the way things went around these parts. Witnesses got real scared-like or they disappeared fer a good long while. Or maybe they just got real forgetful-like. Whatever the reason, Kelley used the opportunity to quit the outlaw trade fer good.

With Sam Kelley pullin’ in the horn, Dutch Henry on the run, and Ed Shufelt in the hoosegow for horse thievin’, Frank Jones, Frank Carlyle, and the other remainin’ pardners planned one last hare-brained, half-cocked scheme — a train robbery. The plan was for Carlyle to blow up the railway bridge just west of Plentywood, Montana, and then the rest of the gang would rob the train. But the sheep-fer-brains Carlyle got real locoed drunk and plum disappeared right before the heist. The bridge didn’t get blowed up good and no train got thieved. He done put a big spoke in the wheel and Jones was fit to be tied. When Carlyle sobered up, he blazed a trail to the Big Muddy where he aimed to hide out fer a spell until his rabid pardner cooled down. But Jones never cooled down. On Christmas Day, two horsemen rode into the ranch where that no-account Carlyle was holed up. He didn’t knowed it at the time, but he was in a heap of trouble. Late that night he was awoken by the sounds of hoof beats. He sprung from the ground and automatically slapped leather, but before he could draw his six-shooter, the sharp crack of a rifle rang out and Carlyle was cut down like the mangy dog he was. Folks now know the place where the slug-infested, whiskey-soaked body was left to rot as Carlyle Coulee.

Nothin’ much was heard of the Big Muddy Mob after that there messed-up train robbery. Edward Shufelt died afore finishin’ his five years in the hoosegow. Frank Jones was tracked down by a posse after he had robbed a local constable in Montana in 1904. He was captured, and after tryin’ to escape, was shot as dead as the president. The Pigeon-Toed Kid was filled with lead by a posse. Bloody Knife got drunk one night and began to shoot up the town of Ambrose, North Dakota. Townsfolk answered by shootin’ him clean through. Duffy and Birch got prison sentences in Canada. Wollett and Parent were arrested and stood trial down yonder in America.

Dutch Henry also knowed it was time to go straight and got a new job roundin’ up cattle in Montana. One day in early 1906, he told his ranch boss that he was gonna leave Montana fer good. Dutch handed over $100 to his boss to hold fer him until he sent fer it. He also gave his bone-handled gun to his boss’ youngun and told him if he didn’t come back he could keep it. On April 24, 1906, some cowboys stumbled across a body over yonder in a field in Roseau, Minnesota. It was part buried in the dirt and had a gunny sack over its head. It was pretty clear that, there body was real dead-like. Part of the face had been shot clear off, so it
was hard to know who he was. Some folks around these parts were right sure it was Dutch Henry. But others in Montana, Saskatchewan, and even as far up as Winnipeg said they had seen Dutch alive and he was still stealin’ horses. On January 21, 1910, a newspaper in Montana said Dutch had been killed by the Mounties 60 miles southwest of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. But the red coats were all-fired sure that there was no truth to that report. In February of 1910, a liveryman from Harlowton, Montana, said he knowed three men who’d swear on a bible that Dutch Henry was alive and kickin’ in South America. Whatever you reckon the truth may be, Dutch Henry was never heard from agin.

Sam Kelley kept a right low profile fer the rest of his life. Some say he continued to bunk out in the Big Muddy caves up until 1909. A year later, he was an honest rancher. But he left the Big Muddy in 1913 to homestead about 40 miles northwest of Prince Albert. Kelley took with him some horses and three cowpokes from Montana. They each built a cabin around the shores of a small lake that folks would later call “Kelley’s Lake.” With the exception of a little rustlin’ now and agin, the men were right well mannered and lived there as happy as pistol-packin’ cowboys on Brokeback Mountain. T’aint much known about Kelley agin, that was ’til a hot July day in 1937 when the Mounties found a grizzled old codger at a bus stop in Smeaton, Saskatchewan. He was cold, hungry, and real confused-like. It turned out to be Sam Kelley. He was sent to the North Battleford mental hospital and passed away there in October at the age of seventy-eight. He was buried in a bone orchard not too far away.

**THE NOCTURNAL DEPREDATIONS OF THESE BANDITS**

Perhaps the most enduring and endearing of all Canadian folklore is that the historical development of this country was relatively free of crime and lawlessness. The origins of this myth may be traced to the mid-19th century. In the aftermath of a local burglary, an 1844 editorial in the *Toronto Star Transcript and General Advertiser* newspaper commented on the rarity of such crimes in the region, “which too frequently disturb the old country.” This may not have been the first instance of this country’s proclivity for benign blindness when it comes to crime. But at the very least it could be evoked as a prototype for Canada’s self-nurtured image as an immaculately well-behaved, lawful people, deferential to authority, and incrementally striving towards the characteristically unassuming goals of peace, order, and good government.

Perceptions of the abounding lawfulness of Canadians spring from a number of sources: the absence of a violent revolution; an abiding respect for good government, democracy, and the decorum of the parliamentary system; and a deference to the rule of law that apparently even surpassed that of the “old country.” Numerous other factors have been cited. From its very beginning, the most populous portions of Upper and Lower Canada were amply garrisoned with British troops and local militias. Even Canada’s bleak climate, which one pioneer famously described as “six months of winter and six months of poor sledding,” has been viewed as an inhibitor against year-round criminal marauding. As the country expanded westward during the latter part of the 19th century, accounts of Canada’s lawfulness became even more ingrained in the country’s collective psyche, especially in light of the bloodshed that accompanied the settling of the American West. The most celebrated symbol of Canada’s peaceful and law-abiding nature is the venerated Mountie. For unlike the U.S., the large-scale settlement of the vast western region of Canada was preceded by a paramilitary, law enforcement presence — the legendary North West Mounted Police — which, for the most part, carried out its responsibilities with great competence, doggedness, impartiality, and integrity.

Despite the idyllic picture painted by some revisionist historians and nationalists, 19th-century Canada was not immune to crime, including the organized variety. Smuggling began to escalate dramatically around the start of the century as Great Britain levied more and more taxes and customs duties on her colonies. In addition, Canada’s inland economy was rife with larceny, corruption, and violence. The fur
trade “exercised a profound influence in the sculpting of the Canadian soul,” Peter C. Newman wrote, and “more than virtually any other single experience, is the primary matrix out of which modern Canada emerged.” If this is true, one must also accept that the early fur trade “became a focal point for widespread law-breaking,” according to Canadian crime historian D. Owen Carrigan. Fur traders “cheated, stole, murdered and debauched the Indians,” plying them with toxic liquor and turning their women into prostitutes. The traders realized that natives had little tolerance for alcohol and traded cheap (and often poisonous) “elixirs” for expensive pelts. Violence also characterized the fur trade. Some traders found it easier to steal the pelts rather than buy them and, in the process, committed murder, genocide, and other atrocities.

In 1668, the Hudson’s Bay Company was formed and, during its early history, a voracious appetite for profits and a monopoly over the fur trade meant that at times it could be extremely unscrupulous in its pursuits. The Company was the first to supply native hunters with cheap liquor in return for expensive pelts. It readily turned to violence when faced with competition, especially from the North West Company, which was founded in 1783. As Carrigan stated, “Murder, theft, destruction of property, arson intimidation, and assault marked the commercial rivalry. Raids on each other’s posts were common.” The enmity between the two reached a bloody peak in 1816 at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. The Hudson’s Bay Company seized Fort Gibraltar, built by the North West Company in 1809, and attempted to intercept its supply of pemmican (dried buffalo meat). In retaliation, a group of trappers aligned with the North West Company attacked the Hudson’s Bay Red River colony killing twenty people, including the colony’s governor.

By the mid part of the 19th century, the frontier outlaw carried on the organized criminal tradition of the sea pirate. The most fabled of these desperado groups were the Youngers, the Daltons, the Wild Bunch, the Hole in the Wall Gang, and the James Brothers in the United States, and, in Canada, the Markham Gang, the Campbell brothers, the Big Muddy Mob, and the McLean brothers. Like pirates, these bands of highwaymen were predatory in nature, robbing trains, stagecoaches, banks, hotels, cattle ranches, and homes. Theft, assault, and murder were not uncommon occurrences in the settling of Canada and at various times, whole towns and regions lived in fear of violent gangs. The “spread of crime in the rural districts of this province, is daily more alarming,” warned a February 6, 1846, article in the Toronto edition of the usually staid British Colonist. “We hear of gangs of horse thieves, and of burglars of every description, prowling about the country in organized gangs, and the peaceable inhabitants have to guard themselves and their properties against the nocturnal depredations of these bandits.”

By the 1860s, Western Canada was inundated with whiskey traders. Like the fur traders in New France two centuries before, this parasitic profession was forged on the drunken and dead bodies of aboriginal people who were given cheap liquor in return for valuable buffalo pelts. During the 1880s, construction crews building the Canadian Pacific Railroad produced another ready-made market for illegal whiskey merchants, not to mention prostitutes, con artists, and crooked gamblers, “all bent upon fleecing the poor railway man of his hard earned gains.” The railway system was also a mecca for dishonest businessmen who manipulated stock prices, swindled settlers out of their land, and offered bribes for government contracts. On the receiving end of the bribes were politicians, some of whom were in a gross conflict of interest as they sat on parliamentary committees that awarded contracts to firms in which they had a financial interest. The various gold rushes during the latter half of the century in British Columbia and the Yukon fuelled a cornucopia of outlawed consensual vices. In 1861, a correspondent for a British Columbia newspaper reporting from the gold-rich Cariboo admonished government authorities for turning a blind eye to the well-organized and omnipresent games of chance:

The openness and extent to which gambling is carried on in the Cariboo is a matter of general remark and surprise. Right under the very nose of the officers of the law, without the slightest show of concealment, are gambling tables daily opened, — covered with gold and surrounded with professionals and their
unsuspecting dupes. In almost every public
house licensed for the sale of liquors these
tables are to be seen, and are seen, by those
whose business it is to suppress such vices; and
the very openness with which the profession is
pursued is the best evidence that it is winked
at by authority…

The inability or lack of political will to enforce
vice laws in and around the railway work camps or
gold mines was indicative of the immense chal-
lenge facing law enforcement in Canada throughout
the latter half of the 19th century. While renowned
for always getting its man, the NWMP was woefully
understaffed in its efforts to police an area the size of
Western Europe.

By the end of the century, Canada played host to a
vast array of organized criminal activities that included
bank and train robberies, cattle and horse rustling,
bootlegging, gambling, bookmaking, prostitution,
and an unstoppable trade in an assortment of smuggled
and contraband goods. The introduction of opium into
Canada in the last quarter of the century would also provide a glimpse into the
future of organized criminality in this country.

NO REMORSE FOR DISREGARDING
TRADE REGULATIONS

Smuggling is the most historically rooted, persistent,
and widespread form of organized non-compliance
perpetrated by Canadians. While smuggling is often
carried out on a small scale by individuals for personal
consumption, it has also been one of the most organ-
ized forms of illegal behaviour affecting this
country. The smuggling of contraband into British North
America began shortly after legitimate commerce
was initiated in the new colonies and was spurred by
the restrictive mercantile policies of the British and
French governments. For the most part, the colonies
were forced to trade only with their mother countries,
which meant that the amount paid for merchandise
produced in New France and British North America
was low while the price of consumer goods imported
into the colonies was artificially high. The early fur
traders were among the first smugglers on the contin-
ent when they began surreptitiously transporting pelts
back to Europe and selling them on the black market
without the knowledge of their charter company. Edicts
from French authorities did little to stop fur smug-
gling from New France, including that perpetrated by
government officials. When a French delegation was
sent to the British colonies to negotiate trade matters
with the English in 1682, a delegate by the name of
Sieur Salvaye took the opportunity to smuggle eight
hundred beaver skins from New France. French of-
ficials at Versailles considered smuggling of fur pelts
so endemic that they increased the penalty for such
infractions from being chained to an oar in the galley
of a ship to death.

Smuggling was also rampant in the early British
colonies along the Atlantic coast of North America.
In a letter dated November 14, 1706, Newfoundland
merchants complained about the smuggling of whale
bones and fins, which was undercutting their retail
trade: "The importers and traders in Whale Finns, doe
find a great Decay in their trade in that commodity;
which they apprehend to be chiefly occasioned by the
Smuggling Trade, which is a great discouragement
to the honest fair dealer, who pays the full Duty." Il-
legal imports into Britain's North American colonies
soared between the mid part of the 18th century to
around 1815. It was during this time that duties on
imported goods began to rise precipitously due to
Britain's insatiable appetite for revenue to finance her
endless succession of wars. The stifling impositions
would become an economic noose around commerce
in the British colonies and, as a result, according to
criminologist William Chambliss, "smuggling activ-
ities promoted an institutionalization of crime in the
colonies in order to ensure their commercial survival."
While the American colonies ultimately responded
to Britain's heavy-handed mercantilist policies by
dumping cases of British tea into Boston harbour
and then rebelling against the unjustice of taxation
without representation, the expression of defiance by
the mother country's subjects north of the 49th parallel
was more subdued — they simply evaded the taxes
by bringing in shiploads of contraband tea. Dave Mc-
Intosh goes so far as to say, "the only reason Canada
and the Maritime colonies did not join the revolution
was that they were expert smugglers and consequently were not as enraged by customs duties as were the Americans.” The contraband market flourished as “Canadians showed no remorse for disregarding trade regulations imposed by a faraway imperial authority without their consent.”

Smuggling only increased after the United States became an independent country. After travelling through the northern U.S. and Upper Canada during the 1790s, François de la Rochefoucauld alluded to the repercussions of British mercantilist policies on her Canadian colonies following the founding of America, “The high duty laid by England upon all the commodities exported from her islands proves a powerful encouragement to a contraband trade with the United States, where, in many articles, the difference of price amounts to two-thirds.” In a letter to the British Secretary of State dated August 14, 1788, H. Townshend, Collector of Customs on the Island of St. John (the future Prince Edward Island), reported on his efforts to suppress the flow of contraband from New York to the island. To his surprise, the smuggling was coordinated by the first governor of the island colony, Walter Patterson (who was dead by the time the letter was written), and his brother, John:

On the 19th June last, I seized as forfeited, a Schooner of British-Plantation-Built, owned and navigated according to Law, the causes of seizure were, first; that her cargo was Imported directly from New York into this Island contrary to the provisions of a late Act of Parliament and secondly, that bulk was broke before entry; the goods were landed in the night-season at the Farm of the late Lieutenant Governor near the entrance of this Harbour, and distant about three miles from Town.

Having received very correct and satisfactory Information of an Extensive Smuggling Trade intended to be carried on between the late Lieutenant Governor his brother John Patterson, and a wealthy inhabitant of the State of New York to whose daughter Mr. John Patterson is married, and being well apprized that this small vessel was to be followed by a larger ship named the Kitty in the same disgraceful employ, I formed a resolution to seize this property, and by that means stop the encrease of so ruinous a Traffick.

Accordingly in the night following I obtained a Party of soldiers from the Commanding Officer here, went to the Farm, and in company with the Controller made a seizure of part of the smuggled Effects, but, before we could get them to the Boats prepared for the purpose, the Servants of the late Lieutenant Governor aided by eight or nine other persons who had been sent over the water by him from Town to their assistance, (being in all about twenty-five persons armed with various offensive weapons) wrested the property out of our hands.

Townshend and the soldiers accompanying him were detained for several hours while the smugglers spirited the goods away. After he was released, Townshend heard of another shipment of contraband landing on the farm. He immediately mobilized a larger contingent of armed soldiers and “went to the farm in company with the Controller and seized the goods in a very artful place of concealment, and conveyed them to Town, and have since labelled them and the schooner in the Court of Vice Admiralty as forfeited.”

At the end of the 18th century, the contraband market in the Maritimes was so large that illegal imports now surpassed legal landings. In their 1908 book *The King’s Custom*, H. Atton and H.H. Holland estimated that contraband consumed in the Maritimes during this time made up “nearly all the tea; three-quarters of the wine; nine-tenths of the spirits; seven-eighths of the soap and candles; most of the indigo, starch, mustard, tobacco and cottons; and all the nankeens, sailcloth, cordage and anchors.” In an 1811 letter to the Nova Scotia legislature, William Goodall advocated on behalf of local merchants when he wrote, “great quantities of teas and all sorts of India goods” as well as “gin, American rum and many other articles, are daily & illicitly brought into this province by the Americans as well as by British subjects residing in this country.” Nova Scotia merchants who legally purchased their goods from British companies complained, “unless some steps are taken to prevent the
smuggling trade from the American states, we shall soon be without a customer for the principal part of the articles that we deal in.”

In his analysis of the contraband trade between the Maritime colonies and the United States in the late 18th century, W. Stewart MacNutt alludes to the factors that drove the northward smuggling of American goods: flour sold at $3.00 on the American side compared to $12.00 in New Brunswick and payment for the services of a man and a boat willing to smuggle the goods was as high as $47 a day, a princely wage for those times. So much of the contraband now entering the Canadian colonies was from the United States, it could be said that British policies prompted the first instance of free trade between America and Canada. Maritime historian Faye Kert believes that smuggling helped cement a strong trading partnership between the two countries, “The close commercial relationships between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia entrepreneurs and their American neighbours in Vermont, New York, and Massachusetts (now Maine) had evolved through years of conspiring to evade British duties.”

The War of 1812 only broadened the underground commerce between the United States and British North America. Not even a wartime trade embargo was going to interfere with a commercial association that was already well entrenched between the northeastern states and the Maritime colonies. A common ruse employed by American merchants to get their goods to market in the colonies during the war was to arrange for the capture of their trading ships by Canadian privateers. Once the American prize was escorted into port at Halifax or Saint John and its goods auctioned off, the owner of the privateering ship would split the proceeds with the American merchant. Although illegal, such collusion was apparently so commonplace in the waters between the Maine–New Brunswick border that some of the so-called captures were actually pre-arranged shipments to the Maritimes.

The contraband trade was so extensive that it became a subject of inquiry by the legislative assemblies of both Upper and Lower Canada. In 1825, a committee of the Legislature of Upper Canada placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of British trade policy, concluding, “the inequality of price holds out a temptation to smuggling which is found to be irresistible.” As part of his testimony in 1828 before a British committee investigating smuggling between the U.S. and British North America, a member of the Lower Canada Assembly, named John Neilson, summed up the enforcement challenges facing the Crown, “Anything that can give any profit by smuggling will come in; all the custom-house officers in the world could not prevent people, living as neighbours and friends, relations, brothers and sisters, people who visit one another almost every evening, from bringing in anything that will enable them to make a profit, or exchanging articles for mutual convenience.”

Tea was, without a doubt, the most popular of the contraband smuggled into the colonies during the 17th and 18th centuries and, once again, it was Britain’s mercantilist policies that encouraged the underground trade. The policy that most outraged the colonies was the monopoly given to the British-controlled East India Company over the sale of tea throughout the empire. In January of 1829, the House of Assembly for Upper Canada passed a strongly worded resolution protesting the monopoly over the supply of the “indispensable article of tea” to the colony “at prices so exorbitant, that the excess, over and above what would be deemed a fair mercantile profit under free competition, amounts to an oppressive and insupportable tax.” By the 1830s, the price of tea supplied by the East India Company was more than fifty times that which was available through American wholesalers who traded directly with suppliers in China. To ensure the British monopoly, duties were slapped on all teas imported into the colonies from the United States. As Gordon Blake notes in his book on the history of customs administration in Canada, “Tea was truly Britain’s gift to the smuggler. Its bulk and weight were small in proportion to its value; it had a relatively inelastic demand; and, since it cheered but did not inebriate, its prohibition tended to alienate an important and influential female public opinion in Canada.”

The total amount of tea legitimately sold in Upper and Lower Canada was estimated at one-tenth of what was actually being consumed. Customs reports, court cases, and newspaper accounts from this period testify to the vast trade in contraband tea and other heavily taxed goods in British North America. In 1833, the New York Journal of Commerce reported
that smuggling was increasing at an alarming rate along America’s northern border. On the Canadian side there was “a remarkable abundance and cheapness of teas and silks,” and on the American side, there was “an equal abundance and cheapness of loaf sugar and broad cloths.” A November 28, 1839, article in Ontario’s Western Herald newspaper concluded, “A vast amount is smuggled into the province. From facts that have come to our knowledge we are convinced that smuggling is carried on to an extent that but few could believe. One of the first acts of the Imperial Parliament should be to relax their prohibitions and heavy duties on imports from the States to Canada.”

In the 1843 case of The Queen v. Miller, the schooner Dolphin from Prince Edward Island was forfeited to the Crown following the discovery of “forty chests of tea of the value of four hundred pounds of lawful money of Canada.” The illicit tea was seized on November 10, 1843, at the Port of Belleville in Ontario. On April 21, 1860, customs officials in Quebec seized a typical contraband cache of heavily taxed consumer goods, including tea, sugar, tobacco, shoe leather, and candles.

Determined efforts were made by the British government to stop the untaxed movement of goods from America into the colonies. The number of customs officers along the border was increased, penalties were stiffened, and the military was employed to prowl popular smuggling routes. The Montreal Gazette reported on February 17, 1817, that “smuggling has arrived at such a height that parties of the 19th Light Dragoons have been stationed between Lapriarie and St. John’s to prevent it.” But even these enhanced measures had little impact, due in part to the sheer determination, adaptability, and ingenuity of smugglers. Various strategies were used by Maritime smugglers to evade restrictive trading policies or customs enforcement. Cargoes were transferred from American to colonial ships in secluded coves around Nova Scotia or were landed on islands off the New Brunswick coast to be picked up by fishermen hired by colonial merchants. On land, buildings were erected that straddled the boundary; at night, goods went through the door on the American side, while in the morning they would emerge from the door on the Canadian side. Another reason the smuggling trade could not be stopped was that the contraband market was so enthusiastically supported by suppliers, traders, transporters, merchants, and consumers on both sides of the border.

Canadian merchants were some of the most flagrant participants in the contraband traffic. In 1865, a Globe article stated “as fact” that “a large number of Canadian merchants are engaged in swindling the Government by means of false invoices, thereby fraudulently withholding from the Government in considerable amount of tax due under the general laws.” On October 19, 1848, customs officials at the Port of Toronto seized 100 boxes of American soap worth £75 from John Ray, an employee of A.V. Brown and Company. The soap was seized at the border after the sales invoices presented by Ray, which greatly undervalued the goods, were judged to be forged. A customs official became suspicious that the invoice was not in fact prepared by the real New York wholesaler because it too closely matched the handwriting of an employee of A.V. Brown and Company.

As the clandestine trade became increasingly necessary for the economic survival of the colonies, some within the colonial governments conspired with smugglers, or at least looked the other way. Even some British military personnel stationed in Canada turned a blind eye to the smuggling trade. To get their goods to the New Brunswick ports, according to historian W. Stewart MacNutt, American smugglers had to evade their country’s warships that hovered off the coast, “but having succeeded in doing so, they came under the protection of friendly British cruisers that escorted them into Saint John.” In his 1833 book, Sketches of Canada and the United States, William Lyon Mackenzie King documented his own eyewitness account of a tea-smuggling operation from Youngstown, New York, to Fort George, Ontario, which occurred under the watchful eyes of British soldiers who made no effort to intervene. The inference he drew was that smuggling across the border “must have been nearly universal.”

The lucrative profits of the contraband trade quickly expanded the ranks of the professional smuggler and, as Dave McIntosh wrote, “armed gangs of smugglers were not uncommon on the Eastern Townships border of Lower Canada and on the St. Lawrence and Niagara frontiers of Upper Canada.” A letter dated
July 23, 1842, from a customs official in Ontario accuses one W. Burnham of being a serial smuggler who has “carried on for years, successfully to himself and injurious to the fair traders.” Although he was known to have been engaged in smuggling for at least a decade before this letter was written, he was not caught until October 1, 1840, when, at Port Hope, officials seized eighteen chests of tea and two kegs of tobacco valued at approximately £212. Violence was also an inevitable by-product of the smuggling trade. An 1865 Globe newspaper article describes correspondence sent by customs officers stationed along the St. Lawrence that documented the “many instances” in which “officers have been personally assaulted by bands of smugglers while in the performance of their duties.” The writer recommended, “the posting of United States troops along the river to aid in the detection and arrest of these contraband traders.” Some customs officials were more aggressive in their enforcement. In 1852, the Globe reported that Henry Smith was “shot by an officer of the customs and his posse, while defending some smuggled goods which were about to be seized.”

THE GANGS OF UPPER CANADA

In addition to consensual crimes like smuggling, 19th-century versions of organized crime were also predatory in nature. While stories of outlaw gangs are etched into the popular folklore of the American West, less is known about the equally larcenous and violent groups of villains that terrorized communities in Ontario around the middle of the century. D. Owen Carrigan describes how some of these gangs were led by men engaged in legitimate commerce, but who effortlessly resorted to violence to maintain their monopoly. In the pursuit of these ambitions, “they gathered about them groups of ruffians they used to intimidate and beat into submission those who stood in the way of their ambition. Such men were to be found competing with each other for hegemony in the lumber trade in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s and none was more ruthless in the pursuit of power than Peter Aylen.”

Peter Aylen became known as the “King of the Shiners” and, as his title implies, he aspired to great heights and resorted to any means necessary to get there. As a timber baron who sought to monopolize the lumber industry in the Ottawa Valley, Aylen capitalized on the large pool of disenfranchised Irish labourers by securing them jobs in the French-Canadian–dominated lumber camps. He set himself up as a tireless campaigner for the Irish workers, but Aylen was less concerned about their well-being, and more interested in using them as his own personal army to help satisfy his economic and political ambitions. His two hundred or so Irish-Protestant followers, who called themselves “Shiners,” were already well known for their indiscriminate use of violence in the Ottawa Valley, which at the time was little more than the backwoods of a developing British colony. Aylen simply made this violence more discriminate and strategic. By sending his troops into work camps, political meetings, commercial establishments, and homes to intimidate, fight, destroy property, and even murder his opponents, Aylen was responsible for some of the most violent years in the history of Ontario.

Not much is known about the early years of Peter Aylen. Born an Irish Protestant sometime in the 1790s, he arrived in Quebec in 1815 as a seaman, jumped ship, and then made his way to Eastern Ontario where he began work in the lumber trade. By the 1830s, he controlled a number of large timber operations, owned several properties, and was a member of the “Gatineau Privilege,” a group of local lumber barons intent on obtaining a monopoly in the Ottawa Valley. Despite his growing wealth, his thirst for power remained unrequited and he began to organize and manipulate Irish immigrants as part of his efforts to seize control of, not only the local timber industry, but also Bytown (which would later expand to become Ottawa). Aylen offered his Irish constituents employment and, with their help, according to Michael Cross, he promised them “a complete victory over the French Canadians who competed with the Irish for jobs in the timber camps, and who had superior skills and a better reputation for reliability.” Aylen also garnered their loyalty by offering them prostitutes, some of whom were imported from Montreal. As Cross wrote, “The orgies at the ‘King’s’ home were extended, exuberant affairs, which often combined the dual pleasures of debauchery and insult to the respectable community. For instance, after sexual appetites were satisfied, the Shiners were known to fill their women with liquor until they collapsed insensible. Then the girls were
stripped naked and arranged on the public sidewalk — well illuminated with candles so they might be seen by the shocked townspeople.”

Before Aylen came along, the Shiners were a loosely knit, unorganized group of Irish immigrants who helped build the Rideau Canal and, when that was completed, worked in the lumber industry. The origin of their name is obscure, and has been variously attributed to the bastardization of the French word *cheneur* (a cutter of oak), the ubiquitous shiny silk hats worn by wealthy English immigrants, or a self-designation, meaning they “shined” above all others. Besides their common occupation, the Shiners all shared the Protestant religion, an intense dislike for the English and the French, and a proclivity for violence. For the longest time, they were an “ungovernable rabble,” wrote a correspondent for the *Globe* newspaper in 1856. “At first, these ruffians acted independently of one another, and without concert jeering and insulting the defenceless and unprotected, and occasionally ‘pounding an enemy.’” Soon thereafter, “they moved about in couples or small gangs, like wild beasts, seeking whom they might destroy.” Their reputation for group violence was cemented in 1828 when a St. Patrick’s Day brawl in Bytown culminated in the death of an Englishman.

For the most part, the violence perpetrated by the Shiners, like the group itself, was without any real purpose. This changed around 1835 when Peter Aylen recognized that the violent, but leaderless, mass of Irish fury could be organized to serve his ambitions. It was then that he sought to establish himself as the leader of the Irish workers, convincing them that the French aspired to drive them from their jobs. He assured them that they had a dedicated leader and a common cause: to force the French Canadians out of the timber camps along the Rideau River. The result was the “Shiners’ War,” a period of organized violence in the Ottawa Valley orchestrated by Peter Aylen that peaked from 1835 to 1837.

The wave of violence began on January 5, 1835, in Bytown with the daylight murder of Charles McStravick at the hands of Shiner James Curry. In the spring of 1835, Aylen’s men attacked French logging camps and boarded their rafts, beating the men senseless and destroying the tools upon which their livelihoods depended. The French Canadians fought back by ambushing rafts manned by the Shiners, but they were no match for their Irish adversaries, who took control of the Union Bridge over the Ottawa River and began demanding payment for anyone who wished to pass over it. “Although the government owned the bridge, no one dared intervene to stop the outrages,” Michael Cross wrote. “All too frequently bodies were found below the bridge, victims of the playful celebrations of the Shiners above.” In the summer of 1835, the Shiners terrorized the owner of a Bytown inn popular among French Canadians and ultimately set it ablaze, forcing the innkeeper and his family to flee the town in fright. When a local constable attempted to arrest an Irish raftsman on a charge of rape, the part-time police officer was beaten by three other Shiners in full view of a large crowd. After Aylen was arrested for assaulting a lawyer from Perth, his men went on a rampage. Assuming their leader was to be transported to Perth via the Rideau Canal, his supporters swarmed a steamer anchored at Bytown and, as a June 25, 1835, edition of the *Bathurst Courier* recounts, when they could not find Aylen, they “commenced an assault on the crew of one of the steamboats, and disabled the engineer and several others.”

The Shiners were able to act with impunity because of the absence of a full-time constabulary and a local population that had been frightened into submission. But the causes of the violence were much deeper. In his detailed examination of the Shiners’ War, Michael Cross believed the “Irish in the Valley were more than ready for a leader and for violence.” They were conditioned to be more tolerant of violence as it was an everyday fact of life in their homeland. Poverty, famine, disease, foreign rule, civil war, and political and religious oppression “combined to produce a society teetering on the edge of anarchy.” These traditions were simply brought over from Ireland to the Ottawa frontier. Existing animosities toward the English, combined with the reality of their own poverty, were exacerbated when they viewed the opulent conditions enjoyed by the local English gentry. Politically and economically, the Irish immigrants were made to feel like second-class citizens as the English and Scots assumed most positions of power. The completion of the Rideau Canal in 1832 created a glut of unskilled labour in the Ottawa
Valley and the Irish found it difficult to get work in the timber camps where the more experienced French Canadians were favoured by employers. The lumber barons also exploited the excess labour by driving down wages and pitting worker against worker. No moderating force within the Irish community arose to restrain these violent impulses and the Ottawa Valley at the time had few strong institutions to quell or even mediate the ongoing violence. In an article dated December 25, 1856, the Globe newspaper offered a more succinct, albeit crude, interpretation of the violence meted out by the Irish workers against their French counterparts in the Ottawa Valley, “‘Paddy’ at home is a slave; abroad, a task master; in fact he must be groaning under a load of chains, real or imaginary, it little matters which, or else he must have a ‘Niggar’ to wallop. The poor quiet Franco-Canadian, for the time, was Paddy’s ‘Niggar’ here.”

By the summer of 1835, Aylen was using the Shiners to help him fulfill his political aspirations. He began by forcing a coup of the powerful Bathurst District Agricultural Society, which was holding its annual meeting in Bytown in August of that year. According to Michael Cross, he arrived at the meeting with—a large body of raftsmen, each equipped with the dollar fee necessary for membership. Never had the friendly little aristocrats’ club witnessed such a scene. Sprawling on the benches, swigging poteen from their bottles, roaring over coarse jokes, the Shiners turned the austere meeting room into a fair facsimile of a Lower Town tavern. Then came the moment Aylen had been awaiting — the election of officers. Vastly outnumbering the legitimate members, the Shiners voted out of office the entire executive and replaced them with timberers.

Elected as the president of the society, of course, was Peter Aylen.

At a meeting of the Nepean Township Council on January 2, 1837, Aylen and his hooligans tried to intimidate councillors into electing candidates who were sympathetic to the Irish migrants. When they balked at his demands, Aylen’s men started to riot. In the process, two members of the council were severely beaten. By this time, Aylen’s power was at its zenith. “Armed to the teeth,” wrote the Globe’s correspondent in 1856, the King of the Shiners “would parade himself on the highways, and in the ‘groggeries,’ with the air of a despot, — a bold, wild, reckless outlaw, for whom nothing was too hot or too heavy, who lived without the pale of society, and who neither feared God nor honoured the kind.” His continued reliance on violence, however, would prove to be his downfall, and the events of February 4, 1837, were the beginning of the end for Aylen. That afternoon, the wife and daughters of a farmer named Hobbs, who had previously run afoul of some Shiners, were returning home in their horse-drawn sleigh after a trip into town. Unbeknownst to them, members of the Shiners were lying in wait. All at once, the Irishmen leaped from the hiding spot and viciously attacked the sleigh, beating not just Hobbs, but his pregnant wife and daughters as well.

Horrified by the vicious, premeditated assault, townspeople appealed to the local magistrate for action. However, attempts at apprehending the men behind the assault proved futile. A week after the attack, a mob of angry farmers arrived in town, armed with pitchforks, clubs, and guns and announced to the magistrate that they had come to aid in the capturing of those behind the ambush. After convincing the farmers to return home, the magistrate was able to arrange for the arrest of the Shiner who led the attack. But this provoked even more rioting by other gang members, which peaked in March 1837. By that time, local citizens formed armed patrols and were sworn in as special constables by the magistrates. With determined community action, the Shiners were brought under control and in the spring and summer of 1837, many were sentenced to prison terms. Despite this enforcement success, Peter Aylen was never brought to justice. Well aware that the tide had turned against him, he sold his property in Bytown and fled to Aylmer, Quebec. Other than an instance in 1843 when he was accused of illegally cutting timber on Crown lands, he assumed the role of law-abiding citizen and community leader. By 1846, he became a member of the Hull Township Council and two years later he was appointed justice of the peace.
On June 13, 1845, the *Toronto British Colonist* shone a light on another violent gang operating in Upper Canada. “There has been for a considerable time past,” the article explains, “a gang of Robbers in Markham and the surrounding townships, whose depredations have been carried on an extensive scale.” For the next year, newspapers would be filled with stories on the Markham Gang, an “extensive and organized gang of rogues” responsible for “a great many daring burglaries and other crimes” in and around the township of Markham. A July 29, 1846, edition of the *Toronto Examiner* reported that, within the previous three years, the gang had committed various robberies in several townships. “A number of thefts, in one case of a few yards of cloth, in another of a pair of breeches, another of a few tin pans, and one of seventy or eighty dollars accompanied by brutal violence, have been perpetrated upon the farmers by persons who must have acted in concert. Great terror pervaded the minds of the timid and those living in isolated and remote places, on account of the frequency of these depredations and the apparent impossibility of detecting the offenders.”

Between 1844 and 1846, the so-called Markham Gang carried out a series of crimes in and around Markham Township, close to present-day Toronto. While their offences included horse theft, pickpocketing, and counterfeiting, their speciality was residential burglaries. Membership in the gang at any one time was as many as nineteen men, although six were considered the group’s leaders or more active offenders: Robert Burr, the brothers Hiram and James Stoutenborough, Nathan Case, James Green, and Henry Johnson. While little is known about the ringleaders, one outraged newspaper of the day revealed that most were from reputable and wealthy landowning families:

It was a remarkable fact that several of those charged were the sons of respectable farmers, while others were men with wives and children, cultivating farms of their own, with plenty and comfort around them! What could induce such men to commit such crimes? That a man living with his family, and owning 200 acres of land, worth 3,000 or 4,000 dollars, should join himself to a gang of ruffians, and go prowling about the country, at one time stealing from his neighbour a gun, at another three or four tin pans, and the miserable booty among half a dozen companions, with certainty of detection, sooner or later, is, we should hope, a rare occurrence.

The *British Colonist* provided some observations on the gang’s rudimentary hierarchy:

From what we have learned of the gang, we should be disposed to divide them into two classes: the cavalry! And the infantry! The former, who are generally mounted on the best horses in the country, figure only in the higher branches of roguery; such as burglary, horse stealing, and in the wholesale dissemination of “Boodle!” Boodle being the flash term of the gang for counterfeit money! To the infantry is delegated the lower or democratic order of thievry! Such as pilfering from hen roosts; stealing harness, buffalo skins, blankets, &c., from stables sheds; wheat and other grain from barns and graineries; clothing, guns and other articles …

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Markham Gang was the systematic planning that went into the execution of many of their crimes. “From the nature of the robberies committed by them, the parties were evidently quite familiar with the habits and mode of living of those they have robbed,” according to the June 13, 1845, edition of the *British Colonist*. “They always watched the most favourable opportunity to enter the houses, so as to escape detection and save their booty.” Most of the robberies they carried out was preceded by careful reconnaissance. Potential victims were identified and gang members were dispatched to observe them in their daily routine. Some even were able to gain entrance into the homes or businesses of prospective victims under false pretences. The gang relied on a network of informants and spies who roamed the countryside and townships gathering information on potential victims. Some of the gang’s operatives were travelling salesmen or tradesmen who scouted on a part-time basis. Gang members
also adopted the cloak of these professions to gather information. Either way, the "avant couriers" had to be respectable in appearance, a pretence that increased the chance that intended victims would take the advance men into their homes, allowing them to determine the location of valuables. One even gained entrance into a home on the pretext of being a roaming Methodist minister. He read psalms and prayed with the family in exchange for food and lodging, all the while trying to determine the location of their valuables.

The well-organized and disciplined nature of the criminal group was reinforced by a strict code of secrecy and loyalty. Each member pledged "to adhere to their rules and never to betray their secrets on the pain of certain death," the British Colonist stated in 1846. Gang members also had to follow strict rules to avoid incrimination. They were never to take stolen items to their own homes or to try to fence the goods in their own community and, if captured, they would not reveal the identity of their co-conspirators. All communication between gang members had to be oral and special horseback messengers were employed to communicate over long distances. Violence and intimidation was also used to deter anyone from "taking proceedings against the robbers, from the fear that the greater evils of fire and murder would be inflicted upon them by this desperate gang." Even judges, police constables, and jurors were not immune to these intimidation tactics; some magistrates were accused of refusing to sign arrest warrants against gang members for fear of reprisals.

One of the first public glimpses of the gang was provided in October 1845 when newspapers reported a vicious burglary committed at the home of John Morrow and his family, who lived in the Reach Township, northeast of present-day Toronto. One night, while John was upstairs in bed, his wife, Mary, heard the heavy pounding of several footsteps on the front porch. Before she could waken her husband, four men barged through the door. One intruder lunged towards Mary and with a closed fist struck her across the face, sending her to the ground. Another of the intruders bounded to the second-floor bedroom where he savagely beat her husband with a large club while demanding he hand over his cash and other valuables. A third man charged into the bedroom of twelve-year-old Margaret and began rifling through a chest. The Morrows testified in a subsequent court case that the man who directed the robbery and doled out most of the beatings was a neighbour, Nathan Case. In his book on the Markham Gang, Paul Arculus describes the suffering the Morrow family endured at the hands of Case and his accomplices:

Case ordered the children to stay in their bed. He returned to the kitchen where he began searching through its meagre contents. Case put a gun to Mary's ear and pointed another at her husband and demanded that they hand over the money that they had gained at the Uxbridge fair. John Morrow, now dazed, told Mary to hand them the money. She went to her purse, hidden under her pillow, and handed it to the third man. He snatched the purse and ripped it open, taking out a roll of notes while the coins fell to the floor. The second man struck John on the head again. By this time he was almost senseless. Mary dragged herself after him to the doorway. To her horror she saw that there were more men, at least ten of them, all now walking away. They were in three groups, each heading in a different direction. Several hours later John regained consciousness. John was sure that three of the men who had carried out this sadistic beating were neighbours, Nathan Case, Hiram Stoutenborough and his brother James Stoutenborough.

Warrants were issued for the three men and two others — Robert Burr and Henry Johnson — who were positively identified by the Morrows. Almost all involved in the robbery went on the lam, but not without continuing their crime spree. According to one newspaper, authorities received information that Burr and Johnson "were lurking in the neighbourhood of the village of Ingersoll in the Brock District, where a number of robberies had recently been perpetrated." A constable was dispatched with warrants for their arrest and upon his arrival, "he found the two parties lodged in the gaol at Woodstock, on a charge of an extensive robbery committed near Embro in which they had been detected, and were subsequently apprehended,
through the vigilant exertions of Captain Graham, an active and efficient magistrate in the Brock District.” When the men were brought to trial, details came forth suggesting the attackers knew the Morrows had received a sum of money from a local fair that day, that Mary was in charge of the family savings, and that she had even more money hidden in the house.

The attack on the Morrows was just one in a series of brazen crimes the gang committed at a relentless pace between 1844 to 1846. No robbery was too large or too small for these thieves as they strategically rambled across the countryside in their pursuit of victims. In July 1844, John Fleming and Robert Hubbard stole 110 bushels of wheat and oats from a farmer's barn. One night in August 1845, Henry Johnson entered Thomas Scripture's home while he was in bed. After being woken by a sound, Scripture went downstairs and noticed he had been robbed of a sizable amount of cash he had received in a transaction only that evening. When he later testified against Johnson in court, Scripture did not know if he had been visited by one of the gang's spies, but he did acknowledge that the thief must have known he had a quantity of money in his home that night. The way Johnson broke into the house, and his quick entry and exit, indicated that he had intimate details of the layout of the dwelling and where the cash was hidden. With equal precision and even greater stealth, gang members broke into the home of John Smith, made their way to his bedroom while he slept, fished the keys from his trousers that he customarily left on a chair by his bed before retiring for the night, unlocked a desk located off the bedroom, and stole $500 in cash. Throughout it all, Smith never awoke. While a neighbour of Smith's was attending the services at the local Methodist church, burglars broke into his house, smashed open a dresser, and removed $300 in cash (although in their haste they missed $700 that was hidden elsewhere in the dresser).

On February 12, 1846, Samson Roberts and his wife, Mary, who supplemented their income by renting out rooms in their large home located eight miles north of Oshawa, took in two strangers who were seeking shelter on that cold and snowy night. Despite the late hour, Mary served them refreshments while they sat by the fire to get warm. A few hours after going back to bed, she awoke to find one of the men standing at the foot of the stairs with a saddle over one shoulder, a candle in one hand, and a meat cleaver in the other. Threatening her into silence, the intruder entered her bedroom, opened the bureau drawers and pocketed their contents. After a few minutes, the man made his way to the front door and left. The Robertses later discovered that the burglars had rifled through almost every occupied room in the house and had stolen a variety of items, including a watch, candlesticks, several coats as well as a money box given to Mary for safekeeping by one guest. Her husband hastily assembled a posse and began tracking four sets of footprints freshly made in the snow. Along the way, they discovered a carpet bag partially buried under the snow and, later that day, found more bags full of items stolen from the house. The details of the burglary were reported to the local magistrate and David Sawyer was later charged.

The members of the Markham Gang also dabbled in forgery and counterfeiting, mostly to facilitate the disposal of the goods they stole. In particular, gang members were often paid for their stolen property in counterfeit money. As the Toronto British Colonist recounted in 1846, they were instructed to take stolen articles “of considerable value and easily removable” such as watches, banknotes, or horses “to Lower Canada, to the townships of Shefford and Durham, where there is a wholesale establishment for issuing counterfeit money of all sorts, and for receiving stolen goods and where the stolen articles are disposed of in exchange for ‘boodle,’ at the rate of $100 worth of boodle for ten dollars worth of valuable property, or for five dollars worth of bankable paper.” The “boodle” would then be brought to the “small fry” of the gang, whose job it was to put the counterfeit cash into circulation.

Local law enforcement began to realize some success in breaking up the band of thieves by capturing individual members and pressuring them to inform on others. The first to be arrested in January 1846 was twenty-three-year-old Daniel Spencer, who was charged with larceny. The same month, Matthew Udell was arrested for passing a forged note, while Thomas Alsop was brought before the police court at the end of the month on a horse-stealing charge. In April, at least five other gang members were charged with larceny. By the Spring Assizes of 1846, many of those picked up were tried and most were convicted.
Robert White was found guilty of stealing a horse and sentenced to three years. Henry Johnson was tried on numerous burglary, horse-stealing, and assault charges and, after an initial acquittal, was retried, convicted, and sentenced to four years. Robert Burr, Nathan Case, and Hiram and James Stoutenborough were condemned to death, but their verdicts were changed to prison terms, including life imprisonment for Burr. The guilty verdicts and sentences that were obtained, especially for the gang’s leaders, effectively put an end to one of Upper Canada’s most infamous and well-organized criminal groups.

Although not as large or well organized as the Markham Gang, other criminal groups gained a certain level of infamy in Ontario during the mid 19th century. Among these were the Campbell brothers, who were at the core of a network of outlaws that flourished in the 1850s along the border between Grey and Bruce counties, about 30 miles east of Lake Huron. John and Colin Campbell operated a tavern that became a notorious meeting place for drunkards, drifters, bootleggers, and freelance criminals, some of whom congregated there to plan their robberies. By providing a meeting place and the occasional start-up capital to thieves, the Campbell brothers received a cut from robberies or would fence the stolen goods. After helping Andrew MacFarlane illegally retrieve horses that had been seized from him by the county bailiff in early 1859, warrants were issued for the arrest of MacFarlane and the Campbell brothers. When Constables George Simpson and Caleb Huyck tried to serve a warrant on the two brothers, they were confronted by a band of armed men, led by Colin Campbell. After firing his gun into the air, Campbell demanded that Huyck eat the warrants. Fearing for his life, Huyck meekly complied. Campbell then gave the two constables the option of leaving or dying. Huyck and his partner chose the former. But the two returned with a posse, and after surrounding the Campbells’ tavern, they exchanged gunfire with the men holed up in the heavy log building. After several attempts, the posse set the cabin ablaze and smoked the men out. While fleeing the burning building, the fugitives adeptly used the fire’s thick smoke as a cover to escape, although Colin Campbell was hit in the back by a bullet from the posse. While his wounds were not immediately fatal, the pain forced him to seek treatment from a doctor in the town of Hanover. A local constable was apprised of his presence and Colin Campbell was arrested. Along with three others, Campbell was charged with horse stealing and assaulting a police officer. The men went to trial on September 30, 1859, where they were found guilty. Campbell went to prison, although his co-defendants were merely fined.

Another gang that gained notoriety in Ontario around the same time worked the streets of Toronto. The Brooks Bush gang — so named because of the seedy part of the city that was their base — were engaged in petty theft, robberies, and break-ins. But they are most remembered for one of the most high-profile murders to take place in Toronto during the 19th century. The slaying occurred on the Don Bridge on December 1, 1859. That night, John Sheridan Hogan, a Member of Parliament, was crossing the bridge on his way home when he was attacked by what the April 6, 1861, edition of the New York Times called “ten or twelve loose characters, of both sexes, known as the ‘Brooks Bush Gang.’” The group of ruffians robbed Hogan, beat him to death, and then threw his body into the Don River. When Hogan failed to return home that night, a search party was organized, but proved futile as his murderers made sure his body would sink to the bottom of the river by attaching heavy stones to it. On the afternoon of March 30, 1861, Hogan’s body was found floating at the mouth of the river by two men out duck hunting. Despite being badly decomposed (having spent more than sixteen months in the water) the body was positively identified as Hogan. Following the confession of Ellen McGillich, a part-time prostitute who was present at the time of Hogan’s death, James Browne and Jane Ward were arrested, tried, and convicted of murder. Ward was accused of delivering the fatal blow, with a stone tied in a handkerchief, while the evidence indicated that Browne threw the body over the bridge. Although the fate of Ward is not known, James Browne was executed on March 10, 1862, before a crowd estimated at five thousand people. To the very end, Browne maintained his innocence, even as the condemned man sat in his jail cell a day before the execution, listening to the construction of the scaffold, from which his own lifeless body would soon dangle.
Another form of organized criminality during the 19th century combined the worst of the consensual contraband trade and the violent predatory gangs of Upper Canada. The illegal liquor trade would also be one of the most socially destructive criminal activities undertaken in Canada during this century. The Canadian whiskey traffic can be traced to the earliest days of the French and English fur traders who bartered rum, brandy, and whiskey in exchange for furs provided by native hunters and trappers. While European settlers were also a market for illicit liquor, the most organized and despicable of the distillers, smugglers, and peddlers amassed their revenues through the pernicious exploitation of aboriginal peoples. As surrogate hunters for the white man, native people exchanged their furs and pelts for a wide range of goods, including blankets, cheap jewellery, food, tobacco, clothing, shoes, metal goods, rifles and ammunition. But it was whiskey that would become the currency of choice for the European traders.

The Hudson’s Bay Company was one of the original rivulets through which native people in British North America got their first taste of liquor. Historical records show that as early as the 1680s, the Company had shipped hundreds of gallons of brandy from Europe to its overseas posts to trade with aboriginal hunters. When their supply of brandy became scarce, due to England’s intermittent conflicts with France, the Company began to distill its own liquor. According to Peter C. Newman, this mixture was called “English Brandy” and consisted of “cheap (almost raw) London gin to which were added drops of any of several tinctures (usually iodine) to duplicate the rich auburn colour of the real brandy.” This innovation would set the die for future commercial relations between white traders and native hunters; instead of purchasing commercially produced liquor, white traders would now “distill” their own product, which greatly minimized their expenses. One whiskey trader operating from an encampment in Alberta during the early 1870s boasted how he obtained two hundred buffalo pelts, worth nearly $1,000, in exchange for $50 of homemade liquor.

The ingredients of the brutal and sometimes lethal concoctions made by subsequent traders expanded upon the original Hudson’s Bay recipe. The base generally consisted of a gallon of diluted raw alcohol with three gallons of water. To this was added a variety of other ingredients, such as molasses, tea, Jamaican ginger, chewing tobacco, soap, the painkiller laudanum, and a dash of lye or red peppers to give it a bite. Red ink or even paint was added for colour. The mixture was then brought to boil to blend the ingredients and to give it an extra kick.

A review of court files in Upper Canada in the early part of the century reveals numerous cases involving the illegal distilling and distribution of liquor. Two moonshiners who appeared regularly before the courts in the Township of Bertie were Mathias Hawn and Edmund Raymond. Information for a court case prepared in 1803 alleged that the two men “carried on the trade of making and distilling spirituous liquors for sale.” The court documents indicated that the men operated four stills, each of which was capable of holding 120 gallons. While it was not illegal to privately distill liquor, the two were prosecuted for failing to pay any taxes on the sale of their homemade booze.

The whites referred to their toxic mixtures by various names — “bug juice,” “benzene,” “Injun juice,” “Injun coffin varnish,” and “hoochinoo.” Aboriginal people called it “firey water” and its impact on First Nations was devastating. Whiskey — and the whiskey trade — eroded their culture, destroyed their self-sufficiency, fuelled violence, and robbed proud hunters and warriors of reason, dignity, and the ability to provide for their family and their community. In 1804, Alexander Henry, a trader for the North West Company, wrote in his journal, “Indians having asked for liquor and promised to decamp and hunt well all summer, I gave them some. Grand Gueule stabbed Capot Rouge, Le Boeuf stabbed his young wife in the arm, Little Shell almost beat his old mother’s brains out with a club, and there was terrible fighting amongst them. I sowed garden seeds.” Reverend John McDougall, a missionary who spread the Gospel in the Canadian West during the 1870s, and whose reports on the whiskey trade helped convince the Canadian government to form the North West Mounted Police, had this to say about the impact of the whiskey trade on aboriginal people: “Mothers lost their children. These were either frozen to death or devoured by the myriad dogs of the camp.”
The birth-rate decreased and the poor red man was in a fair way towards extinction, just because some men, coming out of Christian countries, and themselves the evolution of Christian civilization, were now ruled by lust and greed.

The whiskey traders were little concerned about the effect that the liquor had on aboriginal people, nor did they care about the long-term viability of the fur trade. Their goal was to obtain as many pelts as possible in the shortest period of time. As far back as the early 1700s, Hudson's Bay officials began sending communiqués to its traders cautioning them against trading brandy with their native suppliers, not out of concern for their welfare, but because they realized that drunken aboriginals made poor hunters. The profits made by bartering cheap homemade whiskey for valuable pelts, however, meant that the tradition continued for at least another 150 years. A letter written by an American politician in 1849 accused the Company of continuing to provide “immense amounts of spirituous liquor which is imported by the Hudson's Bay Company annually, not only for their trade in the British possessions, but which is furnished to the Indians who reside and hunt within the limits of the United States.” Beginning in the 1860s, the Hudson’s Bay Company prohibited its traders from using liquor to barter with native hunters. The void left by the Company was quickly filled by others, who were now delivering and trading liquor by the wagon- and boatload. In 1831, whiskey trader James Kipp, who built Fort Peigan at the mouth of the Marias River in northern Montana, played host to hundreds of Blackfoot Indians who unexpectedly showed up one day declaring their intention to trade. Kipp had a single 35-gallon barrel of whiskey left. Frantically improvising, he diluted it with copious amounts of water, added boiled red peppers and blackstrap tobacco, and then strengthened the mix with all the patent medicine he had on hand. By the time he was finished, he had produced 350 gallons of “whiskey,” which he then traded for 2,500 prime beaver furs worth around $46,000.

In the early 1860s, whiskey traders began to cruise along the western shores of the Colony of British Columbia searching for markets among the coast-dwelling native communities. One letter dated 1866 from colonial officials to the Hudson’s Bay House in London alerted them to “a considerable number of traders” who have “introduced spirituous liquors” to aboriginals in B.C. Appeals were also made to London by those fur traders who refrained from bartering liquor for pelts and, as a consequence, were at a disadvantage to the whiskey traders. One such letter from a Hudson’s Bay official to his superiors in London included an urgent plea for help against competitors trading in “large quantities of liquor and goods” that had been smuggled into the colony. “And the answer from the Administrator of the Government to our repeated representation on the subject is that he has no means at his disposal to prevent it. You will thus perceive that as legitimate Indian Traders on the Coast, we have little chance of competing successfully with a fleet of smugglers.” Some vessels were floating distilleries, producing liquor in stills set up in their hulls and then sold on deck to natives who would paddle to the ships in their canoes. A letter from a Hudson’s Bay Company official in B.C. to the acting Colonial Secretary of New Westminster dated October 20, 1866, read, “since the beginning of July several Schooners, some with large quantities of liquor on board have cleared for the North West Coast.” Among those vessels identified in the letter were the Langley, containing 292 gallons of rum, two cases of porter and four cases of brandy, and the Native, carrying 313 gallons of rum. One of the most active of the liquor-trading schooners during this time was the Nanpareil, which, according to the same letter, was “commanded by the notorious Whiskey seller W. J Stephens.” The captain of the Nanpareil had already been convicted on at least one occasion “for infringement of the Indian liquor law of British Columbia and who, very soon after he was unlocked for early liberation, was, while himself trading at Nass River, selling liquor by orders on his Agents at Portland Canal, an inlet a few miles north of the line but chiefly frequented by British Indians by the Nass and Chimsyan tribes.”

There were so many liquor-laden schooners sailing up and down the British Columbia coast in search of native traders that colonial officials petitioned Britain to send naval warships. On November 21, 1870, Anthony Musgrave, the governor for B.C., wrote to London pleading that a “Gunboat should be employed to watch the Coast.” Despite this plea, in
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The same letter he acknowledges, "one Gunboat will be inadequate to exercise the necessary surveillance over several hundred miles of Coast; and I hear that without the constant employment of one or more vessels as Cruisers for this purpose it will always remain difficult to prevent the traffic." British customs vessels were already patrolling coastal waters, but they were greatly outnumbered and outmatched by the wily liquor traders. Colonial officials were told of one customs vessel that "set out on a futile chase after these smuggling Schooners — at one time eleven in number — on a coast so abounding in channels, inlets, sheltered bays, and caves as is that of British Columbia, and whence to escape is so very easy into Russian waters, beyond British jurisdiction." In 1863, several whiskey schooners escaped capture by the British warship H.M.S. Devastation and then sailed near enough along the coast to "barter their liquor with the natives of British Columbia." Under Commander John W. Pike, the H.M.S. Devastation was given the task of checking the liquor traffic along the east coast of Vancouver Island in 1862. Pike was relentless in his duties, detaining and inspecting vessels, scrutinizing paperwork, interrogating traders, seizing contraband liquor, and impounding ships. Notable casualties of Pike's interdictions were the Hamley, which had a cargo of 300 gallons of "vile spirits," and the Langley, which was impounded indefinitely for repeated liquor violations.

The whiskey ships responded to the heightened enforcement by moving their trading centres to more clandestine locations along the coast, in coves or on uncharted islands, while aboriginal middlemen picked up caches of liquor that had been submerged in designated spots. Governor Musgrave wrote that liquor-trading schooners also avoided scrutiny by clearing the ports at Victoria or New Westminster empty, and then taking liquor on board outside the harbour:

It is true that the liquor is not on board when these Coastline traders leave Victoria; but it is not in fact known where or when they take on board the liquor which it is believed that they trade to Indians in exchange for furs. The Gulf of Georgia abounds in Islands. Bays, and Inlets affording numerous places where it is easy to have the liquor left to be taken, or put on board by concert with other persons for such a purpose; and moreover, as the American Ports on Puget Sound are at no great distance from Victoria it is quite possible for their supplies to be obtained from thence.

Whoop-up

By the late 1860s, whiskey trading had also become widespread in the Northwest Territories (what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta). A number of factors conspired to cause an increase in the whiskey traffic in the territories after 1860. Principal among these was a trading post called Fort Benton. Located in Montana on the Upper Missouri River, about 160 kilometres south of what is now the Alberta–Montana border, Fort Benton has been described as "a collection of log stores, cut-throat saloons and wicked hurdy-gurdy houses." The trading fort was established by the American Fur Company, which was founded by John Jacob Astor who amassed a fortune through the monopoly he held over the fur trade in the central and western United States during the first thirty years of the 19th century. Astor became a multi-millionaire by trading aboriginal hunters cheap rotgut whiskey for expensive pelts, using his heavily armed agents to violently crush his competitors and by routinely bribing politicians. His American Fur Company also operated a profitable loansharking operation, providing credit to native customers on such items as rifles, gunpowder, flints, knives, and tools at a rate of up to 400 percent. When the native people complained about the unjust trade, Astor either had them murdered by his agents or he would send urgent cables alerting his friends in the White House and Congress about the rebellious state of the local natives, and federal troops would be dispatched immediately. He died in 1848 as America's richest man.

By 1864, Fort Benton was being managed by Isaac Gilbert Baker, who was born in 1819 in New Haven, Connecticut, and entered the fur business at eighteen years of age. The death of Pierre Chouteau, head of the American Fur Company, in 1865, and the effects of the civil war resulted in the closing of all its trading posts. As a result Baker and his brother George founded a company of their own, and in 1866 opened their first store in Fort Benton under the name of
I. G. Baker and Brother. Under Baker’s management, Fort Benton became the great shantytown of Montana — the “Sagebrush Sodom,” as one historian called it — playing host to a transient population of traders, hunters, prospectors, cowboys, soldiers, aboriginal, gamblers, and prostitutes. It was also the chief source of whiskey used to barter with aboriginal hunters.

Despite the importance of Fort Benton in the whiskey and fur trade, by the late 1860s the real money was to be made north of the Montana border. The demand for buffalo hides was rapidly increasing as manufacturers discovered they could be tanned into a durable leather suitable for industrial machinery belts. Along the American plains, much of the buffalo herds had already been wiped out, but north of the border, a huge buffalo population had thus far been untouched by the white man. Equally attractive to the would-be traders were the numerous aboriginal nations just north of the border — the Cree Blackfoot, Blood, and Assiniboine, to name just a few — all of which boasted seasoned buffalo hunters. It was also during the late 1860s that the U.S. Cavalry and local sheriffs in Montana began to more aggressively enforce liquor laws that prohibited the sale of alcohol to aboriginals. There were no such restrictions on whiskey trading in the Canadian Northwest, nor was there any law enforcement or any kind of government presence. All of these factors culminated in a mass northward exodus of American whiskey traders from Fort Benton. Some of these so-called “free traders” were fugitives from the law, most were men of questionable character, and almost all were lured by the profits that could be made by trading liquor with Indians in return for buffalo hides. As Duncan McNab McEachran wrote in a 1881 Montreal Gazette article, “This class of men have been a curse to the Indians and this whole Northwest territory. They are usually outcasts from society, who fear neither God nor man, and whose object is to destroy the senses of the poor Indians that they may rob them of whatever they may possess.”

It was from Fort Benton that much of the whiskey pestilence spread north. Traders picked up their liquor and other supplies and from there wagons pulled by horses or oxen transported the traders and their whiskey north of the border. On their return trip back to Fort Benton, the wagons would be full of buffalo hides. At first, the traders travelled directly to native encampments. Before long, temporary trading posts were being set up, most of which were simply wagon camps, and native hunters were now expected to travel to these posts to trade. These centralized, stationary posts were preferred by the traders as it reduced their travel time, expenses, and the risks of entering hostile native territory. By the early 1870s, there were dozens of trading posts in Southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, all strategically located to be accessible to aboriginal populations. In 1876, one former trader reminisced about “a half-breed camp on a river called Frenchmen’s river” where there were “thirteen whiskey traders within three miles.”

These temporary trading camps were soon replaced by semi-permanent forts. As business picked up and the traders learned of the hazards of dealing with intoxicated customers and unfriendly native bands, the original ramshackle structures were replaced with sturdy forts, built with heavy timber and fortified with rifle ports and small cannons. Many of the forts were built at the junction of two rivers or streams so they could be better protected from attack by the water barrier. Among the forts operating during the early 1870s were Robber’s Roost, located at the junction of the Belly and the Oldman rivers, and Fort Standoff, which stood where the Waterton and Belly rivers joined and which was named for the time a party of American whiskey smugglers “stood off” a U.S. marshal. Fort Slideout received its name after the occupants “slid out” one night to escape a war party of Blood Indians. Fort Spitzee, located near the High River in present-day Alberta, took its moniker from a corruption of the Blackfoot word ipitsi, meaning high.

Of all the whiskey-trading posts in the territories, none experienced more success and gained more infamy than Fort Whoop-Up. Standing on the high plains where the St. Mary and Oldman rivers meet, just a few miles from what is now Lethbridge, Alberta, Fort Whoop-Up was less than 100 kilometres from the American border and only a seven-day trip from Fort Benton. One RCMP historian wrote, Fort Whoop-Up “stands for everything that was wrong in the west — lawless American desperadoes dealing noxious ‘whiskey’ to an Indian population unaccustomed to alcohol; buffalo hides by the hundreds of thousands...
being shipped out, leaving nothing but rotting carcasses and starving Natives; and a general atmosphere of anarchy with no accountability.”

Fort Whoop-Up was the brainchild of three men: John Jerome Healy and Alfred B. Hamilton, two American traders based out of Fort Benton, and their financial backer, Isaac Gilbert Baker. The driving force behind the fort was Healy, a stout, barrel-chested Irish adventurer who sported a Buffalo Bill goatee through much of his adult years. Vain and arrogant, he loved to brag about his exploits and boasted that he was ready to fight anything from a circular saw to a grizzly bear. He was born in Ireland in 1840 and moved to New York with his family at the age of twelve. In 1858, he enlisted in the U.S. Army’s Second Dragoons and served for two years before taking his discharge. He then joined a wagon train bound for Oregon but left it to prospect for gold in Montana. He later became the sheriff of Choteau County in Montana and, following his brief career as a whiskey trader, went on to such professions as newspaper publisher, ferryman, Yukon trading post operator, and promoter of Alaskan industries. Healy always talked about a new, get-rich-quick scheme and while not all of his business ventures were successful, Fort Whoop-Up did make him wealthy. The efforts of other whiskey traders would pale in comparison with those of the daring, showy, quick-witted, and wholly ruthless Healy, who was able to wrestle the fur trade away from the Hudson’s Bay Company in its own backyard, and who is considered the kingpin of the whiskey trade in the Canadian Prairies during the early 1870s.

Healy had spotted the opportunity to make money in the Canadian Northwest after a stint as a prospector around Fort Edmonton during the summer of 1863. In the late 1860s, he approached Baker about bankrolling a trading excursion north of the border. Deciding the gamble was worth the risk, Baker agreed to outfit Healy and Hamilton with a few wagons loaded with supplies. In 1869, the two men made the trip north on wagons loaded with thousands of dollars’ worth of spirits, a few cases of lever-action Henry repeating rifles, and other merchandise that Baker hoped to trade with native bands for buffalo pelts. Healy and Hamilton set up a crude trading post, made up of log huts linked in a circle by a picket fence, at the confluence of the St. Mary’s and Oldman rivers, which they named after Hamilton. While Fort Hamilton may not have been much to look at, it was immediately successful. When they returned to Fort Benton in the spring of 1870 their wagons were piled high with $50,000 worth of buffalo pelts.

Now fully aware of the immense profitability of the whiskey trade north of the border, Baker equipped Healy and Hamilton for another trip and even provided them with $25,000 to construct a larger, more permanent trading post. While a ragtag assortment of traders had been operating in the Northwest Territories for some years, no one had ever operated on the scale that the three entrepreneurs were envisioning. The investment was a huge sum of money at the time, but Baker was confident that a large fort could generate more business than all the other trading posts combined. Healy and Hamilton chose a spot close to the original Fort Hamilton, which had burned down, and began construction on their new trading post. The fort was built in two years by thirty-two labourers, under the supervision of William Gladstone, a former Hudson’s Bay Company master carpenter. When completed, it was the largest and most secure of
its kind. It was constructed of heavy, squared timbers in the form of a hollow square with a sturdy palisade loopholed for rifles and a bastion at the northwest and southeast corners. One bastion was mounted with a two-inch muzzle-loading brass cannon, while the other contained an alarm bell and a howitzer. Three wickets were carved out of the walls to facilitate trade, and a large gate made of oak was built to admit wagonloads of supplies. The exterior walls were 1.4 feet high and topped with sharpened stakes. The doors, windows, and even the chimneys were barred with iron to discourage trespassers. Heavy log roofs were laid across the partitions and covered with earth to protect the buildings from flaming arrows. A well was dug within the enclosure, and a short distance from the southwest corner a corral was erected for horses and cattle. Flapping from a flagpole attached to one of the bastions was Healy’s personal blue-and-red flag, which resembled the Stars and Stripes. Inside, the fort contained a cookhouse, a blacksmith shop, stables, a fur-storage room, a storeroom for supplies, a stockade, and living quarters with stone fireplaces.

Fort Whoop-Up was open for business in the fall of 1870 and quickly became the central trading post for all of northern Montana and the Canadian territories. Free traders bearing such colourful names as J.B. (Waxy) Weatherwax, Spring Heel Jack, Slippery Dick, John (Liver Eating) Johnson, and Toe String Joe flocked there to buy supplies and whiskey, while natives came to trade their buffalo pelts for whiskey and other supplies. The aboriginal traders were rarely permitted inside the palisade — the only natives allowed through the front gates were women whose sexual services were traded for liquor — instead, they had to push their buffalo hides through a small wicket near the main gate. In exchange, the aboriginal traders could receive blankets, guns, pots, axes, ammunition, and other supplies. But the item that was in most demand was whiskey, which was produced inside the fort and called “Whoop-Up wallop.” An employee of the fort would stand at the trading window, with a tub of whiskey at his side, and dole out tin cups of the noxious brew. One buffalo pelt fetched two cups of whiskey. By the spring of 1871, wagonloads of buffalo pelts and other proceeds of the season’s trades were transported back to Fort Benton along a soon-to-be well-worn route that became appropriately known as the Whoop-Up Trail. The fort was tremendously successful, collecting upwards of nine thousand buffalo hides in less than a year. At the peak of the whiskey boom in the early 1870s, the trading post pulled in an annual revenue that has been estimated as high as $500,000.

There are various accounts of how Fort Whoop-Up received its name, one of which was because the aboriginal traders always “whooped it up” after getting drunk on the fort’s main trading currency. After a while, white suppliers or merchants trying to gain entrance into the fort would yell “Whoop up” when asking for the main gate to be opened. While the name stuck for the white traders, the Blackfoot tellingly called the area around Fort Whoop-Up “Many Ghosts” or “Many Died.” It is estimated that more than 140 native people died in the vicinity of the fort in 1871 and 1872 alone, mostly killed during drunken brawls or freezing to death in a stupor. The fort’s manager, Donald W. Davis, employed enforcers called “mad dogs” whose job was to patrol the fort with guns and clubs and ward off as many drunken and aggressive Indians as possible.

Rival traders took notice of Fort Whoop-Up’s success and the number of whiskey forts throughout
southern Alberta and Saskatchewan swelled. Their proliferation and infamy was also attracting the attention of Dominion officials in Ottawa. In an 1872 report, Colonel Patrick Robertson-Ross, an adjutant-general of the Canadian militia on a reconnaissance mission in the Northwest, wrote that the trading posts were in “direct opposition to the laws both of the United States and the Dominion of Canada.” He also documented the impact the whiskey traffic was having on native peoples and rued the lack of a government presence that allowed the traders to operate unfettered:

The demoralisation of the Indians, the danger to the white inhabitants, and injury resulting to the country from this traffic are very great. It is stated upon good authority that during the year 1871 eighty-eight of the Blackfeet Indians were murdered in drunken brawls among themselves, produced by whisky and other spirits supplied to them by those traders. At Fort Edmonton during the past summer whisky was openly sold to the Blackfeet and other Indians trading at the Fort by some smugglers from the United States who derive large profits there from, and on these traders being remonstrated with by the gentlemen in charge of the Hudson's Bay Post, they coolly replied that they knew very well that what they were doing was contrary to the laws of both countries, but as there was no force there to prevent them, they would do just as they pleased.

The trading posts had now become a serious political issue for the new Dominion Government in Ottawa, especially since most of the forts were being operated by Americans on land the Canadian government had recently acquired from the Hudson's Bay Company. It was also an issue for American officials who were concerned that the widespread lawlessness would spread south of the border. The threat of American intervention in the form of the cavalry policing this no man's land worried the Dominion Government even more, as it would greatly compromise its new-found sovereignty in an area that it deemed its “manifest destiny.” Robertson-Ross recommended that a chain of military posts with a force of 550 soldiers be established for the territories. Ottawa decided on sending a paramilitary police force, which would accomplish the dual objectives of bringing law and order to the territories while establishing the Dominion Government's sovereignty over the land. On May 3, 1873, Prime Minister John A. MacDonald introduced a bill into Parliament that led to the creation of the North West Mounted Police.

While the new police force was being assembled, an unspeakable tragedy occurred in the territories that added to the urgency of establishing a law enforcement presence there. The authors of this tragedy were not the whiskey traders, but another group of unscrupulous white interlopers who had descended upon the plains and who were known simply as “wolfers.” Along with the buffalo, wolf pelts were a valued commodity and the wolfers were notorious for using a method of killing their prey that was easy and inexpensive, but which was derided by the native peoples. They would shoot a buffalo and then poison the carcass with strychnine. The poisoned bait would guarantee a pack of dead wolves in no time. Aboriginals hated the wolfers, not
only because they respected the wolf, but because their own dogs were killed by the poisoned buffalo meat. The wolfers and aboriginals were constantly at war with one another, resulting in numerous deaths on either side. The Waterloo of this ongoing conflict took place in an area of southern Saskatchewan called Cypress Hills.

Straddling the border and rich in buffalo, wolves, bear, deer, and other wildlife, Cypress Hills had long been a favourite hunting ground for aboriginal bands. White hunters and traders were equally attracted to the area. Among them were Abel Farwell and Moses Solomon who built whiskey forts there. In May 1873, a man named Hammond, who was staying at one of these forts, discovered that his horse had gone missing. He suspected a band of Assiniboines camped near the fort and vowed to take two of their horses in retaliation. Along with a group of wolfers who had been drinking at the post, Hammond headed for the Assiniboine camp fully armed and fully intoxicated. By the time the men arrived at the native encampment, many of the braves were also drunk. Any hope of restraint or a peaceful settlement now flowed away in a river of whiskey. Who fired the first shot is uncertain. Regardless, according to Harold Horwood and Ed Butts, “the high-powered repeating rifles of the wolfers were too much for the northern Indians who were armed with ancient muzzle-loaders and some with only bows and arrows.” The wolfers fired randomly into the aboriginal camp. They murdered Chief Little Soldier and mounted his decapitated head on a pole. Four women, including the chief’s wife, were carried away to a nearby trading post and raped. By the time the smoke cleared, one wolfer named Ed Grace had died. By best estimates, thirty Assiniboines, including women and children, had been murdered. Upon departing, the wolfers tore down the aboriginal camp, buried Ed Grace, and rode on. In Ottawa, the Cypress Hills massacre was viewed as a crime of unspeakable proportion perpetrated by American desperadoes who were now taking over the Canadian West. The calamity only hastened the Dominion Government’s resolve to ensure the new police force could assume its duties as quickly as possible.

When the Mounties left Fort Dufferin in Manitoba on July 6, 1873, they had no idea what they were up against. In October 1874, after a long and arduous journey, a detachment of the NWMP under Assistant Commissioner James Macleod arrived at Fort Whoop-Up. Anticipating a prolonged battle, he ordered his men to deploy the cannons while others took up positions well beyond the range of the fort’s rifles and cannons. Still on horseback, Macleod rode straight ahead, towards the entrance of the fort, his men expecting rifles to blast from the loopholed palisade of the eerily silent enclosure any second. In a moment as anticlimactic as any in Canadian history, Macleod halted his horse, dismounted, and strode calmly through a wide-open gate. Once inside, he knocked on the door of the nearest building. A bearded, grey-haired man named Dave Akers opened the door and invited his guest to come right in. As the only white man at the post, Akers was running a small legitimate trade with local aboriginals, when he was not tending to the vegetable garden he had planted inside the fort. Long before the Mounted Police had drawn near, word had reached the whiskey traders that a large number of horsemen wearing red coats and drawing cannons were approaching from the east and they quickly packed up and quit the territories, many heading back to Montana. As the Mounties rode to the other trading posts, they found them equally deserted.

Despite the presence of the NWMP, there were still plenty of liquor smugglers and traders operating in the area. Among them was William Bond, who had his caravan full of whiskey casks, rows of rifles and revolvers, and piles of buffalo robes confiscated by the Mounties. Bond was fined $200 and sentenced to a short term in a makeshift log-cabin jail. The arrest of Bond, and four of his men, led to the discovery of one of the largest whiskey suppliers in the territory, John (Waxy) Weatherwax, a crafty and defiant Montana native who swore he would never be routed from the area. All five men arrested had been working for Weatherwax, who paid their fines, except that levied against Bond. Weatherwax continued to sell whiskey and even frequented Fort MacLeod, the newly built headquarters of the NWMP, to socialize and play cards. On February 17, 1875, Waxy’s welcome ran out. He was rounded up by a patrol of Mounted policemen who surprised the trader and two other men with a large stock of liquor and hundreds of furs and robes.
Waxy was handed a six-month prison term and fined $300. He also had his horses, whiskey, robes and other possessions impounded. The following year, after he had been released from jail, Waxy's body was found a few miles from Fort McLeod with a bullet lodged in his back.

The storied Fort Whoop-Up didn't survive much longer either. Akers continued his legitimate trading business while growing prizewinning cabbages in the compound. But, in 1888, fire destroyed much of the fort and six years later Akers was shot dead by a former business partner. John Healy remained in Montana until 1882 where he farmed and worked as a district chairman of the Democratic Party. In 1877, he was appointed sheriff of Choteau County and, in 1878, he became co-owner and editor of the *Fort Benton Record*, which regularly published anti-British and anti-NWMP editorials. In one that appeared in an 1875 edition, Healy called the NWMP “mounted grabbers of the spoil.” In 1885, he moved to Alaska where he went back into trading and operated a coastal schooner until around 1907. In 1908, while visiting his daughter in California, he became ill and died on September 16 of cirrhosis of the liver complicated by a bad heart.

**LAWS WELL CALCULATED TO SUPPRESS CRIME**

Unlike the swift end to the whiskey forts, the Mounties were less effective in enforcing the recently imposed prohibition laws in the territories and the new province of British Columbia. By the early 1880s, thousands of men were now employed on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The large number of transient labourers, the harsh and isolated conditions under which they worked, and the ban on the sale and possession of liquor within a 10-mile radius of the railway created a golden opportunity for bootleggers. Fuelled by the vast profits that could be made — a gallon of whiskey bought in the East for one dollar would be diluted and then sold in the West for as much as $50 — an underground trade in liquor west of Manitoba began to flourish once again.

At first, there was great optimism that the NWMP could curtail the supply of illegal booze along the railroad lines based on their past success with the whiskey forts. This confidence was reflected in the 1882 annual report of the force's commissioner:

> Our police work during the last year was very great. This has been largely caused by the
construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which employed upwards of 4,000 men during the whole summer, some of them exceptionally bad characters. I am, however, happy to report that, owing to there being no liquor obtainable, very little trouble was given us by them. The difficulty of preventing whisky being supplied them by disreputable characters entailed a great deal of extra duty on the force. Where large amounts of money are being expended among such men as railway navies it was to be expected that many attempts would be made to supply them with liquor. Had this not been effectually stopped, I fear I should have had to report a large number of depredations as having been committed. I venture to state that it is unparalleled in the history of railway building in a western country that not a single serious crime has been committed along the line of work; and I would also add that it is a matter of the utmost congratulation to the Government, inasmuch as it must reflect great credit in the enactment and carrying out of laws well calculated to suppress crime.

It wasn’t long before the optimistic spirit of the commissioner was dashed as bootleg whiskey began to flow freely into the work camps. The task set out for the Mounted Police was made all the more difficult because their jurisdiction was limited to a 10-mile stretch on each side of the railway route. Outside this limit, bootleggers, shanty bars, and saloons proliferated. Inside the dry zone, the sale and the consumption of liquor was omnipresent. Even a staunch advocate of the law like the legendary Superintendent Sam Steele — who commanded a NWMP detachment responsible for enforcement along the railway lines being constructed through the Rocky Mountains and into British Columbia — was well aware of the uphill battle that faced his small contingent of men in halting the liquor trade. He also acknowledged the frustrating irony of policing society’s morals, especially when these edicts went against the will of the majority: “We soon learned that compulsion will not make people sober,” he wrote. “The prohibitory law made more drunkards than if there had been an open bar and free drinks at every street corner.”

The Mounties were increasingly obstructed in their efforts to obtain the co-operation of the railway workers and settlers in combatting the illicit liquor trade. In complete contrast to his cheery account written just two years earlier, the NWMP commissioner penned a more dour assessment in his 1884 report:

The suppression of this traffic is the most disagreeable duty which the police are called upon to perform. On the one hand, they are condemned for omission or neglect of duty, and on the other for interested and undue severity. Under no circumstances, except in the case of a trader quarrelling with his associates, can information be obtained as to the possession or traffic of liquor. Settlers will not incur the odium of becoming informers, however much they may deprecate the existence of liquor manufacturers or traffic in their midst, and when I say they will not become informers, I mean that they will not give even secret information which will tend to the conviction of the law breakers. The information obtainable from the latter is meagre enough, for the profits of the traffic far exceed an occasional half fine paid to an informer, as may be supposed when a single five gallon keg of spirit easily changed hands at Standoff, the other day, at the admittedly low price of $60.

The challenges facing the NWMP in their prohibition enforcement duties continued even after the last spike had been driven into the ground in 1885. “The traffic in illicit liquor cannot, I regret to say, be said to be on the decline,” the commissioner wrote in his annual report for that year. “I may safely say that the majority of the people living in the North-West do not respect and do not hesitate to break the prohibitory liquor law.” By 1887, the frustration of the commissioner was equally palpable when he wrote, “The enforcement of the North West prohibitory law is more difficult than ever. The sympathy of many of the settlers being generally against us in this matter.”

In addition to the unsympathetic settler, the Mounties and other law enforcement agencies had to contend with the rise of well-organized bootlegging
gangs, some of which became quite powerful and violent. In Michipicoten Bay, a small town located along the northern shore of Lake Superior near present-day Wawa, Ontario, the head constable, Charles Wallace, used his position to become the town’s leading bootlegger, in part by arresting all his competitors. After his own digressions cost him his job as the town’s top law enforcer, he began to devote all his time to dispensing liquor. He assembled a gang of some of the toughest desperadoes in the county and, by October 1884, Wallace and his gang were selling liquor to all comers. In his quest to dominate the local trade he intimidated or beat up his rivals and bribed local law enforcement and railway company officials.

Two local lawmen who did make a determined effort to arrest Wallace and his gang — Canadian Pacific Railway agent Alexander Macdonald and Ontario magistrate Captain Burden — had their lives threatened and then, on October 9, 1884, were the target of an assassination attempt. The following day, notices were found posted around the railway office threatening death to Macdonald and all others who dared to enforce the liquor laws. The notice was signed “By Order of the Vigilance Committee.” Macdonald and Burden were not easily intimidated and continued their investigation into the liquor traffic. That night, a local office of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which at the time was the temporary home of Macdonald and Burden, was besieged by more than thirty masked men who riddled the building with gunfire. The assailants then stormed the local jail. Neither of their intended victims were injured, but by the next day the town was in the grips of Wallace and his men. Three newly appointed constables were fired upon (wounding two) while more notices from the Vigilance Committee promising death to CPR officials, magistrates, constables, and informers were posted around town.

An appeal was sent to the Crown Attorney in Sault Ste. Marie, who responded by ordering police from Toronto to restore order in Michipicoten Bay. Wallace’s gang bunkered down for a protracted battle, but they were no match for the armed police who were successful in seizing banned liquor and driving Wallace and many of his gang members out of town. Confident that the whiskey ring had been broken, the imported police contingent left town on October 30, having arrested only one gang member, Harry Cleveland, an American fugitive who had escaped from the Michigan State Penitentiary. Soon after the Toronto police left, Wallace and his gang re-emerged and even paraded down the street in a heavily armed show of force. Wallace himself was carrying four revolvers, a Winchester rifle, and a Bowie knife.

Despite the show of bravado, the real reason that Wallace and his men had returned to town was to hop on the next steamer before any more police showed up. After boarding the ferry, Wallace forced the captain to cruise to a port in Michigan, where they disembarked unarmed. This proved to be a costly mistake. A sheriff and his deputies from Ontario tracked Wallace and his men and captured them in Michigan without a fight. After being transported back to Canada, Wallace and several of his cohorts stood trial in Sault Ste. Marie in November 1884. All were acquitted, however, most likely because their arrest on the American side of the border by a Canadian law enforcement official was deemed illegal. Before long, Wallace was once again selling liquor near railway work camps. This time, with his gang greatly reduced in number, local police were able to capture Wallace, but not before he had shot a constable. The fugitive was escorted to Toronto by the very police officer he had wounded and, after standing trial, was sentenced to a prison term on February 21, 1885. He was released from jail within weeks after his conviction was quashed for reasons unknown to this day. After that, Wallace disappeared from public view.

Wallace and his gang were just one of many organized groups trafficking liquor on a scale that eclipsed that of the old whiskey forts. The steady rise in the number and size of liquor seizures documented in the annual reports of the NWMP attest to the growing scope of the contraband liquor trade. During the early part of the 1880s, the average seizure from a bootlegger was between 5 and 10 gallons. By 1886, the NWMP was routinely making seizures that averaged 50 gallons. Some were as much as 600 gallons. In 1882, the minister of customs fined Hartlaub, Smith & Company $600 for illegally importing spirits into Canada under the guise of vinegar. The value of the liquor seized amounted to $10,000. Law enforcement officials were also faced with what the NWMP commissioner called
a growing “ingenuity which is devoted to encompass
the transgression of the prohibitory law.” Liquor was
now being smuggled into the country and work camps
through a variety of methods, including books (“that
is, zinc cases made up in the shape of books”), tins of
sardines and oysters, loads of coal, oil cans and barrels,
steamer trunks, imitation Bibles, eggs, tins of fruit and
produce, salt and sugar barrels, false-bottomed buck-
ettes, the hollow soles of boots, and, on one occasion, a
coffin carried past the lowered heads of a respectful
departed police patrol. The Mounties also intercepted a consign-
ment of liquor labelled as canned apples addressed
to a justice of the peace and opened two barrels of
oatmeal destined for the Reverend Leo Gaetz only to
find that each contained 10 gallons of whiskey. Smug-
gling was also greatly facilitated by women’s fashion
of the time; one newspaper correspondent reported
that liquor was being surreptitiously transported into
the country by women who secreted the bottles under
their expansive dresses.

While the CPR was vigorously imposing and
enforcing prohibition laws, its own trains were being
used to transport liquor, often with the help of those
working for the railway company. As the NWMP com-
missioner wrote in his 1885 annual report, “there is
no doubt that there has been collusion on the part of
railway employees, or else this system of smuggling
liquor could not be carried on. A baggageman here
was tried, convicted and dismissed by the railway
company for having connection with this traffic.” In
this competitive and lucrative market, hijackings and
thefts were also common. In one instance, a railway
railway car full of alcohol, which had been left overnight on
a Calgary railway siding, was found empty when it
reached its destination. Holes had been drilled through
the bottom of the railway car penetrating the base of
the full barrels sitting on its floor.

Organized bootlegging and liquor smuggling
continued unabated for the rest of the 19th century
and expanded eastward. A June 17, 1892, article in the
New York Times declared, “the traffic in contraband
whisky in Lower Canada has long been carried on by
smugglers, who own a fleet of crafts to carry on the
trade, and have so far, with few important exceptions,
successfully evaded the vigilance of the customs of-
icers, who, however, have hitherto been inadequately
equipped to put down the traffic. Immense quantities
of alcohol over-proof are sent from Boston and other
points in the States up the Gulf of St. Lawrence and
sold there without payment of duty.” The article goes
on to report that “three thousand gallons have been
seized in Quebec District alone within a short time.”
Liquor smuggling was deemed so widespread in the
Gulf of St. Lawrence that armed customs cutters were
commissioned “under orders from the Dominion
Government to begin a crusade against those who
seek to evade the tariff laws by bringing in whisky
from Boston and other ports in the States by vessels
by way of the Gulf.”

AN ESTABLISHED INDUSTRY
The brisk cross-border traffic in booze invigorated
a smuggling trade between Canada and the United
States that was already pulsating due to the high tar-
iffs imposed on goods imported into both countries.
Smuggling was also bolstered by the completion of
the Grand Trunk Railway, which, starting in 1860,
was running between various American and Can-
adian cities. The railway provided a fast and efficient
means to transport contraband, while also allowing
for far greater quantities to be hauled. In one operation
detected in 1877, Grand Trunk rail cars would be
loaded in the eastern U.S. with merchandise cleared by
customs for delivery to the West and bonded through
Canada. Once in Quebec, the seal of the bonded cars
was broken and their contents removed (and later
sold on the Canadian black market). If that was not
enough, goods to be smuggled into the U.S. from
Canada would be placed in the now-empty rail cars.
The cars were then bonded with counterfeit American
and Canadian customs seals and the contraband was
transported back into the United States.

By the final years of the 19th century, a wide var-
ety of undeclared goods was flooding into Canada
from the U.S. Even when tariffs on many goods were
reduced in the late 1880s, it had little impact because,
as the New York Times observed in 1888, smuggling
had “taken root as an established industry” in Can-
da. The list of merchandise being smuggled into the
country resembled the inventory of a dry-goods store
and more: cotton, clothes, shoes, boots, silks, textiles,
coal, and even oil and kerosene “are the staple articles
conveyed across. “One efficient method of smuggling American kerosene across the border was discovered by Canadian authorities in 1883. While the temptation to avoid paying the $3.50-a-barrel duty on American oil was great, the logistical difficulties of transporting a large enough quantity to make it profitable appeared to be a significant deterrent. One enterprising group in Michigan developed a technique that overcame this obstacle to profitability. They simply placed the barrels in the Detroit River on the American side, joined twelve of them together like a log boom, and then towed the floating freight across the river to the Canadian side.

The size, organization, and sophistication of smuggling operations was now unprecedented. “It is not to be supposed that these smugglers are a ‘fly-by-night’ people,” an 1892 edition of the New York Times reads, “as their operations have been reduced to a system that has baffled for a long time and still does baffle the efforts of the officers to whose ears rumours of the illegal sets come. Years of practice have enabled them to carry on their working in a workmanlike manner.” In 1877, federal officials in the U.S. identified a Montreal-based smuggling operation coordinated by a D. McClannaghan, which he began while employed as an express messenger on the Grand Trunk Railway between Portland, Maine, and Montreal. He was discharged after his extracurricular activities were detected in 1865 by company officials, but his smuggling operations only expanded after that. In co-operation with an American Customs inspector, railway baggage handlers, and telegraph operators in Montreal, he devised a system of secreting goods into the United States duty free. He would obtain from the baggage masters duplicates of claim checks, which were then provided to the corrupt U.S. Customs inspector who would stamp the tickets duty paid. One claim check would be sent to a customer in the United States receiving the goods, while the other would be attached to the package to be delivered. McClannaghan then used the services of the telegraph operator to send a coded message to the customer, such as: “Pay note 7,086 S,” which indicated he had shipped goods with the claim check number 7,086 by way of Springfield. In this case, the buyer would present the duplicate baggage check at the railway station in Springfield and receive his goods without question or payment of duties. As the New York Times reported, “McClannaghan shipped anything that was called for — silks, laces, cloth, perfumery, &c — and he was so sure of the perfection of his arrangements that he always insured delivery. No money was asked until after the receipt of the goods. Then he required payment directly to a bank in Montreal. So successful has he been that he owns the Express Hotel and an entire block of ground in Montreal and is estimated to be worth $250,000, all of which he has made out of the commissions on his smuggling ventures.”

Despite the sheer variety of goods smuggled between the two countries, by the end of the century, tobacco products had become the most popular contraband in Canada, due to the imposition of an import duty to protect Canadian cigarette manufacturers. The duty raised the cost of a small package of cigarettes imported into Canada to ten cents while in the U.S. they could be purchased at half that price. The result, according to a 1895 Toronto Star article entitled “Smuggle the vile cigarette,” was that tobacco smugglers were now “doing business on a tremendously large scale, bringing the goods both to Toronto and to Montreal.” In 1898, Dominion officials broke up one of the biggest tobacco smuggling operations to date, involving the illegal transport of thousands of cigars from Puerto Rico into Canada, via Halifax. The contraband cigars were delivered to a Halifax grocery store and from there distributed throughout Nova Scotia. The cigars were also shipped to New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario. “So well and systematically was the enterprise organized,” the Toronto Star wrote, “that the goods were distributed by express and freight over the Intercolonial and other railways, and the payments collected by draft through the banks.” Canada Revenue officers were dispatched to search tobacconists, grocers, and the barrooms of hotels throughout the Maritimes, Ontario, and Quebec for the contraband cigars. The result was “the biggest seizures of smuggled tobacco ever brought into Canada.”

Canada was also used as a conduit to smuggle goods from other countries into the United States. In 1894, authorities in Toronto unearthed an extensive scheme that stretched from Syria and Turkey to Canada and the United States. Arrests were made in
all of these countries, including the ringleaders who, according to the *Toronto Star* “are natives of Syria with unpronounceable names.” As the *Star* reported, the illegal imports were—

the very finest products of Syria and Turkey, consisting of spreads, tapestries, shawls, coverlets, and other fancy articles hand embroidered in gold, and the duty on this class of goods is 60 per cent. The modus operandi of the smugglers was to have the goods shipped from Constantinople to Montreal, Hamilton, and Toronto, where they were unpacked and sent forward in small packages to Windsor, where the smugglers concealed them on their persons and crossed over to Detroit. The rest was then easy. Express parcels to New York and other Eastern points speedily carried the contraband articles to the best markets, where they were disposed of to large dealers in Oriental goods.

Canada’s role as an international smuggling conduit into America prompted the U.S. Secret Service to station one of its agents in Toronto in 1893. His mission, according to the *New York Times*, was to “locate a well-organized gang of smugglers, who for at least a year, have been evading the United States customs officials, sending in large quantities of opium and jewelry.” The head of the smuggling group, who resided in Honolulu, “was shipping largely quantities of opium, pearls, moonstones, and other precious stones to Vancouver, whence duty having been paid on parts of the shipments to the Canadian Government, the goods were shipped to points along the Canadian border and afterward smuggled across the line.”

By the start of the new century, it seemed like every conceivable consumer product was being illegally transported into and out of Canada through any available mode of transportation and facilitated by an imaginative range of concealment and camouflage. In a 1904 article entitled, “The modern art of smuggling,” the *Globe* newspaper summarized the breadth and versatility of this underground industry. A favourite means of smuggling diamonds into the U.S. was to “ship them from Paris or London to Montréal, charging no duty on them, and then to take them secretly across the border into the United States.” The smuggled diamonds would be “hidden in the heels of shoes, in cakes of soap, in the hollow legs of dolls, in false calves, in corks of perfumery bottles, and even in cheeses.” Female smugglers wrapped the diamonds “in tissue paper just the colour of their hair, in which they were well concealed.” One elderly man “is said to have employed with great success a hollow cane, with which he made twelve trips across the Atlantic, on occasions carrying as much as $50,000 worth of stones in this way. He was afraid to try the thirteenth, and so bought a new cane.” In addition to diamonds, “silks, laces, and shawls have been brought over in bales of hops. Iron tubing has been employed to conceal valuable goods; likewise loaves of bread, cork legs, the handles of shaving brushes, and concertinas.” One “reverend-looking gentleman with white whiskers” was found to be carrying a Bible that was hollowed out and filled with watches. “Oil cans have been made with compartments to contain fine French brandy, and one dog has been known to wear the skin of a slightly bigger dog, with laces hidden between his own and the borrowed integument.” Customs officers found “imitation lumps of coal filled with cigars” while “opium has been hidden in organs, and in bananas still hanging on the stalk, as well as in sausages and in the hump of a supposed hunchback.” Mattresses have been stuffed “full of silks, and twenty yards of point lace were discovered on one occasion beneath a porous plaster on a man’s back.” In addition to the railway, smuggling was greatly facilitated by transatlantic passenger steamships and even navy vessels. The crews were the most frequent transgressors and took advantage of the many potential hiding places on board. “Officers of the United States navy are chronic smugglers, taking advantage of a certain amount of latitude which is allowed to them in fetching from foreign lands goods which are supposed to be for their own personal use. Under this disguise they are accustomed to fill many commissions for their friends in the way of purchasing rugs, silks, wines and cigars.” Finally, according to the *Globe*, “one of the strangest forms of smuggling is that of illegally importing Chinamen.” In one case “a dozen
Celestials were found hidden under the boilers of a steamer bound from Vancouver to San Francisco. They were literally roasted and their cries attracted the inspector’s attention, who came on board at Port Townsend. Some of them died afterward.”

A DESPERADO OF THE WORST DESCRIPTION

Along with smuggling, the theft of horses and cattle was a chronic problem during the waning years of the 19th century. With the opening of the Canadian West for settlement, farming, and railway construction, the demand for and value of horses and cattle rose greatly, which increased their attractiveness to thieves. The new pioneer settlements also had to contend with horse thieves from local natives, who adapted their expertise garnered after years of reciprocating horse theft that occurred between rival aboriginal bands. In his annual report for 1883, the NWMP commissioner described how Cypress Hills “was infested by horse thieves” most of whom he identified as “American Indians from the Peigan Reservation, 90 miles west of Fort Shaw, Montana.” A large number of horses were stolen “from the Indians and white men in our country;” he wrote and “in some cases, the thefts committed were daring,” including one from a stable at the NWMP Fort Walsh settlement. Judging by the commissioner’s report for 1884, the problem of horse theft appeared to be increasing in the territories:

Further west, in the vicinity of Wood Mountain, I was informed on reliable authority that a great many horses had been stolen. Settlers there are now bringing their horses north, as they find they cannot hold them, horse stealing never having been carried on so boldly as it has been this season. On arrival at Moosomin I found the inhabitants in a state of terror, owing to the presence of strangers in the village who were looked upon as desperadoes. With reference to the remarks that horse stealing has never been so prevalent before, it is clear that the effect is explainable by the cause. As the country becomes more and more settled, so many more temptations will be presented to the marauding desperadoes, who have not to face, on this side of the line, the contingency by bullet or rope which attends their exercise of their calling on the other.

The theft of livestock necessitated a certain level of organization, regardless of how many heads were being stolen. Planning was necessary to identify a ranch from which the horses or cattle would be stolen. The theft had to be timed when ranch hands were not around; alternatively, the hands were recruited by the rustlers as co-conspirators. There also had to be a sufficient number of men to herd the livestock. A well-planned escape route, which included hiding places big enough to conceal the stolen animals overnight, was obligatory. Cattle and horses stolen in southern Canada would often be smuggled across the U.S. border, which required further stealth and organization. A market was required for the stolen stock and, in order to cover their larcenous tracks, the rustlers had to re-brand the animals. Once stolen horses were herded, the NWMP commissioner wrote in 1884, they would be driven away at the “utmost speed, the thieves riding and relieving each horse in turn, until the American frontier is crossed. Any horses that drop out from exhaustion are abandoned. With pre-arranged plans a thorough knowledge of the country, and accurate information as to the whereabouts of the police, the thieves make straight for their objective point and trust to their own determination to tide them over any unforeseen difficulties.” Crossing the border also meant that the rustlers were out of the grasp of Canadian law enforcement. But this strategy was not without risk. Once on U.S. soil they were now susceptible to the vigilante justice doled out by American ranchers. One NWMP inspector reported to the commissioner that he had reports of fifteen or twenty horse thieves being “linched in the Missouri River and Musselshell regions.” Although these numbers were dismissed as exaggerated, the inspector insisted, “there is no doubt that some were hanged, and others shot, but not in sufficient numbers to break up the organized gang of horse thieves.”

Compared to horses, the theft of cows and steers required even greater organization and covertness because the rustlers could not rely on the element of speed when escaping (although stolen cattle was more difficult to detect than stolen horses because the cows
could be butchered and their hides destroyed relatively quickly). The so-called Cunningham, Grady and Foster Gang, was one of the more notorious bands of cattle rustlers operating in northern Wyoming and Montana as well as southern Saskatchewan and Alberta during the late 1800s. Once a part of the Hole in the Wall Gang, Cunningham was arrested and put on trial when he was caught red-handed illegally branding eighty head of stolen cattle.

In addition to stolen livestock, horses and cattle legitimately purchased in Canada or the United States would be smuggled across the border to avoid duties. In a typical case reported by the NWMP in 1886, a herd of twenty horses and mares belonging to a Canadian settler was seized "for evading payment of Customs." The horses were purchased at Sun River in Montana, "and driven into the country by an unfrequented trail, crossing the Canadian Pacific Railway west of Swift Current, and then following down the north of the boundary." The routes used for smuggling liquor or other goods were often used by horse thieves and cattle rustlers. In a letter dated August 25, 1883, a NWMP superintendent stationed in Maple Creek, Alberta, wrote, "there is more horse stealing going on now more than I have ever known before, and horses are stolen from this vicinity nearly every night." In addition, "a great deal of whiskey" was smuggled from Montana to Medicine Hat and the same trail "evidently used by whiskey smugglers and horse thieves."

One of the largest bands of cattle rustlers and smugglers in the Canadian West was headed by brothers Samuel and John Spencer, who one U.S. Treasury official characterized as "wealthy and unscrupulous men." Working under the auspices of a cattle company called Spencer Brothers & Co. Ltd., the two operated a ranch at Milk River in southern Alberta that was strategically located close to the American border. From this ranch, according to a NWMP superintendent in Lethbridge, the brothers and their hired help "inaugurated a systematic course of smuggling cattle (A) From Canada into United States, and (B) From the United States into Canada." In a February 4, 1902, letter to the Minister of the Interior of the Dominion Government, the comptroller of the NWMP wrote, "we have had very strong suspicion for some time past that the Messrs Spencer Bros., who have a ranching lease in the Milk River country close to the boundary, have been systematically playing fast and loose with the Customs Regulations of the United States and Canada, to enable them to take advantage of the Chicago or Canadian markets, whichever at the moment happens to be paying the higher price for stock."

In April 1900, cowboys working for the Spencer brothers stole about four hundred head of cattle from Montana ranches, which they then smuggled into Alberta. In October of that year, another seven hundred were stolen and transported across the border. In February 1901, some American ranchers complained to the NWMP after Spencer and Company ranch hands gathered up some two thousand head of stray cattle in Montana and drove them across Milk River at a time when the ice was perilously thin. When confronted by an American rancher, one of the Spencers' lead hands told him that he was going to drive them across the river even at the risk of drowning them all. As it turned out, this was no idle threat. Almost half of the cattle fell through the ice on the drive. The following spring, when the dead cows thawed out, it took months to fish the bloated and foul-smelling carcasses from the river.

Despite numerous complaints and sufficient evidence as to their smuggling activity, the harshest punishment inflicted on the brothers were fines. Although they could easily pay them, they regularly turned to their stable of high-priced lawyers to fight the levies in court. "We'll law 'em," was Sam Spencer's usual retort when faced with a fine. In 1902, Canadian customs officials seized 587 head of mixed cattle from the Spencer brothers. Their cash value at the time was upwards of $20,000 and government authorities demanded a bond of $10,000 to release the cattle. The amount was paid by the Spencers, but after they undertook legal action, $4,000 of the bond was returned to the brothers, who then launched another suit for the remaining $6,000. In commenting on recent charges being laid against the Spencer brothers, the NWMP commanding officer at "E" Division in Calgary wrote that he was "certain from the outset that that Firm would contest every step." As part of their numerous criminal and civil trials, the wealthy brothers were also accused of "buying up testimony if given the opportunity."
A FISTFUL OF TERROR

You see, in this world there's two kinds of people, my friend. Those with loaded guns and those who dig. You dig.
—The Man With No Name in Sergio Leone's 1967 film, The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

At the foot of Long Lake, a few miles from the town of Kamloops, British Columbia, four young men camped on a bitterly cold day, a few weeks before Christmas in 1879. The oldest, a tall, strapping man of twenty-five with a black beard, heavy brows, and dark complexion was Allen McLean. Also at the camp were his two younger brothers, Charlie, a dusky seventeen-year-old with coal-coloured hair that sat atop a squat face highlighted by high cheek bones and the beginnings of a post-pubescent moustache, and Archie, the impish, baby-faced fifteen-year-old, whose fair complexion and sandy hair belied any relation to his two older siblings. The fourth member of the group was Alex Hare, the childhood pal and inseparable companion of the three brothers who seemed to wear “a look of ineffable sadness.”

They had barely started their campfire when the sound of hoof beats sheared the silence of the backwoods. Atop the approaching horse was L. William Palmer, a Stump Lake rancher who had recently lost a black stallion and rode into the camp after seeing one tied to a nearby tree. But as Palmer stared down the barrels of two cocked shotguns, he chose not to press the matter directly with the group and galloped away. Instead, he travelled a short distance into Kamloops where he laid a complaint with the justice of the peace, John Edwards. Palmer's accusations were entirely justified and in addition to his own horse, the four were also in possession of another stolen horse, which they had liberated from Palmer's neighbour. In addition, the young men were well stocked with saddles, bridles, guns, ammunition, food, and...
cooking utensils. All of it had been stolen from homes and stores in the sparsely settled country between Cache Creek, Kamloops and the Upper Nicola Valley.

Palmer’s discovery of the encampment signalled the beginning of the end for the young thieves, who had victimized the people of the Kamloops region for close to two years and who would go on to be remembered as one of British Columbia’s most villainous outlaw gangs.

If ever there were three boys who had a hole pre-dug for them, it was the McLean brothers. Their childhood was filled with poverty, segregation, neglect, and violence. Their father, Donald McLean, came to Canada from Ireland and worked as a trader with the Hudson’s Bay Company. He was an arrogant and abrasive man who seemed to clash with everyone he met. He married two successive native wives, although he despised aboriginals. His first wife gave birth to six children. But he abandoned her and, in 1854, took up with another woman. She brought five more little ones into a soon-to-be fatherless world. In 1864, Donald McLean was shot and killed while he and a posse of other vigilantes were hunting down a Chilcotin Indian suspected of murdering a Hudson’s Bay employee.

When their father died, Allen, Charlie, and Archie were all under the age of ten. Archie was just a baby. The boys grew up as neglected itinerants: alone, estranged from their mother, and with no land, no money, and no education. Only Archie had learned to write his name. Because they were half-breeds they did not fit into either white or aboriginal society. They were rootless with no city or town, no street, no walls, no square foot of earth to call their home. They drifted from ranch to ranch working sporadically as cowboys and shepherds, but could not find steady work. The boys did gain plenty of skills while living on the wild frontier that would later prove to be of immense value to them; they were experts when it came to horses, having practically grown up in the saddle, and because they had to hunt to eat, they were all excellent shots.

Like their father, the boys drank heavily, were quarrelsome, and made enemies easier than friends. The outcasts cursed the seemingly “pure” societies of the white towns and aboriginal reserves for their inability to understand the depths of their exclusion. These “sons of a thousand fathers” became social castaways who could rely only on one another. Not only could they see no path ahead of them, they seemed to have sensed there was none. “Having settled into a drifting existence, the McLeans slowly entered into a collision course with the ranchers and townspeople around them.” When they could not find legitimate work, they turned to stealing. “They made off with anything that could be used or sold — money, livestock, food, clothing, firearms. They sometimes beat the victims of their robberies. They were tough, feared nothing, and had no sense of pity or compassion; they were as merciless with the world as the world had been with them.”

In 1877, fifteen-year-old Charlie was arrested after biting off the end of the nose of a man with whom he was fighting and was sent to the Kamloops jail for three months. But he was able to escape and once reunited with his two brothers and Alex Hare,
the four began a larcenous rampage across the Kootenays, robbing farms, ranches, and even pedestrians. From G. Wilson, they stole a saddle and provisions. Four racehorses and several saddles were pilfered from John Wilson’s Savona ranch. A horse and a saddle disappeared from the Kamloops aboriginal reserve. A shepherd named James Kelly was robbed of a bottle of brandy and a loaf of freshly baked bread. The storeroom at Savona’s Ferry was broken into and its provisions were taken. Blankets and armaments were removed from the ranch of Thadeus Harper. James Cavanaugh of Cache Creek lost several items of clothing while George Caughill and Tom Cavanagh were deprived of their saddles. The four desperadoes even crossed the American border where they stole cattle and shaved off the hair of a native woman, a sign of contempt. One night, the boys came across a Chinese man on a lonely road and beat him so savagely he nearly died. They took from him what cash he did have, plus a bottle of whiskey.

With little law enforcement in the region and with nothing to lose, the McLean gang wreaked havoc throughout the years 1878 and 1879. They were unleashed onto society like a pack of wild dogs and were as difficult to catch as a stampeding herd of mustangs. They robbed at gunpoint and left nothing but fear and destitution in their wake. They swore to kill anyone who tried to stop them and constantly threatened to ride into Kamloops and burn it to the ground. They promised to incite an uprising among the local aboriginal bands. “Many Interior residents would as soon hear that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse were coming as learn that the McLean gang was near.” A Victoria Daily Colonist reporter lamented, “This is a fine state of things, to be terrorized over by four brats, who have threatened to burn the jail in order to destroy the records of their deeds. If these vagabonds are not either arrested or driven to American territory, it may become pretty hot for us. This is a nice state of things for us, and a nice Government to allow it. At present nothing is being done and everybody scarcely likes to leave his house for fear of being robbed.”

Arrest warrants were issued in 1878, first in the light in August and a second in the dark of November. But neither brought any immediate justice. The state of law enforcement in the district was simply too weak. Kamloops and the surrounding area had only one part-time constable, John Tannatt Ussher, the son of a Montreal Episcopalian minister who came west to join the Yukon gold rush and then settled down as a rancher on the North Thompson River. Despite his slender and frail appearance, Ussher was a determined man and took his job very seriously. He eventually was able to round up Allan, Charlie, and Archie and charged them with horse stealing and larceny. While waiting in the local jail for their trial, the boys escaped by climbing over the prison wall with a rope thrown from the other side by Alex Hare.

Ussher formed a posse to find the escapees. Among the members of the party were local ranchers John McLeod and William Palmer. On December 8, 1879, after tracking hoofprints in the newly fallen snow, the posse saw four horses tied to a tree. They also spied a rifle barrel sticking out from another tree. At the end of the rifle was Charlie McLean. A sharp whistle was heard and a single gunshot rang out in the stillness of the forest. The bullet cut past Palmer and hit McLeod in the cheek, knocking him from his horse. After the first shot, a barrage of bullets exploded from behind the trees. Palmer, who was armed with a shotgun, began to fire back at Allen McLean, who crouched behind one tree as he reloaded his gun. Bullets from Ussher’s shotgun pierced the tree like nails through a cross. Confident he could reason with the boys, Ussher walked unarmed towards Alex Hare. This would be a misjudgement with tragic consequences. After discharging his pistol in the direction of Palmer and McLeod, Alex came out to confront Ussher. He had a pistol in one hand and a Bowie knife in the other. He lunged at the constable. The two grappled. Ussher quickly gained the upper hand. That was until Archie McLean snuck up from behind and, at short range, fired his revolver at the constable’s head. At almost the same moment, Hare plunged his knife into the lawman’s cheek and continued slashing at Ussher’s face until he was unrecognizable.

Although in pain from his own facial wounds, John McLeod continued to unload his shotgun in the direction of the young outlaws. But he suffered
a second gunshot wound, this one in the leg. After close to thirty shots were exchanged, the posse retreated to Kamloops for more help, leaving the body of Ussher in the snow. Once back in town, twenty additional armed horsemen were recruited and soon they were galloping out of town to deal with the outlaws once and for all.

When the reinforced posse arrived at the camp just after dark, they found the fire still burning. Not too far away lay Ussher’s frozen body, his perforated head surrounded by tufts of maroon-coloured snow. The outlaws had stripped him of his coat, boots, and gloves. The hunters made another grisly discovery not too far away: the body of the shepherd James Kelly. He had been killed in cold blood. After surrounding a cabin where the boys had taken refuge, the posse was able to capture the four by smoking them out. They were arrested, charged, and escorted to New Westminster. After a short trial, they were found guilty of the murder of John Ussher. All four were decreed to die.

“The sentence of this Court is that you be taken to the place from whence you came, and from thence to the place of execution, and be there hanged by the neck until you are dead,” the judge proclaimed to a hushed courtroom. “Sentence to be carried out within a period of not less than two months’ time. May God have mercy upon your souls.”

“It’s a well-deserved sentence, Your Lordship,” Alex Hare was heard to say.

On January 31, 1881, the four young men were executed in a group hanging. As customary, photos of each of the condemned were taken just before. While still wearing their leg irons, each gazed into the camera with a calm, rapt expression like a monk in a monastery. At the time, Allan was twenty-four and Charlie and Alex were seventeen. At fifteen years of age, Archie was the youngest person ever to hang in British Columbia. Never, in the short history of the province, were such young men “wasted so bad.”

**HIGH NOON AT NEW HAZELTON**

_The commandments say “Thou shalt not kill,” but we hire men to go out and do it for us. The right and the wrong seem pretty clear here. But if you’re asking me to tell my people to go out and kill and maybe get themselves killed, I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say. I’m sorry._

—The Minister Dr. Mahin in Fred Zinnemann’s 1952 film, *High Noon*

To the townspeople he was known simply as “Doc.” Despite carrying a muscular physique on his ample six-foot frame, the Reverend Donald Redmond (Doc) McLean was a soft-spoken, unassuming man. His dark hair, brushed straight back, parted in the middle and flattened to the scalp, clung to a smooth, broad forehead. His deep blue eyes were set in a long hard face with heavy bones underlined by an uncompro-mising chin with a cleft so cavernous it could hide a .45-calibre bullet and a jaw so square it seemed to transcend geometrical perfection. He was as out of place in the small British Columbian town as an ageless Grecian statue.

He was born in Nova Scotia and graduated from Knox College at Dalhousie University. But to the people of New Hazelton, British Columbia, his adopted home, he was the preacher who taught the Gospel to the Presbyterians every Sunday, and the horse doctor who worked for the railway contractors the rest of the week. He had a profound love for animals, which he consummated when he graduated from the Ontario Veterinary College, and put on display every time he tended to one of God’s sick or injured four-legged creatures. When he wasn’t caring for animals, he was killing them; he loved to fish and hunt and was known to survive in the wild for days with nothing but a piece of twine, a Bowie knife, and his British army–issued Lee-Enfield .303 rifle.

New Hazelton is a small town in north-west British Columbia, where nothing really
important happens. Nestled in the bosom of the snow-capped Coastal Mountain range, the town was built on the precipice of the new railway and surrounded by picturesque natural beauty, with the 3,000-foot walls of the rugged Rocher de Boule mountains, the meandering salmon-filled Bulkley River, and the wind-swept Hagwilget canyon, named after the Gitksan word for “peaceful, deliberate people.”

On one sunny April morning, Doc was walking peacefully up New Hazelton’s main road, bucket in hand, heading towards the community’s water pump. The drowsy smell of the hazelnut trees the town was named after hung in a misty morning air that was occasionally stirred by a chilly wind off the mountaintops. “As he strolled along the dusty street he little realized that he was about to exchange the water bucket for his rifle, a weapon he handled as skilfully as the bible.”

Around the same time, Mr. Al Gaslin, a manager of a local contracting firm working on the railway, had just entered the local branch of the Union Bank of Canada. The bank had just opened for business and Mr. Gaslin was chatting casually with Mr. Bishop, one of the tellers standing behind the counter.

The bank was as unpretentious as the town and its people. It was a small, low-slung log building with bars at the windows and a wooden-plank sidewalk that ran along its perimeter and out onto Pugsley Street. The bank branch stood on the edge of town, away from most of the other buildings, but it did a flourishing business, especially during the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway.

Soon after the bank’s doors opened that morning, two men walked up the main road heading straight towards the log building. Two others appeared from the edge of the lush, well-watered forest that sat between the rear of the bank and two ranges of rugged hills. Two more men came from the east side of the building. All six men, “hard-eyed and unshaven,” could have easily passed for one of the many railway workers or miners who regularly attended the bank to deposit their paycheque. However, “they weren’t depositors, these six. They were bent on withdrawing. In addition, a rifle, carelessly cradled under one man’s arm, and revolvers in the hands of his five companions suggested they were going to dispense with the usual bookkeeping formalities.”

Inside the bank, Mr. Gaslin had $50 in cash, a few cheques, and his deposit slip in hand. Before Mr. Bishop, the teller, could take the money from his customer, two of the armed men crashed through the bank’s front doors. Four others appeared almost instantaneously and took up positions at various points inside. The final gang member stood watch outside on the wooden sidewalk.

In a slurred, guttural attempt at English, one of the armed intruders shouted, “Hanz up!” Mr. Bishop and his fellow bank employee, Mr. Ray Fenton, raised their hands in shock.

The man yelling out the commands thrust one arm towards Mr. Gaslin, and greedily snatched his deposits from him. In some foreign language, he barked orders to his accomplices. Two of the men replied by leaping behind the teller’s counter. Without hesitation, they pushed Mr. Bishop out of their way, sending him reeling to the floor. They then ripped open the cash drawers and seized the cash inside.

The leader of the bandits then ordered Mr. Bishop to open the safe. The frightened teller tried to explain to the threatening, gun-waving bank raider that a brand-new steel safe had been installed following a previous holdup, and as a safety precaution he had been given only half of the combination. The other half was known only to the bank’s manager, Mr. E.B. Tatchell.

Despite the ruckus inside the bank, all was quiet in the surrounding town. “So far no one in the town suspected anything amiss at the bank. The unshaven lookout man in his work clothes resembled any other construction laborer waiting for a friend in the bank.” The only difference was that this man was holding a Winchester under his mackinaw.

Inside, an exasperated Mr. Bishop was trying to explain to the gunmen that he could not open the safe. Suddenly, without warning, one of the bandits aimed his gun at the teller’s feet and began shooting.
Outside the bank, the manager, Mr. Tatchell, was nearing when he heard the loud noises coming from inside.

“Sounded like shots,” he said, turning to Doc McLean who just a moment earlier had stopped to chat with the new bank manager. Doc’s perceptive eyes then glimpsed the idle figure fidgeting nervously on the wooden planks just outside the bank’s front doors. In a blink of an eye, the man slipped a long gun from underneath his soiled jacket.

“It’s a holdup, Doc,” said Mr. Tatchell. “Over at the bank!”

Mr. Tatchell ran to take cover, while Doc quickly turned, threw aside his bucket, and sprinted towards his ministry, a small modest room above the dry-goods store. He was not running to take cover or to say a prayer. It was there that he kept his rifle.

Doc did not ponder his obligations. He did not shirk from his duty, nor would he waiver in the face of danger or doubt his cause. Some men may have waited for the lawmen to arrive. Some may have hesitated under such circumstances or questioned the very futility of intervening. Some may be apt to say cynically, “You risk your skin catching killers and the juries turn them loose so they can come back and shoot at you again. If you’re honest you’re poor your whole life and in the end you wind up dying all alone on some dirty street. For what? For nothing.”

But unlike Cain, Doc would not forsake his loved ones. Nor would they forsake him. The people of New Hazelton did not have to be talked into upholding law and order. They knew it was their right and their responsibility.

With the courage of a true frontier settler, Mrs. McLean handed her husband his rifle almost as soon as he entered the door of his small chapel. She was a small-boned woman with short wheat-blond hair that was pulled straight back into a large chignon that did not quite cover the back of her head. A yellow ribbon looped around her hair twice. She was wearing her favourite cinnamon-coloured crinoline day dress trimmed with silver buttons. Her high cheekbones, fair complexion, and ocean-blue eyes were suggestively Scandinavian and she carried herself with a self-assuredness that would have been cockiness in one less graceful or humble.

As Doc hurried out of the room, Mrs. McLean stoically grasped the lapels of her husband’s vest and looked deep into his eyes. She pressed her face to his. Her long eyelashes gently caressed his cheeks like the wings of a small butterfly. As she pulled her face away, they spoke not a word as they lovingly stared at one another. They didn’t have to speak. She could read everything about her husband in his eyes, which simply said, “I’ve got to, that’s the whole thing.”

The only law enforcement official for the district was miles away. But the brave townspeople from the heartland of British Columbia — already victims of a bank robbery just six months earlier in which the young teller, Mr. Jock McQueen, nearly died from a shot to the head — were not waiting for the police to arrive. “This time it was going to be different. The robbers would not be the only ones shooting.”

As the word of the robbery spread, the townspeople emerged from every business, home, and livery, with rifle or pistol in hand. They took up positions in every shielded spot that surrounded the besieged bank. Women showed their mettle by passing along ammunition to their menfolk. “Open season on bank robbers!” Mr. Harry Summer yelled. One barbershop customer receiving a morning shave threw his cover aside, leaped out of his reclined chair, grabbed his gun, and took position behind a door post “one side of his face still lathered, a rifle butt pressing the other.” As Doc raced back along Pugsley Street, restaurant owner Mr. Harry Lewis ran across his path before disappearing into his diner. Seconds later he reappeared, gun in hand.

Realizing the bank was surrounded by the well-armed and implacable townspeople, the panicked lookout man sprinted from his sentry post outside and hurried into the bank to warn his partners. “He was barely through the door when the first barrage smashed into the building. Fenton and Bishop threw themselves to the floor while the robbers began returning the fire.” The gunfight was on!

As returned gunfire streamed out of the bank onto the street, Doc, with his rifle in one hand and
a fistful of shells in the other, weaved and dodged his way through the street and threw his lanky body behind a pile of solid galena ore that was sitting in front of the office of Silver Standard Mine. The local mining broker had just hauled the deposit from the Silver Cup Mine to advertise its rich claim. The mound of minerals was large enough to hide Doc in his entirety, solid enough to deflect any bullets, and was a mere 180 feet from the bank, well within the range of his high-powered rifle. After pushing his back up against the ore, he caught his breath, and poked his head above the pile, just in time to see the bank doors explode open and six armed men burst out.

With their guns blazing, the desperate bandits made a break for the nearby bush. One of their bullets ricocheted off the pile of ore and whizzed close enough to shear the bristle tops of Doc's whiskers. Without fear for his own safety, Doc loaded and then pumped the bolt of his lever-action rifle. With studied care, he trained his sights on one of the thieves. In a heartbeat, he released a single 215-grain bullet through the 25-inch barrel that tore through one of the fleeing villain's shoulders, sending him crashing to the ground in screams of anguish.

The remaining bank robbers continued to retreat to the dense woods, with gun muzzles flashing. But they were now dodging bullets from all directions as more townsfolk joined in on the shootout. Bullets careened off buildings, smashed through windowpanes, splintered the wooden sidewalks, “and thudded into the stout logs of the bank.”

Slugs whined past Doc's head as if destiny had marked each one for him alone. Doc knew exactly what he had gotten himself into and “was too much of a gambler not to accept fate. With him was at best an uncertain game and he recognized the usual percentage in favour of the dealer.” With one probing eye affixed to his rifle's scope, he continued to coolly pinch off one shot after another, helping to fell two more of the robbers onto the wooden sidewalk outside the bank.

When the shooting finally stopped and the curtain of acrid smoke-tainted air cleared, six of the bandits could be seen “strewn along the road or the sidewalk. Two of them hadn't moved since they were hit. Three moved spasmodically and one crawled slowly to seek sanctuary under the flap of an unoccupied tent pitched opposite the bank.” The throng of armed citizens slowly emerged from

![Two of the New Hazelton bank robbers, lying dead, 50 feet from the Union Bank of Canada](image)
their places of concealment and drew near to the bank. Most were out of ammunition. From inside the bank, Mr. Fenton, Mr. Bishop, and Mr. Gaslin emerged shaken but unharmed. Mr. Fenton was the only one of the townspeople who had been hurt when he suffered a scalp wound from a splinter shot out of his solid oaken desktop.

After the lawmen arrived on the scene, they had little to do but cart off the bodies of the dead would-be bandits and arrest the three wounded survivors. The sixth man escaped into the woods with $1,100 in cash. A posse followed his blood-stained trail, but failed to find him.

The unfruitful search for the missing outlaw was an anticlimax to one of the most spectacular shootouts in the history of the Canadian West. Some two hundred bullets zinged through the air during the exchange.

A month after the botched robbery, three of the captured bandits came before the local magistrate. Each received twenty years in jail. In the intervening month, as the wounded bank robbers made a steady recovery and confessed to provincial police, a wild and dramatic story of the gang's background emerged.

All were Russians, mostly from Siberia. A local newspaper reported they were members of “a lawless sect feared even in that wilderness of swamp and frozen tundra.” Mr. Dzachot Bekuzaroff, the leader of the bank raid and the only one to escape, “had been a sort of outlaw chief in eastern Russia until action by the Czar’s government sentenced him and his band to different forms of penal servitude.” They were banished to the rock quarries of Sakhalin Island north of Japan, but when part of the islands were ceded by Russia to Japan at the end of their war, the Russian prisoners were freed. Then along came an American schooner recruiting labourers for railroad construction in Mexico. From Mexico, Mr. Bekuzaroff worked his way up to San Francisco and later to Vancouver. It was there that the bank robbery was planned with other Russians recruited from railway construction crews.

“Anyone who has been labouring under the delusion that this gang of robbers were a bunch of poor shots have another thing coming,” the Omineca Herald cautioned not long after the story of the bank robbers was revealed. The newspaper reported further:

They are all ex-members of the Cossacks and have had a thorough military training with all the sharp shooting and plundering frills thrown in. Anyone who had seen the man at the bank door with the rifle would never think that he was a poor shot. ... That they had planned well to “get” anyone who attempted to interfere with them is evidenced by the condition of the bullets found on some of the men. They were not only sharpened, but were split and notched. They were out to rob and kill if necessary. It was only the sharp rifle shooting of the citizens which prevented a successful robbery and a slaughter of the citizens.

The convictions were the finale to one of British Columbia’s most famous bank robberies and shootouts. Two men were dead, three were in jail, and one Cossack remained on the loose. The gunfight showcased the bravery and heroics of a small northern railway-and-mining town, where nothing that happens is really important. Suffice to say, there have not been any more bank robberies in New Hazelton.

Doc felt more at home than ever in the small frontier town. He never doubted the courage of his steely spirited neighbours and he never questioned whether a man of the cloth should so readily pick up arms. He would have been lying if he said his calling did not make him hesitate for at least a fleeting second. But as long as that pile of iron ore remained on the street in front of the mining company’s office, Doc couldn't help but look to the sky and smile knowingly every time he walked past it.

And if anyone should ask, the events described above took place between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m. — high noon.
EVERY CONCEIVABLE TRICK

In addition to those outlaws who robbed banks, trains, stagecoaches, and ranches at gunpoint, 19th-century Canada was also populated by those who stole through the gift of gab. In his 1920 memoir, Toronto police magistrate George Denison recalled one case of a “shrewd looking gentleman who called himself Robert Vincent and gave his address as the Prince George Hotel.” One day, Vincent contacted a Toronto lumber dealer named Daniel Madden and “placed before him a very tempting proposition to make some easy money by purchasing a block of stock in the Wheloe Reinforced Cork Boat Company, which he had been fortunate enough to get hold of through a sick farmer he had met, who had no idea of its value.” Vincent said the stock could be purchased for about $5.00 a share and then immediately sold for $8.50 a share to a broker in Philadelphia who was buying all he could get hold of. Vincent even introduced Madden to the “sick farmer,” who confirmed he had invested in the company. Madden became suspicious and filed a report with the Toronto police, who upon investigation discovered that Vincent and his partner (the sick farmer) were con men trying to sell Madden $20,000 worth of stock in a business that had never existed. “Both men were locked up on charges of vagrancy,” Dennison wrote, “and subsequently a charge of attempting to obtain money by false pretences was laid. At the time of their arrest they had more than $4,000 in their possession, which they would have cheerfully parted from in exchange for their freedom if the police had been purchasable.”

Upon further investigation, Toronto police discovered that Vincent’s real name was Charles Gondorf and the man who played the sick farmer turned out to be Samuel Gerne. American police had been searching for Gerne for more than two years on a charge of obtaining $40,000 by similar scams. Gondorf had been arrested in New York City on this same charge and was out on a $25,000 bond when he was picked up in Toronto. The two men had fleeced hundreds of thousands of dollars from unsuspecting victims by selling them fictitious stock and had been arrested on several occasions in the United States. In carrying out their swindles they went so far as to set up a fake brokerage office in Philadelphia, which was staffed by another accomplice. The intended victim was told to cable the Philadelphia broker and find out what he was paying for the fabricated stock. Not surprisingly, the broker always offered a very attractive price.

Despite the longevity of their fraud operations, and their numerous arrests, the two grifters had never been convicted or spent more than a few hours in jail. They were well connected to men in positions of power and the methods that had kept them out of jail in the United States were also employed in Canada. When his case came before the courts in Toronto, Gondorf was represented by a lawyer (who also happened to be a Member of Parliament) from Welland, Ontario, as well as a lawyer from New York City and one from Chicago. The men also knew an influential New York politician and a prominent bail bondsman who were prepared to put up as much as $20,000 bail for the two. In Toronto, the fraudsters were released on a bail bond of only $5,000, but once freed, Gerne was re-arrested and taken back to New York for a trial on previous charges. Upon hearing this news, Gondorf left Canada as fast as he could. The law eventually caught up with Gondorf, who also stood trial in New York. Both were convicted and sent to Sing Sing, Gondorf for five to ten years and Gerne for one to three years.

In addition to stock market scams, many other types of fraud were being perpetrated on Canadians during the last quarter of the 19th century. As D. Owen Carrigan observed, many were carried out by legitimate companies:

Businesses across the country resorted to every conceivable trick to increase their profits. In some cases, they devised elaborate schemes to cheat the public or the government. Even gold-mining companies, which literally mined wealth, engaged in stock manipulation, the avoidance of royalty payments, and smuggling. One enterprising company in Nova Scotia, at the turn of the century, worked out a scheme to avoid royalty payments by forging duplicate gold bricks. One would be deposited in the local bank as the official product for royalty purposes and the other would be smuggled out of the country. … In 1883, price-fixing agreements involving fire insurance companies,
cotton manufacturers, and wholesale grocers were uncovered. The corporate conspiracies against the public interest became so flagrant that the federal government was finally forced to appoint a Select Committee of the House of Commons to examine the situation.

The 1888 report of the committee revealed that price fixing was rampant in a number of industries, including "wholesaler jewelers, biscuit and confectionary manufacturers, coal sellers, oatmeal millers, cordage and barbed wire manufacturers, undertakers, stove manufacturers, and even egg buyers."

Construction around the new transcontinental railway also became a focal point for fraud and corruption. When stock for the Grand Trunk Railway was issued, bankers and contractors held back a large portion, hoping to drive up the price. "The entire venture was characterized by graft, fraudulent bookkeeping, and shoddy construction," Carrigan wrote. "Although the railroad was in debt, accounts were kept to show an operating profit, thus enabling the shareholders to be paid a dividend. The money, of course, was coming from the public purse and being voted on by the very people who stood to collect a large share of the so-called profits." The land boom that coincided with the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway also provoked a flurry of speculation that was ripe for real estate swindles. "Homesteaders were cheated out of their properties or intimidated into selling by crooked lawyers and agents, who then flipped the holdings for much higher prices."

Corporate Canada's dalliance with fraud and corruption reaches all the way back to the very first public corporation formed in this country. Around 1690, directors and majority shareholders with the Hudson's Bay Company were accused of "stock-jobbing," which consisted of paying out inordinately large dividends to shareholders as a way to attract more investors and increase the share price. When the price of the stock reached a certain level, the original shareholders would unload, making a very nice profit for themselves. In his book on Canada's fur trade, Peter C. Newman wrote that in the fourteen years after it received its original charter, the Company paid no dividends. But in 1688, despite a cumulative loss of £118,014 over the preceding six years, "a fat 50 percent payout was distributed to its tight circle of eight dominant shareholders, including the Duke of Marlborough." This payout was "followed by another 25 percent declaration and, in 1690, by the largest bonus in the Company's history: a 74 percent dividend, together with a stock bonus of 200 percent in the form of a convertible dividend scrip. Vague explanations were floated that this would bring the HBC's capitalization more into line with the committeemen's estimates of what the stock was really worth, yet such a forecast of the Company's potential earnings was so far removed from the facts (in the next five years, further losses of £97,500 would be recorded)." Over the next two years, six of eight Hudson's Bay Company officials who voted themselves the bloated dividends had resigned from the company and sold their shares. In addition, the stock was continuously split, which raised the contract to build the railway. Few believed the prime minister's protestations that the political donations and the awarding of the contract were unrelated, especially when a damming telegraph was published in the press. Six days before the election, Macdonald had wired Allan, telling him, "I must have another $10,000. Will be the last time of calling. Do not fail me. Answer today." Macdonald continued to assert his innocence even after the cable was made public. "These hands are clean," he would say. But his hands weren't clean. MacDonald was censured by a parliamentary commission, his government fell the next month, and his Conservative Party was trounced in the election.
value of the company’s capitalization from £10,500 to £31,500. This increased the value of Marlborough’s shares by 400 percent. Buoyed by the expectation that they would cash in on another 150 percent dividend, investors snatched up the company’s stock. Instead, twenty-eight years of no dividend payments followed as the company fell deeper and deeper into debt.

Of all the commercial crime perpetrated in Canada during the 19th century, perhaps none has been more widespread or better organized than counterfeiting. Based on police and media reports, currency counterfeiting in this country appears to have begun in earnest in the 1850s and for many years following, Canada would be a significant source of U.S. counterfeit cash or “green goods.” In 1853, the New York Times reported that two investigators working for a Boston association mandated to detect bogus American banknotes were dispatched to Montreal “to purchase of a gang known to exist there, some counterfeit bills, for the purpose, if possible, of obtaining legal proof sufficient to convict the counterfeeters.” Unfortunately, the investigators fell into a trap of their own making. While posing as buyers interested in purchasing the phony script, they were able to make contact with the counterfeiting gang and even obtained some fake bills. The head of the counterfeiting group “smelt a rat, however, and by a most shrewd operation, gave such information that one of the officers suddenly found himself incarcerated for having counterfeit money in his possession.” After a short imprisonment, the American investigator was able to verify his credentials and was set free.

On August 1, 1854, two groups of counterfeiters were arrested in Sherbrooke, Quebec. There was some speculation that they were part of the same counterfeiting conspiracy, since their operations were located in remote homes only 5 miles from each other. When government authorities searched one of the premises they found a printing press, twenty-six platters for paper money, an 800-pound machine for stamping gold and silver coins, various engravers’ tools, twenty-four moulds for running hard-money dies, ink, paper, and thousands of dollars in fake money. The New York Times proclaimed, “this is probably the most important arrest of the kind ever made on this continent.” American government officials were particularly interested in this case as most of the fake currency discovered was U.S. script. Two months earlier, $16,000 in counterfeit “ones, threes, and twenties” that had been “executed with singular skill” were discovered in New York State. Large amounts of gold and silver coins were also found. “The band was completely organized and had their engraver, who could make all their plates, and their printers, and their signers of the bills — all of whom are now safely lodged in the Montreal jail.”

Court documents showed that four years later, in the county of Middlesex, Ontario, Hirman Biggs Smith was found in the possession of one machine and several moulds “constructed, devised, adapted, and designed for the purpose of counterfeiting and imitating certain foreign silver coins, to wit, the silver coin of the United States of America.” On July 9, 1858, Smith was found with “four hundred pieces of forged false and counterfeit coins each piece thereof resembling, and apparently intended to resemble and pass for a piece of foreign silver coin to wit, the silver [dollar] coin of the United States of America. Smith was convicted of counterfeiting offences.

Advances in photography and other technology meant that the quality of counterfeit currency steadily improved over the years. In the spring of 1880, highly convincing counterfeit bills began appearing throughout the country. There were estimates that more than one million dollars in fake American and Canadian currency was being circulated. Among the phony script were copies of an American five-dollar bill of government issue, a one- and five-dollar bill issued by the Bank of Commerce, a five-dollar bill from the Bank of British North America, a four-dollar bill from the Dominion Bank, and a one-dollar bill issued by the Dominion of Canada. According to John Wilson Murray, the famed Canadian detective hired to track down the perpetrators, the counterfeitors were “so bold and so daring” that $200,000 in the bogus currency was used to pay for a large shipment of fur. “Even the banks whose bills were counterfeited accepted the counterfeits over their own counters. They denied that they ever paid any of them out again. The bills were afloat in all sections of the country and there was a great stir.”

After fruitless trips to Washington, New York, and Philadelphia, Murray pursued a tip from an
informant, and turned his investigation toward one well-regarded British counterfeiter named Edwin Johnson, who was known to have operated in Canada and the United States. "I remembered the tales I had heard of him," Murray wrote. "He was an Englishman by birth, who was an educated man, and had married an educated Englishwoman. He learned the trade of an engraver and the young couple moved to America, and he was supposed to be honest, and worked at his trade until, when the civil war came on, some one made a fortune out of $100, $50, and $20 counterfeit banknotes, and Johnson had been mixed up in it, and later was reported to have returned to England." Currency experts told Murray "the bills were beauties created by a master. They were the best ever seen."

Murray began his search for Johnson by travelling to Chicago to speak with a well-informed ex-counterfeiter he knew. From him, Murray learned that Johnson's last-known whereabouts was Indianapolis. After obtaining a picture of Edwin Johnson and his family, but having no luck in finding him in Indianapolis, Murray took the train back to Canada. When he arrived in Toronto, Murray visited a nearby saloon "to get a welcome-home nip." To his great surprise, at the end of the bar was Edwin's son, Johnnie. "If he had dropped from the clouds I could not have been more astonished, and if he had been the Recording Angel come to write my title clear, I could not have been more delighted. Johnnie was full. He stood alone at one end of the bar drinking." When Johnson left the bar, Murray shadowed him to a comfortable brick house on Hazelton Avenue. For five days, Murray kept the home under surveillance, but "no one passed in or out, except the butcher and the baker and the milkman." After several more days, the front door opened, "and old man Johnson himself, Edwin Johnson, the king of counterfeiters, appeared on the doorstep and walked jauntily down the street." Murray then began to trail Johnson:

He stopped in almost every saloon on his way down town, but he paid for his drinks in genuine money. He got boozy, and finally he went to the railroad-station and bought a ticket for Markham. I sat six seats behind him on the train. We both got off at Markham. He went into a saloon, and bought a drink. When he came out, I went in. There was a young bartender — a saucy, smart aleck; but I had him call the proprietor, and through him I got the $1 bill that Johnson had given in pay for the drink. I paid silver for it, and had the proprietor initial it. I eyed it eagerly when I got it. It was a new Dominion $1 bill. I had my man at last. Johnson went into place after place, buying a drink or cigar, and paying in bad bills. I followed him from place to place, buying the bills as he passed them.

After gathering his evidence, Murray confronted the elder Johnson, who confessed that he was still active in the counterfeiting business. He even agreed to show Murray his equipment. Once back at his studio, Johnson removed a tarp from a large table revealing the plates he used for the forgeries. "Johnson lifted them out as tenderly as a mother could raise her sick babe from a cradle," Murray wrote. "They were wrapped in oiled cloth, and were encased in solid coverings of beeswax." Johnson said the plates cost more than $40,000 to make, a considerable investment that was partially financed by another unnamed "party" in Canada. Murray examined the plates and "saw they were the finest in the land."

I marvelled at the firmness and precision of the strokes, the authority of the signatures, the beauty of the vignettes and medallions, the accuracy of following all the little whimsies of the engravers of the original, genuine plates. For each bill there were three copper plates — one for the front, one for the back, and one for the wedge. Each plate was about one quarter of an inch in thickness. I scored them criss-cross, and locked them up. Not only were the six Canada counterfeits in the lot, but the plates for the counterfeit States $5 bill was there. There were twenty-one separate copper pieces or plates, three each for the Bank of Commerce $10, the Bank of Commerce $5, the Bank of British North America $5, the Ontario Bank $10, the Dominion Bank $4, the Government issue $1, and the United States $5.
Johnson told Murray that he made the plates while living in the U.S. Tales of his counterfeiting operation also revealed a true family business, complete with a division of labour among his children, which included daughters Jessie and Annie — “both clever, accomplished girls” — and his five boys, Tom, Charlie, Johnnie, Elijah, and David Henry. As Murray remembered, “his daughters forged the signatures. They had been trained in forging or duplicating signatures since childhood. They would spend hours a day duplicating a single signature, and would work at the one name for months, writing it countless thousands of times. Jessie was better on larger handwriting, and Annie was better on smaller handwriting.” While the daughters specialized in calligraphy, the Johnson boys “were learning to be engravers, and one or two of them were so proficient that the old man spoke of them with pride.” Johnson confessed that they printed a large quantity of bills once a year, most of which was turned over to a wholesale dealer who in turn sold it to retail dealers, who then placed the bills with “shovers.” After each printing, “the plates were encased in beeswax and oilcloth and buried, and the other paraphernalia was destroyed.”

Edwin Johnson was placed on trial at the Fall Assizes in Toronto in 1880 and pleaded guilty to every charge. His son Tom, “the lame one” who operated a tobacco store on King Street in Toronto, was arrested in Erie, Pennsylvania, after police discovered hundreds of dollars’ of bogus bills stuffed in his hollowed cane. Johnnie Johnson was arrested in Buffalo, but was able to avoid conviction in the U.S. When he returned to Toronto, he was picked up after trying to pass a counterfeit $10 Bank of Commerce note and received a 10-year jail sentence. Charlie was arrested at Sarnia, Ontario, in possession of counterfeit money and was also sent to jail. After Charlie was released, he went to Detroit, and on August 12, 1898, he and Elijah were arrested. By this time, the old man was dead and the mother and sisters were living in Detroit. David Henry, who was suspected of pushing fake bills for the family, was also living there. Acting on a tip, federal Secret Service agents searched his house and found a hollow place in the baseboard that opened with a secret spring. Inside, the agents found close to $10,000 in counterfeit American banknotes.

Two other skilled and prolific Canadian counterfeiting groups operating during the same period were also family affairs. In 1878, the superintendent of the Dominion Police was hot on the trail of Rowland and Henry Jackson, a father-and-son duo who worked in the Stratford, Ontario, area producing and distributing counterfeit silver coins in half-dollar and twenty-five-cent pieces. A Department of Justice court brief stated that “on or about February 27, 1878, a local constable attempted to make an arrest but was fired upon and the two escaped. The two then traveled to the village of Williamsville, outside of Kingston County where they again fired upon police and escaped. The duo was ultimately captured and sentenced after another member of the gang, who had been arrested in possession of the counterfeit coins, agreed to become a Crown witness.”

In May 1899, banks throughout the country complained to police about a deluge of counterfeit $1 Dominion bills. In February 1900, U.S. Secret Service agents arrested one Anthony Deckers in Maryland after he was found in possession of a plate for “one side of a $5 Molsons bank bill and cuts for other portions,” according to the *Manitoba Free Press*. A search of the room he rented in Baltimore unearthed the plates and other equipment used to produce both the Molsons and the Dominion bills. At his home in Hamilton, Ontario, where his wife was arrested, police found more engraved plates. The Deckers’ son was also apprehended in Woodstock, Ontario, with counterfeit bills in his possession. The conspiracy was apparently hatched in Montreal, but “when the place became too hot for the conspirators they moved west, or at least some of them did.” The father was for years employed at a lithograph company in Montreal “and being a most expert engraver, one of the best in America he drew a princely salary.” A year before he was arrested, he left the firm and it was around this time that the imitation $1 Dominion bills began to appear. Police suspected the forgery ring was about to produce “no less than a quarter of a million dollars in fake $5 bank notes” before it was disrupted. For the *Manitoba Free Press*, the arrests concluded one of the “most sensational schemes of the decade.”
Canadian counterfeiters did not restrict their fraudulent infringements to currency. In the late 1890s, members of the American Music Publishers’ Association blamed “Canadian pirates” for producing “spurious editions of the latest copyrighted popular songs.” As the *New York Times* reported in 1897, the association’s investigation “revealed that all of the most popular pieces have been counterfeited, despite the fact that they are copyrighted, and by unknown publishers are sold at from 2 cents to 5 cents per copy, though the original compositions sell at from twenty to forty cents per copy.” Those behind the music piracy operation took out advertisements in Canadian and American newspapers “which publish lists of music to be sold at, say, 10 cents a copy. The Post Office box given belongs to the newspaper, and it takes half of all the money sent as pay for the advertising, and the other half goes to the ‘pirate,’ who sends the music by mail.” The association estimated that in the month of May 1897 alone, five million pirated copies of sheet music were printed and sold. The result was that “the legitimate music publishing business of the United States has fallen off 50 percent in the past twelve months.” Canada was accused of being a hub for music piracy due to weak copyright laws.

**THE YELLOW PERIL**

By the last quarter of the 19th century, a new form of organized criminality began to rear its head in North America: opium smuggling. While opium’s medicinal use as an anaesthetic and all-round elixir was legal and well established among the white population, it wasn’t until the arrival of the Chinese immigrant that the recreational smoking of opium was introduced in Canada and the United States. But whether the opium was being ingested by white upper-middle-class housewives or Chinese migrant labourers, it was still legal in both countries. What drove the opium trade underground was new government customs duties. At the same time, lawmakers, social reformers, newspaper publishers, and myriad other xenophobes in North America were trumpeting the arrival of an associated threat to the white, god-fearing population: “John Chinaman.”

This new phase in the history of organized crime can be traced to China in the early 1850s, when word began to spread that a wondrous new land was opening up opportunities for anyone willing to work, regardless of race, creed, or colour. Gold was discovered along the Sacramento River in 1848, and thousands of Chinese fortune seekers crossed the Pacific Ocean to join in the quest for instant riches. Once the California gold mines were exhausted, many of the Chinese migrants began to work as labourers along the thousands of miles of railroad track being laid in the American West. Others turned to mining and some became merchants, many of whom set up shop in San Francisco, where the continent’s first Chinatown took root.

By the late 1850s, another “gold mountain” was discovered along the west coast, this time in the Fraser River Valley of British Columbia. Chinese prospectors making their way north from California were joined by others immigrating to the province directly from China. All were looking to pan for gold in the Cariboo gold fields during the 1860s or to help construct the Canadian Pacific Railway lines starting in the early 1880s. The 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration estimated that 15,701 Chinese nationals entered Canada from 1861 to 1884. By the early 1870s, at least a third of all Chinese residents in B.C. were living in Victoria, and the city’s growing Chinatown district was a beehive of economic and cultural activity. Dry-goods stores, restaurants, shoemakers, tailors, and launderers were opening on and around Johnson Street while Chinese business, fraternal, and cultural organizations were being formed. Gambling halls, houses of prostitution, and opium dens also became fixtures in Victoria’s Chinatown. Forced to return from their low-paying jobs to crowded, dismal, unsanitary rooming houses, many lonely and despondent Chinese bachelors turned to gambling, prostitutes, and opium smoking. Since the Chinese residents could not patronize the white man’s “houses of ill-fame,” a handful of Chinese merchants in Victoria and Vancouver began to cater to this demand.

“From the days of the gold rush in 1858,” Anthony Chan wrote, “gambling had been an important part of Chinatown life. Leisure moments away from the sandbars and, later, the railroads, were spent at games of chance.” At first, most of the early professional Chinese gambling operations were transient in nature, catering to the scattered migrant labourers by moving from
one work camp to another. As the Chinese population became more sedentary and urban, so did the gambling parlours. After the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1884, Victoria’s “Fantan Alley” — which stretched one city block and was named after the popular Chinese game of chance — boasted around twelve separate gaming establishments. “Most of the gambling dens were small and could accommodate a few dozen gamblers at most,” according to Chan, while “some of the larger establishments could hold up to one hundred bettors.” As early as 1860, Victoria newspapers began to report on gambling houses catering to the local Chinese population. An editorial in the Victoria Daily Colonist on January 10, 1860, entitled “Chinese gambling,” lamented a decision by the police magistrate to acquit several Chinese residents of charges stemming from their participation in a game of fantan. In 1861, the Daily Colonist ran a story about a police raid on a Chinese gambling house in which dozens of “Chinamen” were “rushing, shouting and tearing about the premises.” Despite these media reports, Harry Con and colleagues assert in their book on the Chinese in Canada that “between 1879 and 1894, only twelve Chinese were ever brought before the court in Victoria for infractions of the gaming laws, ten in 1879 for playing fantan, which was prohibited, and two the following year for possession of an illegal game.”

Another service that could be found in Victoria’s Chinatown was prostitution, which flourished due to the disproportionate number of Chinese males immigrating to Canada. The 1871 national census counted fifty-three women, less than 1 percent of the total Chinese population of 1,548. The numbers did not change much in subsequent years; in 1902, when the Chinese population in Victoria totalled 3,283 people, the number of women did not exceed one hundred. Chinese entrepreneurs were quick to realize the profits that could be made from satisfying the sexual needs of the lonely Chinese male. The first prostitutes brought to Victoria came via San Francisco, which had become the centre for the international trade in Chinese women. The “yellow slave trade” was escalating so rapidly in North
America, that procurers scoured the impoverished villages of rural China for families willing to sell their young daughters. The women and girls were either taken to an underground auction block in San Francisco or sold directly to a Chinese merchant or group of merchants in Canada or the United States. They would be herded into show markets hidden in buildings in San Francisco’s Chinatown or on the waterfront where they would be stripped and then paraded onto a platform so prospective buyers could inspect them and make a bid. Prices for the women ranged from $500 to $1,000. After more restrictive immigration laws were imposed in the U.S., the price of a Chinese woman rose to as high as $2,500.

As the century drew to a close, the Chinese sex trade was becoming more organized in British Columbia, although no one individual or group gained any sort of monopoly. Testimony before the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration estimated there were “150 Chinese women prostitutes” in British Columbia around this time. Most of these, according to one of the commissioners “were living as concubines with their own countrymen, this relationship being deemed among them no offence and no discredit.” Women and girls from the provinces of Guangdong, Jiangsi, and Zhejiang were now bypassing San Francisco and arriving in Victoria and Vancouver. Lee Mon-kow, a Chinese interpreter at the Customs house in Victoria, testified to the 1902 Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration that a contract would be drawn up between a Chinese woman and a Chinese merchant or brothel operator who agreed to pay the woman’s head tax, passage fees, and other expenses. Lee even cited a bill of sale for one woman that cost a merchant $302 plus $7 for clothing and $4 for her leather trunk. In return, he “had the right to her body service.” As part of the contract, the woman agreed “to pay a certain sum at a certain time, to repay the passage money and the head tax and seven percent interest.” When this amount was paid off through revenue generated by the sexual services provided by the woman, she would be “freed” from her indentured existence.

Once in North America, the young women would be placed in one of two types of Chinese brothels that were distinguished by the colour and class of the clientele. The “parlours” were the more opulent establishments that catered to Chinese merchants and white customers, and the women working there were generally more beautiful and better paid. The “cribs,” according to Cassandra Kobayashi’s 1978 essay on the history of sexual slavery in Canada, primarily served Chinese labourers and “were back alley operations where up to six women worked in slatted crates about 12’ x 14’, furnished with a curtain, a pallet, washbasin, a couple of chairs and a mirror. A woman who ‘pledged’ her body to a crib operation had a life expectancy of six to eight years after she started. After six to eight years of sexual slavery she was debilitated by disease, beatings, and starvation and allowed to ‘escape’ to die at the Salvation Army, or at a hospital.”

In addition to gambling and prostitution, another vice closely associated with the “Chinaman” and Chinatown was opium smoking. The Chinese were central to the transport, sale, manufacture, and consumption of raw and smokable opium in North America and Chinatown was a centre of opium trafficking and smoking dens. Anthony Chan estimates that from the initial days of the gold rush in California and British Columbia, until well after the railways were finished in the 1880s, 40 to 50 percent of Chinese males in North America were addicted to opium. While this may be true, the stereotypical addicted Chinese opium smoker of the day shared company with thousands of Caucasian opiate addicts. During the American civil war, morphine was the main anaesthetic used to treat wounded soldiers and so many became possessed by the drug, that opiate addiction became known as the “soldier’s disease.” In the latter half of the century, opium was an ingredient in countless prescriptions and over-the-counter remedies for the treatment of a wide range of ailments, including arthritis, asthma, bowel disorders, bronchitis, cholera, colds, consumption, coughs, diarrhea, diabetes, dropsy, dysentery, erysipelas, “female irregularities,” fever, fits, flatulence, gout, indigestion, inflammation, insomnia, jaundice, liver ailments, lumbago, malaria, nausea, piles, rheumatism, scrofula (the King’s Evil!), tumours, ulcers, venereal disease, worms, as well as pain of any kind. By the end of the century, cocaine was also an active ingredient in many oral anaesthetics and other patent medicinal products, not to mention an original ingredient in a new soft drink, first concocted by a pharmacist in 1886, called Coca-Cola.
Opium was legally imported into Canada from the British colony of Hong Kong and the United States. Because the importation, distribution, and ingestion of opium in Canada were entirely legal during the 19th century, newspapers were filled with advertisements for raw and processed versions of the narcotic. In the early 1860s, the Toronto-based Globe newspaper ran an ad for bulk purchases of Turkish opium in 200-pound lots at wholesale prices. In January 1863, ads in the Victoria Daily Colonist promoted the impending arrival of cases of “Chinese Produce” in Victoria. G. Vigrolo and Company of Wharf Street imported opium prepared in Fooklong, China. During the 1860s, San Francisco was the primary supplier of smokable opium to B.C. and shipments ranging from small, letter-sized envelopes to large chests arrived on Victoria’s and Vancouver’s docks almost daily. The last six months of 1860 alone saw a total of 1,110 cases of opium imported into Victoria. Most of this came from San Francisco, although opium shipments direct from Hong Kong were increasing. In 1862 the total value of opium shipped to Canada was $810. In 1863, the value jumped to $6,640 and climbed steadily for years after that.

British Columbia also became a centre for producing the black tar opium that was used for smoking. Between 1870 and 1908, Chinese merchants opened a number of factories in Victoria and B.C.’s Lower Mainland to convert raw gum opium into the smokable form. While much of the processed opium stayed in B.C., some was shipped east to Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal and south to Seattle, California, and even Hawaii. While the opium factories were legal entities, they had to apply for a government licence to operate. In a letter dated January 17, 1880, to the federal minister of justice, Goon Gan of Victoria asks for information on how to obtain such a licence. Goon identified himself as an agent for “A Chinese House in Hong Kong” that is “desirous of establishing in this city a manufacturary of opium for smoking purposes, provided an exclusive right in British Columbia can be legally obtained.” By the 1880s, British Columbia was now the main North American importer, producer, and exporter of opium. Between 1881 and 1886, opium factories in Victoria increased from one to thirteen. Between 1882 and 1888, the importation of crude opium into B.C. for refining purposes grew from 17,000 to 105,000 pounds. An 1894 article in the Manitoba Free Press estimated there were “600 Chinese men” in British Columbia “engaged in the manufacture of opium, and 160,000 pounds of crude opium comes into the province every year.” While opium production was a competitive business, a few Chinese merchants began to control the industry in B.C. By 1901, three Victoria firms with eighteen partners had established a virtual control over the manufacture of opium in the province.

The Chinese were also the first to open commercial opium dens in Canadian cities. Like taverns and saloons, they were legal, accessible to adult males, and stocked with an assortment of brands and smoking paraphernalia. The opium dens were the principal clients of the opium factories, although Caucasian-operated pharmacies were quickly becoming lucrative customers as many were now selling smokable opium to white and Chinese smokers alike. The colonial, provincial, and Dominion governments also benefited from the early opium trade in Canada. They received licensing fees from manufacturers and taxes were imposed on the retail sale of opium, although the real government money was made from tariffs imposed on opium imports. In February 1865, a 50 percent tariff on opium imported into the colony of B.C. was imposed, far exceeding the usual 12.5 percent applied to most other imports. The substantial tariff prompted the widespread smuggling of opium into Canada, helping the legal substance take its first baby steps into the nether region of the criminal underworld.

Less than a few months after the tariffs were imposed, colonial customs officials in B.C. began making seizures of contraband opium, most of which was being smuggled aboard steamer ships from Hong Kong or San Francisco. Captain Wylde, the customs officer in Victoria, made the first seizure under the new tariff laws on April 24, 1865. “Observing a Chinaman who came up by the Enterprise making some rather suspicious movements,” the British Columbian reported the next day, “Mr. Wylde seized his carpet-sack, in which was found about 23 lbs of opium. A derringer was also found in his possession. ’John’ was marched off to jail and his goods taken charge of by the revenue officer.” Numerous other seizures would soon follow,
including 18 pounds of opium discovered just days later. Because the offences were simply infractions against British customs laws, the penalties were usually small fines. The seized contraband would later be sold at government auctions. While some criticized the tariff as an unnecessary provocation of smuggling, others, such as the racist British Columbian newspaper, called for stringent enforcement, especially against Chinese immigrants, “as there can be little doubt that many of them will attempt to bring in a supply of their favourite narcotic about their persons. Indeed it would seem almost necessary that every Chinamen should be thoroughly searched on arriving in the colony, as we understand they have already had recourse to the artifice of secreting opium beneath the lining of their jackets.” Enhanced enforcement will, no doubt, “teach these rascals a salutary lesson.”

British Columbia’s role as a manufacturer and exporter of processed opium increased substantially in 1890 when the United States Congress imposed its own prohibitive tariffs on opium and morphine imports. The result was that even larger amounts of raw opium were being brought into Canada (legally and covertly), processed through B.C.-based opium factories, and then smuggled into the United States to avoid the tariffs. Following the enactment of the American tariffs, opium was imported from India or China, processed into smokable form in Hong Kong, British Columbia or Mexico, and then smuggled into the United States.

Newspapers were now brimming with stories that chronicled cases of opium smuggling from B.C. into the U.S. The Globe reported one such case in its November 17, 1886 edition:

Advices from British Columbia state that the United States Customs officials are finding it almost impossible to put down opium smuggling from Victoria to Portland, Or. Capt. Gardner, of the United States Customs, has been investigating the several methods employed to defraud the revenue in opium smuggling with good results. At his instigation a Chinese interpreter named Huestis has been arrested, and the authorities have discovered several of his pals, whose arrest will shortly follow. This gang would send demijohns having false bottoms fitted with opium from Victoria to Seattle, and from there to Portland filled up with spirits over the opium. This little game has been going on for some time right under the nose of the revenue officers. The large number of demijohns going through empty to Seattle when they were filled with spirits and shipped attracted the attention of the officers which led to the discovery of the game that was being carried out.

In another case that occurred in the early 1890s, an unnamed ship jettisoned watertight barrels packed with opium into the Columbia River where a waiting fishing boat retrieved them in its nets. Raw opium would be smuggled into Victoria in this fashion and the same technique would be used to transport the processed opium into American ports. Dominion customs officials quoted in the media believed one captured vessel “has for some time been engaged in smuggling opium from Victoria, where, it is said, there is a large establishment devoted to the preparation of the drug for the American market.”

An 1888 edition of the Globe reported that “representatives from British Columbia say the smuggling of contraband opium between that Province and the United States has grown to an enormous extent.” The paper estimated that one of Victoria’s thirteen opium factories would be more than sufficient to supply local demand. As such, it was clear that the “surplus is shipped to the United States.” While opium continued to enter Canada primarily through B.C. ports, it was being smuggled into the U.S. at numerous spots across the border stretching as far east as Quebec. On February 8, 1888, federal officials in the U.S. captured $25,000 worth of opium at Redwood in upstate New York. According to a New York Times article, the opium was brought from China via Vancouver and transported by train to Brockville, Ontario. It was then transferred across the St. Lawrence River “by ferries in summer and sleighs in winter which were met by wagons or sleighs on the American side and then shipped to New York as butter, eggs, etc.” In 1891, 141 pounds of opium was confiscated in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and a saloon in Sweet Grass, Montana, was shut down when
the Mounties told their American counterparts that it was a transfer point for opium entering the United States. In an 1895 dispatch from Montana, American customs officials there alleged that “large quantities of opium” are smuggled from the Manitoba side of the border “in the stomachs of live cattle, and that a great many of cattle are also smuggled.” In his 1898 book on New York’s Chinatown, Louis Beck argued that opium is “smuggled into the United States by French women, who are employed for the purpose by the Chinese. The manufacturer in Victoria, B.C., makes a shipment to Montreal and then the women take the stuff and carry it over the border to some city or town, such as Burlington, where they leave it” until sufficient quantities were amassed to ship to New York City.

While the Chinese usually got most of the press when it came to opium smuggling, it wasn’t long before Anglo-Saxon names connected with the trade began appearing in the newspapers. One of these was Donald McLean (a.k.a. “Little Dan” a.k.a “Opium Dan”) who smuggled and sold opium while working on a passenger steamer ship. In December of 1888, James Carran was charged with smuggling opium from Canada into the United States and later confessed to shipping more than 4,000 pounds to Denver. Canadian Harry H. Hutchinson was arrested in Chicago in 1891 on a charge of smuggling opium after federal officers found 110 half-pound packages of the drug in the bottom of his steamer trunk. One of the most “notorious opium smugglers in the country,” proclaimed the Manitoba Free Press in 1894, was arrested in Detroit by U.S. officials. Charles Kennedy was described as being “engaged in the business of smuggling opium across the border for nearly ten years and during that time has managed to elude the vigilance of the brightest men in the secret service.” Along with partners, George Henderson and Edward Patterson, the arrests broke up “one of the boldest bands of opium smugglers in the country. They are believed to be three of the cleverest smugglers that operated between the Canadian frontier and the American border.” Law enforcement authorities in Detroit learned that the three were arranging to transport a “heavy consignment to this city and would, in all probability, be sent to the Chinese supply depot in North Division street.” As a result of this information, according to the Manitoba Free Press:

Two deputies stationed themselves outside the store and awaited the arrival of the smugglers. They waited until midnight, when they saw three white men enter the yard on the side of the store and drop several suspicious looking packages down into the cellar. The deputies swooped down on the smugglers at about 1 o’clock and took them to the station house. Over 400 pounds of opium was found on the premises. All of it was wrapped in newspapers printed in Vancouver, BC. The opium was estimated to be worth $4,000. The duty on it would be $12 a pound. The Chinamen who run the place are named Wing, Wong and Lee. It is believed the three prisoners have been in the employ of the Chinamen for over a year.

In 1894, Frank L. Gilchrest of Toronto was arrested in Detroit and charged with smuggling opium. When captured on his way to Chicago, he had in his possession 116 pounds of the drug. Canadians George Green and Stephen Wright were arrested the same year at St. Clair, Michigan, after smuggling 250 pounds of the contraband across the border.

HANDSOME PROFITS FOR THEIR OWNERS

Along with opium, Chinese nationals were also being smuggled into the United States from Canada, due in part to ever-tightening restrictions on Asian immigration to that country. This earliest form of human smuggling into North America was coordinated primarily by whites, many of whom were long-time smugglers using well-worn, covert routes between the two countries. One of these professional smugglers was Gus Brede, who began running whiskey from Montana’s Fort Benton to the Peigan and Blood bands in Southern Alberta around 1880. In his book, Sheriffs and Outlaws of Western Canada, Frank Anderson wrote that Brede, “ran his excursions like a battle tactician” and spurned the idea of “dead heading” (returning from Canada with an empty wagon). So after he delivered his cargo in Alberta, he would smuggle Chinese nationals into the U.S. for $50 a head. “Within a few
years he had established an underground railway for Orientals seeking to enter the promised land. The end came for Gus Brede with a shocking abruptness. On an August night in 1891, during a violent storm, Gus was steering one of his wagons, when out of the turbulent skies a bolt of lightning struck him on the head. He died instantly, although, miraculously, neither of the Chinese passengers sitting on either side of him were injured.

In 1884, law enforcement authorities in B.C. captured fourteen fishing ships engaged in human smuggling, each one realizing "handsome profits for their owners," as the New York Times put it. "As high as $80 per head for women and $80 for Chinese men are now paid to Captains of boats for running them across the boundary line." Over an eight-week period, more than "1,000 Chinamen have crossed over voluntarily. British Columbians who are protesting against Chinese immigration are facilitating their getting out of the country into the United States as much as possible." With more than a hint of exaggeration, the Times reported, "advices received from British Columbia state that unless some immediate steps are taken to prevent the smuggling of Chinamen into the United States from the Province before Spring, nearly the whole Chinese population of British Columbia will be transferred over to Oregon and Washington Territory." Another New York Times article from 1896 described one Canadian-based illegal immigration ring that was orchestrated by a "half dozen white men who are regularly engaged in the smuggling business."

In engaging to smuggle Chinamen a guarantee is usually given and required, to the effect that the smuggled person will be taken to some safe place in the United States, but in this case it seems they were intrusted to a man who has already lost a great deal of the confidence of the Chinese merchants by leaving his charges to their own devices in exposed places. ... This regular system of smuggling is at present considered a little out of date and antiquated, and consequently the old method of using false merchants' certificates is largely being resorted to, and, in addition, a system of "fathers" is used with such success that as a fact from twenty to thirty Chinese are allowed to get across by this means every week.

In March of 1890, the Manitoba Free Press reported that at Port Huron in Michigan, an investigator with the U.S. Treasury Department stopped a laundry wagon with "four 'raw' or smuggled Chinamen." Each man had cards with directions on where they were to go upon arrival in the U.S. "They also had a complete opium outfit." On one of the arrested "was found papers showing plainly he is an agent of a gang of smugglers who make a business of running Chinamen across the Canadian border." Federal agents found twenty-six letters addressed to co-conspirators located in Hong Kong, Victoria, Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, London, Sarnia, and numerous American cities. Information obtained revealed that $20 a head was charged for the trip across the border. The gang engaged in this "Chinese importation" was allegedly connected with or part of an opium smuggling gang.

In 1891, police traced a smuggling ring that used the Grand Trunk Railway to illegally transport Chinese citizens from "a junk shop in Toronto." With the final destination being New York City, "the Mongolians enter Canada via Vancouver and go to Toronto, where they are ticketed over the Grand Trunk and Erie to New York. Sleeping car berths are bought, and the Chinamen are asleep in their berths when they pass Suspension Bridge" which spans Ontario and New York State. "The special inspectors do not go through the sleepers, and thus they escape detection." American soldiers with the Eleventh Infantry at Fort Niagara were even accused of ferrying the "Celestials from Niagara-on-the-lake." They are picked up on the Canadian side at the mouth of the Niagara River, just across from the fort, and are paid as much as "$50 apiece for safely landing the Chinamen on this side."

Human smuggling became increasingly organized as the numbers of Chinese aliens illegally spirited into the U.S. grew. In June 1893, customs officials in Portland, Oregon, congratulated themselves after defeating what one newspaper called "the greatest attempt at wholesale smuggling ever made on the Pacific coast." Thirty-two Chinese men had been brought to Seattle "on a smuggling vessel from British Columbia." There, they were transferred to "a Northern Pacific box car,
which was supposed to have contained merchandise for Portland, Ore. After receiving a tip, customs officials broke open the car and discovered the illegal human cargo. Customs officials were also investigating cases where Chinese illegals entered Canada using fraudulent immigration certificates. In one case, government officials traced forged American citizenship certificates to Montreal, although according to the New York Times the “heads of the conspiracy still remain in Boston.” The documents certified that the signatory was a merchant who lives in the United States. The certificate was signed and sealed by the U.S. Immigration Commissioner, but upon close inspection it became clear that this signature was forged. The bogus certificates were sold for prices ranging from $25 to $100. Evidence surfaced that members of the smuggling group were trying to have a stamp produced in Montreal “which would imitate a United States Commissioner’s seal, but that they were unsuccessful, and that dies for such a seal were finally sent from Boston here, where they were fitted to a stamp.”
When discussing Italian organized crime in North America, most people think of the so-called Sicilian Mafia. However, there is also the 'Ndrangheta, which was founded in the southern Italian province of Calabria. In fact, the 'Ndrangheta had the greatest influence on ethnic Italian crime groups in Canada because, since the turn of the century, most of the founders, leaders, and members of these groups were Calabrian by birth or heritage.

The word “mafia” is generally used to refer to a secret, ritualistic criminal organization that began in Italy and was replicated in America, Canada, and other parts of the world. Yet, as Henner Hess notes, the word describes a phenomenon far more complex “than the headlines about a vaunted, secret criminal association suggest.” It refers to a philosophy, a behaviour, and, indeed, a way of life that emerged from historically rooted subcultures in Sicily and Calabria. As a philosophy it is meant to dictate how powerful men are to conduct themselves and the role they are to play in society, or at least in their own sub-terrain of society. For criminologist James Inciardi, the word “mafia” is Sicilian-Arabic in its origins and is derived from terms meaning “to protect and to act as guardian; a friend or companion; to defend and preserve; power, integrity, strength.” Various definitions of the word that began surfacing in 19th-century Italy included superlatives that reflected the traditional ideals of manhood and manliness: power, superiority, bravery, boldness, self-confidence, revenge, respect, honour, and vainglory. Embodying these common ideals was the mafioso who is known and admired for his ability to protect and provide essential services to his kin, his friends and his associates because he is a “man of honour.” Becoming a man of honour is all based on rispetto (respect). Every mafioso demands respect; it is the core of his power and his very being. Respect and honour for the mafioso are garnered by winning a reputation for toughness, courage, the ability to get things done, a defiance of government authority, and the use of violence against his enemies or those of his friends and associates.

As Peter Edwards and Antonio Nicaso observe, “central to a study of the mafia is its twisted concept of honour.” As a man of honour, the mafioso “cannot stand the slightest offence and reacts violently when a sgarro (insult) is done to him. A man of honour knows he is capable of exercising violence in such a way that he frightens others into giving him deferential treatment.” In other words, it does not matter to
the mafioso how he obtains honour or respect; they could be forcibly extracted through threats, intimidation, extortion, revenge, or violence. Intimidation and violence, in fact, serve a number of purposes for the mafioso: to protect his kin and territory, to sustain his criminal activities, to ensure secrecy and obedience, and as a means to gain and reinforce respect, honour, and power. “The instant a mafioso cannot protect those around him with violence, his respect evaporates and he becomes a target himself. Murder is considered an honourable means of gaining and guarding power, respect and territory.” In this regard, habitual criminals like the mafioso “feel the need to call themselves ‘Men of Honour’; much the way those with the worst body odour in Elizabethan times often wore the most perfume.”

A man also gains honour and respect by being able to keep a secret. “An uomo di panza is literally a man of guts, someone who can keep his secrets deep in his body,” according to Edwards and Nicaso. Exemplifying this credo is the code of omerta, a sacrosanct canon of the mafioso that transcends secrecy; it is a term that embodies the virtues of manliness, honour and respect, self-control in the face of adversity, and non-co-operation with the government. By remaining silent, especially in the face of government interdiction, one’s prestige and honour rise immeasurably. In short, “the Mafia has codes, a structure and, of equal importance, a spirit that distinguishes it from common organized crime.” Power, violence, and omerta are intertwined and mutually reinforcing as the foundation for traditional mafia groups. “Power is seized with violence and maintained through silence.”

As a powerful man, the mafioso commands a network of relationships or partito and, as the centre of this network, he views himself as a padrone (patron) to his “clients.” In this role he is a provider of services, especially for those who can’t or won’t turn to the government — from the peasantry in Sicily or Calabria where a government presence was sparse, to the Italian immigrant unfamiliar with or suspicious of the government in a new land, all the way to the thief or murderer, who cannot go to the government for help. For Howard Abadinsky, the mafioso is “a provider of protection broadly defined. For legitimate entrepreneurs, he provides insurance against otherwise untrustworthy suppliers and/or customers and will limit competition by restricting market entry. He acts as a guarantor so that persons who do not trust one another can transact business with a significant degree of confidence; this refers to legitimate entrepreneurs and, most particularly, the illegitimate, who cannot turn to the police or courts to remedy their grievances.” A related role performed by the mafioso is that of an intermediary, whether it is a commercial agent who brings legitimate businessmen or criminals together to make a deal, a political power broker who helps friends get elected to public office, or a mediator who arbitrates a conflict between two parties. To this extent, the terms “mafia” and “’ndrangheta” denote an unofficial, unrecognized, and even secret system of government headed by unelected yet influential men who seek to control a particular community. And like the government, the mafioso charges a fee for his services or expects a cut from any profitable transaction he brokers or is carried out in his jurisdiction.

As an organization, the Sicilian Mafia appears to have begun as an underground sect that emerged to fight foreign invaders and rulers. The most common explanation of the origins of the mafia — as both a moniker and a secret society — is traced to 1282 when the French invaded Sicily. To defend their island, Sicilians rallied under the anti-French battle cry *Morte alla Francia Italia anela!* (M.A.F.I.A.). Italian folklore also holds that the term was applied by the Sicilian resistance movement after hearing a mother scream out, *Ma fia, ma fia!* (My daughter, my daughter!), upon discovering she was being raped by a French soldier. Regardless of its exact origin, the mafia became a nationalistic symbol to the repressed and conquered Sicilian people. Resistance fighters were made to swear an oath under the penalty of death that they would never reveal their underground movement to outsiders and the official ruling elite, which helped lay the foundation for the sacred code of omerta.

As the influence of foreign forces waned in Sicily, the mafia was gradually transformed from a clandestine resistance force to a powerful political, economic, and criminal institution on the island. The abolishment of feudalism in rural Sicily during the early 19th century contributed to the emergence of the mafioso by giving
rise to a new profession, the *gabelotti*, who managed rural estates for landowners. In this capacity, the *gabelotti* played the role of the *padrone* to the local peasantry, subletting farmland to them, controlling local resources, mediating disputes, and protecting them from the ruling gentry or bandits. The *gabelotti* ruled over his estate with brute force, backed up by the *compagnie d’armi*, family members or friends who were recruited because they were men of respect, meaning that they were tough, quick to use violence, and feared. By the end of the 19th century, these local *gabelotti* had become the ruling class in rural Sicily.

The origins of the social grouping that would serve as a basis for the mafia as a criminal organization emerged alongside the mafioso’s rise to power. Most of the early mafia clans were formed around kinship because it was only blood relatives — *sangue de me sangu* (“blood of my blood”) — where true loyalty could be found. When an exclusive reliance on kinship proved to be too restrictive, the *famiglia* began to be augmented through the custom of *comparatico* or *comparraggio* (“god parenthood”), in which outsiders became members to help increase the clan’s strength and power. Over time, standardized rituals were adopted to induct new members into the family, and all inductees had to swear allegiance to their *famiglia* and pledge their commitment to the principle of *omertà*. At the same time, the heads of each family (*capo di famiglia*) began networking with one another and, in some parts of Sicily, came together to form a *cosca*, a small, localized clique whereby member-families supported one another to pursue mutual objectives, divide up territories, and arbitrate disputes amongst themselves. The *cosca* was devoid of any rigid organization and was simply referred to as *amici degli amici* (“friends of friends”), the members of which were known as *aregli uomini qualificati* (“qualified men” or “men of honour”). A *zia* (“uncle”) or *capo* (“head”) was recognized as the leader of these informal, secretive networks and whoever rose to this esteemed position truly personified the attributes of the mafioso. Another level of organization was the *consorteria*, an alliance made up of two or more *coscas*. One *cosca* was recognized as supreme within the *consorteria* and its head was anointed as the *Capo di tutti Capi* (“the boss of bosses”). An informal network of local *coscas* emerged in various parts of Sicily, which helped the mafiosi consolidate their power on the island (although no unified, monolithic mafia group ever became of this loosely aligned confederation). These evolving subcultures were known by various names throughout Sicily, but ironically, never by the term “mafia.” In Monreale, it was referred to as the *Stuppaghieri*; in Bagheria, it was called the *Fratuzzi*, while in other towns it was known as *Cudi Chiatti* (“Flat Tails”), the *Mano Fraterna* (“the Brotherly Hand”), and the *Birritti* (“the Caps”).

By the end of the 19th century, mafia dons were all-powerful in Sicily; they held sway over a large portion of the rural population, had influence over local government, and controlled a number of vital industries on the island. The mafioso was also being transformed from a protector of the Sicilian people to their subjugator, extorting money from the peasantry and merchants under the pretence of tribute or a “protection fee.” These mafia groups were now incorporating criminal activities into their traditional role, which contributed to the forging of a complex and paradoxical social, political, economic, and criminal force in Sicily. As Peter Robb noted in his 1996 book, *Midnight in Sicily*, “The mafia was outlawed, but tolerated, secret, but recognizable, criminal but upholding of order. It protected and ripped off the owners of the great estates, protected and ripped off the sharecroppers who worked the estates, and ripped off the peasants who slaved on them.”

In addition to the Sicilian Mafia, a subculture with similar structures, rituals, and norms was forming and evolving into violent criminal fraternities in Calabria. According to the FBI, the ’Ndrangheta originated in the 1860s, formed by Sicilians who were banished by the Italian government from their native island, an explanation that suggests the Calabrian Mafia grew out from the rib of the Sicilian Mafia. Lee Lamothe and Antonio Nicaso believe the origins of the ’Ndrangheta were indigenous to Calabria; it began as a defence mechanism for impoverished rural peasants against their aristocratic landlords. Regardless of its origins, as in Sicily, weak local governing institutions and the remoteness of Calabria from Rome helped pave the way for the emergence of power-hungry men bent on unofficially controlling all facets of local life, while financially whetting their beaks. For Lamothe and
Nicaso, “Some leaders were beneficent; others were tyrannical. But all were violent, having to first prove their manliness through homicide, preferably in public, and preferably being acquitted of the ensuing charges.” Like “mafia,” the term “’ndrangheta” — which was derived from the Greek word andragathia, meaning heroism, cunning, virtue, and manliness — is embedded with deeper meanings as to how powerful men should conduct themselves.

Traditional ’Ndrangheta groups are also based on family relationships, either through blood, marriage, or the custom of comparatico. All members must go through an initiation ceremony, which consists of a series of vague questions and answers, obscure symbolic gestures, the invocation of mythical knights, and references to violence and the supremacy of the ’Ndrangheta clan to which the inductee is expected to make a lifelong commitment. In 1985, police video cameras captured an undercover RCMP officer as he was inducted into a ’Ndrangheta cell during a ceremony held in a Greater Toronto apartment. After gathering the inductee and six “made” members into a circle, the leader of the cell welcomed the new member into “the Honoured Society of Calabria” and “the Family.” The ceremony was described by long-time RCMP officer and organized crime expert Reginald King:

An ’Ndrangheta group voted three times to accept the initiate into the organization. “I swear on the tip of this knife to forget father, mother, all the family, at whatever call, to answer to ‘Corp of the Society,’ ” the inductee was instructed to repeat. “There is a dark tomb wide and deep under the depth of the sea. Whoever uncovers it shall die with four knifings to the breast,” the vow continued. Later, the leader explained some of the rules, the “codes of the court,” as he called them. Cooperation, communication, dividing of profits, and punishment are crucial elements. “If we make a penny, a penny ... is what is divided amongst us. If (one of us) is in trouble, we are all in trouble. These are not things that are discussed with anyone,” the leader said. “You are older than my brother, but because he entered (the Society) before you … you have to respect him. I will tell you something. When one does a swearing in, they have to do a swearing in that will last. It is not a swearing in that you can say you want to leave ... If he does (a profitable activity) and I don’t know but if I find out, if he does something light, small, there are other methods in which he can pay. And you don’t pay with words ... You know how it is paid? With death, that’s how it is paid.” And finally, catchall words of wisdom: “If you are respectful, you are respected by all. When one has respect, the other things will come.” The leader did not speak of punishment without pointing out benefits, including the connections that came with being a made member.

Variously referred to as “the Honoured Society,” “the Calabrian Mafia,” Fibbia, or N’drina, signs of this secret society began to emerge in Calabria by the end of the 19th century. In 1888, the prefect of the city of Reggio, Calabria, received an anonymous letter alerting him to the existence of “a sect that fears nothing.” Four years later, more than 250 men from several villages throughout Calabria and southern Italy were investigated for mafia-like activities.

The period in which the Calabrian and Sicilian mafiosi were consolidating their power in Italy coincided with the great Italian diaspora to North America. Beginning in the early 1870s, successive waves of Italian immigrants, most from the southern parts of the country, began arriving on the shores of the United States and Canada. By the end of the century, stories about the existence of secret societies, extortion activities, and vendetta-based violence began to emerge from the expatriate Italian communities. Secret societies were being formed by Italian immigrants who had already been inducted as members of the ’Ndrangheta or mafia clan in their native country. Other aspiring mafiosi in North America had no such past, but were endeavouring to create their own nascent organizations. Still others did not bother with such formalities, and simply bastardized the traditional “protection” services of the mafia or ’Ndrangheta by carrying out rudimentary extortion rackets that preyed upon their fellow Italian immigrants.
While the traditions and norms of these secret Italian societies were carried over from the old country, there is little evidence to suggest that entire criminal groups were transported from Italy to North America. Instead, the humble beginnings of Italian organized crime in the U.S. and Canada were the result of a potent mix of customs and traditions associated with the ’Ndrangheta and mafia, men who aspired to positions of power, respect, and honour, and the acculturation of Italian immigrants in an urban environment characterized by poverty, discrimination, marginalization, lawlessness, ambition, and corruption.

THE SOCIETY
The earliest versions of secret Italian societies in Canada were loosely structured groups, influenced by the Sicilian Mafia and the Calabrian ’Ndrangheta. “The Society,” as they were simply called within the Italian communities, were “much whispered about” before they came to the attention of the media or law enforcement, Lee Lamothe and Antonio Nicaso wrote, although “even then it was made out to be more sinister than it actually was.” Some of these societies followed the original philosophical credo of the mafioso and provided a range of services to Italian immigrants, such as helping to bring over family members, locating accommodations, finding jobs, providing money, and fostering social relationships. This was all conducted within the context of the traditional partito, where the padrone served as an intermediary, a broker, and a provider of services to his Italian clients in the new country. Most of these societies required regular donations from those who joined up. This money was then used to help society members who were in trouble with the law or who could not support their families. Many of the padrones who founded these societies, however, regularly abused their positions of power and trust and devolved into criminal piranhas who used the payment of society dues as an excuse to forcibly extract money from Italian immigrants.

Events leading to the first public discovery of a “Society” in Canada began on December 7, 1908. It was on this day that Louis Belluz, a baker in Fort Francis, Ontario, received a letter written in red ink. The letter demanded $100 and, according to a police summery of a statement made by Belluz, if payment was not forthcoming, “his buildings were to be burned and himself burned to death.” After Belluz reported the extortion attempt, police traced the letter to Nicholas Bessanti and Joe Ross. Bessanti told police that he wrote the letter on behalf of a secret society he was forced to join in Fort Francis. He estimated total membership in this group at fifteen or sixteen people. His fee to join was $25, but Bessanti disclosed that he only paid $10. He spoke of an initiation ceremony where a closed circle of men crouched over a large stiletto knife and chanted oaths that consisted of arcane Italian poetry and at the end they hugged and kissed one another. “In joining the Society,” Bessanti told police, “we took a solemn oath that we would obey our leader’s orders: would rob, burn or kill as he directed; that we would protect one another from the hands of the law; to disobey these orders we would expect to be punished by death or otherwise as decide upon by the Society.” Bessanti explained that the group “met every Saturday night in the west end of freight shed and there they decided what to do to raise money.”

Bessanti also informed police that he attended a meeting where it was decided “the Baker Louis Belluz must pay over some money to them. Carmine Domic was chosen to write the letter and I was chosen to carry it to Belluz. It was also decide that an older member of the Society was to go along with me to see that I delivered the letter as instructed. Domic was instructed to write in the letter that if he, the Baker, did not put up at least $50, they would burn his house up and him in it.” Bessanti was warned by leaders of the society that he would suffer the same fate as the baker if the letter was not delivered. Among those present in the freight shed while he wrote the letter was Frank Dusanti, Francesco Tino, Frank Muro, Salvador Tino, and Carmine Domic. The letter Bessanti wrote was dictated to him by the society’s founder, Francesco Tino. Little is known about Tino, except that after arriving in Canada from Italy around 1907, he spent a few months in Montreal and then turned up in the Ontario town of Sault Ste. Marie. Shortly thereafter, he went to Fort William, where he reportedly killed an Italian migrant worker. From there, he fled to Fort Francis. By the time police had begun to close in on Tino, he and Frank Muro, who helped organize the Fort Francis society, had crossed the border into the United States. After warrants were
issued by Canadian authorities, American police arrested the two men in the town of Hibbing, located in northern Minnesota. Tino and Muro were brought back to Canada and following a trial were convicted along with Bessanti of theft and other charges. Tino received the harshest sentence of five years.

THE BLACK HAND

Despite the existence of ritualistic Italian secret societies in North America, the most prevalent and fearsome type of criminal conspiracy operating within the early Italian expatriate communities was not carried out by cohesive organizations. The “Black Hand” was a label applied to a common form of extortion perpetrated against Italian immigrants in Canada and the United States that predominated during the first quarter of the 20th century. While these extortion schemes were no doubt influenced by the ’Ndrangheta and the Sicilian Mafia, most Black Handers eschewed a formal organizational structure, codes of conduct, or ceremonial rituals.

A Black Hand extortion attempt invariably began with a letter addressed to an intended victim. According to Jay Robert Nash, these extortion schemes were not just prosaic, but highly intimidating and potentially lethal:

An anonymous Black Hander would threaten various types of violence to extort money from one, usually well-to-do, victim. These threats most often involved kidnapping a family member, threatening to blow up a business or shop, or to attack, injure, or kill a family member or the recipient of the Black Hand note. These notes were crudely written in broken English … and boldly demanded a certain amount of money, with specific instructions as to how the cash was to be delivered. The note would usually be decorated with a number of horrific symbols and images — daggers dripping blood, a bomb exploding, a gun smoking at the barrel, a skull and crossbones, a body dangling from a rope tied about the neck. The signature of the sender was invariably a hand imprinted in heavy black ink, thus the sobriquet, La Mano Nera (The Black Hand).

In 1903, New York City newspapers began reporting on the activities of Ignazio Saietta, nicknamed Lupo (“Wolf”). Saietta arrived in New York from his native Sicily in 1899 and, over the next few years, he used intimidation and violence to extort money from Italians living in Harlem’s Little Italy. Either on his own, or as an enforcer for other Black Handers, he was reputed to have killed at least thirty people. According to Nash, “He simply strangled them in their homes, dragged their corpses outside to his waiting cart, and drove to a livery stable he owned. He then hacked up the bodies, burned parts of them, and buried what would not burn in his backyard.” Saietta later allied himself with the Morello crime family, one of the earliest Sicilian criminal organizations in New York City. In tandem with Saietta, the Morellos were the leading suspects in the “barrel murders,” a name used by the media to describe victims of the Saietta-Morello union who were stuffed inside a barrel after being beaten, strangled, stabbed, or shot to death. Saietta also branched out into currency counterfeiting.

![New York City Black Hander, Ignazio Saietta](image)
along with Don Vito Cascio Ferro, a Sicilian mafioso who immigrated to the United States in 1901 and who was also a leading Black Hander in New York. Saietta’s reign of terror continued until 1909, at which point he was arrested and imprisoned along with Ferro and a dozen others for counterfeiting offences.

One of the first reports of the Black Hand in Canada came out of Montreal in 1904. That year, Antonio Cordasco, a high-profile Italian immigrant who became known as Re de la lavoratori (“King of the Workers”) while serving as the Canadian Pacific Railway’s chief recruiter of Italian labour, received a menacing letter demanding money. According to Peter Edwards and Michel Auger, the letter included a “drawing of a black hand, pointing to the letters M and A” as well as a “crude sketch of a coffin, two skulls-and-crossbones, and what appeared to be a snake under the hot sun.” Little is known about what transpired following receipt of this letter, but at the time, Cordasco himself was embroiled in controversy, having been accused of capitalizing on the stranglehold he had over Italian workers by defrauding them at every step of their journey from the Italian countryside to Canadian work camps. As labour historian Gunther Peck described:

In addition to exacting between five and seven dollars for each Atlantic crossing, Cordasco charged each compatriot three dollars to get a job and another two dollars to get to the work site. Once on the job, Italian workers continued paying Cordasco tribute by purchasing their food from his traveling commissary service. Charges for all supplies consumed by these mobile men were immediately deducted from their wages and paid to Cordasco at the end of the work season. The more his compatriots traveled along Canadian Pacific Railway lines, the more goods they consumed, and the more Cordasco profited.

A July 23, 1904, letter from a fired CPR employee to a judge presiding over an inquiry into Cordasco’s labour practices also accused him of bribing company officials to ensure that only Italians received jobs on the railway and that the Italian labourers would receive free passage to labour camps on CPR trains. “There was an unwritten law in the CPR Labor Bureau at Winnipeg that no white men need apply, as it was easier and safer to extort fees from those who could speak no English.” Many of the labourers who paid Cordasco did not obtain employment, and when they demanded their money back, some claimed they were threatened with violence. In this respect, Cordasco, like other Society men, turned a paternalistic padrone relationship into a corrupt method of extortion that victimized destitute and trusting Italian immigrants. Cordasco would later be implicated in a conspiracy to smuggle Italian nationals into the United States from Canada in partnership with the Fort Francis extortionist Francesco Tino and Vito Adamo, a Black Hander, bootlegger, and mob boss from Detroit.

In Toronto, rumours began circulating in 1904 that a Black Hand organizer was in town, although this story actually begins in New York City. In the summer of that year, Salvatore Bossito, an eighteen-year-old music student who worked in his father’s restaurant on Park Avenue in Manhattan, went to the police to report a conversation he had overhead among twelve Sicilian men who were living in apartments above the restaurant. He said that the men had planned to cheat a number of Italian miners travelling through New York using a crooked game of chance. Acting upon the complaint, police arrested the plotters. The men found out it was Salvatore who had gone to police and when they were released from custody they began hatching a plot to kill him as revenge. On August 23, Salvatore’s father, Francisco, allegedly found scrawled on the door of his restaurant a cabalistic Sicilian symbol that was said to be a sign of death. The elder Bossito, a Calabrian, laughed it off as a joke. Two days later, while Salvatore was working in the kitchen of the restaurant, he heard his father loudly arguing in Italian with another man. The young Bossito came out to see what the fuss was about, and upon spotting him, the stranger drew a pistol from his pocket and fired at the youth. The bullet struck Salvatore between the eyes, killing him instantly. After knocking down the father, the man escaped into the street, but was caught by police and held at the Elizabeth Police Station while a mob estimated at one thousand people gathered outside calling for his blood.

During his interrogation, the shooter confessed to police that his name was Carlo Rossati. He insisted
that he killed Salvatore accidentally, claiming he had shot the young boy with a bullet meant for another man with whom he was quarrelling over the finger-guessing game passatella. To some, Rossati’s confession was an attempt to downplay evidence that he had been summoned to New York expressly to kill Salvatore. Some pointed to the fact that the thirty-five-year-old Sicilian arrived in New York on August 23 and went straight to the restaurant. Witnesses also told police that after the shooting they had seen Rossati with some of the Sicilian men who were reported to police by Bossito. The shooting was not simply a function of revenge, the New York Times asserted at the time, but the result of “unfriendly relations” between Calabrians and Sicilians, who have a habit of settling “their quarrels without calling in the legally constituted authorities.”

Bossito was targeted, in part, because “invoking the aid of the police for any purpose” is contrary “to the Sicilian and Calabrian canon.”

About three or four weeks before the shooting, Rossati landed in Toronto, telling people he had just come from Baltimore. He was described by the Toronto media as a tall, well-dressed, and stout man who “had the appearance of someone who did little hard work and his hands showed little evidence of any severe toil.” While in the city, Rossati presented himself as a reformer, announcing to whoever would listen that Italians in Canada were mistreated, that they should mobilize for their rights, and that he was the one to organize them. Rossati apparently held a number of meetings in Toronto that were well attended by local Italians. Prompted by recent media reports of Bossito’s murder and the activities of the Black Hand in New York City, some suspected that Rossati was in Toronto to organize a local extortion ring. An August 24 edition of the Toronto Daily Star recounted the story of the “murder in New York by an agent of the Black Hand who had been brought from Toronto for the purpose.” The newspaper then posed the question “Has the society of the Black Hand a branch in Toronto?”

Toronto city police claimed they knew nothing of the society or the man who was said to have committed the murder. A “prominent Italian” interviewed by the Star said that the mafia has several members in this city, but is not believed to have any regular organization. Under the headline “Black Hand in Toronto,” an article in the Globe read, “‘There is very little doubt existing in the minds of members of the Italian colony in this city that Carlo Rossati, who is charged with killing young Bossito in New York on Wednesday, was successful in forming a branch of the Black Hand Society in Toronto.’”

The true nature of Rossati’s intentions in Toronto remains a mystery. A New York City police captain denied reports that the mafia or Black Hand was a factor in the killing of Salvatore Bossito and said no death mark had been chalked on the door of the restaurant. However, the assassination of Bossito — one of the earliest murders in New York attributed to Black Handers — began a wave of media-inspired hysteria that attributed any act of crime or violence within the Italian community to this sinister society. Stories appeared in New York City newspapers on a regular basis about extortion attempts, not to mention the various bombings, stabbings, shootings, and kidnappings allegedly perpetrated by the Black Hand. Over the next five years, the hysteria spread to newspapers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ontario, which were full of sensational stories, many of them baseless, accusing the shadowy Black Hand of numerous crimes and deprivations. The hysterics turned into a full-fledged panic in New York’s Little Italy on October 7, 1904, when frantic parents besieged an elementary school after a local Italian newspaper published reports that the Black Hand planned to dynamite two Harlem public schools attended primarily by children of Italian families. The police found no evidence of such a plot.

Despite the manufactured frenzy surrounding the Black Hand, there was evidence of a number of extortion rings in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia during the early 1900s, some of which culminated in violent deaths. In February 1904, a Newark, New Jersey, man named Michael Rossati received a letter threatening to kill him and his wife if he did not pay $400. The signature was a black-ink imprint of a hand. On December 4, 1904, a New Yorker named Joseph Pagano received a letter demanding $100 or his life. The letter, written in Italian, bore a skull and crossbones. In May 1905, the fruit store and home of an Italian immigrant in Monessen, Pennsylvania, was dynamited after he allegedly refused to pay $5,000 demanded in two pre-
vious extortion letters. Numerous other bombings of Italian shopkeepers would follow in Pennsylvania and New York City. Later that year, an Italian butcher was murdered by four men in his Brooklyn store. Police explained that he had been killed, not because he had refused to accede to extortion threats, but because he had opposed a dominant political faction allied with the mafia in his native Sicily. According to press reports, his murder was carried out by “agents of the Black Hand society” in America. Hundreds of other murders would be attributed to the Black Hand or the Italian mafia over the next few years, most of them never solved. This included the death of five people on November 12, 1905, and eight people (including five children) on April 30, 1908, in New York City. In both instances, fires were deliberately set in Italian tenement buildings, and the families who died had both recently received extortion letters. As early as 1905, Detective Sergeant Joseph Petrosino of the New York City police — a legendary figure in organized crime enforcement who would go on to make hundreds of arrests of individuals supposedly associated with the Black Hand and the mafia — declared “there are thousands of Black Hand robbers and assassins in New York and Brooklyn” who are the descendants of generations of brigands from Reggio Calabria and the Palermo province of Sicily. Petrosino himself receivednumerous death threats warning him to cease his pursuit of Italian criminals. As part of his wide-reaching investigations, Petrosino travelled to Palermo where he was murdered by assassins on March 12, 1909.

In rural parts of the United States and Canada, Italian extortionists turned up at work and camp sites of Italian labourers toilng on construction projects. Some were so brazen that they stood at the paymasters’ wickets to collect their cut of the cash wages paid to their victims. In 1905, the media reported that Italian men working on the dams in New York’s Winchester County were threatened with violence if they did not pay a membership fee to the local society. “Every pay day at the different dams agents of the Black Hand band demand all the way from $1 to $5 from each man, and if refused a note threatening him with death is left at his home the next day.” In Welland, Ontario, where many Italians were involved in the construction of the canal, police came into the possession of several extortion letters that were sent to Italian business owners. In one letter sent to a Fred Guido, the extortionists asked for a payment of $5,000 to be delivered “at 3 a.m. in the Catholic cemetery.” The letter concluded by saying, “We know you’re a person who can afford to pay, if you don’t you will have problems.”

Numerous other extortion attempts were reported in Ontario between 1905 and 1910. In 1906, Italian workers arriving in Toronto from Port Colborne, located in the southern portion of the Niagara Peninsula, told stories about one countryman who had been terrorized into paying $30, and another who disappeared after persuading a friend to guarantee the payment of a similar amount. After asking, “Are there Black Hand Italians at Port Colborne?” the Toronto Daily Star wrote, “It is said that a number of the thriftier Italians have been threatened with dire penalties should they fail to pay the specified amounts. Letters have been written, but frequently the prospective victims are seen in person and significant threats used. Thoroughly frightened, four or five have returned to Italy. These men argued that it would be about as economical to buy a passage back to their native land as to respond to blackmail, and safer.” In North Bay, where a large Italian community supplied labour for railroad, dam, and sewer construction, the Black Hand was considered so active that “there has been a spirit of unrest manifest in the Italian colony,” resulting in “a revolt among the victims.” In 1907, a North Bay merchant named Frank Dececco received “the fatal missive so dreaded by the sons of sunny Italy, informing him that he would choose quickly between death and donating one thousand to the society of assassins designated by the Black Hand symbol.” Dececco was so frightened that he made out his will, bade farewell to his wife and children, and then departed for Italy before he could be “laid low by the assassin band.” The same year, a number of armed robberies against members of the Italian community in North Bay were blamed on the local “Black Hand Gang.” One alleged member of the gang who threatened to go to police was stabbed to death. Relying on the revelations of a self-confessed member of the Society, the Toronto Daily Star reported that when “the society decrees the death of a man, lots are drawn and when the assassin completes his deed
of honour, a scapegoat is ready and provided with 
$100 and a ticket to a distant point with instructions 
to efface himself from the sight of the law. Then the 
crime is sworn on the absent man, who is generally a 
late-comer to the colony and little known. The scape-
goat soon loses his identity among his compatriots 
at a distance, and the law is baffled.”

In 1907, a letter written in English was passed 
along to police from the wealthy Toronto woman who 
received it. The letter demanded $500 “to be paid to the 
Brotherhood of the Black Hand” and warned, “If you 
let the letter be made public, show it to the police, or 
have police on the spot which we appoint to have the 
money paid up, both you and your husband will be 
murdered and your house blown up.” At the bottom 
of the letter “Black Hand” was printed in large letters 
and was accompanied by the initials of no less than 
twenty people. In 1908, in the township of Louth, 
neat St. Catharine’s, an Italian fruit grower was sent 
a letter addressed to him signed “Black Hand.” The 
letter ordered the recipient to place $500 at the end 
of a recently erected row of houses. The man was 
threatened with the torching of his residence and 
barns if he did not comply. While $500 was demanded, 
the letter curiously proposed a compromise: if $100 
was provided, the writer would see to it that no harm 
came to the man or his family. But if no money was 
produced, the letter stated, the man and his family 
would be murdered.

One of Ontario’s most sensational Black Hand 
episodes took place in Hamilton. In September 1909, 
John Taglierino, Samuel Wolfe, Carmelo Columbo, 
and Ernesto Speranza were arrested and charged with 
thief and extortion. The circumstances leading up to 
their arrest began in 1906 when fruit dealer Salvatore 
Sanzone received a letter demanding $1,000. Written 
in Italian, the letter commanded Sanzone to take the 
money to a spot on Dundas Road and pay it “over or 
pain of losing his life, having his family extermin-
ated and his shop blown up.” Sanzone reported the 
threat to police and a sting operation was set in mo-
tion. The police asked Sanzone to follow the letter’s 
instructions, which he did. Upon arriving at the pre-
determined location, and under the watchful eye of 
carefully hidden police officers, the intended victim 
encountered Wolfe, Columbo, and Speranza. The men 
demanded that Sanzone hand over the cash and when 
he complied, police jumped into action and arrested 
the three men.

A confession by the three Black Handers led 
police to Taglierino, a storekeeper who was the driv-
ing force behind the extortion attempt. Police already 
suspected Taglierino of engineering a number of other 
extortion plots within the local Italian population, but 
could not charge him due to the reluctance of witnesses 
to come forward. In September 1909, Taglierino was 
arrested on an assault charge unrelated to the Sanzone 
case, and later that year was charged with extortion. 
Even after his arrests, Taglierino continued to send 
extortion letters, which included another to Sanzone 
that threatened him with “painful death” if he did 
not produce $1,000. This letter, which Sanzone also 
forwarded to police, was signed by “Revolver” and 
was accompanied by a crude sketch of a handgun.

Joseph Courto, a Taglierino minion who became a 
Crown witness, testified in court that Ernesto Sperzano 
wrote the first letter to Sanzone under orders from 
Taglierino. Ralph Rufus, another Taglierino underling 
who became a Crown witness, admitted he wrote the 
second letter under the “Revolver” pseudonym, but 
claimed to have done so after being threatened by 
Taglierino. Rufus was already known to police, having 
been charged with keeping a house of prostitution. On 
October 26, 1909, Speranza, Colombo, and Wolfe were 
found guilty and sentenced to ten years in Kingston 
Penitentiary. At the conclusion of the trial, the judge 
stated that those convicted “had been found guilty 
of one of the most diabolical crimes in the criminal 
calendar. It was more serious than highway robbery, 
for they not only threatened to kill the man himself, 
but his family as well.” Taglierino would be found 
guilty at a later trial.

Around the same time, the town of Fernie, located 
in the Kootney region of British Columbia, was reeling 
under allegations that Black Handers were extorting 
the local Italian population, most of whom had im-
migrated to the area from southern Italy in the late 
1890s in search of work in the mines or in railway 
construction. In 1908, a petition signed by dozens 
of Fernie citizens and sent to the provincial govern-
ment requested that action be taken against the “Black 
Hand Society” which has “for its object, extortion of
money; the wounding of persons who do not yield to its requests, and in many cases, it commits murder.” Following a police investigation, twelve men were arrested in early July and charged with conspiracy to obtain money by threats. Police had obtained statements from at least five of the arrested men — Frank Marasco, Nicolo Cardamone, Joe Quartiere, Antonio Lento, and Louis Carosello — that they were compelled to become members of the Society and forced to pay an initiation fee. Based on their evidence, police identified the two ringleaders as Stephen Bruno and Frank Albernesse, who had come to Fernie from Spokane, Washington, expressly to organize a “Society.”

While being held in advance of their upcoming trial, five of the suspects, including Bruno and Albernesse, escaped from the local jail by prying open a bolted coal-chute door. The five fugitives made their way to the dry-goods store of another suspect named G.S. Bartolo, who had been allowed out of jail to tend to his business. Upon arriving at the store, the men discovered that Bartolo was released only on the condition that he be accompanied at all times by a police escort. Another escaped prisoner ventured to the Australian Hotel, where he bought four bottles of beer. He was recognized, but got away. All the men eventually fled into the bush, where they spent the night, but turned themselves in to police the next morning. One of the escapees, a shoemaker named Jasper Jacimo, claimed the others forced him to flee the jail at razor point.

By August 1, while still waiting for their trial, a small brushfire quickly spread into town, and in less than ninety minutes, the majority of Fernie had been destroyed. Rumours began to circulate that the fire “was started by members of the Black Hand society in an effort to release their imprisoned brothers,” as the August 6, 1908, edition of the Cranbrook Herald reported. These rumours were quashed by local fire officials who had been fighting the brushfires for days. The mayor of Fernie also denounced the story. He even went so far as to praise the prisoners, who had been released on their own recognizance when it became clear that the jail was in jeopardy of burning to the ground, and who had all voluntarily delivered themselves back into custody soon after the fire was extinguished. He also publicly stated that the prisoners, with the exception of five suspected leaders of the Society, had proven to be “the most efficient workers in clearing up the wrecked town.”

By September, ten of the twelve accused men were committed to trial on the charge that they “did unlawfully conspire, combine, confederate, and agree together to form in the said city of Fernie a Society to be known as ‘Black Hand Society’, having for one of its objects the unlawful intimidation of other persons and the extorting of money from them by threats of using violence and personal injury.” The trial concluded on September 19, with all the accused being convicted and sentenced. The five reputed ringleaders — Domenic Marzini, Stephen Bruno, Frank Albernesse, Joseph Ferraro, and Frank Rocco — received between six and seven years, while the other convicted conspirators — Annuzziato Santori, Joseph Ferraro, G.S. Bartolo, Jasper Jacino, and Antonio Vitali, received sentences ranging from six months to two years.

Despite these convictions, complaints about extortion attempts continued to be forwarded to police in Fernie. Acting on these reports, a man named Ranier was arrested. His detention stemmed from threats made to Louis Carosella, who had provided testimony in the previous Black Hand case. Carosella was set to testify against Ranier, when he received a letter advising him to renounce his statements to police or he would be killed. Shortly before the letter was sent, Ranier escaped from the Fernie lockup, although he was soon recaptured. During the time he was on the lam, a shot was fired through Carosella’s bedroom window when he was at home. He exchanged several shots with his assailant who fled after wounding Carosella in the knee. Although police never did determine the identity of the shooter, Rainer was convicted of extortion and sentenced to fourteen years.

There is some indication that the successful prosecution of the Black Handers in Fernie drove any remaining conspirators out of the province. In January 1910, a meeting of six Italian men in Winnipeg was broken up after “a well-directed fusillade of revolver shots poured into the room.” The Toronto Daily Star reported that all the men had recently arrived in Winnipeg “from Fernie, and are known to have been connected with the ‘Black Hand’ there, against which
there has been vigorous crusade.” The men attending the meeting were all purportedly friends of Antonio Bruno, who in 1898 was shot to death in the Kootney town of Moyie by an alleged Black Hander after he refused to join the local Society. Speculation increased that the men were part of a Black Hand conspiracy when none of those attending the sit-down would disclose to police the subject of their meeting or why anyone would want to kill them.

The presence of Black Handers in Manitoba was confirmed in August of that year when a trial of six Society men began in Lac du Bonnet. In the crowded defendants’ box sat Antonio Bordegoni, Frank Filletto, Frank Rolla, Petro Muto, Guiseppi Andre, and Paulo Fillippo, all of whom were accused of operating a “Black Hand Society.” The case followed allegations by Pasquale Devonna that the accused had “invited” him to join the Society and was told that as a member, he might be called on to steal or kill on behalf of the Society. The fee for joining, he said, was $10. Devonna paid the fee and attended one meeting of the Society in Winnipeg where further demands for money were made from him and other new inductees. Devonna told the court that after refusing to pay, he was threatened with death, which prompted his report to police. Written statements made to police by Rolla and Muto indicated that a society did exist. However, as one police officer wrote, they refused to say anything more, “lest they would be locked up like the ‘wolf’,” a reference to Ignazio Saietta who had just received a lengthy prison sentence in New York.

EXPOSE METHODS OF PICCIOTTERIA

Murder followed Black Hand outrage

GRIRO SAYS HE WAS VICTIM OF BLACK HAND

Victim Was Feared and Hated By His Assailant

Murder Took Place on Sunday Afternoon at Church and Front Streets, Where the Victim Was Shot Down—Prisoner Said Crime Was Outcome of Money Matter

Toronto, Sept. 19, 1911—“I am the man who shot Francesco Sciarrone and am prepared to accept the consequences. What do you want to do with me?”

Voluntarily offering the foregoing confession, Frank Griro, who fled from Toronto on July 30 last, after shooting Sciarrone, a fellow countryman at Church and Front streets, and with the Sword of Damocles precariously hanging over Griro’s Mediterranean head,
the fugitive, who, according to accounts, “appeared cool and collected evincing no sign of the seriousness of his actions,” surrendered himself at the Agnes Street Police Station on a charge of murder.

The shocking revelations of the now-contrite Italian are concerned with the July 29 murder of Frank Sciorrone, a murder that turbulently plunged the local Italian colony into a dystopia of unrest. Having paid close attention to the case and the proceedings of the police, upon examinations of the prisoners and his subsequent trial and accusations towards other criminal rogues; and having received much additional information on the subject from informants and witnesses, as well as the magistrate so experienced in bringing the criminal variety to justice, we are enabled to present our readers with some account and exegesis of this wicked story of blackmail, duplicity, and murder, all centering upon a pestiferous secret society that has become an excrescence of Toronto's own Italian colony.

Two days following the murder of Sciarrone, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Frank Griro, aged 25, who, it was said, both hated and feared the victim of this calamitous shooting. Police were convinced that the escapee, Griro, was the slayer, as he answered the description of the killer provided by erudite eye witnesses.

Griro, a barber by profession, is a handsome, yet jowly man, with abbreviated eyebrows that cling to the middle of his face and scars on his left jaw and right chin. He appears neatly dressed and shows signs of having been careful of his personal grooming. His speech betrays that he is a foreigner.

After leaving his flat in a rooming house at 165 York Street the afternoon of the shooting, he met Sciarrone — described as “in his mid-thirties, of medium height with a surly look and a nasty attitude” — at an Italian restaurant at 160 York Street. Witnesses told police they saw the two men walking along the street, apparently in a peaceable manner, when at the corner of Front and Church streets, Griro suddenly whirled upon the other and fired four shots in rapid succession. Griro then threw down the gun and with great velocity escaped the scene; but the wounded man picked up the weapon, moved a few steps towards the retreating shooter, and then sank to his knees, his rapidly ebbing strength prohibiting him from pulling the trigger.

In announcing the warrant for Griro, Inspector Duncan of the Toronto police speculated that the man may be the number one member of the Black Hand society in Toronto. The Italian interpreter working for the police bolstered this supposition when he said that the killing of Sciarrone was probably over money, as it was believed the dead man was in debt to Griro. (Initial rumours that the carnage was the result of a duel fought over a woman were rapidly dispelled.) Police did link Sciarrone to Griro, not as a victim, but as a partner in the carrying-out of the sedulous extortion activities by the malevolent Black Hand Society.

Both men lived on the ill-gotten gains extorted from members of their own Italian colonies in Toronto, Chicago, and Montreal. The many Italian labourers known to the men, “were kept in constant terror, and they feared to inform police lest they draw on their heads the vengeance of the Black Hand.” The unfortunate victims told stories of being forced to hand over to the coffers of the Society the entire proceeds of their labour. One prominent Italian said “all these secret societies are organized by unscrupulous men, who by much high-flown talk work on the sympathies of their more ignorant compatriots, and fill their own pockets.” Members of the Italian colony “believe that once marked by the Black Hand, death sooner or later is certain, that the Society first squeezes the victim's money out of him, and finally when he has nothing left, his life goes to swell the assassination roll of the mysterious and villainous society.”

Following a meticulous search of 165 York Street, Toronto police officers discovered letters and other documents “showing the extensive nature of the operations of the Black Hand Society. These communications were mostly between friends and several contained threats of inflicting punishment on certain persons with whom the writers were at outs.” One epistle told of the wanderings of a member of the gang from Buffalo to Cleveland and other cities and complained that business was not as profitable as it might have been, as the writer “had to
keep constant watch for the police, whose vigilance interfered somewhat with his activities."

On the body of the dead man, Sciarrone, detectives found extortion letters and fake marriage licences, which they believe were to be shown to immigration officials to allow women to enter the country who were coming to be married; in fact, police believe the forged documents were to be
used to enable Sciarrone to import into the country women of questionable repute as part of the white slave trade that now engulfs the province and threatens the morals and sanctity of all good Protestant women in the city. After two weeks on the run in Detroit, St. Louis, and Chicago, the fugitive Griro gave himself up to Toronto police after succumbing “to the twittings of his own conscience.” As police interrogated the suspect, “the discredited society of the ‘Black Handers’ so often and so indefinitely connected with Italian tragedies again leaped into prominence.”

While confessing that he killed Sciarrone, Griro surprised police by claiming he was the victim in the affair and that the shooting was the result of the unrelenting terror inflicted upon him by this violent and vengeful Italian brotherhood, through the persistent demands being made upon him for sums of five and ten dollars by Sciarrone, and it was his only rebellion against the persecution that drew Griro into this fatal form of retaliation against the man for whom he had nothing but excoriating contempt.

Upon meeting with Sciarrone on that day of destiny, Griro claimed to have immediately suspected his compatriot to be the assassin appointed to kill him if he did not accede to their extortion demands. “And sooner than let them do that,” stated Griro, “I decided that I would rather be hanged than shot to pieces.”

A transcript of Frank Griro’s statement to Toronto police detectives, taken August 10, documents one of the first personal testimonies to verify the greatly rumoured presence and demands of this secret society in Toronto:

Q: The dead man came to you and said that you had to give him $5 a week to stay there and help you in your business?
Griro: No, he wanted $5 for Society, or something.
Q: He wanted a contribution of $5 a week from you, did he?
Griro: Yes, he a Camorrist.
Q: He said he was a Camorrist?
Griro: He says he is a Camorrist.

Q: That is the dead man?
Griro: Yes.
Q: He said that he was a Camorrist and that he wanted you to pay him $5 every week.
Griro: Yes, I give him two or three weeks after I leave business, I was afraid.

In confessing his crime, and with a perspicacity that belied his Italian heritage, Griro told police of the great animus he held toward his tormentors, “I am tired of these Black Handers trailing me and persistently demanding money. They hounded me to death and when they demanded money I frequently handed it over. Besides having to face a serious charge, I am going to tell the police how this Black Hand organization, composed of a certain element of the Italian colony, has been operating in Toronto. They have been hounding the poor Italians and keeping them in a state of terror. I am one of those victims.”

Griro declared that the fuglemen of the parasitic Black Hand Society in Toronto directed their attention almost exclusively to poorer classes in the Italian colony, when they made a demand for money. He said they were characters who did not treasure life, and would not hesitate to shoot men down like hunted animals and the pitiable victims of these maledictions were deterred from pursuing judicial action against their assailants for fear that a vendetta of the most excessive sort would be inflicted upon them and their family.

To Inspector Duncan, Griro disclosed other valuable information, and gave a list of the names of those prominently connected with the dreaded organization. This information was most fortuitous for it is well known that Italian crimes are most difficult for Canadian detectives to solve and, as the New York Times reliably opined, the “men who come here from the south of Italy and from Sicily have less control over themselves and their weapons than any other class of immigrants.”

Resulting from this fortuitous information, Sergeant of Detectives Alex Mackie and his entire staff of sleuths paid unsolicited visits to three restaurants frequented by Italians on York Street, and placed under arrest, with various charges of
vagrancy, possession of unlicensed and illegal weapons, and extortion being laid against seven people: James Rapola, Joe Musolino, Jim Vicceray, Mike Polesini, Salvatori Sciarrone (the brother of the deceased), Sam Carolla, Joseph Dolzini, and Mrs. Mary Clarke.

With the arrests, police believe they have broken up the Black Hand Society, which for several months past has been a miasma emanating from the Italian colony.

The effusive confessions of Griro did not simply expose the practices of a local Italian extortion ring; it brought to prominence the existence of a furtive society originating in otherwise sunny Italy and hereto unknown in Canada: the *Picciotteria*.

This clandestine opprobrium of criminals, which began in the southern province of Italy called Calabria, is committed to the most avaricious of evil activities — blackmail, extortion, kidnapping, and murder — and is made up of shooters and stabbers of the most reprehensible sort. The organization is said to have a pyramidal structure with two distinct levels: the *camorrista* and *picciotti*. Both levels are dominated by a *saccio capo* or *capo bastone*, devious organizers who coordinate robberies and extortions. To enter the society, a potential *picciotto* must be introduced by a member of the *camorrista*, and then pay a fee.

Upon joining, leading experts on the Italian secret societies tell us the member must swear “to be faithful to everyone connected to the Society of the *Picciotteria*, to help them unto his last drop of blood, to assist the other members in robberies, to present exactly all stolen goods to be divided equally with all other members cent for cent; to slash or to murder, when it is necessary, or because the boss tells him to, and spies on all people who try to get in the way of the society, including the police.

“The early *picciotti* were village toughs who made a lifestyle out of being outlaws. Their sideburns were long and wide, cutting deeply into their cheeks. They strutted about with rolling gaits, proud that they had little to do because others tended to their needs. On their necks were scarves, or *camuffi*, with ornate edges bearing peculiar and complicated fringes, always in very bright colours. These were purchased from the travelling vendors who arrived on village streets with their wagons overloaded with goods. Rounding out the distinctive look of those in the *Picciotteria* was their hairstyles, described often in archives as ‘like a butterfly.’”

At the head of the Toronto branch of this surreptitious organization is Giuseppe (Joe) Musolino, who owns the restaurant at 165 York Street, which served as the unofficial headquarters for this mysterious association; that the place kept by Musolino was used almost exclusively for those connected with the feared society as a meeting place the police feel certain.

Italian sources inform this reporter that Musolino was initiated into the *Picciotteria* in November 1896 in Santo Stefano d’Aspromonte in the picturesque province of Calabria. Following police raids on his operations in 1901, Musolino incontinently fled to the state of New York, where he opened a restaurant in Niagara Falls, and soon after Musolino arrived in Niagara Falls, a rash of extortion letters was received by Italian immigrants living in the surrounding area. He was subsequently ordered by police to close the restaurant and vacate the city.

Upon his forced departure, the malapert Musolino moved to Toronto and settled in the Italian district in the centre of the city, where he opened his current restaurant.

Acting on Griro’s information, police searched Musolino’s place of business, where they found three stilettos, three boxes of gun cartridges, three boxes of revolver cartridges, a dirk, and a large amount of correspondence in Italian, addressed to different individuals who frequented the place.

Police found other incriminating evidence that connected Musolino to secret Italian societies. A few days preceding Griro’s confession there arrived in Toronto a Secret Service detective from Naples in the old country who figured prominently in the famous Camorra trial that recently took place there. Remarkably, whilst walking along a Toronto street, the detective recognized two alleged Camorrists, who’d escaped from Naples following the commencement of the trial. As soon as they got a glimpse
of his familiar face, the two malefactors disgorged themselves from his view with great alacrity and felicitously boarded a streetcar and escaped. Their timorous departure satisfied the detective that these Italian interlopers were here for odious purposes and their physical description was immediately given to local authorities.

When police entered Musolino’s place, they discovered sitting in one of the rear rooms, seven accused Camorrists who had fled Italy after being accused of murder; one was reading from a newspaper the account of Griro’s return to Toronto, and when they spotted the police, all seven of the reprobates, who were very excited, attempted to escape through the back door, but when they found the alley was blocked, they turned and ran back straight into the arms of the waiting police officers.

At the time of his arrest, Musolino was already known to police who believed he had under his thumb many of the Italian labourers who worked on Toronto’s waterfront, and was arrested a few months earlier on charges of threatening, which stemmed from his Black Hand conspiracies. Police also received several anonymous telephone calls that connected him to the unsolved murders of many from the Italian satellite in Toronto, including one Italian man recently found dead at 160 York Street.

When Musolino was re-acquainted with the seven escaped Camorrists at police headquarters, detectives became certain he was the boss to all those present; the sycophantic outlaws in attendance cravenly looked at him when asked questions by police, and Musolino, with little compunction in his demeanour, directed the conversation of his pusillanimous underlings in their native language when any of the arrested was asked a question through the Italian interpreter present.

Musolino mendaciously insisted he could not speak English, despite being in North America for eight years; but when direct inquiries were made of him by police, he absent-mindedly lapsed into perfect English. Upon realizing his mistake, he would revert to Italian and profess ignorance of what he claimed were abstruse questions being asked of him.

When his murder case came to trial, Griro pertinaciously described how he was pressured with choleric belligerence into joining the abominable society by Frank Sciarone (a.k.a. Frank Tarro), who one day dropped by Griro’s workplace with another man. According to Griro, Sciarone said, “You are a good man and a good fellow. Wouldn’t you like to join the same society as I?”

Griro told the court, “I was afraid and said that I would let him know in a couple of days.”

The rapacious Sciarone then said to Griro, “You had better join, it costs only $50 to join.”

The most compelling testimony of the case came when Griro was questioned by his own attorney:

Q: Did you ever give him any money?
Griro: Yes, I gave him $5 once, $4.50 another time, and $5 once more.

Q: When did you next see Tarro?
Griro: He came to where I was living at 176 Jarvis Street. We went to 169 York Street, where they were playing cards and I went in. Somebody inside told me to go to the corner of University Avenue and Queen Street, and there I met a man named Amara. He took me by the arm and we walked up University Avenue to Agnes Street. Then he said, “If I tell you something, will you tell nobody?” I said, “No.” He then said, “Frank, you have money and there are some fellows that want to take it from you.” I asked, “Where?” And he answered, “160 York Street.” You go there and you will lose your life and money.”

Q: Then what happened?
Griro: I said, “You are fooling me.” He answered, “No, I am not. You leave the city, for if you go to York Street, Tarro and Musolino will take your money and put you in a cellar and perhaps kill you.” I would not believe him, and he said, “You must believe me as they are in the united society.”

Q: Did they tell you what the name of the society was?
Griro: Yes, it was the mafia.

Q: What is this society Tarro wanted you to join?
**Griro:** The Mala Vita or evil life.
**Q:** Is it the same as the Black Hand?
**Griro:** I think so. They are all the same, the Black Hand, the Mala Vita, the Mafia and the Camorra.
**Q:** Did you think Musolino belonged to the Mala Vita?
**Griro:** Yes

The prisoner then described how he had handed over sums of money to Sciarrone, but when on the day of the killing, Sciarrone sclerotically demanded all Griro had with him, all of $120, Griro steadfastly refused and said he would tell the police. Sciarrone replied he would kill him before he had a chance to do that. It was then that the shooting began.

With the trial wrapping up on November 1911, the jury sided with Griro, believing his remonstrations that he killed his tormentor in self-defence due to the ongoing villainous ways of the society that hounded the poor man's every step, and with his brave testimony and verisimilitude, Griro lifted the veil of opacity necessary to expose and effect the perdition of this Italian secret society.

"No person could find fault with your verdict," Mr. Justice Ridell told the jury. "You believed his story and you have the right to believe it." Turning to Griro, the judge dismissed him, saying, "Now you go and behave yourself, and see if you can become a good Canadian citizen." Shortly thereafter, Frank Griro, the Italian man of the hour, walked out of the courtroom a free man of the hour.

Musolino was convicted of illegal possession of a firearm and following another conviction for grievous bodily assault upon that of fellow colony member Michael Silvestro, Musolino was deported from the Dominion of Canada, all the while maintaining that he never belonged to, let alone, headed a secret Italian criminal society called the Camorra, Mafia, Black Hand, Picciotteria or otherwise.

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**“I NEVER TALKED — DONE NOTHING”**

Considerably less was heard of Black Hand extortions or secret Italian societies in Canada between 1910 and 1920. That all changed in the early 1920s when Black Handers resurfaced in Hamilton with a vengeance. The first sign of their coming-out party occurred on May 24, 1921. At about one o’clock that Tuesday morning, dynamite exploded at a home on Sheaffe Street. The front windows were completely shattered, but luckily no one was injured. A police investigation revealed that two and a half months before the bombing, the owner of the home, Mr. Monaco Natale, received a letter, illustrated with a cross and a black hand, demanding payment of $1,000. The letter instructed Natale to deliver the money to the Grand Trunk Railway Bridge on John Street. There, he would be met by someone who would take the money. The letter warned him that failure to make the cash delivery would result in the death of his entire family. Despite the threat, Natale did not comply with the letter's demands.

On September 17, 1922, a home at 32 Simcoe Street West was severely damaged by what police called “a heavily charged time-bomb.” The homeowner, Vincenzo Napoli, his wife, and two boarders were in the house asleep when the bomb was detonated at 2:30 a.m., but again all escaped injury. The explosion did

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Joe Musolino, sporting the butterfly hairstyle popular among Calabrian criminals

Griro, the Italian man of the hour, walked out of the courtroom a free man of the hour.
inflict considerable damage to Napoli’s home, as well as to his neighbours’, and police suspected Black Hand extortionists. Upon questioning by police, however, Mr. Napoli stated that he had never received any extortion letter prior to the bombing.

Then, on October 4, 1922, the home of Mrs. Pauline Lombardo of 36 Simcoe Street West, just two doors down from Mr. Napoli, was rocked by yet another bombing. The explosion, which occurred at 12:30 a.m., was caused by a charge of dynamite that had been inserted in a hole made between the brickwork and the window sill. Not only was the entire lower front of the house destroyed, but windows in nearly twenty houses in the immediate neighbourhood were blown out. Once again, miraculously, no one was injured. Mrs. Lombardo, an elderly Sicilian widow who lived in the house with her four children, said she knew of no reason why she was targeted, as she has never received any threatening letters, nor did she believe she was marked by the Black Hand.

The two explosions on Simcoe Street used similar types of dynamite, which led police to believe the same people were behind both. But police were baffled by the motive behind the bombings, since the occupants of the two houses claimed to have never received any threats. While no arrests were made and police had few leads to follow, there was speculation that the owner of 38 Simcoe Street had been receiving extortion letters and that the wrong houses were targeted. These suspicions were heightened at one o’clock in the morning on March 27, 1923, when the home at 38 Simcoe Street was levelled by an explosion from dynamite placed on the ledge of the front window, almost exactly where the explosives were positioned in the previous two bombings on the street. Despite demolishing the living room, the family of twelve that was fast asleep upstairs was unhurt. When asked by the Hamilton Herald if he knew of anything that might have prompted the bombing, homeowner Sebastino Notto would neither confirm nor deny that he was a target of the Black Hand. Nonetheless, his explanation in broken English, captured phonetically by the newspaper, was revealing, “Mebbe think me know something, but I never talked — done nothing.”

The city was now in a state of fear over the well-publicized terror campaign. Unlike the previous two bombings, Hamilton police did arrest four suspects — Joseph Restivo, Charles Bardinaro, and William Pasquale of Hamilton and Joseph Scibetta of Buffalo — they believed were behind the explosion at Notto’s home. They were charged with vagrancy and were also held on a warrant that implicated them in the bombing of Vincenzo Napoli’s house at 32 Simcoe Street. Following their arraignment on the vagrancy charges, each was released on bail, although Hamilton police indicated that the four would face more serious charges stemming from the bombings. These charges were dropped, however, after a principal witness disappeared.

The bombings on Simcoe Street did end after the four men were arrested, although Black Hand extortion letters continued to be received by some in Hamilton’s Italian community. In May 1924, a number of Italian produce dealers on King Street East received letters bearing the imprint of a large black hand. The letters demanded that the recipient deliver cash ranging from $100 to $1,000 to a designated spot in a secluded part of town. As far as Hamilton police were aware, none of the recipients of the letters heeded the threats and all filed complaints with the police. The Black Hand gained prominence again in July 1924 when Hamilton resident John Borsellino received a letter threatening his life unless $3,000 was paid. The extortion letter, which was not the first one received by Borsellino, was crudely written in Italian and signed with a cross. The letter instructed him to stuff his coat pockets with the cash, and carry on his normal daily routines, always with the money in his pockets. “When it suited their plans,” the Hamilton Spectator reported, “a member of the gang would walk toward Borsellino and, raising his right hand in a salute with two fingers upraised, he would utter the word “Torrino.” Upon hearing this, Mr. Borsellino was expected to hand the money to the passerby and walk away without looking back. If he failed to follow these instructions, the letter threatened him with death.

In August of the same year, the bombings returned to Hamilton. This time the target was the home of Sam Gualliano at 23 Murray Street. Neighbours told the Hamilton Herald that they saw a “high-powered limousine” drive up to the curb directly opposite the doomed home between eleven and eleven-thirty that
night. According to the Herald, “two men, who they could not recognize, alighted and crossed the road to the Gualliano home, where they disappeared in the shadow of the porch. A few minutes later, they returned to the car and drove off. Twenty minutes later, a terrific explosion was heard.” Flames engulfed the home and the next day all that remained was a cavity where the cellar was located. Police investigators learned of several Black Hand letters received by friends and relatives of Gualliano during the preceding three months. The previous week, a Bay Street North building, owned by Gualliano’s brother-in-law, was set on fire. At the time, police believed that the bombing, following so soon on the heels of the fire, was most likely the work of the same gang. After inspecting the remains of Gualliano’s home, police found within the cellar, under charred debris that was once a house, large kegs filled with wine. The liquid stash was most likely illegal contraband, which led some to believe that the bombing was motivated by a rival bootlegging gang. (It is not known whether Gualliano was ever charged with provincial Temperance Act offences, although police guarding the home did have their hands full trying to restrain spectators from hauling off the undamaged kegs.)

The bombings and Black Hand extortions that gripped Hamilton during the early 1920s took place during a period where inter-gang violence was raging in and around the Hamilton and Niagara regions, due in part to the highly competitive trade in illicit booze, as well as vendettas and other clashes between competing Italian groups. Between 1914 and 1924 there were at least twenty murders affecting the Italian community in the Hamilton and Niagara regions. The decade of violence began with the 1914 murder of Peter Basile, one of the leading figures in the Basile bootlegging family, whose bullet-riddled body was found in Lockport, New York. His sister Consima Bane and her husband, Patsy, were the next victims. Both were shot to death in 1918. Following the 1922 bombing of Vincenzo Napoli’s home on Simcoe Street, police theorized that the culprits were after another Italian who lived on the same block and who “some time ago figured in a stabbing affray in which he came out second best.”

Jim Leala, the man who stabbed the Simcoe Street resident, was found brutally murdered in the Beverley swamp near Dundas Street. The police believe that Leala’s associates may have planted the bomb to seek their revenge for his death, although if this was true, they targeted the wrong house. Leala was already well known to Toronto police as a violent bootlegger. In June 1922, Tony Leala, the brother of Jim, was found mortally wounded while crawling in a ditch on a side road near Oakville. Tony Leala was also known to police as a bootlegger and there were rumours that he was targeted by rival gangs who believed he was passing along information to police.

In 1923, Jon Sciabone, a Hamilton resident, was shot and killed in Buffalo and, shortly thereafter, his wife was threatened with a similar fate. In May 1924, Joseph Basile was murdered on the same Buffalo street as Sciabone. On November 11, 1924, local Boy Scouts, helping in the search for missing jitney driver Frederick Genesse, found the decomposed remains of Joseph Baytoizae, whose head had been completely severed from his body. Four days later, police located Fred Genesse’s corpse; a sash cord was tightly wrapped around his neck five times, his left eye was gouged out, and a deep indentation marked his forehead. Both Baytoizae and Genesse were known to have provided information to police on local bootleggers. Two days following the discovery of Fred Genesse’s body, the Toronto Daily Star waxed poetic on the series of gruesome murders that were plaguing nearby Hamilton:

Hamilton Mountain has become a place of skulls, a mountain of human sacrifice. It is like one of the stone pyramids on which the bloodthirsty Aztec priests cut the throats of innumerable victims. Canada needs Edgar Allen Poe to write the murders of the Rue St. James and to solve the mystery of Hamilton’s many Marie Rogets…. So far the Hamilton police force has produced no Poe or Sherlock Holmes. Again and again they have been baffled by the inscrutable mountains which frown above them like an inscrutable enigma.

Despite the lack of convictions or even arrests, police in western New York believed that at least some of the murders were the work of the “Good Killers,” the enforcement arm of a Buffalo crime syndicate that was
attempting to eliminate all bootlegging competition on both sides of the border.

**THE PRESIDENT OF VENDETTA**

The era of the Black Hand in Canada came to an end in 1928 with a highly publicized case that was played out in a courtroom in Welland, Ontario. On February 21, 1928, Giuseppe (Joe) Italiano was found guilty on eight counts of extortion and related charges. He was sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment, eighteen strokes of the lash, and deportation at the expiration of his prison term. Italiano was arrested and charged with threatening Frank Mango, the owner of a shoe shop in Niagara Falls.

**Translated extortion letter sent to Frank Mango**

"Dear Sir:—(foul language) I have to give you reason for all you’ve done. Your not worth anything. You are no better than a jackass. You know all you’ve done, you shouldn’t have done that you do dirty business. Now you watch yourself think it over, surely your life is short, now think over all the best you can do, watch yourself and save your life, and all your family, you needn’t think we care about you and your family, we sure going to clean you out, even the eats, your house. Your house is going to be blown up in the air like a balloon. Your time is short, one week or 15 days at least if you like to save yourself and family try in some way possible find somewhere to do what we want you know what you did, you better (swear word) You should write and pay sum of $4000.00 in this time no longer. Be sure not to open your mouth. I think you know what we are talking about. If you don’t do that, we blow your building up over the river and all you have in Canada. I sign, The President of Vendetta, we will destroy you".

*Your Grave You die the Knife go through your heart and mouth. Better for you to keep your mouth shut*"
In November 1927, Mango received an extortion letter postmarked in Buffalo, and written in Italian, complete with a death threat and numerous expletives, demanding $4,000. The letter, which was translated into English for the trial, promised, “We sure going to clean you out, even the cats, your house. Your house is going to be blown up like a balloon. Your time is short, one week or 15 days at least if you like to save yourself and family.” The letter cautioned Mango to “Be sure not to open your mouth. I think you know what we are talking about. If you don’t do that, we blow your building up all over the river and all you have in Canada.” The letter was signed, “The President of Vendetta, we will destroy you.” At the bottom of the letter was a crudely drawn picture of a grave (with “Your Grave” written underneath) as well as two daggers pointing at a heart (subtitled with “You die the Knife go through your heart and mouth. Better for you to keep your mouth shut.”).

Mango received a second letter, this time written in English, which simply read, “We have warned you. unless you pay us what you promised you will loose all you have and we will get you some where soon so look out. You can’t put it over us no more. We intend to have our rights. What comes are you ready.” The letter was signed “I,h,S,B,h.”

On November 7, Mango’s house was rocked by an explosion, which police determined was caused by dynamite that had been placed on his front porch. Ten days later, Mango received a visit from Italiano, who told him, “The Brotherhood wants the money.” Mango replied that he didn’t have $4,000 but agreed to pay $400 in four instalments. Joe Italiano accepted the offer, but unbeknownst to the Black Hander, Mango had previously been in contact with police, who had his house under surveillance. When Italiano left Mango’s home, with $400 in his hand and threatening letters in his pocket, he was arrested, charged, and later convicted.

**THE END OF THE BEGINNING**

Although it was not known at the time, the Italiano case represented the end of the Black Hand in Canada. It was a fitting end, given that the case typified the elementary and brutish tactics of early Italian organized crime in Canada and the United States. The case of Giuseppe (Joe) Italiano also seems to support the conventional wisdom that extortionists affixed with the Black Hand

![Actual extortion letter sent to Frank Mango](image-url)
label were mostly independent operators. Yet, evidence continues to mount that some of the Black Handers in places like North Bay, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Fernie were connected to secret societies, complete with ceremonies, rituals, and a rudimentary organizational hierarchy, that were influenced by the Sicilian Mafia and Calabrian 'Ndrangheta. As further information on the Black Hand cases comes to light there are also indications that during this period there was a greater level of organization, coordination, and even international networking among Italian criminals than was previously thought. While Ignazio Saietta operated as an independent Black Hander, he also carried out his extortions and other criminal rackets with an established Sicilian organization, the Morello Family. The theory that Carlo Rossati travelled from Cleveland — which police at the time believed was a central location for the manufacture of explosives used by some Black Handers — to Toronto to "organize" local Italians and then on to New York to murder Salvatore Bossito at the behest of a group of Sicilian criminals in that city, suggests some form of international network was in place. Evidence unveiled as part of the Griro case also shows that some "Camorristas" traveled from Naples to Toronto to be hidden by Joe Musolino and were subordinate to him upon arriving in Canada.

While the era of the Black Hand may have ended, extortion would continue to be a stock-in-trade for Italian crime groups in Canada for at least the next five decades. The Black Hand label, and the term "extortion," would now be replaced with a new and grossly misleading designation: "protection." Under the protection racket, Italian businessmen were permitted to operate in a territory under the control of a local mafioso, as long as they paid a regular fee. In return for these payments (or "tribute") the payee received protection against violence, arson, robbery, union troubles, or the non-delivery of essential supplies. The mafioso rationalized this extortion by stressing that it was part of the paternalistic duty of the padrone in protecting his flock. The reality was that most of the threatened calamities likely to befall the recalcitrant client would be carried out by the mafioso himself.

The protection racket, and extortion in general, is heavily reliant upon, and intertwined with, two fundamental imperatives of organized crime: intimidation and violence. While extortion can be carried out by individuals working alone, it is most credible when carried out by a group, particularly a group that has a reputation for using violence. Extortion is favoured by criminal groups that prey upon their own ethnic communities because it serves a dual purpose: it generates revenue for the perpetrators while also keeping the community in a state of fear and silence. Each successful extortion boosts the reputation, stature, and influence of the criminal group within the community it victimizes, which it then uses as a foundation to augment the grip it has over the community while expanding into other criminal endeavours.

Extortion fulfilled all of these objectives for the 'Ndrangheta, a criminal fraternity that, not only influenced the Black Handers, but also future generations of Italian criminal groups in Canada. Indeed, Italians of Calabrian descent would assume a formidable place in the annals of the Canadian underworld. While extortion and other predatory crimes would continue to be used by Italian criminal groups, the tactics of the Black Hand became increasingly outdated and those who relied exclusively on these predatory money-making ventures lost ground to the more modern criminal entrepreneur. By the 1920s, the highly profitable trade in liquor, drugs, gambling, and prostitution revealed that the greatest source of illicit money was to be made in satisfying the vices of receptive consumers. This would be the future of organized crime in Canada.
CHAPTER FOUR
CANADIAN VICE
Dope Peddlers, White Slavers, and Fantan Operators

Of Prohibition, root of all our woes.
—Milton, Paradise Lost, IX, 645

With the exception of the contraband smuggling trade, organized criminality in Canada before the 20th century was predatory in nature; most criminals robbed, cheated, or extorted people out of their money. These uncongenial revenue-generating enterprises would continue as a staple for organized offenders for years to come. However, by the start of the new century it was becoming clear that the greatest source of illicit revenue was to be accumulated, not by depriving people, but by providing them with the goods and services they demanded, but which were outlawed by the government. Gambling, drugs, liquor, and prostitution would increasingly be driven into the receptive environs of the criminal underworld by powerful reformist movements, panicked over the growth in society’s vices, the breakdown of Victorian moral values, and the threat posed to the racial and religious purity of white, Protestant society by the flood of new immigrants. Only too happy to oblige the powerful Prohibition lobby were politicians who enacted laws regulating and criminalizing the supply and consumption of society’s most popular turpitudes. The consequence of these actions would be the creation of immensely profitable underground markets, widespread law breaking, and the launching of organized crime to a new level of wealth, sophistication, violence, and power.

THE WHITE SLAVE TRADE
Prostitution is not only the world’s oldest profession, it can also be one of the most financially lucrative, especially when well organized. While there continued to be plenty of freelance prostitutes during the first quarter of the 20th century, it was also during this period that the sex trade became much more organized in North America. Like most other vices, the organization of harlotry was precipitated by a heightened demand for sexual services, which itself was the result of large-scale immigration of unattached males to Canada and the United States. The wave of immigrants who came to Canada during the late 19th and early 20th centuries differed from the migrants of the past, who were primarily farm families that headed straight to rural areas. This new spate of immigrants was disproportionately made up of men, either bachelors or husbands who had left their wives and families at home until they could get established in the new country. Many of these newcomers headed to urban centres in search of work.

Among the different sectors of urban commerce that benefited the most from the overabundance of males was the sex trade. While many women came to the trade of their own volition, the heightened demand for prostitutes also resulted in the aggressive recruitment and procurement of eligible women who were forced into sexual servitude. The organization of the prostitution trade and the forced conscription of
women into the profession prompted a deliberately frightening new term in the public’s lexicon — the “white slave trade.” The term was first popularized in England in the 1830s by Dr. Michael Ryan, a British reformer who actively campaigned against vice. Like many of the moral crusaders who followed him, Ryan’s goal in his use of this phrase was to arouse moral indignation among the public while exhorting the government to intensify its efforts to combat prostitution. One of Ryan’s tactics was to capitalize on the fervent anti-Semitism of the day by blaming Jews for the organized sex industry (a tactic that had long been used to demonize the loansharking industry). In reference to the white slave trade in London, Ryan wrote, “It has been proved in several cases that have come before our public magistrates, especially at the eastern end of town, that the infernal traffic in question is still carried on to a great extent, principally by Jews.”

Subsequent generations of anti-prostitution crusaders in Canada and the United States overtly or subliminally identified Jews, the Chinese, blacks, and other “foreigners” as the culprits responsible for the trafficking of young women. Books, brochures, church sermons, radio broadcasts, and laughingly gullible and sensationalized newspaper articles propagated lurid tales of alien pimps, madams, and their agents forcing young Christian white women into prostitution through kidnapping, cross-border smuggling, forcible confinement, and drug addiction. The term “white slave trade” is itself a misnomer; by no means was the sex trade populated solely by the white race during this period. Women of all colours were attracted to or forced into the business. However, calculating moral crusaders knew that an exclusive inference to white women would resonate among the Anglo-Saxon population. While the extent of the white slave trade was exaggerated by social reformers, the hyperbole did make the anti-prostitution campaigns of the early 20th century enormously successful, at least as measured by the moral panic created, the number of media articles on the subject, the new legislative and enforcement initiatives undertaken, as well as the numerous international conventions adopted by the fledgling League of Nations.

Despite the exaggerated claims of the moral reformers, it would be sheer folly to deny that prostitution was becoming better organized or that women were being coerced or forced against their will into the sex trade. In America, the most infamous of the early white slavers was Mary Hastings, a Chicago madam during the 1890s who prowled the Midwest seeking trusting teenage girls. By promising them a job in Chicago, she convinced some to return with her. Once inside her three-storey brothel, the girls were supposedly stripped naked, locked in a room, “broken in” by well-endowed “professional rapists,” and then forced to pleasure male callers. Hastings was also known to sell her girls to other brothel keepers at prices ranging from $50 to $300, depending on their age, looks, and health. Legend has it that one victim of Hastings managed to scrawl on a scrap of paper, “I’m being held as a slave,” which was then tossed out the window of her room. The note was found by a passerby and taken to the police, who raided the brothel and rescued the prisoner. Following in the footsteps of Hastings was perhaps the most successful of the organized white slavers in North America, Giacomo (Big Jim) Colosimo. By the early 1900s, Big Jim was said to have controlled more than a hundred whorehouses in Chicago’s Levee district. Known as the “King of the Pimps,” Colosimo organized a regional prostitution ring in which young girls would be lured to Chicago with promises of good jobs, and then imprisoned and forced to turn tricks in one of Big Jim’s many establishments.

Mary Hastings and Big Jim would help cement Chicago’s prodigious reputation as the vice capital of America. In a 1909 book entitled White Slavery, Edwin W. Sims, the U.S. attorney for Chicago, was quoted as saying: “The recent examination of more than two hundred ‘white slaves’ by the office of the United States district attorney at Chicago has brought to light the fact that literally thousands of innocent girls from the country’s districts are every year entrapped into a life of hopeless slavery and degradation because parents in the country do not understand conditions as they exist and how to protect their daughters from the ‘white slave’ traders who have reduced the art of ruining young girls to a national and international system.” Like many others, Sims believed the white slave trade to be a monolithic conspiracy, “The legal evidence thus far collected...
establishes with complete moral certainty these awful facts: that the white slave traffic is a system operated by a syndicate which has its ramifications from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific ocean, with ‘clearing houses’ or ‘distribution centers’ in nearly all of the larger cities; that in this ghastly traffic the buying price of a young girl is from $15 up and that the selling price is from $200 to $600.” He went on to characterize this international syndicate as “a definite organization sending its hunters regularly to scour France, Germany, Italy and Canada for victims.”

As part of his ongoing crime commissions in Chicago, John Landesco contended in his 1929 report that since the early part of the century, there was an elaborate system for procuring and transporting women between New York, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Chicago.

Some of the earliest stories of organized prostitution in Canada came out of Hamilton. In 1910, officials with the YWCA told the Hamilton Spectator, “There is more white slave trafficking in Hamilton than in any other city of its size — in the whole of America — not Canada, but America.” One YWCA official described the case of “a foreign girl” who landed at the Stuart Street Railway Station in Hamilton with no one to meet her:

She was a pretty girl, 17 years of age, and came here in reply to an advertisement, but was not met at the station. She had only recently arrived from a European country and could not speak a word of English. On arrival at the station, she was met by a well-dressed woman, who had every appearance of being a friend. She took the girl by the hand, spoke kindly to her, and on seeing that she was a foreigner, told her to wait until she went to the telephone. Some minutes later a man who could speak the girl’s language arrived at the station, with the result that she was taken to a disreputable house.

In 1911, the Hamilton Times reported on a new enforcement campaign that successfully rounded up a “large number of street walkers and supposed members of a gang of colored alley workers, which the Provincial police department and the police of the largest cities in all the province had been trying for two years to break up.” In 1912, under the headline “Hamilton a center of white slave traffic,” the Hamilton Herald reported that “many young girls are enticed into lives of shame and that the white slave traffic is carried out here to a very large extent.” The Herald reporter was told by YWCA officials “of case after case where young girls had gone wrong through being enticed to houses of ill fame by people who posed as friends.” Young women arriving in the city for the first time by train are “often approached by men and women of disreputable character who in the most smooth manner endeavor to get them to go to their houses, promising the most attractive things in the way of money and comforts.” One YWCA worker claimed to have evidence on “an organized gang in the white slaves traffic,” in Hamilton including “a Chinaman, a colored woman, and a white man who approached young girls.” According to Reverend Dr. Lyle, president of the Anti-White Slave Association, “Hamilton had the worst reputation in Canada as a city where the white slave traffic was carried on.”

The Hamilton white slavers used all conceivable methods to attract young women, according to the moral crusaders and the media. “They dress sometimes like widows, or pose as very pure and humble people, and talk religion in an effort to get the young girls interested, according to a 1912 edition of the Hamilton Herald. “Once interested the girls are gone unless someone interferes in their behalf.” Other techniques used by the “Mashers” included posing as theatrical agents searching for pretty faces or giving young girls “doctored candies and automobile and buggy rides.” Reverend C.E. Burrell told the media “he had heard a woman was forcibly picked up” on a Hamilton street “and but for strong friends would have been carried off for an improper purpose.” In 1913, the Herald ran a story about Canadian immigration authorities who blocked what they believed to be “one of the most brazen attempts at white slavery ever brought to the attention of the officials of the city.” The scheme, worked by two men, was to advertise for stenographers and other female help. The man went so far as to rent an office to conduct their job interviews. After one applicant took her suspicions to
police, an inspector conducted surveillance within the building where he heard propositions being made to other young women to go to Buffalo or Toronto where they would be provided with jobs as secretaries.

On June 20, 1917, the *Globe* reported that “the first case of alleged white slavery to be found in Toronto in many years was unearthed yesterday afternoon by police of No. 2 Division.” Toronto police discovered that, for three weeks, eighteen-year-old Paulina Theoualt was “held captive in a house at 153 Victoria Street, and by means of frequent drugging has been forced into abominable practices.” Having escaped her captor and “with her right eye blackened and her face bruised and cut,” Miss Theoualt rushed to a local police station and told her sordid story. Her injuries, she said, were at the hands of her pimp, Rinaldo Centino, who “proved to be a dangerous character” when two police officers cornered him in his home. “Plainclothesman Scott met him at the door just as he was leaving, and in spite of Centino’s objections shoved him back inside the house. Once inside the front room, which was used as a bedroom, Centino swiftly drew a razor from his hip pocket and attempted to slash the officer with it, but Scott was too quick for him, knocked him over the bed and took the razor from him. Upon searching Centino’s clothing the police found that in every suit he secreted a razor in preparation for emergency.”

By the early 1920s, RCMP annual reports began including brief accounts of the white slave trade in Canada. Most of the information was supplied by Reverend John Chisholm, who worked in co-operation with the Mounted Police, primarily by meeting ocean liners arriving at Montreal and caring for “unaccompanied female immigrants.” Although the RCMP does not appear to have investigated many white slave cases, their annual reports did print Chisholm’s accusations that “many attempts were made by infamous creatures to corrupt and entice away young women.” In a 1923 report, under the heading “Protection Against Commercialized Vice,” the RCMP lauded Chisholm for his work, which has “cast a vivid and unpleasant light upon the dangers which threaten the unescorted girl who travels, and upon the number of human beasts of prey who strive to trap her; some of the plots, which Mr. Chisholm and his helpers frustrated can only be described as diabolical, and the organization has saved many women from ruin and misery.” Despite its apparent support for the work of Reverend Chisholm, in its annual report for 1923, the RCMP dismissed Canada’s role in the international sex trade, writing, “Mexico, not Canada is the principal avenue whereby women are conveyed from Europe to the United States for improper purposes.” The RCMP did acknowledge, “attempts continually are being made, however, to inveigle unsuspecting girls from Canada to questionable places in the United States, and a number of these plots have been frustrated.”

In a submission prepared for the RCMP dated January 20, 1925, Reverend Chisholm cited research presented at the International Conference for the Suppression of White Slavery and Commercialized Vice, held in Geneva in 1912, which accuses Montreal of being a major source of women for the international sex trade. This study, which examined the registers used by hospitals and other medical facilities to record the names, birth places, and physical conditions of female brothel “inmates” in North and South America, found that with the exception of New York and Chicago, Montreal contributed more victims to the white slave traffic than any city in the western hemisphere. Based upon his own interviews with prostitutes who suffered from advanced cases of venereal disease, Reverend Chisholm wrote:

On their deathbeds they confessed with sobs and tears, the awful tragedy of their brief career of sexual degradation. From their dying lips, I learned that the women in charge of the Montreal Bureaux of Employment, under false pretenses, gave them to procurers from the U.S.A., who at that time could without any barriers, take domestic servants to their country from Canada. They told me, how, after they became diseased, they were cast out of the houses into which they were forced. After they were rejected, they were arrested, examined, and deported via Canada.

That Montreal was a major source of prostitutes and sexual slaves should provoke little surprise given the renowned scope of the city’s red-light district.
In his autobiography, former Montreal vice cop and RCMP commissioner Clifford Harvison reminisces about the city's brothels in the early 1920s, which "operated openly in a red-light district that covered more than a dozen blocks." These bordellos ranged from "luxurious houses where dalliance was expensive and the girls young and pretty, on down to the cheap tawdry places where intercourse was handled on a production line basis whereby girls carried tally cards punched by the matron each time a prostitute headed for the bedroom with a new customer, where it was not unusual to find twenty or thirty punch marks on the card. In one case a tally of forty-two marked a girl's effort for a fourteen hour day."

Relying on police information, the "Committee of Sixteen," a self-appointed group of private citizens who conducted their own investigation into Montreal's vice conditions in 1918, estimated the number of "houses of commercialized prostitution" at between "250 and 300, including 6 or 8 hotels operated almost exclusively as 'houses of assignment'." The group also commented on the organized nature of prostitution in Montreal, "Vice in Montreal is thoroughly systematized for the exploitation of girls and young women for the profit of third parties. Girl after girl has recounted as a warning for us to give to other girls that there is nothing in the 'life' for the girl, the madam and the pimp getting all the profit." In its report, the committee tells the story of one wayward girl who fell into the clutches of what appears to be a well-organized syndicate of white slavers:

Take the case of Mary B., 15 years old who made the acquaintance of Fred, a famous procurer, at an apartment on St. Denis Street. Mary met him through Ethel G., a thoroughly depraved girl of 17, who had already led another one of our girls astray. Mary had become delinquent and occasionally immoral before this time and it was easy for this unscrupulous man to persuade her to go with him to Madam Z. on Lagauchetiere Street. One of his infamous co-workers had already recruited another of Ethel's associates, feeble-minded Maud T., who later came to our attention and who in turn pointed out Mary to a worker of this Committee. Mary, on reaching Madam's house, saw $50.00 given to Fred by Madame Z., and she was not allowed to leave until this had been paid off by her earnings. Mary paid $12.00 a week for board and $2.00 protection money, which may or may not have been used by Madame for this purpose. Moreover, Mary was forced to buy at exorbitant prices clothes to wear in the house and later, when she was allowed one afternoon a week to go out, her street clothes. Clothing dealers had a monopoly of this business in the houses drove the bargain and divided the profits with Madame. Those clothing dealers have also been pointed out by other cases as being on hand at court to pay fines after raids, after which the girls return to work off the fines, more enslaved than ever. Mary found herself in a cheap house, in the blunt parlance of the district, a 'dollar' house. Each visitor netted her personally 50 cents, Madame getting the other half. From six to twelve visitors were received every night, and Mary was obliged to take anyone who came, Negroes and Chinamen as well. Practically no precautions were taken against disease and Mary became ill with syphilis. She still worked on, receiving her round of six to twelve visitors.

A judicial inquiry into vice and its enforcement in Montreal conducted by Justice Louis Coderre in 1924 and 1925 also documented the dozens of "houses of ill repute" operating in the city's red-light district. In his final report, Justice Coderre described the proliferation and aggressive nature of Montreal's white slavers. The agents of the city's whorehouses could be found in billiards halls, hotel rotundas, restaurants, dance halls, taverns, railway stations, harbours, and even at church doors pursuing "clients by discreet invitations." Meanwhile, "prostitution runs rampant in the streets with its addicts and its protectors who have always in their hands a card with the name and address of a public woman." The judge also decried the organized nature of the city's sex trade: "Prostitution itself, commerce in human flesh, in its most shameful form, and most
degrading effect, operates and flourishes in Montreal like a perfectly organized commercial enterprise; I would dare say that few industrial or commercial establishments have as perfect an organization, as powerful methods of action, a personnel as well-groomed and as rigorous an internal discipline; I do not know of any which have in such a short time enriched so great a number of proprietors. By way of conclusion he argues, “proof made at the inquiry reveals an astonishing state of affairs and, I might say, an alarming one. Vice shows itself in our city with such a hideousness and insolence that are born of the certitude that it will go unpunished; like a giant octopus it stretches its tentacles in every direction and threatens to strangle a population which is three-quarters healthy and moral.”

While appearing before the Coderre inquiry, Dr. Alfred K. Haywood — Superintendent of the Montreal General Hospital, which treated a number of the red-light district’s prostitutes — provided extensive testimony that alluded to the organized nature of Montreal’s sex trade. This included declarations on the efforts by pimps to procure new prostitutes, the use of drug addiction to ensnarl and imprison women, the slave-like conditions under which the women were forced to work, and the network of accomplices, such as bail bondsmen whose job it was to extricate the women after they have been charged, doctors and nurses who performed abortions on the prostitutes, and corrupt police and government officials who turned a blind eye to the city’s vice industry. The doctor was personally told by “several” prostitutes who attended his hospital that they were forced into the sex trade after being “picked up in the street” and “drugged.” Many of the addicted women had little other means than prostitution to support their habit. “A woman very seldom has the courage to steal,” Dr. Haywood testified, “and dozens yes, hundreds of them have told me personally that they entered into houses of prostitution, where their entry had been made very easy, for the purpose of making enough money to purchase drugs.”

Dr. Haywood described to the inquiry how he had hired a detective to find a missing woman he suspected was working the red-light district. In the course of his work, the detective found her in a brothel on City Hall Avenue, “in bed with a coloured man and he found in practically every room in that house coloured men in bed with white women. He found the house full of drugs . . . ” The detective brought the woman to the hospital where she told Dr. Haywood that “she was put into this house by a drug peddler” who is now in jail. “The condition I found her in was almost too pitable to explain,” the doctor told the inquiry. “Her normal weight should have been a hundred and forty five pounds and at that time we weighed her and she weighed one hundred pounds.” He kept her at the hospital for nearly a month and “thought we had cured her of the drug habit.” She was twenty-three years old at the time, a widow of a man who died during the influenza epidemic. To deal with her grief she began “taking ten grains of morphine a day and as much as four grains at a time. She started taking the morphine five years ago and after her husband died found it necessary to get into a life of prostitution in order that she might secure money for drugs.” The young woman also admitted that she “had been pregnant several times, but have been able to get rid of her baby by visiting a certain doctor who is now in jail for life for this practice.”

Dr. Haywood confirmed that medical professionals had been hired to perform these illegal procedures. He also noted that a pathologist working at Montreal General was approached by a brothel operator to see “if some arrangements could not be made whereby her girls could come to the hospital and be examined regularly and be given a certificate of good health.” The pathologist was told he would be paid “a liberal sum for that work.”

Vancouver’s red-light district also thrived during the first quarter of the century, due in part to a steady migratory flow of merchant seamen, loggers, fishermen, and other seasonal labourers. The bawdy houses were tolerated, British Columbia historian Daniel Francis contends, as long as they “did not advertise themselves too blatantly, conformed to liquor regulations, and the women did not solicit too aggressively.” But even in Vancouver’s laissez-faire atmosphere, reformers pressured police and politicians to launch periodic crackdowns, which accomplished little except the creation of a highly transient population of pimps and prostitutes. According to Francis:

During 1907, responding to a public outcry, authorities closed the Dupont Street bawdy
houses and arrested many of the prostitutes. But the brothels simply relocated around the corner in Canton Alley and Shanghai Alley, then the centre of Chinatown, and later a couple of blocks south to Shore Street, a short lane of ramshackle buildings running off Main Street. In 1910, a resident of Shore Street reported that “there are seven houses of prostitution all showing red lights” and “every night hundreds of men may be seen going to and from these houses.”

At a 1928 judicial inquiry into vice and police corruption in Vancouver, one police official stated the “conditions are practically wide open so far as gambling and prostitutes are concerned,” while the chief constable presented statistics showing that 489 “bawdy house keepers” had been charged between 1925 and 1927 alone. The most well known of these was Joe Celona, a politically astute über-pimp who was known as the “King of the Bawdy Houses,” the “vice czar,” and the “the mayor of East Hastings.” Born in Italy in 1898, Celona immigrated to Vancouver shortly after the First World War and soon became well known as one of the city’s most disreputable citizens. Celona owned several other well-attended brothels in the city. He was colour blind when it came to both the prostitutes and their clientele, provided cab drivers a cash payment for every referral, paid off police officers to look the other way, was rumoured to have had one Vancouver mayor in his pocket, fortified his bordellos by installing iron doors, and vigorously fought every charge laid against him. After being convicted on one occasion, Celona registered the houses he owned in the name of his wife or his brother, who were also responsible for managing some of his brothels. The people of Vancouver were aghast when they learned from the testimony of one police officer that a whorehouse Celona operated at 210 Keefer Street, in the heart of Chinatown, was “a resort that Chinamen were going to and that there were several young white girls in the resort and Chinamen stated that they went there to have intercourse with these girls.”

One of Celona’s associates was Frank Casisa, who was first arrested for operating a disorderly house at 240 Georgia Street. According to one police officer who testified at the 1928 inquiry: “It was an old house and there was one big room in the bottom and a curtain between. There were no lights on the house, and a man would go in and he would go in with the girl at the back of the curtain, and Casisa would watch out in front for an officer and as soon as he saw any officer going to raid the house he would tip off the girl and she would go through a small cut into the house next door and get away. And I arrested him at that time and we could not get the girl. In fact I heard it was his own wife.”

The inquiry heard several accounts of the brutal methods personally employed by Frank Casisa to keep his prostitutes in line. Among those testifying was Jean Smith, a sometimes housekeeper and prostitute who worked in Casisa’s bawdy houses:

**Smith:** Well, I told [Vancouver police detective] McLaughlin that I was in the hospital with a premature birth in February; it was St. Valentine’s Day when I went there. I told him how sick I was; I nearly died and Dr. Brewster was my doctor and he can tell you the condition I was in and when I came out he met me.
Q: Did you tell McLaughlin anything about the cause of the premature birth?
Smith: Yes, that he had beat me so that he had brought on premature birth.
Q: Who had beaten you?
Smith: Casisa, Frank Casisa.
Q: How did he beat you?
Smith: He threw me downstairs once. He beat me with his feet and his hands and up against the wall.
Q: When was the time that you had this trouble with Casisa when he did this?
Smith: You mean when he beat me?
Q: Yes, and caused the premature birth?
Smith: Well, he used to beat me often.
Q: When was the premature birth?
Smith: In February, in here, in this hospital.
Q: How did he beat you?
Smith: With his fists.
Q: Why did he do that?
Smith: He was just cranky because business was not good and he thought it was my fault because the business was not good. I told him he should not talk like that, but he just took his spite out on me. For no cause at all he hit me.
Q: After the premature birth you came out of the hospital?
Smith: Yes.
Q: And you went back to live with Casisa again?
Smith: Yes, I had to go back again.
Q: And it was then that you became Casisa’s housekeeper, was it not?
Smith: Oh, I was the housekeeper before that.
Q: You were the housekeeper before that?
Smith: Yes, about two months before.
Q: Let us go back. Did you tell McLaughlin all about this when you went to the Police Station, that Casisa had run this house and received part of the money?
Smith: Yes.
Q: You told him that, too. Did you tell McLaughlin anything else?
Smith: Yes, I told him after I came out of the hospital that I was in the family way again; I was four and a half months and he [Casisa] tipped me to Nurse Jessop for an illegal operation; he gave me $46 to go to her for an illegal operation. She performed it, but did not do it right and I had to go to the hospital two days later. They took me from the Balmoral Hotel in the ambulance to the General hospital here.
Q: What happened at the Balmoral Hotel?
Smith: Five days after I came out of the hospital he beat me up terribly.
Q: Casisa?
Smith: Yes.
Q: What did he do to you?
Smith: He blacked my eye and all his finger marks were on my throat and both sides of my face were black and blue and my chest here and the backs of my hand where he grabbed me like that with his fingers.
Q: Your mouth was cut?
Smith: My mouth was all cut and swollen and my nose had a great big mark upon it here and my head up here had a great big lump on and a little vein was sticking out and the proprietor of the hotel came and threw Frank out.
Q: That was the Balmoral Hotel?
Smith: Yes.
Q: In what room?
Smith: This beating was done in 614, 614, but I was in 707 when they took me to the hospital.
Q: They took you to a hospital in an ambulance that time?
Smith: Yes.
Q: As the result of the beating?
Smith: That was when the illegal operation was, when I was sick.
Q: That was five days after the illegal operation?
Smith: Yes, this beating I am just telling you was about five days after.
Q: That is in your chest?
Smith: Yes, and oh, I was terribly sick, but any-how...
Q: What did he say about that?
Smith: He never done anything. He never even got a doctor, never got any medicine, and when I got a little better he made me work again, but I can only whisper and so after I left why
I had to go to a doctor. I was awfully sick and blood came, came up like when I was at 511 Main Street and I went to the doctor and he x-rayed my lungs in the hospital and he said it was T.B.

Q: Was there anything else?
Smith: Yes.
Q: You had a blood disease?
Smith: I had four plus Wasserman.*
Q: You contracted that?
Smith: Yes, I found out later that Frank Casisa had the same thing and I must have got it from him.
Q: Did you tell McLaughlin about that?
Smith: Yes, I told McLaughlin, but I did not know at the time it was from him [Casisa], so I told McLaughlin I did not know, but later I found out from several people.
Q: Just a minute, now. Did you sleep with Frank Casisa?
Smith: Yes, Frank Casisa came around to my window the night before last night.
Q: The night before last night?
Smith: Yes.
Q: At the hospital here?
Smith: Yes.
Q: How long did you work after the operation?
Smith: Oh, I just worked a week or so.
Q: After the operation?
Smith: Yes.
Q: You think that your physical condition — do you think you could work after a serious operation?
Smith: Well, I never worked in the house very much, just once in a way when the girls would not be on duty, while I would be there in the morning.
Q: What do you mean by “working”? Were you prostituting yourself after the illegal operation?
Smith: Oh, just twice, I guess.
Q: A week afterwards?
Smith: Yes.
Q: One week after the operation?
Smith: Yes.

Q: You were able to prostitute yourself as soon as that?
Smith: I was not able to, but had to.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GAMBLERS
Long before governments in Canada began legalizing gambling, anyone wishing to partake in a professionally run game of chance had to visit an underground gambling den, while those who preferred to bet on the horses or a hockey game had to consult with their local bookmaker. During the 1890s, the Toronto Daily Star ran a number of stories on the illegal gambling parlours in the city. In a May 1894 article entitled “On the throw of dice,” the newspaper described the “gambling halls in full operation where many men lose most of their earnings and where a few make very comfortable livings without working.” The most popular destinations for gamblers in Toronto during this time were the “poker joints,” which are “frequent at the present time and have been for many years.” The newspaper noted that while rooms in private houses and public buildings are devoted to friendly games where a few meet to play for sport “others are devoted to games where sharks meet unsuspecting victims and fleece them to the limit of their possessions.” The paper also describes a new innovation in the gambling world that had become all the rage: craps. In October 1894, the Star ran stories on a “cook shop,” which played host to 24-hour crap games and the numerous hotels where gambling was carried out. Six years later, the Star reported on a police raid at a gambling operation “for the working class” run by Frank Duffy and located in a barn at the corner of Queen and Leslie streets:

On Saturday night Frank Duffy was chief Pooh-Bah in a gambling den; now he is a broom-maker in the Central Prison. When the police raided Duffy’s place they did not find the bones rolling on green baize tables, and the players resting their weary feet on Brussels carpet. The banker did not wear a diamond pin and keep his silver in a tray. Works of art were conspicuous by their absence from the wall,

* The “Wasserman” is a blood test used to detect syphilis. “Four plus” indicates the presence of syphilis.
and the flickering oil lights revealed chinks in the walls and a straw-littered floor. The bones rolled on a canvas-covered table in one corner. In another greasy cards were slapped down upon another table, where a poker game, with a cent ante and a nickel limit, was in progress.

The gamblers arrested by police during the raid were described by the newspaper as “rough-clothed workingmen” and once they were all assembled at the police station, “the roster of drunks and disorderlies read like an enunciation of an Irish Colony.”

By 1901, professional gambling operations in Toronto were perceived to be so widespread and the police response to them so lax, the city’s Board of Police Commissioners was compelled to hold a public inquiry. In his testimony before the inquiry, the chief constable of the Toronto police, Lieutenant Colonel Grasett, blamed the low rate of police arrests on the highly mobile nature of the games: “You are probably aware that gambling is conducted now in a different way from what it used to be; at one time there were cumbersome appliances necessary for the games which were very difficult to get rid of hastily; and when the police visited gambling rooms and found those implements there they had prima facie evidence of what went on; now those appliances are either too slow or else too self-evident so the gamblers resort to crap-playing, which is a game played with dice, easily disposed of — they can be thrown out of the window in an instant or concealed about the person — and to card-playing.” A staff inspector added that some of the gambling operations had lookouts so that once police entered a gambling hall, it was inevitably empty.

In addition to gambling dens, bookmaking was becoming a growing source of revenue for underground entrepreneurs in Toronto. Local “horse-books” became widespread with the opening of the Woodbine Racetrack in 1874 and its decision to license individuals to take bets on site. It was not long after that hordes of unlicensed bookmakers began showing up at the track, offering better odds than their legitimate counterparts. By the turn of the century, the legion of bookmakers who stationed themselves at the track had become so plentiful that some were calling Woodbine the “University of Gamblers.” Off-track betting operations or “bucket shops” were also popping up throughout the city to accommodate those who were unable to attend Woodbine or other racetracks in person. Testimony at the 1901 police commission by a self-confessed bookie named Alexander Smiley suggests that bookmaking operations in Toronto had already become well organized. In his testimony, Smiley also indicated that some bookies in Toronto were part of a larger gambling syndicate based in Buffalo. This relationship allowed residents of upstate New York to place bets on horse races at Woodbine, while Toronto residents could bet on races at various tracks in New York State through their local bookie.

This long-distance relationship among bettors and bookies was greatly facilitated by the telegraph system, which could quickly relay up-to-the-minute information on races and other sporting events between cities. The wire service became so vital to off-track betting that any self-respecting bookmaking operation had to have a “wire room,” complete with a large blackboard where the odds and results from racetracks all over North America were tallied. The wire service also bolstered the cross-border network of bookmakers by facilitating the transfer of money, whether it was to place a bet, for a payout, or to settle an account. Testimony at the 1901 inquiry revealed that the telegraph was used to remit funds from Toronto to Buffalo, where central accounts were maintained. The following exchange between Smiley and the inquiry commissioners provides a glimpse into the connections among bookmakers in the two cities, the organized nature of the betting industry, and the anonymity that was maintained among participants as a protective measure:

Q: Have you got agents that can do it with more than one [race]track?
Smiley: The one house will do business on every track.
Q: The one house in Buffalo?
Smiley: Yes
Q: And you are authorized to send telegrams to them “Collect”?
Smiley: He says he does that through an agent here in town.
Q: Don't you send them yourself?
Smiley: No sir.
Q: Don't you go to the Telegraph office with them?
Smiley: No sir.
Q: You always take them to this friend; who is he?
Smiley: Have I got to answer?
Q: Yes.
Smiley: Mr. Samuel Clapp is the gentleman's name.
Q: What is his address?
Smiley: He lives on Yonge St, somewheres; I don't know exactly his number.
Q: About where ...
Smiley: Up around the Avenue, pretty near opposite Yonge St. Avenue, or College St; somewheres around there.
Q: Does he keep a store?
Smiley: He keeps a bicycle store.
Q: But he would never know who these people were on whose behalf you had sent this money?
Smiley: No sir.
Q: Do you hand him a slip showing who the money is for?
Smiley: No; I just tell him to put so much money on for me.
Q: And if it is won you distribute it later after you know the result?
Smiley: Yes.
Q: And if it is lost you pay it to Mr. Clapp.
Smiley: Yes.
Q: At once?
Smiley: No; it may be a week or two weeks.
Q: As I understand it as far as this man Clapp and the Buffalo men are concerned, the whole matter is impersonal and the only person that is accounted to is yourself, you having placed the order?
Smiley: That is all.
Q: And Clapp does not know who the individuals are that made the arrangements with you?
Smiley: No.

The front pages of the Toronto Daily Star were a microcosm of the contradictions that inevitably accompanied legalized horse racing. At the top of the page, on a daily basis during racing season, the results of the previous day's runnings at Woodbine would be printed. On the same page, the reader could often find a story on the latest arrest of an unlicensed horse bookie. The arrests escalated as police, posing as bettors, began regular sting operations. Even if arrested and convicted, however, the penalties for bookmaking were minimal and hardly served as a deterrent. In one 1906 case, four associated Woodbine bookmakers caught in a police sting were each fined $50 and costs, despite the fact that the court heard evidence that their daily revenue was ten times that amount. (When one of the undercover officers took the stand he told the court how he placed bets with the accused for the purpose of securing evidence and described the betting board, sheets, and tickets provided by the bookies. In detailing his undercover operation, the constable described how he wagered $2 on a horse named Judge White to place first, second, or third. “Did you bid on him because he was a judge?” the magistrate asked whimsically. “No, Your Worship,” the police officer dutifully responded.)

By the end of 1906, new laws, regulations, and court decisions resulted in a bizarre legal situation where unlicensed bookmakers at Woodbine could avoid any criminal penalty for keeping a “betting place” as long as they did not operate from an enclosed or designated space. The result was an even larger contingent of bookies at the track, some of whom took bets while riding atop bicycles to ensure compliance with the court ruling. In 1907, after thirty-nine bookies were charged at Woodbine, an even bigger scandal erupted when it was revealed that the Jockey Club was selling to bookies advance information — which included the names of jockeys, the weight of horses, and their trial times — before the information was printed in the official programs. On May 31, John G. Cavanagh and Mortimer Mahoney were charged with “keeping a disorderly house” at Woodbine, where they sold information to bookies for $10 a race. Not content with simply selling information, the two were also supplying their bookmaking customers all the associated paraphernalia, including a slate listing the names of the horses, a bag with the bookie's name on it, and betting tickets.
Police were also busy raiding off-track betting parlours. In August 1909, in what the Daily Star called “one of the most successful raids ever carried out by the detective force of Toronto,” thirty-one men were arrested on charges of being either keepers or frequenters of betting houses. “The raid took the police to all sorts of business places — a tailor shop, a barber shop, a real estate office, a pool room, a food store, etc.” After police entered his real estate office, one bookie tore the telephone off the wall, while another “reached for a knife on his desk, and with one slash cut the telephone wire, in order to block the officer from getting evidence in that way.”

While the earliest of the illegal horse books in Toronto were run independently by small-time operators, they were increasingly pushed out or absorbed by organized gambling syndicates based in Buffalo. Indeed, bookmaking in the U.S. and Canada was becoming increasingly organized and centralized, a development some blame on the moral crusaders. In 1905, anti-gambling coalitions in the United States pressured Western Union to abandon its $2-million-a-year horse-racing wire service. This opened up the door for underworld figures to take over the business. As a result, according to Stephen Fox in his book on the history of organized crime in America, “Western Union wires still might carry racing information, but the underworld collected it, received it, and gathered most of the profits. Reformers had once again outlawed something into the hands of gangsters.” As gambling operations became better organized, a division of labour began to emerge, which included such positions as runners, collectors, enforcers, controllers (mid-level managers who hire and supervise the bookies), bankers (who control the money, pay winners, and bribe police), technicians to install the wire service, and operators to decode the information. By the 1920s, large-scale bookmaking consortiums were now operating in Canada’s major cities, most of which had ties to American gambling syndicates. In December 1923, under the headline “Toronto is biggest betting place in North America,” Daily Star correspondent Ernest Hemingway wrote that bettors could place a wager in Toronto for horse racing or sports events in cities across Canada and the United States. He estimated there were ten thousand bettors in Toronto generating profits for gambling organizations that was as much as $100,000 a day. “It has been estimated that more men are employed in illegal betting in North America than work in the steel business,” Hemingway wrote. “And it all goes on under the surface.”

In his inquiry into vice conditions in Montreal, Justice Coderre also discussed the increased organization of illegal betting houses in that city, which were ordinarily hidden behind barber shops and tobacco stores. Their doors are open to all, which shows how safely they can be operated. They are affiliated with a central bureau which, for a certain sum, paid weekly, bring to the small places quotations and results. The probe revealed that these operations have been allowed to go on for months and years past and this without the police succeeding in catching those at the head of these activities. People holding these places are sometimes raided but as soon as their fine is paid, start again without being molested.

In Vancouver, several social clubs came under investigation in 1904 by the provincial attorney general for gambling infractions. Among these was the Playgoers’ Club, which was incorporated in 1903 under the Benevolent Societies Act to foster “social intercourse, mutual helpfulness, mental and moral improvement, and rational recreation.” Complaints were received by the police that gambling was taking place at this club and, in April 1904, its manager was convicted of keeping a common gaming house and was ordered to pay a fine of $97.50 plus court costs. The club folded operations after this conviction. On June 13, 1905, thirteen men were convicted of gambling at the Vancouver Chess Club. In a letter to the provincial secretary, the attorney general wrote that the informant who blew the whistle on the club “states that games, such as poker and black jack, were generally played, and that, although he frequently visited the place, he never saw a chess board there.” During two separate raids of the Elks Club (not to be confused with the Fraternal Society of Elks) police found draw poker and roulette games in progress. Police also found a ledger maintained by the proprietor, Mr. J. J. Bottger,
which kept track of each $1 chip that the house took as a rake-off. The Eureka Club, another of Bottger's operations, was located upstairs behind the Eureka Cigar Shop. In reference to this well-hidden gambling operation, the attorney general wrote:

Access to it may be gained through the shop or from the lane on the north side of the building. To reach the gaming room, it is necessary to go upstairs, pass through a small room, and from that into another room; then, passing through the second room and on turning to your right, you reach the Club room. In one of the doors, through which it is necessary to go, there is a little slide — a peep-hole, the witnesses call it — which enabled the person inside who guarded the door to scan any visitor before he was admitted. The police stated that they always found this door guarded and never could reach the gaming room without considerable delay outside the peep-hole door. The gaming room is furnished with four tables, three of them, at least, being round card tables, and a number of chairs. A witness, who had played in the Club, stated that it was frequented by white men, Japanese, and, occasionally, by Chinamen. The game played was draw poker.

Despite repeated police raids, by 1910 the acting solicitor of Vancouver had declared in a letter to the mayor that the keepers of gambling dens in the city “have unlimited financial resources to contest the efforts of the police to drive them out of business.”

Vancouver's Chinatown was also a hot spot for gamblers of all races and ethnicities, and during the 1920s it came under the microscope of police and the city's judicial inquiry into vice. In 1918, the Globe newspaper estimated, “there are over forty gambling dens in Chinatown today, and that many of these have advertisements in their windows for 'fantan' as above stated.” One police official provided the inquiry with a list of thirty addresses in Chinatown that he said were operating as gambling dens between 1921 and 1928. Among the biggest gambling house operators in Chinatown were Chow Wong Lun (a.k.a. Georgie Chow) — who ran one so large that it was described by a police officer as “an enormous barn of a gambling place” — and Joe Won Lum, who admitted to being the “bossman” of a Chinese lottery at 846 Main Street and a gambling hall outside of Chinatown on Davie Street. The inquiry was told that Lum was “dealing with pretty well high up English people who have got most of the money” and in order to better serve his white clientele, Lum sent out runners with lottery tickets that his customers could mark at their leisure. This innovative service saved the affluent Caucasian gamblers the indignity of frequenting a Chinese establishment, helped to modernize the numbers racket in the city, and made Lum a tidy profit. According to ledgers seized by police, Joe Won Lum’s “small place” at 615 Davie Street was able to take in as much as $1,440 a month, while only paying out winnings of $34. Lum also confessed that he was a partner with Georgie Chow in other gambling operations.

One man more than any other stood out under the glaring spotlight of the Vancouver judicial inquiry: Shue Moy, the self-proclaimed Potato King — an appellation derived from his ownership of the largest potato ranch in Canada — but who was best known as Vancouver's “King of the Gamblers.” Moy, who had come to British Columbia from China in 1899, had an eclectic career after arriving in the province. In addition to farming potatoes, he owned a grocery store, sold lumber in Victoria, and served as the postmaster in a small interior town. Although he was never convicted of a criminal offence, Moy was accused of operating several gambling houses, running a brothel, trafficking opium, overseeing protection rackets, and providing generous bribes to city officials, including the chief of police and the mayor of Vancouver. In his testimony to the 1928 judicial inquiry, one police officer named Harold Duggan, who confessed to having known Shue Moy “intimately for three years,” stated that Moy had told him he had an interest in two gambling dens. Detective Ricci, of the Vice Squad, testified that Moy did not outright own any gambling halls, but had an interest in four of them located in and around Chinatown. In the following exchange between inquiry commissioners and Ricci, the police detective explains that gambling operations in Chinatown are rarely owned solely by one person, but controlled by groups of investors, through companies, benevolent societies, or other types of association:
You said yesterday that he [Moy] was interested in four places; that is #54 Cordova Street East and West, 91 Pender and 119 Pender. Now, you do not know the extent of his interest in the places on Cordova Street, 54 east and west?

Ricci: I know it is a company.

Q: You did tell us there was no such thing practically as one Chinaman having a gambling house. It was always companies?

Ricci: Companies.

Q: Syndicates?

Ricci: Always depending on what district they come from in China. And these certain people come from China from a certain district; they get together; they are like a bunch of brothers. They call themselves cousins and brothers and they get a little money and chip in and start a gambling house.

In his testimony before the commission, Joe Won Lum confirmed that most Chinese gambling halls were run as partnerships. He asserted that joint ventures were essential to ensuring the solvency of the gambling houses and explained to the commission the system by which large bets were handled. Amounts too big for the smaller operations were turned over to a “clearing house” that was itself a partnership among Chinatown merchants. Detective Ricci concurred with this assessment, stating that the amount of capital required for some of the larger gambling halls to cover potential losses was greater than any one man could invest: “There is no gambling joint existing in Chinatown unless there is 10,000, 20,000 or 30,000 dollars in the back and there are very few lottery joints that start with less than $10,000. I know this myself for facts, especially in Chinatown, because they may go broke with one night, may lose $10,000 which I know somebody wins several times $10,000 and go back the next night and lose it all and be drunk for a week.”

When put on the stand, Moy tried to characterize himself as nothing more than a patron of Chinatown’s gambling operations, but quickly confessed to having an interest in several gambling joints in the city:

Q: Since you came to Vancouver, what have you been doing?

Moy: Oh, I am just gambling a little myself.

Q: You are a gambler?

Moy: Yes.

Q: By a gambler, what do you mean, a man who runs gaming houses or gambling houses?

Moy: No, I play most, I have a little interest in 54 Cordova East.

Q: I will come to that later, but you make your living, you say, by gambling?

Moy: Yes.

Q: Actually gambling?

Moy: Yes.

Q: You have been referred to throughout this enquiry as the King of the Gamblers. What do they call you on Water Street?

Moy: The Potato King.

Q: Why do they call you the Potato King?

Moy: I don’t know, I guess I have too much potatoes to sell.

Q: It is true that you had the biggest potato ranch in Canada up at Lillooet?

Moy: Yes.

Q: And they called you the Potato King?

Moy: Yes.

Q: You are King twice in your own right. Listen, have you any convictions against you?

Moy: Never.

Q: You had an interest, he did not know much, in 54 Cordova West and 54 Cordova East. Is that right?

Moy: Yes, I have one ninth.

Q: One ninth interest in those two places?

Moy: Yes.

Q: You are, I understand, a member of the club at 91 Pender Street?

Moy: Yes.

Q: And also 119 Pender Street?

Moy: Yes.

Q: Those are clubs composed of a large number of Chinese?

Moy: 91 has 120 members, and I have one share. 119 has 160 members, and I have one share.

Q: You have one share in each of those places?

Moy: Yes.

THE GRAFT-RIDDEN CITY

To understand why organized prostitution and gambling seemed so impenetrable to government enforcement
efforts, one must appreciate the extent to which vice operators were protected, or at least tacitly ignored, by police agencies and politicians, sometimes in return for generous compensation. Prostitution and gambling were often viewed as harmless vices by police and politicians and, as such, they chose to focus on more serious crimes or could rationalize taking a bribe. The result was that the underground vice industry spawned corruption in police forces and other government agencies in major Canadian cities. During the first thirty years of the 20th century, each of Canada's three largest cities had at least one judicial inquiry into government corruption resulting from organized criminal activities, and gambling in particular. Toronto's inquiry was held in 1901 (there would be more municipal and provincial corruption investigations in the years to come), Montreal's began in 1924, and in British Columbia a provincial inquiry was held in 1923 and another was convened by the city of Vancouver in 1928.

Toronto's first judicial inquiry into underground gambling and corruption was prompted by a series of articles in Toronto's *Evening News* in November of 1901. These stories charged the police department with failing to suppress professional gambling and accused some police officials of being in collusion with gambling operators and bookmakers. While the commission exonerated most senior police officials, the inquiry did find that a number of police officers were placing bets with local bookmakers.

Former RCMP commissioner Clifford Harvison referred to Montreal as "a graft-ridden city in the early twenties" where "the rot of bribery and corruption had crept into branches at all levels of Government and had spread to undermine law enforcement and to tilt, if not upset, the city's scales of justice." Harvison backed up his allegations with descriptions of mutually convenient arrangements between the local government and the city's brothels:

While not licensed, the houses paid taxes under an indirect and smoothly organized system. By arrangement, raids were carried out during which it was required that a "madam" and a specified number of girls and "found-ins" would be available for arrest. The frequency and timing for the raids and the number of arrests required worked out in accordance with the size, location, class, and business potential for each establishment. Regular patrons, having been warned, stayed away during these brief interruptions, while the madam and her girls went visiting for an hour or so before resuming business as usual. Their places were taken by "stand-ins," derelicts recruited from the flophouses and hang-outs of the area for a set fee of two dollars. Each plea of guilty brought fines that followed a fixed scale. The fines were paid forthwith by representatives of the organization that controlled the brothels.

Similar accusations were made by a group of private citizens investigating vice conditions in Montreal. They wrote in their 1918 report that "houses of commercialized prostitution and gambling dens are tolerated and exist openly in large numbers" and fines collected from convictions of brothel operators were simply an indirect form of licensing by the city for "revenue purposes." The committee documented in its report that between May 27 and November 17, 1917, "fines collected from raids at disorderly houses amounted to $41,604.75. In practically none of these cases, according to police, do these fines result in cessation of the activities of those fined."

In his testimony to the Coderre Inquiry in 1924, Dr. Alfred Haywood of the Montreal General Hospital simply stated, "I don't think that the Red Light District could exist without the leniency being shown by somebody, whether it is police or Court officials or whoever it might be. It would be utterly impossible for a Red Light District such as ours to exist without leniency being shown." Justice Coderre did not find systemic corruption within the Montreal police. But he did conclude that senior police officials wilfully turned a blind eye to vice in the red-light district and, because of incompetent leadership or lax discipline, allowed pockets of corruption to form within the police department whereby some gambling houses were being tipped off about looming raids. In his final report, Justice Coderre summarized the evidence provided by Monsieur Dore, the proprietor of one gambling house:
One of the employees in this shop, E. Provost, remarked that at each raid by the police — about once a year — the gambling room was emptied as if automatically, a few minutes before the arrival of the constables, so that when the latter arrived, they had nothing to do but to collect the telephones, the bookmaker and two or three bettors, just as much as was necessary, in order to make a case to be put to the credit of Sgt. Archambault, specially entrusted with this service. The conclusion is inevitable: the keeper having been notified, passed the word to his clients who, ten minutes before the police came, deserted the room and took refuge on all the available seats in the barber shop. The straw-men employed by Dore and his Greek associate, docilely followed the policeman, came to court to plead guilty, received his sentence and paid his fine on the spot; the following morning business started again and went on as prosperously as ever until the next raid, about a year later.

One focus of the Coderre Inquiry was the alleged relationship between the city’s chief of police and Tony Frank, a habitual offender who robbed banks and armoured cars, worked as a pimp, operated gambling halls, and ran a protection racket. While Frank was involved in multiple enterprises, much of his wealth came from the influence and power he held over other gambling house operators in the city, many of whom paid Frank a percentage of their profits, supposedly for protection from police, but more likely for protection from Frank’s gang of thugs. Evidence was provided at the Coderre Inquiry by Abraham Mouckley, who testified that despite protection money paid to Frank, his gambling house was still raided by police:

Q: Did Tony Frank go and see you after you had pleaded with [Police Chief] Sauve to be lenient? Did Tony Frank say anything to you?
Mouckley: Well, Tony Frank didn’t come and see me at all.

Q: What happened?
Mouckley: I got a phone call.
Q: From whom?
Mouckley: From a party. I don’t know who it was from.
Q: And then what?
Mouckley: Told me to go to Tony Frank’s place of business and see me.
Q: What about?
Mouckley: Yes, I went there and when I went there, he told me he never knew I was operating a gambling house, it was too bad, he heard I got raided last week, and asked me what I had decided to do, whether I should remain there or to close. I told him, I said, “If I cannot go on, I might as well close.” Whether he obtained money from me for police protection — I don’t think it was police protection, because I did not get any — it might have been protection from hold-ups; that is all I ever got but he got money from me.

Q: Did you pay any money to Tony Frank, and if so how many times and how much.
Mouckley: I gave him four hundred dollars.

Mouckley later conceded that the money paid to Frank was most likely to protect his gambling operations from Frank’s gang. “No police protection was mentioned,” Mouckley meekly confessed. “The only thing [Frank] said was — ‘I will see that there will be no harm; no harm will come to you or your players.’”

Even before the Coderre Inquiry began, allegations were made at a robbery trial that Montreal city police had been tipped off about the planned holdup of an armoured car, but did nothing. The robbery, which took place on April 1, 1924, by a crew assembled by Tony Frank, was successful, but, in the process, bank employee Henri Cleroux was shot and killed. Police arrested two of the holdup men and, facing the prospect of the death penalty, they implicated Tony Frank. Coderre interviewed most of the accused, including Giuseppe Serafini who claimed that an understanding was in place between the thieves, the receivers of the stolen goods, and the police, whereby all profits from the sale of the goods would be split with certain police
officers. Allegations that the gang had connections with Montreal police continued to mount when one of the robbers turned out to be a former police officer. Some speculated that one of the corrupt officers still serving on the police force was the chief himself, as it was well known that he had an ongoing relationship with Frank. However, there was insufficient evidence to pursue these charges and Frank took any corroborating evidence he may have had to the gallows. On June 24, 1924, Tony Frank, ex-detective Louis Morel, Giuseppe Serafini, Frank Gambino, Mike Valentino, and Leo Davis were all found guilty in the murder of Henri Cleroux and were sentenced to death. All were hanged on October 24, 1924.

In 1928, Vancouver City Council established a special commission to look into accusations that members of the police force were receiving bribes from professional criminals. In establishing the articles of the commission, the provincial attorney general wrote that since at least 1910, allegations had been circulating that police officers were accepting cash payments “from the professional gamblers, both Chinese and white, and from the keepers of houses of prostitution, in return for protection from prosecution.” T.W. Fletcher, an alderman and member of the commission, even charged that criminal influence reached as high as the mayor. From April 30 to July 6, 1928, Justice R.S. Lennie heard 180 hours of testimony from ninety-eight witnesses, including the mayor, various police officers, other civic officials, as well as a host of alleged gamblers, gambling hall operators, bookmakers, prostitutes, and pimps. The public inquiry was headline news for weeks, with sensational evidence suggesting that gambling dens and prostitution houses were operating with immunity from the law, while top police officials and the mayor’s office had conspired against any police crackdowns. In his final report, Justice Lennie wrote, “Some of these police officers both uniformed men and detectives gave evidence of instances where they were unable to secure support from their superiors and indicated that gambling and disorderly houses were carried on to such an extent and under such circumstances that they were unable to suppress the conduct of certain individuals and their positions as policemen were flouted by Chinese gamblers and the keepers of disorderly houses, as they contend because of the lack of co-operation and interference by their superiors and the Mayor of the City.” A former Liberal member of the provincial legislature, Gerry McGeer demanded that Mayor L.D. Taylor be removed from office, proclaiming, “Organized lawlessness has taken charge of the town.”

Police representatives were the most forthcoming about the open nature of the gambling and prostitution houses in Vancouver and the almost complete lack of heed that their owners, employees, and patrons had for police enforcement. In his report, Justice Lennie reflected on the appearance of Vancouver police constable Angus Murdock Stewart, who was “almost ashamed to work on his beat with the number of gambling houses that were running wide open and he was particularly impressed with the disregard they had for policemen entering their places. They quite openly came out of their places counting the spots on their lottery tickets and made no effort to hide or conceal their gambling when he went in there.”

The proprietors of some prostitution and gambling houses testified that they made payments to the police, which ranged from $5 to $50 a month. Most notable of these was Georgie Chow, who stated that in 1926 and 1927 he was paying $50 a month to Sergeant George McLaughlin and Inspector John Jackson to protect his gambling operation from police raids. Chow told the inquiry a detailed story concerning his alleged gift of a $360 diamond ring to Sergeant McLaughlin in early 1926, while Commissioner Lennie described a bribe reportedly given to Inspector Jackson by one “Chinaman” who “left a note naming the addresses of three gambling houses on a slip of paper enclosed in an envelope with four twenty-dollar bills. The Chinaman who delivered it was well-known to Inspector John Jackson on whose desk it was left.” Lennie concluded the note “was accepted to protect those places from being further raided.” While Chow’s partner, Joe Won Lum, flatly denied ever paying protection money to police, one of his employees, Joe Yem, contradicted his boss when questioned by the inquiry:

Q: Did you ever know beforehand when a raid was coming?

Yem: In most of the cases.

Q: In most of the cases you knew beforehand that the raid was coming?
Yem: Sometimes I know beforehand and sometimes we don’t know.
Q: When you knew beforehand what happened?
Yem: The boss man told us and led them one or two men up to the jail.
Q: I see the boss man told you, who was that—Joe Won Lum?
Yem: Yes.
Q: Where did he get his information from, do you know?
Yem: I don’t know where he get his information, but he told me he pay $50 for police protection.

Asked point-blank by commission lawyers why he was providing evidence against the police since he was also paying protection money to them, Georgie Chow declared that police were not giving him the same privileges that Shue Moy was receiving. He objected to his gambling operation at 60 Cordova West being closed down by police while those of his competitors were allowed to stay open. Chow said he had gone to Inspector Jackson to complain that Shue Moy was running wide open at 54 Cordova Street West, but when Chow opened up next door at 60 Cordova Street West, police officers came and “raised hell.” According to Chow, Inspector Jackson once told him, Shue Moy “is a good friend to the mayor. He can do anything he wants.” In his testimony, Inspector John Jackson also alluded to the preferential treatment that Moy appeared to be receiving from the mayor’s office and senior police officials:

Jackson: I say the Chief of Police and the Mayor both discussed the thing with me, that they did not want us to bother with these fellows at all, but to go down and get after these holdups and so forth. That is as far as I know.
Q: Then as a matter of fact it was due to the instructions that you received from the Mayor and the Chief of Police that these places were allowed to run under your inspectorate?
Jackson: I suppose.
Q: Eh?
Jackson: I suppose that is about it.
Q: Now, can you tell me why Georgie Chow was put out of business?

Jackson: There were several of them put out of business as we went along.
Q: For instance, take this famous place 54 Cordova Street West and I point out to you there were four raids on that place?
Jackson: Yes.
Q: And at this little place 1263 Seymour Street of Georgie Chow’s there were fifteen raids in the same period of time? Was that all at Georgie Chow’s at that time?
Jackson: Well, Georgie Chow and his partner, he had several other places I understand, four or five places, but this particular one at 1263 Seymour Street, it was raided fifty times; Cordova Street was raided four times and Joe Won Lum’s famous 17 Crounce Alley was only raided seven.
Q: Can you give me any explanation why you were not going after 54 Cordova Street East and 54 Cordova Street West?
Jackson: No.
Q: I am going to suggest the reason was it was because you knew the Mayor wanted those places of Shue Moy’s to operate?
Jackson: The Mayor did not want us to bother about it. I have told you that before and that is as far as I can go.
Jackson: And further than that Shue Moy’s places in Chinatown were never raided either?
Jackson: Yes.
Q: Eh?
Jackson: Yes.
Q: In the year 1927 tell me of one single place of Shue Moy’s in Chinatown that was raided in 1927? Can you do that?
Jackson: Offhand I cannot tell you, no.

In fact, much of the inquiry centred on Moy’s reputed cozy relationship with the mayor of Vancouver, Louis D. Taylor. Evidence presented before the commission, including testimony by Moy himself, showed that he visited the mayor’s home on several occasions and had also made a number of financial contributions to his political campaigns. Other witnesses provided more damning evidence. Ah Kim, a partner with Moy in one gambling house, testified
that he paid $300 a month to the mayor so that Moy could keep his main gambling house at 54 Cordova West open. Although Moy denied he ever paid protection money to the mayor or police, he did admit it was “a Chinese custom” to give “gifts” to officials. Even more damning, the chief of police described a conversation he had with the mayor who requested “that two specific lottery joints be allowed to run as there were two Chinamen who had assisted him in his election who wished to open these places.”

Also implicated in the corruption scandal was the reigning King of the Whorehouses, Joe Celona, who also was alleged to have ties to the mayor. Numerous police officers provided testimony that they were reprimanded for aggressive enforcement actions against Celona’s properties. In his sworn statement to the commission, Constable William George Thompson described one encounter with Joe Celona outside a brothel he operated:

I questioned Chinamen going in and out and searched them for narcotic drugs and gave them all the trouble I could and this caused a falling off in the business and one night Joe Celona, he said that he was Joe Celona, wanted to know why I was riding his joint all the time. I told him that it was about time that he was moving on, that I did not want to have anything to do with him, that I would take him in and charge him with vagrancy. He made a bet with me that I would be fired off the beat the next night. I told him who was going to do all this, that he could not do it and he said “His good friends.” I said “Who is your good friend?” He said “The big boss at the city hall.” I said “Who is the big boss at the city hall?” He said “That is all right, you will find out.” I did find out the next night. I came to work at eleven o’clock and I was told that the deputy chief wanted to see me in the chief’s office. I went there and Deputy Chief Leatherdale was there himself and he said that he had a complaint that the officer on the beat, number 184, had been riding 210 Keefer Street, had been camping on the doorstep too much. He said that the man, in person, he did not know the name of the man, had gone to Mr. Taylor, and complained, and that Mayor Taylor came to Chief Long and that Chief Long had told him to see me about it that Mayor Taylor was complaining. I said “What am I to do? Are you giving orders to lay off the place and leave it alone?” He said, “No, don’t do that, use your own discretion. Don’t make yourself too noticeable.” I kept on myself the same as ever and gave them all the trouble I could for the rest of the month. I was only on the beat another week.

As a result of the Lennie Commission, Chief Long and Detective Sergeant McLaughlin were fired from the Vancouver City police force. Shue Moy emerged unscathed and continued to be a force in Vancouver’s criminal underworld until at least the mid-1930s. The commission was a political disaster for Mayor L.D. Taylor, despite Justice Lennie’s conclusion that there was insufficient evidence that he ever accepted a bribe or directly interfered with a police investigation. As Taylor’s biographer notes, the mayor was not corrupt, but simply a realist who recognized that “a certain amount of gambling and prostitution was going to occur. He was not as concerned about it as he was about ‘major crimes’; that is, murder and property crimes. His approach, which he stated openly, was to regulate vice crimes while at the same time committing the city’s limited police resources to protecting citizens from violent crimes and tracking down serious criminals.” Regardless, because of the highly publicized allegations of the inquiry, Taylor lost the mayoral race in October 1928 (topping off a horrific year for the mayor that included emergency surgery after being struck by an airplane propeller and losing his first wife to an automobile accident). But L.D., as he was affectionately called, bounced back. In 1930, he was re-elected to the first of two consecutive two-year terms as mayor, losing to Gerry McGeer in 1934. Among the many issues in that year’s election was Joe Celona, who had recently been arrested for keeping a Chinese bawdy house on the top floor of the Maple Hotel on East Hastings Street and for procuring two young girls to work there. The thirty-eight-year-old Celona was convicted the following spring and sentenced to
I visited Chinatown in Vancouver, that queer district where men seem to glide from nowhere to nothing.
—Emily F. Murphy, The Black Candle, 1922

It is with the utmost of urgency that we alert you, our gentle reader, to one of the greatest threats facing the white inhabitants of our fine Christian Dominion. This most pernicious malediction emanates from what the Victoria Times calls “a vast alien colony,” unassimilated, uncultured and “bound together in a secret and defensive organization with fewer wants and a lower standard of living than their neighbours, maintaining intact their peculiar customs and characteristics, morals, and ideals of home and family life” and which, by the pressure of their very numbers, can only serve to undermine “the very foundations of the white man’s well being.” Of course, we are referring to John Chinaman and his brethren. With the dangerous combination of “occidental ingenuity and oriental craftiness,” the yellow race represents the most significant peril to the security, sanctity, and purity of British culture and civilization in North America since the Queen’s Archies were defeated at Bunker Hill by the Union Army during the American Revolution of 1812.

We can only wholeheartedly endorse the resolution on the “Chinese Question” from the British Columbia Legislature of 1885 that urges the Dominion Government to curtail immigration and crack down without sympathy on the current blight of Asiatic foreigners invading our soil. “The Chinese are alien in sentiment and habits” and “do not become settlers in any sense of that word. They have no intention of permanently settling in the country, but come for the purpose of trading and labouring, in order to return to their native country with the means to make the remainder of their days in ease.” The Chinese population in our fair land “chiefly consists of male adults, and thus — without responsibility of providing for a family — they come in unfair competition with white labour.” These migrant labourers are nothing more than “the slaves or coolies of the Chinese race, accustomed to live on the poorest fare, and in the meanest manner, and hence their presence tends to the degradation of the white labouring classes.”

We do concede they provided important labour for the building of the railway. Yet when those honest wages were not enough, they departed for greener pastures — or, more accurately, golden pastures — the abundant gold mines of British Columbia and the Yukon. Despite the economic opportunities so graciously provided to them by their host country, one cannot deny that the “Chinamen, as a class, are the smallest consumers, the least producers, and the most unprofitable of all who resort to these shores,” as the British Columbian newspaper wrote. “Economical in their diet and nomadic in their habits, all we have in return for the really large quantities of gold they carry away is the paltry revenue derived from the Chinamen’s opium and ‘licee.’” Yes, the C.P.R. would never have been built without them and our laundry has never been cleaner and whiter. “But with their frugal ways, they put little back into the economy.” When one thinks of John Chinaman, “it is usually as the genius of the washtub.” With that said, as the Toronto Star points out, he also “causes much disturbance to the larger laundries by competing with their costly machinery by the dint of his two hands and the housewife’s tools.”

We are asked to extend our sympathy to this most baneful class of foreign scroungers, men “who follow on the heels of the hardy pioneer,” yet never become colonists, let alone Christians. The “jackal-like” Chinese retain their ancestor worship in their adopted countries, “but outside of that they appear to have little interest in the religions of their native land.” As our first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, eloquently warned the House of Commons on May 4, 1885:

eleven years, but was released on parole less than six years later. Following a public outcry over this leniency, he was sent back to the B.C. penitentiary to serve out the remainder of his jail term.
The Chinese are foreigners. If they come to this country, after three years’ residence, they may, if they choose, be naturalised. But still we know that when the Chinaman comes here he intends to return to his own country; he does not bring his family with him; he is a stranger, a sojourner in a strange land, for his own purposes for a while; he has no common interest with us, and while he gives us his labour and is paid for it, and is valuable, the same as a threshing machine or any other agricultural implement which we may borrow from the United States on hire and return it to the owner on the south side of the line; a Chinaman gives us his labour and gets money, but that money does not fructify in Canada; he does not invest it here, but takes it with him and returns to China; and if he cannot, his executors or his friends send his body back to the flowery land. But he has no British instincts or British feelings or aspirations, and therefore ought not to have a vote.

It is irrefutable that immigrants from the yellow race have “prevented white men with families from coming to British Columbia” which would have “made the province a flourishing place, with happy, contented people.” Equally alarming, the Occidentals “are driving the white people out of British Columbia, and if they are not stopped will soon drive them out of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba,” the Dominion’s precious breadbasket, first settled by white men and women who want nothing more than “to preserve the British type in our population.” That this transient and congenitally procreative population scorches through their temporary country like an incendiary wildfire is vividly discernible in our Dominion. Already they have made their way as far east as Hamilton, Toronto, and Montreal. “Like most of the large cities on the continent, Toronto has quite a cosmopolitan population, and one of the most largely represented of the strange peoples is the Chinese,” the Star newspaper reports. There among the good people of Toronto are “between four and five hundred of these Celestial visitors, and they live in all parts of the city. Consequently, there is no Chinatown with its picturesqueness but also with its enmity to sanitation.”

Indeed, the Chinaman’s lack of hygiene and loathsome tolerance to disease imperils his white neighbours, especially given his preference to habitat in cramped, isolated slum-like conditions. “That their custom of living in quarters of their own — ‘Chinatowns’ — is attended with evils, such as depreciation of property, and owing to their habits of lodging in crowded quarters and accumulating filth is offensive if not likely to breed disease. But these evils might be dealt with by police supervision.” A case in point, dear reader: Toronto’s housing inspector recently found dozens of cases of infraction of the city’s lodging-house bylaw. The regulations call for 364 cubic feet of air space for every man, woman, and child who breathes. Yet, in nearly every Chinese domicile, “this limit was exceeded. Ten and twelve persons were sandwiched away in bunks, tiered one above all other, where only half that number should live. In one house, supposed to be a store, not a lodging house at all, thirty-seven Chinamen were found lying around the floor in a stifling, disease-breeding atmosphere.” In another cellar, “a dark kind of dungeon where even sacks of rice become moldy and the atmosphere has a sodden chill,” twenty-nine Chinese made their home.

The greatest cause for concern emanating from the alien Celestials and their Celestialtowns is their rampant vices and depraved immorality ubiquitously reflected in such omnipresent problems as prostitution, opium addiction, and gambling; vices that were virtually unheard of throughout much of the Dominion before the Orientals arrived. This horrible state of affairs is exemplified in Victoria’s Chinatown, which is nothing more than a “nest of gambling” and where young girls are sold body and soul. Chinatown is “infected with moral and physical leprosy, and upon Britain’s free soil — the helpless are shackled.” The fact remains “that in Christian Canada’s banner city of Vancouver there are women of the worst kind and in a state of moral degradation alongside which the history of Babylon appears like a saintly record.” But to clean up such a moral and physical stain is difficult.
“The Chinese gamblers and women proprietors are past-masters in the art of duplicity and of cheating the devil. They can lie without a smile on their faces, and swear to it without winking.”

The congenital deceit of the yellow race extends to their secret gambling dens, the front of which often appear as “a shallow innocent little candy shop having a stock of candies, nuts, raisins, etc.,” as the mayor of Vancouver wrote to the Dominion’s minister of justice in 1910. To the trusting eye of the white man, the rear of this shop is merely a blank wall; but it is in fact a reinforced bolted door, with a small peephole, seven or eight feet up from the floor. Behind the wall is the real gambling den. And out on the street, according to his Worship the Mayor —

is a Chinaman soliciting and loading his white victims to this bolted door. He gives the high sign and the door is opened from within. Behind the gambling table within sits another Chinaman superintending the game or assisting in it or sometimes taking a hand in the play. When the police make a raid they are met in the front shop by a grinning Chinaman who “no saveys.” If they undertake to force their way through the door in the
back partition usually they have to exert a force with a jack-screw equal to raising about four tons in weight. When they have broken down this barrier they usually find a number of misguided white men sitting around the “chuck-a-luck” or “Fantan” tables, but the Celestials have disappeared through their underground retreats connecting “a la Frisko” the underground world of Chinatown.

Chinese to the right of ’em,
Chinese to the left of ’em,
bruised up, but bravely they leapt to their feet.
Bare batons in the air
they grabbed, by arm or hair,
half of Hamilton’s Chinese elite.

Handcuffs on wrists were placed,
then, sad and sorry-faced,
twenty-four Chinese were led to the street.
But to have seen the smile on Sergeant Walsh while,
lo! it was almost angelically sweet.

Back in the room were found two dollars flying round,
mostly in coppers and nickels and dimes
(of course there was Chinese stuff,
but, you know well enough,
Chinese spondulaks don’t sound well in rhymes).

Two tables there were seen covered with baize to green,
whereon ’twas thought that the playing was done.
One that was almost round
Sergeant Walsh placed on th’ ground
and wheeled to the station, it must have been fun!

They took two dozen men away
and they were charged in court today
with gambling on the Sabbath night
which everybody knows ain’t right.
Those twenty-four big Chinamen,
packed tight together, filled the pen.
“Who’s who” the sergeant couldn’t tell,
so all were locked up in a cell.

Hamilton Herald, February 2, 1914, “Police raided Chinese place.”

That the gambling industry is controlled by John Chinamen is evidenced by our courtrooms, which as of late are filled with “shaven heads and pigtails.” Some are clad in the “latest Occidental style, with their queues carefully coiled on top of their heads. While others wore the felt soiled shoes, loose trousers, and smocks of their fatherland.” The air becomes “full of the Chinese monosyllables,” and the Crown Attorney’s table is piled high with the paraphernalia of the various games of chance favoured by compulsively gambling Chinamen: dice, dominoes, chips, cards, lottery boards, counting machines, as well as the account books of the various games. And on those occasions that the Chinese criminal can outwit our men in blue, should it please his fancy, he might laugh into his westernized sleeve and say, “Gee whizza! Police big chumpee. Me Number 1 boy, all right.”

Most threatening of all the Chinamen’s vices is the smoking of opium, which is extending throughout the country “to the demoralization of the native races,” a calculated strategy by the Chinese to “encourage the use of this drug amongst others of our own raising population.” Police searches of Chinatown inevitably uncover a concentration of opium joints; but these are not the luxurious opium dens of the movies, “wherein smokers sprawl in comfort on plush divan while scantily clad maidens flit across deep oriental rugs to serve their every want.” These gee yen dens of reality are made up of rows of dirty, smelly cubicles. “Quite often the male smokers would be accompanied by a female companion — not scantily clad oriental maidens, but unclad prostitutes employed to loll about in the nude. Apparently the presence of naked women helped to form and lend some reality to the hallucinations of the smoker.” The Chinese opium smokers are, almost invariably, peaceful, docile, and sanguine. Many of them are older citizens, who have “had the habit for years and could not quite understand why, suddenly, a fuss was being made.”

As an intrepid scribe with the Vancouver Daily Evening Post perceptively observed, it is through the hopped-up Chinaman who sits precariously on the end of a flimsy straw-filled cot “in a half trance, though he smokes vigorously, and in his cadaverous
face, painfully hollow cheeks, deeply sunken eyes, open vacuous mouth, and teeth discolored, decayed, and, as it seems, loose as castanets, that you read the penalties of opium smoking." While we would be grateful for the drug-induced extermination of the Chinamen, we are now well aware that opium is a disease no longer restricted to the Oriental people; it has now insidiously spread to the white race.

The non-Oriental addicts are marginalized riff-raff of no consequence to society: drifters, the unemployed, debtors, jazz musicians, Negroes, merchant seamen, university professors, and other social derelicts. The majority of these slack-twisted persons are confirmed addicts and “although only white people of low standards would smoke opium, nevertheless, they are demeaning themselves and the white race by ‘stooping’ to such a despised Chinese practice.”

As has been said in our own House of Commons, John Chinaman is not content with simply smoking opium; he is also the exclusive purveyor of this narcotic. The trafficker, generally an Oriental, a cool, calculating scoundrel, does not take the drug himself because he knows its terrible effects on those who become its slaves. It is also well known that the “Chinese have amongst them a greater number of criminals than white people, in proportion” due to a moral character that is as weak as their tea. “Opium is the Chinese evil” and this drug is used in every Oriental house, with scarcely an exception. “The evil is growing with whites” and we have been told “on good authority that white girls of respectable parents use it.” Make no mistake, the Chinaman “has taught white men and women, and boys and girls, to smoke opium.” It is only natural “that the Chinaman should prefer teaching the art of ‘hitting the pipe’ to white ‘devils,’ like you and me who probably have no souls anyway, and certainly no ancestors.” As magistrate Emily Murphy elucidates in her 1922 book *The Black Candle*, the peddling of opium beyond their own race, is part of a “well-defined propaganda among the aliens of color to bring about the degeneration of the white race”:

> It is hardly credible that the average Chinese pedlar has any definite idea in his mind of bringing about the downfall of the white race, his swaying motive being probably that of greed, but in the hands of his superiors, he may become a powerful instrument to this very end. In discussing this subject, Major Crehan of British Columbia has pointed out that whatever their motive, the traffic always comes with the Oriental, and that one would, therefore be justified in assuming that it was their desire to injure the bright-browed races of the world. Naturally, the aliens are silent on the subject, but an addict who died this year in British Columbia told how he was frequently jeered at as “a white man accounted for.” This man belonged to a prominent family and, in 1917, was drawing a salary of six thousand dollars a year. He fell victim to a drug “booster” till, ultimately, he became a ragged wreck living in the noisome alleys of Chinatown, “lost to use, and name and fame.” This man used to relate how the Chinese pedlars taunted him with their superiority at being able to sell the dope without using it, and by telling him how the yellow race would rule the world. They were too wise, they urged, to attempt to win in battle but would win by wits; would strike at the white race through “dope” and when the time was ripe would command the world. “It may sound like a fantastic dream,” writes the reporter, “but this was the story he told in one of the brief periods when he was free from the drug curse and he told it in all sincerity.” Some of the Negroes coming into Canada — and they are no fiddle-faddle fellows either — have similar ideas, and one of their greatest writers has boasted how ultimately they will control the white men.

We have already witnessed the Chinamen’s first step toward domination of the white race with the 1842 defeat of the British army at the hands of the Manchurians during the Opium War, which irrevocably weakened the vigorous and heroic effort of the Commonwealth to curtail the worldwide trade in the devil’s nectar.
The chief target of the yellow dope-pushing villains are younger Christian men and women whose natural rebelliousness and naivety make them more inclined to be drawn to “banging the gong” and “taking it on the hip.” In his 1908 report on the opium trade in British Columbia, W.L. MacKenzie King observed that use of the drug was spreading to young boys and girls and “to be indifferent to the growth of such an evil in Canada would be inconsistent with those principles of morality which ought to govern the conduct of a Christian nation.”

As the future prime minister dutifully documented in his report, the Celestial opium trafficker is particularly interested in the white woman, who, when she becomes an addict inevitably “seeks the company of those who use the drug and avoids those of her own social status. This explains the amazing phenomenon of an educated gentlewoman, reared in a refined atmosphere, consorting with the lowest classes of yellow and black men.” Their senses dulled, decent white women and girls are subjected to the influence of the Chinese dope pedlar whose ambition is to degrade, demoralize, abuse, and lure them into their brothels through opium addiction. White or aboriginal women and girls are forbidden by law to work in Chinese places where, in the opinion of society, it is dangerous to their morals to do so. Thusly, the Chinaman finds other ways to corrupt them; Celestials of great wealth and living in expensive, luxurious quarters, give snow parties “at which white women, whom they employ, act as hostesses. Young girls are invited from about the city to take part in these so-called social functions — perhaps a dance, perhaps a card party; something of that kind. Inter-spersed among these young people are two or three addicts who are trained and whose business it is to inveigle other people into the use of narcotics.”

During a raid of one such party, Toronto police found on one of those arrested, Wah Lee, who gave 196 York Street as his address, a letter addressed to a white girl. Another of the Chinamen, “Ling Hen, who also resides, he says, at 196 York Street, had a white girl’s photo in his possession.” One of Toronto’s most habitual Chinese dope wholesalers is Lee Jim, who between May 11, 1911 and December 9, 1913, was arrested on nine separate occasions for various offences relating to the manufacture, storage, and sale of opium. He was also known to have sold opium directly to white women. One of these arrests ensued after police found $10,000 worth of opium at 25 Chestnut Street. According to one Crown report on this case, “the ease with which the women obtained the drug indicated that white women are not infrequently seen at the Chestnut Street warehouse.”

In conclusion, faithful reader, it is this inferior Oriental race, with its penchant for opium smoking and dope peddling and its desire to sexually ensnare good Protestant white women that threatens to overturn the safety, sanctity, and racial purity of this great land. It threatens our very origins, which can be traced to 1776 when the great English explorer Marco Polo discovered America, landing in the shadow of Lady Liberty at New York’s harbour after circumcising the Pacific Ocean with his three ships, the Santo, the Pinto, and the Enrico Caruso. As the Secretary of the Asiatic Exclusion League stated in reference to the impact of the opium trade and its chief sponsor: “Here we have a disease, one of many directly traceable to the Asiatic. Do away with the Asiatic and you have more than saved the souls and bodies of thousands of young men and women who are yearly being sent to a living hell and to the grave through their presence in Canada.”

**A Bondage Worse than Slavery**

The reality of the early Chinese experience in North America, of course, was quite the opposite of the laughingly stereotypical and racist portrayals put forth by newspaper editorials, politicians, and “Anti-Asiatic” groups of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like many ethnic ghettos, the various Chinatowns of Canada and the United States have wrongly been held out as symbols of the insular and clannish Chinese community. Instead, they were formed as the first and subsequent waves of Chinese settlers banded together for protection in the face of racial hatred,
ethnicity-based herding, violence, and legislative disenfranchisement. Some cities went so far as to adopt restrictive bylaws to prevent the Chinese from buying property beyond the boundaries of the Chinatown enclave. Chinese labourers were excluded from unions, paid lower wages than their white counterparts, driven out of small towns and work camps, denied licences in certain professions, such as medicine, law, and teaching, and in some provinces, forbidden to work on government-funded construction projects. Fears that the Chinese male was out to anaesthetize, seduce, and corrupt white women prompted laws in numerous jurisdictions prohibiting the latter from working in Chinese businesses. Chinese Canadians were denied the federal vote until 1947 and the provincial vote in B.C. until 1949. Of all the “ethnic” immigrant groups arriving in Canada, only the Chinese had to pay a fee to settle here, the infamous “head tax” that was initially set at $50 in 1885, and then rose to $100 in 1902 and $500 in 1903. In 1923, the Chinese Immigration Act (which has been more accurately referred to as the Exclusion Act) prohibited Chinese immigrants from entering Canada with a few exceptions. Anyone of Chinese descent already living in the country, including those who were born here, had to register with the Dominion Government.

In British Columbia, anti-Chinese organizations, such as the Asiatic Exclusion League and the Vigilance Committee, held periodic meetings, lobbied politicians, and posted notices in Victoria and Vancouver all in the effort to force the eviction of Chinese immigrants and citizens from the province and the country. The outcome of these overzealous anti-Chinese sentiments in B.C. was violence and even mass rioting. On the night of February 24, 1887, several hundred members of the Anti-Chinese League held a meeting at Vancouver’s city hall. The gathering began with calls to protest the hiring of cheap Chinese labour and ended in violence. A mob of more than three hundred people stormed out of the meeting and descended upon Vancouver’s embryonic Chinatown district, breaking windows, ransacking stores, and setting fires. The mob then attacked a Chinese work camp on the periphery of the city. They razed the shantytown, tearing down the shacks that were the homes of the transient workers, starting bonfires into which their scant possessions were thrown, and forcibly loading anyone who looked even vaguely Asian onto wagons and then driving them miles outside the city. The violence continued to the next day and even expanded into New Westminster.

Anti-Asian hostility erupted into violence again in Vancouver on September 7, 1907. Following a hate-filled meeting organized by the Asiatic Exclusion League, a crowd of close to one thousand people surged into the nearby streets of Chinatown where they attacked, destroyed, and looted Chinese businesses and homes. A few blocks away, Japanese shops and businesses were also attacked. The riot lasted five hours and property damage was estimated at between $50,000 and $100,000. As the Toronto Star reported two days later, “Monday morning the wrecked quarters of the Orientals presented a dreary aspect. The interior of the shops were littered with costly china, silks, teas, and spices, worth thousands of dollars.” When Chinese merchants complained to the federal government, R.G. MacPherson, Vancouver’s Member of Parliament, placed the blame on the victims, saying it was an outcome of their unfettered immigration into the province. “B.C. is white man’s country,” he declared. Future prime minister Robert Borden echoed his sentiments, saying B.C. had to be kept “a British and Canadian province, inhabited and dominated by men in whose veins runs the blood of those great pioneering races which built up and developed not only Western but Eastern Canada.” Despite the callous and racist responses from some politicians, the Dominion Government in Ottawa did take the complaints seriously and launched an inquiry. What followed was an unforeseen turn of events that would constitute one of the most significant precursors to the development of modern organized crime in Canada.

William Lyon Mackenzie King, at the time deputy minister of labour in the Dominion Government, was dispatched to Vancouver to assess the losses incurred by Chinese and Japanese businessmen and to determine what compensation, if any, should be forthcoming. Among those making claims for compensation were the Chinese owners of two opium-processing plants that had been vandalized in the riots. Through these claimants, King was shocked to learn that there was a perfectly legal opium-processing and wholesaling
industry in British Columbia. He subsequently toured the two factories that turned gum opium into the smokable variety and later learned that there were at least seven plants in the province. He also discovered the lucrative nature of this industry; the combined gross receipts for the factories for 1907 alone were between $600,000 and $650,000. “The factories are owned and the entire work of manufacturers is carried on by Chinese, between 70 and 100 persons being employed,” he wrote in a subsequent report. “One or two of the factories have been in existence for over twenty years, but the majority have been recently established.” King even went so far as to buy a few grains of opium to prove how easy it was to obtain on Vancouver’s streets.

King had inadvertently stumbled upon British Columbia’s well-established and profitable opium industry and, although it had little to do with his original mandate, the politically aspiring King decided to make the issue his cause célèbre. “I will look into this drug business,” he said to the *Vancouver Province.* “It is very important if Chinese merchants are going to carry on such a business, they should do so in a strictly legal way.” But Mackenzie King had no intention of condoning or regulating a legal trade in opium. Shrewdly capitalizing on the race-based fears of the domestic opium trade, King wrote in his 1908 report entitled *The Need for the Suppression of the Opium Trade in Canada,* “The habit of opium smoking was making headway, not only among white men and boys, but also among women and girls.” King was now determined to use his influence to prohibit the manufacture and consumption of opium in Canada.

He submitted his report to the Dominion Government and, that same year, Parliament passed the *Opium Act* of 1908, which criminalized the import, manufacture, and sale of opiates, except for medical use. For the first time in Canadian history, a narcotic substance was now regulated by the *Criminal Code.* Having acquired the reputation of an expert in opium and its trafficking, King was appointed to a British delegation attending the Shanghai Opium Commission in 1909. With the realities of opiate abuse and addiction now being recognized internationally, King vowed that Canada “will not only effect one of the most necessary moral reforms so far as the Dominion is concerned, but will assist in a world movement which has at its object the freeing of people from a bondage which is worse than slavery.”

By 1911, King, now a member of Wilfrid Laurier’s Liberal government, introduced a more stringent *Opium and Drug Act,* which required legal drug distributors to keep records of their transactions, made opium smoking and possession a criminal offence, and expanded the list of prohibited drugs. By 1921, amendments to the *Opium and Drug Act* included a maximum seven-year penalty for the importation, manufacture, and sale of opium or any other narcotic drug mentioned in the act. In 1922, King convinced Parliament to add cocaine to the schedule of prohibited drugs. The same year, flogging and deportation were added as penalties to the narcotics legislation. In 1923, marijuana was added to the schedule of prohibited drugs. In 1929, this whirlwind of legislative action culminated in the *Opium and Narcotic Drug Act,* one of the country’s most punitive pieces of criminal legislation, which increased jail sentences for trafficking and possession, broadened police search-and-seizure powers, and increased the scope of possession charges. The legislation would be in force until the 1960s.

Mackenzie King had made his mark and used this notoriety as a springboard to become Canada’s longest-serving prime minister. As Neil Boyd observes in his book *High Times,* King adroitly positioned himself at the leading edge of a new “moral entrepreneurship” in Canada and abroad that “successfully marketed a new morality with respect to drug use.”

**THE CALAMITOUS NATURE OF THIS TRAFFIC**

While the legal opium manufacturers were put out of business, the original 1908 legislation was a boon to the patent-medicine industry and to the pharmacists who legally dispensed opium and opiate-based elixirs. After opium was outlawed in 1908, pharmacists became some of the biggest dispensers of opiates in the country. Police, court, and College of Pharmacy records from Ontario show that a large number of police investigations and prosecutions were directed at pharmacists based on allegations that they were dispensing an inordinate amount of raw and processed opium. In a letter dated November 17, 1909, to the
deputy attorney general of Ontario, the Crown attorney for the County of Middlesex wrote:

[a] complaint was made to the Police Authorities here, that a firm of druggists was furnishing large quantities of opium to Chinese residents of the City. A Policeman was sent in plain clothes to purchase some. He asked for gum opium and was shown a very large quantity, probably several hundred dollars worth, and asked if that was the kind he wanted. He replied that it was and then bought a quarter of a pound, for which he paid $2.00. … The purchaser of the opium did not produce any medical prescription or certificate, nor did he indicate in any way that he required the opium for medical purposes.

A 1913 report of an Ontario Provincial Police constable assigned to investigate illegal narcotic sales by pharmacists describes how his Chinese agent, Lee Chun, helped gather evidence. In one particular sting operation against a pharmacist named J. Urquhart, who had been suspected of selling large quantities of opium to Chinese customers, the constable made the following report:

I shadowed Lee Chun till he entered the back door of J. Urquhart’s drug store. Lee Chun came out in about 10 minutes and gave me the sign that he had bought some opium; I then entered the drug store and made search for opium. I first secured the marked bills which I had given to Lee Chun to buy the opium with, and which Mr. Urquhart had in his right hand pants pocket. I next secured some opium which he had behind the counter and which he appeared to be trying to hide, also secured a basket of opium which Urquhart said was no good and which he was going to return to the wholesaler, in all I secured ten or twelve pounds …

Urquhart, who told the constable he had purchased the opium from a legitimate pharmaceutical wholesaler, was arrested and fined $400.

Following the new federal drug laws, some pharmacists began purchasing inordinately large amounts of opium and other narcotics from wholesalers. In a 1917 memo, an official with the Ontario College of Pharmacy in Woodstock wrote, “Quite a lot of opium has been coming in here lately from Toronto, Montreal, and London. One druggist had 50 pounds in a month as you can easily find by looking up the wholesale of record.” The memo also describes a druggist in Woodstock “who professes to furnish the Chinese with laundry sundries and going around amongst them in this way he also deals opium.” As part of a widespread investigation into drug retailers and wholesalers, the Ontario Provincial Police discovered a surreptitious system by which retail druggists ordered their excessive amounts of opiates from wholesalers. Attached to official orders would be handwritten notes, such as one accompanying an order from a Toronto druggist that read, “if you can spare 20 or 25 lbs Persian Gum just so you may send it along with these goods.” The handwritten notes were expected to be destroyed by the wholesaler after the order was filled. Evidence showed that drug wholesalers regularly filled the large orders. Dominion Government records reveal that between January 1915 and November 1916, the Vancouver-based National Drug and Chemical Company sold 523 ounces of morphine, 59 ounces of powdered opium, 366 pounds of gum opium, and 454 ounces of cocaine. During the same period, another Vancouver wholesale druggist, J.A. Topoorten Limited, sold 37 ounces of heroin, 67 ounces of powdered opium, 4,981 ounces of morphine, 1,140 pounds of gum opium, and 4,216 ounces of cocaine. Among the customers of these wholesalers were a handful of retail druggists. One of these was O.C. Rutledge, who, during this period, purchased 1¼ ounces of powdered opium, 23 ounces of heroin, 1,518 ounces of morphine, 146 pounds of gum opium, and 1,277 ounces of cocaine. Another reliable customer of the wholesalers was S. Edgar Kee, who purchased 8¾ ounces of heroin, 3,179 ounces of morphine, 988 pounds of gum opium and 2,807 ounces of cocaine. In responding to these sizable orders, a federal official advised, “a retail druggist enjoying a lucrative trade in any large city in Canada does not legitimately use more than from five to ten ounces of cocaine in a year and that he does not so
use more than 20 or 25 ounces of morphine in twelve months, such a druggist would not in the same time legitimately use more than one ounce of heroin…”

Doctors also became drug traffickers of sorts, catering to an exclusive clientele, according to David T. Courtwright in his book on the history of opiate addictions in America. “The upper-class background of many addicts is certainly consistent with the allegation that some doctors courted the wealthy client with a little morphine,” he wrote. “Even worse, it was common practice for ‘quack cure joints’ to offer 10 to 20 percent kickbacks for referring addicted patients. The utterly unscrupulous practitioner could realize a handsome profit by addicting patients and then having them trek from one asylum to another — asylums with which he had an arrangement.” Between April 1921 and March 1922, the Dominion Government prosecuted under the provisions of the Opium and Drug Act, twenty-three doctors, eleven druggists, and four veterinary surgeons. In its annual report for 1925, the RCMP reported that the Quebec City detachment “made a very good clean up of the drug situation” in the city, “apprehending a number of doctors and druggists.” In its report for the following year, the RCMP commissioner extolled the Mounties’ ongoing “purification of the medical profession by exposure and conviction of a number of its members — few in proportion, I should add — who have sunk into the practice of dispensing these drugs illegally.”

As the 1920s wore on, pharmacies and druggists were less and less a source of legal or illegal opiates, due to increased regulatory control over pharmaceutical drugs and the refusal of the retailers to stock opiates because of moral objections or the increased risk of hold-ups and break-ins by addicts. The retreat of retail druggists from opium distribution, in conjunction with the ongoing criminalization of narcotics, pushed the drug trade further underground. The expansion of the black market in opium and morphine was also quickened by a substantial growth in the supply and demand for these illegal drugs in the postwar years.

During World War I, government controls severely limited the international distribution and availability of narcotic drugs. When the war ended, supply — both legal and illegal — escalated, in part to meet the heightened demands of the many morphine-addicted soldiers whose return from the battlefields in Europe or whose release from domestic hospitals swelled the addict population in major Canadian cities. In 1922, the RCMP was calling attention to “the alarming increase in the use of narcotic drugs in Canada and the growing traffic in the same.” A review of year-end reports by the Mounted Police during the 1920s shows that drug trafficking had become a significant law enforcement problem in many of Canada’s larger cities. As the commissioner wrote in the annual report for 1922:

An important and arduous task is the support of the Department of Public Health in enforcing the Opium and Narcotic Drugs Act. Reference was made in the last annual report to the calamitous nature of this traffic; I regret to be obliged to state that the evil persists, and I fear has grown in some parts of the country. To check it will require the united efforts of this force and the provincial and municipal priorities, and also drastic punishment of the agents, such as the peddlers who desperately create addicts. … the figures already given show that we have been active, having arrested over one thousand persons and having secured 800 convictions…

**THE MOST POWERFUL AND WEALTHY CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION**

Despite the spike in demand for opium and morphine, the illegal drug trade was still a fairly primitive business in the first quarter of the 20th century; most illegal shipments into Canada were measured in ounces and most of the smugglers operated independently. For much of the 1920s, the majority of the illegal opium smuggled into the country arrived aboard passenger steamer ships from Europe or Asia. As stated in the 1922 annual report for the Opium and Narcotic Drug Branch of the Federal Department of Health, “Most of these illicit shipments are smuggled in by the crews on the incoming steamships, the drugs being carefully concealed below decks, either among the cargo or in the coal bunkers, etc. Quite a large proportion of such shipments are brought into the country by freight or cargo vessels, and particularly tramp steamers calling at Canadian ports for wheat cargoes, etc.”
The opium trade became better organized as smuggling and trafficking networks began to coalesce and grow in size. While still dealing at the ounce level — or, at the most, one or two pounds at a time — opium wholesalers were becoming much more plentiful as the demand grew for middlemen who could connect overseas suppliers with street-level peddlers in Canada. Many Canadian wholesalers also doubled as retailers, often personally handling the drugs themselves. At the street level, drugs were sold in “decks,” a folded piece of paper the size of a postage stamp containing between one and fifteen “grains” of opium, morphine or cocaine. These decks sold anywhere from 25 cents to $5 apiece, depending on the quantity, scarcity, or region of the country. In Vancouver in 1922, an opium addict had the choice of purchasing a twenty-five-cent deck (½ grain — about 1/50th of an ounce), a fifty-cent deck (1 grain), a one-dollar deck (3 grains), or a four-dollar deck (15 grains). Once the opium made it to Canada it was adulterated and diluted, which contributed to the profitability of the trade for the wholesaler and the street-level retailer. Given an average wholesale price of $5 for an ounce of opium, a retailer could potentially make a profit as high as $200 an ounce.

In 1922, the federal Opium and Narcotic Drug Branch declared that the illegal opium traffic “is controlled almost altogether by large drug rings, which employ numerous agents to distribute the drug. Some of these agents simply act as a medium of distribution, between a dealer with a large stock and the small peddler, and work on a commission basis.” The January 14, 1992, edition of the Vancouver World had this to say about a particular drug ring operating in that city: “Investigations made by the authorities have led them to the conclusions that the most powerful and wealthy criminal organization on the American continent has its headquarters here. Its object is the handling of drugs. Its ramifications extend as far east as Montreal and Chicago. It will undertake to sell $100,000 worth of ‘dope,’ or it will sell it by the ‘deck,’ the small package sold by the street vendor for from one to five dollars.”

In reality, most of the drug trafficking groups in Canada had little in the way of a national presence, although drug connections were being forged between groups and individuals in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. As importantly, smuggling and trafficking linkages began to emerge between Canadian and American cities, the most notable being between Montreal between and New York. It was during the 1920s that Montreal became positioned as a central conduit through which opium and morphine from Europe or Southwestern Asia would be transported into New York. Vancouver was also becoming established as a major port of entry for opium from Southeastern Asia and a major trans-shipment point for other markets in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. and as far east as Toronto. As Montreal and Vancouver increased their stature as international drug channels for the rest of North America, the quantity of opium and cocaine smuggled through these port cities began to spiral. According to one confidential RCMP report dated May 20, 1922, of the 14,000 tins of opium (114,000 ounces) that are estimated to have been smuggled through Vancouver’s ports, some 9,000 tins (72,000 ounces) are sent to the United States and the balance is consumed locally, in the interior of B.C. and in Alberta. Between October 1920 and September 1921, the RCMP in B.C. investigated 477 Opium and Drug Act cases, from which they secured 292 convictions. One of those convicted was Nip Gar, who the media referred to as the “Queenpin” who “controlled the drug trade in Chinatown.” Gar was sentenced to seven years after police made nine undercover buys from her. Other notable seizures during this one-year period included opium worth $50,000 found in the store of a Chinese merchant, concealed in a “cleverly-constructed pocket in the seat of a chair” and behind a false baseboard located behind the store’s counter.

In one report from 1922, the RCMP estimated that the Canadian Pacific’s Empress passenger ships carried “some 800 lbs of narcotics” into Vancouver during the previous year with another “1,200 lbs of narcotics distributed over the other four lines from the Orient.” It was the crew of these ships who were the smuggling workhorses, some working independently, some conspiring with other crew members and officers, while still others were recruited by drug trafficking rings or Chinese merchants. As the Vancouver Daily World reported in 1922, the smugglers capitalized on the array of potential hiding spots aboard the large ships:
Innocent passengers may be sleeping on it on the way across for a wily Oriental has a knack of hiding it in staterooms under the berths. It has even been stitched into the mattresses. Planks have been pried from the walls and thousands of dollars of cocaine and morphine concealed in cunningly contrived cavities. It has been concealed among the stores on the life-boats; in the engine room store; in the crews quarters; down in ventilators. It is anywhere and everywhere. Cunningly built up lumps of coal, seemingly innocent enough from the outside, have been broken open and reveal a few thousands dollars worth of dope securely done up in watertight packets. Solid looking blocks of wood have on very close investigation revealed themselves as hollowed out hiding places, the joints so well made and blending with the grain of the wood that only an expert could detect them.

Once the ships docked, the drugs were surreptitiously carried onshore through body packs, in passenger trunks, or in cargo. Alternatively, watertight packages would be thrown overboard to be picked up by waiting boats before the ship docked.

In March 1921, RCMP Special Agent Number 23, Constable Frank Eccles, who worked undercover at Vancouver's marine ports, wrote a confidential memo entitled “Opium & Drug Traffic, City of Vancouver and Empress of Russia” in which he describes how he was told by a Chinese steward on the Empress of Russia that “a large quantity of Opium, Morpynine and Cocaine had been taken off the boat” by three Chinese crew members and delivered to a group of Chinese drug wholesalers in New Westminster. The informant estimated that on each trip the three were smuggling “$10,000 to $30,000 worth of drugs.” The RCMP constable was also told that the smugglers “employ a number of China boys to arrange for these drugs to be taken ashore in order that the Customs Department will not know who brings the drugs over, and if any of these boys are caught, their fines are paid, and they receive one dollar per tin for all opium they carry off the ship” (a tin contained around seven ounces of smoking opium). The smuggled opium eluded customs inspections because one of the crew members “is in charge of all 2nd class cabins and after the passengers leave the ship, these drugs are stored in these vacated cabins and the doors locked, this is ‘C’ Deck, cabins from 300 up; also toilets and bath-rooms. During the search, they keep moving the drugs from one place to another.” Once delivered, the opium was divided among the Chinese traffickers for sale locally and for disbursement to the Prairies, which was shipped through a mail order business operated by one of the conspirators. Eccles was informed that this trafficking ring has “a cache somewhere East — about two days run on the train, and drugs are distributed from there, as needed, to different points.” The investigation stemming from this report led to the arrest and conviction of J.J. Wing, who the Crown alleged “to be one of the ringleaders in the narcotics trade of the city.” Other confidential RCMP documents from 1923 indicated that Wing had been “carrying on a very large and presumably well protected system of import and distribution, both by a system of runners and also by the use of the mails.” The RCMP estimated that Wing had “30 or 40 Runners” working for him in Vancouver.

Another RCMP report, dated April 7, 1921, contains evidence of drug smuggling and internal conspiracies among customs officers, railway police, and dockworkers. Based on evidence provided by Frank Yip, who worked on passenger ships docking in Vancouver, an RCMP inspector wrote:

Opium, Morphine and Cocaine is brought in on every vessel coming from the Orient. It is brought across by the Chinese and Japanese sailors aboard, and taken off by Chinamen, wearing vests specially made, containing thirty pockets, each for a tin of Opium. Also local Chinese visit the boats on a pretext of seeing their friends, and carry the dope off in a similar way. Yip claims that the Chinese pay $3.00 per tin for every tin taken off, to the Customs and Railway Officials. The guard on the gang-plank “Splits” with these officials, and is responsible for these people going on and off the ships at will. In wet weather when the
longshoremen are wearing heavy coats, they pack it off also. Yip says that all the officials who have the handling of the ships cargoes are implicated. If the Chinese think they are being watched, they get the Railway Police to carry the stuff off.

In a memo dated July 31, 1921, Constable Eccles wrote of being informed that two hundred tins of opium and five tins of cocaine had “found its way into Vancouver last week from Victoria, B.C., to a Company here whom I know quite well, and the five lbs. of Cocaine has been shipped to Seattle already.” Less than a month later, “one of the largest drug dealers in town” told him that he had just “purchased 200 tins of Opium and some Cocaine” while another “Chinaman named Yee Lun, of Yee Lun & Co, 534 Fisgaurd Street, Victoria” purchased twenty pounds of cocaine and three hundred tins of opium from Sim Yin, “the No.1 Fireman on the Empress of Asia.” According to Eccles, “Yee Lun Co. is the largest dealer over there and some days ago was trying to sell to my informant 500 tins of Opium in Vancouver, but the deal fell through.”

Asian crew members were not the only ones accused of opium smuggling. In an RCMP report dated October 18, 1921, confidential sources accused Captain Hopcraft, of the *Empress of Japan*, as heading “a gang of Drug Smugglers” that also involved the ship’s master of arms, a baggage master, and a purser. The information received by the RCMP indicated that “four different Chinamen” regularly visited the captain’s home in Shaughnessy Heights and hauled away large quantities of opium and other narcotics. “The Captain also has two China boys visiting his home daily when the ship is in port, supposed to be servants. They carry things off the ship without being searched, and they may be packing these drugs as they are interested in same. The Gangway Customs officer is well supplied with cigars and whisky for letting them off without being bothered.”

Among the dockworkers accused of conspiring to smuggle opium ashore was the secretary of the longshoreman’s union in Victoria. According to one RCMP memo, “it was common talk” on Victoria’s waterfront that this man “had frequently brought drugs from the boats ashore.” Customs officials would also be accused of collusion with smugglers. One of those making such charges was Frank Eccles, and between 1921 and 1923, at least six customs officials were dismissed or quit due to these allegations (although there is no indication that criminal charges were ever laid against them).

In August of 1923, the accuser became the accused when Constable Eccles, along with Constable William (Doc) Smith, a fellow drug squad member, Sergeant Robert Mundy, who was in charge of the RCMP’s undercover operations, and Frank Fernandez, a police informant, were arrested at Victoria and charged with illegal possession of opium. That year, a classified RCMP report disclosed that “No. 23, Special-Agent Eccles, had purchased a fast green-coloured boat in which he and an ex-Customs Officer, named James Sperring, were getting drugs from the Empress Boats.” Dominion customs investigators, who were already suspicious of Eccles, followed the green boat during one of its pickups from an *Empress* ship and caught Eccles red handed with 50 tins of opium. In November of that year, Eccles, Smith, and Fernandez were convicted under the *Opium and Drug Act*. Eccles and Fernandez were sentenced to eighteen months and fined $1,000 each, while Smith was sentenced to nine months. For the attorney general of B.C., the convictions only hinted at the widespread involvement of these dishonoured police officers in the drug trade. The scandal prompted him to appoint lawyer J.P. Smith to lead a provincial inquiry to investigate accusations that Eccles and his convicted colleagues had been responsible for “framing certain drug addicts and others in order to cover the traces of their alleged graft, traffic in the business they were supposed to suppress.”

Among those testifying at the inquiry was Mrs. Annie Jones who stated under oath that Eccles had used her as a drug courier and described how on one occasion she was sent to the *Empress of Russia* to pick up morphine and raw opium. Eccles, she alleged, accompanied her onto the ship and from there into a room “where a Chinese came in carrying a bundle that looked like laundry.” The Chinese man gave her eleven packages, which she stowed in a skirt specially made to conceal the drugs. She told the inquiry that the packages were so heavy she did not think she would have the strength to board the streetcar to get home.
She did in fact make it home, where the merchandise was later picked up by another Chinese man who gave her $10 a package. Jones’ husband also testified that two years earlier, Eccles and Fernandez went to one of the Empress ships and took “two sacks full of drugs” to Fernandez’s home, which was then picked up by the same Chinese man. Mr. Jones testified that he was paid $1,000 by Eccles a few days later.

J.J. Wing, the convicted opium trafficker who at the time of the inquiry was serving seven years on drug charges, was also called to testify. In a startling revelation, he told the commissioners that he had bought twenty pounds of opium from two Mounted Police officers for $2,000. While being questioned by inquiry lawyers, he acknowledged that the two policemen were sitting in the room, but stubbornly refused to identify them. Wing also alleged paying Eccles $300 to take care of a police witness testifying in the drug case against him. Sergeant Mundy confirmed this testimony by admitting he had sent the material witness, a fellow Mountie, out of town on another drug investigation. (The diversionary tactic was not successful; the constable made it back in time for Wing’s court case and provided evidence that helped convict him in 1921.) Wing also claimed that Constable Smith had come into his store with Eccles and two seventeen-year-old girls, whereupon he pulled out of his shoes “125 grains of cocaine” and proceeded to sniff it in the presence of Wing and the girls. He then passed the cocaine along to Eccles and to the two teenage girls. One of the girls vomited after inhaling too much. Both of the girls testified before the commission of inquiry that they had been supplied with cocaine by members of the Mounted Police drug squad.

Incredibly, when presenting his findings on February 11, 1923, Commissioner J.P. Smith exonerated the RCMP members against charges of drug trafficking, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. This absolution was not unexpected by the provincial attorney general who had already withdrawn his support for the inquiry because the commissioner refused to enter into the record such pertinent information as the criminal convictions of the men as well as the damning testimony provided by J.J. Wing (testimony that was made public by the attorney general in December 1923, a few weeks after he stopped co-operating with the inquiry).

Despite the unflattering light the inquiry shone on the RCMP drug unit in B.C., the Mounties continued to take the lead in drug enforcement in the country and were generally successful in tracking down some major traffickers during the 1920s. In 1921, they began investigating Lee Kim, who was described in a classified RCMP memo as “one of the largest drug dealers in the City of Victoria” and “the sole supplier of opium to small dealers and consumers in that city;” Kim was also suspected of being an agent for other wholesalers and “keeps a stock in one of the numerous truck farms outside the City of Victoria, orders being fulfilled as required.” Despite making Kim a priority, the Mounted Police were unable to accumulate enough evidence to charge him, primarily because he was “too smart to handle the goods himself,” according to the memo. By 1927, the RCMP were able to close in on Kim, and more importantly, his boss, Lim Gim (a.k.a. Lim Jim), who was considered one of the largest opium wholesalers in all of Canada.

The investigation began early that year in Windsor, Ontario, where the RCMP made a number of arrests following a series of undercover purchases in that city. The Mounties determined that the opium was coming from Vancouver and, more specifically, Lim Gim, who at the time was the president of a large import company and one of the wealthiest and most prominent men in Vancouver’s Chinese community. Lim Gim, who had come to Canada at the turn of the century, was making an estimated $900,000 a year through his various businesses, although opium trafficking was the greatest source of his fortune. “This man is wealthy,” the 1928 annual report of the RCMP stated, “controlling several firms; he long has been regarded as the centre of the opium smuggling traffic in British Columbia, but hitherto no case could be made against him.”

An undercover RCMP agent, posing as a New York City drug wholesaler in search of a new supply, was introduced to Lim to negotiate a large opium purchase. When the agent tried to buy $10,000 worth of opium, Gim told him that he didn’t have that just much at the time, but could obtain it from a ship that just arrived in Seattle or from other ships coming to the United States. Within weeks, the undercover operative received a letter from Gim postmarked in Seattle.
that read, “Mr. A.B. Smith is now in town. He will be ready to do business at any time. Let me know as Mr. Smith is going away shortly.” The name “Mr. Smith” was one of the many codes used by Lim, in this case an indication that two hundred cans of opium were ready for pickup. Coded telegrams were sent back to Gim confirming the date and time of the delivery.

In conjunction with American narcotics agents, an undercover police officer visited Gim in his store in Vancouver in July 1927 where he obtained and paid for the opium. Gim was promptly arrested. At the conclusion of his trial, he received four years, but upon appeal by the Crown, the sentence was increased to seven years.

Despite Gim’s 1927 conviction, his smuggling and trafficking network persisted unabated. A new RCMP informant, who had recently been arrested after hauling opium from an Empress ship, reported that Chan Sun Sing (a.k.a. Henry Chan) had asked him to offload a future shipment from the Empress of France. Chan was employed by the Victoria Baggage Company and had already used the informant to unload and transport a number of opium loads from Empress ships, including the one that got him arrested. In his latest request, Chan told the informant he was picking up the opium for Lee Kim and was to deliver it to a pre-arranged site. The RCMP learned that Lee Kim had travelled to China at the end of 1928 and returned to Victoria on the Empress of Russia on January 25, 1929. Accompanying Lee Kim on his cruise were three hundred tins of opium that were earmarked for at least six Chinese wholesalers in British Columbia and Washington State.

The man responsible for ensuring that the shipment made it safely to Victoria and onto a ship destined for Seattle was Henry Chan. During a conversation with the RCMP informant, Chan remarked that in June 1928, customs agents in Victoria seized 350 tins of opium from the Empress of Asia that he was supposed to have picked up.

On August 27, 1929, the informant reported to his police handlers that Henry Chan had told him arrangements were being made for him to unload the opium from the Empress of France that night. Around midnight, the informant and an undercover customs officer approached the Empress of France in a small boat. They were told to look for a porthole that was covered in a red cloth. After spotting the cloth, the informant attached to the end of a string hanging from the porthole a half piece of paper that had been given to him by Henry Chan. The paper was hauled up into the porthole where it perfectly matched its other half. Within minutes, forty-four tins of opium wrapped in burlap were lowered to the men in the boat. The two then took the opium to the Vancouver Hotel where Lee Kim was waiting to take delivery. After Kim praised the informant for eluding customs, one of his lieutenants, named Charlie Sam, arrived to pick up the drugs. After counting the tins, Sam carried them to another room in the hotel where he was staying. Once he stepped into the hallway, the RCMP sprang into action and arrested him. When police knocked on Sam’s hotel room door, it was opened by none other than Lee Kim and Henry Chan, who were also arrested. After searching both hotel rooms, the RCMP found numerous coded documents that, when translated, contained detailed information on this and other opium smuggling conspiracies. Police also found a map showing the location of certain landmarks at the southern end of Vancouver Island that were designated as drop-off and pickup points for opium taken from ships docked at Victoria. Lee Kim, along with Charlie Sam, Mah Po, and Henry Chan were all eventually convicted under the new federal drug statute.

Now focusing primarily on major smuggling and trafficking conspiracies, the RCMP and the Dominion Customs Service continued to make a number of significant drug seizures and arrests during the late 1920s and early 1930s. On July 14, 1927, Lore Yip, who the RCMP described as the third most important narcotics dealer in Vancouver, was arrested after police found 43 pounds of opium, morphine, and cocaine concealed in the panelling between two walls of his apartment at the Sherman Hotel in Chinatown. At the time, it was the single-largest drug seizure in B.C. history. In 1931, the RCMP announced the arrest and conviction of Winnipeg-based Arthur Toole, who they touted as “undoubtedly the largest dealer in heroin in the entire West.” According to the RCMP, Toole’s arrest “created consternation among the drug-peddling element of Winnipeg and the West, and practically cut off the illicit supply of the drug mentioned.”
THE FRENCH CONNECTION, PART I

Like Vancouver, Montreal was a major entry point into North America for opium, morphine, and heroin. In addition to its marine ports, Montreal was a popular conduit for drug smuggling because it was a terminus for nearly all Canadian and United States railways, was located close to the American border, and was connected to New York and other major American cities along the eastern seaboard through brand-new asphalt highways. Montreal's vibrant red-light district and large addict population also helped to ensure a substantial domestic market.

Quantities of opium were being seized in Montreal that was unheard of in Vancouver. In June 1918, a police raid on an old farmhouse on the outskirts of the city turned up approximately seventy pounds of raw and processed opium. Along with 240 copper boxes containing varying amounts of the drug, police also found a small manufacturing plant to turn the gum opium into the smokable variety. As the Montreal Gazette reported, “The boilers, machinery and raw material found in another of the rooms constituted the biggest drug plant that the police have yet raided. The quantity of opium found in the house is claimed to be the largest ever seized in Montreal.” The house was also equipped to manufacture opium pipes, a number of which were seized by police. Two Chinese men were arrested at the scene and it was clear they had prepared for a long stay; there was enough food and liquor in the house to meet the needs of the occupants for over a year, police told the media. “Several revolvers and many boxes of cartridges were also found, the men evidently being prepared for any raid which might occur.” Less than a year later, this record seizure would be eclipsed when police discovered 180 pounds of opium in the home of Lee Jee, a Chinese merchant with a store on La Gauchetière Street. Eighteen packages, each one containing ten pounds of opium, were seized. The packages had been shipped East from B.C. via parcel post.

Between October 1920 and September 1921, the number of drug cases investigated by the RCMP in Quebec was 167. During the following fiscal year, the number had jumped to 531 and, for the rest of the decade, the RCMP investigated an average of 250 cases annually in the province. High-profile cases also kept the narcotics trade on the front pages of Montreal newspapers. In 1924, a shipment of cocoa, phennacotin, and other goods was sent from a firm in Switzerland to a variety of companies in Montreal. All of these companies had the same address on St. Peter Street, which aroused the suspicion of customs agents. With the assistance of the RCMP, more than three thousand pounds of morphine, heroin, and cocaine were seized en route to the Canadian consignees. The wholesale value at the time was estimated at $200,000. This would be one of the largest drug seizures ever made in Canada.

In 1925, Inspector J.W. Phillips of the RCMP’s Quebec Division wrote about the ever-increasing organization and sophistication of the underground drug trade in Montreal. “Slightly better progress has been made against offenders under the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act, but as time goes on our work becomes more and more difficult,” he wrote. “The traffic in drugs in Montreal has now reached such a science and has been driven so far underground that it is only with the greatest difficulty we can obtain any good results.” In its 1932 annual report, the RCMP identified Goon Lin (a.k.a. Goon Dep Bon, a.k.a. Goon Kwong Lin, a.k.a. Goon Sham) as the head of the largest opium ring “in the Chinese district of Montreal.” While he first came to the attention of the RCMP in 1928, “so cunning was he and so careful with his method of delivery that it was not until February 5, 1932, that it was possible to arrest him.” The RCMP described his sales routine as follows: “The usual procedure was for the customer to come in a motor car, stop before his house and send some passing Chinaman in for him; he then would emerge, identify his customer, and tell him where the delivery would take place. The customer would drive to the spot mentioned and Goon Lin procured the drug from its hiding place in one of several houses which he was in the habit of using, proceed to the spot and hand it to him.” After being put under surveillance, Lin was seen making a delivery to a customer, which prompted RCMP detective sergeant W.H. Styran to arrest Lin. In Goon Lin’s tightly clutched hands was a deck of opium, and in the ensuring struggle, the paper burst and both became covered with the drug. Upon searching his home, the RCMP discovered what it called a “considerable quantity of drugs.” Lin pleaded guilty and was sentenced to eighteen months and a
$200 fine. Evidence presented at his trial showed that Lin was also a major wholesaler to other street-level dealers in the city.

A French-Canadian man named A. Frenette, reputed by the RCMP to “be one of the most important dealers in narcotics in Montreal,” was arrested on February 13, 1932, following a high-speed chase that began after police observed Frenette making a drug delivery. He was forced to cut his getaway short as he had secreted much of the opium in the tires of his car. According to a RCMP report, the inner tubes of the car’s tires were perforated “and a certain amount of drug inserted therein. The inner tube is then placed into the tire on the wheel of the car, which is inflated with sufficient air to give it the appearance of an ordinary tire. Of course the car may not be driven at a high rate of speed.” Frenette was arrested, but acquitted at his trial when the Crown could not prove that the opium found in his car was his property. The same year, Hector Valade, a member of the Montreal city police, was arrested after an RCMP investigation showed he “was using his position of trust to deal in Narcotic drugs.” Valade was charged, found guilty on two counts of drug trafficking, and sentenced to eight years.

Most of the illegal and legal opiates entering Montreal originated from Germany, France, or Switzerland. During the 1920s, pharmaceutical companies in these countries were the world’s largest manufacturers and suppliers of legal morphine and heroin and imported huge quantities of gum opium from China and Turkey. The finished product would then be shipped throughout the world. The importation of raw opium, as well as the manufacture and export of its derivatives, were controlled by government agencies in these countries, with strict limits on quantities to be imported, produced, and exported. However, some of the companies illegally dealt in much larger quantities, most of which was diverted to international black markets.

One Montreal-based trafficker who attempted to tap into this illicit surplus was Max Faber. In 1924, a classified RCMP report acknowledged that Faber (a.k.a Max Farber, a.k.a Maxie Faber) was well known to police in Quebec “as an International Drug Trafficker, and as a man who was running a Wholesale and Retail Narcotic Peddling Joint in the Benoit Street District in partnership with one known as ‘Red’ Miller. This Joint was run in a very business like manner, neither of these times men peddled themselves, always employing men to do this work for them. They also ran, for a short time an Opium smoking Joint, somewhere in the ‘Red Light District.’” Faber, who was born July 10, 1892, in Russian Poland, was described by the London Metropolitan Police as the “head of Maxie’s Gang in Montreal” and a man who “usually dresses rather poorly” and “bears all the appearance of a Jew.” The Scotland Yard report goes on to characterize Faber as “an exceptionally cunning scoundrel. In the drug traffic his part usually has been the handling of the money, leaving the passing of the poison to be performed by others.” Similarly, the aforementioned RCMP report acknowledges, “attempts have been made to catch him with the goods, but with no success. He has always employed someone else to do the dirty work for him and this other person was always sufficiently well paid to ensure silence in the event of an arrest.”

According to the RCMP, after closing down his “peddling joint” on Benoit Street sometime in 1922, Faber concentrated on importing opium into Montreal. Between 1922 and 1924, he made three trips to Hamburg, Germany, accompanied by his two Alsatian wolfhounds. On his first trip, he met “Lambert alias Elias, a man known locally as ‘The English Jew’.” After stealing “a quantity of opium and drugs” from the Hamburg warehouse of a German drug firm, Maxie, the “English Jew,” and other accomplices were arrested and convicted. When Faber and Elias were released following a short stint in prison, they “made a deal or two and collected quite a supply in Hamburg ready for shipment to either America or England.” While in Hamburg, Faber arranged with the officers of passenger ships sailing for North America to transport the opium. When Faber returned to Montreal, he bribed a customs officer to clear the boxes of soap which hid the opium.

In 1924, Miquel de Maluquer, the consul for Spain in Montreal, and Ramon Tey de Torrents, an importer of Spanish goods, were convicted of conspiring to smuggle drugs from Spain into Canada through Montreal and were sentenced to six months each. It was the first time that an accredited representative of a foreign power had been arrested in Canada for a criminal offence. Maluquer was working in tandem with an international network that bought opium and
morphine in Barcelona, shipped the drugs to Liverpool, repacked them in trunks, and then sent them off to Montreal. There, a corrupt customs official intercepted the trunks and delivered them to the traffickers for an honorarium of $1,000 per trunk.

Based on evidence initially provided by an informant who admitted to being involved in the smuggling trade for the past twenty years, the Mounties also began investigating a Quebec-based drug smuggling ring that was tapping into this Spanish-English pipeline. According to a 1923 RCMP report, the informant identified Mr. E. McLaughlin, a senior customs official at the Port of Montreal, as “the man who passes these drugs through at Montreal” and who received “$2,000 for every trunk he puts through.” Another conspirator was “Mr. Henry Blachford, connected with the Northern Woodlands Limited, having offices at 180 St. James Street Montreal” who “acts as agent for Mr. McLaughlin; he is the man who makes all appointments and acts as middle-man.” Leon Piard, the manager of a dining room on Notre Dame Street West was described as “the man who negotiates for the drugs and talks business with Mr. Blachford.” When a shipment of drugs was en route to Montreal, McLaughlin, who has already received notice of the name of the ship before it has left port in Europe, proceeded to a point along the river east of the city where he could board the ship and accompany the goods to Montreal. He then relied on his accomplices in the customs service to ensure the trunks were passed through without inspection.

When an undercover RCMP officer, posing as a prospective opium pusher, had dinner with a drunk and talkative Piard, he was told if he could come up with $2,000 he could “go to Germany and make $15,000 easily.” According to a report by the undercover officer, a Canadian customs official “would fix me up with three trunks and letters to certain parties in Germany and I would cross and the return trip would cost about $250 each way, buy 1500 ounces of cocaine at $1.00 an ounce, pack 500 ounces in each of the trunks, and ship it as passenger’s baggage on the boat or even as freight.” Before leaving Germany, the undercover smuggler was to tell the customs official on what boat the drugs would be secreted “and he would guarantee me $25.00 an ounce here, leaving a profit of about $36,000.” This profit would be divided as follows: $15,000 for the buyer, $11,000 for the customs officials “and $10,000 for the Royal Mounted.” Piard informed the RCMP officer that to facilitate the unloading of the drug-laden trunks, the corrupt customs agents had “three trunks exactly similar to the ones containing the junk; when the boat unloads, the trunks containing the junk are at once taken off the dock and the other three are placed in their place to comply with the manifest; these are examined and passed and shipped to any address in Montreal as given by the handler in Germany, the carrier brings them back, as the consignee is unknown at the address given and they are eventually sold as unclaimed goods.”

The RCMP officer’s report noted that customers of this smuggling ring included two wholesale drug firms: “Messrs. Gasgrain & Charbonneau, Wholesale Druggists, 28-30 St. Paul Street East, Montreal and Messrs. McEwen, Cameron Limited, Wholesale Druggists, 132 St. Paul Street West, Montreal.” The report also states, “Two Jews, I. Lande and his brother-in-law, a man named Gordon are also interested parties and supply some of the money.” An RCMP informant reported that Mr. Cameron of McEwen, Cameron, Ltd. had been until recently connected with another drug wholesaler by the name of Lyman. According to the informant, a Member of Parliament, by the name of Gault, who was on record as strenuously opposing the lash and other corporal punishment penalties under federal narcotics legislation, was a shareholder of Lyman’s Ltd. The report also described him as “one of the biggest men in the drug game, he sends stuff to New York and deals locally through a man named ‘Harry’ from whom the informer has purchased drugs frequently but does not know his full name.”

The “Harry” referred to above may very well be

* The RCMP report is vague as to the identity of the Member of Parliament named Gault. It may be a reference to Andrew Hamilton Gault, who was born in England in 1882 and died in Montreal in 1958. He attended McGill University, became a millionaire through his family’s businesses, was commissioned in the Second Canadian Mounted Rifles, served in the Boer War in South Africa, and used $100,000 of his own money to found the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry in 1914, which he led into battle in the First World War. On retirement from the military in 1920, he moved to England where he was elected Conservative MP for Taunton in 1924, and became well known for his progressive views. The “Lyman” in question may be Walter Lyman who owned a number of pharmaceutical firms in Montreal during the 1920s.
Harry Davis, who the RCMP identified as a client of this smuggling group while heading one of Montreal’s biggest trafficking rings during the 1920s and 1930s. Davis, a Romanian by birth who had become a British subject, arrived in Canada in 1907. By the early 1920s, he had his hand in a number of criminal enterprises, including bank robbery, prostitution, gambling, bookmaking, fencing stolen goods, and drug trafficking. As part of his drug trafficking ventures, Davis was well connected with suppliers in Europe and had influential partners in New York City’s underworld. In Montreal, he worked on and off with a number of other drug traffickers, including Abraham Mouckley (a.k.a. Abie Mockley), Eddie Schreider (a.k.a. Dave Schrieder, a.k.a. Eddie Davis, a.k.a. Little Eddie), Eddie Baker (a.k.a. Kid Baker), Michael Sagor (a.k.a. Mike Sagor, a.k.a. Mick Sagor), Lazarus Goldberg (a.k.a. Lazarus Oblay, a.k.a. Kid Oblay), and Charlie Schwartz (a.k.a. Fatty). Davis’ principal partner in Montreal was Eddie Baker, who was born in Russia in 1898 and came to Canada at the age of two. Even as an adult, Baker was diminutive in stature, standing around five foot eight and weighing 140 pounds. He picked up his nickname “Kid” as an amateur boxer in Montreal and would later describe his occupation to police as a manager of prizefighters. By the early 1920s, he already had a criminal record, having been arrested several times under different names for being found in gambling houses. As a drug dealer, according to a 1923 RCMP report, Baker “carries on a fairly active business around St. Lawrence Main Street” and “has working for him a man named ‘Jockie Fleming,’ another man ‘Gussie’ and a third named ‘Smithy.’” The report also noted that the four are “particularly prone to taking ‘Gayety Girls’ out to ‘slumming’ parties which involved sitting in front seats at the Gayety Theatre on Sunday night, picking out the girls they desired, meeting them after the show, and then visiting Chinatown where they would smoke opium.” Baker also operated a mail order business through which he sent opium and morphine to other parts of the country. In a 1923 letter to the Opium and Drug Branch in Ottawa, the chief of the Winnipeg Police Force wrote that Jennie Labansky, “an old time dope” in Winnipeg, was found in the possession of a package with “four packets of morphine cubes, and another large envelope with what proved to be morphine.” The woman confessed to Winnipeg police that “one Ed. Baker living at either 226 or 266 St. Urbain St., Montreal, is where her source of supply comes from.”

By 1923, Davis, Baker, and their drug dealing cohorts were well known to the RCMP in Montreal and all were subject to constant police surveillance and undercover sting operations. One surveillance report from August of that year describes the retail drug operations of Davis and Baker:

A buyer enters Davis’ shop at No. 266 St. Urbain Street, he states his requirements to Davis, who tells him the price by ounce and takes his money then. Whether Davis himself or “Kid” Baker is to supervise the delivery of the drug, the buyer is usually required to wait for, say half an hour at 266 St. Urbain Street. The time is sometimes less, sometimes longer, but the procedure usually follows as detailed. Everytime “Kid” Baker takes the buyer to the place of delivery he follows this plan — the buyer is taken in Davis’ car along this route, North on St. Urbain Street to St. Catherines, West on St. Catherine to Benoit, South on Benoit to Dorchester, West to St. George, North on St. George crossing St. Catherine Street, North on Jeanne Mance Street and the drug is delivered by a small Jew at the corner of Jeanne Mance and Ontario Street. Should Davis himself take the buyer to his drugs, this plan is followed: The buyer enters Davis’ car and is taken North on St. Urbain, West on St. Catherines, across Bleury and then either North or South on St. Alexander Street where the car is met by the same small Jew and delivery effected. The plan of actual delivery is this: Davis or Baker on arrival at the points detailed stops his car, having the engine running, the buyers usually more than one, are in the car. The runner, the small Jew, who always carries his coat on his arm, having the bottle of drugs in the coat, appears walking, Davis or Baker starts the car and the runner jumps in. Delivery is effected to the buyers who in turn jump out of the car while the
car is in motion. Davis always uses the same runner, whether he delivered at or near his place at 266 St. Urbain Street or by car.

The same report documents the work of RCMP undercover agent No. 717 who, after gaining the confidence of Davis, told him he had an associate who might want to buy a large quantity of drugs. “Previously, Davis has said that he could supply any quantity up to 200 ounces without delay.” On August 13, Agent 717 visited Davis at his shop on St. Urbain Street and placed an order for an ounce of opium to test for purity. Davis instructed his new customer to get into the car where Kid Baker would take care of him. With two other buyers already in the back seat, and Kid Baker at the wheel, the car followed Baker’s usual route. The car stopped for a short wait on Mayor Street, about a half block west of Bleury. Baker then turned the car around and retraced his course as far as the corner of St. Catherine and Bleury where he turned north. Proceeding north on Bleury, the “small Jew” runner — who police later determined was Jockie Fleming — was seen standing near the corner of Mayor and Bleury. Baker stopped the car on Mayor Street and Fleming jumped into the back seat, promptly producing five ounces of opium. Between July 4 and October 28 of 1923, RCMP undercover agents made ten separate one-ounce purchases from Davis. While they were never able to locate the cache from which their supply of opium and morphine was retrieved, more than enough evidence was accumulated to arrest and convict Davis, Baker, and their cronies.

Even after charges were laid, Davis and Baker continued their trafficking activities. In May 1925, Kid Baker along with Kid Olay and Fatty Schwartz, were charged again for drug sales they made almost immediately after they were released from their prior arrest. One loyal customer of Kid Olay filed the following deposition as part of Crown’s evidence for the new charges:

During the Great War, I served in the 3rd Canadian Battery Garrison Artillery. In the year 1917 I was wounded and sent to hospital, as a result of the treatment I received, I became addicted to narcotics, and have since then, more or less, been forced to use drugs, but I am now trying to take the cure. On my return to Canada I had to find some source from which I could obtain my supplies of narcotics. I bought from a number of people, until one day, about three years ago, certainly not less, I met one known locally as Kid Olay, a narcotics trafficker. I have bought my narcotics drugs from this man since that day, except on occasions as I have been out of town. Kid Olay, about two years ago, used to sell two dollar decks. He was famous at that time for the purity of the drug in his two dollar decks, and he consequently had considerable success. Recently he has gone in for what might be called the wholesale traffic, selling on a larger scale. He sells from a quarter of an ounce of any drug upwards in quantity.

In June 1925, an undercover officer posing as an out-of-town buyer was introduced to Olay through an informant. According to a report filed by the officer, Olay told him “his partners were Kid Baker and Schwartz and that he resided at No. 72 Sherbrooke Street East. He also told me that they had been in the business for the past six years, they were backed up by well to do Jewish people in the City and that their methods for getting drugs into this country was an International affair and that all of their drugs went through Customs.” According to the RCMP officer, Olay told him “he could get as much as 600 and 700 ounces at the one time of ‘C’, ‘H’, and ‘M’. He said that they had never been caught except for a charge now
pending against them which was made by some stool pigeons, but that it was not strong enough to send them down. He also said that he knew everyone of the police and that one of them would not be able to talk to him for two minutes before he would know him.” Following this show of bravado, Oblay sold the undercover officer $35 worth of opium and also told his buyer, “If I did not care to come to Montreal to get the goods myself, all I had to do was to send a money-order payable to one Fred Harris and to address it to Kid Oblay, 73 Sherbrooke Street East.” During the course of another drug deal between the two men on July 3, Oblay told the undercover officer that he was “not a big man in the game,” only dealing in one- and two-dollar decks, and occasionally in ten-dollar decks and ounces, and that he was supplied by a bigger source, “his boss,” who dictated prices to Oblay. Around this time, Oblay’s boss, Kid Baker, was under surveillance as he travelled from Detroit with a “load of drugs probably concealed on his wife’s person,” according to an RCMP report.

By the end of the summer of 1925, the RCMP realized they could lay even more charges against members of what they called the “Kid Baker Gang,” if they could only get a corroborating witness. Fortunately for the Mounties, Naiten Erlich was arrested at a most opportune moment. Erlich was only twenty-one years old when he was picked up by the Mounties for drug trafficking, but had been working as a street dealer since he was fifteen. At the time of his arrest, he confessed to working as a runner for Baker and, as reported by a RCMP memo, was “an intimate acquaintance of traffickers he mentions and a very highly trusted man by them.” Erlich agreed to become a Crown witness and began unravelling a story that substantiated much of the evidence already collected by the RCMP drug squad. Erlich confessed to being a drug addict and stated that Baker used Kid Oblay and Abie Mockley to get young kids hooked on drugs, and then employ them as their street-level peddlers. These dealers were expected to take the fall for their bosses if they were ever caught.

Unbeknownst to the young drug addict or his police handlers, Erlich was shadowed to the RCMP barracks by members of the Baker gang the evening he was arrested. When Erlich was released, Oblay and Abie Mockley confronted him and gave him the choice of either being killed or getting out of town. Erlich chose the latter. Oblay purchased a one-way ticket for Windsor and made sure Erlich was on the train that night. But the RCMP caught up with the fugitive and recorded the following statement from Erlich after he was brought back to Montreal:

Erlich: They pushed me in the corner — Oblay and Mockley did — and then Mockley started to talk fast with his hand to his pocket all the time.

Q: With his hand to his pocket — what was the idea behind that?

Erlich: He said, “I will cut your face for you if you don’t get out of town.” I said, “Why?” He said, “You got arrested yesterday,” and they told me I was met going up to headquarters.” He said, “You are not going to turn ‘red’.”

Q: What did he mean by saying “You are not going to turn ‘Red’?”

Erlich: Stool-pigeon.

With Erlich’s most recent statement, the RCMP now had witness-tampering charges to add to the multiple counts of drug offences they had accumulated on the gang. Baker, Oblay, Mockley, and Eddie Schreider were arrested and, on November 24, 1925, they were found guilty of drug trafficking, conspiracy, and witness tampering. As the Montreal Gazette reported, “When the indictments were read to the accused in the afternoon the four answered guilty in their turn. Baker was called upon to make a response three times. Mouckley and Oblay twice, while ‘Little Eddie’ Schreider replied only in the charge of conspiracy to traffic in drugs.” Baker, Oblay, and Mockley each received a three-year prison term and when they were released, none of them would ever be a force in Montreal’s drug trafficking scene again. Davis was later convicted in a 1928 trial, but received only a six-month sentence. Before the end of the decade he would be back on the street and would continue on as the biggest drug trafficker in Montreal.
That was until Fat Charlie came along. It was Charlie who would be the downfall of Harry Davis and it was Charlie who would beat his gums and begin the unravelling of one of the world’s largest dope smuggling rings.

It was a hot June day in Montreal, nineteen hundred and thirty one — the kind of day where you could fry a gefilte fish on the sidewalk — that Charlie became a stoolie. Short, fat, shifty-eyed, double-chinned, swarty-faced Charlie Feigenbaum. He had a mug that looked like a tuckas, but he was a ganster k’nacker in Montreal’s underworld. He had so many slots in the resort shtetls scattered throughout the Laurentians that he was called “The King of the North.” He also tried his hand at bookmaking and at one time had a share in the White House Inn, the largest and most popular gambling hall in Montreal. Another major shareholder in this dice emporium was Harry Davis, the slender, impeccably dressed, aristocratic-looking clipster, with the inscrutable poker face, slicked-back dark hair, and piercing eyes the color of a burnt loaf of sour rye.

Despite his shlumperdik appearance, Charlie actually began in the schmada business. He parlayed that into dealing contraband silk, a racket bigger than a chazzer noshing at a free kosher buffet thanks to the heavy import taxes imposed by the Canadian feds. Most of the silk was brought in from New York by bronfen shmuglens returning to Canada after they had schlepped their prohibited schnapps south of the border. It was through his sneaky silk sales that Charlie first met Pincus Brecher.

Pinky was just five foot seven, and looked even shorter because he was always stooping. He had wavy black-grey hair that looked like worn steel wool, pale gaunt skin, grey and sombre eyes partly covered by drooping lids, a nose with a tip as flat as the blunt end of a hammer, no jawline to speak of, and a scar that ran from the outer corner of his left eye toward his left nostril. He had a battered face that “was as threadbare as a bookkeeper’s tweed office coat after if it had been hit by everything but the bucket of a dragline. It was scarred, flattened, thickened, checkered and welted.” Pinky had come to America from Romania around the turn of the century when he was a little north of twenty years old. He moved to New York where he became a big-shot silk soykher in the Bronx.

Pinky was also in the dope trade and his chief partner was one of the most legendary k’nackers in the American mob, Louis (Lepke) Buchalter. During the 1920s and 1930s, this “diminutive hawk-nosed creature of the Manhattan streets” had plenty of shutfims in New York’s mafia families. He had his meathooks in every illegal racket imaginable, which some say netted him a cool $50 mil in scratch every year. His hatchet men eighty-sixed dozens of rivals through Murder Inc., the syndicate’s bloodthirsty enforcement arm. Lepke was ruthless, moraless, murderous, and remorseless. He gave even the most blood-thirsty rod merchant the hewbie jewbies. He was the kind of guy that would kill both his parents and then throw himself on the mercy of the court because he was an orphan.

Lepke was one of the biggest gownicks in the world during the last roar of the Roaring Twenties and the first dirt of the Dirty Thirties. He bought most of his hop from Paris-based Jacob Pollakowitz. The transatlantic shvindel used by Buchalter, Pollakowitz, and Brecher was pretty straightforward: the gow would be hidden in steamer trunks and then schlepped stateside by mob gees to New York or Montreal on passenger ocean liners. The palms of ships crews and customs’ combers would be well oiled so they would take care of the hype-filled luggage. Most of the easing powder that landed in Montreal would end up on the streets of New York.

When Brecher met Fat Charlie he knew he could be plenty helpful in smuggling the white cross into and out of Montreal. Charlie was a natural gonif and his record as a border-tripper was unblemished. He had customs dicks in his pocket like so many pennies and nickels, and was a big-time macher in Montreal who had plenty of pull with the coppers and croppers alike.

In summer of 1930, Brecher and Buchalter were in Montreal to break unleavened bread with Feigenbaum and Davis, who was back cooling his heels on the street after his short stint in the big house. Charlie was getting a piece of the smuggling
action, but he was not told he would be schlepping the foolish powder. They told him the merchandise would be Swiss watches and he would get a cut of the take if he could get the timepieces into the country. This was old schmeer for Charlie the contrabandit. He began by providing the oil of angels to his bent customs bulls so the trunks could slip through the port without being sniffed. Charlie also got his hands on shvedeleed passports for some of Brecher's key loogans, including Jacob Pollakowitz.

On August 15, 1930, the first shipment of “timepieces” arrived in Montreal on board the S.S. Montclair. But there was a problem. The on-duty customs dick refused to allow the trunks in without snooping through them first. Feigenbaum had an ace up his sleeve just in case a raw deal like this happened. He contacted his number-one bent customs snark, Joe Lapalme, who signed the paperwork and made sure the trunks passed like a hot knife through schmaltz. For his services, Lapalme was dropped six grand. Not bad for a couple hours of work. The trunks were released to Charlie's brother, Max, and taken to his house in Montreal. Harry Davis stopped by the house a little later and emptied the trunks of their illegal medicine. To Davis, Feigenbaum was a kishef macher and any doubt about his value to the organization had been laid to rest.

Davis and Buchalter asked Feigenbaum to become a partner in their bindle business and offered him a cut of future deals. Feigenbaum's shadowy g'virs also asked him to travel to Paris to serve as a mekler with Pollakowitz and prepare the next few shipments for Montreal. While in France, Feigenbaum and Pollakowitz hacked out a system to mark the trunks filled with the joy flakes so Fat Charlie's well-oiled border schlumps would know which ones to let through. After a few empty trunks were sent across the pond to test the system, the race began for real. By November 11, 1930, four trunks full of the "O" and the "M" had been shipped from France and shtuped straight into Montreal. The trunks contained more than three hundred kilos of dope.

Charlie was now riding higher than the Star of David. He was kvelling over his partnership with some of the biggest gonifs on the eastern seaboard and was making more gelt than a public shmeckle on the take. But god forbid he should get to enjoy his success. His undoing began with a routine bust involving a couple of bindle-dealing deucers in Montreal. On October 11, 1930, Saltorio (Sam) Arcadi and Harry Tucker were pinched after they sold a kilo of morph to an undercover RCMP dick, who was posing as an American aeroplane pilot who promised to smuggle the dope into the U.S. through the air. Arcadi had already been busted for trafficking junk. A 1932 Mountie report said he had connections in the United States, and “usually dealt in a rather large way.” Arcadi and Tucker were convicted and sent up to the state bucket. Tucker received a three-spot while Arcadi got a nickel's worth, plenty of time to think about his sins and to call his mother. After the two pugs were clocked, Harry Davis told Feigenbaum that he had sold them the hype.

Feigenbaum knew John Law would have a hard time connecting him to Arcadi, Tucker or the dope, so he wasn't too verklempted. But in December 1930, his shagetz customs flunky, Joe Lapalme, got all guilty and spilled his guts to his bosses, the yutz. Long story short, along with four others, including his brother Max and the French babbling brook Lapalme, Charlie was handed a stretch for smuggling silks into Canada. He ended up at the St. Vincent De Paul big top looking at five and a half years' slammer time. Once inside, he stewed over how Brecher and Davis came up with bubkis when he needed bail or a mouthpiece for court. Charlie was sore. Plenty sore. So in June 1931 he spilled the beans to the heat. He never thought he would do it, but Charlie became a spikotz.

Feigenbaum klipped and kvetched to the Mounties about those shmendriks Davis, Brecher, and Buchalter. He told them all about the dope shipments and their sources in Europe. He told them about the shady customs bulls and conspiring crews on the passenger ships. Charlie even told them about Davis selling Arcadi the junk. We should all be so lucky that we get a gift so generous that Charlie gave to those Mounted policemen! Through their own spade work, the Mounties corroborated Charlie's statements and linked Davis to 852 kilos of dope.
pushed on the streets of Montreal and New York between January 1 and December 31, 1930.

The bar mitzvah was over for Davis. On April 9, 1932, the harness bulls plastered him with nine counts of dope boosting and grafting public officials. Enough gow had been pulled from France “to put the whole of New York City to sleep,” trumpeted Crown Lips Gustov Monnette. Bail for Davis was set at 100,000 bills. Not even the biggest shylocking schnorrer bailsman in Montreal could come up with that much shtrudel for Davis. And without so much as a mazel tov, the judge sent him off for a whiff in the joint. Jack Pollakowitz was also eyeballed as a co-conspirator and Pincus Brecher was fingered for pushing the smeck in the Big Apple. Both were indicted in the Empire City a few weeks later.

Harry’s legal circus began on October 1, 1933, in the Court of King’s Bench in Montreal. The Crown’s court jester called more than fifty witnesses and the first to take the stand – you guessed it, Fat Charlie (Don’t get me started on that shlemiel). He yipped about how he shmuglened the angel’s dust for Davis and Brecher. Sam Arcadi also made the show as a Crown blabber. Dressed in snazzy blue standard-issue duds and iron bracelets courtesy of the St. Vincent de Paul pen, Sammy-the-Wop tipped out that Davis had furnished him with the illicit linctus he was shoving. The earful given by the two blobbers was so damning that the Crown glove puppet did not even bother to put any of his remaining eyes on the stand. The judicial circus took all but five days and at the end the jury slapped Harry Davis with a guilty verdict after less than an hour of lip smacking. Dressed in a brown suit, a dull white shirt, and a light brown tie that “had been tied with a pair of plyers in a knot the size of a pea,” Harry sat in the prisoners’ holding pad as steady as a moyel’s hand at a bris, while Chief Justice Greenshields threw the Talmud at him. The judged handicapped Harry to fourteen years in the can, ten strokes of the lash, and a $3,000 fine. “I know nothing good of you,” His Lordship said. “You apparently have earned the unenviable reputation of being the ‘master mind’ in this illicit traffic in deadly drugs.” The court umpire also recommended the Crown lips start extradition proceedings against Pincus Brecher, who had been let go by a New York judge because any criminal capers he allegedly perped were in Canada, not the States.

In December 1933, less than two months after Davis was sent packing to the joint, Feigenbaum hit the street. Fat Charlie knew that he was a marked man on the outside. He shed the protection of the Mounted Horsies because he was trying to mount a comeback in the Montreal underworld. But Charlie was no mashugga; he hired his own shtarkers, and by the spring of 1934 he was operating a sporting house at 56 Mount Royal Avenue East, providing the best odds this side of Monte Carlo. Rumours were also flying around town that he was trying to muscle in on the slot machine action in Montreal.

Charlie Feigenbaum

Charlie was back on top of the world. He was a free man, making plenty of gelt, and was his own boss. But his shтик naches would soon turn into a tsuris as big as an elephant’s heine. On August 21, 1934, Fat Charlie arrived at the home of his shvegerin to take her to the family cottage in the country. With the help of his eighteen-year-old kaddishel Jackie,
Charlie was waddling back and forth between the house and the curb loading packages into the trunk of his heap. Before he was finished, he was startled by two men who had just catfooted across the street from their parked Hudson rattletrap. Each casually pulled a rod from underneath their jackets. Before the horrified peepers of the young Feigenbaum, his tatteh was mowed down in a hail of .45-calibre iron pills. Six slugs were pumped into the forty-eight-year-old schlimazel, to be exact. One drove into his leg, two drilled the abdomen, two grazed the back of his skull and the top of his head, and one burrowed into his heart like a gopher into the ground. Feigenbaum was plugged. He was plugged good. As his lead-filled body collapsed into the gutter at 5:45 p.m. that summer evening, the two paid wipers casually strolled back to their Detroit iron and sped away. After spying his blood-mottled suit, they knew right away that Fat Charlie was as dead as a wholesale discount outlet on the Jewish Sabbath.

One eyewitness wrote down the licence plate of the fleeing bucket and immediately called the public dicks. The jalopy was found abandoned on a nearby street just ten minutes later, but there was no sign of the trigger men. Six hoods, five of them American, were later held by the dime-a-pops for questioning. When the suspects were scooped up in the rented room of their flophouse, the soft shoes also found several ounces of hop and four hop sticks. But they could find no evidence linking the loogans to Fat Charlie’s icing and they were released from the copper factory. Any leads on Fat Charlie’s murder quickly became as cold as a bowl of shav. Charlie’s dousing would remain forever unsolved.

The bulls knew that Charlie’s lead poisoning was not just revenge for his backstabbing Harry Davis. He was also slated to be the star snitch at the Montreal trial of Pincus Brecher, who had just been sent gift wrapped from the American feds on Canadian dope charges. But Charlie’s unscheduled absence did not help the New Yorker’s case. On September 28, 1934, the fifty-seven-year-old Brecher was convicted on all counts. Brecher boasted to the courtroom that he was an odds-on favourite to win on appeal. Perhaps his outward chutzpah belied his own inner fachadick and fahklumpt state. Later that evening, Brecher broke free from the two screws who were escorting him to his room in the state hotel and hurled himself over the second-floor guardrail, landing with a klop on the concrete floor, yarmelkeh first. He was as flat as a matzoh, an instant nifter. Like the Daily Star reported the next day, “When the name of Pincus Brecher, New York millionaire drug trafficker, is called in Court of King’s Bench for sentence on narcotic drug charges, there will be no response for the mortal remains of Pincus Brecher today lie in a morgue of Montreal Jail.” Above the picture of Brecher in the Star it read “To a higher court.”
In 1939, he was convicted on dope charges and sentenced to fourteen singles in Sing Sing. But he wouldn’t have to finish his sentence. In 1944, after being convicted of murder, Buchalter was baked like a knish in the prison's barbecue stool.

Harry Davis was released from the big house in 1945 and resumed his place as one of Montreal’s leading clip joint operators and edge men. One day, he was sitting in his office located in the back of his Stanley Street bookie joint. A large steel safe took up more than half the room. In one corner was a heavy, old mahogany desk covered in betting slips, receipts, an overflowing ashtray, old racing forms, and a cold cup of joe that was ground during the Meighan administration. A hat rack stood lonely in another corner with a cashmere coat carefully hung on a wooden hanger. The parquet floor was scratched and well worn with little of its original gloss finish surviving over the cheap varnish haphazardly laid over generations of dirt and the occasional cigarette butt. A window that opened onto a back alley let in the air from the garbage cans mingled unpleasantly with the musty odour of the office.

Out of nowhere a two-bit nishtikeit named Louis Bercowitz strolled into the office like he owned the joint and demanded that Davis give him his blessings to open his own gambling hall. Davis didn’t much like that idea so he refused the little pisher and told him to scram. Bercowitz stormed out of the office and vowed revenge. Big talker, that Bercowitz. But Davis wasn’t worried. In his business, gun punks were a dime a dozen and would-be tough guys came a nickel a gross.

But Bercowitz returned to Davis’ office plenty mad on the night of July 25, 1946. He was a tough little ape who now planned on cutting a bigger one down to size. Hate filled his eyes and steamed his ears red. He was ready to jump all the way out of his brogans and trudge up and down the length of Davis like a welcome mat. Bercowitz parked his boiler at the curb outside the lane that led to the back door of Davis’ office. His right hand checked the snub-nosed, spring-holstered roscoe beneath his left arm. He sat there for just a moment, eyeballing the joint. With boiled-up rage and killer courage glinting from his slitted eyes, Bercowitz plotzed into the office, pulled his rod from his trousers, and sprayed bullets at Davis, splattering the yid-disher kop of Montreal’s legendary mob boss all over the walls.

After Bercowitz was nabbed by the eagle eyes he squibbed off that he snuffed Davis in self-defence; he had heard rumours that Davis was planning to bump him off. He yipped that when he confronted Davis, Montreal’s big bookie told him he could “be taken care of just as easy as Feigenbaum.” The jury at Bercowitz’s trial thought his alibi was kosher enough and saved him from the big sleep by handing him a fifteen-year term in the barred hotel for manslaughter.

STRIVING TO WALK ON AIR

In contrast to Quebec and British Columbia, Ontario appears to have had less of a drug trafficking problem during the first quarter of the century. Periodic busts did occur in the province, such as the forty tins of unadulterated smoking opium police found hidden in a box of alarm clocks that had entered Canada through Vancouver and ended up at the Kuorg High Chong Company at 179 Queen Street East in Toronto. As in the rest of the country, the addict population in Toronto began to grow following the Great War. Harry Wodson, a long-serving magistrate in the city, also blamed a growth in demand for opium and morphine on the imposition of strict liquor laws in Ontario: “Hundreds of cocaine and morphine victims filter through the court each year,” he wrote in 1917, “but since the Ontario Temperance Act came into operation the number of young men adopting the drug habit has been steadily on the increase.”

A moral panic over drug use began to take root in the puritanical province of Ontario as robberies, shootings, and other violent deeds were now being blamed on “the rapidly growing use of drugs.” A February 1921 edition of the Hamilton Spectator quoted an unnamed police investigator who confidently stated, “We know positively that some of the worst crimes of the past few months have been ‘pulled off’ by dope fiends.” The culprits were mostly “young chaps” under
the age of twenty who were responsible for a rash of armed robberies at drug stores and other retail outlets in Hamilton while “filled with ‘hop.’” Reporters wrote about “dope fiends” sitting in local restaurants and bars “lit up to the eyes” and making no effort to conceal their drug use. “One man was observed to help himself to his bit of ‘snuff’ in full view of many customers in the place” while another who was “delightfully ‘lit up’ persisted in jumping up and down striving to walk on air.” Organized bands of dope peddlers were now dominating the street trade, according to the Spectator. “Men who are known not to have had a cent to their names have been made suddenly and mysteriously rich, through trafficking in drugs, the leader of the supposed ring according to the stories circulated making enough to buy himself a fine automobile. Others are known to have acquired fat bank accounts through the business of dope selling.” To guard against police sting operations, “the sellers of drugs will not part with their wares without elaborate inquiries and introductions to make sure that their customer is ‘on the level.’”

One of the largest drug importation rings in Ontario during the 1920s was headed by Rocco Perri, although many believe it was his common-law wife, Bessie Starkman, who was the driving force. “Bessie was the person who made most of the deals, corrupted many of the public officials on the Perri organization payroll, collected most of the money coming in to the Perri mob and met with many of their gangster allies in the States and ran her criminal empire with an iron fist,” James Dubro and Robin Rowland wrote in their book on Frank Zaneth, the legendary RCMP undercover officer who penetrated the Perri-Starkman organization. Rocco and Bessie made most of their money by overseeing a multimillion-dollar liquor smuggling operation during the 1920s, but police in Canada and the U.S. gathered considerable intelligence connecting them to the drug trade. As early as 1922, RCMP reports were chronicling the “suspected dealing in narcotics on a large scale” by an Italian immigrant in Canada named Rocco Perri. In a March 12, 1926, letter, a U.S. Narcotics Bureau agent accused “Rocco Perry” of supplying an “Italian dope peddling” ring in Pennsylvania.

Rocco and Bessie’s network of associates were strategically placed in various locations in Southern Ontario, mostly along the American border. Some were running booze into the U.S. and returning with loads of raw opium to be processed into smoking opium or morphine. One RCMP informant alleged that drugs were also brought into Ontario by seaplane, which landed on Lake Ontario near Burlington, or by dropping packages by silk parachutes onto old flying fields near Hamilton. “There is no doubt this is the cleverest gang of drug runners in the country,” an undercover Mountie wrote of the Perri-Starkman gang in a 1929 memo. “The ring leaders are very shrewd and have deliberately withheld introducing a new customer until they knew more about him.” If there were suspicions that police were on to them, they would “rather close down temporarily rather than take any unnecessary risks.” The memo also acknowledges that Bessie “is the brains of the whole gang and nothing is being done without her consent.”

By the late 1920s, as it became clear that Prohibition was coming to an end, Bessie and Rocco diversified their criminal activities by expanding their drug operations. It was during this time that the RCMP noted a substantial increase in the availability of opium, morphine, and heroin in Southern Ontario. As a result, the RCMP stepped up its surveillance of suspected members of the drug trafficking network. In 1929, under the guise of a Quebec drug dealer looking for a source in Toronto, Frank Zaneth was introduced to two of Perri’s bootlegging and drug dealing cronies, Tony Defalco and Antonio Brassi. Zaneth successfully negotiated the purchase of $40 worth of morphine, which was delivered on May 8 by another Perri lieutenant, Tony Roma, who handed over to Zaneth a hundred white cubes, each weighing between 2 and 2.5 grams. By June of that year, Zaneth had purchased cocaine and morphine from Roma and Brassi on three occasions and noticed that in each buy, the drugs were wrapped in pages from Hamilton newspapers. This led him to believe that the source was located in Hamilton, a suspicion that was corroborated by an informant who identified Hamilton-based Francesco Rossi (a.k.a. Frank Ross), one of Perri’s most trusted lieutenants, as his main distributor of cocaine and morphine. Through his investigation, Zaneth also discovered that the drugs sold through Perri’s group were kept at the
Hamilton home of yet another underling, Nazzareno (Ned) Italiano.

Beginning on June 20, 1929, the RCMP raided Tony Roma’s gambling hall in Toronto where they found drugs, money, guns, and ammunition. Roma was arrested along with Zaneth, who was still playing his drug dealing character. Italiano’s Dundas Street home in Hamilton was raided at the same time and police found a supply of morphine and some of the marked money used by Zaneth in his undercover buys. Italiano and three other men were arrested. Much to the RCMP’s surprise, as they were winding down the bust at Italiano’s home Bessie Starkman arrived. When questioned, the startled drug doyen replied that she was just making a social call on her husband’s old friend. When police searched her purse they discovered rolls of bills that added up to hundreds of dollars. Upon close inspection, they determined that none of the cash was the marked money used for the undercover drug buys. As a result, Starkman was released without any charges laid against her.

On September 23, 1929, Italiano, Defalco, and Branni were put on trial for drug trafficking and four days later the three were convicted. Italiano and Defalco were sentenced to six months while Branni received three years in the Kingston Penitentiary. Police testimony during the trial revealed that Rocco and Bessie had visited Italiano’s house while it was under police surveillance at least three times. However, there was still insufficient evidence to link either to drug trafficking and they were never charged. Tony Roma, meanwhile, had jumped bail before the trial began and a bench warrant was issued for his arrest. Suspecting he had skipped the country, Roma became the subject of a continent-wide manhunt. It wasn’t until July 27, 1936 that Roma would be captured by the FBI near the small town of Fowler, California. After being extradited back to Canada, where he stood trial on outstanding drug charges, the fifty-two-year-old Italian native was convicted on December 21, 1936, and sentenced to two years in the Kingston pen. Following his release, Roma tried to re-enter the United States, but was deported to Italy.
It was just past midnight, October 6, 1923. Sidney Gogo was quickly offloading his cabin boat, the Hattie C. She was docked on the shore of Lake Ontario, at the foot of Leslie Street, in the City of Toronto. There was a moon somewhere in the autumn sky, behind the dark clouds, but only a sliver of light sliced across the surface of the bay. It was a cool night, but not too cold. A few tentative raindrops splashed into the water and sent ripples the size of Canadian dimes, then nickels, then quarters, then half dollars.

The cargo being hauled to shore was 106 bags of high-grade Canadian hooch; more than 2,400 quart bottles of Corby's special whiskey. This was Prohibition-era Ontario, and the illegal cache of liquid damnation had a street value of over twenty thousand clams. Helping Gogo with the squirrel dew was his brother James and son John. On the receiving end of the juniper juice was a group of rum-running pugs led by Francisco (Frank) Di Petro and Rocco Perri.

Before the rye sap could be completely unloaded into the waiting motor cars and lorries, the hoods were startled by the sudden appearance of Toronto's finest. Knowing they were in a jam deeper than J.M. Smucker, the Gogos leaped into the idling boat and started to scram. The lead copper spied the schooner making a break for it and barked, “Stop the engine. Come in, we’ve got you cornered.”

The Hattie C did not stop. As she slowly disappeared into the dark shadow of the moonless night, the two bulls unholstered their bean shooters. The lead copper roared again, “Stop your engines or I’ll sink your boat.”

No good. With engines puttering, the Hattie C continued to ankle from the shore. The lead bull turned to his men. “Sink it!”

In a flash, John Law’s iron rods clapped thunder. Warning shots were pumped over the bow of the fleeing boat. The hot lead then found its mark in the hull. The boat sputtered to a stop. As the public dicks boarded the hobbled vessel, they made a grim discovery. James Gogo was lying in a pool of his own blood. He was drilled in the jaw by the fusillade of lead. His twenty-four-year-old nephew was lying still in his father’s arms. Crimson blossoms stained his shirt. He’d been taken a .32-calibre slug to the chest. Fifteen minutes later, he was as dead as a pickled walnut.
News of the pinching and fatal metal squirting spread quickly. The front page of the Toronto Star howled, “Today’s tragic raid was the first time the police have come in close grips with the rum runners who have been stealing into Toronto under the blanket of night and discharging their illegal cargoes of whiskey into the eager hands of bootleggers.” The story would be news for weeks to come.

All eight roustabouts found at the water’s edge were arrested and charged with the illegal transport of stagger juice. Three days after the early morning ambush by the state beaks, Ontario’s top Crown mouthpiece ordered a probe into the gunplay and the bootlegging racket of the punks nabbed that night. The hammer and saws made a point of fingering Rocco Perri as the big cheese behind the operation and vowed to do everything in their power to send him up the river.

The trial for the men nabbed that night took place in November. By the end, Sidney Gogo and Frank Di Petro were slapped with a sentence of thirty days in the joint or a fine of a thousand singles. Di Petro was forced to pay because he was the owner of the Model 34 Marmon heap that had most of the offloaded squiril. He paid his tab, while Gogo chose to serve thirty days in the cooler.

The coppers were certain that Rocco was the real buyer of that boatload of gay and frisky. But Rocco was singing another tune, and it was not music to the elephant ears. Rocco’s reason why he was at the foot of Leslie Street that night, “I run into Frank Di Petro on York Street about eleven o’clock,” he said. “And Frank ask me how to get to Leslie Street, so I show him.” The flatfeet pounded the pavement and were able to prove that Rocco owned the three jalopies seized at the bay. The button men thought they had caught Rocco red-handed this time for sure. But there still was not enough proof to sock him away and he was allowed to walk. Maybe he was just giving directions that night. Maybe not. It was a dark night. This wouldn’t be the first time Rocco avoided the big party on the hill. All through his career as a boozeheister, Rocco would be more slippery than a Seymour River salmon spawning upstream. It was one of the reasons why he was called the “King of the Bootleggers.”

Rocco Perri was small but stocky. He stood five feet four and weighed around 160 pounds. He had a swarthy complexion, a round face, a cleft chin, and a small boil scar on his left cheek. His straight black hair was fronted by a receding hairline and accentuated by a small bald spot on top. He was renowned for his loud ties, slick ace-deuce suits, and straw boater hats. Expensive Cuban stogies that looked like they were rolled by Manuel Lopez and licked shut by Mae West were often seen dangling from a crooked mouth that one typewriter jockey described as “grinning an Italian grin.” To some, he was plenty confident, cocky, and well connected, with a swell eye for the rackets. Others saw him as timid and dim-witted; a two-bit hoodlum who kowtowed to his wife, Bessie, the real brains behind their wet-mule racket. It didn’t much matter. The Rocco Perri gang became one of Canada’s big-shot mobs during Prohibition. Rocco would also become a humdinger scofflaw in the annals of Canadian underworld history.

Rocco and Bessie

Rocco was born in Reggio, Calabria, in 1890. He came to Canada when he was thirteen, joining thousands of Italian immigrants in Ontario. In 1912, he moved to Toronto where he fell for a dame. Her name was Bessie Starkman, the Polish immigrant wife of his landlord. Bessie was of medium build, with straight shoulders and narrow hips. Her large face and wide cheekbones accommodated an oversized mouth and a pug nose. Her puss was topped by neatly plaited hair and underscored by a witchly pointed chin. This dame was no looker, but...
her confident mug and cocky countenance loudly proclaimed she was no kept floozy or anybody’s chiselly-wink.

Rocco snatched Bessie from her husband and, in 1915, the two moved to Hamilton where Rocco began working in a macaroni factory. The next year, they opened a small grocery store hawking noodles, olive oil, tomatoes and other necessities of life for the local Italians. The store was also where their bootlegging empire was distilled. In 1916, the *Ontario Temperance Act* was now law, outlawing the sale of panther sweat in the province. Prohibition in Ontario had begun.

The banning of tonsil paint was a present to the underworld and this present came gift wrapped in C-notes. Bootleggers were now as common as a run in a dollar pair of stockings. Prohibition turned petty thugs and small-time crooks like Rocco into boozeheisters, rumrunners, gin joggers, and whiskey walkers; distillers, brewers, alky-cookers, and booze foundry founders; mobsters, gangsters, grifters, and grifters; blind pig proprietors, speakeasy supervisors, gin mill managers, moonlight innkeepers, creep joint operators, and whoopee parlour property owners; not to mention, button men, hit men, hatchet men, and trigger men; croppers, droppers, and wipers; gun punks, gun pokes, hoods, apes, loogans, and stooges; mugs, pugs and thugs.

Rocco and Bessie quickly took advantage of the demand for giggle water. They began by hawking blotto juice from the back of his grocery store; fifty cents for three fingers of nose paint. Their first run-in with the law was on January 4, 1919, when the store was raided and Rocco was cuffed with OTA charges. The *Hamilton Herald* reported on his January 6 appearance at the Hall of Justice:

Rocci Perri Sussino, grocer, 105 North Hess Street must have bathed in booze, washed his teeth with it, used it for shaving, gargled his throat with it, shampooed his raven locks with and utilized it as a massage. The OTA tax on toilet water Sergeant May and Constables Coburn and Goddard found on Rocco’s premises Saturday night amounted to $1,000. There were eighteen quarts of “ski” under a bed in the living apartments above the store, a gallon can of alcohol in an upstairs kitchen, a partly filled bottle and glass in the downstairs kitchen, two dozen “dead soldiers” in the bathroom, a hundred gallons of wine in the cellar and a bunch of whiskey labels and the seal of a Canadian distillery.

In addition to having his liquid lightning confiscated, Rocco was fined 1,000 clams.

But that did not stop Rocco. He was soon blipping around the province taking orders for the red eye from an ever-expanding clientele. His cover was a travelling salesman for the Superior Macaroni Company. Rocco took advantage of all the gaping loopholes in the prohibition laws. You couldn’t buy the tanglefoot in Ontario, but you could drink it in the comfort of your own home if you brought it in from Quebec or another province. It was still legal to produce it, if you had a federal licence, and Ontario boasted plenty of distilleries and breweries. This perplexing patchwork of provincial and parliamentary Prohibition prelates portended a promising platform to please the peccadillo of the parched punter. As Will Rogers quipped, “Prohibition is better than no whiskey at all.”

Rocco was plenty well positioned to help fill this demand and was a regular customer at Ontario’s biggest booze producers: Gooderham and Worts, Seagram and Sons, and Hiram Walker. By 1920, he was the biggest pour-out man in Hamilton. But the pint-sized Canadian market for contraband hooch was now dwarfed by the Texas mickey-sized thirst south of the border. Prohibition had just whipped into America like sand in an Arabian windstorm. The liquid Eldorado for Rocco and other snakehead salesmen had arrived. For the next dozen years, Canadian rumrunners would no longer be dumping their load of contraband liquor cargo exclusively on their own soil. They would now shoot their load into America.

Rocco moved swiftly into the business of exporting the insanity water to America and built a network of bootleggers that stretched across Southern Ontario and northern New York. By the mid-
1920s, he had a fleet of forty souped-up cars and trucks. Many were modified to carry loads of up to three hundred gallons at a time. He also launched an armada of fifty fishing boats that smuggled thousands of gallons of the devil’s diet across Lake Erie to the American side. He was buying cases of 60-proof shoe polish in Toronto for as little as $18 a case and selling them across the border for as much as $120 each. During a ballyhooed interview with the Toronto Daily Star, Rocco beaked off that he sometimes sold as many as one thousand cases of whiskey a day. Bessie also made with the words in the same interview, saying they never dealt in less than one-hundred case lots.

Before long, Rocco and Bessie were richer than a Lindy’s cheesecake. They lived in an opulent igloo at 166 Bay Street in one of Hamilton’s toniest neighbourhoods. It was a nineteen-room, three-chimneyed Victorian beauty that was more pleasant to look at than the Queen, but a little smaller than Buckingham Palace. It was in the expansive living room of their classy wigwam that Rocco and Bessie threw lavish parties where politicians, judges, and other big shots rubbed shoulders with Canadian and American mobsters while sipping absinthe out of bone-china teacups strained through lumps of laced sugar. Rocco and Bessie owned a battalion of motor cars, trucks, boats, hotels, and speakeasies, where mutton-faced blonds bellowed gummy mammy songs. They were often seen driving around town in a chauffeured limo, and Bessie was always dolled up in public, wearing dresses that looked like they were cut by Michelangelo and pricey fur glad rags thicker and softer than a newly washed kitten fresh out of a newfangled electric dryer machine. Strands of expensive ice dangled from her plump neck. They were free spenders and they stepped around town high, wide, and handsome.

Because of Prohibition, their bank accounts were multiplying faster than the Dionne family. Intrepid spadework by government bean counters unearthed seven accounts opened by Bessie under various nom de plumes. The feds found more than 841,000 cranberries on deposit. A 1927 audit commissioned by the feds’ accountants found one account at the James Street branch of the Standard Bank of Canada in Hamilton. “It is interesting to note that after 1920 the account is headed ‘Mrs. Bessie Perry, In Trust,’ and the deposit slips are also made out in this way,” one forensic number cruncher wrote. “The deposits in this account all appear to have been made by Mrs. Perry herself.” The total amount deposited into the account in a four-year period was a cool five hundred grand.

Rocco was often lurking in the shadows of a liquor pick-up or delivery. But he always kept several layers between him and his rackets. One former copper reminisced that he had personally stopped Rocco many times but never actually caught him with any illegal mouthwash. “He may have been the King of the Bootleggers but he never drove a car full of booze in his life.” He didn’t have to. At the pinnacle of his reign, Rocco was reputed to have an army of more than two hundred scuffers on either side of the border. His soldiers came from all different ethnic backgrounds, but his gang was mostly made up of fellow Calabrians who pledged an oath of omerta to Rocco. “There is not an Italian in Hamilton who would give this man away,” a Mountie scribbled in a 1926 memo. “Perry is a clever and dangerous crook exercising an extraordinary influence over the men in his employ, and any who are not in his employ are afraid of him. He is the ‘King-pin’ directing all operations but the members of his gang, when caught, shoulder the responsibility and pay the penalty.” Rocco made plenty sure that cars, boats, and other property were registered in the name of Bessie or his stooges. In a 1920 raid on their stately Hamilton manor, the law found fifteen cases of high-grade hooch in the garage. Rocco claimed the garage was leased to Tony Morano, who was rapped, convicted, and fined half a G-note. Rocco’s rackets were also well protected through his religious use of state lubricant. His payroll extended to top coppers, Prohibition enforcement bulls, and customs flunkies on both sides of the border.

Rocco’s rise was also due to his muscle. His climb to the top of bottle hill was scattered with stiffs who were once his rivals. He also hijacked the loads of his competitors. “Over the telephones, he received information concerning the movements of shipments by rival gangs, and over the wires he
sent forth his commands to intercept the shipments,” one reporter reported in 1923. Rocco was also the lead suspect in the deep-sixing of the heads of rival gangs. On September 5, 1922, Joseph Scaroni of the rival Scaroni family was found in the Welland Canal near Thorold wearing lead buttons on his suit. Near the body, police came across a shallow, freshly dug grave. The public deeks thought Scaroni was rubbed out in another part of the province and then tooted to Thorland by motor car. The “murderers probably intended to bury their victim, but were frightened away, and so threw it into the Canal in their flight,” a 1922 edition of the Globe reasoned.

Four months earlier, on May 10, Joseph’s brother, Dominic Scaroni, was sent to dreamland somewhere around Lewiston, New York. He was plugged four times at close range after being taken for a ride and his bullet-riddled body tossed from a speeding car. On June 4, Tony Leala, a relative who worked for the Scaroni family under the alias of Frank Cici, was found stone cold near Oakville.

In 1926, a Red Coat wrote in a secret report, “In Hamilton during the last few years there have been several bombing outrages and murders among the Italians, and it is freely stated that these have all been in connection with the members of Perry’s gang of smugglers, who are desperate men and will stop at nothing. Again the directing hand is stated to be Perry.” Rocco would never be nabbed for any of the icsings. He did pay his last respects at Dominic Scaroni’s cold-meat party, however, and was even a pallbearer, helping to carry Dominic’s Chicago overcoat down the church steps. After the Scaroni brothers were eliminated, Rocco took over their bootlegging racket. This was just another ritual in his coronation as the king of the alki racketeers and the capo crimini of Ontario’s Italian colonies.

All through the Roaring Twenties, the state nabbers tightened the dragnet around the Calabrian Liquor King, but with only a shot glass full of success. In the early 1920s, John Cruickshank, a senior snooper at the East Hamilton police clubhouse, led a raid on Rocco’s home and seized raw alcohol and several boxes of fake labels of well-known booze brands. Rocco was convicted under the OTA and dinged a thousand Canadians. He paid his fine in cash.

When forty-five people in the Niagara Peninsula became inanimate stiffs after drinking a batch of toxic moonshine, a warrant was issued on July 31, 1926, by a U.S. D.A. for the arrest of Rocco. The warrant was part of a case where more than ninety indictments were handed down by the State Shyster in Buffalo. The Ontario A.G. laid manslaughter charges against all the Canucks listed in the American indictment, including Rocco. But the American and Canadian charges against the King were thrown out because of a lack of evidence that tied him to the lethal embalming fluid.

On November 18, 1927, eight counts of perjury were laid against Rocco and Bessie after they spun a load of lies to a federal commission investigating the smuggling trade. Early the following year, the pair came to trial to face the charges. Bessie won an acquittal, but Rocco was slapped with six months under state care. It would be the longest time he would ever take a load off in the slammer.

When he emerged from the can, Rocco wasted no time in throwing himself back into the illegal sour-mash racket. But he soon discovered that the King had been dethroned. The distilleries were now bypassing Canadian outfit boys like Rocco and selling direct to American syndicates. To make matters worse, by the late 1920s temperance laws were falling throughout Canada like born-again converts at a Southern Baptist religious revival. To make up for lost profits, Rocco and Bessie ramped up their dope peddling. Rocco also opened a gambling joint with Black Hander, John Taglierino.

The violent rackets in which they ensconced themselves would soon strike Rocco and Bessie like a pouncing cobra. When they returned home from a party on the night of August 13, 1930, two gun punks jumped out from the bushes and with grind organs rat-a-tat-tatting they filled Bessie’s body full of daylight. She kicked off instantly. Rocco was untouched, mostly because he flew away like an uncaged canary in a room full of felines. Wrath suffused Rocco’s swart face as he swore revenge—prodded bloodshed. But the trigger men were never found. The rats and mice on the street were laying even scratch that Bessie was sent on a deep-six holiday because she refused to pay the prime and
the juice after going into dutch on a dope deal. She
gambled, but in her final deal, there was no shuffle,
no cut, and on top of the deck was her final card.
The death card.

The gangland slaying of Bessie Starkman — the
Queen of the Bootleggers, the moll with moxie, the
original doyenne of the Canadian syndicates —
added more fuel to rumours that she was the real
brains behind the Rocco Perri criminal empire.
In 1930, an undercover Mountie scribbled that
a stalwart stoolie sang about three hatchet men
from Buffalo “who did it, as he was well acquainted
with the three men that called on him the previous
night, and it is stated that it was the same men that
killed her.” The stoolie told the mounted policeman,
“Rocco Perri does not dare report these men to the
police as he fears that harm or possible death may
come to him.”

Years later, Rocco was targeted for the eternal
cHECKOUT. In March of 1938, the veranda of his
Bay Street shack was blown to bits by a stick of
dynamite with an explosive temper. In November,
he cranked the key of his jalopy and the ignition
spark set loose an eruption that ripped it apart,
catatpulting his engine hood across the street, and
carving a three-foot-deep crater in the concrete.
Two men standing nearby were injured. Rocco
emerged with only minor scrapes.

For the next few years, Rocco kept a low profile.
For most of the war, he was locked up by Canadian
G-men as an enemy alien. On April 23, 1944, while
visiting a cousin in Hamilton, he stepped outside
for some air. From that day forward, Rocco Perri —
Canada’s answer to Al Capone, the Canadian Little
Caesar, the self-proclaimed King of the Bootleg-
gers — was never seen again. Most pundits thought
that he ended up wearing a concrete leisure suit at
the bottom of Hamilton Bay. But his body would
never be found. A letter dated June 19, 1949, was
discovered years later in the hands of a relative in
his native Italy. It read simply, “Dear Cousin, With
this letter, I will tell you I am in good health. Let
them know I’m fine if you’ve heard the news.” The
letter was signed “Rocco Perri.”

on the death of john barleycorn and
the birth of organized crime
For organized crime in North America, Prohibition
changed everything. In Canada, provincial temperance
laws dating back to the early 1900s kick-started the
illegal liquor trade in this country. The domestic trade
in unlawful booze, however, would be a drop in a cask
compared to the tidal wave of Canadian contraband
liquor that would wash across America following the
First World War. For, in 1920, the Eighteenth Amend-
ment to the Constitution of the United States came
into effect, opening up history’s single-largest illegal
market. Prohibition helped create organized crime as
we know it today, launching it into an unprecedented
epoch of growth, sophistication, power, profitability,
corruption, and violence. The ramifications of Prohibi-
tion for the organization of crime were recognized in
a 1929 article in Canadian Forum magazine:

What has actually happened is that prohibi-
tion has given a new rallying point and a new
coherence to the criminal element. There is a
demand to be satisfied, and the legal sources
of supply have been stopped. The result is an
illicit trade that has reached the basis of an
established industry. But those engaged in it
have to face competition, often accompanied
by violent methods, and they cannot appeal
to the protection of the law. So the trade has
built up its own protective system and in many
cases its own legal system as well. It has its
acknowledged district heads, it has its own
courts, attorneys, judges, it has its own armed
forces; and the code of gangland is more bind-
ing on its members, and its breach is more
severely avenged, than the laws of civil society
in which the gang exists.

Before Prohibition, most criminals did not ac-
cumulate a great deal of money, power, or influence.
“Criminals had always belonged to the flotsam and
jetsam of society, not to the economic elite,” C.W. Hunt
wrote in his book Booze, Boats and Billions. “Now,
prohibition and the enormous illegal profits it made
possible was changing this perception and leading to the emergence of a new phenomenon in Canadian society — the millionaire criminal.” Prohibition also taught gangsters an invaluable lesson: there was far more money to be made in satisfying the vices of a receptive public than cheating, gloomming, grifting, shyting, or extorting the tenderloin citizen. Moreover, bootlegging and other consensual crimes were preferred by gangsters because it meant there were no victims to complain to police. In years to come, criminal syndicates and underground entrepreneurs would follow the precedent set by the bootlegger and focus on filling the insatiable demand for outlawed goods and services.

Prohibition in America would have enormous implications for the organization of crime in Canada, which was the main source of illegal liquor south of the border. Bootlegging became a nationwide industry, employing tens of thousands of people. Smuggling organizations were formed and quickly multiplied. Export companies conveniently sprang up just north of the U.S. border. On a daily basis, fleets of ships would set sail from Canadian ports to the shores of America, while caravans of motor vehicles crossed over the border, all carrying liquid gold. To help ensure safe delivery, the palms of government officials would be liberally greased, leading to an epidemic of corruption that to this day is unparalleled in Canadian history. Prohibition drew Canada further into the web of the American underworld and, for decades to come, the most notorious Canadian criminal groups would become branch plants of American organized crime.

Canadian distilleries and breweries regularly dealt with some of the most infamous gangsters in America and were behind the largest smuggling operations ever carried out across the 49th parallel. These companies relied on graft, duplicity, and forgery to get their product to the underground market and, in the process, they evaded tens of millions of dollars in taxes. Prohibition laws helped make Canadian distilleries and breweries some of the largest and most profitable liquor producers in the world. Encouraged by a Canadian government that was indifferent to provincial and U.S. temperance laws, these same companies were instrumental in undermining the Noble Experiment. By supplying the bulk of the liquor sold by American and Canadian bootleggers, they contributed to the expansion and modernization of organized crime, while providing the economic power base for the rise of Italian-American organized crime, La Cosa Nostra.

The following is the story of Prohibition and the role it played in forever changing the organization of crime in North America.

“THERE’S NOUGHT, NO DOUBT, SO MUCH THE SPIRIT CALMS AS RUM AND TRUE RELIGION”

The temperance movement in British North America can be traced as far back as the early 19th century. Prohibition advocates became one of the most visible crests of a broader social and moral crusade spearheaded by well-organized, well-funded, and politically connected church congregations who blamed the demon rum for many of society’s ills. After decades of pressure, the Dominion Government partially relented to their demands and passed the *Canada Temperance Act* in 1878. This legislation did not prohibit the sale of ardent spirits in Canada. Instead, it provided the provinces with the power to regulate the sale and consumption of alcohol, while its manufacture, interprovincial trade, import, and export remained in federal hands. In 1901, Prince Edward Island became the first province to prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol and over the next fifteen years, practically every province in the country enacted some form of temperance legislation.

It was only during the last years of the war that Canada would be subject to a national ban on booze. In 1918, the federal Cabinet passed an order-in-council barring the production of liquor for personal consumption, while also prohibiting liquor imports. Most provincial governments also passed wartime prohibition legislation or reinforced temperance laws already in effect. By the end of the Great War, however, temperance laws began to fall throughout the Dominion. Quebec revoked its ban as early as 1919 and, in 1920, British Columbia followed suit. The single-greatest setback for the temperance movement in Canada occurred on January 1, 1920, when Cabinet lifted its wartime Prohibition policy. From this day forward, there would be few meaningful restrictions on the manufacture of liquor in this country. Beginning the
same year, the Eighteenth Amendment to the American Constitution came into effect completely banning the manufacture, sale, importation, and transportation of alcoholic beverages in the U.S. Together, the two diametrically opposed national policies fermented an underground economy, a smuggling maelstrom, an organized criminality, and a spirit of lawlessness that was never before seen on the continent. The Canadian government's stubborn maintenance of its wet policy made a mockery of, and completely undermined, temperance laws throughout North America. It can also be cited as one of the most significant catalysts in the repeal of America's Prohibition laws in 1933.

The shared jurisdiction over liquor by the federal and provincial governments meant that, while it was perfectly legal to produce and even import booze, in many provinces it was illegal to consume it. Bewildering provincial Prohibition laws added to this incongruity. From 1916 to 1927, it was against the law to buy most spirits in Ontario, but thanks in part to the powerful grape growers lobby in Ontario, wine could still be freely purchased in the province in strengths up to 28 percent. Moreover, it was legal to order liquor into Ontario from outside the province. You weren’t allowed to buy it locally, but you were allowed to consume it locally (as long as you did so in your home). As a result, Ontario residents flocked to Quebec by foot, horse, car, train, and boat to buy their booze or had it shipped to their local post office through a burgeoning interprovincial mail order business.

Ironically, Ontario’s prodigious liquor industry actually came of age while that province’s temperance laws were in effect. By the mid-1920s, there were breweries in Belleville, Kingston, Toronto, and Hamilton. There was also the Wiser’s distillery in Prescott, the Gooderham and Worts distillery in Toronto, the huge Corby distillery in Belleville, and the Hiram Walker distillery just outside of Windsor. Unable to sell booze legally in the province, these companies shipped their cargo off to Quebec, which was then sold to customers in Ontario through the mail. In 1921, both the Ontario and Dominion governments clamped down on this booming mail order business, but the effect of the toughened enforcement was simply a harbinger of things to come.

After being cut off from legal suppliers in both Ontario and Quebec, residents of Canada’s largest provinces turned en masse to bootleggers. Booze was now more widely and conveniently available in Ontario than ever before. Hotels and restaurants, the backs of stores, taxis, private residences, barns, the trunks of cars, and the suitcases of travelling salesmen all became common, albeit unofficial, sources of the drink. Underground gin mills, booze cans, grogshops, speakeasies, and blind pigs multiplied. Another popular outlet for booze in Ontario was the medical doctor or the pharmacy. Under the province’s temperance law, doctors were allowed to prescribe alcohol to any patient who needed it for medicinal reasons. In 1920 and 1921, 588,000 prescriptions for medicinal liquor were issued in Ontario alone. By 1923 and 1924, the total number had risen to 810,000. One Toronto doctor dispensed 2,005 prescriptions in a single month (only to be surpassed by a medical practitioner in Vancouver who sold 4,100 liquor prescriptions in a month, an average of 136 a day). Many drugstores — now part apothecary, part speakeasy — did not even bother to keep up a pharmaceutical pretence. As B.J. Grant writes in his book When Rum was King, “This was the era of what was called the ‘talcum powder drug-store,’ the shop that carried on its shelves a few bottles of iodine, Minard’s Liniment, Scott’s Emulsion, cough syrups (that were highly alcoholic), a lot of talcum powder, and almost as much booze as a fair-sized liquor store.”

Stephen Leacock observed that in order to obtain a bottle of liquor in Ontario, one simply had to go to a local drugstore, lean up against the counter “and make a gurgling sigh like apoplexy. One often sees these apoplexy cases lined up four deep.”

The underground liquor supply was no less scarce in other dry provinces. In Woodstock, New Brunswick, one newspaper editorial mused, “there are three licensed vendors in town and 1,219 bootleggers and there is a growing impression that the proportion is out of all reason.” In 1921, one New Brunswick man told the media he “knew of thirty-four places or persons in West St. John where liquor can be bought. Before prohibition, he said it was difficult to buy liquor in West St. John.” In Vancouver, an investigator with the Provincial Liquor Control Board estimated that in 1929 there were 7,000 known bootleggers working in the
city. Prohibition also prompted the greatest proliferation of home-based micro distilleries in the history of the country. In an editorial dated April 6, 1923, the Regina Leader newspaper claimed Saskatchewan to be the Canadian capital for illegal stills:

The discovery that there are more illicit stills in Saskatchewan, with a population of less than 760,000, than there is in the rest of Canada, with a population of 8,000,000, will come as an unpleasant surprise to the people of the Province. … Out of a total of 1,606 investigations of infractions of the Inland Revenue Act carried out by the Mounted Police during the year ended September 30 1922, 962 were in this province. Of a total of 1,420 investigations of breaches of Federal Statutes in Saskatchewan during the year under report approximately 68 per cent were illicit still cases. Assuming that the estimate made by certain Inland Revenue officers is correct, where one illicit still is discovered nineteen others are operating undisturbed by the officers of the law. … The illicit distilling industry is almost solely, as far as Saskatchewan is concerned, an adjunct of the farming industry. The fact that 962 cases of illicit distillery were investigated by the Mounted Police last year indicated that there are operating in the Province today perhaps 20,000 illicit stills, or one for every fifteen farms in Saskatchewan.

In the early 1920s, the attorney general of Alberta estimated the number of stills operating in his province at 1,140. Like Saskatchewan, moonshine operations proliferated throughout this largely rural province, prompting a 1923 edition of Canadian Forum magazine to suggest, “in some districts every farm-house is a potential and often an operating distillery. Many a mortgage has been washed away by moonshine.”

Bootleggers and rumrunners also took advantage of the legal liquor export trade to circumvent provincial Prohibition statutes through “short circuiting,” a practice where liquor exports found their way back onto Canadian shores. Vessels leaving from Vancouver with a load of whiskey consigned to be delivered to Mexico would sail to some unfrequented part of the B.C. coast, where they would unload their cargo and then, to avoid suspicion, return to home port only after sufficient time had elapsed to make the voyage to Mexico. In the Maritimes, cargo that was to be exported to foreign shores was unloaded on the coast of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, or Prince Edward Island just hours after it left port. Some east coast rumrunners did not even bother to keep up the pretence of a foreign journey. In a speech to the House of Commons in 1926, one Member of Parliament cited the case of the schooner Morso, “which left Halifax for St. Pierre, Miquelon on August 13 with 2,632 cases and 185 kegs of liquor. In two days, she cleared Halifax again; she must have made the round trip of 1,000 miles in 48 hours, allowing no time for unloading and loading.” In response to this unlawful repatriation of exported liquor, the Dominion Government forced exporters to post a bond that would require them to forfeit twice the value of their cargo if it did not reach its stated foreign destination. The surety would be returned to the exporter on presentation of a receipt from the foreign entry of port. These legal requirements were easily circumvented either by bribing customs and excise officials or by forging foreign landing certificates.

In addition to short-circuiting, booze was smuggled into dry provinces from abroad. One cartel based in Nova Scotia had freighters make several trips a year to the West Indies where they purchased Caribbean rum in bulk. Once back in Atlantic Canada, the “mother ships” would offload the kegs to small motor boats, which would scurry back to the shores of New Brunswick for offloading and distribution. To
keep police off their scent, gang members phoned in anonymous reports of fictional bootleg liquor sightings in locations far from the real offload site. Police in New Brunswick received so many false reports that after a while they stopped responding to all tips provided by the public. This smuggling group also operated their own counter-espionage system using a network of rural telephone operators who were on their payroll. Not only would these internal conspirators tap into police communication networks, but the telephone lines could also be thrown out of whack during the times that police dispatchers were trying to communicate information about a smuggler’s whereabouts. The immense challenges facing law enforcement in the Maritimes was recounted in a desperate telegraph dated September 11, 1926, sent from an RCMP detachment in Amherst, Nova Scotia, to its headquarters in Ottawa: “Smuggled liquor pouring into this country in enormous quantities stop unless ten men from Mounted Police Force sent here tomorrow country will be swamped with smuggled liquor stop Department advised of this situation before by me before stop please notify Halifax to send ten men not later than tomorrow stop.”

THE FOUR-THOUSAND-MILE ANDORRA

Following its enactment of national Prohibition laws in 1920, America would be supplied with illegal booze from a diverse number of countries. Canada was by far the greatest source, however, outstripping all other countries combined. Estimates of Canada’s share of America’s contraband liquor market ranged from 60 to 90 percent. As historian Ralph Allen wrote, “To anyone interested in assuaging the sudden thirst of a hundred million Americans, Canada was the promised land, a smuggler’s paradise — an Andorra with a border four thousand miles long, and an undefended border at that. At each end lay enough open water to float a thousand Mojacas.” In their 1931 report, a U.S. federal commission examining enforcement of Prohibition laws in that country wrote, “Importation is chiefly from Canada, both directly and indirectly, since Canada is a large producer and is exceptionally convenient, by proximity and by geographical conditions and conditions of transportation, as a base for smuggling operations.”

It was not simply geographical fate that solidified Canada’s role as the chief supplier of illegal booze to the United States. While American lawmakers were closing their own spirituous beverage floodgate, the Canadian government was opening theirs by lifting the nationwide wartime prohibition on liquor production. Safe, name-brand, high-quality booze was now available from Canada, in sharp contrast to the often hazardous and unsanitary rotgut that was secretly being produced in American stills and bathtubs. To make American enforcement matters worse, the Canadian government made only token efforts to restrict the tsunami of Canadian booze that was crashing down on American shores. In fact, Ottawa bent over backwards to facilitate the manufacture and export of Canadian liquor. The Dominion Government allowed any exporter with even the most suspect of credentials and the least seaworthy of boats to purchase from a Canadian distillery, as long as they promised to ship to an offshore location. Cuba and the West Indies were the most frequently listed destinations for Canadian liquor, but of course, the booze was being sent short distances to U.S. ports. The situation became so ludicrous and so infused with government corruption that one boat was recorded as leaving the same Canadian port for Cuba four times each day. While American officials pleaded with the Canadian government to clamp down on its illegal exports, Ottawa did just the opposite: it allowed exporters to clear shipments directly to the
United States. In the end, an unspoken, yet mutually beneficial partnership emerged between the Dominion Government, liquor producers, and rumrunners. Together, this tacit triumvirate would pose a major challenge to America's Prohibition laws.

At first, Canadian rumrunners imported liquor from other countries for re-export to the United States. During the first full year of American Prohibition, the import of scotch whiskey into Canada increased from an annual value of $5.5 million to $23 million. The Dominion Bureau of Statistics shows that, between 1925 and 1929, the value of all liquor imports into Canada increased from $19,123,627 to $48,844,111. Canadians soon realized that greater profits could be made by producing liquor domestically and then exporting it to the American market, so breweries and distilleries quickly popped up throughout the country. By 1927, there were eighty-three breweries and twenty-three distilleries, all federally licensed, in Canada. In Ontario, sixteen distilleries and twenty-nine breweries were legally established in 1920 alone. In one Atlantic Canadian town with a population of just over 25,000 there were no fewer than twelve bottling plants, all of which manufactured beer and ale. In 1924, almost 4.5 million gallons of spirits were produced in Canada. By 1929, this had jumped to more than 11.5 million gallons. A U.S. Coast Guard intelligence report from the late 1920s estimated that only 20 percent of the liquor produced in Canada was consumed domestically. The other 80 percent found its way into the United States.

The earliest attempts to smuggle liquor across the border were often for personal consumption or small, local sales. And while these smuggling efforts were often quite amateurish, they were not without imagination or ingenuity. Suits with secret pockets were filled with flasks. The legs of rubber boots were stuffed with pint bottles. Deep-pocketed carpenters' aprons were worn under baggy suits. Rubber inner tubes and garden hoses carrying booze would be tightly wound around bodies. Hot-water bags dangled from necks. Small bottles were tucked inside oversized shoes. Suitcases and steamer trunks with false bottoms were lugged across the border. Women concealed liquor in their bloomers, their corsets, and even in false rubber breasts. Bottles were wrapped in baby blankets and coddled by innocent-looking women crossing the border. Infants would also be perched atop liquor bottles in baby carriages. Hollowed-out baseball bats, wooden carvings, potatoes, and baked bread filled with booze were found by U.S. Customs agents. One man reportedly hurried across the International Bridge at Buffalo carefully carrying two dozen eggs, each of which had been emptied and refilled with whiskey. Gas tanks, tool chests, jerry cans, and maple syrup tins would be filled to the brim. A double-amputee war veteran boasted that he could carry 36 pints at any one time in his hoallowed-out artificial arm and leg. On a larger scale, horses pulled sleds carrying logs that had been hollowed out and filled with hundreds of bottles.

The money that could be made from running rum attracted the involvement of otherwise law-abiding citizens, and those smuggling for personal consumption evolved into or were quickly joined by the professional rumrunner. Immediately following the enactment of Prohibition in the United States, small independent groups dominated the early liquor smuggling traffic. Residents living along the Ontario side of the Detroit River ordered liquor from Quebec and then sold it for big profits to Canadian and American smugglers. During the first seven months of 1920 alone, 900,000 cases of whiskey were shipped to the Windsor area from Quebec for “personal consumption” (increasing the per capita consumption from a prewar total of nine gallons to 102 gallons). Some Canadian rumrunners moved from supplying domestic markets to smuggling across the U.S. border. Others were truck drivers or fishermen, lured by the considerable financial rewards their skills now offered. Known as the “little fellow,” the independent rumrunner often worked alone, travelling by car across the many back roads that hugged the U.S. border or navigating the numerous waterways into United States via rowboat, canoe, fishing boat, or pleasure craft. As Vernon McKenzie wrote in a 1926 edition of Maclean's magazine, “A new 'profession' has developed during the past years — that of professional smuggler. Previous to the enactment of Prohibition in the United States smugglers were, comparatively, isolated outlaws. A competent authority estimates today on this continent there are 100,000 men whose sole business is that of smuggling.”
“THEY CALL ME A SMUGGLER. THAT IS WRONG. I AM A RUM-RUNNER.”

One of these men was Ben Kerr of Hamilton. He was a plumber and boatbuilder by trade but turned to smuggling the lip trop after the war-to-end-all-wars ended. He was a lean man who carried a self-satisfied look. His mouth was narrow, his grin was taut, and he liked to crack wise. At his peak, he employed between eight and twenty pullers at any one time. His office was Lake Ontario. His desk was a motorboat. His paycheque was a wad of dead presidents. He was one of the biggest and the best of the early independent shine movers.

Orders were arranged between Kerr and the Corby’s distillery. The load of eel juice would be rattled by rail from the Belleville plant to Whitby, Ontario, where it was picked up by Kerr and his jobbers and loaded onto one of his boats. The stated destination on export documents was either Cuba or Mexico, but the load was always dumped at a pre-determined spot on the shore of Lake Ontario, near Rochester, New York. The American palookas got their booze, Kerr got his commission, and everyone was happy. Kerr made even more mazuma by smuggling raw Yankee alcohol back into Canada on his return trips.

Kerr was a savvy sailor who knew Lake Ontario like Mary Pickford knew the Turkish baths. He owned three boats to transport his loads of lubrication to the American shores: the Martimas, the Lark, and the Voyageur. The Martimas was the slowest of the three, but she could haul the most — as many as 1,200 cases at a time. She was forty-two feet long and perfectly suited “to the early days of rum running when reliability and carrying capacity, rather than speed, were the most important qualities of a black ship.” Kerr travelled under the cover of the night’s darkness and even refused to make deliveries when a full moon was out. He didn’t use his lights to avoid being spied by the seafaring bulls and moved as quiet as a shadow on water. Kerr was also one of the first hooch racketeers on Lake Ontario to make use of a swell new technology called radio. By 1925, he was making eighteen jaunts a day across the lake and was grossing between 2,400 and 3,600 clams on each trip. He had more dough than an army baker and built up a bank account that at one time had a balance of 45,000 big ones. He owned a large home in one of Hamilton’s most well-heeled neighbourhoods, as well as a marina with thirty houseboats that provided plenty of rental cabbage. His friends and associates were among the highest of Hamilton’s highbrows.

Kerr wasn’t too keen on greasing the palms of John Law and that was part of the problem; he wouldn’t play the game. He spouted off that he could outwit any state hammer at any time. Most of the time he could. He was nicknamed the “phantom bootlegger” because he was one of the most elusive smugglers operating on the Great Lakes. The Prohibition coppers had been trying to catch him for years, but Kerr always appeared where he was least expected. On the evening of May 26, 1925, Ben Kerr’s luck began to run out.

Kerr and his beerocrats were busy unloading crates of suds from the Martimas into a dory that was attached to the shore by a cable. U.S. coastal Prohibition-men glommed the activity and a cordon of thirteen keystones closed in. Kerr tried a clean sneak by cutting the cable and racing his boat to open lake. The Customs cruisers gave chase and, as they closed in, Kerr ordered his boys to toss the rest of the barleybroth overboard. The coppers’ .30-calibre Lewis machine guns belched. Two rounds of lead were fired across the bow of the Martimas. Kerr kept catfooting away. The coasties then gave him the works and raked the hull of the boat. Eight slugs found the mark.

The P-men boarded the Martimas, but found only eight cases of Dow ale. They did find another sixty cases in the dory and six hundred cases on shore. They also discovered that Kerr and his dousers had more arms than a Hindu elephant god. Three repeating shotguns, one double-barrelled shotgun, three rifles, and two automatic revolvers were confiscated. All were fully loaded. To dissuade pirates from hijacking his hooch, Kerr and his loogans always strapped on the iron.

The capture of the “King of Lake Ontario Rum Runners” and eleven of his plumbers was hailed as a great victory for the Prohibition agents. Despite
being pinched by the P-men, Captain Ben was supremely confident he could beat the rap and blew his horn more than Louis Armstrong. He wouldn’t pipe down and boasted to the American newsies, “the rest of the rumrunners are too yellow to come over here very often.” Bail was set for most of the prisoners at the sky-high rate of $60,000. The largest bail — $100,000 — was set for Kerr.

He was tried in Rochester in September 1925 and was ready to cop a guilty plea when he caught wind that he was also to be tried for manslaughter. This charge arose from a tragic tryst with two sport fishermen who were out on the lake during a night as dark as a black boot. Their boat accidentally rammed into Kerr’s reinforced hull and broke apart as easy as a wet snickerdoodle. Both men went to the big fishing pond in the sky. Kerr was operating his boat at night without lights, so he was criminally negligent in the two fishermen’s long goodbye. Kerr had crapped out and was now hotter than a two-dollar pistol. After reading about his indictment in the Rochester newspapers, Kerr got wise, dummied up, and skipped town. The local D.A. responded by putting a bounty on Kerr’s noodle.

It would only get hotter for Kerr. In 1926, he was named as one of the culprits behind the liquor-poisoning deaths of forty-five stiffis and was arrested in Hamilton on a warrant charging him with manslaughter. But the government’s case collapsed when it could not produce evidence to tie Kerr to the toxic booze. Charges against Kerr, Rocco Perri, and dozens of others were dropped. The discharges meant that the hard work of the P-men once again went straight into the toilet.

Kerr returned to rumrunning and even had a new boat custom built for him. The Pollywog was powered by two six-cylinder 180-horsepower engines and was capable of skirting across the sea at thirty-five miles an hour while carrying a hundred cases of neck oil. On a stormy night, in February 1929, Kerr and a jobber named Alf Wheat were crossing Lake Ontario in the Pollywog. The ship was partially disabled after recently been given the hot-lead treatment from yet another run-in with a U.S. Customs picket boat. Three weeks after he left on that routine trip across the lake, Kerr’s bloated and frozen carcass washed ashore. He was identified from a cluster of maple leafs tattooed on his arm and one remaining sock that had been knitted by his mother.

HATCH’S NAVY
As the demand for Canadian liquor steadily grew south of the border, the small shipments of the lone smuggler were no longer sufficient. The independent little fellow was being pushed out by larger and better-organized smuggling groups. Professional criminals were now flocking to the highly profitable trade like lions to a feeding. In a 1923 article, journalist William McNulty wrote that the first shipment of smuggled liquor from Canada into the U.S. was made in 1917, the year the American War Time Prohibition Act was passed by Congress. “At first only Canadians were involved in the traffic, but in 1919 American smugglers began to run liquor over the international border. In 1921, the American-Canadian whiskey manufacturing and smuggling gangs made their debut. The individual smuggler who did not expand beyond his modest beginnings was squeezed out by their new competitors, or else they joined the gangs.” The Detroit News reported in 1920 that the business of transporting contraband liquor into the U.S. from Canada had already become “intricately organized” by bands of astute operators.

The independent who owned his own truck or boat was actively recruited by smuggling groups or Canadian liquor producers and would be paid by the hour or by the number of cases they could deliver. If caught, some of the syndicates that underwrote the shipments would pay the legal fees of their contracted rumrunners. Other smuggling groups owned their own fleet of cars, trucks, or boats, employed sales agents to take orders from American customers, and then arranged for pickup or delivery. One American group operating along the Detroit River had one of its crews purchase the liquor at the export docks in Windsor, another transported the liquor across to a designated location on the U.S. side, a third team picked up the cases and transported them to nearby
warehouses, while yet another team trucked the booze to its customers in Detroit.

It was not long before the underground liquor trade in Canada was dominated by a few well-organized bootlegging syndicates, such as those headed up by Rocco Perri, Max Worztman, Roy Olmstead, or Albenie Violette. Some of the Canadian bootleggers hid behind legitimate fronts. Federal investigators determined that between June 1924 and June 1926, the Regina Vinegar Company illegally removed some “four thousand gallons of alcohol from the company’s bond,” according to a 1928 report of the Royal Commission on Customs and Excise, which investigated the contraband liquor trade and accompanying corruption. However, the alcohol “did not go into the vinegar mix, but was taken from the company’s premises and used elsewhere, apparently in the bootlegging business.” These suspicions were confirmed when investigators discovered that the owners and managers of the Regina Vinegar Company were Z. Natanson and S. Diamond, “two well-known bootleggers.” Notwithstanding these sorts of corporate fronts, at the pinnacle of the contraband liquor trade and accompanying corruption, were legitimate Canadian distilleries and breweries that amassed substantial profits by selling to Canadian and American bootleggers and by coordinating the export and transport of huge quantities of booze to the United States.

The rumrunning trade also benefited from advancements made in the horsepower and reliability of motor vehicles. The introduction of the six-cylinder engine allowed many a rumrunner to escape capture at the hands of law enforcement. Six-cylinder cars were so popular with liquor smugglers, they became known as “Whiskey Sixes.” Rear seats were removed from Packards, Hudsons, Buicks, and Studebakers to make room for extra cases of liquor. Gas tanks were divided so that one part carried a little gas while the other stored bottles. The fabric tops of cars would be separated and between the two layers a storage space four inches deep was constructed that could carry 180 pint bottles. Cars were rebuilt with false floors and storage areas running the length of the drive shaft that could conceal 480 quarts at a time. The suspension of liquor-smuggling cars would be reinforced to support the heavy load. Some rumrunning vehicles dragged dust-inducing chains to obstruct the vision of pursuing law enforcement officers. For wintertime operations, oversized skis would be attached to the front axle of cars and trucks, which were then driven across the frozen rivers and lakes separating Canada from the United States. The doors would be swung open or completely removed in case the car broke through the ice or encountered a fishing hole and the driver had to bail out quickly. Propelled by strong gusts of wind, iceboats were also used to transport booze on frozen lakes and rivers and were often preferred over cars as they were lighter, faster, and safer.

Soon, caravans of cars and trucks were transporting large quantities of liquor. Heavily armed enforcers would sit alongside the drivers to protect shipment from hijackings, while lookouts would travel miles ahead to scout out police roadblocks or spots vulnerable to ambushes by rival bootlegging gangs. In two confidential reports written in 1926, the RCMP in New Brunswick detailed the system used by one rumrunning group headed by Thomas Nowlan, “Usually the routes are governed by a block system, that is, a decoy car travels ahead; this has no liquor as a rule, if stopped the driver phones to certain places where it is understood the autos carrying liquor must not pass unless the road is clear; if the decoy car is stopped, then the loaded cars take another route, or hides until the word comes that all is clear.” One of the reports also observed, “there are as many as 12 autos used, three taking one route and three taking another and so on. The idea being that if three are caught the other nine get away.” The RCMP officer who wrote the reports conceded that very few of the liquor caravans are caught, for the simple reason that “they are well organized and have every Customs Officer spotted through their spy system.”

Boats also became a staple of the rumrunner and had several advantages over motor vehicles. They could accommodate larger payloads, sail in international waters where they could not be touched by American law enforcement, and could navigate directly to the ports of major cities, such as New York, Boston, Detroit, and Seattle, or land along the thousands of miles of unguarded American coastline. A 1920 article in a London, Ontario, newspaper reported that Canadian rumrunners,
with secret caches of liquor, waited in hiding at night among the trees and tall grass on the Canadian side of the Detroit River. Pocket torches would be waved using a primitive system of signals for “yes” and “no” or “stop” and “go” while their American customers coasted up and down the river with empty rowboats looking for the signal to come ashore. Then the bargaining would begin. Once the deal was closed, the liquor changed hands and was transported across the river.

Rowboats soon gave way to outboard motorized vessels, which in turn were replaced by fishing boats. As the U.S. Coast Guard commissioned faster enforcement vessels, open fishing boats were replaced by high-powered speedboats, custom built for rumrunning. It wasn’t before long that the large smuggling groups were using fleets of boats. The biggest Canadian flotilla ever assembled for rumrunning purposes was put together by Herb and Harry Hatch, two brothers who began their careers bartending at hotels and saloons around Belleville, Ontario, and who would go on to make millions from a liquor empire built by supplying the underground American market. At the centre of their empire was Gooderham and Worts Ltd., the distilling giant that would become a major supplier to some of North America’s biggest bootleggers. These included Rocco Perri who, under the alias of J. Penna, was on the phone almost daily placing large orders. (He later began using the alias J. Johnson because, as he admitted in court, too many orders were going to J. Penna.)

In 1911, Harry Hatch opened a retail liquor store in Whitby, Ontario, where he catered to the residents of Oshawa, which was dry at the time. When all of Ontario went dry in 1916, Harry began a mail order business in Montreal. In 1921, he was hired as the sales manager for the Canadian Industrial Alcohol Company, which owned and operated both the Corby and Wiser distilleries in Ontario. Within two years, Harry’s cunning as well as his natural marketing skills helped increase sales for the Corbyville distilling operation from 500 to 50,000 gallons a month, primary by selling to customers south of the border. Before the end of the decade, the Corbyville distillery was one of the largest liquor producers in the world.

Most of Corby’s products were transported across the Great Lakes as part of one of the largest ongoing liquor smuggling conspiracies that ever took place in North America. In 1927, a federally appointed auditor estimated that liquor diverted from the warehouse of the Walkerville distillery to the United States, using bogus bills of lading from other countries, totalled more than $2 million. Due to a lack of records maintained by the distillery, the auditor acknowledged that this value was only the tip of a multi-million-dollar smuggling iceberg overseen by the Hatch brothers. Herb Hatch assembled his armada by purchasing defaulted mortgages on boats from indebted fishermen, who were then recruited to run the booze across Lake Ontario to the U.S. side in a flotilla of fishing boats. “Hatch’s Navy” would become so successful that Rocco Perri put his fifty fishing boats operating on Lake Eire under the control of Herb Hatch.

To increase their payload capacity, the Hatch brothers slung large fishing nets on each side of their boats, running from bow to stern. The nets would then be loaded with booze. Once on the other side of the lake, the cargo would be deposited on the sandbars for retrieval by American buyers. An added benefit of this system was that if U.S. Coast Guard boats were seen approaching, the nets could be cut in a matter of seconds, allowing their contents to quickly sink to the bottom. To salvage their sunken booty once the coast was clear, all of the nets were marked with a buoy and a large piece of salt. When the salt melted, the buoy would float to the top — signalling the location of the submerged liquid treasure. To ensure the liquor would actually sink, wooden cases were replaced with cardboard and pockmarked with holes. To help them sink even faster, the bottles were wrapped in lead. While this cargo-jettisoning system worked most of the time, it was not foolproof. Bootleggers once tried this manoeuvre in shallow Lake Erie waters near Munroe, Michigan, but before the cases could be reclaimed by the smugglers, the tide had receded. Lakeshore residents who woke up the next morning could hardly believe their eyes: bags containing bottles of beer, whiskey and wine were scattered along the beach. One local fisherman was quoted in the media as saying he had “his best catch in forty years.”

Numerous modifications were also made to boats to accommodate the needs of rumrunners. The Hatch brothers had twin Packard engines installed in many
of the fishing vessels used on the Great Lakes, and legend has it that some of the larger ships were fitted with as many as four airplane motors. Entire boats were painted grey or black to make them less visible at night and cabins were lopped off and pilothouses lowered to reduce their profile on the water. Some boats carried multiple nameplates, so they could clear Canadian Customs under one name and then arrive in American waters with a completely different name. Exhaust pipes would be extended underwater to muffle the loud roar of their powerful engines and some boats were outfitted with armour plates on their pilothouses for protection in the case of a shootout with the U.S. Coast Guard. Still other boats were equipped with devices that belched out a billow of low-hanging black, choking smoke if a pursuing coast guard cutter got too close.

Canada’s east coast shipbuilding industry was one beneficiary of the demand for custom-built boats. New boat registrations in the Maritimes increased steadily throughout Prohibition. In the peak years of 1928 to 1930, ninety-two boats were built, the majority for rumrunning. In fact, the Nova Scotia shipyards began to specialize in designing and building vessels expressly for the liquor smuggling trade. To accommodate greater payloads, boats built at the Metechan shipyard in Nova Scotia increased in length and weight from 70 feet and 40 tons in 1926 to over 100 feet in length and 118 tons in 1930. The cargo capacity was also increased to hold up to 1,600 cases of liquor. For the power needed to outrun enforcement vessels, many were installed with two or more V-8 car engines. Despite these substantial augmentations, the boats were designed with a low profile that was flatter, sleeker, and stealthier.

Communication also became more advanced. Morse code was eventually replaced in some ships by new radio technology, including radio wave direction finders that enabled rumrunners to locate Coast Guard surveillance technology.

Not only was booze smuggled above the water, it was also transported below the surface. Stories circulated about pipelines being constructed through which bulk liquor would be pumped directly from shore to waiting tankers. Police discovered that sleds filled with cases of liquor were being dragged across the bottom of the Detroit River with the aid of steel cables and automobile engine–powered pulleys attached to concrete anchors along the opposite shorelines. The New York Times reported in 1920 that “electronically operated torpedoes loaded with whiskey are being sent across the Detroit River from the Canadian to the American shore.” Citing a government informant, the newspaper wrote that three torpedoes 10-, 15-, and 25-gallon capacities were being used (while one with a 50-gallon capacity was currently under construction). Each one was fitted with a copper casing, and “a propeller at the nose actuated by electric storage batteries.” The torpedoes would submerge to 100 feet and required about five minutes to cross the river. A red flag on one side of the river and a white one on the other side “comprise the targets at which the operators direct their torpedoes.” After they make their journey to the Detroit side, the liquor-filled torpedoes were emptied and then “ballasted with water and sent back.”

When the traditional methods of land and sea transport faced heightened threats of hijacking or detection by law enforcement, the railway system was increasingly used. Cases would be stacked into freight cars, or bulk liquor would be pumped into empty oil tanks. Shipping booze by rail was done mostly by liquor producers or large syndicates with enough money to pay for the several boxcar loads and to withstand the occasional loss of one to police. In collusion with corrupt railroad employees, the waybills for the freight were described as anything but booze. Railroad cars full of liquor originating in Canada would be labelled and...
routed to Mexico by way of the U.S. While in the United States, however, a mysterious problem often inflicted the loaded railcars, requiring them to be taken off the train and then switched to a convenient siding. It was there that the whiskey was unloaded and distributed to local bootleggers. In a memo dated October 23, 1926, a RCMP corporal describes how the rails were used by Consolidated Exporters Corporation Ltd. to smuggle liquor from Vancouver to Seattle:

I have the honour to report that on the 21st, inst, at 6.00, pm, I received information from an Informant, (who wishes his name not to be divulged) to the effect that 300 cases of Whiskey had been loaded sometime the last few days into an empty oil tank of a freight train around the G.W. Rly Freight Yards, Vancouver, B.C. The 300 cases of Whiskey would eventually land into the U.S.A. on the other hand, it is possible, that it might be switched back into Canada. The informant went on to say, that the freight train would pull out of the G.H. Rly Freight Yards, Vancouver on the night of the 21st inst, for Seattle, Wash, U.S.A. the freight train with oil tank would then be broken, and this particular freight car with oil tank would be switched on to some convenient siding near Blaine, or Bellingham, where the 300 cases of whiskey would be unloaded.

Some smugglers aspired to even higher ambitions, literally. In October 1921, the first airplane loaded with liquor was reported to have left Winnipeg for the United States. Ten years later, in April 1930, sixty-two planes loaded with Canadian liquor allegedly cleared from Ontario airfields for points in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Wisconsin. The planes generally flew at night, and landed on crudely made runways in unpopulated areas. The runways would be illuminated by the headlights of the cars and trucks waiting for the payload.

A NATION OF BOOTLEGGERS

By the mid-1920s, bootlegging had become a national industry in Canada. From British Columbia, liquor was routinely smuggled into Washington State and as far south as California. Most liquor-laden ships consigned for delivery in Mexico rarely sailed past Washington’s Puget Sound. The Manitoba Refineries, a liquor export company based in British Columbia, was regarded by the Royal Commission on Customs and Excise as “a typical illustration of what is and has been the practice at the ports of Vancouver and Victoria in connection with all so-called shipments of liquor in transit.” The ship Chris Moeller cleared the Port of Vancouver with a cargo of 17,779 cases of liquor owned by the Manitoba Refineries. Her official destination was San Blas, Mexico. Shortly after disembarking from Vancouver, she called at the port of Victoria to take on an additional 3,700 cases. Customs officers became suspicious of the large cargo and refused a clearance from Victoria pending an investigation. Two pieces of evidence suggested to customs investigators that this cargo was not in fact destined for Mexico. First, the liquor was originally imported from Great Britain and was shipped to Vancouver by way of the Panama Canal, which would have brought it past its Mexican destination. Second, investigators deduced that San Blas was a small village located far inland with no port or harbour. Customs officials concluded, “the alleged consignee is fictitious and that it is not intended that the liquors should be delivered at San Blas, the port of destination, but rather that the same should be made available elsewhere to rumrunners or bootleggers for consumption in the Western states.”

One of the most prolific west coast smugglers was Stuart Stone, who was active from 1920 to the end of Prohibition in 1933. By the mid-1920s, he was commanding mother ships like the five-masted schooner Malahat, which could carry a cargo of 100,000 cases — 60,000 in the hold and 40,000 on deck. Captain Stone would moor the floating warehouse off the west coast of the United States, but in international waters, and supply a steady stream of customers in speedboats, pleasure crafts, and fishing boats who would purchase the liquor and transport it back to the mainland. Charles Hudson captained another west coast mother ship called the Coal Harbour, a three-masted schooner that could carry 10,000 cases of liquor. Peter C. Newman tells the story of one trip where the ship was captured by the U.S. Coast Guard off the California coast while safely outside the
12-mile limit that constituted American jurisdiction. “Hudson learned that rival rumrunners had given the Coast Guard skipper $25,000 to testify that the Coal Harbour had been inside the limit, but the skipper backed Hudson’s story after receiving $25,000 from lawyers for the Vancouver liquor exporters. The Coal Harbour was released, her cargo intact.”

In 1922, a number of brewery and distilling companies from B.C. and back East formed the Consolidated Exporters Corporation Ltd. and set up a large warehouse in downtown Vancouver, close to the rail yards and port facilities, to supply smugglers. Many west coast rumrunners were also supplied by Henry Reifel, one of the largest distillers and bootleggers in B.C. during Prohibition. Reifel, a German immigrant who settled in British Columbia in the late 1880s, had learned to brew lager beer at the Chicago Brewing Company before making his way to Nanaimo where he began an apprenticeship at a large bottling company. In 1890, the Nanaimo Brewing Company was launched and after two highly profitable years, and a few company mergers later, the ambitious Reifel became the brewmaster and a minority shareholder in the Union Brewing Company of Nanaimo. By the early 1900s, the new company was one of the most profitable breweries on the west coast, thanks to Reifel’s skill as a brewmaster and his shrewd business sense. By 1908, along with his brothers and sons, he built the Canadian Brewing and Malting Company in Vancouver, which later amalgamated with other companies to form Vancouver Breweries Ltd. in 1919. With his brothers, he established British Columbia Breweries and, with his sons, he founded the British Columbia Distillery Company Ltd. In 1926, the family formed Brewers and Distillers Ltd. as a holding company for their two distilleries and four breweries. The Reifels also operated their own export companies, which supplied west coast bootleggers with liquor from their distilleries and breweries to smuggle to the U.S. According to an RCMP report from 1940, Frank Eccles, the former RCMP undercover agent who was convicted of opium possession during the 1920s, was at the same time “actively associated with the Reifel Interests, and was, what might be termed, ‘Shore Skipper’ for their smuggling activities.”

In 1925, members of the British Columbia legislature’s Public Accounts Committee accused Henry Reifel and his companies of smuggling liquor to the United States through his export companies. It was also rumoured that, from his posh oceanfront mansion on Vancouver’s Marine Drive, Reifel directly piped liquor to waiting ships. When Henry and his son George crossed into the United States in July 1934, smuggling charges were laid against the two based on evidence that the products of Brewers and Distillers Ltd. “found their way into the commerce of the United States during the period of prohibition.” The pair could only leave the country after paying $200,000 in bail. In 1934, as a result of the charges, Henry and his two sons were forced to resign as directors of Brewers and Distillers Ltd. The case did not go to trial as the Reifels agreed to pay U.S. authorities $500,000 in back taxes and fines, plus the $200,000 in bonds already forfeited when the two never showed up in Seattle for their arraignment.

In Saskatchewan, farmland located right on the American border was used as a staging ground to sneak booze onto the U.S. side. Farmers were recruited to help smugglers by allowing the illicit inventories
to be stashed in their barns and lending out tractors and other farming implements to transport the liquor across the border. The prairie province was also home to no less than sixty-nine liquor-export houses, and, by the end of 1920, they were already selling 28,000 cases a month, 95 percent going to the United States. Many of the export houses were controlled by Meyer Chechik and Harry Rabinovitch through the Prairie Drug Company and the Regina Wine and Spirit Company. According to a 1928 report by the Royal Commission on Customs and Excise, the latter company broke numerous laws during its short existence:

The Regina Wine and Spirit Company conducted an export liquor business at Regina and certain border towns in Saskatchewan. They compounded, labelled and sold liquors on a wholesale scale with a licence and contrary to sections 187 and 196 (inclusive) of the Excise Act; and in violation of the provisions of the Food and Drug Acts 10–11 George V, chapter 27, and the regulations made thereunder. They applied false trade marks and false descriptions to such goods, contrary to the provisions of section 488 of the Criminal Code; they used United States Revenue strip stamps and Scotch liquor labels on goods bottled by them contrary to law. These companies kept a double set of books and false accounts for the purpose of deceiving the Government as to the extent of their operations and their income. Their cash receipts for sales from July, 1920 to December 21, 1921 exceeded $2,200,000 and the returns made by them do not show all the profits.

In one interim report, the Royal Commission could not mask its incredulity when discussing the lack of government scrutiny over the ownership and operations of Saskatchewan-based companies, which hid behind the veil of legitimacy to cloak their bootlegging operations:

We refer to the Canada Drug Company, the Yorkton Distributors, the Prairie Drug Company, the Regina Wine and Spirits, Dominion Distributors and the Regina Vinegar Company. All of these companies appear to have conducted their business in persistent and open contravention of the laws and regulations governing excise, and even the most casual observer could not have failed to detect their irregularities. These companies were owned and controlled by the Bronfmans, the Chechiks, the Natansons, the Diamonds and Rabinovitch, and yet they were seriously expected to carry on a bona fide “drug” and “vinegar” business. That such a condition of affairs could have existed at all, let alone have continued for several years, shows not only a lack of intelligent and efficient supervision on the part of the collector of the port but serves to demonstrate a breakdown in proper and efficient supervision on the part of the Department [of Customs and Excise] as a whole.

From Southern Ontario, booze-filled boats sailed across the Great Lakes to the small seaside towns of upstate New York and Michigan, with deliveries extending to larger cities such as Duluth, Toledo, and Cleveland. From the Niagara region, they crossed into Buffalo. Through Lake Champlain, they travelled to Plattsburg, New York, and Burlington, Vermont. Despite the multitude of smuggling routes, there was probably no spot across the U.S.-Canada border that was as porous as the Detroit River. Seventy miles long, but less than a mile across in some places, smugglers could cross from one shore to the other in just a matter of minutes. Along a 15-mile stretch of the northern side of the Detroit River, there were at least two dozen government-licensed export docks that served as the launching pad for Canadian liquor. A 1929 article in the New York World estimated that 75 percent of the liquor exported to the United States came from the Windsor district via Detroit. Dominion records appear to back up this assessment; statistics from the Department of National Revenue for 1927 show that of the 4,252,583 gallons of beer, ale, and porter exports from Canada, 2,993,547 gallons were shipped from Windsor. “There before our astounded eyes were the boats, on runners, loaded down to the gunwales with kegs and cartons of beer,” journalist Roy Greenaway wrote as he witnessed the flurry of export activity.
on the Windsor docks one winter's day. “They were spaced out at approximately hundred-yard intervals. We soon counted twelve, and more were shooting out from the shelter of the canals on the Canadian side. The men who were dragging and shoving them across the ice looked like pirates in their toques and high rubber boots.” In the first months of 1920, one estimate placed nearly 24 percent of the population of Ontario living within a few miles of the Detroit River as connected with the illegal liquor business in some way or another.

In the Maritimes, “rum running, smuggling, and bootlegging was a way of life,” J. W. Calder observed in his book on Canada’s east coast during the Prohibition era. William McNulty estimated that in 1922, “no fewer than 500 vessels of all sorts and descriptions were engaged in smuggling whiskey from the maritime provinces of Canada to the New England seaboard.” The coastal stretch from Boston to Atlantic City was so populated with booze-laden ships that it became popularly known as “Rum Row.” Mother ships would anchor in international waters and then unload their cargo onto speedboats. In 1931, the National Commission on Prohibition Enforcement in the U.S. reported on the scope, sophistication, profitability, and adaptability of liquor smuggling along the eastern seaboard:

This form of transportation has been elaborately organized, often with special craft, with radio stations, and with efficient service for soliciting business, directing the movements of boats, ascertaining the movements of enforcement agents, and giving warning of their activities. It has developed all manner of ingenious apparatus, using the newest methods of engineering and of science. The organizations can operate profitably if they can land one boat load of five. The margin of profit is more than enough to take care of all ordinary activities of enforcement agencies. When an organization of this sort is broken up, it is quickly set up again by reorganization of experienced violators knowing exactly what to do and how to do it.

Many of the mother ships anchored off Rum Row operated under the British flag, but were registered in Canada and belonged to Canadian owners, many of them working for American syndicates. A letter dated April 3, 1930, from a Canadian diplomat in Washington noted that during the first few months of 1930, the U.S. Coast Guard at New York “has reported the names of thirty different vessels of British registry as having been observed while laden with liquor off the entrance to the New York Harbour. Three of these vessels were registered in Newfoundland, twenty-three were certainly registered in Canada, and the remaining four are probably Canadian, although I have no definitive information on this point.”

Vessels that frequented Rum Row were often crewed by fishermen and other experienced sailors from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland. In 1925, Maritime Merchant magazine reported that about half of the hundred vessels that made up the Lunenburg fishing fleet in Nova Scotia were engaged in the rum trade, some being leased to American bootleggers for as much as $4,000 a month. In his autobiography, I Was a Rum Runner, Nova Scotia’s Don Miller estimated that “ninety percent of Lunenburg’s fleet were involved at one time or another.” So many fishermen had forsaken their original profession that the Lunenburg Progressive Enterprise newspaper reported in 1924 that a local fish plant was forced to close. Some contended that rumrunning was one of the few reliable sources of income during the recession that gripped the Maritimes during the 1920s. By renting out their boat or captaining a vessel full of booze, fishermen could make more in a week than they did all year catching fish. Others believed it was a U.S. tariff on Canadian-captured fish that forced many Maritimers to the smuggling trade. An editorial in a 1923 edition of the Globe newspaper describes the conditions and enticements that stirred Maritime fishermen to enter the rumrunning trade, as well as the typical smuggling methods of the Nova Scotia rum ships:

Canadian fishermen have been shut out of the United States market by the tariff and are tempted by American agents with plenty of money to employ their idle ships and crews in carrying liquor cargoes. The tempter lays down
the cash, insures the vessel against any calamity, and charters it as a coasting freighter. The ship clears from Yarmouth in the ballast for St. Pierre, where she takes on a cargo, clearing for Nassau, in the British Bahamas. But before she reaches her destination she has discharged her cargo along the Atlantic coast. She loads at Nassau with clearance papers for St. Pierre, and again her cargo disappears before she completes her northern voyage.

The role of the Canadian Maritimes in supplying bootleg liquor to America was heightened when the U.S. Coast Guard began commissioning destroyers, minesweepers, and cabin cruisers and hundreds of smaller vessels along Rum Row. The result was that many rumrunners were driven away from the U.S. seaboard towards the safety of what would become “Rum Row North” — the coastal waters that ran off the Maritime provinces to the northeast as far as Newfoundland. The creation of Rum Row North also situated the French Islands of St Pierre and Miquelon at the forefront of the Atlantic coast’s underground liquor trade. “Now if you are never in St Pierre,” advised Jack O’Hearts, a bootlegging character in a Damon Runyon story, “I wish to say you miss nothing much, because what it is but a little squirt of a burg sort of huddled up alongside some big rocks off Newfoundland, and very hard to get to, any way you go. Mostly you go there from Halifax by boat, though personally I go there in 1924 in John the Boss’s schooner by the name of the Maude, in which we load a thousand cases of very nice merchandise for the Christmas trade. The first time I see St. Pierre I will not give you eight cents for the whole layout, although of course it is very useful to parties in our line of business.”

Located some 20 miles off the coast of Newfoundland, the French colonial outposts were free from any restraints on the sale or consumption of liquor and boasted deep-water ports and docks that were open year-round. When the SS Sable Island docked at St. Pierre on July 1, 1922, with a cargo of 12,000 cases of Canadian Club whiskey, “it marked the beginning of the most frantic period of activity the colony had ever seen,” according to Jean-Pierre Andrieux’s book Prohibition and St. Pierre. Soon, the island became “flooded with booze to the point where at times when the fog rolled up the streets of the small island with the nightly tides they would carry a distinct Scotch flavour.” The two islands became an oceanic mecca for bootleggers and a logistical haven for Canadian distilleries, which set up transhipment facilities for liquor bound for the American coast. Andrieux estimates that 95 percent of all import activities on St. Pierre were controlled by the Canadian distilleries. The same distillers had a fleet of eighty or more vessels available on call to deliver whiskey from St. Pierre to points in the United States and Canada. Canadian government export figures also revealed the value of the French islands to liquor producers in Canada; for the nine-month period ending in December 1929, Canada exported 747,944 gallons of rye whiskey to St. Pierre and Miquelon. After Rum Row was cordoned off by an enlarged American enforcement presence, St. Pierre received 1,624,956 gallons for the same period ending 1930. Over the course of the following year, Canadian rye whiskey exports to St. Pierre jumped to 2,042,692 gallons. A branch of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce was even established on the island to facilitate commercial transactions. When American Prohibition ended, the CIBC promptly closed the branch.

Joining the rum rows off the Atlantic coast were the rum trails that ran from New Brunswick into Maine. In 1921, journalist William McNulty estimated that “one hundred booze-filled vehicles passed daily over the border, including those operated by “at least three dozen Maine syndicates.” One of the suppliers to these syndicates was Albenie Violette, perhaps the largest and most successful bootlegger in New Brunswick during the 1920s. “Joe Walnut,” as he was nicknamed, was described by Canadian customs agent W.G. Carr as “a typical French Canadian of the woodsman breed. Tall and slim, agile as a cat, dark featured, with thin cruel lips. His eyes were black as coal, yet slightly protruding, the white bloodshot from constant drinking. He was reported to have a fiendish temper, and few scruples.” Violette purchased large quantities of both raw alcohol and distilled spirits from suppliers all over the world, which he then wholesaled in Canada or the U.S. He also produced his own liquor. A booze foundry with a capacity of 50 gallons was built under
the floor of his barn in St. Leonard to distil imported denatured alcohol that was then poured into bottles with fake labels of popular brands. Up until his death in 1929, Joe Walnut was probably one of New Brunswick's biggest private importers of raw alcohol.

Violette's bootlegging activities made him a wealthy man. He owned a stable of cars and boats, an automotive dealership, several bottling plants, and hotels in New Brunswick and Maine. He also owned local politicians, judges, liquor inspectors, and even had his nephew made the chief of police of his hometown. These connections would come in handy for Violette. After the Canadian National Railway police secretly seized a boxcar of raw alcohol, valued at $80,000, they waited for Violette to show up to collect his goods. Even after receiving a tip that a trap had been laid for him, Joe insisted on reclaiming his merchandise and went down to the rail station where he offered a bribe to a CNR officer. The bribe was refused and Violette was arrested and charged with trespassing on railway property and attempted theft. He was turned over to his nephew, the chief of police, and released on his own recognizance. When he appeared in court, the more serious charges against Violette were dropped. In the end, he was fined $100 for trespassing.

Violette enjoyed matching wits with law enforcement authorities and regularly taunted customs officials by using fictitious names on his declaration forms, like Albert Soucy or B. Temperance. On one occasion, local police seized and then quarantined eight barrels of Violette's homemade booze in a hotel cellar behind locked door and police guard. Undaunted, Violette had his son enter the cellar through a secret entrance and replace all barrels with eight replicas full of water. When the case went to trial, he was acquitted and the barrels were returned to him. Without skipping a beat, Violette accused the government of tampering with his ardent spirits and then had his lawyer file a civil suit against the New Brunswick Board of Liquor Commissioners. He won the case and was awarded $8,954 in damages. In another show of impertinence, Violette let it be known where he would be one night while running a load over the Maine–New Brunswick border. American Prohibition officials responded by setting up a roadblock at that very spot. As Violette's car sped closer to the roadblock, the U.S. federal agents frantically signalled for it to pull over. Violette did not stop. Instead, he crashed through the blockade, smashing into the Prohibition officers' car, and overturning his vehicle. After searching his car, but finding no liquor, the two hapless federal agents found themselves on the receiving end of a barrage of accusations and expletives from Violette who accused them of damaging his car and endangering his life. The customs agents knew little about the wily French Canadian and his thespian skills. For his tirade was all an act. While the Americans were trying to calm Violette down, a heavy truck barrelled down the road heading toward the U.S. border. The truck slipped past the gap made in the blockade by Violette and sped into Maine carrying a large cache of his liquor. Even this was not enough for Violette. He later instructed his lawyers to sue the Prohibition officials for trespassing, alleged negligence, recklessness, and a violation of the highway laws. Both federal agents were arrested by Maine police and damages were paid to Violette by U.S. authorities to keep the matter out of the courts.

**A TIDY BIT TOWARDS CANADA'S FAVOURABLE BALANCE OF TRADE**

The underground liquor trade was driven by the most basic of economic laws: that of supply and demand. Outlawing liquor did little to squelch demand. It did, however, provide enormous revenues for distillers, brewers, bootleggers, and criminal syndicates. The money that could be made from skirting Prohibition laws proved to be irresistible to thousands of people and more than offset the risks of capture. In 1929, the average wholesale price of Canadian-made spirits, including excise and sales tax, was $16.20 an imperial gallon. The bootlegger's price in the U.S. averaged $55 an imperial gallon. As early as 1920, the *Detroit News* figured that the smuggling organizations who "keep the alcohol deluge flowing across the Canadian line" were sharing in net profits that totalled $100 million. And that was only for Detroit.

Prohibition made many Canadians rich and turned a sizable number into millionaires. An investigation into the finances of New Brunswick rumrunner Thomas Nowlan revealed that between 1923 and 1927 he had deposits of more than $830,000 at a branch of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. In 1926,
the revenue produced from the smuggling operations of Ontario-based Max Wortzman was estimated to be worth $1.4 million. These fortunes were being amassed during a time when the average annual income in Canada was $3,000, a nickel would buy a malted milk or man’s linen shirt collar; twenty-five cents would buy a package of MacDonald’s CutBrier cigarettes or a meal at the Woolworth’s lunch counter; $2 would rent a modest hotel room for one night; $4.50 would buy a Black Siberian Wolf Muff; $10 would cover the price of a men’s gabardine suit or two women’s wash dresses; $1,000 would buy a Ford coupe motor car; and $7,000 would finance a detached, solid-brick, eight-room home with hardwood floors and electric fixtures on Spadina Avenue in Toronto.

Prohibition in America also proved to be a financial windfall for Canada’s economy and spurred an air of entrepreneurship that had rarely been seen in the young Dominion. Thousands of Canadians and Canadian companies made money directly or indirectly from supplying booze to the United States. Canadian distilleries and breweries grew to be some of the largest and most profitable producers of spirits in the world. Numerous other industries benefited, including export-related firms, transport companies, hotels, restaurants, and boat building. American currency sprayed into the country like an out-of-control fire hose. In addition to revenue brought into the country from the sale of liquor, tourism flourished as thirsty Americans streamed into the wet provinces. American Prohibition, the Financial Post observed, "has provided a tidy bit towards Canada’s favorable balance of trade.”

The Canadian and provincial governments also profited handsomely from Prohibition in the United States. Provincial governments made millions from their monopoly over liquor sales, provincial taxes, as well as licensing fees for export warehouses. According to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, from 1920 to 1928, annual provincial liquor revenues increased from $3,837,000 to $22,755,000. The financial windfalls accruing to the governments of wet provinces did not go unnoticed by the dry ones. By 1927, almost every province had repealed its temperance laws and began cashing in on the huge demand for liquor. Municipal governments were reported to be milking Prohibition through the collection of fines. From January to August of 1920, the city of Windsor collected $259,500 in fines from those illegally in possession of liquor. It was the federal government, however, that profited the most from Prohibition. The Bureau of Statistics estimated that the Dominion Government’s annual liquor-related revenue increased from $8.5 million in 1919 to $49.8 million in 1928. By the fiscal year ending March 31, 1928, approximately one-eighth of all Dominion Government revenue was derived from the trade in alcoholic beverages. All told, according to a 1932 article in Maclean’s magazine, the estimated revenue accruing to the provincial governments from liquor sales and taxes between 1922 and 1932 was $152 million. For the same period, the Dominion Government reaped $399 million from the liquor trade.

The Canadian millionaires that most profited from the evasion of Canadian and American liquor laws did not organize crime gangs. They formed companies. These businessmen were the owners and operators of some of Canada’s largest and best-known distilleries and breweries, like Joseph E. Seagram’s and Sons, Consolidated Distilleries, the Wiser Distillery Company, Gooderham and Worts, Hiram Walker and Sons, John Labatt, O’Keefe’s Beverages, B.C. Brewery Limited, and the Carling Export Brewing and Malting Company. These companies, and the men who ran them, were the consummate and matchless Prohibition profiteers. The Canadian conglomerates that grew fat off Prohibition were some of the first corporations to be vertically integrated, handling all aspects of their trade including production, distribution, sales, export, financing, and marketing. They were also the most corrupt, unethical, and duplicitous corporations ever to operate in this country. Canadian liquor producers aggressively pursued distributors and consumers in dry jurisdictions and did not shy away from selling to dangerous criminal syndicates. Export houses were set up within walking distance of the U.S. border and sales agents were sent to America to drum up business. Canadian distilleries and breweries directly organized massive smuggling operations that transported millions of gallons to the United States or into dry provinces. They forged export documents, fraudulently listed the consigned destination of exported liquor as anywhere but the U.S., used counterfeit landing certificates from
foreign ports, set up shell front companies, misrepresented the contents of their products, forged liquor labels, and bribed customs officials.

While investigating the Saskatchewan-based Franco-Canadian Import Company, federal investigators found in the desk drawer of its manager, Harry Rabinovitch, 50,000 forged U.S. Customs duty paid excise strip stamps. Harry Low, the managing director of Carling Export Brewing and Malting Company, used stolen Canadian and U.S. customs seals and shipping documents to divert railway cars of beer to the U.S. camouflaged as other commodities. Hiram Walker and Sons used fictitious consignees and false landing certificates for alleged shipments to Central America and Cuba. “The traffic had been carried on by means of fictitious consignees, clearances of false declarations as to destination, false return clearances and false landing certificates,” a 1928 Department of Customs and Excise report investigating liquor exports from Canadian distillers stated. “In a large number of the cases, the goods so shipped were allowed to remain in sufferance warehouses for an extended period in order that shippers or consignees might find purchasers for the same in the United States.”

Not content with their millions in profits, these companies also went to great lengths to avoid paying sales and excise taxes. Consolidated Distilleries was repeatedly accused of fudging its books to underestimate their profits and tax liabilities. Gooderham & Worts of Toronto listed all orders for liquor, no matter what their origin, as foreign destinations to capitalize on tax-exempt exports. Joseph E. Seagram’s and Sons evaded income tax by distributing profits to its three principal shareholders in the guise of loans. When these companies were subjected to government audits, stalling tactics were used to keep investigators away from their accounting records. It was also common for company books to mysteriously go missing. The Royal Commission on Customs and Excise reported on one attempt by government-appointed accountants to audit the books of the O’Keefe Beverage Company:

On the 26th of October, 1926, the accountants, P.S. Ross & Sons, under instructions from the Department of Customs and Excise, presented themselves at the office of the above named company to make an examination of their books. Access to the books was refused to them. On the 10th of December, 1926, another attempt was made by one of the representatives of the accounting firm with no more success. On the 26th of December, 1926, the representative of the same accounting firm, accompanied by one of the customs officials of the Customs Department, came to the office of the brewery and then were admitted to make the examination of the books, but they soon discovered that all the books, vouchers, invoices that could give any information of the dealings of the company previous to September, 1926 were missing.

The commissioners concluded that the books of the O’Keefe Beverage Company “are concealed purposely, and their whereabouts are known to the officials of the company and can be produced by them if they are so minded.” An alternative theory is that rather than turn their books over to the Royal Commission, managers at the O’Keefe Brewery had them burned.

When the records of the liquor producers were discovered, auditors uncovered a cornucopia of irregular and illegal accounting practices. In the case of one liquor exporting company, the Royal Commission found $990,000 of unvouchedered expenditures, and “it was impossible to find any official of the company who could or would give a satisfactory explanation of these items.” Investigators also discovered dual sets of books maintained by these companies that existed solely “for the purpose of deceiving the Government as to the extent of their operations and their income.” More than fifty breweries and twelve distilleries in Canada became the subject of tax investigations and audits by the Royal Commission. Based on these forensic audits, the commission calculated the following taxes and duties owed by just a few of these liquor producers: Consolidated Distilleries Limited ($973,667), Gooderham and Worts ($488,223.34), O’Keefe’s Beverages Limited ($320,000), B.C. Brewery Limited ($114,428.21), Joseph E. Seagram’s and Sons ($156,601.17), Carling Export Brewing and Malting Company ($129,416.11), Wiser Distillery Company Ltd. ($86,078.04), and Dominion Distillers ($20,580.30). These penalties represented only a fraction of the taxes evaded by
Canadian liquor producers. In 1935, the U.S. Treasury Department threatened to go after Canadian liquor producers for approximately $60 million it claimed was owed to the American government from evaded excise and customs tariffs.

Despite the many accusations, no executive of any major liquor producer in Canada during the Prohibition years was ever convicted of a criminal offence. On November 2, 1928, an indictment was returned in the U.S. District Court in Buffalo against some thirty defendants, including Gooderham and Worts and its chief officer, Harry Hatch, charging them with offences against the National Prohibition Act. In 1930, Hatch travelled to Buffalo and pleaded not guilty to the charges. With the case still pending in 1932, Hatch wrote to no less than the Right Honourable R.B. Bennett, prime minister of Canada, exhorting him to “authorize Major Herridge [Bennett’s minister in Washington and brother-in-law] to discuss this matter informally with the United States authorities at Washington with a view to having this indictment discharged insofar as I am concerned.” All charges against Hatch were eventually dropped.

While directly controlling the flow of illicit booze to the United States, the Canadian liquor executives were well insulated from the rumrunners and kept many layers between their legitimate corporate facade and the illegal markets. The Canadian liquor producers endowed the underground liquor market with a scope, sophistication, efficiency, and organization that was unparalleled in the history of the contraband trade. Their organizational structure and business practices were even emulated by America’s biggest criminal syndicates. By supplying organized smuggling syndicates, Canadian liquor companies were partially responsible for the rise of some of the most powerful and most violent criminal enterprises in the U.S., including the Italian-American mafia (hereafter “American mafia”). These Canadian companies and their principals would be as culpable as any gangster in undermining and contributing to the repeal of Prohibition in the United States. In turn, American Prohibition and U.S. criminal syndicates helped Canadian distilleries become some of the largest, most profitable liquor producers in the world, while producing some of Canada’s richest and most fabled family dynasties.

**The Whiskeyman**

The most famous of the Canadian family dynasties to make its fortune from Prohibition was that of the Bronfmans. By the time he died in 1971, family patriarch Samuel Bronfman was a billionaire who had built one of the world’s largest liquor empires. At their height in the mid-1960s, Bronfman-controlled companies claimed more than one-fifth of the U.S. liquor market.

Sam was one of eight children of Yechiel Bronfman who emigrated from the Bessarabian region of Russia to Saskatchewan in 1889. After trying their luck in farming, wood fuel delivery, and even horse trading, the family entered the hotel business, buying the Anglo-American Hotel in Emerson, Manitoba. The lore surrounding a teenage Samuel Bronfman is that after watching his father complete a horse sale with a ritual drink at a bar in the Langham Hotel in Brandon, he urged him to abandon the horse trade for the more profitable hotel business. By 1912, the Bronfman family owned four hotels in Manitoba, and in just a few years, the family was buying and selling hotels in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. Even in their early years, the Bronfmsans were dogged by accusations of harbouring illegal activities. In 1908, when the family was renewing the liquor licence for their Balmoral Hotel in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, they were accused by local townspeople of previous liquor violations and condoning illegal gambling in their inns (an accusation perhaps fuelled by anti-Semitism, given that such charges could have been levelled at many hotels during this period). In his biography of the Bronfman family, Peter C. Newman also notes that some of the Bronfman hotels were accused of being nothing more than glorified brothels (“If they were,” Sam would say later, “then they were the best in the West!”). Despite the isolated gambling and prostitution accusations, the prodigiously entrepreneurial Sam realized that the true money-making potential of hotels during this period was in the sale of booze. From these humble beginnings, Sam and his brothers found their true calling.

The family’s road to its global liquor empire, however, appeared to be blocked early on. Prohibition was taking hold throughout Canada, and, in 1916, both Manitoba and Ontario had adopted temperance laws,
dealing a severe blow to the family’s hotel businesses. Undaunted, the brothers embarked on what at the time could be seen as an inauspicious and ill-timed business move: they entered the whiskey trade. Yet this decision was simply an early indication of the cunning and opportunistic business sense of Sam and his older brothers, Harry and Abe. They recognized that while the temperance laws in Manitoba and Ontario prohibited the local sale of liquor, both provinces allowed booze to be imported from outside provincial boundaries. With this in mind, Abe Bronfman, the oldest of the four brothers, moved to Ontario where he set up a liquor mail order house that catered to the Winnipeg market. He later moved to Montreal, where he set up another mail order company to supply liquor to eastern Ontario. In 1916, Sam purchased the Bonaventure Liquor Store Company in downtown Montreal where he filled mail orders sent in from throughout the country. By capitalizing on Canada’s porous temperance laws, the brothers not only made their first fortune, they also established a pattern of wily decisions that would characterize their Prohibition-era liquor operations. As Peter C. Newman aptly put it, the Bronfman’s expertise in manipulating the system and avoiding the full force of the law was so adept that the federal and provincial liquor laws seemed to be drafted in such a way as to maximize the Bronfman brothers’ bootlegging profits.

The enactment of national Prohibition in Canada in 1918 virtually wiped out the Bronfmans’ mail order liquor business, but true to form, Sam and Harry took advantage of another loophole in provincial Prohibition legislation. They realized that Saskatchewan still allowed the sale of liquor for medicinal purposes. With this in mind, Harry obtained a licence to establish a wholesale drug company and, in 1919, with the newly acquired provincial licence in hand, he founded the Canada Pure Drug Company in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, which Bronfman biographer Michael Marrus called “a thinly disguised liquor outlet that soon pumped more whiskey into retail drugstores than any other wholesaler in Saskatchewan.” This new business venture was another crucial turning point for the career of the Bronfman brothers. No longer were they simply taking advantage of legal loopholes. They were now breaking the law. In addition to importing and legally supplying medicinal alcohol to doctors and pharmacies in that province, the same liquor would be flavoured, bottled, and then labelled for the underground market in Canada and the U.S. In their investigation of the Bronfmans, one of the Royal Commission’s conclusions was that the Canada Pure Drug Company “was never engaged in the drug business, but confined its activities to the sale of alcohol in the western provinces and to purchasers from the United States.” The commission documented evidence “that the company imported from the United States about 300,000 gallons of alcohol, brought it to Yorkton, and had it compounded and bottled.” The company then “labelled the compound as Scotch whiskey.”

Years before the Royal Commission would level such accusations, Harry continued to work around, underneath, and above the law. His next move was to use the family’s wholesale drug firm to obtain a bonded warehouse licence from the federal government. With both licences, he could now import and export liquor to and from Canada. With this in mind, Harry embarked on yet another gamble: he bet the Canadian government would continue to allow liquor to be imported and exported regardless of the wartime ban on production. He was right again. Finally, he gambled that national Prohibition would soon be a reality in the United States, shutting down distilleries in that country and opening up a huge export market for Canadian liquor. Once again, he was correct. Relying on highly placed contacts in the Unionist federal government, the Canada Pure Drug Company was granted bonded warehouse status and, almost immediately, the Bronfmans began importing massive amounts of liquor into Canada. “They filled one warehouse until the floors creaked, then another, then another,” James Gray wrote. “Then, with all the facilities overflowing, another twenty-seven cars of whiskey arrived on the siding. The liquor would then be reshipped to the export houses that were springing up all over Western Canada, including those which they were establishing in Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario.”

Events continued to turn in the Bronfmans’ favour. In 1920, national Prohibition was repealed in Canada, which allowed them to resurrect their mail order liquor business on a national scale while
establishing warehouses across the country. By 1921, Sam's mail order business had spawned at least sixteen companies across Canada, most of which he did not even bother to incorporate. When Prohibition in the United States began, the Bronfman family could not have been in a better position. They had warehouses filled to capacity with imported liquor, had a well-oiled mail order business in place, export companies were established coast to coast, sales agents were hired in the United States, and a string of "boozoriums" were set up along the Saskatchewan–North Dakota border from which American customers could conveniently purchase their liquor.

Despite the vast profits already rolling in for the family, they set their sights even higher. The brothers realized that even more money could be made in liquor production. The Bronfman family was now in the distilling business. In the early 1920s, Harry set up the Yorkton Distributing Company and purchased ten 1,000-gallon redwood vats and a machine that could fill and label a thousand bottles an hour. The liquor all came from the same vat, but were poured into bottles with different brand names (many of which resembled existing high-quality brands of competitors). Once Harry got the Yorkton plant running smoothly, it was processing an average of 20,000 gallons a month, which produced gross monthly revenues of $500,000 and an annual profit of over $4.5 million. While Harry kept turning out more booze, Sam travelled about the country, establishing a network of connections with Canadian and American bootleggers and smugglers.

Now fully immersed in the underground liquor trade, the Bronfmans became increasingly vulnerable to government enforcement as well as the violence of the bootlegging trade. The year 1922 would not be a good one for the Bronfman family on both accounts. They became the subject of a tax audit by the Department of National Revenue, which discovered that the wealthy family had failed to file any income tax returns between 1917 and 1922. As a result, they were forced to pay $200,000 in back taxes and fines. Worse still, on October 4, 1922, Paul Matoff, a brother-in-law of the Bronfman’s who also operated the family's boozorium in Bienfait, Saskatchewan, was murdered by a shotgun blast while unloading a shipment of liquor at the local railway station. The killer, who was a mere 10 feet from Matoff when the 12-gauge shotgun unloaded, also made off with $6,000 in cash from Matoff as well as the diamond ring on his finger. Speculation about the motives included Harry’s contention that it was a simple case of a robbery gone wrong. Others claimed the murder was a blunt warning to the Bronfman's from their American customers that they shouldn't water their whiskey so much. Another theory is that the assassination was a reprisal for Matoff’s role in the arrest of members of Minnesota’s notorious Kid Cann gang, which had previously hijacked a Bronfman car loaded with booze. Two American bootleggers who had been customers of Matoff were formally charged with the murder, but were later acquitted. Despite numerous leads, his murder would remain unsolved.

Matoff’s death occurred in the midst of a spate of robberies and violence at Saskatchewan’s liquor warehouses and export houses. Local newspapers, politicians, and townspeople were aghast and linked the violence and local crime sprees to the bootlegging trade and the Bronfman brothers in particular. Because of the public outcry, the Saskatchewan and Dominion governments moved to outlaw the export business in the province. By the end of 1922, the province of Saskatchewan — the birthplace of the Bronfman family fortune — had effectively expelled their most famous citizens. Like other events in the lives of the determined Bronfman brothers, the brothers turned what seemed to be a setback to their advantage. Sam packed up and moved to the friendlier climes of Montreal, where he established the headquarters of his ever-expanding empire. In 1924, he founded Distillers Corporation Limited and built what would become one of the world’s largest distilleries. In the same year, the family consolidated its fortunes under the privately held Brintcan Investments Ltd., which at the time was worth around $3.5 million. In 1926, the Bronfman’s corporate interest would go public to finance their expansion in the booming liquor export market. In 1928, Sam purchased Joseph E. Seagram’s and Sons Ltd. and its historic Waterloo, Ontario, distillery. After merging numerous corporate entities, Seagram’s became the world’s largest producer of spirits.

By the mid-1920s, the Bronfman brothers controlled all aspects of their liquor business from distilling
Companies and warehouses were also established in the West Indies and Mexico, which meant that the Bronfman's international transhipment points now encircled their main market, the United States. Their liquor shipments to the United States were facilitated by Canadian and foreign customs agents who were on the Bronfman's payroll and who stamped the bills of lading with their country seals for shipments they never saw. The Bronfman's also forged landing certificates from foreign ports so they could be reimbursed by the Canadian government for the bond required for liquor exports. A hierarchy of real and shell companies, nominee owners, fictitious names, domestic and foreign bank accounts, and elaborate money laundering operations were all used to conceal their illegal exports and their enormous profits. These crews and other rumrunning employees were well protected by the Bronfman's as the bail and legal expenses of various individuals charged with Prohibition-related offenses were put up by the family's many subsidiaries. By the end of the 1920s, the Bronfman companies were generating annual revenue in the tens of millions of dollars. In 1930 alone, the Atlas Shipping Company had deposited $3,794,907.99 into the account of the Distillers Corporation Ltd. A federal investigation revealed that a shell company set up by the Bronfman's to facilitate the bootlegging end of their distilling operation was the recipient of more than $8 million.

In accumulating these revenues, the Bronfman's and their agents dealt with some of North America's most notorious rumrunners, bootleggers, and gangsters, including Ontario's Rocco Perri; Meyer Chechik and Harry Rabinovitch of Saskatchewan; Frank Costello and Meyer Lansky of New York; Cleveland's Moe Dalitz; the Purple Gang from Detroit; the Reinfield Syndicate of New Jersey; and Charlie Solomen, a major player in the Boston underworld. Even competitors such as Lewis Rosenstiel, who later ran the giant Schenley Distillers Company in the U.S., got his start during Prohibition by purchasing booze from the Bronfman's during his trips to Montreal. Some have alleged that Sam Bronfman flew to New York to solicit business from U.S. bootleggers and personally wooed Meyer Lansky over fancy dinners. In turn, Lansky reportedly arranged for Bronfman to attend a Jack Dempsey fight in New York.
in 1923. Whether Bronfman and Lansky ever met is uncertain, but in his old age, Lansky, a principal architect of modern organized crime in America, would bitterly ask, “Why is Lansky a ‘gangster’ and not the Bronfman and Rosenstiel families? I was involved with all of them in the 1920s, although they do not like to talk about it and change the subject when my name is mentioned.”

During a special U.S. Senate Committee hearing into organized crime held in 1951, Frank Costello — a New York mobster so powerful and influential that he was referred to as the “Prime Minister of the Underworld” — was confronted over his reputed ties to Sam Bronfman. Although he first denied ever “personally” buying liquor from the Bronfmans, after repeated questioning Costello nervously provided this rambling and confused admission, “… what I meant is if I bought liquor from him, that means I met him in the United States and brought it from him in the United States … I come to the conclusion that I never bought it from him in Canada … I bought it in New York … either from Bronfman or independent people … I want to make it specifically on the record that I bought it in New York, whether it was Bronfman or anyone else, and if Bronfman shipped it to anyone else, I bought it from someone else.” Through its own investigative work, the committee may very well have unearthed the identity of that “someone else.” Committee members confronted Costello with testimony he made before the New York State Liquor Authority in 1947 “in which he stated that one Harry Sausser was the person through whom he arranged the importation of liquor from Canada.”

Another regular Bronfman customer was Joseph Reinfeld, a naturalized American citizen from Poland who presided over a massive New Jersey–based bootlegging organization, which, according to the U.S. Senate investigation, “imported nearly 40 percent of all the illicit alcohol consumed in the United States during prohibition.” U.S. Treasury investigators stated before the committee that they had uncovered bank deposits made by the syndicate of “around $25,000,000” and estimated that the “Reinfeld Syndicate collected approximately $60,000,000 from their illegal liquor distributorships.” An October 21, 1929, letter marked secret from the Canadian Legation in Washington to the secretary of state for external affairs in Ottawa described the Reinfeld syndicate as “a highly organized smuggling ring, operating on a very large scale, maintaining its own fleet of ocean-going vessels, fast motor boats, as contact ships, a radio station to direct operations and houses along the coast which the newspapers call well supplied armouries.” Based largely on the testimony of retired U.S. Treasury agents, the Senate committee accused the Bronfman family of being the primary source of liquor for the Reinfeld syndicate, going so far as to declare that during Prohibition this group of “notorious bootleggers” were “partners in some of Bronfman’s operations.” The committee also alleged that the Reinfeld syndicate was laundering its profits through Canada:

This syndicate, dealing largely with the Bronfman interests which owned the Bronfman Distillery of Canada, carried on what they described as the “high seas operation.” The system under which they operated consisted of bringing liquor from Canada, France, England, Scotland, and Germany to the little St. Lawrence River island of St. Pierre et Miquelon and there transhipping it to “rum runway” 12 miles off Sandy Hook. At that point the syndicate’s customers took over and ran the liquor into the United States. Much of the money received would be sent in the $100,000 and $500,000 lots, frequently in gold to Canada so that in case this country got too hot for them, they would have something if they had to flee.

At the height of its operations, the Reinfeld syndicate was reportedly purchasing 22,000 cases a month from Bronfman companies. Historian Stephen Fox also contends that tanker ships owned or leased by Reinfeld would travel to a Bronfman dockside warehouse in Montreal or St. Pierre where the booze was pumped directly into large copper-lined tanks in the ship’s hull. It would then set sail to the New Jersey coast where it would anchor a hundred yards offshore. A small boat would bring out a hose lined with linen and “twenty-five thousand gallons of Canadian whiskey would be pumped into oaken tanks on shore.”

The business relationship between Bronfman and Reinfeld was significant for a number of reasons. Not only was Reinfeld one of the first American customers
of the Bronfmans (he was selling their whiskey in his Newark saloon-turned-speakeasy as early as the summer of 1920), but as Reinfeld’s primary supplier, the Bronfmans helped to nurture the largest American bootlegging operation during Prohibition. Reinfeld also helped to revolutionize bootlegging, first by operating on such a grand scale, and second by cutting out the middleman and purchasing and shipping whiskey directly from Canadian distilleries to American shores. When the Canadian and American government began to clamp down on Canadian liquor exports to the U.S., it was Reinfeld who allegedly advised Sam Bronfman to ship his American-bound whiskey from St. Pierre.

Sam’s dealings with Reinfeld also exposed him to other American mobsters. This included Abner (Longy) Zwillman, one of America’s most influential gangsters who helped start the infamous Murder Incorporated, and who sat on the so-called Mafia Ruling Commission in the 1950s. Longy made his first of many millions by running Canadian liquor, using surplus World War I armoured trucks to offload booze-filled ships from Canada. In 1923, at the age of nineteen, he muscled his way into acquiring a 50 percent partnership in Reinfeld’s smuggling syndicate, and, according to Zwillman’s biographer, Joe Reinfeld had Longy negotiate directly with Sam Bronfman in Montreal. Recognizing Zwillman’s ambitious nature, Reinfeld reportedly admitted, “My biggest mistake was sending him to Montreal to meet Sam Bronfman. Now he’s got the connection too.” After America’s Prohibition laws were repealed, Reinfeld, Zwillman, and James (Nuggy) Rutkin, created a new liquor importing corporation called Browne-Vintners. “To avoid public disclosure of the investors,” the special U.S. Senate Committee reported in 1951, “all the stock of this corporation was held by a nominee.” Stephen Fox alleges this nominee was an employee of Seagram’s in Montreal, who “laundered” the initial $250,000 investment provided by the former American bootleggers. In 1940, Browne-Vintners was sold to the Bronfman-owned Seagram’s Distilleries for $7.5 million.

As the 1920s drew to a close, their many years of covert activities began to catch up with the Bronfmans. The Royal Commission investigating smuggling and corruption with the Customs and Excise Department had placed the Bronfmans’ family businesses under a very unflattering light and recommended that bribery charges be laid against Harry, based on the testimony of customs officer Cyril Knowles. Because of the attention paid to the Bronfmans by the Royal Commission, they became the centre of a political storm in Saskatchewan. Before gaining power in the province in 1929, the Conservative Party had repeatedly called for the prosecution of the Bronfmans. Once the party achieved power, it wasted little time in going after Harry. On November 29, 1929, he was arrested on the instructions of Saskatchewan’s attorney general and charged with attempted bribery and witness tampering. The bribery charged stemmed from his alleged offer of graft money to Knowles eight years earlier. The second charge stemmed from an incident wherein Harry attempted to extricate his brother-in-law, David Gellerman, from a charge of selling whiskey to William Denton, an undercover provincial liquor commission agent. Denton told the court that in 1922, Bronfman gave $1,200 to the two witnesses to leave the province, which they did. When the case was dismissed, due to the absence of the material witnesses, Denton claimed that Harry offered him $2,250 as a reward for shepherding the two out of Saskatchewan. Predictably, on September 13, 1930, Harry was acquitted of the tampering charges. After the trial, he invited the jury to a party in his suite at the Hotel Saskatchewan where he reportedly filled a bathtub full of whiskey to celebrate.

By the time American Prohibition ended in 1933, Seagram’s was poised to capture the market once again, this time legally. It had amassed vast inventories of aged and blended whiskies, and had an extensive distribution network already in place. Americans had developed a taste for Seagram’s Seven Crown American Whiskey and V.O. Canadian Whiskey and they became some of the best-selling brands in the post-Prohibition era. The Bronfmans purchased distilleries in the U.S. and Sam moved Seagram’s main office to New York City.

Despite the end of American Prohibition, Canadian and U.S. authorities were not through with the Bronfmans. In 1934, the Canadian government, now under the control of the Conservative Party of R. B. Bennett, launched a nationwide investigation into the liquor smuggling industry. Prime Minister Bennett was
highly critical of his predecessor, Mackenzie King, for failing to combat liquor smuggling and, more specifically, for not prosecuting the Bronfmans. Near the end of this sweeping investigation, an RCMP memo reported, “in five provinces of the Dominion and in the United States the RCMP were last night trailing sixty-one Canadians against whom stands a blanket warrant charging them with conspiracy to evade payment of more than $5 million in customs on smuggled liquor.” It was the biggest investigation in the history of the force, stretching from Prince Edward Island to British Columbia. As part of its prosecution, the Crown alleged that conspirators collectively handled approximately $50 million worth of contraband liquor.

Among the sixty-one defendants were all four Bronfman brothers. Late in 1934, the Crown charged the four with conspiracy to evade payments of duty on liquor shipped to St. Pierre (which the government claimed was short-circuited back onto Canadian shores, thereby evading federal excise tax) and “conspiring to violate the statutes of a friendly country” (i.e., the United States). The bail for each was set at $100,000. As part of the investigation into the Bronfmans, thousands of documents from their companies were seized. The Crown’s case was fatally weakened, however, when the RCMP could not gather sufficient evidence from Seagram’s headquarters. Accusations quickly surfaced that Sam Bronfman ordered the destruction of thousands of incriminating papers, “almost certainly with a view to shielding their early operations from inquisitorial eyes,” according to a 1935 article in the Globe. Other Bronfman companies used for smuggling purposes conveniently went out of business, and their assets were transferred offshore. On June 15, 1935, the Bronfmans were acquitted of all charges. As a reward for his diligent defence, their lead lawyer was awarded one thousand free shares of Seagram’s stock. While once again escaping criminal charges in Canada, the U.S. Treasury Department demanded millions of dollars in excise and customs tariffs it accused the Bronfmans of evading. After negotiations with the Treasury Department, the Bronfmans’ bill came to a mere $3 million.

With the last of their Prohibition-era legal wrangles behind them, the Bronfman empire expanded at a dizzying pace. Under Sam’s leadership, Seagram’s sales topped the $1 billion mark in 1965. Sam himself would often feign innocence when confronted with his nefarious past. In an interview with Fortune magazine in 1966, Sam rationalized his export-driven business during Prohibition without a hint of moral compunction: “We loaded a carload of goods, got our cash, and shipped it. We shipped a lot of goods. Of course, we knew where it went, but we had no legal proof. And I never went on the other side of the border to count the empty Seagram bottles.” On November 12, 1963, Harry Bronfman passed away. Eight years later, on July 10, 1971, Sam died of cancer, leaving the empire in the hands of his family. Following the death of the two brothers, the Bronfman family would assiduously endeavour to yarn a mythology of the origins of the family fortune. Regardless, in both their legal and illegal operations, the Bronfman family became the most successful of all Canadian liquor producers and suppliers. This is appropriate enough, given the Yiddish translation for the name Bronfman is “whiskeyman.”

**MY AMERICAN GANGSTER**

The Bronfmans were only one of many Canadian liquor suppliers that worked with the American criminal syndicates that increasingly monopolized the underground liquor trade. Most of America’s infamous Prohibition-era gangsters were supplied with booze from Canada and many dealt directly with Canadian distilleries and their export subsidiaries. Some even set up accounts and lines of credit with their Canadian suppliers. This mutually profitable partnership catapulted the Canadian liquor industry to new heights and also helped transform the organization of crime in the United States. By supplying American bootleggers, Canadian liquor producers contributed to the modernization, consolidation, and expansion of organized crime throughout North America. If Prohibition provided the jump-start to American organized crime, then Canadian distillers were the jumper cables. As Stephen Fox writes, “organized crime in America was permanently transformed by thirteen years of Prohibition.” Gangs moved beyond their own neighbourhoods and an “informal cooperation among bootleggers in different states was increasingly sys-
tematized. By the late 1920s, the major bootleggers of the Northeast and Midwest had organized themselves into the “Big Seven.” This group included some of the most influential and dominant names in American organized crime — Johnny Torrio, Charles Luciano, Frank Costello, Meyer Lansky, Charlie Solomon, Waxey Gordon, Longy Zwillman, Benjamin Siegel, Al Capone, and Moe Dalitz — all of whom bootlegged Canadian liquor. At a 1929 meeting in Atlantic City, the biggest names in American gangsterdom met to divide up the rackets and to ensure peace among the competing groups. As part of the meeting, Cleveland’s Moe Dalitz “took the floor and told the bosses that there should be an end to the cutthroat underbidding on liquor from Canada and Europe,” according to John William Tuohy. “If that happened, he said, prices would drop and they would all make more money. All the bosses agreed.” For the first time, the U.S. underworld was united “under one thought, one direction.”

Johnny Torrio, the man who initiated the Big Seven, the Atlantic City conference, and the idea of a national commission of criminals, was one of the first Chicago gangsters to make direct contact with Canadian distilleries and breweries. Forever trying to apply business principles to his rackets, Torrio recognized that he could maximize his profits by directly smuggling whiskey from Canada, rather than purchasing it from middlemen. Al Capone, a Torrio disciple, was also a major importer of Canadian liquor. Through a network of alliances with other bootleggers in Detroit, St. Louis, and Philadelphia, Capone obtained huge quantities of liquor from Canada, Cuba, and the Bahamas. Rumours persist to this day that Capone personally travelled to Saskatchewan in June 1926 to strengthen his ties with his Canadian sources. This included stops in Moose Jaw, which was directly linked by rail to Chicago, where he reputedly hid from police in the tunnels under the town, and in Bienfait, where he met with Sam and Harry Bronfman. One of Capone’s alleged suppliers was Rocco Perri. When questioned about a possible acquaintance with his Canadian counterpart, Capone spat out what would become one of his most famous quotes: “Do I do business with Canadian racketeers? I don’t even know what street Canada is on.” A Chicago syndicate headed by Al’s brother Ralph supposedly owned twenty airplanes that regularly flew into Canada to pick up liquor.

Stefano Magaddino, who was once described as “the grand old man of the Cosa Nostra” made millions by moving bootleg whiskey from Canada’s Niagara region into Buffalo’s underworld (which he would dominate for many years to come). Francesco Castiglia (a.k.a. Frank Costello) purchased liquor directly from Sam Bronfman’s St. Pierre operations, most of which was then transported to New York City where it would be sold to the highest bidder. Costello’s former lawyer and biographer contended that the “boss of all Bosse of the Mafia” also worked directly with Nova Scotia shipbuilders to manufacture “rummies of a new character.” It was through his involvement in bootlegging that Costello forged a historic partnership with Charles (Lucky) Luciano and Meyer Lansky, both of whom also purchased liquor from Canadian distilleries and bootleggers. By helping to establish the five New York mafia families, the three men could rightly be considered the fathers of modern-day organized crime in America.

Cleveland’s Moe Dalitz, who is considered to be second only to Meyer Lansky as America’s most influential Jewish gangster, was a loyal customer of the Bronfmans and other Ontario-based liquor producers. He used barges to float empty trucks across Lake Erie to the Canadian side where they would disembark and drive to distilleries or export warehouses. The barges would then be sailed back and the booze distributed throughout Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. Dalitz and his partners in Cleveland’s Mayfield Road Gang moved so much Canadian whiskey across Lake Erie that it became known as “the Jewish Lake.” William (Big Bill) Dwyer, one of New York City’s most prolific bootleggers and a former employer of Frank Costello, also brought liquor across the Great Lakes in armoured speedboats. (In 1925, Dwyer used $75,000 from his bootlegging profits to purchase the Hamilton Tigers hockey team, which was then moved from Ontario to his hometown and renamed the New York Americans.)

The Purple Gang, a loose confederation of Jewish gangsters from Detroit’s east side, was once the city’s biggest and most violent criminal syndicate. In addition to shoplifting, extortion, gambling, insurance fraud, kidnappings, and contract murders, they were
heavily involved in distilling, brewing and hijacking contraband liquor. They later began importing Canadian whiskey from Windsor, which was then diluted at one of the gang’s many “cutting plants.” One faction of the Purple Gang was the so-called “Little Jewish Navy,” a group of smugglers who brought liquor across the Detroit River via motorboats. When Chicago’s Al Capone decided to set up a base of operation in Detroit, he was told in no uncertain terms by the Purple Gang that he was not welcome and that the “river belongs to us.” Ever the incisive businessman, Capone avoided a war with the Purples by hiring them as his agents in Detroit. From that time on, the Purple Gang affixed Old Log Cabin labels to bottles of Canadian Club whiskey, which were then sold to Capone for distribution in Chicago. It was the hijacking of a shipment of Old Log Cabin whiskey by Capone’s archrival Bugs Moran that led to the massacre of seven of Moran’s men on Valentine’s Day in 1929.

Joseph P. Kennedy, the son of a Boston liquor dealer and the father of a future American president, is also reported to have made millions from smuggling booze into America. In one book documenting the many transgressions of the Kennedy generations, Seymour Hersh quotes a former employee of the elder Kennedy who said he “heard anecdotes, rumours, and stories of bringing Haig & Haig scotch from Canada to Cape Cod and to Carson’s Beach in South Boston.” Another of Kennedy’s biographers asserts that he arranged for the transport of liquor from Canada and England to Rum Row where “organized crime syndicates” including those run by Frank Costello “picked up the liquor on the shore.” In a 1973 interview conducted just ten days before his death, Costello told journalist Peter Maas that he had been contacted by Kennedy who wanted help bringing liquor into the country and that the two became “partners” in the liquor industry. Joseph Bonanno, who headed one of New York City’s mafia families, also alleged that he worked with Kennedy smuggling liquor from Canada. In his 2003 biography, Ted Schwarz claims that Joe Jr. obtained Canadian whiskey through his father for the tenth reunion of his Harvard graduating class. Kennedy was also linked to Samuel Bronfman and his steady customer Joe Reinfeld by Diamond Joe Esposito, Chicago’s powerful underworld boss during the 1920s, who allegedly supplied Cuban sugar to all three men. Through his political connections, Esposito boasted that he met with U.S. president Calvin Coolidge where he asked that the three men “receive special protection and all rights to bootlegging.”

The most concrete evidence of Kennedy’s involvement in bootlegging Canadian liquor comes from the Royal Commission on Customs and Excise, which linked Kennedy and British Columbia brewmaster Henry Reifel. Along with their breweries, the Reifel family ran Joseph Kennedy Ltd., a holding company that operated several bonded export houses in British Columbia. With sons George and Harry presiding as president and general manager, respectively, the company was headquartered at 1206 Homer Street in downtown Vancouver. According to a 1928 report of the Royal Commission, the sole business of this company was “the export of liquor to the United States.” In addition to smuggling booze, the commission also documented “a great many irregularities, some of a very serious nature, in connection with this company.” This included attaching “forged United States revenue stamps to bottles containing liquor bottled by this company.” Another associated company accused of being used by the Reifel family for smuggling purposes was the Kennedy Silk Hat Cocktail Co., which shared its offices with Joseph Kennedy Ltd. on Homer Street in Vancouver.

In a letter to the RCMP’s director of Criminal Investigations from the Customs Department dated October 9, 1926, an undercover agent accuses the Kennedy Silk Hat Company, Henry Reifel, and other west coast exporters of short-circuiting liquor consigned to foreign ports:

Large shipments of liquor in transit between Europe and central American ports are landed at Vancouver and held in Sufference sheds until convenient to tranship to certain boats engaged in rum running. … Among water
front employees, such as Stevedores, Checkers, and Police, with whom I conversed. It is the opinion that a large quantity of the tran-shipped liquor never reaches the foreign ports to which it is consigned, but is landed in Canadian waters, and ultimately returns to Vancouver for distribution among local bootleggers by such firms as Consolidated Exporters Ltd., Manitoba Refineries Ltd., Kennedy Silk Hat Cocktail Co. &c. Henry Reifel, R.T. Morgan, and other prominent men connected with distilleries and Breweries in B.C. are freely spoken of as being the leading men in these activities.

The agent also notes in his letter that Captain Aubrey T. Gowe, president of the B.C. Grain Stowing Contracting Co. claimed he had personally dealt with Reifel and Kennedy, although no details are provided on the nature of these meetings. Following the end of Prohibition, Kennedy entered the legitimate world of liquor importing, and in a few years established himself as the largest distributor of scotch in the United States. In 1946, Joe Reinfeld and Longy Zwillman bought Kennedy’s Somerset Importers.

Dwarfing all other west coast bootleggers on either side of the border was Roy Olmstead, a former lieutenant in the Seattle police force who ran “one of the most gigantic rum-running conspiracies in the country,” according to the New York Times. Dubbed by the Seattle press as “King of the Puget Sound Bootleggers,” Olmstead purchased the majority of his booze in British Columbia. As Puget Sound historian Daryl C. McClary writes, "Olmstead reasoned that an unlimited source of good liquor in British Columbia, Canada, plus an untapped market for booze in Seattle, equalled the perfect combination for a very profitable business opportunity. Bootlegging just needed someone to...
organize and run it like a business; Roy Olmstead was just the man for the job.” Olmstead’s ships loaded two to four thousand cases at a time at Vancouver’s and Victoria’s ports. He took advantage of the Canadian government’s tax-free exemption for liquor destined to non-American foreign ports by listing his ships’ destination as Mexico. After leaving port, however, the ships’ cargo would be unloaded on small islands in the Haro Strait northeast of Victoria, where it was stored until picked up by speedboats that took the cases to designated spots along the coast of Washington State and Oregon. With the combination of his tax-free liquor and the discounts he received on his bulk purchases from Canadian suppliers, Olmstead was able to undersell his competitors in Seattle by as much as 30 percent. At his peak, Olmstead’s organization was delivering two hundred cases of Canadian liquor to the Seattle area on a daily basis, grossing between $200,000 and $250,000 a month. Olmstead went so far as to purchase a radio station that law enforcement officials believed was being used to send coded messages to his Pacific fleet, providing information on where the cases were to be unloaded and warning them where Coast Guard vessels were patrolling.

In addition to his many rumrunners and bootleggers in Washington State and Oregon, Olmstead also had a number of operatives in British Columbia. In one of the largest liquor smuggling cases prosecuted in the U.S., Olmstead was indicted along with ninety-one other people. Of these, according to a former assistant attorney general in charge of Prohibition, “many lived in Canada.” Among those Canadians indicted was Russell Whitehead, president of National Canners Ltd. of Vancouver, lawyer F.R. Anderson of Victoria, twenty-seven directors of the Consolidated Exporters Corporation, and the entire crew of the steamship Quadra, which was owned by Consolidated Exporters and was captured with a load of liquor by a U.S. Coast Guard cutter off the coast of San Francisco.

The American investigation began in October 1924, when Canadian customs officials seized the Eva B, one of Olmstead’s rumrunning boats, arresting three men and confiscating 784 cases of liquor. Olmstead was eventually arrested, and while out on bail, he continued to smuggle booze from B.C. In 1927, the U.S. assistant district attorney for Oregon,
Arthur Boyd, Ed Morris, all of Seattle, Washington, and suspended Prohibition Agent Alfred Hubbard. The letter concludes, “The United States Attorney for the district of Oregon considers this the largest and most important smuggling case that has come up in his district during his term of office.”

**“STEP ON HER, KID. MAKE IT QUICK.”**

For every year that Prohibition was in effect, the competition between rival bootlegging groups became more fierce and more violent. Rumrunning cars and boats were routinely ambushed and hijacked by heavily armed assailants. A 1923 article by William McNulty conveyed the Darwinian laws of the bootlegging industry that inevitably paved the way for an unprecedented level of violence on both sides of the border:

“Might is right” was the motto adopted by the gangs. In the wake of the whiskey shipments of 1922 came a veritable stream of blood, an orgy of violence and theft. The gangs began to attempt the annihilation of the weak in order to limit competition. On the sea schooners loaded with whiskey were stolen; motorboats filled to the gunwale with the forbidden liquid were seized; and even steamers fell into the hands of “hijackers,” as the whiskey pirates were known.

In one of the single-largest cases of hijacking during this period, the steamer ship *Lutzen*, which departed from Montreal with 4,300 case of scotch whisky officially consigned for Bermuda, was overtaken by a “modern Captain Kidd” thirty-six hours out of port and out of signalling range from other ships. As the *Globe* newspaper reported on February 12, 1924, “When the buccaneers bore down on the *Lutzen* out of the blue the Captain and the crew of the latter were too astonished to put up a fight. Besides, they said, they were armed.” The hijackers boarded the ship, bulldozed the crew into obedience, shackled the liquor agents in irons, and then took command of the vessel, “while the pirate captain set the *Luten*’s bow dead for Rum Row, off the Long Island coast.” Upon arrival at their destination, “the captured vessel competed with other rum ships, selling the scotch at $30 a case, it was said, till the last of 4,300 cases had gone over the side.” A New Jersey aviator reported that he had sighted the commandeered vessel, although the name “Lutzen” had been painted out and substituted with “Lion.” Before they could be captured, “the buccaneers sent signals to the Long Island coast, and a steam tug came chugging out before daybreak that morning and took all the marauders on board.” The thieves “escaped with about $129,000 in their pockets. This was the last heard of them.”

Another bloody example of the risks assumed by seafaring rumrunners occurred on September 24, 1924. The *Beryl G*, a fishing boat sailing off the coast of British Columbia with 350 cases of liquor, was hijacked by three men, one of whom was wearing a police uniform. In addition to the liquor, the hijackers made off with $3,000 in cash. In the course of the robbery, the lone men aboard the fishing boat, William Gillis and his teenage son Bill, were shot to death and their bodies thrown overboard, but not before they were handcuffed together, tied to an anchor, and slashed with a knife so that they would sink faster. The brutal murders set off lengthy investigations on both sides of the border. After a year’s search, Owen Baker and Harry Sowash were captured in the U.S. and extradited for trial in British Columbia. On January 14, 1926, the pair was executed at the Oakalla Penitentiary in Burnaby. It was to the hangman that Baker purportedly muttered his final words, “Step on her, kid. Make it quick.”

Because ambushes and hijacking became such an accepted part of the underground liquor trade, most caravans of cars and trucks were heavily armed. As the *New York World* described in a 1929 article, “The rum runners sleep atop their loads with drawn weapons until a convoy can be made up. These convoys are preceded by a ‘fix’ car, a light automobile containing no liquor. This is manned by men who make a ‘fix’ if they can. If they can't other methods are adopted, usually accompanied by copious gunnery.” One such battle occurred in June 1920 when a party of hijackers attempted to entrap a group of rumrunners near the Amherstburg Distillery in Ontario, at a spot known as the Indian Burial Ground. The town of Amherstburg, located not far from Windsor, had become the headquarters for one of the most rapid and reckless
bands of hijackers operating on the Detroit River,” a 1929 Maclean’s magazine article warned. “With the true delicacy which marks the modest tribe, these young gentlemen elected to entitle themselves the ‘Blood and Guts’ gang:

Word came to their ears of a considerable cargo of liquor stored in a barn near the riverfront town of Sandwich. It was the intention of the original owners to load this valuable consignment on a scow and jerry it across the river under the cover of darkness. The hour of departure had been set for one in the morning and the business of loading was to start around midnight. The playful little lads of the Blood and Guts gang planned to ambush the loading party at the moment the scow was ready for clearance, take them by surprise and rush the cargo. Afterward they would ferry it over themselves and dispose of it in their own market. It looked simple, but in some mysterious manner — there was almost as many spies on the waterfront as there were bootleggers — word of the projected raid was carried to the owners of the shipment. Therefore, when the merry marauders from Amherstburg arrived on the scene of their proposed operations, they were considerably annoyed to be greeted by a welcoming committee which poured a fusillade of revolver fire into their ranks. … To their credit it must be set-down that the bold buccaneers did not in this emergency disgrace their gory title.

The battle between the two sides raged for three hours before the would-be hijackers fled. During the gunfight, it was estimated that some three hundred bullets had been fired.

Violence among rum-running gangs was particularly fierce in Southern Ontario. The Windsor-Detroit border was the site of ongoing bloodshed and lawlessness unmatched in any other part of Canada. However, it was the Niagara bootleg war of 1920–22 that has become a symbol of the violent nature of the bootlegging trade in Canada. This particular spate of carnage was blamed on competition and vendettas between the Scaroni and Perri gangs. Some of the victims whose murders have been attributed to the region’s bootleg traffic during this violent period include:

- Thomas Mathews, who was found stabbed to death near his Stoney creek property;
- Ralph Mandrolo of Niagara Falls, who had his head blown off by a shotgun blast;
- Fred Tedesca, who was shot in Guelph supposedly on the direct orders of Dominic Scaroni;
- Angelo Fuca, who was plugged on a Hamilton street;
- Frank Pizzuto of New York City, whose body was hacked beyond recognition;
- James Saunders (whose real name may have been Nunzio Corazzo), who was stabbed to death “by a man strong enough to drive the knife or stiletto through him in a single blow”;
- George (Toni) Timpani, who had four bullets fired into his head as he climbed Clifton Hill in Niagara Falls;
- Vincenzo Castiglione, whose bullet-riddled body was soaked in oil and then set ablaze in Hamilton;
- Mike Lobosco, who was shot outside his barbershop; and
- Maurrizzio Bocchimuzzo, whose body was found by hunters on the outskirts of Niagara Falls, New York with a handwritten sign nearby reading “Death! Here! Look!”

The bloodletting ended around the summer of 1922 with the elimination of Joseph and Dominic Scaroni and the consolidation of their bootlegging racket by the Rocco Perri organization.

While the carnage was concentrated among members of rival bootlegging gangs, law enforcement officials were not immune to threats and acts of violence. Between 1920 and 1932, one estimate of the death toll associated with the underground liquor trade in the United States was five hundred Prohibition agents and two thousand civilians, most of them rumrunners and allied gangsters. Enforcement officers in Canada were also the victims of
bootlegging-related violence. In Edmundston, New Brunswick, two charges of dynamite exploded within three minutes of each other at the homes of local police constables. Both policemen, according to the Daily Gleaner newspaper, had been “very active in this district against rumrunners, bootleggers, etc.” and both had turned down large bribes to look the other way. Three men, two from Maine and one from New Brunswick, were arrested and charged with attempted murder. The men were hired by Archie Dube, who confessed to police that he was contracted by “high-ups,” in the New Brunswick illicit liquor traffic, and who were connected with a powerful syndicate made up of New York, Quebec, and New Brunswick bootleggers. One of the bombers confessed that he had been provided $25 for the job.

Violence also extended to those working jobs within the distilling and brewing industries. In September 1927, Sam Low, a wealthy liquor exporter and younger brother of Harry Low, the vice-president of Carling Breweries, was kidnapped and held for a $35,000 ransom. His kidnappers were alleged to be from Detroit. John Allen Kennedy, a mid-level bookkeeper for Carling, whose initials and signatures were on suspect cheques under investigation by the Royal Commission, was murdered just before he was to appear as a witness for hearings concerning federal tax evasion by Canadian breweries. He had been shot through the head at short range.

EMPEROR PIC

Emilio Picariello, a.k.a. Emil Picarello, Emperor Pic, Pick, the Bottle King, family man, entrepreneur, the Godfather of working-class Italian immigrants, an Italian Robin Hood, a murderer—just who was the man?

Pic was already a legendary brewheister in the Great Canadian West. His real name was Emilio Picariello. He was born in Sicily in 1875 and moved to Fernie, British Columbia, with his family in 1911. He stopped growing at five feet eight inches tall, but was built like the front of a draught horse. He had shoulders the size of the Rockies, a meaty neck, a broad Cro-Magnon jaw, a thick-lipped blubbery mouth, a handlebar moustache that could steer a Schwinn, a rounded bulldog nose, and brows as expansive and as lush as a British Columbia redwood forest.

By December 1914, Pic was hawking vino as the local rep for the Pollock Wine Company. Four years later he set up shop in Blairmore, Alberta, and became the sole agent for a Lethbridge brewery. When Prohibition drained Alberta on April 1, 1918, Pic began running bingo from its wet neighbour to the west. At the start of American Prohibition, he expanded his B&A racket south of the border. The dope on Emperer Pic was that he was making dough hand over fist. The big dog had a big brass collar. He owned six touring rattletlaps, each one capable of holding dozens of cases of illicit hooch. He relied on various pilot men to deliver the scrog and even employed a full-time mechanic.

By the early 1920s, Pic had already had plenty of run-ins with the bulls. His hotel was raided and his car was frequently stopped and searched. To cope with John Law’s roadblocks, he equipped his whiskey sixes with bumpers made from piping filled with concrete. Pic’s Italian-made testicolis must have also been filled with concrete. One night, after his whiskey-filled heap became stuck in the mud during a rainstorm, he asked a couple of provincial coppers for help. After a few minutes of pushing by the two public dicks, Pic was dislodged and drove away with his load of illegal hooch. On another occasion, as Pic was returning from a trip into Montana, an American P-man jumped on the running board of his Buick just inside the American border. With one wing on the steering wheel, Pic catapulted the other out the driver’s-side window, fastened a viselike grip around the man’s neck, and held him until his crate had safely crossed into Canadian territory. Once on the other side, the American lawman was helpless to do anything to Pic. That was just

The Pic also had a gentle side. He was always the first to help someone in need. He handed out toys to kids at Christmas and delivered grub to hungry families. He lent money out at no interest. When the coppers opened his safe after he died, it was filled with promissory notes. Many were from police. Pic was a big dog with a big heart.

On September 21, 1922, provincial lawmen were in Blairmore on the blink for Pic after receiving a tip.

Portrait of Emilio Picariello and family, 1915
that he had a load of 40-rod red eye. Around four bells, First Class Constable Steve Lawson and the town's chief flattie, Jonathan Hougton, eyed a small caravan of Detroit boilers heading into town. The first was driven by J.J. McAlpine, Pic's mechanic. The second was handled by Pic's nineteen-year-old son, Stephen. The third was piloted by the Pic himself.

When the caravan of roadsters snorted past the lead coppers, they reported the arrival of His Majesty the Emperor to the provincial P-agents, who then paid a visit to him at his castle, the Alberta Hotel. It was a rough-edged building with small dried-out planter boxes on the window ledges. The late-afternoon breeze made the ends of the headless plants tap-tap against one cracked window. A wedge of sunlight sliced through the dirt street and fell noiselessly on the front entrance of the hotel. Pic purchased the hotel in 1918, and it became a front for his ski business. Beneath the flophouse, he excavated a small room where he stashed his outlawed hooch. Leading to the cave was a tunnel large enough to drive one of his Special Six McLaughlin Buick touring hippos.

After being served with a warrant to search his jalopy, Pic hopped into his chariot and sounded his horn as a signal. The P-men rushed to the rear of the building in time to see Pic's son blip out to his own bucket and light a shuck for high ground in a thundering hurray. The provincial black and whites then snorted off to their own prowl cars and made a beeline in the same direction. The elder Pic followed suit and was soon in the thick of the chase.

After spotting the cars speeding his way, Constable Lawson stepped in the middle of the street and flapped his wings like a hen laying a square egg. But Pic Junior twisted his tiller and scooted around the stationary copper. Lawson pulled out his roscoe, drew a bead on the car, and sprayed metal. Stephen drew two pieces of lead into his left mitt. Lawson commandeered the car of a local resident and gave chase. The law-hounded son of the bottle king flew across the winding dirt roads like a crow searching for field mice in a prairie autumn. His large Buick rear fishtailed along tight hairpin turns. Its large tires kicked gravel and stone into the afternoon air. In hot pursuit, Lawson squeezed off a third pellet before he was forced to pull over with a flat tire. With the law choking on his dust, Stephen Picariello safely crossed the provincial line to freedom.

Later that day, Lawson confronted Emilio, exclaiming, "You might as well bring the boy back, for if you don't, I will." Pic ventured out in search of his son, but he failed to find him and returned to Blairmore. In the evening, he learned Stephen had been nabbed and sent to the University of Young Delinquents. In the dark of the night, Emilio set out to retrieve him.

Florence Lassandro, the twenty-two-year-old housekeeper and nanny to Pic's children, insisted on coming along. This was not the first time she accompanied Pic. Emilio often urged Florence to ride along with him on some of his bootlegging trips. He believed the P-men would be less suspicious if a young woman was inside his car. She was born Philomena Costanzo in 1901 in Calabria, Italy, and immigrated with her family to Fernie. As a teenager, Florence married Charles Lassandro, who became one of Pic's delivery boys. Her semi-masculine features were set off by a Romanesque nose, lids that drooped over her brown eyes, a protruding chin, and large brows that expanded along their outer corners. In her mug shot, Florence displays an eerily calm countenance, set off by a Mona Lisa smile.

The judge who presided over Florence's trial said that her "relations towards the boy, Steve, who was shot, were something more than friendly." When she inquired about Steve's condition with a local police officer, "she said that she thought a great deal about him but that it was not necessary to tell her husband."

While the two searched for Stephen, Pic suddenly stopped the car, pulled a heater from under his coat, loaded it, and placed it on his lap. After a short distance, he stopped the car again, drew another gun from under the seat, and thrust it into Florence's narrow lap. "For protection," he growled like a rabid dog. "They used guns this afternoon, we meet them on their own terms!"

As Pic continued his revengeful journey into B.C., he stopped to talk to some men gathered at the CPR station at Crow's Nest. The men would later tell the court that Pic waved his automatic cannon
and threatened that if his boy had been harmed, he would kill Lawson that night.

Pic returned to Alberta and confronted Lawson at his home. With a pent-up fury, Pic accused him of plugging his son and demanded that the harness bull produce his boy. Lawson swore he did not know his whereabouts. Pic's eyes had a murderous glassiness to them. His breath came in short gasps and he said, through tight lips, and pointing at the gun clenched in his lap, "If you don't cut out this shooting, I can shoot too!"

Lawson spied the gun and lunged for it. A struggle ensued. There was a deafening roar. The smell of gat powder filled the air. A lead lug whizzed past Florence's feet. Other shots rang out wildly. One hit the speedometer. Another smashed through the windshield. Glass rained down over the inside of the car. The smell of gunpowder filled the air. Lawson loosened his grip on Pic and ran to the safety of his barracks. Pic's piece blasted away at the unarmed provincial flat foot. A pile driver knifed through Lawson's shoulder at the back. His torso jerked with the impact of the .38-calibre slug. He stumbled backwards and fell to the ground with a thud. Within a few minutes, he was ripe for the lilies. Watching the forty-one-year-old constable expire were his wife and one of his five children.

Coldly and snollygosteringly, Pic turned to Florence and demanded she take the rap for the shooting. "You shot … yes, by accident … them then you shot … when you saw his gun … someone shot at you and you shot back in self defence … A woman can, you know. To protect herself … a woman can. They no touch a woman … Listen! You say you did it. I go free and with money I get the best lawyers. Then you go free too." As he barked out the orders, Florence went wooden on him.

Pic was elbowed by the choirboys the following morning. Florence faced the show that afternoon. As instructed by Pic, she dutifully confessed to popping Lawson, but she would not be the only one stuck with a first-degree-murder charge.

It was a short trial that ended with a conviction for both, followed by appeals all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, a stay of execution, and a clemency plea to the prime minister. But there was no leniency for the pair. Emilio and his nanny were hung at the Fort Saskatchewan Pen on May 3, 1923.

In a letter to his family the day before he mounted the thirteen steps to swing on the gallows pole, Emilio Picariello penned the following:

My dear wife and children. I expect this will be the last letter I will be able to write
Dear wife and children. I go to the scaffold tomorrow as an innocent man, and I am prepared to meet my maker. I hope that you and the children will lead good and happy lives together and that we will all meet again, according to the will you already have from me you are the sole executor until Steve our son becomes of age and then you will both become trustees and I wish that they all get an equal share. I want you to know that I do not owe any body. I want you to know that Mr. E. Gillis has already had $4500.00 from me and I consider I have over paid him for work he had never done. all other lawyers are paid in full. ... I want you to remember all the people I have helped at different times they have forgotten me know and don't come to help or cheer me. I will say good bye with love to you all children till we meet again and may god bless and keep you all safe kis all the children for me.

Your loving Husband and Father
Emilio Picariello

The final official statement made by Philomena Costanzo was transcribed into a letter to the minister of justice in Ottawa by her priest. She pleaded for mercy and for the truth. "Lawson was shot by a thirty eight revolver but I don't know how it happened. I am positive that I never had a gun in my hands." Florence would be the first and the last woman ever to be executed in Alberta.

ASSURANCE AND PROTECTION

A New York police reporter wrote once that when you pass in beyond the green lights of a precinct station you pass clear out of this world, into a place beyond the law.
—Raymond Chandler, The High Window, 1942

Like violence, corruption was an unavoidable consequence of Prohibition. It is doubtful that Canada or the United States ever experienced the level of government corruption that emerged during this period. Thousands of police officers, customs officials, liquor inspectors, Prohibition officers, politicians, and judges on both sides of the border were convicted of graft connected to the contraband-liquor trade. Thousands more were never exposed. The temptation to look the other way was often too great to pass up; a single bribe to a police officer could exceed his annual salary. Customs officials were enticed to look the other way or to call in sick on days when trucks full of Canadian liquor would rumble across the U.S. border. Other law enforcement personnel were on the payroll of criminal syndicates and received a regular payment or a pre-determined cut from a successful delivery. Some government agents provided armed protection to bootlegging caravans and even trafficked in the very product they confiscated (which led to the accusation that a Prohibition agent's zeal in enforcing the law was often in direct proportion to the payload of the rumrunner). In 1929, the entire crew of the U.S. Coast Guard's Cutter 219 was apprehended and then convicted after they had seized a boatload of contraband Canadian whiskey and transferred it to another rumrunning vessel. In what was called the worst scandal in the history of the Detroit Police Department, the commander of the Harbor Patrol was forced to retire after it was discovered that he used police boats to convoy liquor from Canada to the American shore and even ordered patrolmen under his command to help unload the liquor. (As payment for their help, the commander shared the bootleg liquor with his men.)

Between 1920 and 1926, 750 U.S. Coast Guard employees were dismissed due to "misconduct and delinquency," according to a June 1929 edition of the Congressional Record. Over the next two years, an additional 550 were charged with "extortion, bribery, solicitation of money, illegal disposition of liquor and making false reports of theft. In the same period, the federal Prohibition Bureau fired 1,600 agents with cause. "The grounds for these dismissals," a 1931 U.S. government commission summarized, included "brib-
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ey, extortion, theft, violation of the National Prohibition Act, falsification of records, conspiracy, forgery, perjury and other causes which constitute a stigma upon the record of the employee.” Of this total, 257 were criminally prosecuted. While he was a member of the New York State House of Representatives, Fiorello La Guardia sarcastically surmised that it would take 250,000 police officers to enforce Prohibition laws in New York, and another 250,000 to police the police.

In 1921, Cecil Smith, a Windsor taxi driver–turned–bootlegger, was sentenced to five years after he admitted in court that he offered $2,000 to an Ontario Liquor Licence officer to walk away from twelve cars being filled with cases of liquor at the Windsor depot of the Canadian Pacific Railway. In court, he confessed that he had also provided a case of liquor to “express company agents” to release the booze shipment before government inspectors arrived. Smith admitted that over the course of one year, he had paid more than $90,000 in bribes to government officials.

Canadian liquor producers were also directly involved in graft. In a document prepared for the Royal Commission on Customs and Excise entitled “Private notes for counsel re: John Labatt Ltd.,” a commission staffer summarized evidence provided by Mr. Burke, a Labatt’s manager in charge of exports. Under the heading of “Special Payments,” the staffer wrote that Labatt’s paid “sums of money to various persons in order to carry on their export business, and for this purpose the company had a secret fund which was known as the ‘Snake Fund.’ We gathered that unless gratuities were given their business would be hampered in every possible way. Mr. Burke stated that while a portion of that money was paid to Customs officers, it was only for clerical services in making entries and not by way of corruption.”

Maxwell Henderson, who worked as an accountant for Seagram’s and who would later become the auditor general of Canada, claimed that both the Liberal and Conservative parties expected large financial contributions from liquor companies. While testifying before the Royal Commission, Henry Reifel admitted to providing nearly $100,000 to provincial political campaigns in 1925 and 1926. A Liberal Party “bag man” in Vancouver named William McArthur admitted to receiving four cheques between January and June 1926 totalling $40,000. Reifel told the commission that he did not receive any “promises” in return for the donations, although he acknowledged he recorded these payments in his company’s financial ledger as “assurance and protection.” Reifel recommended to the Royal Commission that a law be made prohibiting campaign contributions because “you never get any return on the money.”

Clement King, a director of the Hiram and Walker Distillery in Windsor admitted that his company had paid out over $250,000 to politicians in a three-year period. Emilio Picariello would routinely deliver his political payments to a go-between, who forwarded it to elected officials. The Alberta bootlegger supposedly tailed the intermediary one day to an office and discreetly waited outside until he was sure the money had changed hands. He then walked into the office and introduced himself as “the man who is paying you the money.” As he turned to leave, Pic explained to the startled official, “I just wanted to see where my money was going.”

Unsurprisingly, customs officials on both sides of the border were the rumrunner’s most sought-after government ally. A hundred-dollar bribe to an American customs officer could open up the border for hours, allowing tens of thousands of dollars’ of contraband to be safely delivered. Canadian Customs and Excise officials were paid to sign export documents for foreign ports knowing the cargo was destined for the United States. Some customs officials were gracious enough to sign a number of blank liquor export permits, leaving the rumrunner to fill in such required information as destinations, cargo size, and departure date. One customs report on corruption at Canadian ports noted that liquor imported from Europe landed in Vancouver and was “held in Sufferance sheds until convenient to tranship to certain boats engaged in rum-running.” Some of the imported liquor would be consumed while in the Port of Vancouver, “with the knowledge of the Customs Officer on duty, who is invited into the different rooms to partake in the hospitality of those in possession of liquor.” The Royal Commission into Customs and Excise uncovered the existence of a “snake fund” out of which customs officials in Windsor “were subsidized for passing American rum-running cars without inspection on their homeward journey to Detroit,
and for ‘tipping off’ the drivers if they were likely to be searched on the American side.” Several customs agents admitted to receiving “payments of $10 per car for those so passed.”

The immense scope and blatant nature of the graft shocked the minister of national revenue, William D. Euler, when he visited Windsor in 1928 to personally observe rumrunning operations. “I could see the United States Customs office in the other shore,” Euler recollected in a media interview. “And I could also see that it was not difficult to detect any boats that left the Canadian shore to go to the American side.” The minister asked a Detroit bootlegger where customs officers happened to be when all the illegal liquor streaming uninterrupted across the river. “It just happens that they are not there when we go across,” the man replied.

The single-most infamous episode of corruption in Canada during these years involved Joseph Alfred Bisaillon. As the chief preventative officer for the Department of Customs and Excise in Montreal, Bisaillon became what historian Ralph Allen called “one of the most incredible sitting ducks in the annals of public malfeasance.” During his tenure with the Dominion Government, and despite a modest paycheque, Bisaillon owned houses on both sides of the Quebec–Vermont border. One home was located in a well-known smugglers’ den known as Rock Island. In addition to smuggling liquor into the U.S., he was also accused of selling stolen cars that had been illegally transported into Canada from America, and was also hauled before the courts for conspiring to help smuggle $35,000 worth of opium into Canada (a lack of evidence allowed him to walk free from the drug charges). In 1924, Bisaillon pulled rank on two Quebec Liquor Commission officers who had just seized 16,000 gallons of contraband alcohol. He dismissed the two officers from the scene and then permitted the two American smugglers to escape. While he impounded the illicit cargo, he was still charged by the Crown with conspiracy. These charges were also dismissed for lack of evidence. In the incident that eventually led to his downfall, Bisaillon was found to have deposited $69,000 into his personal bank account, despite the fact that his annual salary was only around $2,500. While this revelation may appear to have been just one of many examples of government corruption brought about by liquor smuggling, it in fact initiated a series of events that would expose the colossal scope of the contraband trade affecting Canada and the culpability of the Dominion Government in encouraging (or at least ignoring) smuggling into and out of the country. The incident also precipitated the most significant constitutional crisis ever faced by the young country.

On February 3, 1926, H.H. Stevens, a Conservative M.P. from British Columbia, rose in Parliament and linked Bisaillon to widespread sleaze within the Liberal government. “I find running through all of this thing like a slimy, evil influence, the name of Bisaillon,” he discharged in a multi-hour rant in the House of Commons. He referred to Bisaillon as “the worst of crooks, he is the intimate of ministers, the petted favourite of this government. The recipient of a moderate salary, he rolls in wealth and opulence, a typical debauched and debauching public official.” After talking until four in the morning, Stevens was able to convince the House that corruption within the Department of Customs and Excise was endemic. The result was the formation of a special Commons Committee to investigate the administration of the department. Through hearings held between February and June of 1926, the committee documented extensive corruption, stretching from port inspectors all the way to the highest levels of the department. At the centre of the committee’s investigation was Bisaillon, who stood accused of buying, transporting and selling contraband liquor and was estimated to have “had a turnover in the last two years of $1,500,000.” The lead investigator of the inquiry concluded, “To my mind, only one inference can be drawn: that Bisaillon was doing business with the knowledge of his superior officers.” The committee went so far as to implicate the minister of customs and excise himself. Evidence was presented showing the minister, Jacques Bureau, along with his deputy minister had “a large quantity” of seized liquor transported from Canada Customs warehouses in Montreal to their Ottawa homes. Even before the hearings wrapped up, an article in Maclean’s magazine labelled the Department of Customs and Excise as “corrupt and debauched” and damned the entire Dominion Government for an unprecedented
level of neglect, incompetence, and corruption. “Politicians and procurers, servants of the Government and prostitutes, graft in public places high and low, inefficiency almost unparalleled, are intermixed in a nauseous mess, comparable in gravity to nothing else previously been placed before a nose-holding and well-nigh despairing citizenry.”

The committee’s report landed like a political bombshell in the House of Commons on June 29, 1926. Many personally blamed prime minister W.L. Mackenzie King for allowing liquor smuggling and corruption to careen out of control. The House of Commons went so far as to adopt a motion that it had lost confidence in the minority Liberal government. With few options, the prime minister visited the governor general and asked that Parliament be dissolved. In a surprise and unparalleled move, the governor general, Lord Byng, refused the Prime Minister’s request and instead handed power to the Conservative Party, sparking a major constitutional crisis. The new government fell just three days later, however, and a general election was called.

Before Parliament was disbanded for the election, the House of Commons resolved that “since the Parliamentary inquiry indicates that the smuggling evils are so extensive and their ramifications so far reaching that only a portion of the illegal practices have been brought to light, the House recommends the appointment of a Judicial Commission with full powers to continue and complete investigating the administration of the Department of Customs and Excise and to prosecute all offenders.” With little delay, the Royal Commission on the Department of Customs and Excise was created. From November 1926 to September 1927, the commission travelled the country hearing more than 15 million words of testimony. Although the inquiry was only incidentally mandated to examine the liquor smuggling problem, bootlegging inevitably became its principal focus. With the power to subpoena, the commission wasted little time going after some of the biggest fish in the bootlegging sea, including Rocco Perri, Bessie Starkman, Ben Kerr, Thomas Nowlan, Herb and Harry Hatch, Sam and Harry Bronfman, and the employees, officers, and directors of every major distillery, brewery, and export company in the country.

The commission’s report was presented to the House of Commons on January 27, 1928, and expanded upon the parliamentary committee’s revelations of widespread corruption at all levels of government. The findings of the commission forced the Dominion Government to take more seriously the smuggling of Canadian liquor to the United States. The re-elected Liberal government clamped down on liquor exports and numerous criminal investigations were launched. The department of customs and excise was restructured to minimize future corruption, and greater customs enforcement powers were handed over to the RCMP. Some Canadian distilleries and breweries had their licences revoked while others faced tax investigations.

**How Powerless We Are**

Despite increased enforcement, from the outset of the Noble Experiment, the enforcement of Prohibition laws in Canada and the United States was a grand exercise in futility. As historian Andrew Sinclair points out, those circumventing the laws were more organized and better funded, and often, received greater support from the public than those enforcing the laws. As a result, “the inadequate were forced by their country to pursue the prepared.” On the American side, Congress initially entrusted enforcement to a new bureau within the Treasury Department. However, only 1,500 positions were created for the country as a whole. To make matters worse, according to a 1933 U.S. commission that studied Prohibition enforcement, political connections seemed to be more important than skills or experience in getting hired, and training was almost nonexistent. Federal Prohibition agents were, in the words of one U.S. Treasury official, “a most extraordinary collection of political hacks, hangers on, and passing highwaymen.” To frustrate enforcement efforts even further, the courts did not seem to take bootlegging offences very seriously. During 1928, 6,200 violations of the Prohibition law occurred in the two federal districts of northern New York. Only 1,200 cases came to trial, while a mere 120 convictions were secured. “I arrested a prisoner last summer with a load of ale,” one commander of a New York Coast Guard station wrote in a letter to his bosses. “He was fined $1.00 in court and as his carfare was $1.15 home, a collection was made in the court room and carfare paid to him.”
U.S. Customs was handed the impossible job of trying to defend thousands of miles of border from liquor smugglers. As one bootlegger declared, “There are at least fifty roads from Canada leading into the United States through Plattsburg [New York], and there are only about fifteen United States customs officials to guard these fifty or more bootlegging trails.” Gradually, more funds were dedicated by Congress to combat the problem, more personnel and equipment were added, and there was better coordination between local, state, and federal agencies. The U.S. Coast Guard was provided with faster and better-armed ships designed expressly to catch the high-powered rumrunning vessels. The increased American enforcement effort met with some initial success. In the Detroit region, during a two-year period in the latter half of the 1920s, 634 boats, 964 liquor-toting automobiles, 46,594 cases of beer, 6,644 barrels of beer, and 16,560 cases of whiskey were confiscated. Despite this success, U.S. Customs continued to be hampered by high levels of corruption, incompetence, bureaucracy, a rapid personnel turnover, and a lack of resources. A popular analogy that depicted the helplessness of the Coast Guard concerned a recently commissioned speedboat; while on routine patrol, it ran out of fuel and had to be towed to dock by a rumrunner.

A serious effort by the Dominion Government to combat the smuggling problem was conspicuously lacking throughout much of the Prohibition era. U.S. officials implicitly blamed the smuggling problem on a Canadian government that legally allowed and financially benefited from the production and export of liquor. “The rum runners are obeying every Canadian law,” a Detroit Prohibition chief began, “and violating every law of the United States.” Washington repeatedly appealed to Ottawa to stop the export of Canadian liquor to the United States, but for much of the 1920s the Canadian government declined to undertake any such measures. In a speech to Parliament, the minister of national revenue in the Liberal government defended the Canadian practice of clearing liquor cargoes that eventually ended up in the United States, saying that securing America’s borders was an American, not a Canadian, problem. Upon advice from the Canadian Department of Justice, the minister even declared that no law existed in Canada to prohibit the shipment of liquor to the United States.

At times, federal authorities in Canada seemed to bend over backwards to accommodate the contraband liquor trade. With jurisdiction over the production and export of liquor, the Dominion Government approved liquor production and liquor export facilities in all of the provinces, regardless of whether they were wet or dry. And like the bootleggers, the Canadian government knew exactly where to go for the big action. A 1929 Customs and Excise Department memo entitled Departmental Regulations Regarding Exportation of Duty Paid Intoxicating Liquors designated seventeen docks in the Windsor area alone “for the acceptance of entry and clearance of such goods for export.” Chester Walters, chief of the Hamilton Dominion Tax Office, ruled that bootleggers and rumrunners who filed federal income tax returns were entitled to deduct the amount of their Ontario Temperance Act fines as legitimate expenses incurred in the course of their business. However, those who had their liquor seized by government authorities were not entitled to any reduction, as that was counted as a capital loss.

Eventually, the Mackenzie King government grudgingly made a few modest efforts to address the tidal wave of Canadian liquor flooding the United States. In 1924, Canada and the United States signed the Convention to Suppress Smuggling. While American officials pushed the Canadians for a complete embargo on all liquor exports to the United States, the prime minister refused, fearing that Canadian voters would see him as toadyling to the Americans. Instead, among other provisions, Canada agreed to provide the U.S. with information on vessels cleared to the United States. In effect, Canada Customs agents would telephone their American counterparts whenever a boat loaded with liquor was officially cleared for the United States. In 1928, this practice was discontinued at the request of U.S. authorities, perhaps due to the overwhelming frequency of the calls, perhaps due to the rampant corruption in customs agencies on both sides of the border, or perhaps due to the ease with which bootleggers circumvented the reporting requirements. Rumrunners found that providing false destinations or false names of boats to Canadian cus-
toms officials was sufficient to throw a wrench in U.S. Customs' interdiction efforts. One Canadian member of parliament estimated that there were five thousand instances in which Canadian customs agents communicated the wrong name of a boat or captain to their U.S. counterparts. “An unbelievable number of the boats were called Daisy and their skippers Bill Smith,” he remarked. After 1928, lists of liquor clearances for the U.S. were mailed on a weekly basis to local U.S. Customs offices, a trifle late to catch rumrunners who were departing Windsor for a scant five-minute trip across the river to Detroit.

It was only after the Royal Commission issued its final report that the Dominion Government made any serious attempts to combat liquor smuggling. In 1929, Ottawa closed down a number of export docks throughout the country, including almost all along the Detroit River. Customs officials also began to prohibit small, rickety crafts from taking on loads to foreign destinations they could not possibly reach. On June 1, 1930, legislation prohibiting the export of Canadian liquor destined for delivery in a country that outlaws its importation came into force. Immediately, seizures were made by Dominion authorities and, less than two weeks later, liquor prices in Detroit increased by 50 percent. The move also signalled to some liquor producers that their export-fuelled prosperity was no longer guaranteed. In 1930, the Financial Post advised its readers not to buy shares in Carling Brewery because in the future it will “have to rely on [the] domestic market.”

The augmented enforcement measures on both sides of the border, however, proved too little, too late. By 1930, it had become clear that there was no stopping the underground trade in Canadian liquor. For every new enforcement initiative introduced on either side of the border, the resourceful and resilient smuggler simply modified his modus operandi. Increased enforcement also served to weed out the smaller, independent smugglers, leaving the trade to the larger, better-organized, and more violent criminal syndicates. American officials acknowledged that even with the increase in seizures, they were confiscating no more than 5 to 10 percent of the total amount of booze coming from Canada. In a 1926 letter to the director of customs investigations, one RCMP member admitted, “how powerless we are to cope with the situation successfully. We may get an occasional haul but this only means a drop in the bucket as the saying goes.” The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin argued that Prohibition “can not be enforced in its entirety, even if the military power of the Federal Government were to be put behind it, as long as there shall exist the present division of popular sentiment throughout the country.” The New York World editorialized that “State and federal officials brandish the feeble mop of a badly organized prohibition enforcement system at this gigantic and cunningly controlled flood tide.”

**THIS SINISTER SLOTH**

The hopelessness of curtailing liquor smuggling — combined with the ever-growing organization and sophistication of the bootleg liquor trade, the accompanying problems of violence and corruption, the unpopularity of Prohibition, and widespread lawlessness — led to the gradual repeal of temperance laws throughout Canada and the United States. By 1927, most Canadian provinces had annulled their laws. In 1933, the Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution of the United States officially killed Prohibition in that country.

Ironically, the Canadian liquor industry, which for over a decade had flouted American law, was given privileged access to the U.S. market soon after Prohibition was repealed in that country. It would take some time for America’s brewers and distillers to meet the pent-up demand and Canadian booze was safe, reliable, and of high quality. The flood of orders from the United States helped the shares of Canadian distillers shoot through the roof, contrary to the predictions of the Financial Post. Hiram Walker’s common stock rose from $5 to $35. Consolidated Distilleries went from fifty cents to $9. Distillers Corporation stock catapulted from $5 to $20 a share.

Besides the vast benefits Prohibition provided the Canadian liquor industry, the repercussions of the great social experiment were lasting and profound. With its paternalistic overtones, Prohibition foreshadowed the rise of the welfare state and its ideological penchant for intervening in the lives of its citizens for their own good, whether such intercessions were welcome or not. Prohibition also kick-started a development
that coincided with the rise of the welfare state: the expansion of the criminal justice system, which was now the government’s main tool to control other personal vices, such as drugs and gambling (despite the precedent-setting failure in controlling the public’s thirst for the demon rum).

Prohibition also had implications for the maturation of Canada as a country that increasingly yearned for its own identity and independence. Prohibition immediately followed the First World War where, for the first time, divisions of Canadian troops fought as national units instead of being parcelled out to support and reinforce British regiments. American Prohibition continued Canada’s evolution toward independence from Britain. The 1924 *Convention to Suppress Smuggling* signed with the United States was the first international treaty Canada negotiated without Britain’s involvement and signalled the start of made-in-Canada foreign policies. The Bisaillon scandal and its political aftermath was a major impetus for the *Statute of Westminster*, passed by the British Parliament in 1931, which granted legislative and political independence to Canada and other Commonwealth countries. Prohibition also helped to strengthen a Canadian nationalism that would steadily be built upon a defiance of America and its new-found continental and international power. Indeed, the uniquely (English) Canadian process of nationalistic self-identification would largely be forged by efforts to differentiate the country from the overshadowing American behemoth. The defiance exhibited by the Liberal government towards America’s Prohibition laws, and its insolent role in undermining these laws, was driven in part by this emerging sense of Canadian identity. At the centre of this defiant nationalism was the Liberal Party of Canada and its politically astute and populist prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, who led the patriotic cheerleading in the Dominion by obdurately refusing to bow to American pressure. In his repudiation of the United States, King showed he was more concerned with popular nationalistic sentiments, economic interests, and re-election, than kowtowing to the American government.

Unfortunately, the indifferent and often obstructionist position taken by the Dominion Government towards American and provincial temperance laws also fermented extensive lawlessness, organized criminality, violence, and corruption within Canada. As Ralph Allen wrote, “It took half a dozen years or more before Canada fully comprehended the impossibility of providing both an operating base and the raw materials for a multi-billion-dollar criminal industry while itself remaining untouched by the crimes involved.” Under the banner “Why this Sinister Sloth?” the *Globe* editorialized in 1928 that, “not only does the Department of National Revenue continue to make possible large scale criminal operations against a friendly neighbour by its unrestricted issuance of liquor export clearances. It does so with a cynical disregard of the nullifying of such operations on the laws both of the Dominion of Canada and the various provinces.” Through the charity extended to liquor smugglers, the Canadian government was instrumental in creating an environment that tolerated and even celebrated law-breaking. Paradoxically, the lawlessness that emerged in many parts of Canada belied the country’s most defining characteristic — that of a law-abiding, peaceful, deferential people. Thus, in promoting a Canadian nationalism, a cherished symbol of the Canadian identity may have been further diluted.

It took a high-profile corruption scandal, a parliamentary inquiry, a Royal Commission, and the fall of the Liberal government to force federal politicians to realize the repercussions of their inactions. By the end of the 1920s, the Dominion Government was, according to Allan Everest, “waking up to the disagreeable fact that smuggling into Canada was on the increase, with a consequent breakdown in Canadian law enforcement and the loss of considerable revenue. American bootleggers, who were already breaking the laws of one country, saw no reason to observe those of Canada. Where once they went back to Canada with empty cars and boats, they now found double profits from smuggling in both directions.” The minister of customs himself stated in 1925 that at least $50 million worth of smuggled goods entered Canada in the course of a year. As a 1926 article in *Maclean’s* magazine reported, “Truck-loads of liquor are running to the United States, and truck-loads of silks, denims, radio supplies — even jewellery — are run into Canada, on the return trips. Smugglers soon learned that primary principle of economics of
transportation, that it does not pay to return empty.” The contraband goods being smuggling into Canada cost the Dominion Government millions of dollars in lost duty. Because these goods were sold on the black market at heavily discounted prices, Canadian businesses also suffered. The tardy enlargement of the Canadian government’s enforcement efforts had less to do with American pressure, and more to do with a realization of the damage being inflicted on Canada by smuggling.

Among other things, Prohibition will be remembered for producing the greatest mass participation of the North American public in unlawful activity. It should have come as no surprise that even the most well-intentioned Prohibition laws would have little impact on consumption. Since Neolithic tribes discovered the fermentation process and began consuming berry wine around 6400 B.C., liquor has been the drug of choice. Government edicts were not going to change this. Temperance laws lacked the necessary acceptance by the majority. A small minority of moral reformers, social do-gooders, and political opportunists foisted a social and personal morality upon a recalcitrant population. Prohibition blurred the distinction between ordinary people and criminals. Because of Prohibition, otherwise law-abiding citizens were now breaking the law on a regular basis, without any significant repercussions or social stigmas. Many people were on the side of the bootleggers and in some places, according to Art Montague, smuggling was “so ingrained as a way of life that rumrunning was more acceptable social behaviour than trying to stop it.” While many rumrunners and bootleggers may have been viewed innocently as outlaw heroes of the day, a more dangerous symbiotic relationship was being forged between organized crime and mainstream North American society.

Prohibition illuminates the monumental challenges societies face in their attempt to regulate vices. It also shows how outlawing such vices helps create and nurture organized crime. Prohibition demonstrated that no matter how illegal a product may be, or how much its supply is restricted, demand will persist. And if the price is right, there will always be someone to fill that demand. Because of the huge demand for booze, the criminal element in North America became larger, better organized, wealthier, and more powerful than ever before. Prohibition required a level of organization and sophistication that was not necessarily required for such pre-existing rackets as gambling, extortion, kidnapping, prostitution, or even drug smuggling. The contraband liquor industry flourished via a network of distillers, exporters, financiers, bootleggers, shippers, importers, retailers, transportation companies, banks, insurers, enforcers, and corrupt government officials.

Prohibition forged a more elaborate form of logistical organization for criminal entrepreneurs and, following repeal, this new organizational structure was carried over to other forms of criminal conspiracies, in particular drug trafficking. Ambitious efforts to coordinate the activities of different criminal organizations and to settle disputes, such as the Atlantic City Summit and the National Mafia Commission in the United States, would never have been needed or been possible, without Prohibition. The underground liquor trade also became international in scope, and this experience proved to be invaluable for future transnational criminal activities, such as the smuggling of narcotics, cigarettes, and people. Prohibition turned neighbourhood gangs into criminal empires.

In short, Prohibition brought organized crime into the modern age, cementing it onto the North American landscape.

While Prohibition was responsible for launching many criminal organizations in Canada, the most notable of these did not evolve into the type of continuing and diversified criminal conspiracies witnessed in the U.S. following the repeal of temperance laws. Instead, most of the Canadian criminal syndicates dissolved, with their ringleaders and subordinates either retiring with their profits or returning to previous law-abiding occupations. Others moved on to fill the demand for other outlawed goods and services, such as drugs and gambling. For the next few decades, the Canadian criminal element would not be beholden to the large distillers and brewers. They would, instead, become subservient to the American mafia. As Canada was gradually pulled into the economic web of America, a similar process was occurring in the North American underworld.
PART III

ASCENDANCY

1933–1984
By 1934, the dawn of a radically different criminal underworld had arrived in North America. Organized crime was now more widespread, more sophisticated, more entrepreneurial, more consensual, more transnational, and more Italian. Indeed, for the next fifty years, the so-called Italian mafia would become the single-most dominant organized criminal force in Canada and the United States. The mafia would become synonymous with organized crime and for good reason — it set the standard for all other crime groups that followed. The scope and influence of the mafia in North America was deemed so great during the postwar years, that some believed it constituted a single monolithic organization whose threat to the legal, economic, and moral values of democratic societies was second only to that of Communism. To investigate and counter this threat, there were at least five presidential or congressional commissions formed in the U.S. and at least six provincial or federal commissions in Canada between the end of the war and the early 1980s. To investigate and counter this threat, there were at least five presidential or congressional commissions formed in the U.S. and at least six provincial or federal commissions in Canada between the end of the war and the early 1980s. To differentiate the American variety of Italian organized crime from its Sicilian foils, a distinctive new moniker — La Cosa Nostra — was applied by U.S. law enforcement in the early 1960s. Roughly translated from Italian as “this thing of ours” or “our thing” (the abstract way mafia members referred to their secret criminal society), this sinister-sounding designation was created to help scare the public into supporting the war against organized crime waged by the Kennedy administration and led by Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

In Canada, most government officials were less alarmed by the threat posed by the Italian mafia. In fact, for many years the attitude of Canadian politicians and some senior police officers was to deny that an ongoing criminal conspiracy based on the principles of the Sicilian Mafia even existed in this country. Technically, they were correct. Unlike the United States, where the Cosa Nostra was primarily made up of Sicilians, most mafiosi in Canada were from Calabria, or at least could trace their roots to the Italian province. As such, the secret Italian criminal societies that arose in Canada beginning in the 1930s were mostly influenced by the traditions of the 'Ndrangheta (although for the most part there is little difference between the customs and traits of the Sicilian and Calabrian Mafia).

There are many reasons why the Italian mafia reigned so supreme in the American and Canadian criminal underworlds in the decades that followed Prohibition. Their organizational structure incorporated...
a rational hierarchy, complete with a capable, ambitious, and visionary leadership, and a business-like approach that stressed entrepreneurship and the timely exploitation of any illegal or legal business opportunity that had the potential to make money. As Robert Stewart writes, the Cosa Nostra fashioned their money-making ventures “in a systematic, expansive, protracted, diversified and synergistic manner,” which means that “the gambling operation feeds the loansharking operation, which in turn generates the debtor businessperson, who then forfeits his business, or the debtor warehouse worker who pinpoints a valuable item in storage to be stolen, or the debtor police officer who can be compromised and corrupted, etc., etc.” This rational commercial infrastructure was complemented by emotionally grounded contrivances — in particular, membership in an exclusive secret society, and the use of the “family” as the core of each Italian crime group — which promoted shared bonds, values, and goals within each crime family and across different families that were a part of “this thing of ours.” The Cosa Nostra also benefited greatly from the partnerships they formed with other like-minded criminals, regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or location. American and Canadian mafia groups effectively incorporated the essential tactics of organized crime, in particular the use of violence and corruption, while the code of omerta ensured other crucial tenets of a criminal organization — loyalty, discipline, and silence — were maintained to protect the mafia members from arrest and prosecution.

The steady stream of Italian immigrants into Canada and the United States also meant there was an abundance of prospects from which to recruit members. Most of these immigrants came from the mafia strongholds of Sicily and Calabria and, although only a small fraction were made members of the mafia or ‘Ndrangheta, an intensive police crackdown on organized crime in Italy during the postwar years did result in an exodus of experienced mafiosi who would be influential in establishing the traditions of the secret societies in their adopted countries.

The Italian mobsters also learned the lessons of Prohibition better than anyone else: the biggest criminal profits were to be made by satisfying society’s vices and, more specifically, by controlling the manufacture or wholesaling of illicit goods, while working towards a monopoly over a particular market or territory. Italian criminal groups emerged from Prohibition with a substantial financial war chest that was re-invested into a number of illegal and heavily regulated goods and services that were in high demand. As Richard Hammer writes, for criminal entrepreneurs the Great Depression of the 1930s was in some ways superior to the heady days of the 1920s in that the “racketeers were the dispensers of dreams and escape — in the form of alcohol, gambling, money, drugs and sex — and by the early thirties they had enormous wealth and clout.”

The end of Prohibition had little effect on the emerging on the emerging mafia groups in Canada; they quickly capitalized on the increased costs of booze by providing a cheaper tax-free product that was produced in massive underground distilleries or was shipped in from abroad. It was illegal gambling and bookmaking, however, that became the singlereatest source of income for organized crime in the years immediately following Prohibition. Like booze, gambling enjoyed a popularity that cut across social classes and ethnic groups. The demand for commercial gambling outlets fuelled a dramatic increase in underground casinos, floating card games, illegal lotteries, and bookmaking operations. In 1938, the Toronto Daily Star ran a series entitled “Canada in the bookies’ web,” which investigated the “vast octopus of bookmaking” that spread from Montreal to Vancouver. Up until the end of the Second World War, the illegal gaming industry in Canada was characterized by pure competition; no one individual or group dominated. This changed at the end of the war as Italian-Canadian crime groups, backed by the money, organization, and muscle of the American mafia, began their hostile takeover of the independent professional gamblers and bookmakers. The takeover of illegal gaming in Canada by the Cosa Nostra was part of a larger plan: to gain control of ethnic Italian criminal organizations in the country, which could then be used as ground troops to monopolize the country’s most profitable criminal rackets.

If any one individual can take credit for the Cosa Nostra’s invasion of Canada, it was Charles Luciano, the far-sighted and highly ambitious American mobster who has been widely cited as the father of modern
organized crime. Inspired by the Roman Empire, Lucky Luciano sought a comparable criminal dynasty and in 1933 even created a governing Mafia Commission in the U.S. Made up of the heads of the major mafia families in New York and other American cities, the Commission acted as a sort of board of directors for the Cosa Nostra and, although it had little formal powers, it was respected enough to mete out binding decisions in disputes that arose between different families. Luciano’s grand vision also resulted in the partitioning of the United States and Canada into twenty-four separate regions, each of which would be under the jurisdiction of a particular mafia family. The implication for Canada was that it would be treated as a protectorate of the Cosa Nostra. As a result, the Montreal mafia became a wing of New York’s Bonanno Family, southwestern Ontario fell under the influence of the Detroit mob, while the rest of Ontario’s underworld became the fiefdom of Buffalo’s mafia boss Stefano Magaddino.

The servitude of Italian-Canadian crime groups to their American counterparts escalated in the early 1950s when a crackdown on organized crime in the U.S. prompted mafia leaders in that country to relocate many of their illegal gaming operations to Quebec and Ontario. Independent professional gamblers and bookmakers in Canada were put out of business, or at the very least were forced to pay a percentage of their revenues to the Cosa Nostra. Canada was also established as a major “lay-off” centre for the American mafia’s bookmaking operations (a “lay-off man” takes bets from other bookmakers who are trying to insure against heavy losses, if one horse or sports team receives heavy betting, by placing bets on the favourite with the layoff man). Through their expansion into Canada and Cuba, their move into Las Vegas, as well as shrewd investments in national and international wire services (which instantaneously transmitted information on sporting events), the Cosa Nostra created an international gambling and bookmaking network the likes of which had never been seen. As Alan Phillips wrote in a 1964 Maclean’s article, “this underworld federation is first and foremost a gambling cartel, a monopoly so well-concealed that some policemen refuse it credence. Gamblers call it ‘The Combination.’ Through a network of affiliates, a small bettor in Saskatchewan can bet on a fight in Sweden, a dog race in Florida, or a horse running on any track in America.”

The American mafia also began taking over other criminal rackets in Canada. As RCMP commissioner Clifford Harvison stated in a well-publicized address to the Canadian Club in Toronto on November 6, 1961: “the American syndicates are showing an increased interest in Canada and they are moving to take over direct control of some existing criminal organizations and to expand their criminal activities. They are already active in the field of gambling, narcotics trafficking, counterfeiting, and in the protection rackets. There are some indications and there is some evidence that the syndicates have already started to treat Canada as an area for expansion of their activities.” Commissioner Harvison’s comments prompted President John F. Kennedy to remark in 1962 that his administration’s war against organized crime must be succeeding if so many gangsters were fleeing to Canada.

**THE CANADIAN CONNECTION**

In addition to incorporating Canada into its gambling network, the Cosa Nostra was establishing its northern neighbour as a part of its international pipeline for
drugs smuggled into the United States. Throughout the 1930s, Canada’s coastlines and official maritime ports were well-travelled entry points for opium exported from Asia and morphine and heroin processed in Europe. The illegal drug supply dwindled precipitously during the war years, but by its end, the amount of opium, morphine, and heroin smuggled into Canada escalated to unprecedented levels. By 1947, the number of RCMP investigations under the *Opium and Narcotic Drug Act* had jumped by 40 percent over the previous year and in 1949 they increased by another 28 percent. The spike in supply was due to a heightened demand, which stemmed from the return of thousands of morphine-addicted war veterans and a rise in drug-friendly counterculture movements such as the beatniks. Supply also increased as the end of the war meant fewer obstacles to production in Southeast and Southwest Asia as well as the escalation of merchant shipping. The sheer profitability of the heroin trade also contributed to an abundance in supply; wholesalers paying US$3,500 for a kilo of heroin in Europe were generating revenues as high as $40,000 a kilo once it was diluted and sold on Canadian streets. A final reason the heroin supply increased in the postwar years was that production, smuggling, and wholesale distribution became concentrated in the hands of a confederation of drug trafficking syndicates — the French *L’Union Corse*, the Sicilian Mafia, the American Cosa Nostra and the Canadian ‘Ndrangheta — that together constituted one of the longest ongoing heroin trafficking conspiracies of all time.

At the start of the 1940s, Italian mafia families in the U.S. and Canada began supplanting Jewish groups as the largest illegal dispensers of opiates and, for the next forty years, they held an almost complete monopoly over the wholesale distribution of Turkish heroin in both countries. Their main suppliers were French Corsicans, who had become the world’s biggest heroin producers. The criminal syndicate behind what would be called the French Connection was *L’Union Corse*, so named because most of its leaders and members hailed from Corsica, an island located southeast of France in the Mediterranean Sea. *L’Union Corse* rivalled the Sicilian mafia in terms of the scope of its criminal operation and, according to a 1972 edition of *Time* magazine, it “is more tightly knit and more secretive than its Sicilian counterpart.” Following the end of the Second World War, *L’Union Corse* was making millions from its various illegal ventures, which included theft, extortion, counterfeiting, gambling, prostitution, immigrant smuggling, and its most profitable enterprise, heroin trafficking. The group was able to operate unfettered for years due to its infiltration of local, regional, and national government agencies in France.

Until the mid-1970s, the world capital for heroin production and distribution was the French port city of Marseilles. Located less than an hour’s plane ride from Corsica and with direct maritime connections to opium sources in Southwest Asia and to heroin markets in North America, Marseilles became the hub for the conversion of Turkish opium and Lebanese morphine into heroin. Those who took a leading role in the *L’Union Corse*, such as François Spirito, Paul Carbone, Joseph Orsini, Paul Mondolini, Antoine d’Agostino, and Jean Jehan, were responsible for supplying thousands of kilos of heroin during the height of the French Connection in the 1950s and 1960s. Carbone and Spirito were the original forces behind *L’Union Corse* and its foray into heroin production and smuggling. During the 1920s, they began importing opium from Turkey and morphine from Lebanon or Germany, which was converted into heroin in labs in Paris. Following a temporary interruption in the heroin trade because of the war (during which time Carbone was killed by the French Resistance after it was discovered that he and Spirito was collaborating with the Nazis), Spirito and his lieutenant Joseph Orsini organized the many independent opium smugglers and heroin processors into a centralized syndicate and set up processing plants in Marseilles. They also entered into a partnership with Corsican crime lord Joseph Renucci, who had connections with opium and morphine suppliers in Turkey and Lebanon as well as a powerful friend in Charles Luciano, who was now setting up his own drug smuggling networks. By the end of the 1940s, a seamless international narcotics cartel was in place whereby brokers working on behalf of the Corsicans purchased opium in Turkey, which would be smuggled into Syria or Lebanon to be processed into morphine, and then shipped to one of the many clandestine laboratories in Marseilles, where it would be processed into heroin and then smuggled to the U.S. and Canada.
Quebec’s cultural, commercial, and linguistic ties to France, the subservience of the mafia in the province to the American Cosa Nostra, as well as Montreal’s inviting seaports and close proximity to New York, made the city a major entry point for heroin being shipped into North America. According to a 1963 U.S. Senate Committee on organized crime, “in the early 1950’s, the clandestine processing of heroin from morphine base had shifted to the hands of the French Corsican traffickers, along with a substantial share of the import trade into the United States. The advent of the Corsicans as major traffickers brought changes in the smuggling operations; for years, the main port of entry had been New York but now the French Corsicans supplied the drugs to their French-speaking Canadian confederates for smuggling into the United States.” One of the first French-Canadian customers of the Corsicans was Lucien Rivard, who in turn was supplying two of Canada’s biggest heroin dealers in the immediate postwar years: the Mallock brothers.

John and George Mallock originally hailed from Winnipeg where they were well known to local police as small-time criminals. Around 1947, John began dealing small amounts of heroin in Winnipeg while his brother was serving time for assault. Business prospered and as the revenues accumulated, he built his own drug-dealing organization, forcing out competition in Manitoba and then moving into Saskatchewan and Alberta. When George Mallock was released from jail in 1949, John was already one of the biggest heroin traffickers in the prairie provinces. The two brothers then struck out on an even more ambitious quest: to take over the lucrative heroin traffic in British Columbia. According to a 1950 RCMP report, during the summer of that year, the Mallock brothers “took up residence in Vancouver and set out to take control of the distribution of illicit narcotics in that city with the intention of eventually extending their operations into the Western United States.” While John was organizing new deliveries through Lucien Rivard, George and another member of his trafficking network, named William Carter, were supplying street-level dealers in Vancouver and Seattle. By July, the Seattle office of the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics was alerted to their presence in the city and one of their agents, Henry L. Giordano (who would later head the bureau), was dispatched to Vancouver as part of an undercover operation. Through a police agent, Giordano was introduced to Carter and, in September of that year, he purchased an ounce of heroin from him. This led to the arrest of Carter and then the Mallock brothers after police discovered in George Mallock’s possession $500 in the marked money that was used to buy the drugs. Police also seized heroin with an estimated street value of $20,000 from George’s common-law wife.

A judge set the Mallock brothers’ bail at $20,000 each, but they easily raised the funds, while leaving behind their destitute partner, William Carter. When their trial began on January 30, 1951, John and George were nowhere to be seen and bench warrants were issued for their arrests. While the two were on the run, Carter was convicted and sentenced to seven years. By the end of November 1951, the RCMP had learned that the brothers had managed to sneak into the United States, with the help of Lucien Rivard, although it wasn’t until late 1953 that George was captured. Even while
on the lam, they were working on drug deals; George visited Rivard in Montreal in September 1953 where he purchased a kilo that was sent to Winnipeg, while John had travelled to Mexico to purchase heroin there. While in Montreal, George Mallock was also buying directly from Corsican Antoine d'Agostino, who was emerging as a major heroin supplier to Canadian dealers. In 1953, George was arrested in New York City along with d'Agostino’s chief courier, and was extradited to Vancouver where he was sentenced to twenty-one years in March 1954. His brother’s trail was picked up in Mexico, but before he could be arrested, he died just a month after George’s conviction. Some believe the highly suspicious car accident that took John Mallock’s life was orchestrated by d’Agostino, who exacted revenge when he was never fully paid by John for five kilos of heroin he purchased from d’Agostino.

In addition to the Mallock brothers, Rivard was supplying members of the Montreal mafia. Throughout the 1950s, the Cosa Nostra and its Canadian branches were the biggest patrons of the heroin trafficking arm of L’Union Corse and their relationship was highly flexible. On some occasions, the Corsicans arranged to smuggle the drugs out of Europe to New York or Montreal, where it would be wholesaled to mafia groups. On other occasions, individual members of American and Canadian mafia groups coordinated the smuggling, which sometimes entailed working through a Sicilian intermediary. Regardless, by the end of the 1950s, the mafia had a stranglehold on the wholesale distribution of Corsican-processed heroin in the United States and Canada.

In addition to the Corsicans, Charlie Luciano was also behind the massive postwar heroin trade. Despite his varied career as a mobster, he actually began as a drug trafficker and was first convicted in 1915, at the age of eighteen, for selling morphine and heroin. By the mid-1920s, he and another prolific mafia narcotics dealer named Vito Genovese were financing heroin shipments to America. When Prohibition ended, Luciano ramped up his drug trafficking activities, negotiating deals with Corsican suppliers Spirito and Carbone, diverting legally produced heroin from Italian pharmaceutical firms (a 1950 investigation by the Bureau of Narcotics alleged that over a four-year period at least 700 kilos of heroin had been supplied to Luciano from the Schiaparelli drug company), and working with his Cosa Nostra colleagues to set up distribution networks in the U.S. When Luciano was deported to Italy in January of 1946, he began working with mafia families in Sicily to import opium from Turkey and the Far East, as well as morphine from Lebanon. Freighters would offload the opium or morphine to fishing boats waiting off the coast of Sicily, and once on shore, the drugs would be transported to heroin processing labs, like the one in Palermo that was disguised as a candy factory. Luciano was also organizing what was called the “American Colony,” a network of other deported Italian-Americans who he posted throughout Italian and French ports to coordinate drug shipments back to the U.S. in tandem with New York’s Lucchese, Genovese, and Gambino families.

A major turning point in the development of the international heroin trade, and Canada’s role in the trade, purportedly occurred over a four-day period in October 1957 when Luciano hosted meetings in
Palermo at the Grand Hôtel des Palmes. Attending the meeting were a delegation of American mafia leaders, most notably Joe Bonanno and his underboss Carmine Galante, as well as Sicilian mafiosi Gaetano Badalamenti and Tommaso Buscetta. Among the outcomes of the meeting was the establishment of a transatlantic heroin trafficking accord between Sicilian and North American mafia families to smuggle heroin from Marseilles to Sicily and then to the United States and Canada. The FBI believed it was at this meeting that Joseph Bonanno was convinced to participate in the Cosa Nostra's international heroin trafficking network. Whether this claim is true, there is no doubt that starting in the late 1950s, members of the Bonanno Family in New York and Montreal became much more active in organizing the importation and distribution of heroin, which significantly increased Montreal's role as a North American access point for European-processed heroin.

As Lee Lamothe and Adrian Humphreys write, Gaetano Badalamenti was highly receptive to the partnership, recognizing the American market for heroin would generate untold profits for the Sicilian families. However, the greedy Badalamenti made a decision behind the back of his American mafia partners that escalated the role of Canada in the new global heroin trafficking hierarchy even further. He directed his underling Tommasso Buscetta to travel to North America, but “rather than deal strictly through the Bonanno Family receivers, Buscetta was instructed to create a parallel pipeline from Sicily to Montreal, Windsor, Toronto and, from there, into the United States. Both networks would pass through Canada en route to America.” The result of this historic meeting, according to the 1963 Senate committee, was the establishment of a well-coordinated and highly flexible international trafficking conspiracy whereby heroin manufactured in Marseilles would take what the committed described as “one of several routes toward its eventual destination in the United States. A large part of the heroin is sold by the Corsican racketeers to their close associates, the mafia traffickers in mainland Italy or in Sicily. From any of a number of Italian seaports — Naples, Milan, Genoa, Palermo, Rome — shipments are routed to this country by way of certain ports of entry — notably New York and other Atlantic seaboard ports, Montreal or Toronto in Canada, or Mexico City. The French traffickers also deal directly with heroin buyers in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.”

The Palermo meeting was followed a month later by a summit of Cosa Nostra leaders from every corner of America and Canada. Held at mafia associate Joseph Barbara’s country estate in the town of Apalachin in upstate New York, it has been asserted that one of the purposes of the meeting was to hammer out the details for the distribution of the heroin in America and Canada by the different mafia families. Some believe that the decisions made at this meeting reaffirmed the use of Ontario and Quebec as landing and distribution points for heroin destined to the United States. Facilitating the importation of the heroin into Canada were the branch plants of the American Cosa Nostra — the Cotroni group in Montreal, which reported to the Bonanno Family, and in Ontario, Anthony Sylvestro, the Agueci brothers and John Papalia, who reported to Stefano Magadino in Buffalo, but who also worked with New York City’s Genovese Family.

The U.S. Bureau of Narcotics estimated that between the end of the Second World War and 1963, the Cosa Nostra was responsible for 95 percent of all the heroin smuggled into the United States. While this estimate may be a slight exaggeration, what cannot be denied is that during roughly the same period, police in United States and Canada investigated dozens of major importation conspiracies that brought in thousands of kilos of almost pure heroin and which led to the conviction of more than three hundred people in the two countries. Many of these were “made” members of mafia families. As illegal drug use skyrocketed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Montreal and Toronto continued to serve as conduits for European heroin imported into North America. The only difference was that the mode of transportation had shifted from the sea to the air, which meant that airports in both cities became the sites for some of the biggest heroin busts in the country.

In 1971, the Nixon administration persuaded Turkey to ban the cultivation of opium in exchange for subsidization of alternative crops. That same year, an official agreement was reached with French authorities...
to crack down on the extensive heroin processing and trafficking network based in Marseilles. The result of these measures was a major reorganization of heroin trafficking: Turkey was replaced as the chief supplier of heroin by the “golden triangle” of Thailand, Burma, and Laos and the “golden crescent” of Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. The breakup of L’Union Corse provided the Sicilian and American mafia families with an even greater monopoly over the Southwest Asian heroin traffic and Sicily resumed its role as a major heroin processor in the mid-1970s. By the late 1970s, Sicilian Mafia families in partnership with their American colleagues, and the Bonanno Family in particular, established another massive heroin importation conspiracy, which came to be known as the Pizza Connection because much of the heroin that made it into America was sold through mafia-connected pizza parlours.

The disruption of the Pizza Connection by American and Italian law enforcement signalled the end of the mafia’s dominance in the global heroin trade. But the international heroin partnership forged between the French Corsicans, the Sicilian Mafia, the Cosa Nostra and its Canadian subsidiaries in the postwar period remains one of the biggest ongoing drug trafficking conspiracies in the 20th century. It not only transformed Italian organized crime and modernized the international narcotics trade, but it gave Canada and Canadian mobsters a pivotal role in the global heroin traffic, while further pulling the country’s criminal underworld into the orbit of the Cosa Nostra.
Despite the end of Prohibition, contraband liquor continued to be one of the most profitable sources of illegal revenue for criminal groups in Quebec. While the American market dried up for Canadian bootleggers, a steady increase in liquor taxes at home reinvigorated a domestic contraband market. And in what can be considered a case of Canadian karma, the increased liquor taxes spurred the smuggling of low-cost booze from St. Pierre and Miquelon, the United States, and the West Indies into Canada. With a vast smuggling infrastructure already in place, and the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway as a shipping route in 1937, Montreal was the destination of choice for fleets of motorboats that transported thousands of cases of booze into the city on a monthly basis. In its annual report for 1938, the RCMP acknowledged there was "considerable" liquor smuggling activity in the Lower St. Lawrence River "most of which was brought over by larger vessels from St. Pierre and Miquelon. No fewer than sixteen contact boats were seized in the Lower St. Lawrence, twelve of which were forfeited for having smuggled liquor on board, and destroyed."

During the 1930s, the biggest illegal-liquor dealer in Montreal was Joe Normandin, who, according to the same RCMP report, "had been engaged in the traffic for a number of years and had built up a complicated system which made it extremely difficult to secure information regarding his activities." After several truckloads of liquor were seized by the Mounties in 1936, Normandin was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to four months in jail and fined $2,000. In 1937, he was freed after his lawyers successfully appealed the conviction and, upon release, he immediately returned to peddling illegal liquor. His network of bootleggers was now under intense law enforcement scrutiny, however, which resulted in more liquor seizures and arrests. On August 24, 1937, a truck carrying 97 gallons of alcohol was stopped by police and one of Normandin's drivers was charged and sentenced to twelve months. On November 12, 1937, the RCMP discovered 3,034 gallons of illegally imported American and European spirits in the basement of a west end Montreal home. The ensuing investigation linked the cache to Normandin, who was again arrested and charged. A month later, police stopped another one of his trucks with more than 321 gallons of illicit liquor and Normandin on board. He tried to escape but was captured and once again placed under arrest. This time, he was sentenced to twelve
months in jail, which was to run concurrent with his previous sentences.

Large quantities of smuggled liquor destined for Quebec were also being landed in the Maritimes. In its 1938 annual report, the RCMP wrote, “liquor vessels were quite active throughout the entire navigation season off the coasts of the three Maritime Provinces. The bulk of the shipments apparently originated at Mt. Martin’s French West Indies, which has become the chief point of trans-shipment for rum intended for the Canadian trade.” Mother ships hovered in international waters, while under the cover of darkness “cargoes of alcohol and mixed liquors are illegally loaded on schooners and motor boats.” These cargoes were then landed on the shores of Cape Breton, the northern coast of New Brunswick and Quebec, and in the Bay of Fundy.

A 1936 report by the Canadian Department of Transport described how the S.S. Reidun, flying the Norwegian flag, unloaded a cargo of more than 30,000 cases of liquor in international waters off the coast of Nova Scotia between November 10 and 13, 1935. Over the course of those four days, five Canadian-registered speedboats made several trips to relieve the freighter of its cargo. The Reidun had been charted by the Shaw Steamship Line of Nova Scotia, and an employee of the company was reported to have boarded the vessel 100 miles off St. Pierre to oversee the offloading onto the smaller boats. The Department of Transport had evidence that Shaw Steamship Line had charted at least two other freighters for similar purposes, including the Trajan (which offloaded 14,838 cases of spirits) and the Anders (5,085 cases). All of the cargo was ultimately delivered to Montreal. In 1939, the RCMP initiated an extensive investigation targeting what they considered to be the single-largest liquor smuggling organization operating off Canada’s east coast. By the end of the year, charges were laid against forty-eight people, of whom forty-two were convicted. Thousands of gallons of liquor were confiscated, as were numerous ships, most of which were forfeited to the Crown. The organization’s smuggling activities were so widespread that as part of the investigation the RCMP examined approximately 75,000 postal money orders, 50,000 railway express delivery receipts, 50,000 express waybills, and 15,000 postal money orders.

Those who preferred to avoid the risk of smuggling liquor into the country set up illegal distilleries. On the afternoon of September 16, 1937, Quebec Liquor Commission officers seized a large commercial still in the Rosemount district of Montreal and arrested Romeo Berube of Montreal, Max Bittman of Cleveland, and Robert McCullen of New York. A fourth man, who had the misfortune of arriving with a truckload of sugar, molasses, and yeast just after the provincial officials showed up, was also arrested. The still was located at the rear of a bankrupt bakery called Mother’s Tasty Pies. The bakery had been purchased by the bootleggers and its former owner was paid to reopen it as a cover for their illegal liquor production. After being handed two-year terms, Bittman and McCullen sought to reduce their sentences by providing information on a province-wide network of stills of which they were only a small part. An investigation was launched that led to the arrest of six more men on conspiracy charges. Among them were Sam Chernoff and Robert Pageau. Chernoff was already well known to Quebec police, having been arrested in 1934 on charges of conspiring to defraud the government of $250,000 by illegally importing 15,000 gallons of alcohol from the United States. After a long court case, all were convicted; Chernoff was sentenced to three years and Pageau to two. Other investigations that spun off from this case resulted in the arrest of another forty-five people who were tied to the province-wide network. Police marvelled at the scope and sophistication of the operation; experienced American engineers were brought in to build commercial-capacity stills; numerous bankrupt businesses were purchased as fronts; elaborate distribution schemes that transported the liquor across the province were set up; and an insurance policy of weekly payments of $25 were made to the families of any of the conspirators arrested and jailed.

By the start of the Second World War, the majority of the contraband liquor available in Canada was smuggled into the country, due to the domestic rationing of ingredients necessary for homemade distilling, such as sugar or molasses. In addition to liquor, numerous other products were being smuggled into the country because of shortages of goods or outright bans that were in place due to wartime conditions.
Among the contraband most frequently seized by border officials were tobacco products, tea, coffee, silks and other textiles, cars and car parts, and household electrical appliances. In addition to goods that were being smuggled in, Canada was also a source of contraband for black markets in wartorn Great Britain and Europe. An April 5, 1943 memo from the Paymaster Captain of the Canadian Navy read, “large scale smuggling of tea, tobacco and cigarettes has recently been discovered in N. Ireland” and the “Canadian corvettes are alleged to be the worst offenders.” The majority of contraband cigarettes found in the U.K. “are American or Canadian and one 25 lb. case of tea is addressed to N.S.O., Halifax, and is still wire bound.” The memo ends with a request from the British Admiralty that steps be taken to warn “the Masters and crews of H.M. Canadian ships of the serious consequences which may follow detection of such trafficking.”

In the postwar period, cigarettes became the commodity of choice for most smugglers, once again owing to Canadian tax hikes that increased the cost of a pack to an all-time high. The enormous volume of cigarettes illegally crossing the border pushed seizures under the Customs and Excise Act to their highest level since statistics were maintained. In 1945, more than 3,223 seizure reports were made by federal agencies, an increase of 722 cases over the previous year. This escalation, according to a RCMP report, is largely “accounted for by the increased number of seizures made of non-duty paid cigarettes entering from the U.S.A.” While a large proportion of these seizures were from individuals bringing tobacco products across the border for personal use, the RCMP also investigated a number of well-organized cigarette smuggling operations. In 1950, more than 450,000 cigarettes were seized from one smuggling group alone. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the RCMP was also busy investigating groups that were smuggling new cars, stolen in the United States, into Canada.

In 1954, concurrent investigations in Quebec and New York uncovered what police called a $3-million black market in babies in which more than one thousand were smuggled out of Montreal and then sold in the U.S. over a ten-year period. According to a Canadian Press report that year, information obtained by police indicated that most of the babies were sold in the United States to Jewish couples “who were led to believe the French-Canadian and other Christian infants were born of parents of the Jewish faith.” The American buyers reportedly paid from $3,000 to $10,000 for each baby. Most of the infants were said to have come from unwed mothers in Quebec who were “given amounts up to $50 and their living-in expenses paid,” the Canadian Press article stated. “Others had their babies snatched away virtually without the mothers’ consent.” The infant racketeering schemes included the falsification of birth records and involved lawyers, doctors, nurses, and nursing-home operators. “The rings are said to have thrived because official child-placement agencies in the United States have long waiting lists, particularly of Jewish couples.”

**THE VICE CAPITAL OF CANADA**

Contraband liquor, untaxed cigarettes, and black-market babies were not the only revenue generators for organized criminals in Quebec following the end of Prohibition. Throughout the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the postwar years, Montreal’s vice economy continued to thrive. Despite judicial inquiries, new laws, and intensified police enforcement, the city’s reputation as a “wide-open town,” the “vice capital of Canada,” and the “Paris of North America” remained intact. As Alan Phillips wrote in his 1963 exposé on organized crime in Canada, the city’s “two hundred night clubs offered entertainment second only to New York. Its bordellos were famous. Its wide-open dice games drew an international clientele. You could bet any sum on a game or a horse through fifty-some wire-serviced bookmakers.” Montreal’s reputation as a sink of iniquity was bolstered during the postwar years with the invasion of American mobsters, who brought with them scores of bookmakers, crooked stockbrokers, strong-arm crews, and heroin importers. At the vanguard of the American interlopers were senior members of the Cosa Nostra, who carried across the border ambitions to take over and consolidate Montreal’s rackets. Responsibility for overseeing the Quebec interests of the American mafia was eventually delegated to a man who went on to become perhaps the most successful and powerful mafioso in Canadian history: Vincenzo Cotroni. As the head of the Canadian wing of New York City’s Bonanno Family,
Cotroni ruled over a criminal empire that lasted more than forty years.

The foundation for Vic Cotroni’s ascension as Canada’s leading mafia don was Montreal’s gambling and bookmaking industry, which expanded dramatically throughout the 1940s and 1950s due to a number of reasons. This included the large number of troops transiting through the city on their way to and from Europe, the introduction of long-distance telephone and the wire service, a crackdown on illegal gambling in the United States, and the consolidation of Quebec’s betting operations by well-oiled American syndicates. By the mid-1940s, a gambler could lay a bet in one of over two hundred establishments in greater Montreal that collectively generated $100 million a year in revenue. A 1946 *Time* magazine article describes how gambling at the luxurious Mount Royal Bridge Club, located in a small municipality just beyond the westernmost limits of the city, often took in as much as $100,000 on weekends through its crap games and roulette wheels. A series of *Montreal Gazette* articles published in the summer of 1945 reported that during their peak periods between 9 p.m. and 4 a.m., the city’s barbotte houses — so named after a dice game similar to craps — employed close to four hundred people who collected $75,000 in bets every hour. One of the largest barbotte houses, the University Bridge Club, located at 1222 University Street, “is always open and you can walk in as easily as in any local store,” a Gazette reporter observed. “After climbing a flight of stairs, you are welcomed by the checkroom attendant, who directs you politely to the first smoke filled room where the ‘big’ table is.” With single bets as high as $1,000 and an average of about $4,700 on the table for each roll of the dice, clients who placed less than $25 on the table were generally frowned upon. To accommodate players, most of the barbotte houses had their own restaurant with waitresses who brought sandwiches and soft drinks to the players so that they would not lose their seats at the table. In addition to gambling, the Gazette reported, barbotte houses also sold many other “commodities rarely seen in law-abiding places.”

In addition to these clubs, there were the floating barbotte games that were ferried from one location to another by taxis and moving companies in only a matter of minutes. For those who preferred to play the lottery, Montreal’s Chinatown was the place to be. Lottery tickets were available from numerous Chinese merchants, with draws occurring at 2:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m., and 11:30 p.m. For those too impatient to wait, “quick draws” were offered. Gamblers in Montreal also had the luxury of betting on horse races from all across North America through local bookmakers equipped with long-distance telephone and telegraph connections, including one who had been lodged for years in a building at the corner of Ontario and St. Lawrence and who shared office space with a printer that supplied racing sheets.

Between July 5 and July 18, 1945, police raided forty-two gambling houses in Montreal, arresting 515 people. Since most of the charges were not for criminal infractions, the majority of those taken into custody were released after pleading guilty and paying a $100 fine (for the operators) or a $25 fine (for the “found-ins”). The Gazette estimated that during the mid-1940s, the city of Montreal took in approximately $300,000 annually in fines against those “found guilty of offences against morality — that is gambling and prostitution.” As in years past, police and other city officials were accused of lacking a serious commitment to shutting down the underground gambling halls, which was evidenced by the small fines, the absence of jail time, and the fact that most operations were up-and-running twenty-four hours (or sooner) after they had been raided by police. One press report described how, following a police raid at 9:30 p.m. on a Wednesday night in July 1945, the University Bridge Club was “going ‘wide open’ again” by midnight with more than one hundred clients “crowding around the same four tables that have been there for some months.” It continued its operations as usual on Thursday “while its alleged operator and 37 found-ins were being arraigned in Recorder’s Court.” On September 28, 1945, the morality squad padlocked thirty-one barbotte houses in raids that lasted from the early afternoon to midnight. By October 2, the Gazette noted that twenty-one of the games that had supposedly been shut down were “still going openly at the same locations as before while two others [had] moved to a nearby address after leaving a man to give
the new location to all comers. Three establishments are really closed while one of the civic addresses given by police as having been padlocked does not exist.” After its original location was padlocked by police, the University Bridge Club moved to a nearby street. Reporters visiting the old address found a man casually sitting at a small table providing the new address to anyone unaware of the move.

The lax enforcement of the law on gambling operations was epitomized by a commonly used law that mockingly became known as the “comedy of padlocks.” Municipal statutes stipulated that police must padlock establishments that provided illegal gambling or prostitution if two offences had been committed in the span of twelve months. However, these ordinances were easily circumvented by crafty operators working in tandem with corrupt government officials. Padlocks were fastened to dummy doors, brick walls, kitchen cupboards, and, in one case, a tool shed located behind a building. In some establishments, gamblers were inconvenienced when the only room available to padlock was the coatroom, or worse, the bathroom. A screwdriver was always handy in one apartment building that housed numerous barbotte games to quickly remove the numbers from the apartment doors to be padlocked so they could be fastened to others that were empty. Before long, the barbotte operator found this too inconvenient and simply had all the apartment door numbers written in chalk. Two newspaper reporters who visited six establishments that were supposed to have been padlocked a day earlier found five of them still open while the sixth had moved to another location. As they walked up the stairs of one barbotte house, the reporters spotted a set of double doors. On one of the doors was a padlock and a court-ordered seal marked “closed by police.” As they went in through the adjoining unlocked door, they realized that it opened onto the same room as the sealed door. Once inside they found the room filled with dice-throwing players crowded around four tables.

Allegations of lackadaisical enforcement, protection of gambling operations, and corruption within the Montreal police force resulted in yet another public inquiry — the Commission of Inquiry into Gambling and Commercialized Vice in Montreal — this one held between 1950 and 1953 under Justice François Caron. One long-time manager of a gambling house testified before the inquiry that the officer in charge of a police raiding party was normally “given a $20 or a $50 bill as a tip from the management of the house.” The witness made it clear that this was not a bribe to the police officers, however. “It was just for being gentlemen and carrying out their duties.”

The morality squad of the Montreal police was also accused of receiving bribes from Chinese lottery houses, each of which was charged a monthly $100 levy by leading Chinatown merchants who then passed the graft money to police officials. Deals were purportedly arranged between some gaming operators and city police whereby the former would be allowed to operate unfettered, as long as the latter were given the opportunity to conduct “show raids” every so often. During these raids, the management of a gambling house would offer up “stooges” or “straws” who would be arrested. Because police also had to show they were seizing prohibited gaming equipment, the gambling house operators offered up old decks of cards, dice, chips, roulette wheels, folding tables, and even “dummy tables” that were prepared by carpenters who were kept on staff for such purposes. A member of the police morality squad told the commission that when raiding a brothel, they ordinarily arrested the woman who opened the door. One forty-seven-year-old housekeeper who worked in many of the twenty-four brothels operated by Montreal’s most enterprising madam, Anna Beauchamp, admitted that she had been arrested on eighty-five separate occasions. Mme Beauchamp was a familiar figure at the courthouse. The flamboyant brothel operator would arrive in her chauffeur-driven Cadillac and then stride down the corridors in her mink coat, swinging a large red handbag. Before she paid the fine for her “straw women,” she would chat with the other madams and police officers to whom she would provide advice on which brothels should be raided in the upcoming month.

Barney Shulkin, who had worked for fifteen years as a slip writer at one of Montreal’s largest bookmaking operations at 286 St. Catherine Street West, was informed by the commission that, before 1947, he had been convicted 102 times as a keeper of a betting house. He told the inquiry that this number sounded
about right to him, but he assured the commis-

sion that he never spent any time in jail, except on those occasions when he had to wait in the holding cell before his boss, Louis Klitzner, came to pay his bail or fine. When questioned, Shulkin told the inquiry he made $30 a week, but denied it was part of his job to be arrested:

**Q:** How can you explain that you were arrested so many times as keeper of the “book?”

**Shulkin:** I don't know. I think it's because the informer always picked on me.

**Q:** What happened when the police raided the place?

**Shulkin:** Well, they rushed in, and everybody was scared.

**Q:** Were you scared, too?

**Shulkin:** Sure, I was scared. You see them come in like that. Some of the people tried to run away, others wanted to jump out the window.

**Q:** But you weren't sufficiently scared to quit?

**Shulkin:** Well, it’s a living. I have to work.

**Q:** What did the police do when they raided the place?

**Shulkin:** They rushed for the counter and took the money on the counter, and then they lined up everybody and the fellow in charge of morality took the names.

**Q:** After the police raid what happened?

**Shulkin:** All the people went out and we were left alone.

**Q:** Who was left alone?

**Shulkin:** The keeper and employees. Naturally, half an hour later they came back.

**Q:** Who came back?

**Shulkin:** Why, the people who were betting.

**Q:** Did the police come back?

**Shulkin:** Oh, no. But maybe they went to visit some other place.

**“THE HORSES FORGOT TO WIN”**

Before the takeover of Montreal's vice rackets by the American mafia, many of the city's gambling and bookmaking operations were run by Jewish syndi-
cates. Upon his release from prison in the mid-1940s, Harry Davis resumed his position as Montreal's most powerful gambling czar. Not only did he run his own gaming houses, but he had a say in who else could operate in the city's red-light district and received an estimated 20 percent of the net returns from other gambling operators. Davis was also an investor in the largest gambling house in all of Greater Montreal, the Mount Royal Bridge Club. The sprawling edifice, which was built on rural property in the Montreal suburb of Côte Saint-Luc at an estimated cost of $100,000, was located directly across the road from the home of the town's police chief and lone constable. A 1945 *Montreal Gazette* article describes how taxi drivers were paid double their fare to transport customers to the club, which included “hundreds of prominent citizens.” Opened in the summer of 1944 by “a powerful syndicate headed by a local sports promoter and a Toronto operator,” the building was subdivided into several rooms, had a capacity of close to 150 people, and featured craps, roulette wheels, *chemin de fer*, and barbotte. The death of Harry Davis in 1946 sparked an even greater proliferation of gambling venues in Montreal, as the profit potential increased due to the elimination of Davis' automatic cut. Eddie Baker, who ran a bookmaking operation at 362 Notre Dame Street West, attempted to fill the void left by the death of his old drug trafficking colleague by demanding protection money from barbotte operators. But Baker was outmanoeuvred by a rival named Harry Ship, who would go on to become the new “King of the Montreal Gamblers.” It was also Ship who would inadvertently provide the beachhead that allowed for the takeover of Montreal's underworld by the Cosa Nostra.

Born in 1915, Harry Ship was a mathematics student at Queen's University before dropping out and beginning a career as a bookmaker's clerk. Although little is known about Ship, he possessed a number of attributes that propelled him to prominence among professional gamblers in Montreal: he had a great mind for business, was well respected among his peers, was highly innovative when it came to using new technology, and was a brilliant mathematician. In 1940, he began Montreal's largest bookmaking enterprise at the time when he converted several apartments in a St. Catherine Street residential building. Ship equipped
each apartment with five telephone lines and several blackboards. Adapting the headsets worn by Bell telephone operators with long extension cords, each bookie was now free to take calls and write bets on blackboards simultaneously — an innovation that allowed Ship to cut personnel costs by combining two jobs into one. Business became so brisk that Ship used partitions to subdivide apartments into halves and then quarters. Each cubicle housed a slip writer, five telephones, and one or more blackboards, and the partitioned apartments became so stuffy that the bookies were often found working in their underwear. Ship had Barney Shulkin’s brother Joe supply racing forms from his nearby printing office and, by 1943, he was contracting with the telegram service of the Canadian National Railway to receive the results of horse races and sports scores. He also had a sports ticker service installed in the hall of the building and, in 1946, this was hooked up to a Trans-Lux projector, which illuminated onto a large screen the racing information coming in over the ticker service.

Harry Ship’s bookmakers took bets on races and sporting events from across North America. His long-distance bills (all addressed to and personally paid by Harry Ship) were so large that the Bell Telephone Company required him to make a monthly deposit of $500 (which was raised to $1,000 as the number of telephones multiplied). His bookmaking operations covered so many events and his slip writers took so many wagers that blackboards had to be replaced on a monthly basis. When he appeared before the Caron Commission in 1952, Ship admitted that between 1940 and 1946 he grossed more than $1 million annually from his bookmaking business, most of which was deposited into a bank account registered in the name of the Victory Cigar Store. During the same period, Ship’s St. Catherine Street operations was raided thirty-four times by police, leading to thirty-seven convictions against his bookies, the padlocking of various apartments in the building, and thousands of dollars in fines. “The fines we paid took care of the
police department’s salaries, or a large part of them, and the city coffers were getting fat,” he said. “I think that’s why we were tolerated.”

Despite his substantial revenue, Ship cried poverty when he was arrested on gambling charges in 1946. “The horses forgot to win,” he laconically explained to Justice Caron. On January 8, 1948, the thirty-three-year-old was convicted on three counts of operating an illegal gaming house and was sentenced to six months in prison. Ship’s assertion that he was broke may very well have been true. He was an inveterate gambler who had no qualms about betting thousands of dollars on a single horse race or sporting event. Because of his chronic gambling, Ship became indebted to Frank Erikson, one of the biggest and wealthiest bookmakers on the American eastern seaboard. By taking lay-off bets from other bookies across the United States and Canada, Erickson reportedly made bank deposits that totalled more than $6 million over a period of just four years. Erikson had numerous silent partners in his gambling and bookmaking operations. Among these were some of America’s most powerful mobsters — Meyer Lansky, Lucky Luciano, and Frank Costello. Whether or not he knew it at the time, Harry Ship was now indebted to the Cosa Nostra.

Enter Luigi (Louis) Greco and Frank Petrula, two Montreal-based criminals with ties to Costello and Luciano, who became aware of Ship’s indebtedness and saw this as a golden opportunity to take over his rackets. Greco and Petrula both got their start in Montreal’s gangland as bodyguards for Harry Davis. Greco was a short, squat man, with matching dark brown hair and eyes and a face that bore a passing resemblance to that of Babe Ruth. Born on September 19, 1913, Greco emigrated from Sicily to Montreal as a child with his family and was only a teenager when he received his first conviction for assault. After he began working for Davis as a bodyguard, Greco quickly moved up the ranks due to his ready use of violence and the cash he generated for Davis by robbing gambling

Harry Ship (centre) in a Montreal courtroom during his 1946 trial
operations that refused to pay protection money. In 1936, Greco was convicted of armed robbery and sentenced to eleven years in prison. Frank Petrula was the son of Ukrainian immigrants and specialized in car theft, bank robberies, and drug trafficking. He was described in a 1963 article on Quebec organized crime as the embodiment of the quintessential Hollywood movie gangster: “He was darkly good-looking, thin and high-strung, and dressed like a clothing ad.”

Petrula and Greco took over many of Davis’ rackets when he was killed in 1946 and viewed Ship’s operations as another stepping stone to controlling professional gambling in Montreal. With the backing of Frank Costello and Charles Luciano, Greco and Petrula had Erikson pressure Ship to take the two men on as partners in his Montreal bookmaking operations. Erickson, Costello, and Luciano probably did not need much convincing; not only would they receive a cut of the profits, but all three were well aware of the opportunities that stemmed from establishing a presence in Quebec. Erikson and Costello were interested in moving some of their American bookmaking and gambling operations to Canada because of the government crackdowns in the United States, while Luciano recognized Montreal as a key entry point for heroin imported into North America from Europe. Ship had little choice but to take Petrula and Greco on as partners.

Before long, Costello and other American crime bosses began instructing their bookies and other hired help to pack up and relocate to Montreal, with assurances from Greco and Petrula that they would be provided protection from the municipal and provincial police. By the spring of 1953, the groundwork had been laid for a radical re-alignment of the city’s criminal world. This included the arrival of some of the largest criminal combines from the United States, the establishment of Montreal as one of the biggest bookmaking centres on the continent, the eventual consolidation of local rackets under New York’s mafia.
families, and the transformation of organized crime in Quebec into a branch of the Cosa Nostra.

As RCMP commissioner C.W. Harvison put it in 1962, a number of well-known bookmakers “made their permanent residence in Montreal, operating there behind the facade of commercial establishments, conducting their operations by batteries of telephones, and connected to other bookmakers in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Windsor, Hamilton, Ottawa, Quebec City and the Maritimes, as well as all major cities in the U.S.A.” Leo Schaffer transferred his massive bookmaking network from Chicago to Montreal. Gil Beckley, Cincinnati’s leading bookie, drove straight to the city in his Cadillac. Morris Schmeizer (a.k.a. Max Courtney) and his partner, Frank Ritter (a.k.a. Frank Reed), who had set up gambling operations in the Bahamas with money from Meyer Lansky, began a giant lay-off business between New York, Miami, and Montreal, piling up telephone bills that ran as high as $15,000 a month. Gordon Collins arrived via New York and set up his bookies in two Montreal apartments that were linked together by a phone extension so bets taken by phone in one apartment were recorded in another. Lookout men stood at the front of the building with buzzers to announce the arrival of police, and lit cigars were always at the ready to incinerate the chemically treated flash paper that was used to record bets. Almost all of the newly arrived bookmaking operations were connected to wire services, including the storefront located at Ontario and St. Lawrence streets, where a master control fed race information into a battery of phones that supplied almost fifty bookie joints. Bets that totalled millions of dollars monthly flowed in from every part of North America. One journalist estimated Gordon Collins’ revenues to be $3 million a year, while Charlie Gordon, who hailed from Shreveport, Louisiana, and leased a suite in Montreal’s Crydon Hotel, claimed that the profit for one season of football bets alone was $2 million. Overseeing each of Montreal’s newest professional gamblers was a personal attaché to the heads of the New York families who ensured their bosses received an appropriate cut.

The favourable climate Montreal offered to American bookmakers, combined with the substantial revenue now being generated, meant that the appearance of high-ranking New York criminal overlords in the city was inevitable. Of all the American gangsters who arrived in Montreal during the postwar years, none was more powerful, more ruthless, more closely connected to the heads of the New York families, and more influential in the Cosa Nostra’s takeover of organized crime in Montreal, than the man called “Mr. Lillo.” In 1953, Carmine Galante, an underboss with the Bonanno Family, relocated from Brooklyn to Montreal to run the New York families’ bookmaking and gambling operations in the city. But this was not enough to satiate his Machiavellian ambitions; he wanted a cut of all criminal rackets and any business operating on the fringe in Montreal. As Lee Lamothe and Adrian Humphreys write in their history of the Montreal mafia, “Mature as the city’s underworld was by Canadian standards, it was a shadow of what Galante envisioned it could be: nightclubs and restaurants were not being shaken down thoroughly enough, pimps and madams operating brothels were paying a mere pittance and back alley abortionists had somehow escaped altogether the underworld imperative of paying kickbacks to the mob to be allowed to work in peace.” Galante also recognized the pivotal part Montreal played as a gateway for European heroin entering North America and was determined to expand that role, while enriching himself in the process.

Galante was in his early forties when he arrived in Montreal. He was a short, bald, paunchy, bespectacled man who always seemed to be chomping on a cigar. Yet, his unobtrusive exterior hid an unremorseful hit man with dozens of murders under his belt and a lust for power that drove his long-time quest to become New York’s capo di tutti capi. Galante was born on February 10, 1910, the son of a fisherman who had immigrated to America from Castellammare de Golfo in Sicily. His criminal career began as early as the age of eleven when he formed a street gang made up of other youth from New York’s Lower East Side. He entered mafia circles while still a teenager and, by 1930, was arrested and put in jail after hijacking a truck and shooting a police officer during the getaway. When he was released from prison in 1939, he began working as a hit man for Vito Genovese, one of New York’s most powerful mafia dons at the time. Sometime during the 1940s, he defected to the Bonanno Family and quickly rose to the level of underboss.
Carmine (Mr. Lillo) Galante

Galante was the most senior American mafioso to be stationed in Montreal, and it was not long after his arrival that he began organizing the city’s underworld on behalf of the New York families. Assisting him was Luigi Greco, Frank Petrula, Harry Ship, and a promising young gangster named Vic Cotroni. Galante began by demanding protection money from the city’s gambling dens, bookmakers, drug traffickers, brothels, nightclubs, thieves, and shady stockbrokers — as much as $300 a week from each plus 25 percent of their revenue. Those who refused to pay were faced with violent attacks, arson, or police raids. By 1954, Galante was extending his influence to Montreal’s legitimate businesses by investing in nightclubs, bars, and restaurants. He also brought in from New York City an ex-burglar named Earl Carluzzi to set up Local 382 of the Hotel, Restaurant and Club Employees’ Union, which allowed Galante to control the hirings and firings of all staff in these service industries, while raiding union funds. During his time in Montreal, Galante also established a local decina (cell) of the Bonanno Family, swearing in fellow Italians as members, establishing himself as the boss, and anointing fellow Sicilian Luigi Greco as his underboss.

One of those Galante swore in as a member of the Bonanno Family was Vincenzo (Vic) Cotroni. Although he was not a Sicilian, Cotroni quickly impressed Galante and the two became friends and later godfathers to each other’s children. Cotroni’s standing in the Montreal decina would soon surpass that of Greco and in a few years he would take over from Galante, paving the way for his long career as one of Canada’s most powerful criminals.

“IF HE WERE OF NO FURTHER USE, HE WOULD BE DEAD”

Vincenzo Cotroni was born in 1911 in the small Calabrian village of Mammola. In 1924, he, along with his parents, two sisters, and younger brother, Giuseppe, immigrated to Canada and settled in Montreal. Rather than attend school, Vic, as he was often called, worked briefly as a carpenter’s apprentice and then as a wrestler under the name “Vic Vincent.” He became a student of Armand Courville, a well-known local wrestler and coach who gave lessons to aspiring young pugilists and who had financial interests in bars, speakeasies, and gambling houses. It was Courville who introduced Vic to Montreal’s seamier side and, before long, his student was involved in bootlegging, petty theft, cheque kiting, passing counterfeit money, and working as a political goon that stuffed ballot boxes and terrorized voters on election day. The two became good friends, business partners, and criminal associates for the next fifty years. By his early twenties, Vic had already accumulated a criminal record, although he never spent more than six months in jail. One of the charges laid against him was for rape, but it would later be dropped when the victim agreed to become his bride. His reputation for violence appeared to be a contradiction for the young man who was shy, reserved, and unemotional, and whose drooping lips, thick nose, and oval face made him appear slow and dim-witted.

In 1942, Armand and Vic bought the Café Royal, a popular nightclub located in the heart of the red-light district and frequented by many of Montreal’s criminal elite. In 1944, Cotroni, Courville, and two drug-dealing brothers from Marseilles, named Edmond and Marius Martin, opened a bar called Faisan Doré, which became popular among politicians, lawyers, and judges. Cotroni, Courville, and other investors also became partners in a number of
gambling operations, which they ran out of apartment buildings. In tandem with Courville, Vic re-entered the corrupt world of Quebec politics and, in 1947, he was charged with and later acquitted of voter impersonation. While Courville can be credited with Vic’s criminal apprenticeship and his growing influence in Montreal’s underworld, it was Vic’s relationship with Carmine Galante in the early 1950s that sent his career as a mobster spiralling. He began as one of Galante’s strong-arm men and reportedly caused $30,000 damage to the Chez Paris nightclub, because its owner, Solomon Schapps (a.k.a. Solly Silver), would not allow Galante’s prostitutes to work there. Cotroni was charged with wilful damage, but his only penalty was a $200 fine after Silver was pressured to revise the damages to his club to a paltry $1,000. As Vic rose through the ranks of the Montreal mafia, he now had a number of soldiers reporting to him. He also proved to be as strict a disciplinarian as Galante. One night, while Harry Ship was dining in a Montreal restaurant, he was confronted by a man with his topcoat pulled over his head, who fired two bullets into each of his legs. Ship was attacked because of persistent rumours he wanted out from his role as lay-off man for Galante’s bookmaking operations. As Alan Phillips wrote in 1963, “This was simply a warning — to him and others — to stay in line. If Ship were not serving the syndicate still, if he were of no further use, he would be dead.”

Vic Cotroni’s influence in the Bonanno Family’s Montreal wing grew exponentially when Galante was deported from Canada in 1954. After a succession of lieutenants sent from New York to manage Bonanno Family affairs in Montreal were deported back to the U.S., Vic and Luigi Greco were appointed as joint heads of the Montreal arm. However, Vic would quickly outmanoeuvre Greco for sole possession of the capo decina position in Montreal. By the end of the 1950s, the emerging don had grown quite wealthy from his interests in a wide variety of profitable enterprises, including extortion, gambling, bookmaking, labour racketeering, prostitution, and loansharking. Also joining him in his criminal endeavours were his two younger brothers, Giuseppe (Pep) and Francesco (Frank). Neither would ever rise to the heights of their older brother, although both would become key players in the American mafia’s international heroin trafficking network.

**JUNK DEALER**

I have seen the exact manner in which the junk virus operates through fifteen years of addiction. The pyramid of junk, one level eating the level below (it is no accident that the junk higher-ups are always fat and the addict in the street is always thin) right up to the top of tops since there are many junk pyramids feeding on peoples of the world and all are built on

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basic principles of monopoly: (1) Never give anything away for nothing. (2) Never give more than you have to give (always catch the buyer hungry and always make him wait). (3) Always take everything back if you possibly can. The pusher always gets it all back. The addict needs more and more junk to maintain human form ... buy off the monkey.

—William Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*, 1959
Bonacci, Galante, Greco, the Cotroni Brothers, Petrula — junk dealers...underworld entrepreneurs, phantom purveyors of misanthropic misery; like vampire bats, giving off a “narcotic effluvium, a dank green mist” that anaesthetizes their victims and renders them helpless in their enveloping presence. All vital cogs in boosting Montreal's mantel as North America's premiere junk funnel; a large inviting marine port spread open like a seasoned whore...invisible hierarchy of captains; panhandlers of political power...Montreal is not a young land: it is old and dysfunctional and corrupt. Shoot the junk through the watery mainline, son. You can smell it coming in and feel the cool hard cash coming out; a rush of pleasure, overflowing bank accounts, gleeful accountants prostrated across black-inked ledgers. This is the yen of the gangster; a need without conscience or moral direction, rancid ectoplasm shot out by unrelenting yobs coughing up money like phlegm.

And always the junk pushers. Practiced, smooth, unapologetic. Bonanno: cool, calculating New York mafioso, all sharpened up, with greedy insect eyes, controlling la belle ville in la belle province through the Cotroni clan... French-speaking mobsters communicating with Corsicans, the wily refiners transforming hop into junk...

American and Canadian narcs think Frank Petrula is working with Joseph Bari of New York's 107th Street mob. Bari is a main pusher of Mexican brown heroin...adobe junk...the country's biggest export next to migrant labourers. Petrula is suspected of being his largest customer. A 1945 secret Mountie report reads, “...opium comes from Mexico into California and it is placed in cans there and shipped in large quantities direct to New York City.” In through the out door: a vast network of ecto-connections; in lead zeppelins hovering over humanity; sopping up what the city oozes. Petrula travels to NYC to purchase the junk for transport back to Canada. The “107th St. mob will only sell into Canada in a twenty-to-twenty-five-thousand dollar lot.” Traffickers in the white meat, flesh of the white centipede “found in a land of black rocks and iridescent, brown lagoons, exhibit paralyzed crustaceans in camouflaged pockets of the Plaza visible only to the Meat Eaters.”

Petrula and Greco fly to Italy in 1954 on the orders of their boss Carmine Galante and meet with Charles Luciano to import Sicilian-processed junk into Montreal. Petrula and Greco return to Montreal with a suitcase that had more in it than silk suits and toiletries. The Mounties catch a whiff and raid Petrula's home. No drugs are found, but they discover something of even more value. Their law enforcement smile ignores the misadventure of a balloonist or a circus animal run amuck. In a wall safe hidden behind tiles in the upstairs bathroom police find $18,000 in cash and detailed notes. Figures...numbers...names...the Galante-Cotroni four-flushing, political-buggering, street-hustling gang shelled out $94,000 to at least six newspapermen (rag men) and one radio reporter (Can you say Canadian payola?) to denounce and discredit the reform-minded Civic Action League and its mayoralty candidate, Jean Drapeau during a recent municipal election; that top cat has been a thorn in the side of Montreal's mobsters for the past four years as one of the legal beagles on the Caron Commission, Drapeau ran on a platform to clean the city of vice and gangsters. Pop! Bang! Shoot! Fix! The mayor is a junkie, but can't take it direct because of his office...so he has his own circle of power dealers...from time to time he makes contact with them and gets recharged...his face a flash of intensity slipping faute de mieux into the inexplicable cleavage of corrupt Quebec governments.

Petrula's papers also show money paid to goons who trash Civic Action League committee rooms, who stuff ballot boxes and terrorize voters at polling stations. Ever pop C-note into the mainline? It comes back to hit you like a speedball...pure pleasure...electricity through the circuits...“a need without body and feeling”...The C-note-charged brain is a “berserk pinball machine, flashing blue and pink lights in electric orgasm.” C-note pleasure cannot be felt by a thinking being, “but the first stirrings of insect life.” A veritable phone book of key Galante-Cotroni men — Carmine, Vic, Luigi, Harry, Vincenzo, others...Squatting on a three-ring binder of information, a panorama of naked fools in
black and white, drunk on money, stretched across Montreal. The notes blacken Petrula's eye and his underworld mugwumps are furious. A crackle of short sharp shocks and the smell of singed flesh, identities revealed hang in the air like soiled laundry on a clothesline. Drapeau is still elected as mayor and mounts a campaign to force the American mugwumps out of Montreal. Petrula is a spent force in the Montreal mafia and is targeted for removal. In 1956, the feds accuse him of tax fraud to the tune of $220,000. In June 1958, Petrula vanishes and is never seen again; his algae-covered body languishes somewhere at the bottom of the Saint Lawrence Seaway. “The gangster in concrete rolls down the river channel … They cowboyed him in the steam room … Is this Cherry Ass Gio the Towel Boy or Mother Gillig, Old Auntie of Westminster Place?? Only dead fingers talk in Braille …”

The American mugwumps scamper back home leaving a trail of ectoplasm slime as their trail, pieces of turf hanging from their black soulless shoes. 1955. Galante is deported back to the U.S. and is replaced in Montreal by brother-in-law Tony Marulli. But Marulli is forced to leave the country and in 1956 Salvatore (Little Sal) Giglio, a Galante underboss in the Bonanno Family, is sent to Montreal. More religious devotees of superseded, unconscionable, deals, doodling in Etruscan, addicts of junk not yet invented, black marketers of the soul, exorcists of telepathic sensitivity, gynaecologists of the spirit, investigators of violations censured by insipid paranoid checker players, undoers of disconnected warrants taken down in the hebephrenic shorthand costing unmentionable mutilations of the soul, unofficial of uncontested police states, brokers of nightmares and nostalgias resting on sanitized cells of junk sickness and bartered for the last remaining raw materials of the will. With the help of Vic Cotroni, Giglio takes up where Galante leaves off, exacting protection from the remaining bookies and expanding Galante’s heroin trafficking network. One more shot … tomorrow the payday. The way there is short. Come-ons and bring-downs are the different side of the same coin. The junk dealer has to see the vein … blood blossoms like a bubbling cauldron … currents of movement from the two criminals dancing with their captors; delayed justice, proceeding through unknown portals.

1957. Lucky … Carmine … Bonanno … Corsican processors … Sicilian suppliers expand the world’s junk traffic; the boys are like enigmatic old men again in the high cool quarters of their own vacuous visions of mortality … hoisting the sails of society’s junk-fuelled morbidity … Turkish junk is sent to Marseilles, converted to heroin, and smuggled into Montreal and then America. The disease ignores borders and travels through the international mainline like junk through a vein … half of the continent’s junk is entering through Montreal … Montreal’s A-1 gig as a major junk mainline for North America goes aces up … controlled by the Bonanno-Galante-Greco-Giglio-Cotroni consortium; money sealed in translucent ambers of success that could never by equalled by their traditional rackets. The commandant murmurs orders through clogged telephone lines as signal flares of junk orgasm burst all over the skies of North America. Galante’s face brightens with flashbulb intensity threatening any moment to explode, and entrusts the Montreal end to Giglio and the Cotroni brothers. Pep Cotroni … becomes the Montreal mafia’s lead man in trafficking junk … fluent in French, he forms an alliance with Corsican junk wholesalers in Marseilles. (All standing there, syringes in one hand, holding their pants up with the other, abdicated flesh burning in the cold white halo of Times Square; sick, sweating, single cell organisms running cold and desperate for another fix. Shoot it through the mainline, son.)

Pep falls into the world on February 22, 1920, and slovenly follows in his brother’s criminal footsteps … Vic’s subservient mugwump … Pep makes a name for himself through armed robbery and by fencing stolen bonds. He is “a free-wheeling, free-spending, tough, pushy, ex-con, head of a band of bank robbers whose million-dollar break-ins have made them the most successful of all time.” He enters the banks like ghosts with ghost fingers … moving through mirrored alleys of time and space where no life can survive as usual … only the pallid have no sense or smell of death and cower in the corner like a captured fly caught in a cobweb. He is affable enough, brown eyes, two small scars on
his eyebrows and forehead, a wart above his right buttock (so says a 1959 FBI memo) and a rapidly receding hairline that makes his head look like a Penny Ford gumball machine covered by a thin layer of translucent olive-oil skin. 1937 and Pep has already been charged eight times for various offences; in 1949 he is convicted of receiving stolen bonds and spends four years in the St. Vincent de Paul iron bungalow. The years are hard on Pep. The sailor spots his serpent. Disintoxicafied observations. Paranoia of social withdrawal. Sheepish adherence to mafia protocol while his free brother dines on caviar on the outside; dead electoprotoplasm of illicit wealth … Flesh dead, tender, toneless … Pep's bloodshot yellow animal eyes gone out, "dying inside, hopeless fear reflecting the face of death."

Pep deals junk as an effluvium of crusty skin flakes off his suit, with a mildewed stench like an old discarded syringe. He works Corsican junk wholesalers and visits Paris several times a year (his is arrested once by French police and cannot explain the torn American dollar in his pocket); his couriers run fifty kilos a month from Montreal to New York using Cadillacs with secret back-seat compartments (occluded from space-time by a welders torch wielded by a laughing hyena locked out from the zoo). The junk is delivered to Galante and Big John Ormento in NYC who cut it and dispose of it to the street pushers. Pep and Vic are suspected of being behind thirty-one pounds of pure heroin seized from the French freighter, the SS Saint Malo in 1955. Canadian brass supplying the junk throws up groaning into the volcanoes of America leaving eyes bloodshot in their sullen faces; passing out incomprehensible dialects, with burned cigarette holes in their pale skin. Shoot it up the main street, son. Pep Cotroni is now A1 in the international junk market. (Power calls forth a prostitution of the mind, a cerebellum stimulation similar to schizoid substance [note similarity between the exercise of power and a C-soaked brain]. Eventual result of power — especially true of the weak-minded rich and privileged where large doses dulls the monotony of money — is enduring despair
and a state of terminal vegetative schizophrenia: total lack of concern, autism, nearly deficient of cerebral occasions.)

Fast-forward to 1959. Time jumps like a broken typewriter … Edward L. Smith, a Canadian drug courier and former Montreal chauffeur for Carmine Galante is copped by U.S. narcs at the American border with a stash of junk in his car travelling from Montreal to New York. Sniggering customs agents copulate to the anguish of a trapped rodent. Lonely librarians unite. Rats take heed. Smith becomes a double agent and promises to introduce an undercover narc to Cotroni and his suppliers. A thirty-year-old U.S. Narc Bureau agent named Patrick Biase poses as a New York junkie named Dave Costa who wants to get into the business of pushing. The square wants to come on hip. April 1959. He is introduced to Pep Cotroni by Smith, who whispers in a forged, eviscerated junkie voice. Cotroni cannot deny his protoplasmatic core and accepts Costa's offer of $14,000 for two kilos of junk, $4,000 more than he could get in New York. The dream police disintegrate into globs of joy hot on a doughy, balding junk dealer, coughing and spitting up a trail leading to the mafia. June 1959. Their faces melt from the heat. Cops, dogs, & secretaries snarl at their approach. The providential capitalist god has fallen to unassailable despicability. Junk pushers don't break. They bend; elastic, expandable, resilient, flexible — endless putty stretched into perpetuity, blazing a trail to the Cosmos.

The undercover narc returns to Montreal (schlup, schlup, schlup) and purchases the junk from Cotroni. Rene Robert makes the delivery: 98.2 percent pure junk. June 18. Costa buys another two kilos. A double this time waiter, the singles keep leaking. It is again delivered by the Frenchman Robert. It tests 100 percent pure junk. Shoot it up straight to the police station boys. Cotroni supplies the narc another two kilos on credit. Biase is smooth ... nameless grey and ethereal … and can make any junk dealing rube (Note: Make in the sense of “dig” or “size up”). June 24. Cotroni and Robert arrived in New York to negotiate a third purchase. There is the man on roller skates throwing money to the bums, a corpulent drag queen walking his pet rabbit through the East Forties, cab drivers of Absolute Reality gazing into rearview mirrors that are their lives, an old junkie squatting on brittle bones in a pile of excrement pissing down a rusty subway staircase, a businessman in a red-hot blaze of fire, burning flesh, stretches (and stenches) to the darkened horizon, wearing three-piece, white-collared costumes hiding their crimes, bankers, wholesalers, industrialists, opium farmers of Wall Street … The world is full of junk dealers, turning on a spit over a fire of burning swastikas. (Note: New York and Montreal have more junk dealers per capita than anywhere else in the world.) July 8. Biase-cum-Costa meet with Cotroni and Robert in Montreal under to purchase more junk. When an agreement cannot be reached, Cotroni and Robert are arrested by the Mounties. November 9, 1959. Pep Cotroni, thirty-nine years old, is awarded ten years in jail and an $88,000 fine. Robert receives an eight-year sprint on the same charge. Hesitant half-parodies that dissolve in shadows … pockets of moulty ectoplasm swept away by a junk dealer coughing and spitting and retching in the sick shadow of justice. Pep is offered a plea bargain if he implicates his brother and Carmine Galante in the transactions. Pep refuses and takes the fall for his brother. Sibling Mafia Hierachy. One top copper belches, “I’m sure [Vic] used Pep as protection against being out front. Vic was the boss so his brothers were expected to be the guys out front, protecting the eldest from any direct involvement in anything.” Pep goes where his brother never does ... a place “specially designed for the containment of ghosts: precise, prosaic impact of objects … washstand … door … toilet … bars … there they are … this is it … all lines cut … nothing beyond … Dead End … And the Dead End in every face …”

The six kilos of junk used to charge and convict Cotroni and Robert is taken to New York and used as evidence in a junk conspiracy case against almost forty defendants. The city swarms with every conceivable junk dealer — Slav, Chinese, Italian, Jew, Gentile, Scot, Aryan.

Police conclude the junk smuggling operations are part of a huge conspiracy (to fill conspicuous consumption followed by junk-sick mornings) that
smuggled hundreds of kilos of French junk into the United States through Canada. May 1960. Store shutters slam like a sharp new guillotine blade on a cold winter day. Riot noises in the background, a panic suctions the city, cold turkey — a thousand hysterical junkie bettors with money to burn. A federal grand jury in New York cops Carmine Galante, John Ormento, Vito Genovese, and future Bonanno capo Natale Evole; spectral vendor of the junk, spirits as grey as ashes, sweeping out the junkies’ souls like a vengeful ecclesiastical choirstep. They are blind from money, their bodies “a mass of scar tissue hard and dry as wood.” They are accused of peddling more than 600 kilos of junk (worth a cool $600 million on the streets) since 1954.

The trial of Galante, Ormento, and nineteen others begins on November 14, 1960. The Corrupt versus the Corrupt. Two years later, fourteen are convicted and sentenced to refrigerate from nine and a half to forty years. Carmine Galante receives twenty years and a $20,000 fine. Big John Ormento receives forty years. Others like Salvatore Giglio and Angelo Tuminaro (wait for it) skip bail. The slow, anguished, irregular beating rhythm of a dying cardiac, the clang, clang, clang of the jail cell convulsing on a criminal career; the sycophantic sinner is no more as the Alabama lie detector crashes down on his head … like an old brown photo that is exposed in the sunlight.

Lucien Rivard blows into the scene and fills the hole left by the arrest of so many big-shot junk pushers. Short, paunchy, black eyed, “the conscious ego that looked out of the glazed, alert-calm hoodlum eyes — would have nothing to do with this suffering of his rejected other self, a suffering of the nervous system, of flesh, and viscera and cells.” Shoot it in the French mainline, son. Rivard is already a major player in the junk trade (a former partner of Pep); wholesaler, retailer, financier, smuggler, they are all his bag. Rivard leaves Cuba — where he runs a casino and organizes international junk and gun smuggling junkets until he and his mugwump criminal comrades are kicked out by Castro (future betrayer of revolutionary proletariat power) — and balls the jack to Montreal in 1959 shortly before the arrest and conviction of Pep. Timing is everything. This

is the yen of the pocketbook alone; a want without emotion and without body, earthbound needs, rancid ectoplasm swept away by junk dealers, coughing and spitting out junk and inhaling money. Rivard has connections with Corsican pushers like D’Agostino and the two work together “to make Montreal the wholesale depot for the U.S.” The long streets look like an endless parade of pathetic priests and rabbis and mullahs pining for blood transfusions from pagans and atheists while coveting undocumented sexual trysts with lonely domesticated Eisenhower-era, amphetamine-popping suburban housewives. Shoot her in the mainline father.

1960. The RCMP is told that Rivard is in Acapulco at the same time four international junk dealers, boots laced up tight, are blowing up a storm in Mexico. “Something falls off you when you cross the border into Mexico, and suddenly the landscape hits you straight with nothing between you and it, desert and mountains and vultures; little wheeling specks and others so close you can hear wings cut
the air (a dry husking sound), and when they spot something they pour out of the blue sky, that shattering bloody blue sky of Mexico, down in a black funnel…” Donkeys … palms … dusty weed-filled streets … merchandise carts … pushed by young brown lions … no rigour mortis here … Fellow Corsican and former Saigon police chief, Paul Mondolini, the balding, scowling heavy-browed thief whose armed robbery of the Aga Khan in 1949 made him 200 million francs richer and one of the world’s most wanted criminals. He is there. The city is visited by an epidemic of junk dealers … Junk dealers tend to merge together into a unified, but rotting body … frantic skeleton smirk of unceasing junkies glazed over with white sunshine … the unintended dead are left for the “H” vultures. The blind junkie shields his bloodshot eyes in the afternoon sun.

October 10, 1963. Joseph Michel Caron and his wife are nabbed at the U.S.-Mexican border crossing into the U.S. at Laredo, Texas. Dust filled, government sanatorium of invisible boundaries, spectral corridors of smugglers and illegals pouring like effluence into a giant desert toilet. A border narc checks the padding of the car seats and is suspicious of their hardness. He rips the seats open and finds 35 kilos of junk (second-biggest catch to date in U.S. history). Caron spills: he is delivering the junk to Lucien Rivard and blows the works on Mondolini and some Mexicans as suppliers. Joselito … Paco … Pepe … Enrique … Boys look up from street ball games, bull rings, and bicycle races as sirens whistle by and fade away. An indictment is handed down by a grand jury in Texas and leads to warrants for Rivard. June 19, 1964. Rivard is arrested in Montreal on a charge of smuggling junk into the U.S. He sits in the Bordeaux Prison and awaits his extradition hearing. A follower of rebellious unthinkable trades, addicts, not yet digested, reduced to an unmitigated habit of longevity … power; philistine bureaucrats of the junk state … overseers of constitutional carnage … brokers of junk welfare … doling out instantaneous lobotomies, dismantling the wings of Icarus … The 6-foot centipede gnaws at the iron door.

1964. The summer screams in a false falsetto. Rivard’s lawyers fight his extradition. Pierre Lamontagne is the Canadian lawyer hired by the American government to seek Rivard’s exile to America. A seemingly silky spread of dollars, he is offered a $20,000 bribe to stop objecting to Rivard’s release on bail because he is telling the judge that if the prisoner is released he would most certainly fly. The court agrees and refuses Rivard bail. The man who offers the bribe to Lamontagne is Raymond Denis, executive mugwump assistant to the immigration minister, René Tremblay, of Lester Pearson’s Liberal government (he sits in the office catching insects with his long tongue). Lamontagne is also pressed by another Liberal Party mugwump: Guy Rouleau, M.P., Prime Minister Pearson’s parliamentary secretary. The mugwump men with their shiny red empty faces come with alabaster briefcases full of multicoloured graft to smooth out the politicos saying Rivard is a good friend of the party and it would be good for the party if Rivard is released. Guy Masson, a Montreal Liberal organizing mugwump, carries a briefcase full of tainted promises, dreams of power and a $60,000 donation to the Liberal Party by Rivard’s wife if her husband is freed (hold her, she is desperate) … everyone looks like a junkie … The Liberal Party is a power junkie … continual dreams of command (those addicted to power have done far more damage than those addicted to junk) … And every decade there is one mugwump who shoots it straight into the party’s mainline; clean and cold hard cash; the C-note connection; you can feel it going in, a rush of orgasmic political power right through your electoral war chest. “Your head shatters in white explosions. Ten minutes later you want another shot…you will walk across town for another shot.”

Lamontagne gets the morals and does not accept the bribe; he passes information about the bribe to justice minister Guy Favreau, who refuses to press charges. (In his previous life as immigration minister he also does not deport gangsters when found in the country — story to be continued!) Favreau does a striptease at his government desk as the disease of power permeates his brain like frenzied rock and roll fans storming the stage, throwing acid into the faces of their heroes, open bathroom stall doors, burning in effigy bankers and accountants. August 10, 1964. Lamontagne takes the allegations to the Mounted Police. They investigate, but conclude there
is insufficient evidence to lay charges. Orders from faraway headquarters; distant rumblings of charades by politico-plasmid police throwing great creamy power eunuchs off Parliament Hill. They put on their electric smiles. Junk dealers and politicians have no shame … they are impervious to the repugnance of others … It is doubtful that shame can exist in the absence of caring … a soiled paper rose twisted on a wire hanger in the filthy Passaic, leaped on the waters, crying, crying. They stand on the edge of the abyss with "dead cold, undersea eyes, eyes without a trace of warmth or lust or hate or any feeling no … at once cold and intense, impersonal and predatory.”

The affair hits the newspapers in November 1964 when opposition parties begin a relentless campaign against Favreau. Mr. Attorney General chews his cud, sprawled out in his office, surrounded by simpering dark-eyed political sycophants. The story is headline news for months. It causes such a ballyhoo that the feds are forced to form a commission of inquiry headed by Frederic Dorian, chief judge of the Quebec Superior Court. Squads of lawyers and judges with thin lips and large egos moving with the syncopated rhythms of their own power and self-worth. Gabfests are held from December 15, 1964, to April 9, 1965. And as it is about to come to a close … Another twist. March 2, 1965. Fade-in to the Bordeaux Prison. Rivard and a collegial fellow monkey inmate named Durocher ask to hose down the outdoor rink; guards say yes (despite a balmy four degrees Celsius); the two blow the prison scene using a gun carved out of wood and blackened with shoe polish. The most famous manhunt in Canadian history begins. By car, boat, plane, horse, and skateboard, but it isn't until July that Rivard is recaptured, unarmed and in his bathing trunks, his shiny red face, sunburned and wet from frolicking in the water while at his cottage in the Laurentians, a place given over to free love, hideaways, chestnuts, and continual bathing.

So leave us to return to the stricken capital. June 1965. The air is cloyed with a sweet evil smell of middle-class hypocrisy as husbands and fathers slip out to play craps while wives and mothers sit around and sip pousse-cafés through chilled straws and watch the pool boy. Dorian submits his report and confirms that Rivard's friends tried to parlay their connections with Liberal Party mugwumps and offered bribes to secure his release. Guy Rouleau offers his resignation as parliamentary secretary. The scandal also forces justice minister Favreau's resignation. It forces him to eat and digest the scales of justice like a trapped boa constrictor, and he is finally convicted in the court of public opinion only after burning his party with a flame thrower – the court of inquiry ruling that such means were not justified and after losing humanity's passport was, in consequence, a creature without species, country, political party, or riding. Rivard is shipped to the U.S. In September 1965, a Texas judge sentences him to twenty years.

For the 1965 election, Prime Minister Pearson recruits a number of new Liberal candidates from Quebec in an attempt to put a new face on his party government. Among the new recruits is Pierre Elliot Trudeau. An enlightened Canadian romantic or just a plain polemist? (Rhetorical question.) On November 8, 1965, Canadians blast the joint with another Liberal minority government. Trudeau becomes justice minister. On December 14, 1967, at the Liberal Party convention — where political junkies stand and cheer passionately and real citizens wig with their new unrestrained addiction, drinking the tea of the disposed, and the last nothing but a hopeful little bit of hallucination; instead, the concrete void of insulin — Pearson announces his retirement from politics. Pierre Trudeau sits like Buddha in a lotus position as he is chosen the new leader of the Liberal Party of Canada (By God I don't have to take this! I will metabolize my own junk!). He combs his hair like a Canadian Caesar and pirouettes his way to the ultimate power-junkie position in Canada. The commandant of cool is a sharp dresser and wears a cape to a football game. Nembies, bennies, junkies, dollars, junk dealers, Big "C,” goofballs, politicos, amp heads, yellow jackets, power, businessmen, yen pox, graft, hotshots, tea. “A rabid dog cannot choose but to bite. Assuming a self-righteous position is nothing to the purpose unless your purpose be to keep the junk virus in operation. And junk is a big industry.” Shoot it in the mainline, son.
By the early 1960s, with Carmine Galante and Pep Cotroni in jail, Salvatore Giglio on the run, and Luigi Greco relegated to a subordinate role, Vic Cotroni tightened his control over the Montreal arm of the Bonanno Family. His stature as mafioso was also evident; while his brother and other members of the Montreal and New York mafia groups were being convicted on drug trafficking charges, all strictly adhered to the code of *omerta* and shielded their don from prosecution. Throughout the 1960s, the soft-spoken and taciturn man, who never learned to read or write, reigned as the most powerful criminal in Quebec. He was also one of the wealthiest and was not shy about enjoying and even displaying the spoils of his profession, whether it was his ubiquitous bodyguards, the chauffer-driven limousines, his luxurious duplex in Montreal’s exclusive Rosemount District, or his palatial summer estate in Lavaltrie on the St. Lawrence River, which housed a six-car garage, a vineyard, a greenhouse (complete with a full-time gardener), a boathouse, and a sunken swimming pool.

While he preferred to remain in the background, Vic’s prominence in Montreal’s criminal underworld could not be veiled and he was increasingly exposed to the glare of the media and the government spotlight in both Canada and the United States. In 1962, the name “Vincent Cotroni” was placed on the U.S. attorney general’s list of persons engaged in organized crime activity, while Quebec police were monitoring his whereabouts, activities, and conversations. He took on an unlikely foe by suing *Maclean’s* magazine for $1.25 million in damages after a 1963 article referred to him as the “godfather” of the Montreal mafia. The trial judge concluded that Cotroni’s reputation was indeed “tainted” by the article, but ruled that the defendant was entitled to an award of only two dollars, one dollar for the English version of the magazine and another for the French version. Vic’s imprudent strategy had backfired on him; not only did the lawsuit thrust him even more into the public eye, but the ruling was an implicit recognition of his criminal stature. Even worse, the two dollars in damages awarded to him was an embarrassing blow to the prestige and honour of the mafioso.

Cotroni’s ties to the Bonanno Family were also displayed for the world to see in the summer of 1964, when Joseph Bonanno flew to Montreal and declared to Immigration Canada that he wished to make an investment in Quebec and perhaps even become a Canadian citizen. “At the immigration office, I repeated my intentions of investing in a Canadian business for the purpose of expanding a cheese plant and hiring more people,” he wrote in his 1983 autobiography. “I was helping Canada reduce its unemployment.” But Bonanno’s attempted emigration north of the border had less to do with his altruistic interest in the Canadian labour market, and more to do with his desire to escape an escalating conflict that was engulfing his family in New York, a conflict he created and would perpetuate for years to come.

Joseph Bonanno was born on January 18, 1905, in Castellamare del Golfo, Sicily. He came to America with his family in 1908, but returned
shortly thereafter to his hometown. As a youth growing up in Sicily he learned the way of the mafioso and, like many of his ilk, he was also an anti-Fascist who became involved in the underground movement to depose Mussolini. Whether it was because of his opposition to the Italian dictator or his involvement with local mafia groups (or both), Bonanno was forced to flee Sicily and returned to America in 1924. He settled in Brooklyn and before long was working for a local mafioso as a bootlegger and an illegal lottery operator. Even as a young man, Bonanno's brains, superior organizational skills, and opportunistic instincts set him apart from his more thuggish associates. When violence broke out between two rival Italian criminal factions in New York during the late 1920s, Bonanno aligned himself with the winning side and was rewarded with his own family and a position on the newly created Mafia Commission. Bonanno was only twenty-six years old at the time, the youngest of all the heads of the five New York families. Under his leadership the family prospered and he was soon a millionaire. Gambling, loansharking, prostitution, labour racketeering, and drugs would be the family's primary money-making ventures, but over the years he also invested heavily in legitimate businesses, including clothing factories, cheese producers, moving and storage companies, pizza parlours, cafés, and funeral homes.

Bonanno's arrival in Canada in 1964 sparked a flurry of press coverage, not to mention great consternation within the Canadian government, which came under tremendous pressure by American government officials to deport him to the United States. Canadian officials found a legal reason to do so when they discovered on Bonanno's immigration documents the declaration that he had never been convicted of a criminal offence. As his son Salvatore (Bill) Bonanno defiantly describes in his own autobiography:

... the Canadians said he had lied on an entry visa form where he had been asked to state if he had ever been convicted of a crime. He had answered — truthfully — in the negative. The Canadians pointed to a violation of wages and hours statute that had been filed against him in 1941 by the federal government when he was a partner in a garment factory in Brooklyn. But the charge had been against my father's company, not against him personally. His company paid a four-hundred-dollar fine at the time. The U.S. Justice Department, through the Canadians, were grasping at straws.

Joseph Bonanno refused to accept extradition, knowing that if he was deported the FBI would have just cause to arrest him upon his arrival on American soil. During his legal wrangling in Canada, Bonanno would spend close to ninety days in Quebec's Bordeaux Prison, where he was treated like royalty by the other inmates. In the end, his lawyers and Canadian officials worked out a face-saving deal for both sides: Bonanno would not be officially deported from Canada, but instead would be released from jail a free man as long as he agreed to return to the U.S. voluntarily.

Bonanno's arrival back in America did little to quell the growing storm that was brewing within mafia circles over his trip to Montreal. When Stefano Magaddino found out about his cousin's northward expedition, he was livid and allegedly proclaimed, "he's planting flags all over the world." Magaddino suspected that Bonanno was trying to muscle in on his rackets in Ontario and that his trip to Canada was a ploy to that end. Characteristically, Bonanno rejected the allegations that he had gone to Canada to expand his interests. Instead, he had travelled there to escape the conflict engulfing him in New York: "What bothered Stefano about my Canadian trip was not that I went to Montreal but that I might use Montreal as a jumping-off point to encroach on his cherished Toronto," he wrote in his autobiography. "There was no truth to this. I was looking to extricate myself from my world, not to entangle myself in territorial disputes."

The disputes were largely of Bonanno's own making and confirmed Magaddino's suspicions of his aspirations beyond New York. In addition to Canada, Bonanno had established gambling and prostitution interests in California, bought a home
in Arizona, and claimed a large part of the American Southwest as his territory. Bonanno’s aggressive attempts at expansion and his not-so-subtle desire to become the capo di tutti capi of the Cosa Nostra were of great concern to the heads of the other New York families. They were justifiably even more outraged when they learned that Bonanno had placed contracts on the heads of mafia leaders Carlo Gambino and Thomas Lucchese of New York, Sam Giancana of Chicago, Frank DeSimone of Los Angeles, and Magaddino in Buffalo. Responsibility for the assassinations was given to Bonanno’s top enforcer, Joseph Magliocco, who in turn delegated the responsibility to Joseph Colombo. Instead of carrying out the murders, Colombo reported the plot to the Mafia Commission.

Bonanno was ordered to appear before the Commission to explain the allegations, but he steadfastly refused. The Commission mulled over several forms of punishment for Bonanno and did not rule out killing him and dispersing his family’s interests, which would have resulted in handing control of Montreal to Magaddino. Their final decision was surprisingly lenient: Bonanno would be stripped of his authority as head of his family and replaced by his lieutenant, Gaspar DiGregorio. The result was a civil war within the Bonanno Family pitting the DiGregorio faction against those still loyal to the old boss and who fought under the leadership of his son Bill. Dubbed the Banana War, the conflict was blamed for a number of deaths in New York as well as Montreal. The senior Bonanno would also become a casualty of the war. On October 21, 1964, the eve of his scheduled appearance before a U.S. grand jury, Joseph Bonanno was kidnapped at gunpoint on Park Avenue before the astonished eyes of his lawyer. For the next nineteen months, he was held hostage by Stefano, who was backing the DiGregorio bloc. Bonanno eventually agreed to step down as the head of the family and accept the Commission’s decision on a successor. As a result, he was set free from captivity. Once freed, however, Bonanno reneged on his offer and threw himself into the war to regain control of his family.

Throughout the conflict, Vic Cotroni was careful not to take sides. As Peter Edwards writes in his biography of the Montreal godfather, Vic was placed in a highly untenable position, “He couldn’t have wanted to defy the Commission,” writes Edwards. “But he also couldn’t afford to offend Bonanno, who represented his link to the riches of the American market and who was, in effect, his boss. Lives would be lost, as well as money, if Joe Bonanno’s bitter personal rivalries were allowed to divert energies from money-making to in-fighting. At the very least, Joe Bonanno’s arrival [in Quebec] disrupted Vic Cotroni’s seclusion.” Vic’s preferred isolation was interrupted again in 1966 when Bonanno sent a delegation to Montreal to ensure that control over his Canadian interests were maintained during the conflict. Among the delegates sent north was his son Bill, who met with Vic Cotroni and his lieutenants in November of that year. Following one of the meetings, Montreal police arrested Bill Bonanno and his men when three loaded handguns were discovered in their car. Among those nabbed were Louis Greco and Peter Magaddino, brother of Buffalo mob boss Stefano. On December 2, 1966, thirty-four-year-old Bill Bonanno and his American entourage were deported from Canada. For the next two years, a battle of attrition was fought over control of the New York family. In 1968, just when Bonanno appeared to be winning, he suffered a debilitating heart attack. While he was recuperating, Bonanno finally agreed to a compromise with the Commission: he would be banished to Arizona where he could retain control over his rackets in the Southwest, but had to relinquish control over his family’s operations in New York and Montreal.

In retrospect, Vic Cotroni actually benefited from the conflict in that he emerged with greater autonomy from the Bonanno Family. Nonetheless, for years to come, he would continue paying his respects to his American superiors by sending millions of dollars to New York, generated from his highly profitable criminal activities. By the mid-1960s, his gambling interests alone were multifaceted: Montreal continued to be a major bookmaking centre for North America, he oversaw numerous gambling operations in the city while expanding into the Ottawa-Hull region, tribute continued to be extracted from independent professional gamblers and bookmakers, and family members
and associates were arranging junkets from Montreal to mob-controlled Las Vegas. In addition, money continued to pour in from extortion and protection rackets, drug smuggling, loansharking, and labour racketeering.

Vic Cotroni also controlled a number of legally incorporated businesses in Montreal, including construction companies, food importing firms, ice cream manufacturing and distribution operations, as well as hotels, restaurants, and bars. The businesses thrived, in part because they had an edge over legitimate competitors by circumventing labour laws and health codes, while using intimidation and violence to bankrupt rival companies. One Cotroni-controlled business was Montreal’s biggest meat wholesaler, while another had an almost total monopoly over the sale of Italian ice cream in the city. Vic Cotroni’s investments in the hospitality sector were bolstered by his influence over the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union. Officials with the union could be relied upon to keep labour peace within the family’s hotel and restaurant businesses and to stir up union troubles among the competition. (In the early 1980s, Montreal’s Local 31 of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union became the only union ever to be barred from the Quebec Federation of Labour due to unethical conduct, which included police allegations that it had ties to Vic’s younger brother, Frank.)

To carry out his numerous criminal and semi-legitimate business ventures, Vic built a productive and sturdy mafia unit. At the core of the organization was some twenty made members who, in the words of crime historian D. Owen Carrigan, were “cemented together by family ties, friendship, common ethnic origins, and a strict code of loyalty and silence.” Vic based the structure of his decina on that of the New York families, with the core membership made up only of Italian “men of honour.” While full-fledged membership in the Montreal mafia was available only to those of Italian descent, there was no discrimination based on what part of Italy a made member hailed from. Testifying before the Quebec Organized Crime Commission in 1975, Dr. Alberto Sabatino, a senior official with the Italian national police, stated that the Montreal mafia was an “exceptional” mixture of Calabrian and Sicilian gangsters and that it was “unusual” to see the two regional groups working as one mafia organization. “Such a mixture of Calabrian and Sicilian gangsters does not occur in Italy,” Dr. Sabatino said. What Sabatino did not know at the time was that cleavages did exist between the Sicilian and Calabrian factions, which would soon result in a wholesale transformation of the organization’s leadership and hierarchy.

Most of the made members of the Cotroni decina did not specialize in any one particular criminal endeavour, but were in charge of or worked in a particular geographic district in Montreal. With such names as St-Laurent Gang or the Sorrento Gang, each cell was headed by a high-ranking member and made up of several picciottis (soldiers) who, in turn, had a number of people under their command. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Vic’s most senior lieutenants were Luigi Greco, Nicola Di Iorio, Frank Cotroni, and Paolo Violi.

From his pizzeria, Luigi Greco ran the group’s gambling, loansharking, and extortion interests on the west side of the city. Unlike his ostentatious Calabrian boss, Greco was an unassuming Sicilian Mafia traditionalist who lived in a modest middle-class home and performed many of the menial functions at his small restaurant, such as baking pizzas and cleaning the floors.

Nicola (Cola) Di Iorio was considered Vic Cotroni’s most brilliant deputy. Born in Montreal in 1922, he learned the ropes from family soldiers Jimmy Soccio and Diodato Mastracchio and then rose through the ranks until he began reporting directly to Cotroni. Intelligent, well connected, and politically astute, Di Iorio had Vic’s utmost respect and served as his most trusted adviser. He also became the organization’s chief political corrupter. Di Iorio was particularly successful in building strong ties with the Quebec Liberal Party during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Along with Frank D’Asti, his second-in-command, the two made financial donations to Liberal politician Pierre Laporte in his failed bid for the leadership of the Provincial Liberals in 1969, and when he ran in the provincial election in 1970. Jean-Jacques Coté and René Gagnon, Liberal Party organizers and Laporte’s principal campaign aides, later admitted that they met with Di Iorio and D’Asti in 1969 to obtain contributions
for Laporte’s leadership campaign, and again in April 1970, just two weeks before the provincial election. There has been much speculation that the second meeting was personally attended by Laporte and another Liberal Party candidate, Jerome Choquette. Following the election, police secretly recorded D’Asti and Di Iorio discussing how they could wring favours from Laporte if he was appointed attorney general. In particular, they wanted to end the constant provincial police raids on their nightclubs and gambling dens. While the two later expressed disappointment when Laporte was instead named minister of labour, police did overhear them talking about assurances they supposedly received from Coté, who promised them the same level of support from the new justice minister, Jerome Choquette. Police also received information that Vic Cotroni was planning to expose the alleged underworld links of Pierre Laporte to pressure the Quebec cabinet to halt an ongoing provincial inquiry into organized crime. The plot thickened when members of the extremist Quebec separatist group Front de Libération du Québec kidnapped and murdered Pierre Laporte in October 1970. Just days before the kidnapping, the FLQ Manifesto, which was read on the CBC French-language network, included the allegation that the Liberal Party’s recent provincial election win “was nothing but the victory of the election riggers, Simard-Cotroni.” The reference was to the perceived influence of the Cotroni clan and the wealthy Simard shipbuilding family in the provincial Liberal Party.

Heading the so-called St-Laurent Gang was Francesco (Frank) Cotroni, the fifth of six Cotroni children. Frank was born in Montreal in 1931 and, by the late 1950s, he was a senior member of the decina. Fluent in Italian, French, and English, his nickname was the same in all three languages: “Il Cice,” “Le Gros,” “The Big Guy.” Unlike his older brother, Frank never shrank from public attention, nor was he content to operate in the background; he became directly involved in a cornucopia of criminal activities, from gambling and loansharking, to extortion, counterfeiting, bank robbery, pornography, murder-for-hire, smuggling, and drug trafficking. Frank threw himself with reckless abandon into his illegal endeavours and, as a consequence, was arrested more times than his brothers Vic and Pep combined.

Frank was first arrested in September 1960 for possession of a deadly weapon (he was carrying a gun that fired armour-piercing bullets). Along with seven others, he was charged with conspiring to rob the Decarie Boulevard City and District Savings Bank in 1967 after police found a 53-foot tunnel leading directly to the bank’s vault from a nearby home. There had been a spate of bank robberies in the Montreal area in recent years, most of them the work of the local mafia, according to the Montreal police. Despite his arrest and police pronouncements, however, Frank was acquitted on all charges after his co-conspirators, several of whom were convicted, protected their boss by refusing to rat him out. On February 18, 1971, Frank Cotroni took the unusual step of holding a press conference to clear his name after being arrested and jailed by Mexican authorities in Acapulco. A month earlier he was charged for being in possession of stolen jewellery (it was a case of mistaken identity and he was not charged) and then being accused by American Express of using a stolen credit card (which forced the hand of Mexican authorities who decided to expel him from the country). Montreal police conceded this was the first time they had ever heard of an alleged mafia leader staging a press conference, and in inimitable Frank Cotroni style, he even made sure there were drinks and hors d’oeuvres on hand. “He wore a conservative black suit, black patent leather shoes, a wide racy tie striped with maroon and a very expensive nouveau-gauche-style ribbed white shirt,” according to the Toronto Star. “His kinky black hair had been newly styled, and his stubby fingers were freshly manicured.” Frank Cotroni’s press conference was not only a first for a Canadian gangster, it also reflected his audacious personality; one of the reasons he was in Mexico was to work out a deal to export cocaine and heroin to New York City.

Vic Cotroni’s fourth lieutenant, and the man he would one day share power with, was an Italian immigrant known in Montreal as “The Godfather of St. Leonard.” His name was Paolo Violi and he would be responsible for ushering in a new era for the Montreal mafia, not once, but twice. Paolo Violi was born into the mafia subculture on February 6, 1931, in Sinopoli, a rural village on the Calabrian peninsula. Italian police accused his father, Domenico, a shepherd by trade, of
being the boss of the 'Ndrangheta in Sinopoli and was once even exiled from the village under that country's anti-mafia laws. The elder Violi was also deported from Canada after a report from Italian police provided to Canadian immigration authorities described him as a retired mafia chief. Paolo himself was in trouble with the law from a young age. A 1947 Italian police report described the sixteen-year-old as "a dangerous person with an impulsive nature and a violent disposition, capable of anything."

Paolo immigrated to Canada in 1951 and began his new life in Southern Ontario. His first brush with the law in his adopted country occurred in Toronto in 1955 when he was charged with involuntary manslaughter in the death of Natale Brigante, another recent Italian immigrant. Brigante's death apparently resulted from a quarrel between the two men over a woman, an argument that dated back to the old country. One version of the murder is that Brigante was lured to a parking lot in Toronto by a phone call and found Violi waiting for him. After a brief joust, Violi pulled a .32-calibre pistol and shot Brigante twice. He died on the spot, but not before stabbing Violi under the heart. Police picked Violi up in Welland and charged him with manslaughter, but he was acquitted in court. According to one account, he successfully claimed self-defence, using his stab wounds as proof.

Violi gained his Canadian citizenship in 1956 and by the early 1960s he was running bootleg liquor into Toronto from Quebec, where dozens of clandestine stills operated by the mafia were each turning out hundreds of gallons of 165-proof liquor on a daily basis. In 1961, Violi was convicted of possessing illegally manufactured liquor (and was rumoured to have used his trips to the Toronto courthouse to run booze into Ontario). Around this time Paolo was also ingratiating himself with Giacomo Luppino, the leader of the 'Ndrangheta in Hamilton who reported to Buffalo mob boss Stefano Magaddino. Because Paolo was the son of his old friend Domenico, Luppino took him under his wing and even allowed him to court his daughter Grazia. Whatever Paolo's intentions may have been toward Luppino's daughter, it was an astute move by a young man desperate to join the ranks of the mafia.

In 1963, Paolo left Ontario for Montreal, supposedly on the orders of Luppino so he would not clash with another ambitious Hamilton mobster named John Papalia. Accounts differ on whether Magaddino approved of Violi coming within the orbit of the Montreal mafia and, by extension, the Bonanno Family. While it is possible that Magaddino may have felt betrayed by the move — and was reportedly persuaded to spare Paolo's life by Luppino — some also believe that he backed the decision to send Violi to Quebec and may even have instigated it to provide him with a toehold in the province. When he arrived in Montreal, Paolo opened Violi Pizzeria in the city's north end, which he used as his base to extort members of the Italian community of St. Leonard. He also became involved in currency counterfeiting, while continuing to run bootleg liquor to Ontario. Before long, he had befriended Frank and Vic Cotroni and used the association as a stepping stone to become a part of the Cotroni organization, to which he was already paying tribute. At the same time, he maintained close ties with the Luppino family and, in 1965, took Grazia Luppino as his bride. Violi now had the best of both worlds: he was part of Ontario 'Ndrangheta royalty while expanding his influence with Quebec's leading mafia clan.

Violi became an important bridge between the Hamilton and Montreal mafia decinas, while also playing an emissary role with other families within and outside of Canada. Police observed Vic Cotroni and Paolo meeting with known mafia members from Italy and, in March 1963, police learned that Violi was one of the participants at a Montreal meeting with American Cosa Nostra members to discuss the distribution of counterfeit money printed in the U.S. On November 28, 1966, Paolo Violi, Vic Cotroni, Giacomo Luppino, and Luigi Greco met with Bill Bonanno and other members of the Bonanno Family in Montreal. While Paolo would pay his respects to both Cotroni and Luppino, as well as Bonanno and Magaddino, he was playing a dangerous game. According to Peter Edwards, "Paolo Violi clearly had his own ideas. He privately told Luppino that the Cotroni family should strike out on its own and should be subordinate to neither the Magaddino nor the Bonanno family. Violi displayed dangerous signs of hubris as he belittled the abilities and judgment of Vic Cotroni and his close associate Louis Greco."
By the late 1960s, Violi was making his move to take over the Cotroni decina and by the end of the decade he was second only to Vic, having surpassed Luigi Greco, Frank Cotroni, and Nicola Di Iorio in the hierarchy. By the early 1970s, Violi's stock had risen so high that police began referring to the Montreal mafia as the “Cotroni-Violi Family” (although technically it was not its own “family,” but a wing of the Bonanno Family). Violi was also forging strong links with other Canadian, American, and Italian mafia groups. Police wiretaps revealed frequent contact between Violi and such men as John Papalia, who was the godfather of Violi's second son, and Joe Gentile, the leading mafioso in Vancouver, who was godfather to one of Violi's daughters. Police wiretaps also picked up numerous conversations between Violi and members of mafia groups from Italy or America, concerning the settling of disputes and accepting new members from Sicily into the Montreal organization. Between 1972 and 1975, a number of long-distance phone calls and face-to-face meetings took place between Paolo Violi, Vic Cotroni, and high-ranking mafiosi from Italy, such as Settecasi, head of the mafia in the Sicilian province of Agrigento, Leonardo Caruana, a member of the Settecasi family, as well as Pietro Sciarra, Camelo Salemi, and Giuseppe Cuffaro, another senior Sicilian mafioso. On April 22, 1974, for example, Sciarra, Salemi and Cuffaro discussed with Violi recent changes that had taken place in the Sicilian Mafia, among them the election of Leonardo Caruana as a capo de madamento (district boss). While he was a Calabrian, Violi showed great respect for his Sicilian associates and frequently turned to them for advice. For Violi, his connection to these men of honour represented a link to the historical traditions and sacrosanct principles of the mafia. According to the Quebec Police Commission, it was clear that regardless of whether a made mafia member was located in Italy or Montreal, they were all considered “friends,” meaning they are all part of the same honoured society. Violi referred to this in a May 10, 1974 conversation with Camelo Salemi, “Some people who come from Italy have the same privileges when we know they’re ‘residents’ from over there. They come here … they’re recognized by everybody.” Salemi agreed, responding, “In our mob, it’s a friend and we gotta recognize a friend and that’s that.”

While membership in the Montreal decina was restricted to Italians, like other mafia groups in North America, this core membership served as the infrastructure for a larger criminal network, which over time included hundreds of associates from all types of ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds — French, English, Irish, Slavic, and Jewish, among others. Certain non-Italian associates were deemed so important they reported directly to Vic Cotroni or Paolo Violi and were even assigned soldiers to work under their supervision. Despite their power, however, these associates could never become made members. Paolo Violi confirmed as much on May 10, 1974, when he spoke of one French Canadian who worked as an enforcer for him: “Yeah, but you gotta know that the guy who was with us, he’s a good picciotto, a French picciotto. He’s good … Yeah, but he’s not one of ours …” Armand Courville, according to the 1977 Quebec Police Commission report on organized crime, was “without any doubt one of the most influential and respected non-Italian partners of the Cotroni-Violi family.” Courville — who was described in one 1975 newspaper article as standing “about five feet high” and measuring “about the same in circumference” with
“There’s more to you than mere money-lust, Duddy, but I’m afraid for you. You’re two people, that’s why. The scheming little bastard I saw so easily and the fine, intelligent boy underneath that your grandfather, bless him, saw. But you’re coming of age soon and you’ll have to choose. A boy can be two, three, four potential people, but a man is only one. He murders the others.”

— Uncle Benjy in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* by Mordecai Richler, 1969

What with all the money rolling into the Cotroni-Violi coffers, it was inevitable they would need a little help on the financial end. The Cosa Nostra had Meyer Lansky. The Montreal mafia had William Obront. “The Boy Wonder was just another bum at the time. Funny isn’t it? I mean his phone bills alone last year must have come to twenty G’s (he’s got lines open to all the tracks and ball parks all day long, you know), but only ten years ago he would have had to sweat blood before he coulda raised a lousy fin.”

The Quebec Police Commission, a pretty good authority on Montreal mobsters from St. Urbain Street and beyond, once wrote that William Obront “appears to have been the individual charged with accomplishing various tasks for the Cotroni-Violi group, particularly in the corporate and financial spheres. He met regularly with individuals identified as being members of the Cotroni-Violi group and was asked to undertake responsibilities ranging from a menial to an extremely important nature.”

“He’s broke like I said. So he walks up to the corner of Park and St. Joseph and hangs around the streetcar stop for a couple of hours and do you know what? ... He’s pulled for milking pay phones. Or stealing milk bottles, maybe.”

William Obront — “Willy” or “Obie” to most — was born in Montreal on March 27, 1924. Even as a young boy, he looked middle aged; with lazy black eyes, a sullen face, a drooping neck, and a receding hairline. His most notable feature was his youthful lips, which contrasted with the remainder of his ripened face, abbreviated stature, and unremarkable personality. But that scheming little bastard was a shrewd financial and corporate wizard and used these skills to become a powerful racketeer. “All that time... he’s collecting streetcar transfers off the street and selling them, see. Nerve? Nerve. At three cents apiece he’s up a quarter in two hours, and then what? He walks right in that door, MacDonald, right past where you’re standing, and into the back room. There, with only a quarter in his pocket, he sits in on the rummy game. Win? He’s worked his stake up to ten bucks in no time. And you know what he does next?”

Obie first came to the attention of the police as a shareholder in the Hi-Ho Café and the Bal Tabarin Nightclub. Both were well known as hangouts for members of the Montreal underworld. Beginning in 1950, he was part owner of the Beret Bleu nightclub along with Peter Adamo and Frank D’Asti, but sold his interest to Vincenzo Soccio in 1958. “Around the corner he goes to Moe’s barbershop and plunk goes the whole ten spot on a filly named Miss Sparks running in the fifth at Belmont. On the nose. You guessed it, MacDonald, Miss Sparks comes in and pays eleven to one. The Boy Wonder picks up his loot and goes to find himself a barbotte game. Now you and me, MacDonald, we’d take that hundred and ten fish and buy ourselves a hat, or a present for the wife maybe, and consider ourselves lucky. We mere mortals we’d right away put some of it in the bank. Right? Right. But not the Boy Wonder. No Sir.”

He ran a thriving loan-shark business that generated millions of dollars in profit, and set up companies like Trans-world Investments Ltd. (incorporated October 12, 1961) which provided financing to legal and illegal business ventures. One loyal and highly leveraged client of Obie’s was
Mitchell Bronfman. The nephew of Sam Bronfman first turned to Obie in the early 1960s when he began an executive airline service and could not get at his share of the family fortune because it was tied up in trust. Between 1962 and 1974, his Execaire Aviation Limited, located at Dorval Airport, rarely showed a profit, so Bronfman was borrowing larger and larger sums from Obie. During those years, Bronfman sent 1,199 personal cheques to Obie amounting to $2,473,316. Between 1967 and 1974 alone, Bronfman borrowed $1,417,250 from Obie and ended up accumulating interest totalling $1,037,031. By 1974, Bronfman still owed Obie around $200,000, but this money was seized from him in 1975 by the Quebec Department of Revenue as part of the $1,058,000 that Obie owed in back taxes.

"How that goniff manages to keep out of jail beats me."

Obie also made millions from playing and manipulating the stock market and maintained trading accounts with at least seven brokerage firms in Montreal. In addition to helping finance high-pressure boiler-room operations, Obie was manipulating share prices through heavy trading with associates and company insiders. He was eventually charged with more than four hundred counts of fraudulently manipulating stock market shares over a fifteen-year period. Obie's dexterous financial and criminal mind and his tight relationship with Vic Cotroni and Paolo Violi made him a top associate in the Cotroni clan during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1973, Obie played a key role in helping the Cotroni group take control of bookmaking in the Ottawa-Hull area. Larry Tucker, Obie's long-time employee, was appointed to oversee the extensive bookmaking operation with enforcement assistance from former Luigi Greco bodyguard Leslie Coleman. His job was to ensure that local bookmakers came under Tucker's control. Posing as the local salesman for Obront's meat business, Tucker was soon supervising a network of bookmakers in the Ottawa-Hull region that handled around $50,000 in bets a day, with 25 percent of the volume going to Paolo Violi. "Picture him, MacDonald, a twenty-nine-year-old boy from St. Urbain Street and he's not even made his name yet. All night he spends with those low-lifes, men who would slit their mother's throat for a lousy nickel. Gangsters, Graduates of Saint Vincent de Paul. Anti-semites, the lot. If he loses, O.K., but if he wins — If he wins … MacDonald."

Obie himself was a degenerate gambler and confessed to the Quebec Police Commission that he sometimes bet as much as $50,000 a weekend using bookies on both sides of the border. When Obie appeared before the commission, he was asked how he could bet in one day more money than he claimed to have earned in a year. "I don't generally lose," he replied."Imagine him, MacDonald. It's morning. Dawn, I mean, like at the end of the film. The city is awakening. Little tots in their little beds are dreaming pretty little dreams. Men are getting out of bed and catching shit from their wives. The exercise boys are taking the horses out. Somewhere, in the Jewish General Hospital, let's say a baby is born, and in the Catholic hospital — no offence, MacDonald — some poor misguided nun has just died of abortion. Morning, MacDonald, another day. And the Boy Wonder, his eyes ringed with black circles steps out into God's sunlight — that was before his personal troubles, you know — and in his pocket is almost one thousand de-isollers — and I should drop dead if a word if this isn't true."

A key role played by Obie in the Cotroni decina was to serve as the organization's chief banker and
financial adviser, which meant he was responsible for laundering millions of dollars in illicit revenue. As part of his money laundering operations, he opened numerous bank accounts and incorporated myriad fake and legitimate companies to hide, legitimize, and invest vast amounts of dirty money. The Quebec Police Commission estimated that over the course of 1974 and 1975 alone, Obie handled more than $84 million for the Montreal mafia and its associates. Obie was well at ease in the business world and, between 1950 and 1975, he was involved in thirty-eight companies, as owner, shareholder, or director. Despite his pretence of corporate legitimacy, rarely did Obie ever play by the rules, as the Quebec Police Commission observed in their 1977 report *Organized Crime and the World of Business*:

One of the characteristics common to all the companies incorporated in Quebec in which William Obront was known to have had interests, openly or through a frontman, is the fact that they almost never complied with the laws concerning the information required annually from companies in Quebec … People who hide behind many real or fictitious corporations are also trying to cover their tracks and mislead the police, the income tax authorities and the public. Tycoons are very adept at using this technique. William Obront did not invent or create this method, but he made use of it on a grand scale for a long time.

As the Cotroni clan’s money man, Obie was called forth to assist in financial matters both large and small. He was asked to come up with financing for drug deals that required millions of dollars in cash, but was also tapped for a thousand or even a few hundred dollars. In 1974, a shepherd who was already paying tribute to Paolo Violi approached his don to help finance the transportation of a load of lambs and goats from Texas to Quebec. Violi responded that he did not have the $5,000 on him and then called Obie and told him that a friend who deals with goats and lambs needed a cheque for $5,000. Obie asked Violi to send the shepherd over and he would provide it to him immediately. In May 1972, professional gambler Sol Teblum met with Paolo Violi for permission and money to run gambling junkets from Montreal to Las Vegas. After first consulting with Obie, Violi gave Teblum his blessing, but laid down two conditions. First, Teblum had to share 25 percent of his profits with him. Second, he was to go through Obie for the initial financing. “That morning he takes the train to Baltimore, see, and that’s a tough horse town, you know, and they never heard of the Boy Wonder yet. He’s only a St. Urbain Street boy, you know. I mean he wasn’t even born very far from where I live. Anyway, for six weeks there is no word. Rien.”

During the early to mid-1970s, Obie maintained at least nine personal accounts at four banks and from 1974 to 1975, at least forty-six people and fourteen companies made deposits — ranging from $2,500 to $1.7 million — into these accounts. During this two-year period, the deposits, which were made up of Obie’s own revenue plus that being laundered for other members and associates of the Cotroni *decina*, totalled over $18 million. Obie’s annual declared income during this time was around $38,000. When his taxable income for the years 1965 to 1973 was re-assessed, the government figured he had undeclared income of $2,197,801, which meant he had an unpaid tax bill of $1,058,102.79 (plus fines and interest). After the assessment, Quebec’s Department of Revenue seized Obie’s assets and charged him with tax fraud to the tune of $469,238.59. He was also sentenced to twenty months in jail in 1979 and was ordered to pay $683,046 in back taxes and fines or face another twenty months. “Then one day, MacDonald, one fine day, back into town he comes, only not by foot and not by train and not by plane. He’s driving a car a block long …”

Obie was also the public face behind the Cotroni group’s infiltration of Montreal’s Expo 67. In the spring of 1967, Liberal politician and former Quebec justice minister Claude Wagner announced that four companies controlled by the Montreal mafia and its associates were supplying the meat and vending machine concessionaires at the world’s fair. Joe Frankel, who Wagner called “a
chief of Montreal bookies,” owned a company called Fleur de Lys Vending Machines that had a contract to supply Expo 67. Frankel in fact was working for Obie who at the time operated Obie’s Meat Market (officially owned by his uncle Ben Obront), which also had obtained a contract to provide meat to the Expo 67 concessions. Wagner even produced a map of the Expo warehouse area that showed a space was reserved for Obie “which allows him to do business in meat at Expo.” Obie was not only the biggest supplier of meat to the fair, but he was also the only one who had cold-storage lockers on site.

“… and do you know what, MacDonald? He parks that bus right outside here and steps inside to have a smoked meat with the boys.”

Almost ten years following the world’s fair, the Quebec Police Commission made a stomach-turning discovery: most of the wieners and burgers sold by Obie’s Meat Market to Expo 67 — 400,000 pounds to be exact — was unfit for human consumption. “Meat from animals that die of disease or natural causes is being sold on a large scale,” one commission official said in 1975. “It’s supposed to be used only for dog food.” Gilbert Massey, who worked at the Cotroni-controlled Reggio Foods Inc. from 1967 to 1972, testified to the commission that at least two tons of sausages made from unfit meat was processed by the company. A butcher who worked at Reggio Foods provided the commission with his recipe for a batch of hamburger patties supplied to Expo 67: twenty pounds of turkey giblets, forty pounds of beef, sixty pounds of horsemeat, and seven or eight pounds of protein. After Reggio Foods supplied the Quebec Summer Games in Rouyn-Noranda in 1973, more than forty athletes became so sick that events had to be cancelled. Acting on a tip, government authorities seized over 20,000 pounds of horsemeat from the freezers of the school where the athletes were housed. The meat was found in boxes that had originally carried a horsemeat label, but all the labels had been removed. “By this time he owns his own stable already. So help me, MacDonald, in Baltimore he has eight horses running. O.K.; today it would be peanuts for an operator his size, but at the time, MacDonald, at the time. And from what? Streetcar transfers at three cents apiece. Streetcar transfers, that’s all. I mean can you believe that?”*


THE FRENCH CONNECTION, PART II

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, mafia groups in Italy, Canada, and the United States continued to be responsible for much of the heroin sold in North America. Montreal would also carry on as a major gateway for European-processed heroin entering the continent during this period. The only real difference from years past was that the transportation of choice was no longer ocean liners, but airplanes. A 1970 Quebec judicial inquiry into crime stated, “the Montreal International Airport plays an important part in the transporting of large quantities of narcotics.” Further, since 1967, there had been “an appreciable increase” in the number of couriers arrested stepping off planes from Europe. In 1967 alone, twenty-one drug couriers were arrested at the airport, most of who were arriving from France or Italy. On May 28, 1967, Josephine Noelle Kontoudenas and Marius Frontieri were found with 16 kilos of heroin wrapped around their waists. On October 26, a search of Michael Bernard and his wife, Yvonne Marie Louise, uncovered another 16 kilos of heroin hidden in the false bottoms of their two suitcases. On December 12 and 13, six Italian citizens with Argentinean passports were arrested with 36 kilos after arriving on separate flights from France. On September 5, 1968, Paul Antonorsi was caught with six kilos of pure heroin after getting off his flight in Montreal. The Quebec crime probe concluded “these importations were not isolated but were in fact connected with each other and that several of the suspects had successfully eluded customs officials on previous occasions.”

After being arrested in New York on October 27, 1971, French citizen Michel Mastantuono confessed
to helping smuggle 419 pounds (190 kilos) of heroin from Paris to New York via Montreal from 1969 to 1971. Mastantuono, who oversaw the Montreal end of the operation while he worked as a bartender at the Chez Clairette nightclub, recruited a number of French and French-Canadian entertainers who wittingly and unwittingly smuggled the heroin from Europe hidden in amplifiers and automobiles. One of the entertainers he used was his lover, Danielle Ouimet, a beautiful B-movie actress from Quebec. In the summer of 1970, Mastantuono travelled to France with Ouimet and purchased a Citroën DS21 automobile, which was then filled with 40 kilos of heroin and shipped to Montreal and then New York. The organizers behind the massive smuggling operation were members of New York’s Gambino Family, Joseph and Anthony Stassi. Based largely on the court testimony of Mastantuono, the two brothers were convicted and sentenced to twenty-five and thirty years, respectively, for conspiring to smuggle a total of 528 pounds of heroin into the United States. In return for his assistance, Mastantuono received a new identity through the federal witness protection program while Danielle Ouimet was sentenced in March 1976 to five years’ probation.

Among those illegally importing drugs into Montreal was Frank Cotroni, who dealt in both heroin and cocaine. Police first linked Cotroni to heroin smuggling when he was spotted in the company of Sicilian mafioso Tommasso Buscetta, who was under surveillance while he intermittently lived in Montreal in 1969 and 1970. Buscetta, who attended the landmark 1957 meeting in Sicily that mapped out future heroin trafficking by the mafia, became a key player in its international smuggling efforts. While on the lam after being convicted in absentia by an Italian court for his part in the murder of seven police officers in a 1963 shootout, Buscetta relocated to Brazil where he helped run the Sicilian Mafia’s South American narcotics operations.

Cotroni met frequently with Buscetta in Montreal, not only to coordinate the smuggling of heroin into North America, but also to expedite the illegal immigration of Sicilians into Canada and ultimately the United States. A Canadian Immigration Department intelligence report from 1969 alleged that mafia groups in Italy, Canada, and America were working together to sneak Sicilian migrants into America where they were used in such low-level criminal activities as drug smuggling and muscle-for-hire or employed in mafia-run businesses as dishwashers, trash collectors or construction labourers. Most of the smuggling routes ran through Quebec and were coordinated by the “Cotroni brothers” smuggling more than 1,000 Sicilians into the United States in recent years. “A handful has been deported; the rest work as ‘slaves’ in mob-run restaurants, bakeries and construction companies, or as hoodlums.”

The usual procedure was for the Italian migrants to come to Canada on official visitor permits, receive forged government documents, such as passports or social security cards, and then enter the U.S. In a 1971 Toronto Star article, the attorney general of Ontario spoke of whole Sicilian villages being funneled into America through Canada. On December 9, 1969, American customs officers at the Champlain, N.Y., border crossing arrested Buscetta and two New York mafia members as they tried to slip into the U.S. Buscetta, who was caught with four Canadian passports, managed to escape back into Canada. He did eventually make it into the U.S. and was arrested in New York City in August 1970 for being in the country illegally. At the time of his arrest he was using a forged Mexican passport and travelling under the name Manual Lopez. Buscetta was deported to Italy and, in 1984, became the single-most important turncoat in mafia history when he provided Italian authorities with information that led to more than 350 arrest warrants.

In addition to helping transport illegal immigrants into the U.S., Frank Cotroni was also moving cocaine into the country. On November 9, 1973, Cotroni, along with Frank D’Asti, fellow Montrealer Guido Orsini (who also worked with Cotroni and Buscetta in smuggling immigrants), Paul Oddo of New York, as well as Claudio Martinez and Jorge Asafy Bala of Mexico, were indicted by a federal grand jury in Brooklyn for conspiring to import and distribute nine kilos of cocaine in New York in 1971. The state’s main witness was Giuseppe Catania, a long-time drug dealing associate of Tommasso Buscetta, who had been
indicted in August 1973 for his involvement in smuggling more than 300 kilos of heroin into the U.S and Canada. Catania told police that Buscetta introduced him to Frank Cotroni, who purchased nine kilos of cocaine from him. Catania had obtained the coke from Jorge Asafy Bala, a major Mexican heroin and cocaine wholesaler. The drugs were then smuggled from Mexico by Claudio Martinez who delivered it to Paul Oddo in New York on January 8, 1971. After being arrested on an international warrant by the RCMP in Montreal, Frank Cotroni battled extradition all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. But the court refused to block his deportation and, on March 24, 1974, Cotroni was sentenced to fifteen years and a fine of $20,000 in a New York City courtroom. He would join fifty-nine-year-old Frank D’Asti, who just three weeks before his own arrest on the cocaine trafficking charges had been sentenced in a New Jersey courtroom to twenty years for heroin smuggling. D’Asti was arrested in the lobby at New York’s Plaza Hotel in December 1973 and charged with conspiring to smuggle ten kilos of heroin from Canada to the United States the previous year.

A THOUSAND MEN
The convictions of Frank Cotroni and Frank D’Asti were not the only setbacks that plagued the Cotroni decina during the early 1970s. Around this time, Willie Obront was awaiting trial on various fraud, tax evasion, and forgery charges. Among his other problems, Frank Cotroni was arrested in Montreal in 1972 after trying to extort $250 a week from a Greek restaurant owner. That same year Luigi Greco lost a $200,000 investment when British customs officials seized 3,395 pounds of hashish at an English port. In December, he lost his life after being fatally burned at his pizzeria when the solvent he was using to clean the floor caught on fire. In 1973, Antonio (Tony) Mucci, a Cotroni soldier, was arrested after shooting newspaper reporter Jean-Pierre Charbonneau while Conrad Bouchard, a key associate of the Cotroni clan, was implicated in a scheme to smuggle 100 kilos of heroin into America with the alleged backing of high-profile American financier Robert Vesco. The Quebec Police Commission began hearings on organized crime in 1973 and almost immediately focussed its attention on Vic Cotroni. In a widely publicized statement by police officials who appeared before the commission in November of that year, Vic was described as the “godfather” of the Montreal mafia. In the summer of 1974, he was subpoenaed to testify before the commission.

Throughout this turmoil, Paolo Violi was tightening his grip over the Montreal decina. With Frank Cotroni in prison and Luigi Greco dead, two potential obstacles to his leadership ambitions had been removed. Violi was also given control over Greco’s and Cotroni’s soldiers and territories, which only added to his power and authority. Violi’s leadership ambitions were given a boost on October 20, 1973, when he met with Gambino capo John De Matteo in New York City. The Gambino Family had taken control of the Bonanno Family following Joseph Bonanno’s forced retirement and De Matteo was inviting Violi to represent the Cotroni wing at an upcoming meeting in New York to elect a new leader for the family. The position was to be voted upon by all of the Bonanno Family captains and, much to Violi’s delight, his vote
was being courted by one of the candidates, Philip Rastelli. On February 25, 1974, Violi left Montreal for New York City and, at the meeting held at the Americana Hotel, helped elect Rastelli as the new head of the family. Rastelli had already been installed as the acting boss by the Mafia Commission and knew Violi while serving as the family's liaison to their Montreal arm. In exchange for his vote, Violi petitioned Rastelli for more men, a request that was motivated by his desire for soldiers who would be personally loyal to him. Rastelli apparently agreed to Violi's request, but would not commit to any timetable.

Violi exhibited great deference to Rastelli and actively lobbied the new Bonanno capo to install him as interim leader of the family's Montreal branch. This request was prompted by the September 1974 jailing of Vic Cotroni, who had been cited for contempt by the Quebec Organized Crime Commission, which described his testimony to the inquiry as "voluntarily incomprehensible, disconnected, vague, hazy and equivalent to a refusal to testify." While Vic had already delegated responsibility to Violi for much of the day-to-day operations of the Montreal decina, Paolo wanted to ensure his leadership was formalized. On January 9, 1975, Violi asked one of his most trusted advisers, Pietro Sciarra, to go to New York to plead his case before Rastelli. Violi told Sciarra, "You're gonna talk. The best thing is to explain your case before. You're gonna say to him: Paolo sent me here, actually, and seeing as Vincent's inside, all that time ... things there, everybody, somebody's gotta take responsibility now. So then Vincent, when he was sent down, he didn't see none of us to hand things over to somebody." A few weeks later, Violi told Joe Di Maulo, a fellow member of the Cotroni group who travelled with Violi to New York, that he'd obtained what he wanted: Rastelli had made him the acting capo for the Montreal wing, at least until Vic was out of jail. "He said to me: when Vincent gets out, have him call me, and if a change has to be made then, I'll talk to Vincent. But for the time being, you take over." While Vic's lawyer won a reversal before his year-long sentence was up, Violi's strong ties with Rastelli and his ongoing consolidation of power now placed him on almost equal footing with the aging Cotroni.

Like other mafia traditionalists, Paolo Violi stayed true to many of the prevailing customs and beliefs that underpinned his calling. Police wiretap recordings revealed a man obsessed with ensuring he was accorded the respect he felt was due him. In 1972, Violi expressed his indignation to Vic Cotroni about one Louis Stoll, whom Violi felt was insolent while he was arbitrating a dispute between Stoll and Abe Isalf. He took particular exception to Stoll's outbursts toward Isalf, an associate of Violi and Willie Obront, "But this guy lost his temper and honour toward me and I was only there to discuss business. So I will tell Obie that the fucker does not know who the people are and I am surprised of you because you had to prepare him of my visit. Now for this respect which he didn't have toward me ... I don't want to do a grave thing but I have to show him something and for this he will have to pay me $50,000. So he will learn for the next time." As the Quebec Police Commission noted, Violi was "quite upset by Stoll's attitude since he expected that Obront would have explained to Stoll how influential a person he, Violi, was and that Stoll would consequently have acted with the proper 'respect.'" Instead of physically harming Stoll, Violi decided to impose a fine, "once again illustrating the analogy of the parallel system of government" that the mafia represented to men like Violi.

In addition to respect, Violi also viewed loyalty and the code of omerta as supremely important. During one discussion with Giuseppe Cuffaro on May 10, 1974, Violi made it clear that the affairs of the Montreal decina were not to be discussed with any outsiders, including members of other mafia families. When Cuffaro asked whether as an associate of the Montreal group he could work with "friends" from outside the decina, Violi answered, "You can, but you can't talk to them about affairs of the family..." Loyalty and secrecy was also intermeshed with the mafia hierarchy, and the lowly soldier was expected to unquestioningly obey every order from his superiors and, if necessary, take the fall for them. This was never more apparent than in 1973 when two of Violi's picciotti, Moreno Gallo and Tony Vanelli, obediently bowed to his orders that they plead guilty to the murder of rival drug trafficker Angelo Facchino, whom they killed at the behest of Violi.

Paolo Violi also revelled in the mafiosi's time-honoured role as arbitrator. In one conversation with
Pietro Sciarra on April 22, 1974, he outlined what was expected of the mafioso: "Uncle Petrino, we're here to do the thinking, to arrange things for this one and that one. … and our job, all the time, is to straighten things out." One of the many mediation “clients” served by Violi was Réal Pelletier, who was in a financial dispute with a contractor who built his home. After receiving a number of anonymous telephone calls threatening his wife and children, Pelletier’s brother-in-law Ralph Di Zazzo set up a meeting with Violi, who promised Pelletier the problem could be settled if he agreed to pay $5,000 to the contractor. After Pelletier balked at this amount, Violi persuaded him to pay $2,500 to settle the affair. In his testimony before the Quebec Police Commission, Harry Ship commented on the mediation services that Violi provided in a dispute between himself and Willie Obront. When Ship was asked how it was that Violi had been accorded power to provide binding arbitration decisions, he had this to say:

Ship: Well, my view about Violi is that he is highly respected by certain people for some reason or other.
Q: Well, which kind of people?
Ship: Let’s say people that are on the fringe of legitimacy and he is called in arbitration and he makes decisions.
Q: In the same respect when you attend these types of meetings where Paolo Violi acts as “arbitrator” to what extent would you question his decision?
Ship: I would accept his arbitration as a rule
Q: In this case it seems that Obront also accepted it?
Ship: No question about it.

Violi often charged a fee for his arbitration services, whether his clients wanted the services or not. Lino and Quintino Simaglia learned this lesson the hard way. In 1971, Violi told the two brothers, who ran a small business, that he could settle a problem they had with a Toronto-based company. A few months later, Violi demanded they make a $1,000 payment every Christmas for the services he rendered. Testifying before the provincial crime commission, Lino said that they did not dare refuse this command and, as a result, were unable to afford gifts for their children during the holiday season because they had to give Violi his $1,000 “Christmas present” every year.

For Violi, his role as a mediator stemmed from his larger function as a padrone to those within and outside mafia circles, which involved using his influence and contacts to provide opportunities and expedite transactions for his “clients.” Paolo once told a picciotto named Antonio (Tony) Teoli to go through him when fencing stolen goods, "But I told you before, when you have something … tell me, because I know my way around better than you do … do it this way because I know people who get a few more dollars.” Teoli told the provincial crime commission that during 1973, "I made lots of deals, including heroin, and I talked them over with Paolo." Teoli was referring to a taped conversation with Violi who instructed him to go see Guido Orsini who could provide heroin at a price that was far less than Teoli’s current suppliers.

Like other mafiosi, Violi’s self-appointed role as a padrone was simply another way to exercise his power, while whetting his beak financially. Police recorded one exchange on March 27, 1974, where a twenty-three-year-old picciotto named Massimo Di Rodolfo incurred Violi’s wrath because he had fenced stolen jewels without consulting him first. Violi caught wind of the $4,000 transaction and summoned Di Rodolfo to his Reggio Bar where he unleashed a verbal tirade, assessed a $600 fine, and warned him in the future that any stolen merchandise must be brought to him. Before being dismissed, the young thief apologized profusely while professing his respect for Violi, “Paolo, I’ve always respected you, I’ve never done anything … Whenever I do anything, I’ll always come to you. I made a mistake … You’re the boss, Paolo.” In her 1979 biography of Violi, Ann Charney wrote that his “insistence on respect and how it ought to be expressed drove him to exercise absolute control, and to demand a cut from every transaction, even when it involved a ridiculously small sum of money.” In one instance, Violi insisted on an offering of sheep as tribute. No crime was too petty for Violi and he rarely displayed any discrimination in his choice of victims. In August 1973, he chastised two of his men, who specialized in stealing presents from wedding receptions, for bringing him "nothing
but cheap stuff." Violi then referred the two picciottis to "a good place that would bring in a lot of money." The target turned out to be Violi's own neighbour, whom he knew went away every weekend. Violi even suggested the two thieves follow him home that night so they could case his neighbour's house.

As part of his self-anointed role as padrone, Violi, like Cotroni before him, demanded tribute from those doing business in the neighbourhoods he considered his territory. Violi's insistence on payments extended to both illegal and legal commerce, and at the height of his power, he was collecting protection money from every Italian shopkeeper in the St. Leonard district. One day, Giuseppe Petrozza, manager and owner of the Tricolori Pizzeria, was paid a visit by two of Paolo's soldiers, Massimo Di Rodolfo and Tony Mucci, who demanded $5,000 from him. Wiretaps and Mucci's own testimony before the provincial crime commission reveal that it was Violi who had "suggested" they extort the money and even provided instructions on how to do so. He told Mucci to first pass by the store to make sure there were no police around. He then instructed him to tell Petrozza "they want $5,000," and if the owner resisted, to "give him a few slaps in the face." Another Italian immigrant who ran a small window-washing business testified to the commission that he received a phone call asking him to draw up a bid for a contract to clean the windows at Violi's Reggio Bar. When he arrived with his bid, two of Violi's soldiers forced him down to the basement and, with a gun pointed at his head, was ordered to make out three cheques, each for $500. Later on, Paolo came down to the basement to close the deal and when the man begged Violi to intercede on his behalf, he was released but not before having to write two cheques. After the man bravely refused to take on Violi as his partner, he soon began losing most of his customers, which forced him out of business.

Despite his petty and brutish nature, Violi was also known to have a more genteel side. "As a mobster, he played his role with a warm smile and a friendly handshake," a Toronto Star reporter once wrote. "He drove around Montreal in a white Cadillac and frequently offered rides to those he knew." Anne Charney tells the story of Bob Beale, president of the St. Leonard Home and School Association in the mid-1960s, who vigorously opposed the removal of English language instruction at local schools, and as a result found himself harassed by nationalist extremists. Violi despised the Quebec sovereignists and offered Beale moral support. "If he saw me passing by he would call me over, invite me in for a coffee and tell me what a great job I was doing," Beale was quoted in Charney's 1979 article. "'My Boy' he would say — he always called me that — 'we admire you and we appreciate this.'" Violi even went so far as to station some of his men around Beale's house for protection. Violi's hatred of the sovereignists was surpassed only by his antipathy towards competing French-Canadian mobsters. Police intercepted one conversation between Violi and Vic Cotroni where Paolo brags about his attempted hit on Pierre Lacerte, who had threatened to murder him:

**Violi:** Last night I went to do the guy, but you didn't see it in the papers.

**Cotroni:** No ... he's dead?

**Violi:** No, he's ... the asshole didn't die!

**Cotroni:** You shot him?

**Violi:** Yes, three good ones in the head.

**Cotroni:** They know you did it?

**Violi:** No, no, no, no, no, no. But I'm telling you I did it, with another picciotti who, we went there. He was asleep. Bang, bang, bang. I fired three shots.

**Cotroni:** Did he recognize you?

**Violi:** No, no. He was asleep in the house, it was in the house.

Italian immigrant named Mauro Marchettini opened a pool hall on the same block as the Reggio Bar. Before long, suppliers refused to make deliveries to the new business and after failing to heed a warning to close down, Violi unleashed his merciless brother Francesco, who beat Marchettini with a wooden paddle he used to make ice cream.
**Cotroni:** You hit him with a couple. How many?

**Violi:** Yes. But they don't have a name, but even if he lives, I don't think he'll be like before. That's if he doesn't die.

**Cotroni:** You'll shoot him again ...

**Violi:** Ha, ha, ha, ha ...

Violi was most likely lying to Vic about the attempted hit in order to impress him, although he was involved in ordering some of the various murders in the Montreal area that police blamed on inter-gang rivalries during the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1963 and 1969, 110 slayings were attributed to organized crime, seventy of which occurred in 1968 and 1969. A 1969 provincial inquiry into crime in Quebec blamed a number of the deaths on battles between the Magaddino and Bonanno families for control over Montreal's rackets. In fact, the violence was the result of ongoing conflicts between numerous criminal factions in the city, including the Italian mafia, French-Canadian mobsters, Irish criminal groups, and outlaw motorcycle gangs. The violence peaked in 1975, when there were more than two hundred murders in the province, including seventy-three that police categorized as gangland executions.

On the front lines for the Cotroni *decina* in their battles against rival French-Canadian mobsters was Joe Di Maulo and his brother Vincenzo. On May 4, 1968, Gilles Bienvenue and Albert Ouimet, two men associated with a French-Canadian gang led by Richard Blass, were shot to death by masked gunmen. Three days later, Roger Larue, a member of the Blass gang who had vowed revenge, was seen in a heated argument with Joe and Vincenzo. Larue was murdered hours later. In October 1968, Joe Di Maulo opened fire on Richard Blass, who was wounded in the head and back but survived. On May 6, 1969, Vincenzo Di Maulo and two other Cotroni soldiers pumped a dozen bullets into another French-Canadian gang member. A number of bystanders witnessed the killing, which helped lead to murder convictions against the three men. On March 12, 1971, Joe Di Maulo and three others were found guilty of first-degree murder in the slaying of three French-Canadian gangsters, but had their convictions overturned on appeal. On July 10, 1973, two Cotroni soldiers were slain after they were accused of selling poor-quality heroin to drug dealer Angelo Facchino. Paolo Violi was outraged and blamed it on members of a French-Canadian motorcycle gang who worked with Facchino. "They shot up some Italian *picciotti* and that's no good for any of us," Violi told Vic. "They've got to be dealt with."

Paolo’s call to arms resulted in a meeting among the *decina*’s ranking members. Their goal, in Violi’s own words, was to “figure out what the hell we’re going to do with these Frenchmen.” During another meeting between Violi and Frank Cotroni on July 31, 1973, Frank tells Paolo that he knows the French-Canadian men involved in the murder, saying they were “crazy, crazy, crazy … They’ve killed something like 10 guys already!” Frank agreed to take care of these men, while Violi said he would handle Facchino. He gave the job to Tony Vanelli and Moreno Gallo and on September 2, 1973, Facchino was murdered. A few weeks later, police wiretaps recorded Violi fuming over the death of another of his *picciotti* named Tony Di Genova, who was killed in retaliation just twelve days after Facchino was assassinated. Violi told two unidentified men that the Di Genova murder “never should have happened” and the only reason it did was because Frank Cotroni wasted too much time in taking care of the “Frenchmen” who ended up assassinating Di Genova. "I told Frankie to leave the Italian [Facchino] to me and to hit the Frenchmen first … He should have gone into the club, clients or no clients, lined everybody up against the wall and rat-a-tat-tat.” At a meeting held at the end of September attended by Vic and Frank Cotroni, Paolo Violi, Nicholas Di Iorio, and Tony Mucci, the decision was made that there would be no reprisals for the Di Genova hit, at least for the time being.

**THE BROTHERS DUBOIS**

Paolo Violi’s contempt for French-Canadian criminals was returned with equal vehemence by Claude Dubois, the leader of Montreal’s only other crime group that could seriously rival the strength and scope of the Cotroni clan during the 1960s and 1970s. “They put Violi as a big king,” Dubois once remarked in an interview. “To me, Violi’s a punk. He tried to go and
collect a guy for $100 a week with a punch in the nose. You don’t call that a king. For me, he’s a punk, no?”

Claude Dubois knew plenty about punks and gangsters. At its height, the Dubois network of criminals comprised about two hundred men loosely organized into independent gangs of several dozen members. At the centre of this criminal constellation were nine Dubois brothers: Raymond, Jean-Guy, Normand, Claude, Rene, Roland, Jean-Paul, and twins Maurice and Adrien. The Quebec Police Commission paid the Dubois brothers the ultimate compliment when it wrote in its 1977 report, “Some maintain that the ruthless methods of the Dubois, the large number of toughs gravitating about each of the nine brothers, as well as the widely dreaded cruelty of their hirelings, make them the most influential criminal group at the present time on the Island of Montreal.”

The brothers grew up in a poor family in the working-class district of Saint Henri in southwest Montreal and began cultivating a reputation for toughness and criminal behaviour during their teenage years. The older brothers — Jean-Guy, Raymond, Normand, and Claude — “were physically sturdy, aggressive, given to brawling and closely united as a group, having quickly learned the truth of the saying that in unity there is strength,” the commission wrote. “Together they constituted from the very beginning a gang that was perfectly cohesive, with which few in that part of town could compete.” The cornerstone of their criminal fortunes was intimidation and violence and they reigned like feudal lords over legitimate and illegitimate businesses alike in the territories they controlled. They terrorized the owners of bars and nightclubs, forced them to pay protection money, and then took over their businesses. They used similar tactics to organize a network of pimps, prostitutes, drug dealers, loan sharks, strippers, thieves, and fences. When the Cotroni decina began to show signs of weakness during the early 1970s, the Dubois brothers expanded into their territory in both the east and west ends of the city. They virtually wiped out a rival Irish gang and took over lucrative drug markets in Montreal’s downtown by outmuscling motorcycle gangs.

Their criminal careers began with a series of burglaries and armed robberies during the early 1950s.

Claude Dubois

By the end of the decade, five of the brothers were charged with, but later acquitted of, murdering a waiter who was shot in a bar after a quarrel. By the 1960s, the brothers began specializing in extortion, targeting the owners and employees of nightclubs, bars, and taverns in the eastern part of the city. If an owner refused their demands, the brothers and their associates would make nightly visits to the establishment where they would threaten the staff and patrons, pick fights, vandalize the premises, and attack the proprietor until he finally gave in. Charles Houle, the owner of a bar on Notre-Dame Street West, told the police commission how Raymond Dubois paid a visit shortly after the bar opened in 1965 and demanded that he be paid $100 a week. When Houle testified before the commission in 1975, he was still paying protection money, which he estimated had totalled more than $50,000. Once a Dubois brother gained a foothold in a particular business, he would force the owner to hire gang associates as managers and staff. The newly hired personnel would then collect protection money, control the hiring of personnel, and oversee criminal activities on the premises, including drug trafficking, loan sharking, gambling, and fencing stolen goods.
Those who refused a Dubois brother or associate paid the ultimate price, as was the case of Louis Fournier, owner of the Jean Lou Cabaret, who was murdered on June 20, 1971. After rebuffing the brothers, Laurier Gatien, the owner of the nearby Tavern Montréal, endured several attempts on his life that involved shootings, knifings, and attacks with billiard cues and balls. Despite police protection, and the conviction of Dubois-hired assassins, Gatien finally relented to the pressure and sold his tavern in October 1973.

Claude Dubois extended this protection racket to pimps and prostitutes who were forced to purchase a “work permit” for $35 if they wished to ply a street or an establishment controlled by a Dubois family member. He also extracted a percentage of their revenue. When one prostitute refused to pay her fee, acid was thrown into her face. The Dubois brothers also muscled their way into a booking agency for strippers, the Paul Calce Agency. Claude Dubois collected $250 a week from the agency, which in return received a monopoly over booking dancers at Montreal’s strip joints. By the 1970s, the Dubois gang had become the foremost loan sharks in the west end, using the bars they took over as their offices. To obtain a loan, a borrower had to visit one of the Dubois-controlled bars and if the loan was approved, the money was either given directly to the borrower or delivered by a courier. Cash repayments were expected to be made at the same establishment. The interest on most loans ran about 30 percent a month.

The Dubois brothers prospered throughout the 1970s as they continued to expand their territory and criminal activities. A 1977 Quebec Police Commission report described most of the gang as living in “opulence if we can judge by the external manifestations of wealth, such as town houses, country houses, expensive cars and an ostentatious life style.” The brothers’ success as a criminal organization can be attributed to their family bond, which gave the gang “a kind of loyalty and cohesion that protect against internal dangers such as defection, stool pigeons, or power struggles,” according to the commission, which also observed that “nine brothers and their friends, in a cohesive nucleus, can put up a firm resistance against attacks from outside and make convincing use of threats of reprisal.” There was never any formal hierarchy to their organization; each brother, either individually or in tandem with another, controlled a particular territory or criminal activity and had his own small army of soldiers, which was often shared among the brothers.

In addition to their intermittent battles with the Montreal mafia, in 1973 the Dubois brothers began an open war with the McSween gang, a smaller group of Irish-Canadian mobsters who had controlled territory adjacent to that of the Dubois brothers for a number of years. Pierre McSween and his brothers Jacques and Andre began working with the Dubois brothers in the mid-1950s to help support their fatherless family. They committed thefts, burglaries, and truck hijackings for their criminal contractors, who in turn supplied the McSweens with weapons, getaway cars, and hired hands for a cut of between 10 and 20 percent of the loot. In the early 1970s, the McSweens began operating more independently and, by 1973, they controlled a number of rackets in a portion of downtown Montreal just east of Dubois territory. Among the most profitable of the McSweens’ criminal activities was a loan-shark business that brought in $7,000 to $8,000 a week. They also scored big on a crooked bookmaking operation that took bets on the time the Montreal Canadiens scored their last goal in their home games. There were very few payoffs, however, as Jacques McSween had an arrangement with the official timekeeper at the Montreal Forum to ensure that the time of the goal reported in the newspapers was altered. The rigged lottery brought in between $15,000 and $18,000 a week for the McSweens.

The Dubois brothers were intent on driving the McSweens from their territory and launched what would be called the “war over the west end.” More than a dozen lives were lost on both sides, but the French-Canadian gangsters emerged victorious, enabling them to extend their territory. When the smoke finally cleared in June 1975, nine men linked to the McSween gang were dead. In the Montreal version of the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, four men were killed on February 13, 1975 when Dubois hit men opened fire in the bar of the South Shore Lapiniere Hotel, a McSween hangout. Three of those killed had no association with the gang. “They weren’t cool killers,” Pierre McSween told the police commission. “They stood too far back and sprayed the place … Cool guys
would have walked up to the table and put a bullet in the target's head, that way nobody else gets hit.”

Among the war dead was Jacques McSween, who was killed on October 5, 1974, after being ambushed at his home by Jean-Guy, Adrien, and Claude Dubois. All three men were charged with the murder based on evidence provided by Donald Lavoie, who was at the scene of the crime but insisted his role was confined to driving the getaway van. Despite his remonstrations, Lavoie was the Dubois brothers’ most prolific killer. He confessed to single-handedly murdering fifteen people, participating in thirty-four others, and possessing evidence on seventy-six killings in total. In 1980, Lavoie began working as an informer for the Montreal police and in exchange, he entered the witness protection program and was able to escape charges in all of the murders to which he confessed.

The war was instigated when Real Lepine, a friend and drug trafficking associate of the McSweens, was killed in a bar on Notre Dame Street West after refusing to deal drugs sold by Adrien Dubois. The Dubois brothers — especially Adrien, Claude, and Roland — had logically branched off into drug trafficking and by the mid-1970s, they controlled the sale of marijuana, hashish, LSD, amphetamines, and cocaine in the west end and centre of the city. The drugs were distributed through a web of dealers working in the licensed establishments under control of the brothers. In late 1973 and early 1974, Montreal police seized nearly two million tenuate pills, a prescription-based amphetamine being distributed by Adrien Dubois.

Claude Dubois gained control over the drug trade in parts of the downtown area by scaring away one of Montreal’s most vicious motorcycle gangs. As the Quebec Police Commission wrote, “The Claude Dubois gang is so strong that it was able to take over this important territory, almost without striking a blow, from a greatly feared motorcycle gang, the ‘Devil’s Disciples,’ noted for their violence and for the bloody battles they had with rival factions.” The Disciples had carved out a profitable drug trafficking enclave in Saint-Louis Square in downtown Montreal around 1972, which quickly became the city’s largest open-air drug market. Viewing this as an intrusion into his territory, Claude Dubois dispatched a group of hired muscle to expel the bikers and between August 1974 and January 1976, fifteen members of the Devil’s Disciples were killed.

In a telephone conversation that took place on July 12, 1975, Jean-Guy Giguere, who had just met with Claude Dubois, informed Claude Ellefesen, the leader of the drug dealing wing of the Disciples operating in Saint-Louis Square, that Dubois had put a contract on Giguere’s head and that of his associate Pierre McDuff (who was murdered in his car just a few days following the conversation). By the end of the phone call Ellefesen made it clear that he had no intention of crossing the “big one,” Claude Dubois:

Ellefesen: Another thing ... Dubois, the big one ... Giguere: Hm ... hm ...
Ellefesen: He knows I was makin’ money out of “dope” you know ...
Giguere: Oh! Yeah.
Ellefesen: Like, he wanted to take over my business.
Giguere: Oh! Maybe.
Ellefesen: Like, you know, I didn’t bug him, man, I just got the hell out.
Giguere: Yeah.
Ellefesen: I started business somewhere else.

On November 17, 1975, the Quebec Police Commission began hearings that focussed on the Dubois brothers and, on December 8, a special police task force was established to dismantle their gang. By the fall of 1976, the constant police attention began to take its toll on the brothers; their network of criminals began to unravel, their drug markets withered through police undercover operations, and their foothold in Montreal’s bars and other businesses was slipping away. Many of the gang’s most notorious and loyal associates had either met violent deaths, become police informants, or had fled Montreal. By 1977, Claude and Adrien were charged with perjury for providing false testimony to the commission, and Roland and Normand faced assault charges. Earlier that year, Jean-Paul received a year’s sentence for possessing the proceeds of a $100,000 jewellery theft and was also charged with contempt and perjury by the commission. On April 27, 1977, Jean Guy Dubois was found guilty of second-degree murder in the death of Jean-Guy Fournier. On November 12, 1982,
Claude Dubois, the driving force behind his family’s sprawling criminal empire, was convicted of ordering the 1973 murder of Frank Cotroni’s brother-in-law, Richard Desormiers, at the Mons Pays bar and was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for at least twenty-five years.

**INSTANTLY OBsolete**

The government and police cordon that closed in on the Dubois brothers was no less yielding for Paolo Violi and the criminal organization he was now leading. In May 1975, the Quebec Police Commission began hearings into the tainted-meat scandal, which resulted in a scathing report, descriptively entitled *The Fraudulent Marketing of Meat Unfit for Consumption and Fraud in Connection with Horse Meat*. The hearings also led to fifty-five police raids in Quebec that resulted in the seizure of more than 500,000 pounds of meat and a city of Montreal injunction shutting down Reggio Foods, which was enforced through a twenty-four-hour police presence at the company’s plant.

Willie Obront had fled Canada in August 1974 so he would not have to appear before the commission and relocated to Miami. His presence in the U.S. had become an embarrassment to the American government, however, especially when it was learned that the Canadian mobster was able to bypass the usual five-year waiting period for naturalization. When extradition proceedings were undertaken by the Canadian government in May 1976, he fled again, this time to Costa Rica, but was expelled the same month. Under RCMP escort, he was brought back to Canada where he was sentenced to a one-year prison term for his refusal to testify to the commission. Around the same time he was convicted of tax evasion and fraud, including a charge of fleecing creditors of Obie’s Meat Market out of $515,991, and was sentenced to four years in prison. The Quebec Police Commission also forced Armand Courville into retirement after his controlling interest in Reggio Foods was exposed and many of his other businesses were forced into bankruptcy following revelations at the hearings.

In November 1975, Paolo Violi was sentenced to a year in prison and a $25,000 fine for conspiring to manipulate Buffalo Gas and Oil shares on the Montreal Stock Exchange. That same month, Violi, Vic Cotroni, and Hamilton-based mobster John Papalia were arrested for conspiring to extort $300,000 from a Toronto stock promoter. To make matters worse, the Quebec Police Commission began new hearings the same month, focussing again on the Montreal mafia. By early December, evidence presented before the public hearing confirmed that Paolo Violi and Vincenzo Cotroni were “co-directors” of the Canadian division of a powerful New York crime family. On December 1, Violi was subpoenaed to testify before the commission. He was handed his notice to appear upon arriving at Dorval Airport in Montreal after being whisked from Toronto by police where he was being held on the aforementioned extortion charges. Just before he was transported back to Montreal, Violi was arrested by the Ontario Provincial Police, acting on a Canada-wide warrant charging Violi with conspiracy to commit grievous assault.

This charge stemmed from a 1972 attack on Pasquale Tullio by two of Violi’s soldiers. Paolo had ordered the assault on behalf of Michael Cutoni who had paid Violi $375 to avenge his honour after Tullio had struck Cutoni during an argument over money.
At Violi's preliminary hearing the judge acquitted him of the assault charge because neither Cutoni nor Tullio would testify that Violi was involved in the attack. Despite this victory, Violi was sentenced to one year in Bordeaux Prison on December 2, 1975, for refusing to answer questions before the provincial crime probe. His stay in prison was short; just before Christmas he was released on bail by the Quebec Court of Appeals after his lawyers successfully petitioned the Supreme Court of Canada to scrutinize the constitutionality of the Quebec Police Commission. Violi now appeared to be untouchable. That was until the commission introduced stunning evidence that would prove to be fatal to Violi's honour and power.

In December 1970, Bob Menard, an undercover police officer posing as an electrician, began renting a flat above Violi's Reggio Bar, located on Jean-Talon Street in the St. Leonard district of Montreal. This allowed police to plant electronic listening devices throughout the bar and Violi's adjoining offices. Along with the telephone bugs already in place, police now had almost unlimited access to conversations Violi and his colleagues held in his de facto headquarters. In a media interview following the end of his undercover duties, Menard described his unease as he walked into the bar, along with an undercover policewoman posing as his girlfriend, and encountered Violi face-to-face for the first time, “He was sitting way at the other end of the room with half a dozen flunkies around him. When he looked up to examine us I remember being struck by his eyes. They were the most piercing eyes I'd ever seen. They seemed to look right through you, and I'll tell you, they shook me up a lot more than the questions.” After interviewing Menard, Violi informed him that he could rent the flat. It would be the single-worst decision Violi ever made in his life. In his quest to generate a little more revenue for himself, Violi provided a crucial opening for “Project Benoit,” the most revealing surveillance operation ever launched against the Montreal mob. Beginning in October 1975, the provincial crime commission began to release selective transcripts of the recordings. The result, according to journalist Anne Charney, was that “Violi's private conversations, revealed for all the world to hear, made him vulnerable not only to public authority but also the authority of the mafia. In a world where silence, omerta, is a first commandment, the daily serialization of Violi's rule rendered him instantly obsolete.”

The most serious threat to Paolo Violi came not from the government, however, but from within his own crime group. The cleavages that were festering between the Sicilian and Calabrian members were now coming to a head. The result would be a power struggle that lingered until 1981, resulting in more than twenty casualties in Montreal and Italy. The main instigator of the internal strife was the decima's most errant and rebellious member, Nicolò (Nick) Rizzuto. Born on February 18, 1924, Rizzuto grew up in the small Sicilian town of Cattolica Eraclea, located in the province of Agrigento, a mafia stronghold. After marrying Libertina Manno, their first child, Vito, was born on February 21, 1946. Their daughter, Maria, would arrive soon after. Rizzuto had married into the local mafia family, which was led by his new father-in-law, Antonio Manno. When he immigrated to Canada with his wife and children in 1954, Rizzuto renewed contact with his mafia family members and other Sicilian mafiosi who had already relocated to Montreal. Most likely recruited by Luigi Greco, he
became a member of the Cotroni decina sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s. While working under the Calabrian leadership of Vic Cotroni and Paolo Violi, Rizzuto steadily built his own crew of expatriate Sicilians drawing from a well-established network of mafia members and prospects that had immigrated to Canada from the province of Agrigento.

Among his most faithful allies in Montreal were the Caruana and Cuntrera families. The patriarchs of the two clans, Pasquale Cuntrera and bothers Leonardo and Liborio Caruana, were born in Siculiana, a small village on the southern shores of Agrigento. Joined by blood and intermarriage, the two families formed a criminal clique that ruled their village. In the early 1950s, Pasquale Cuntrera and Leonardo Caruana were arraigned on homicide charges and fled Sicily for Canada. For the next twenty years, family members from three generations began to emigrate to various parts of the world — Canada, England, Venezuela, Switzerland — where they forged what would eventually become one of the world's largest drug trafficking conspiracies. The Cuntrerases settled briefly in Montreal before moving to Venezuela, headquarters for their international drug network, while the Caruanas moved to England and then Venezuela before finally settling in Canada. Wherever they were located, the families were unwavering partners of Nicolò Rizzuto.

While Rizzuto made a significant contribution to the financial coffers of the Montreal decina, he grew increasingly frustrated with the Calabrian leadership. As Peter Edwards and Antonio Nicaso write, instead of following the orders of Violi and Cotroni, “Rizzuto glibly ignored them, doing whatever he pleased, whenever he pleased. Worse yet, newly arrived Sicilian mobsters in Montreal gravitated toward him, while ignoring old Calabrian leadership.” Rizzuto's rebellious behaviour was an extension and perhaps even a deliberate provocation of the chasm that was fermenting between the Sicilian and Calabrian factions of the Montreal mafia. In a 1967 article entitled “Mafia families active in Canada,” the New York Times reported, “the Canadian police have seen indications of disharmony between Greco and the Cotroni brothers.” This was due in part to the elevation of the Calabrian Vic Cotroni to the highest post in the Bonanno Family's Montreal wing, relegating the Sicilian Greco to a subordinate role. As one senior Canadian police officer told the newspaper, “Greco is only a door opener for Vic Controni.” Greco had good reason to be insulted. Not only did he share Sicilian roots with the Bonanno Family leadership, he also had seniority over Cotroni in the family hierarchy. If Greco was resentful, it rarely showed; by all accounts he faithfully served his don until his death in 1972. The difference between Luigi Greco and Nicolò Rizzuto was that Greco appeared willing to accept a subservient role for himself and his fellow Sicilians in the Cotroni decina.

Rizzuto's frustration peaked when Cotroni's protégé and fellow Calabrian Paolo Violi was appointed interim leader in 1974, prompting him to operate even more independently. Rizzuto's wayward behaviour infuriated Violi, who constantly complained about his lack of respect for the leadership of the decina. In one conversation taped by police, Violi grumbled that Rizzuto "goes from one thing to the other, here and there, and says nothing to nobody, he does things and nobody knows nothing." As the Quebec Police Commission wrote in their 1977 report, Paolo and Vic's main grievances against Rizzuto "were that he was a
lone wolf, that he stayed away from occasions where members of the family could meet and discuss together, that he showed respect neither to his superiors nor to those placed under his charge, that he lied about his real intentions, that he by passed the line of command and acted on his own initiative in important matters, and finally that he would come and go without letting anyone know what he was doing.”

The mutual antipathy between Rizzuto and Violi only grew as Paolo did everything in his power to contain the growth and influence of the Sicilians within the Montreal mafia. In a number of conversations taped by police, Violi made it clear that any new Sicilian recruit would have to serve a five-year probation period before they could become a made member (in contrast, Carmine Galante, who was now heading the Bonanno Family after being released from prison in 1974, was initiating recent Sicilian arrivals into the New York family with little or no waiting period). On April 22, 1974, Paolo explained his rules to Pino Cuffaro, “No ‘cause you see, Pino, things here, I know all about how it is in America. Someone who comes here from Italy, it’s orders and you better believe it, he has to stay here for five years under us … After the five years are up, then everyone can see what he’s like …” On May 10, 1974, Violi said in reference to one Sicilian prospect, “We’re keeping him near us. When the right time comes, we’ll have him sent here, but today there’s no chance, ‘cause the positions are all taken for now.” For Peter Edwards and Antonio Nicaso, Violi’s membership rules were a means to establish some independence from both Sicily and America; he “was giving a Declaration of Independence of sorts, saying that the colonies had grown up and expected some respect. Especially the Calabrians in the colonies like him.” But given his oft-repeated request for more soldiers, Violi’s insistence on the five-year probationary period should more rightly be seen as a strategic ploy to ensure that the Sicilian bloc did not grow so strong as to outweigh the dominant Calabrian faction.

Vic Cotrone and Paolo Violi felt so betrayed by Rizzuto’s contemptuous and provocative actions that they moved to have him formally expelled from the Montreal decina and even considered seeking permission from New York to have him killed. But Violi was smart enough to know that New York would never sanction such an extreme move, especially given the drug trafficking revenues that Rizzuto was generating. Vic Cotrone also preferred a mediated settlement and, in conjunction with Violi, sought advice and arbitration from numerous senior mafiosi in New York and Sicily, some of whom travelled to Montreal to adjudicate the dispute. Violi went so far as to travel to New York at the beginning of 1972 to discuss the Rizzuto problem with Natale (Joe Diamond) Evola, the new boss of the Bonanno Family. Evola promised Violi that as soon as he had put his own family affairs in order, he would send an envoy to Montreal to settle this quarrel. In September of that year, two ranking members of the Bonanno Family arrived in Montreal and, after sitting down with each side, decided that Rizzuto should stay in the Montreal decina. This decision infuriated Cotroni who, in one police recording, fumed that he had the power to kick Rizzuto out, “Me, I’m capo decina. I got the right to expel.”

But Vic and Paolo were not about to challenge the authority of New York and, while both lost face as a result of the decision, they exacted some revenge when Paol was named interim head of the family in 1974. This appointment was the final affront for Rizzuto, who fled to Venezuela the same year to join the Cuntrera family in Caracas. With their growing narco-wealth, the influence of the Cuntreras and Rizzuto grew among their mafia colleagues in North America. Despite his distance from Quebec, Rizzuto had no intention of forsaking his membership in the Bonanno Family or its Montreal wing. While Nick and the Cuntreras were establishing their international base in Caracas, Vito Rizzuto and the Caruana brothers remained in Montreal to help coordinate the importation of heroin and cocaine and to maintain a foothold in the city and in the Cotroni-Violi organization until such time as the opportunity presented itself to launch a coup.

That moment came in 1976 as Violi’s power and stature within the Bonanno Family was decimated by the public release of the police wiretap transcripts. While Violi’s selection as interim head of the Montreal decina had the blessing of New York, he would never be forgiven for allowing himself to become enmeshed in the police dragnet. Violi made matters worse by telling Carmine Galante that the Sicilian faction of
the Montreal mafia continued to ignore his authority. It was no coincidence that around this time Nick Rizzuto was spending much more time in Montreal. He also travelled to New York City where he met with Galante, in part to seek permission to remove Violi, who, he argued, had become a liability and an embarrassment to the family. The events that followed over the next few years are proof that Rizzuto received the permission he sought from New York to eliminate Violi and his supporters. Pietro Sciarra, Paolo’s most trusted adviser who backed him in his battle against Rizzuto despite the fact that he was Sicilian, was the first to go. On February 14, 1976, as he was leaving a Cotrioni-owned movie theatre with his wife, Sciarra was shot dead (ironically the couple had just watched the Italian-language version of *The Godfather, Part II*). Francesco Violi, the tall and physically imposing younger brother by nine years, was next on the list. If Sciarra was targeted because he was Paolo’s consigliere, Francesco was second on the list because he was Paolo’s most loyal enforcer. On February 8, 1977, while Paolo Violi languished in jail on extortion charges, Francesco was ambushed at his family’s import business by two gunmen who barged into his office, forced him against the wall, and shot him execution style.

In May 1977, Violi was freed from a Toronto jail after the Ontario Court of Appeal reduced a six-year sentence handed to him and Vic Cotrioni on extortion charges. While Violi must have suspected that he would be the next target, he carried on with his life and attended his regular hangouts. On January 22, 1978, he received a phone call inviting him to play cards at the Reggio Bar, which he had sold some months earlier to brothers Giuseppe and Vincenzo Randisi. Paolo promised his wife that he would be home in time for dinner. After arriving at the bar, he settled into a chair at a table behind a partition at the back of the room and began playing cards with three others. Around 7:30 p.m., two masked men entered through the back door and walked straight toward the table. Approaching Violi from behind, one of the hired killers pointed a 12-gauge Italian Lupara shotgun — a traditional mafia execution weapon — at the back of his head and pulled the trigger. A second superfluous but symbolic bullet was also fired into the top of his skull. One of the men playing cards with Paolo was said to have kissed him on the cheek — the traditional *bacio della morte* (kiss of death) — right before the fatal shot was fired. Paolo Violi was forty-six years old.

The media reported that Violi knew for months that a contract worth as much as $50,000 had been placed on his life. But, as Peter Edwards and Antonio Nicaso write in their book on Canadian mafia murders, “Paolo Violi had had no plan to fight back. He had willingly gone to his old café — the centre of the fiefdom he had once controlled — to die.” He had betrayed the code of *omerta* and now, as a man of honour, was willing to accept the consequences. Other organized crime experts dispute that he went to the bar knowing he would be killed. For Lee Lamothe and Humphreys, Violi — whom they characterized as “a relatively unintelligent thug and provincial thinker who had an inflated view of his own power” — was completely unaware “he was being drawn into a trap by the Rizzuto Family the day he died. He believed a meeting was being arranged for the following week that would accommodate the use of Montreal as a heroin pipeline into the United States; the arrangement, he was told, would leave him in control of the day-to-day organized crime activities of the Quebec underworld.”

Whether Paolo had accepted his fate or not, there was little uncertainty about who was behind the hit. Police were well aware of the feud between the Calabrian and Sicilian factions and also had numerous clues to work with in uncovering Violi’s assassins. Several weeks before the murder, Montreal police began following a white van loaded with guns, ammunition, and ski masks. They felt certain they were on the trail of hired killers, but did not know the identity of the intended victim.
Frank Cotroni arriving at Montreal’s Dorval Airport in 1979 after being released from U.S. custody
Due to a lack of resources, police had to call off their surveillance just a month after it began and only a day before Violi’s murder. On the basis of the information already gathered from the aborted surveillance, police were able to quickly identify five suspects in Violi’s death and arrested three of them. All had connections to the Rizzuto and Cuntrera families: Domenico Manno was Nick Rizzuto’s brother-in-law, Agostino Cuntrera was a member of the Cuntrera family, and Giovanni DiMora had married into the Cuntrera clan. Despite the evidence against them, the three were able to get away with pleading guilty to murder conspiracy charges and received minimum sentences ranging from five to seven years. Police were unable to wrest any confessions on who ordered the hit.

Nick Rizzuto returned to Montreal shortly after Violi’s murder and, along with his son, assumed control of the decina. While the elimination of Violi removed the last obstacle to Sicilian control of the mafia in Quebec, Nick and Vito did build a working relationship with members of the Calabrian faction. However, it was their Sicilian network, in particular the Caruanas and Cuntreras, that would form the nucleus of this new chapter in the Montreal mafia’s history. Due to the shared origins and close relations between these three families, Italian authorities began referring to them collectively as the Siculiana Family, a title that refers to the region of Sicily from which all three families originated. With much of his ambitions realized, Nick Rizzuto passed the reins of power to his capable son, Vito, and returned to Venezuela to rejoin the Caruanas and Cuntreras. The Siculiana Family was to ensure Montreal continued as a gateway for drugs imported into North America, whether it was heroin now being processed in Sicily, cocaine from South America, or hashish from Pakistan and Lebanon. Rizzuto’s rise to power was paved through drug trafficking and when he took power he steered the Montreal mafia away from localized criminal ventures, such as extortion and theft, towards the much more lucrative trade in narcotics.

As Peter Edwards writes, the Montreal mafia was being transformed from a neighbourhood-based group that “mediated community disputes while parading as living embodiment of manly honour” to a multinational drug trafficking conglomerate. And it was Rizzuto’s partners, the Cuntrera-Caruana group that “represented the new spirit in the Mafia. They took as their role-model the daring venture capitalists.”

The Sicilians’ consolidation of their power over the Montreal mafia was heightened as the remainder of the old guard began to die off or join forces with the new leadership. Police considered Paolo’s brother Rocco to be only a minor participant in the Calabrian faction. Nonetheless, he was seen by the Sicilians as a threat and in order to eliminate the possibility of reprisals, Rocco had to go. On October 17, 1980, he was killed with a single shot to the heart while he sat at his kitchen table with his sons. A year earlier, Pep Cotroni died (of natural causes) after eight years of freedom from prison and his own successful return to narcotics trafficking. The remaining members of the Montreal mafia now pledged their fidelity to Nick and Vito Rizzuto. Among those who accepted the changing of the guard was Frank Cotroni, who was released from a U.S. prison into a vastly changed Montreal underworld on April 25, 1979. He was welcomed into the Rizzuto-led mafia, or at least tolerated, because of his drug trafficking experience.

On July 12, 1979, Carmine Galante was shot dead as part of the New York mafia’s ongoing power struggles and as a direct result of his own unrelenting ambition to become the don of all dons. Galante’s death was symbolic for organized crime in Montreal, for it was he more than anyone else that made the mafia in that city a branch plant of the New York families. And like that of Paolo Violi, his murder also marked a turning point for the Montreal mafia insomuch as the Rizzutos began to slowly seek greater independence from New York. While the Rizzutos did not immediately cut ties with the Bonanno Family, over the years they gained considerable autonomy to the point where they were no longer considered simply a decina, but an autonomous “family” in their own right.

As for Vic Cotroni, his life was spared because of the status he enjoyed in Montreal’s gangland, but also because it was only a matter of time before his cancer-riddled body would cease to function. On September 16, 1984, Vincenzo Cotroni, the mafia don who built Canada’s most powerful criminal organization, died of cancer at the age of seventy-four. His funeral featured a twenty-three-car procession, massive floral arrangements, and a seventeen-piece
brass band. The passing of Vic Cotroni was equally symbolic for the consolidation of the Rizzutos’ power. Over the next two decades, Vito Rizzuto would entrench his position as the most powerful mafia don, and perhaps the most powerful criminal in all of Canada, while increasingly asserting his independence from the Cosa Nostra, thereby establishing one of Canada’s first truly independent mafia families.

The body of Carmine Galante immediately following his 1979 assassination, cigar still firmly clenched in his teeth
I saw the best criminal minds in Ontario destroyed by sloth, carelessness, and greed

Rocco Perri, the once tip-top daddy of the bootleggers, now under cement bedsheets, upping some real crazy watery riffs?
But beat me daddy, eight to the bar ‘cause the three dons straight from Calabria are re-animating the ’Ndrangheta in Ontario, a sweet swinging sphere for The Society

At the top of the pops sat Don Stefano portly, balding Undertaker; one bad boss reigning from his Buffalo pad with Ontario under his thumb while he dines on Italian flesh, long gone
To solitude! Waving! Don Stafano! I’m with you in Ontario, where you mine the anti-Victorian underground and plot the next criminal revolution

The Sylvestro and Cipolla families putting it down into illegal jazz water, craps, and hops Jive, jump, kicksville; Making the scene Laying it on Ontario A new generation of junk dealers, and if that don’t turn you on brother you ain’t got no stitches

Dan Gasbarrini a solid wig, totally uncubistic hep cat, a member of the Magaddino clan
Carrying the hop out west  
  high, fly and too wet to dry  
The void is no longer in Ontario

Johnny Pops in Hamilton, pressed stud  
  stay cool, hang loose, and don't admit nothing
My solid pigeon, that roscoe is a killer-diller  
  an e-flat dillinger, hell-bent on taking over Toronto the Good.
They stone his soul to its body again  
  from its pilgrimage to a cross in the darkness under the loveless!
Corrupt Moloch! The heavy judger of men!  
Moloch whose eyes are a thousand black jacks, billy-bats, and knuckle-dusters!
Gangster in Moloch!

Vincent Feeley and Joseph McDermott,  
  hip to the hipsters of gamblers, all rejoicing in Toronto's secreted soul  
that shivered the city down to the last honest copper  
  with the echoes of shuffling cards and rolling dice and counted dollars  
the mad hatters of Toronto who bang the same bebop rackets
I'm with you in Toronto where you will split the subterranean heavens  
  and resurrect your living human soul from the dustbin of irrelevancy

His friends called him "Maxie", the sabbath-observing gambling boss who blew  
  and then was dragged off to the Town Tavern to bop with the Enforcer
Never to be the same again  
  hincty, hung up, a link in a chain that leads to insanity  
one crazy cat, frantic threads, while continuing alone, his back lifts to Heaven!
Heaven which exists and is everywhere about us! Visions!  
Omens! Hallucinations! Lunacies! Crazy man.

The Agueci brothers, Vito and Alberto  
  their evenings in Sicilian rose gardens  
knee high in white butu powder brought over to satiate America.
The one-eyed shrew that does nothing but ingest and vomit and ingest again
Angel-headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the visible mad man  
  and to be a victim  
tramped down the stroll, burned flesh, tapsville, eclipse of the doom  
  bought, sold, and done for

Big Boss Giacomo Luppino  
  falling in and digging the happenings in Steel town suburbs  
  Calabrian, Mafiosi, Magaddino capo, head of La Camera di Controllo
Ontario mobsters of Steel town I'm with you, says Magaddino the master  
  righteous, putting it down, way down  
besides the flapping laundry of suburbia
Michele Racco, undisputed Siderno daddy
copasetic, cool, a real gone, ding-dong daddy
Mooch the system
but he don't go for that magoo
he gets the signal, cool and clear
Moloch the incomprehensible prison!
Moloch the soulless jailhouse and Parliament of sorrows!

Vople using his Big Apple connections,
to become a member of the Magaddino Family.
Volpe in Toronto where you tear it down, just to build it up again
suave hep cat, the cat's pyjamas, a solid wig
busting his four-flushing conk, putting the bite on everyone
only to be dragged off to the airport! To solitude!
I'm with you in Toronto where you laugh at this invisible hypocrisy
I'm with you in Toronto where you scream in a straightjacket
that you're innocent and the immortal should never die
But you are not the living end
You are the end

A history of 'Ndrangheta
manifested in the Commissio brothers,
big barracudas, bottom dealers, midnight ramblers
vipes, but too many vops
boots laced up too tight, flipped out violence
blowing in off Lake Ontario only to be done in by a chop-beating wired biker

Extortion is the Musitanos' bag
and they go crazy on their own reign of terror
Squall, ball and climb the wall
Putting it down with dynamite, blasting others wacky
peeling the ears, loose as a goose, and getting in with the Devil's Disciples
Only to be abandoned and turned in
after clipping cokehead Domenic, the glorified drugstore cowboy
Canceling his Christmas. Scratching him from the big race.
The Eternal Checkout. The Big Chill.
And if I'm lying, I'm flying
Daddy-O

THE UNDERTAKER AND THE THREE DONs
Rocco Perri set the stage for the rebirth of Italian secret societies in post-Prohibition Ontario. While Bessie may have been the brains behind the couple's extensive bootlegging and drug trafficking business, it was Rocco's network of Calabrian-born compatriots that carried out the dirty work. This Calabrian connection would also foreshadow organized crime in Ontario for many years to come. By the 1940s, however, Perri was already considered part of the old guard of racketeers. This sentiment was particularly strong among some of the up-and-coming mafiosi on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border who were intent on taking over the rackets once dominated by
the Perri-Starkman gang. Following two attempts on his life in the late 1930s, Perri disappeared for good in 1944. Although there has been some speculation that he escaped Ontario alive, others believe his destiny was not unlike that of his criminal associates. One ill-fated crony was John Deluca who, in 1945, was murdered and then disembowelled, a symbolic gesture of contempt inflicted upon the enemies of the mafia. Another was Louis Wernick, whose body was found in a snowbank in Islington, Ontario, early the same year. The January 29, 1945, edition of the Globe and Mail reported that the forty-two-year-old bootlegger and drug dealer was “taken for a ride” and then beaten and shot to death sometime around the middle of the month. An investigation into his death reached over the border and, although his killers were never caught, newspapers speculated that Wernick was most likely murdered by a “Buffalo dope syndicate.” A secret U.S. Bureau of Narcotics report from 1944 provided evidence that Wernick was buying heroin from Frank Lojacono of Buffalo, who represented the same group that supplied Rocco and Bessie. Other Perri associates, such as Paul Doneff and Giovanni (John) Durso, also vanished around the same time.

Rocco Perri’s disappearance signalled the end of an era for Ontario’s criminal underworld. The independent mobster who achieved power during Prohibition was now being replaced by a tightly knit group of men, many of whom also hailed from Calabria and whose criminal roots were much more firmly planted in the traditions of the ’Ndrangheta. They also had less autonomy in that they were answerable to mafia families in the United States. Most notable among the new Calabrian crime bosses report from Ontario were Anthony (Tony) Sylvestro, Calogero Bordonaro (a.k.a. Charles Bardinaro), and Santo Scibetta. The so-called “three dons” were instrumental in re-animating the ’Ndrangheta in Ontario. Their rise to power, which began almost immediately after the repeal of Prohibition in the U.S., was bolstered by their close association with the Magaddino crime family in Buffalo. At the top of the family hierarchy sat Stefano Magaddino, the portly, balding don who not only resembled Nikita Khrushchev, but wielded power like a Soviet dictator. He was known as the “Undertaker” because of his funeral business and has been given credit for the quaint mafia custom of the double-decker coffin in which the body of a gangland victim would be quietly disposed of by placing it under that of the funeral parlour’s legitimate client. He would later be called “the grand old man of La Cosa Nostra,” a testament to his influential role and longevity in the American mafia. A cousin of Joe Bonanno, Magaddino was born in Castellamare del Golfo in Sicily in 1891. He became involved in mafia activities at a young age but was forced to leave the island following the murder of his brother at the hands of the rival Buccellato Family. He immigrated to the U.S. and settled in Brooklyn, where his credentials as a mafioso helped establish him as a leader among a group of Castellamare criminals. Sometime during the 1920s, Magaddino relocated to Buffalo to escape the inter-family warfare that had been exported to Brooklyn and which led police to suspect his involvement in the murder of several Buccellato Family members. Once in Buffalo, he became the largest bootlegger in western New York, importing most of his liquor from Ontario. He consolidated his power on both sides of the border through his unflinching use of violence. Some believe he was behind what the newspapers of the day called the “Good Killers,” a group of enforcers and hit men who systematically eliminated competitors in western New York, Southern Ontario, northern Pennsylvania, and eastern Ohio. Following the repeal of Prohibition, he put together his own mafia family and moved into loansharking, extortion, labour racketeering, fraud, theft, gambling, and drug trafficking. Illiterate, but with a strategic mind and a ruthless demeanour, Magaddino’s wealth and power were recognized when he was awarded a seat on the mafia’s ruling commission. As part of the partitioning of North America by the commission, Magaddino was granted jurisdiction over much of Ontario, which he jealously guarded until his death in 1974.

The alliance the three dons forged with Magaddino provided them with their own heightened level of power and prestige in Ontario’s underworld, which was instrumental in fuelling the re-emergence of the ’Ndrangheta in the province and its growing dominance in gambling, bookmaking, illegal liquor production, and drug trafficking. Santo Scibetta is believed to have already been a made member of the Magaddino Family when he arrived in Hamilton via
Buffalo following his deportation from the U.S. Little public information is available on Scibetta, in part because he was able to avoid police scrutiny for much of his life. This in itself is a remarkable testament to a man who could rightly be considered one of Ontario’s most powerful and respected mafia figures until his death in 1985. As Hamilton mob authority Adrian Humphreys noted in 1999, “As an old man, after seven decades of Mafia activity, Scibetta became a sort of universal consigliere for Ontario’s mafia groups, and would slowly wander from his modest Hamilton home on Dundurn Street South near Aberdeen Avenue to all manner of offices, restaurants, and parking lots, listening to proposals by young mobsters, giving his nod of approval for the plans and reaping a cut of the profits.” When Santo Scibetta moved to Hamilton he joined his older brother, Joseph, who had been an active Black Hander and, along with Calogero Bordonaro, was behind a number of extortion-related bombings in the city during the early 1920s. When he was not extorting the local Italian population, Bordonaro was bootlegging liquor for Rocco Perri. By transferring his allegiance to Magaddino, Bordonaro emerged from the Prohibition era as a powerful member of the Buffalo family until his death in the 1960s. He also sired the first lawyer ever to be a made member of an American mafia family — his son, Ignazio (Harold) Bordonaro — who, like his father, would enjoy a long tenure with the Ontario wing of the Magaddino Family.

Tony Sylvestro also worked for Rocco Perri as a bootlegger and a drug trafficker, as did his brother Frank. Tony took up residence in Guelph and branched off into “highgrading,” a popular racket among Canadian mafiosi that involved purchasing stolen gold from corrupt miners and then re-selling the gold on the black market. In addition, he became one of Stefano Magaddino’s biggest Canadian heroin wholesalers during the 1940s and 1950s. Tony Sylvestro died in 1962, but not before he ushered his sons into their own criminal careers. His eldest boy, Sam, would be convicted of bookmaking offences in Guelph in the 1950s and 1960s, while younger brother, Frank, was arrested on loan-sharking, bookmaking, and extortion charges.

Another criminal clan in Guelph that worked closely with the Sylvestros was the Cipolla family. “There are two Italian families in this city that bring discredit to these citizens,” Justice Bruce Macdonald wrote in his 1964 report on organized crime in Ontario. “These are the Cipolla and Sylvestro alias Sylvester families. Through these two families, criminals congregate at Guelph and the city is used as a meeting place to plan many major crimes.” The Cipolla family, which had been in Guelph since the 1920s, operated a fruit market and a restaurant that was used as a front for bootlegging, gambling, currency counterfeiting, and drug trafficking. In December 1927, the patriarch of the family, Matteo (Big Joe) Cipolla was sentenced to a five-year term in Kingston Penitentiary for drug offences. On August 9, 1933, he was arrested again, along with Alexander Duarte, of Niagara Falls, New York, Giuseppe Coddaro of Welland, Ontario, and Mike Trotta, of Niagara Falls, Ontario, and charged with selling ten ounces of cocaine and 2 pounds of gum opium. The arrests followed an undercover operation in which an RCMP officer posed as a physician from Detroit looking to purchase large quantities of narcotics. He was able to negotiate a drug buy in the U.S. from Duarte, who was supplied by Cipolla. Matteo’s sons, Charles and Frank, followed in their father’s footsteps.
and amassed criminal records that included possession of an illegal weapon, possession of counterfeit currency, and drug trafficking. In 1931, police arrested Charles Cipolla for his part in a conspiracy that was about to ship $20,000 in counterfeit American cash from Toronto to Winnipeg. Police reported that the bogus bills were the same type seized by U.S. Treasury agents when they raided a printing plant in the basement of a suburban Buffalo bungalow. Charles was convicted and sentenced to Kingston Penitentiary where he joined his brother Frank who had already been convicted after being found in possession of $40,000 in counterfeit bills the previous year.

The Sylvestro and Cipolla families were also behind the operation of illegal stills in Ontario. The size of these secret distilleries dwarfed anything that was known to be operating in Canada during Prohibition, thanks in part to the guiding hand of Magaddino who provided start-up capital and sent experienced engineers, distillers, and construction crews from south of the border. In its 1937 annual report, the RCMP alluded to the illegal stills when it described how “several large plants were seized during the past year” which are “of similar construction and capacity and the same gang of bootleggers are suspected of being responsible for the majority of the plants, although they are refrained from actually operating the still, relying on their employees to take the rap when they have the misfortune to run afoul of the provisions of the Excise Act.” One police bust carried out on a 200-acre estate near Woodbridge in York County uncovered a distillery capable of producing two hundred gallons of 63 percent-proof liquor a day. The still was so large it occupied two stories of the house, extending from the ground-level bathroom into the second-floor bedroom through a hole cut in the floor. Five people were arrested, including Cipolla, who police observed tending to the still and stirring large vats of mash.

The Sylvestro family was behind the province’s largest-known bootleg distillery, which was discovered by the RCMP on February 19, 1937, in a Toronto factory that was being rented from the Liquid Carbonic Corporation Ltd. To camouflage their illegal operation, a sign was erected on the front of the building that read, “Dominion Oil Reclaiming Company.” The lessees even went so far as to scatter a few empty oil drums around the yard to add an air of legitimacy. Below the main floor of the factory, a tunnel led to a huge still as well as several hundred five-gallon cans filled with alcohol. In a garage attached to the building, police found a five-ton truck, loaded with 1,200 gallons of distilled liquor ready for delivery. Under the garage was a 5,000-gallon mixing tank fitted with a revolving agitator, driven by a large electric motor, and a conveyor belt that fed sugar into the mix tank. Nearby were two 1,000-gallon tanks filled with alcohol and connected to a four-spout filter that filled the five-gallon cans. In another part of the building was a 4,400-gallon hot-water tank and three 10,000-gallon steel tanks, each containing mash in various states of fermentation. By the end of the raid, the RCMP had seized 22,700 pounds of sugar, 6,020 gallons of alcohol, 34,160 gallons of mash, 539 gallons of molasses, and eighteen electric motors ranging from one-quarter to 10 horsepower. At the time of the raid, six men — Morris Joseph, Hyman Topp, Abe Moore, Sam Pizzolo, George Rogers, and Patrick O’Brien — were arrested and later convicted and fined. Sam Pizzolo, a close associate of the Sylvestro family, was in charge of the operation.

Starting around the mid-1930s, Ontario’s Calabrian Mafia families, and Tony Sylvestro in particular, helped fuel the expansion of the opium and heroin trade in the province. “For a considerable period prior to June, 1936,” the RCMP wrote in its 1938 annual report, “there appeared to be very little heroin available in Toronto, but, during the latter part of that year, it became apparent large quantities of heroin were being brought into Toronto for illegal distribution.” RCMP investigators traced the source of the Turkish heroin to “two gangs, the heads of which were found to be Italians.” The first was controlled by Carman Chiovitti and Louis Spadacini, while the second, and the larger one, was headed by James Pugliese. What the RCMP did know at the time was that both were being supplied by Tony Sylvestro. At the end of June 1937, James Pugliese, Sam Pugliese, Margaret Pugliese, Charles Mulligan, and John Murphy were arrested by the RCMP in Toronto and charged under the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act. The amount of narcotics seized was small, but there was sufficient evidence to show that James Pugliese had been one of the chief sources
of heroin in Toronto. Following a brief trial, he was sentenced to three years in the Kingston Penitentiary. In 1937, Chiovitti and Spadacini were also arrested following a high-speed chase through Toronto. While they were being pursued by police, a small package was thrown from their car, which turned out to contain several capsules of heroin. After being convicted of illegal possession of drugs, Chiovetti was sentenced to three years while Spadacini was sent away for nine months.

Further evidence of Magaddino’s involvement in Ontario’s heroin trade began to emerge in 1938 with the arrest of Luigi and Dante (Dan) Gasbarrini in Toronto on drug trafficking charges. That year, information was obtained by the RCMP drug squad that heroin being sold on Toronto streets was coming from a source in Hamilton. On November 3, 1938, members of the RCMP followed a street-level trafficker from Toronto to a house on Sheaffe Street in Hamilton. When he left the house, the man was stopped by the Mounties and relieved of five capsules of heroin. The RCMP then raided the house where they discovered Luigi Gasbarrini, his wife, and their daughter. Twenty minutes later, their son, Dan, arrived. After searching the home, police found 162 capsules of heroin, each around 2.5 grams in quantity. The father and son were placed under arrest and, following their trial, Luigi received a six-month sentence, while Dan was acquitted. Dan Gasbarrini, who would go on to become a member of the Magaddino crime family, had come to Hamilton from Italy with his parents in 1926 at the age of six. By thirteen, he had dropped out of school and, following some odd jobs, he embarked on a career as a teenage bookie. During the Second World War, he was stealing and fencing war bonds. When he was hauled before the courts on theft charges, the main witness for the Crown failed to appear (and was never heard of again) and the charges were dropped. Gasbarrini became firmly entrenched in Ontario’s Calabrian Mafia when he married the daughter of Tony Sylvester. The marriage also pulled Gasbarrini deeper into Sylvester’s and Magaddino’s heroin trafficking universe. By the 1940s, classified reports from the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics and the RCMP documented the flow of Mexican brown heroin from Buffalo to Hamilton and then on to Toronto and Vancouver, as well as Turkish heroin that was moving from Ontario to Buffalo and then to the eastern seaboard. In May 1949, two of Sylvester’s main distributors, Carmen Chiovitti and Dan Gasbarrini, were arrested on drug charges in a Vancouver hotel after the RCMP obtained an adjoining room to conduct surveillance. The two were supplying heroin to the Vancouver market and, before the bust, police traced a large amount of funds that were being wired from B.C. to Dan Gasbarrini in Hamilton. On October 11 of that year, ten men were put on trial in Vancouver on drug charges and, before the end of the month, five of the conspirators, including Chiovitti and Gasbarrini, were found guilty. After appeals by the two men were dismissed by a higher court, each was sentenced to seven years.

While Magaddino controlled much of Southern Ontario, Windsor was considered the jurisdiction of Detroit’s mafia families. When he appeared before a U.S. Senate hearing into organized crime in 1963, former Detroit police commissioner George Edwards stated that Southwestern Ontario is treated as a “suburb” by the Motor City mafia. Among the Detroit mafiosi most active in the Windsor area during the 1950s and 1960s was Pietro (Peter) Corrado, who owned a 100-acre farm just outside Windsor. Corrado died in 1957, but at the time Detroit police believed he had actually gone into hiding as the farm continued to be registered in his name for years to come. As in the days of Prohibition, southwestern Ontario was of great strategic benefit for the Detroit mob, especially when it came to smuggling. In the 1950s, Windsor and the surrounding area became a launching pad for heroin imported into Detroit. The region would also serve as a staging ground for the smuggling of illegal Italian immigrants into the U.S.

Beginning in the 1950s, Pietro Corrado and his son Domenic helped ensure the Detroit families were well supplied with manpower by sneaking Italian nationals across the border to work in mafia-owned businesses in Detroit (but not before they were put to work on Corrado’s Windsor-area farm). “At first they worked for starvation wages — because their bosses used the threat of deportation to hold them in virtual slavery,” the Toronto Telegram reported in 1961. “Later, those with the proper strong arm qualifications were given jobs in the Mafia’s real business — crime.
Because these men were pawns in the hands of the syndicate, they made ideal henchmen.” The illegal immigration schemes continued until the 1970s under the supervision of other Detroit mafia members living or working out of Windsor, most notably Nicholas Cicchini, Onofrio (Mono) Minaudo, and Giuseppe (Cockeyed Joe) Catalanotte.

Onofrio Minaudo was the most senior member of the Detroit mafia on the Canadian side during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Born in Sicily sometime in the early 1900s, he entered the U.S. illegally around 1924. After he left Italy, Minaudo was convicted in absentia by an Italian court of a double murder as well as other offences and was sentenced to life imprisonment. While on the lam, he settled in Detroit and soon was running a mob-controlled bar and bowling alley. After working with the Purple Gang during Prohibition, he became a made member of the Detroit mafia where he specialized in labour racketeering and was a principal suspect in a number of unsolved murders in the city. He was deported from the U.S. in 1953 and wound up in Cuba, where he became involved in mafia-run casinos and drug smuggling. He first came to Canada on a tourist visa in 1956, moving to the Windsor suburb of Riverside. Undercover as a bakery owner who conveniently made daily bread deliveries to Detroit, Minaudo operated as a Canadian underboss for the Detroit mafia. Police Commissioner Edwards testified to the 1963 Senate hearings on organized crime that three Windsor bakers — Minaudo, Cicchini, and Catalanotte — were linked to the mob in Detroit and coordinated the smuggling of heroin, hidden in loaves of bread, across the river. Although no heroin-filled bread was ever seized, police on both sides of the border did arrest a number of drug couriers linked to Cicchini during the 1950s. This included the February 1956 arrest of Giuseppe Indelicato who was nabbed in New York City after travelling from Italy with three pounds of heroin.

**THE ENFORCER**

In the fall of 1957, two men entered the Bay Street office of Toronto stock promoter Philip Owen and beat him so viciously they knocked a tooth through his cheek. Owen laid charges against the men, but this only prompted numerous threatening phone calls as well as another attempt to attack him while he sat in his car at a red light. He eventually withdrew the charges and then collapsed into a nervous breakdown that required a six-week stay in the hospital. Following Owen’s harassment, stories began to circulate around Toronto’s financial district that other stockbrokers and businessmen were assaulted and extorted by mysterious figures. The pattern for each was painfully similar. In one encounter described by Toronto Star columnist Pierre Berton, a man of medium build entered the office of a brokerage firm and walked straight into the office of a broker. Once inside, he gave the man his name and then asked, “Does that mean anything to you?”

“No,” the broker replied.

The stranger responded, “Well, it’s going to. I’m your new partner.” The broker immediately rejected the outrageous offer.

“Don’t you know who I represent?” the stranger demanded. “I represent people from the other side.” The broker began to grow angry.

“Now look,” the stranger said, “I don’t want any trouble with you.”

“What do you want?” asked the broker.

“A thousand dollars a week—for protection.”

“What kind of protection?”

“Protection against everything.” The broker told him to leave or he’d call the police.

“Call the police eh?” replied the man. “We’ll have to learn you the ABC’s. We’ll have to give you a few lessons.”

A few minutes after the threatening stranger left, two other men walked into the broker’s office. One was swinging a blackjack. They paid no attention to his fellow employees and beat the broker unconscious before leaving. Numerous other stockbrokers were known to have been threatened and attacked. One victim paid $12,500 after he was warned, “You’re going to come home one day and find your wife and kids in the garbage can.” To some of the intended victims, the man who usually initiated the threats referred to himself as Johnny. To others, he was known by another nickname: “The Enforcer.”

John (Johnny Pops) Papalia was the son of Rosie Italiano (the cousin of Rocco Perri’s drug dealing minion Ned Italiano) and Anthony Papalia, who had immigrated to Canada from Calabria around the
beginning of the century and settled in Hamilton. Johnny was one of seven children — six boys and one girl — who were raised on Railway Street in Hamilton's lower-class Italian neighbourhood. Sometime in the 1920s, Anthony Papalia began bootlegging liquor and would continue to do so for years following the repeal of Prohibition laws. (When he was interned as an enemy alien during the Second World War, his occupation was listed simply as “Bootlegger.”) His first employer was fellow Calabrian Rocco Perri but, in later years, Anthony worked for Tony Sylvestro and become active in the various criminal rackets carried out by Ontario's Calabrian Mafia families. Papalia's ties to Sylvestro, and ultimately Magaddino, were exposed when he was interrogated by police for his possible role in the murder of Bessie Starkman.

Born on March 18, 1924, John Papalia grew to be a skinny, often sickly-looking kid, but had a tough reputation, even at a young age. He went to school with Dan Gasbarrini, marking the beginning of a partnership that would last for decades. Like his future partner-in-crime, he dropped out of school around the age of thirteen. It was as a young teenager that Papalia embarked on a criminal career, first becoming involved in theft and bootlegging before moving on to more violent crimes, such as extortion and muscle-for-hire. By 1943, Papalia had relocated to Toronto where he began running with a gang of other young toughs. While in Toronto, he received a four-month sentence for a residential break-in, the first of many convictions that would see him in and out of jail for the rest of his life. Before the end of the decade, he was pushing heroin for one of Toronto's biggest traffickers, Harvey Chernick, who was supplied by Anthony Sylvestro. In 1949, at the age of twenty-five, Papalia was arrested near Union Station after being caught with fifty capsules of the white powder. He was sentenced to two years less a day.

After his release from jail in 1951, Papalia headed to Montreal where he used his connections to land a job as an enforcer for Carmine Galante, working under the command of Luigi Greco. It was in Montreal that Papalia cemented his credentials with important mafia figures and picked up invaluable career experience through his merciless extortion of professional gamblers and shady stockbrokers. According to writer Adrian Humphreys, sometime in the mid-1950s, Papalia was called back to Ontario by Stefano Magaddino and inducted into his family. By this time, Galante had firmly incorporated Montreal into Joseph Bonanno's orbit and Magaddino was building up his own Canadian base in Southern Ontario. While the Buffalo boss already had the three dons and other mafiosi running rackets for him in Ontario, Magaddino required “a young, firm, hands-on boss to move the organization into rich, new areas of growth.” John Papalia would be one of his top selections. “Johnny was not to supersede the older dons of Ontario who already answered to Magaddino,” writes Humphreys, “but rather work with them, taking on the role of hands-on boss, with the old dons remaining almost as consigliere, advisors, and arbitrating; spiritual leaders who were paid tribute through both respect and cash payments. Although insolent with anyone from outside his criminal fraternity, Johnny remained acutely respectful of his Mafiosi elders, allowing these old dons to maintain influence over him.”

John Papalia, circa 1950s
When he returned to Hamilton around 1954, Papalia was thirty years old and a made guy. Alan Phillips depicted Papalia in his 1963 Maclean’s magazine article on the Ontario mafia as follows, “His taste in clothes and girls was costly and he had the hoodlum's habit of always carrying a thousand dollars. He was not a big man, about five-foot-eight and slight, with a scarred right cheek, hooknosed and black haired, soft-spoken and well mannered — except when slugging someone with a blackjack.” As soon as he arrived back home, Johnny Pops began assembling his own criminal crew. Among his closest recruits were enforcer Fred (Gabe) Gabourie, a former Hollywood stuntman named Jack Weaver, professional gambler Donald (Red) LeBarre, enforcers Art Tartaglia and Frank Marchildon, his brothers Domenic, Frank, and Rocco, and brother-in-law Tony Pugliese. By putting together a gang that included non-Italians, Papalia broke with ‘Ndrangheta tradition in Ontario, but the men he hand selected were fiercely loyal to their boss and most would maintain lifelong relationships with him.

Back in Hamilton, Papalia began to branch out into gambling, loansharking, extortion, and peddling stolen stock certificates. He also set up legal companies, partly as a cover for his illegal enterprises. One early indication of the overlap between his commercial and criminal interests was the 1954 gangland-style murder of Tony Coposodi, a driver working for the Crown Taxi Company, which Papalia started with his brother Domenic. In 1958, John Papalia began the Monarch Vending Machines Company with Art Tartaglia and, in Toronto, he founded the Star Vending Machine Company in partnership with Alberto Agueci, another member of the Magaddino Family. Papalia’s companies enjoyed a distinctive edge over their competitors. Business owners who had gambling debts owing to Papalia had no choice but to accept his companies’ vending machines on their premises. Bribery was also used to place machines into other businesses and, if that didn’t work, Papalia could always rely on intimidation and violence as a marketing tactic. Another competitive edge was that much of the merchandise sold through the vending machines was stolen. Not long after Papalia’s companies were established, railway cars, transport trucks, and warehouses filled with cigarettes were hijacked in the Hamilton-Niagara region.

“At first it was mostly break-ins,” an Ontario provincial police officer was quoted as saying in a 1963 interview with Maclean’s magazine. “They’d hit the warehouse. Then they started hitting the railways. Now it’s the transports. It’s spread across the province and into the States and Quebec. We believe it’s the same Toronto gang; their MO is the same. One stole forty thousand cartons in eight months in 1962–63. In one month this group ran up a gasoline bill of five hundred dollars following cigarette trucks, charting their routes and stops.” The same method was used with cargo-filled railway cars. “They get the number. They know where it stops. They don’t hit till they’re sure it’s safe, about once every month or six weeks. Then they back up a one-and-a-half-ton truck and load up about ninety cases, worth eighty to a hundred and twenty dollars a case on the black market.”

By the late 1950s, many of Papalia’s criminal ambitions had been satisfied. He was a made member of the Magaddino Family, he worked closely with the senior dons in Ontario, and he maintained strong connections with mafia figures in Montreal and New York. Magaddino also tapped Johnny to take the lead in his most ambitious plans in Ontario to date: to take over illegal gambling in Toronto.

**WHAT’S THE ODDS?**

Like most other big cities in North America, gambling and bookmaking became the most profitable of all organized criminal activities in post-Prohibition Toronto. According to a former RCMP commissioner, for every dollar bet legally at the racetrack, three to five dollars was bet illegally off track. Hockey was also a favourite among Toronto gamblers and it was no coincidence that many of the city’s illegal betting parlours encircled the famed Maple Leaf Gardens, which was built in 1931. A 1938 Toronto Daily Star article touted its hometown as one of the biggest illicit betting centres on the continent, boasting a citywide network of bookmakers “located in small stores, running elevators, driving taxis, in factories and office buildings, poolrooms and hotels.” Toronto police estimated that in 1936 the largest bookie in town had annual revenues of approximately $500,000. Beginning in the 1930s, Toronto bookies relied heavily on the Canadian Racing and Financial News company,
which not only distributed the *Daily Racing Form* (a legal publication), but occupied a downtown office with a wire service that immediately reported the results of horse races from around North America and Cuba (an illegal practice in Canada at the time because it facilitated off-track betting). When Toronto police raided the office in 1936, they found eighteen women working a bank of telephones and recording the results of various races. The operation was owned by Moe Annenberg, the American millionaire publisher of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, who also owned a chain of racing papers and the Nation Wide News Service, which wired racing results across the continent.

Toronto also had more than its fair share of underground gambling dens. During the 1930s, the largest and most prosperous was the Brown Derby, a luxurious restaurant-club located on the Lakeshore Highway in the suburb of Etobicoke. On June 16, 1938, eleven police officers equipped with sledgehammers smashed their way through a thick, heavily barred door that served as the club’s entrance. Inside, they arrested thirty-nine people and seized gambling equipment, including several tables used for blackjack, stud, and draw poker. At one end of the room hung a huge tapestry that hid a cashier’s cage. On the north side of the building was a mezzanine with a catwalk and a long chalkboard that listed the horses, jockeys, and odds at local and American tracks and recorded race results once they were received by long-distance telephone. Among the raiding party was the chief of the York police, who answered one ringing phone and was promptly informed of the results of a horse race just held in Santa Anita, California. Beneath the mezzanine on the ground floor were wickets where patrons placed bets and received their payouts. The building also incorporated a number of elaborate precautions against police raids or robbery attempts. Police had to break down five doors to get to the main betting parlour and, once inside, they found a bouncer armed with a sawed-off shotgun who sat in a cubicle lined with a quarter-inch of steel guarding the cashier’s room, which itself was hidden behind a mahogany panel. A 100-foot underground tunnel led from the basement to beyond the large fence that ran along the perimeter of the club’s backyard and, on the night of the raid, police officers arrested the shift manager who was attempting to flee through the tunnel with $2,000 in cash.

The same night, Manny Feder was arrested in his suite at the Royal York Hotel and charged with operating the Brown Derby as a common gaming house. This was at least the second time in three years
the Derby had been raided and Feder charged. When he was arrested the second time, police confiscated a key to a safety deposit box in the hotel, which they opened to find $6,850 in cash and two dozen loaded dice. (They were loaded with weights so when rolled as a pair, the combination would not add up to seven or eleven, a winning combination in craps. This was just one of many tricks used by crooked gamblers, which also included rounding or cutting edges of die so they would roll to certain numbers, or altering the backs, fronts, or sides of playing cards for the benefit of crooked dealers and players.) The Brown Derby was shut down, but Murray Feder and his financial backers simply moved their gambling and bookmaking operation to another spacious location in Etobicoke, which they re-opened as the Combine Club. A few months later, police raided the nearby Brockwood Country Club. As part of the raid, police found dice, card tables, and a roulette wheel that one newspaper called “the best ever seized in Toronto.” Police believed that Feder also had a controlling interest in this club.

Beginning in the early 1940s, “there was an alarming upsurge in organized gambling in this province, particularly in gaming,” Justice Wilfred Roach wrote in his 1962 report on organized gambling in Ontario. This increase in “gaming” (a legal term that differentiates games of chance from other types of gambling, such as sports betting) was fuelled, in part, by a provision in the Criminal Code of Canada that allowed bona fide social clubs to provide certain games of chance, although it prohibited any rake-off by the club. Professional gamblers took refuge behind incorporated social clubs to operate elaborate underground casinos, using letters patent from the Department of the Provincial Secretary. Charters for social clubs were rarely cancelled, and if a gambling den was shut down, the charter was used to open a “social club” at another location. In 1950, the chief of the Toronto police wrote, “One of our big problems in dealing with the common gaming house particularly, is the Chartered Club, which can operate under certain provisions set out in Section 226(b)(ii) of the Criminal Code, but in our opinion (and we say this after careful consideration), many of these clubs operating under provincial charter are nothing but ‘fronts’ for professional gambling activities. The most unfortunate feature is that these charters are issued by the Provincial Government for a specified organization, but only in a few cases are they issued for a specified street address or city or ‘town location,’ with the result that the charters seem to ‘float’ from one location to another, further complicating the situation for the Police.” Professional gamblers bought out existing social clubs or obtained control of dormant charters and reactivated them by filing annual returns. In his 1962 report on organized gambling, Justice Roach described one club on Yonge Street in Toronto that was able to obtain a number of charters over a nineteen-year period (one was purchased for a mere $1,700). He described the club as “a den occupied in succession by one family of wolves after another, each wrapped in the sheep’s clothing of a social club charter.”

Along with his partner, Dan Gasbarrini, John Papalia set up a lucrative gambling hall in Hamilton in 1955 under the auspices of the Porcupine Miners Social Club charter, which they put into good standing by having front men pay the government fees that had fallen into arrears. The charter, which was originally issued in the late 1920s to set up a club for miners working in the Northern Ontario town of Timmins, was secured by Tony Sylvestro (one of the club’s silent partners) from a shady mining official he knew from his highgrading days. After three years at its new location in Hamilton — 740 kilometres from Timmins, but only a block away from police headquarters — the club’s charter was revoked when police determined it was being used for professional gambling. Years later, Gasbarrini told the press, “For two years the police never bothered with us although they knew it was going on. But we never paid anyone off. It was just that we ran an honest game and had some of the best people in town coming to it.” The club was closed down, he said, when police “stopped looking the other way.” Not to be deterred Papalia, Gasbarrini, and their associates became involved in various other underground gambling clubs throughout Southern Ontario.

One police report from 1950 indicated that Toronto’s small Chinatown, located along two blocks of Elizabeth Street in the downtown core, had “no less than 8 Clubs operating under Provincial charter” that were “being used in many instances to cover up pro-
professional gambling operations.” These gambling halls were operated by “syndicates” that rigged many of their games. Another report noted that between July 15, 1946, and May 15, 1947, “a store at 76 Elizabeth Street was raided on at least nine separate occasions and its proprietors charged with keeping a common gambling house.” In each raid, a different proprietor was charged, suggesting to police that managers were being rotated through by whoever controlled the gambling club. Less than a block away, at 92 Elizabeth Street, police were equally busy; between October 26, 1946, and May 15, 1947, the small store was raided by police at least eight times, with a different manager being charged with keeping a common gaming house each time.

As illegal gaming and bookmaking increased in Toronto, so did the level of violence. Gambling joints were particularly susceptible to armed robberies, not only because of the large amounts of cash on hand, but because the victims could be expected not to file a police report. In December 1936, Toronto police were in the midst of investigating at least four robberies of illegal gambling operations, only one of which was reported. The violence was also a product of the many crooked games of chance that were being run. In one such operation on Jarvis Street, men leaving taverns were met by attractive women who enticed them to nearby apartments where they lost their money on games with stacked cards, loaded dice, and fictitious horse races. Police learned that one victim who protested his losses was beaten and then dumped in a back alley. Besides “clipping” their victims in card and dice games, the gang behind this racket was also known to make money by extorting other bookmakers and gambling dens. Police identified the leaders of this gang as John (The Bug) Brown, Michael (Mickey) Macdonald, and Joseph Constantineo. In January 1939, the three were found guilty of assaulting and robbing bootlegger James Elder in his Church Street apartment. Brown also faced charges of armed robbery, arising from the holdup of a secret gambling den. Macdonald was later arrested and tried for the murder of Jimmie Windsor, who was killed in his home, in front of his family, on the night of January 7, 1939. “The leader of the murder squad shot Windsor down in cold blood and as he lay dying with a bullet through his abdomen, kicked him in the head,” a Toronto Star article reported.

“Windsor might have talked, even with a bullet in his stomach, but repeated kicks stunned him so that there was no need to fire another shot to silence him for good.” Police were told that Windsor refused to pay a weekly $25 protection fee for his Yonge Street barbecue and dance hall. Macdonald was convicted of the murder and sentenced to hang, but four days before his execution he was given a reprieve by a court of appeal, which called into question much of the evidence provided by Crown witnesses. At the end of his second trial — and despite his confession that “I’m as good as on that rope right now!” — Macdonald was found not guilty. Nonetheless, he was transferred to Kingston Penitentiary to serve the remaining fifteen months of a two-year term for the robbery of James Elder. Around the same time, his brother Alex was sentenced to ten years for the armed robbery of a Port Credit bank in which a teller was shot.

Another by-product of Toronto's underground gaming industry was a thriving loan-shark business. In 1961, the Toronto Telegram told the story of one group of loan sharks who stationed themselves right
outside of gambling houses. One heavily indebted hotel owner had borrowed $5,000 and was required to pay $6,000 two weeks later. After a few months of avoiding his creditors, the man wound up owing more than $10,000. As the threats against him and his family escalated, he was forced to sell his home to settle the loan. In another case reported by the newspaper, “a Toronto playboy” who was delinquent on a $1,000 loan was confronted “by two strong arm men” in a Bay Street bar and forced to sign over the ownership of a new convertible car. A Toronto lawyer whose gambling losses amounted to more than $100,000 and who fell behind in his loan payments to the gang was forced to provide them with legal services, which included establishing dummy corporations that were used as fronts for loans and loan payments.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the biggest and best-known professional gamblers in Toronto were Joseph McDermott and Vincent Feeley. The man considered the brains behind their operation was Joe McDermott, who was described in a 1963 *Maclean’s* article as “an exuberant crafty man” who “respected knowledge.” He enjoyed legal texts, especially those dealing with betting and gaming, and even attended a Supreme Court session that was hearing a gambling case involving sections of the *Criminal Code*. “If anyone in Canada knew how to run a gaming house it would be Joseph McDermott,” Toronto lawyer David Humphrey told a 1962 provincial commission on organized crime. McDermott had a violent side as well. He kept a baseball bat behind a door at one of his clubs and when one patron was caught cheating at cards, it was forcefully deployed to break the man’s arm before he even had a chance to collect his winnings. Vincent Feeley, a high-school dropout who forged his own discharge papers to avoid service in the Second World War, was largely responsible for the bookmaking end of the operation. He once admitted that he rented safety deposit boxes under fictitious names — and put nothing in most of them — so he could use the bank cubicles and phones to call his customers and associates and to calculate his bookmaking sheets. Feeley also appeared to prefer footwear to bank accounts; police once found $10,000 hidden in one of his shoes.

In the 1950s, police investigations revealed that McDermott and Feeley had an interest in a number of gambling clubs in Ontario, including the Centre Road Veterans’ Club in Cooksville, the Jordan Club and Riverdale Club in downtown Toronto, the Roseland Club in Windsor, and the Frontier Club in Fort Erie. The average daily value of bets recorded at the Jordan Club alone was $30,000. Their largest and most profitable venture, however, was the Centre Road Veterans Association, which was granted a provincial charter as a social club in 1957. Other gambling halls they controlled operated under federal charters obtained from army, navy, air force, and merchant marine veterans groups. The membership lists for these “social clubs” numbered in the thousands, and McDermott became a master at manipulating provincial and federal laws by obtaining licences in the names of nominees or transferring licences between different clubs. To travel to their gambling operations scattered across the province, McDermott and Feeley had a private airplane at their disposal and both were licensed pilots. McDermott also reportedly bought a helicopter for $44,000 in cash produced from a suitcase.
McDermott and Feeley had another ace up their sleeves in the person of Sergeant John F. Cronin, second-in-command of the anti-gambling squad of the Ontario Provincial Police, who protected their operations while raiding competitors. They lost the services of Cronin who retired in 1954, but their relationship with the anti-gambling squad continued under Constable Robert Wright. In 1961, the twenty-seven-year-old police officer was committed to stand trial on charges of bribing OPP undercover agent Constable George Scott and obstructing justice. Wright’s co-defendants were forty-year-old Joseph McDermott and thirty-six-year-old Vincent Feeley, who were charged with obtaining information illegally from a police officer, obstructing justice, and keeping a common gaming house. During the trial, Scott testified that he received $1,000 in bribes from Wright for tipping him off on impending OPP raids. He also alleged that Wright had given him McDermott’s unlisted telephone number and was to call him with any information on any planned police visits to his “social clubs.” In a secret diary discovered when he was arrested on May 28, 1960, Wright had written that he was attempting to trap Constable Scott who he suspected of being in league with the two gamblers. Feeley and McDermott’s lawyers admitted both men were professional gamblers and that McDermott had readily taken the tipoffs that flowed to him. But he stressed the Crown had failed to show any evidence that either McDermott or Feeley passed even a dollar to Wright or Scott. Following a nine-day trial the three defendants were found not guilty of conspiring to bribe a policeman. (As McDermott returned to the prisoner’s box before the jury’s verdict, he leaned over to the press table and was heard to ask, “What's the odds?”)

Despite their acquittal, the three still faced other bribery and corruption-related charges, while McDermott and Feeley faced illegal gambling charges. Their ongoing trials were highly publicized affairs, not only because of the salacious details that came out on Toronto’s underground gambling scene, but because frequent references were made to senior police officials and provincial government officials who were accused of being on the take. Among those mentioned in the first trial were provincial attorney general Kelso Roberts, past and present senior officers with the OPP, and several Toronto lawyers. The man who was second-in-command of the OPP’s anti-gambling squad was made deputy chief of the Peterborough Police Force because gamblers bribed the selection committee, according to George Scott, who told the court he heard this information from Robert Wright.

The negative publicity generated from the trial also prompted greater government action against professional gambling operations. This only stoked the media frenzy due to revelations of the lucrative nature of these operations and the large amounts of bets being placed or laid off in Ontario. On February 1, 1960, Norman Joseph, an American connected to Buffalo gambling syndicates, and Michael Genovese, a front man for Papalia’s Porcupine Club and a wholesaler in Tony Sylvestros’ drug trafficking network, were convicted of keeping a common betting house at the Alexander Motel on Highway 20 outside of Hamilton. Betting sheets seized by police showed an average daily take of $22,900. On September 13, 1960, police raided one Toronto home and confiscated betting slips showing that $65,000 had been wagered on various sports and horse races over the last four days. A week later, police tracked down another Toronto bookie who took an average of $37,000 a day in bets. Most satisfying to police was the closure of the legendary gambling clubs operated by McDermott and Feeley, including the Centre Road Veterans’ Club in Cooksville, the Jordan and Lakeview clubs in Toronto, and the Roseland Club in Windsor. Police raids had become so frequent at the Centre Road Veterans’ Club that a local plumber was on call to drain the septic tank because so many die were being flushed down the toilets in moments of panic.

The increased police activity did little to satisfy members of the province’s political opposition parties, who were out for government blood. On May 2, 1961, one member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation demanded that Ontario premier John Robarts act against criminals in “high places,” contending that he was shielding government officials who were co-operating with organized crime figures. At the end of November 1961, John Wintermeyer, the Leader of the Opposition in the Ontario legislature, made similar accusations against the government. He claimed that certain gambling operations posing as social clubs were somehow immune to police interdiction. “Between 1957 and the middle of this year,”
he said in the legislature, “thirty-one so-called social clubs lost their charters as a result of illegal gambling in Metropolitan Toronto. Yet at the end of this period there were still twenty-four clubs in the Metro area suspected of illegal gambling by the police.”

The onslaught of illegal gambling and corruption allegations led to the creation of a provincial Royal Commission, headed by Justice Wilfred D. Roach. The inquiry, which began public hearings on March 20, 1962, and concluded with the commissioner’s report dated March 15, 1963, heard accusations that prominent politicians intervened to secure charters for social clubs despite police reports showing the clubs were being used for professional gaming. One witness from the provincial government estimated that in the previous eleven years, five provincial secretaries issued a total of twenty-seven charters (overriding the objections of police). In the end, Justice Roach cleared most government officials, including Kelso Roberts, of any wrongdoing. Unfounded rumours of high-level corruption in the Ontario government were largely the work of Joseph McDermott, who Justice Roach called “an audacious liar who will stop at nothing to advance his own cause.” However, Roach did recommend that OPP deputy commissioner James Bartlett and District Inspector J. Allan Stringer be removed from the provincial police force because of evidence “pointing to an association between Stringer and Feeley.” Both men resigned in disgrace.

Singled out in the final Royal Commission report were McDermott and Feeley. Following the release of the report, McDermott offered to surrender two club charters he controlled, an offer that was made from Burwash Reformatory where he was serving eighteen months after finally being convicted for conspiring to corrupt a police officer. The report also documented the growing presence of American gambling syndicates in Ontario. When the report was issued, mafia families from various parts of the U.S. were in the midst of a two-decade-long campaign to cash in on and consolidate gaming and bookmaking operations in the province. In 1948, Detroit police commissioner Harry Toy stated publicly that Windsor was a “central wire service” that supplied all the bookie establishments in Detroit. In 1951, while testifying before Senator Kefauver’s organized crime committee in Washington, D.C., the new commissioner of the Detroit police repeated the claim that Windsor was the source of illegal racetrack wire information for Detroit and other American cities. He said an investigation into one bookmaking operation in Detroit uncovered an “intricate network” of racing information, which originated in Toledo, Ohio, then went to Windsor, and from there to Detroit. According to FBI reports, Frank Costello, the powerful New York mob boss who had poured much of his Prohibition-era profits into illegal gambling, had controlled Windsor’s bookmaking syndicates since the mid-1940s. By overseeing Windsor’s bookmaking operations, the FBI concluded, Costello was able to control bookmaking in Detroit and parts of Ohio.

A 1950 Toronto Daily Star article claimed that, in 1945, Costello sold his Detroit bookmaking interests to Howard Kerr of Windsor, who was once described as the “best handicapper” in the horse-race business in America. By 1949, Kerr was muscled out of the Detroit-Windsor bookmaking market by Vito Giacalone, Peter Liccavoli, the long-time Detroit mafia boss, who around the same time employed a Hamilton woman to oversee a “travelling prostitution system, whereby women are interchanged among large cities, from Boston and Montreal to Chicago and Detroit,” according to the Star. The 1964 government inquiry into organized crime in Ontario also established that Vito Giacalone, a kingpin in the Detroit gambling scene, had a financial interest in McDermott and Feeley’s Roseland Veterans’ Club in Windsor area, and was even arrested there as a found-in during an OPP raid. In 1958, a police intelligence report alleged that McDermott and Feeley went on a hunting party in Moosonee, Ontario, with Detroit mobsters Domenic Corrado, Vincent Meli, and Anthony Tocco. McDermott covered the party’s expenses, a bill of around $2,000.

Outside of Windsor, the Magaddino Family was behind La Cosa Nostra’s takeover of gambling in Southern Ontario. He no doubt received a cut from John Papalia’s clubs in Hamilton and also backed the Sylvestro and Cipolla families in establishing Guelph as an important link in a multimillion-dollar cross-border bookmaking network. Guelph police estimated that $15,000 to $30,000 a day in illegal bets were handled through bookies in the city. One of the first signs of
Magaddino’s foray into Toronto’s underground gambling industry was revealed on March 26, 1947, when police raided an illegal betting place located in the rear of a fruit store on Dundas Street. Arrested and charged with keeping a common betting house was Carmen Chiovitti, the Magaddino Family member who had just been released from a 1937 drug trafficking sentence. Also arrested were his brother Samuel and their mother, who had a purse in her apron pocket containing more than $2,000 in cash. (She later used the money to provide bail for herself, her sons, and those arrested as found-ins.) Samuel took the rap by pleading guilty, allowing his brother and mother to escape conviction, although the sentencing judge did mention Carmen’s considerable criminal history, which included charges on ten separate occasions related to illegal gambling, drugs, contraband liquor, and assaulting a police officer.

There were other indications that the Magaddino Family and other upstate New York gambling syndicates were extending their reach into Ontario. Sam Rich, a Buffalo bookmaker, had moved into a Toronto hotel and was taking bets from all over the U.S. On March 28, 1961, Toronto police raided the premises at 353 Betty Ann Drive in Toronto, where they charged Reuben Stein and Sam Band for keeping a common betting house. While the police were on the premises they intercepted incoming telephone calls in which large bets were being placed or laid off from numerous American and Canadian cities, including Queenston and Buffalo, New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Miami, Hamilton, Guelph, and Montreal. That same year, the New York State Commission of Investigation released a report called *Syndicated Gambling in New York State*, which provided evidence that Toronto, Guelph, Hamilton, Niagara Falls, and Montreal were part of a bookmaking network that fanned out across upstate New York. “Layoff centers are maintained in several cities in Canada,” the report stated. “There is an extremely close relationship between major bookmakers in Canada and those in the Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany areas. Many of these bookmakers in Canada are transplants from New York city who periodically shift their operations from the one site to the other.” The close relationship between bookies in upstate New York and Southern Ontario is a function of geography, according to the report, as “bookmakers tend to operate on a regional basis. Thus, the small bookmakers in the central New York area lay off primarily with contacts in their own immediate geographical section.” The report described one Toronto-based betting operation that netted nearly $500,000 during two months of the baseball season by taking layoffs from bookies in upstate New York.

By the late 1950s, Stefano Magaddino had firmly incorporated many of Ontario’s bookmaking operations into his fold, turning numerous cities into important layoff centres, while taking an interest in numerous underground casinos throughout Southern Ontario. Yet, despite the encroachment of the mafia on Southern Ontario, some large-scale gambling operations in Toronto continued to be run by independents. At the behest of Magaddino, John Papalia was determined to change that once and for all.

**THE MOST REMARKABLE CASE OF MASS BLINDNESS IN SCIENTIFIC HISTORY**

Papalia’s efforts to consolidate the mafia’s hold over underground gambling operations in Toronto began around the late 1950s. By the early 1960s, almost every major illegal gaming and bookmaking enterprise in Toronto (outside of Chinatown) was either in partnership with, paying protection to, under the control of, or being shut down by Magaddino through John Papalia and his crew. An April 1961 article in the *Toronto Telegram* described the plight of one bookmaker operating in the downtown core who told the newspaper that three tough-looking men paid him a recent visit and ordered him to close shop. “When he objected he was told it would be better for his health if he complied, and he did.” This story was repeated by at least five other bookies in the city. “Those in the know say the mobsters want to wipe out the small bookies so all the money will filter through big-time outlets, which they hope to control.” The takeovers continued throughout the first half of the 1960s, as Allan Phillips summarized in his 1964 *Maclean’s* article:

The syndicate has been tightening its control in Toronto. Its former employees appear in other combines, no doubt as watchdogs. Some of the best-known bookmakers of the Fifties are being squeezed out. One of the biggest —
he netted a quarter of a million dollars a couple of years ago on sports bets — has been reduced to taking bets on the street. Another has quit and is in the scrap-metal business. A third is in the stock market. A fourth, once big, applied for a gun permit and has opened up retail stores in Sudbury and North Bay, the only two northern Ontario cities east of the Lakehead with bookmakers. When one would-be free-enterpriser said that he wanted to get in the business, a friend, a bookie, asked, “Have you got permission?”

Not even the most powerful professional gamblers in Toronto could escape the mafia’s reach. Joseph McDermott and Vincent Feeley were providing a cut from their Veterans’ Club revenue to the Detroit families before it was shut down by police. By 1958, the Ramsey Club in Niagara Falls, which the two also controlled, was being run by Benny Nicoletti on behalf of Stefano Magaddino. In 1960, McDermott and Feeley reportedly received a visit from Peter Magaddino, Stefano’s brother, who sought to tap into their connections with the Anti-Gambling Branch of the Ontario Provincial Police. With Ontario’s biggest gambling operators under the thumb of the American mafia, Johnny Pops now turned his attention to the last of the big independents in Toronto: Maxwell Bluestein.

His friends called him “Max” or “Maxie” and he was described by one journalist as “a tough man with deep blue eyes and very dark hair, which only accentuated the pallid flesh of his harshly featured face. Although a man of very few words — he hardly spoke at all, in fact — he was bold, cocky, and clever, and was into gambling’s biggest bucks.” Bluestein had long been involved in Toronto’s criminal world and recorded his first conviction in 1934. In 1946, he was one of three men charged with assaulting Ernest Steinberg, who was most likely attacked because he had given police information that led to a raid on a local gambling joint. A classified RCMP report from 1945 accused Maxie Baker (his real name) and associates of being “the main heroin distributors in Toronto” and “definitely connected with the peddling of illicit narcotics in this City.”

By the 1950s, Bluestein had become wealthy enough to live in the fashionable Forest Hill district of Toronto. He had an interest in several popular gambling clubs, including the Cooksville Veteran’s Club, but his jewel in the crown was the Lakeview Club at Eglinton and Bathurst, which he ran with Joseph Zeldin and Samuel Binder. Incorporated as a social club, it operated for more than three decades and, by the 1950s, had become Toronto’s pre-eminent gambling establishment. If this were not enough, Maxie always had several crap games floating around town. Notwithstanding these profitable businesses, most of his money came from sports books and he was known to have employed at least two hundred runners in Toronto to take wagers. Betting slips seized by police following a raid on the Lakeview Club in 1960 showed a daily average of $37,700 over a nine-day period. In his testimony before the Roach Commission, Bluestein argued that this estimate was excessive, but he did admit that his daily intake was more than $10,000. In addition to his gambling operations, he was known to have investments in a finance company, hotels, and apartment buildings.

In 1958, John Papalia asked Bluestein to meet with him at the Westbury Hotel in Toronto. When he arrived, Maxie found he would be sharing company
with representatives of mafia families from Montreal, New York, Buffalo, and Detroit. Pops told Bluestein in no uncertain terms that he was to merge his operation with the mafia's gambling interests in the city and, in return, would receive a percentage of the take. Maxie refused and for the next three years, Papalia and his men placed intense pressure on him to capitulate, which included recurring threats as well as tips to police that resulted in raids on his Lakeview Club. Fiercely independent, Maxie began to fight back. He started by feeding information to the police on Papalia's gambling's outlets. He applied for a gun licence, but was turned down following a criminal background check. He then arranged for goons to come in from Detroit to rough up Papalia, hoping that it would scare him off. It didn't work. When the Detroit enforcers discovered Papalia's mafia connections they immediately backed off and even lent their support to his move against Bluestein.

In July 1960, the Lakeview Club was raided by police and Bluestein and his partners were convicted of keeping a common betting house. The stingy Bluestein chose four months in jail over the $15,000 fine, but this would prove to be a grave tactical error on his part. After finding out that Papalia was ratcheting up his efforts to take over Bluestein's gambling operations, Maxie promptly paid his fine and was released from jail. Before long, Bluestein was called to another meeting with Papalia, which was to take place on March 21, 1961, at the Town Tavern, a popular Toronto lounge and restaurant. Papalia had arranged for the restaurant to be packed with his friends, associates, and other professional gamblers and bookmakers so they could watch Bluestein surrender, or, if he continued to refuse Papalia's entreaties, to observe the consequences.

Bluestein arrived at the restaurant, settled into a table with some friends, and then sealed his fate by rejecting a drink ordered for him by Papalia. Maxie was well aware of the significance of this seemingly charitable offer; if he accepted the drink it would signal his intentions to give in to Papalia's demands. At about one o'clock in the morning, as Bluestein was picking up his things at the hat-check counter, Papalia asked him to step into the lounge, which by this time was dark and deserted. At the same time, Papalia's henchmen, Freddie Gabourie, Jack Weaver, and Frank Marchildon, had sidled up towards the counter. The men now had Bluestein surrounded and moved in for the kill. Instinctually, Maxie pulled a pocket knife and was able to stab Marchildon several times. But he was outnumbered. In his Toronto Star column that appeared a couple of weeks later, Pierre Berton describes the rest:

A moment later, in full view of 100 persons, including the personnel of the Town Tavern and the steady customers, they administered as terrible a beating as it is possible to give to a man without killing him. Iron bars, with ropes tied to them for better leverage, rained down on Bluestein's head and across his forehead, eyes and cheekbones. His scalp was split seven or eight times. Knuckle dusters smashed into his eyes and a broken bottle was ground into his mouth. When Bluestein dropped to the floor he was kicked in the face. His overcoat, torn and slashed, was literally drenched in his own blood. His scalp later required 20 stitches.

With the help of Berton's column, Bluestein's thrashing would be front-page news for weeks to come. The publicity not only provided Papalia with a new notoriety, but it confirmed to many the existence of the mafia in Ontario. Four days after the beating, metro police announced that the attack was the work of a secret organization that was attempting to take over the city's gambling operations. The April 8, 1961, edition of the Toronto Telegram howled that the beating was conducted by “three of the most notorious racketeers in Ontario,” members of the Italian mafia that were muscling in on Toronto's gambling rackets. Metropolitan Toronto chairman Fred Gardiner charged that the planned attack was “evidence of the introduction of gangsterism into Toronto” and promised that the police commission would look into the incident.

Despite the widespread publicity, police were severely hampered in their ability to lay charges. Topcoats belonging to two of Bluestein's attackers were left in the Town Tavern, but, as the Telegram reported, “both bore the trademarks of the professional gangster — frayed patches where labels had been removed earlier to prevent identification.” Bluestein
was not co-operating with police and threats against the lives of witnesses meant that few came forward. As Pierre Berton wrote on April 7, customers at the Town Tavern that night had been stricken by “perhaps the most remarkable case of mass blindness in scientific history.” Police eventually did convince witnesses to come forward and two months after the beating occurred, Freddy Gabourie, Jack Weaver, and Frank Marchildon surrendered to police. Papalia was also charged but had disappeared from sight. A massive manhunt was undertaken, while surveillance was conducted on Papalia’s known associates. One man being tailed by police in the hopes he would lead them to Papalia unexpectedly pulled a baseball bat from his car and swung wildly at his two police shadows. At the same time, he appeared to be throwing a packet into the gutter. The man was overpowered by the two officers, who also retrieved the small package. Inside, they found two capsules of heroin. As a result, Alberto Agueci was charged with illegal possession of narcotics and possession of a dangerous weapon.

Papalia did eventually surrender to police, with some speculating that he was forced to by his mafia superiors in order to take some of the heat off the syndicate. On May 11, 1961, dressed in a tailored suit, wearing dark glasses, and with a white handkerchief shielding his face from the media’s cameras, John Papalia gave himself up to Hamilton police. He was quickly hustled off to Toronto and after appearing before a magistrate, he was released on bail. On his way out the door, he stomped on the foot of a television cameraman and spat at a newspaper photographer. A month later, three men were convicted and sentenced to jail for the beating. John Papalia was given eighteen months, Frank Marchildon was sentenced to nine months, and Fred Gabourie received four months.

That night at the Town Tavern was seen by many as a seminal event in the history of organized crime in Ontario. It confirmed the presence of the mafia in the province, exposed their efforts to take over Toronto’s underground gambling industry, and helped trigger the creation of a Royal Commission into gambling and organized crime. As organized crime writer James Dubro explains, it was also significant in that the attack backfired on Stefano Magaddino and John Papalia in their quest to establish a mafia monopoly over Toronto’s criminal rackets:

Since the Mafia’s lifeline is in its ability to instill fear, Johnny “Pops” and the Mafia, in the end, lost the fight to Maxie Bluestein. Not only did Maxie stand up and fight, he inflicted his own share of damage. And he showed everyone that all one had to do to overcome the Mafia was to fight back, even if it meant risking your own life. Many on the street argue that Maxie was never the same after the terrible beating he received from “Pops” and the boys. But Bluestein did hold on to his gambling in Toronto and “Pops” did go to jail for the beating after many of the reluctant witnesses were shamed by Pierre Berton and others into coming forward. Papalia didn’t take over Bluestein’s operations or Mafia operations in Toronto. In fact, he has never been able to take over mob operations in his hometown of Hamilton. After the Bluestein beating, Papalia was never as big as he once appeared to be. He had lost a lot of respect, a vital and all-too-fragile commodity for a Mafia boss.

While Bluestein held his own against Papalia, he was never the same following the beating. He was suspicious of everyone and rarely left his swank Forest Hill home. In 1973, he discovered four sticks of undetonated dynamite under his car, which only contributed to his well-founded sense of paranoia. The same year, he shot and killed a close friend, David Stillman. He was found not guilty by reason of insanity — he denied the killing and even refused to accept that Stillman was dead — and was committed to a mental institution. In time he was released and, on October 30, 1984, he died at his home following a heart attack.

THERE IS SO MUCH JUNK IN CANADA IT’S LYING AROUND IN BAGS

While the American mafia and its Ontario branches were busy trying to corner the illegal gambling markets, they also had their sights set on incorporating the province into an international heroin network. The province would not only be a destination for the drug, but, more important, it would serve as a gateway to the United States. Ontario had already been used on a limited basis by mafia families to smuggle heroin into North America, but it was dur-
ing the late 1950s and early 1960s that it began to flow into Ontario in record quantities. American mafia leaders attending the October 1957 meeting at the Grand Hôtel des Palmes in Palermo and the Apalachin conference in upstate New York a month later reportedly decided that Ontario would be one of the continent’s main conduits in their expanding heroin importation plans. During the latter half of the 1950s, Settimo (Big Sam) Accardi was coordinating the smuggling of heroin, hidden in suitcases and cans of anchovies, from Sicily and Marseilles into Canada and the United States while he lived in Toronto. The 6-foot, 215-pound member of New York’s Genovese crime family took up residence in Toronto after he skipped bail pending a trial on heroin trafficking charges in New York City.

Another major figure responsible for establishing the Ontario connection was Alberto Agueci, the Magaddino Family member who also lived in Toronto and who maintained strong contacts with heroin wholesalers in his native Sicily. Agueci was born in Salemi, Sicily, in 1922, two years after his brother, Vito, another Magaddino Family mafioso. As the brothers grew older, both became involved in mafia activities in Sicily and, in 1950, Alberto was refused entry into the U.S. due to Italian police reports that documented his criminal ties. But he was accepted into Canada, first settling in Windsor and then Toronto. When he entered the country, he carried with him a letter of introduction from Rosario Mancino, a Sicilian Mafia boss who was one of the biggest international heroin traffickers at the time. Vito followed his brother to Canada and the two opened a bakery in Toronto, while specializing in heroin importation and trafficking in Ontario and western New York on behalf of the Magaddino Family. In his testimony to the 1963 Senate Committee on Organized Crime, Joseph Valachi, a low-level soldier with the Genovese Family, made this brief, but significant, reference to Vito:

Valachi: … Vito Agueci himself is a member from Canada.
Q: From Canada?
Valachi: Yes.
Q: He is a member of another family though?
Valachi: In Canada.

Through his contacts in Sicily, Alberto Agueci began bringing over small quantities of heroin into Canada, often sending his brother to make the purchases. Alberto’s Sicilian suppliers assured him they could get their hands on an endless supply of almost pure heroin from Corsican gangsters. Now all he needed was a larger market. The opportunity to supply the biggest heroin market in North America presented itself when Alberto was introduced to Vincent Mauro and his two lieutenants, Frank (Frankie the Bug) Caruso and Salvatore Rinaldo. All three men were made members of the Genovese Family, New York City’s most prolific heroin retailers at the time. Rinaldo, who would later turn state’s evidence and testify against his Canadian drug dealing colleagues, was working as a small-scale heroin distributor for Mauro in New York, but his suppliers were inconsistent and rarely had the large quantities he desired. The man who would bring Alberto Agueci and Vincent
Mauro together and cement the relationship between supplier and distributor was none other than John Papalia. As two of the most prominent members of the Magaddino Family’s Canadian wing, Agueci and Papalia were close associates, having worked together on a number of scams in Ontario. One of their swindles was rigged bingo games where tiny printing presses that manufactured winning cards were smuggled into bingo halls. They also became partners in illegal gambling operations and liquor smuggling, and the two co-owned the highly profitable Star Vending Machine Company. Papalia was also close to Vincent Mauro (a.k.a. Vinnie Bruno), the heavy-set native of Greenwich Village who reported to Anthony Strollo, the Genovese underboss who oversaw the family’s heroin trafficking in New York.

In October 1958, Papalia introduced Alberto Agueci to Mauro, who then put Agueci in contact with Caruso and Rinaldo to work out the details of their fledgling heroin smuggling partnership. “I was told we were going to work together,” Rinaldo later told a New York City courtroom. “Agueci and Papalia would take care of their end in Canada and bring the stuff from Europe and we would take care of our end here.” Rinaldo told the court that the joint venture was hatched in March 1960, after fellow Genovese soldier Joseph Valachi returned from Canada and proclaimed there was “so much junk in Canada it was laying around in bags.” The date provided by Rinaldo was perhaps a deliberate lie, although Valachi did spend a few days in Toronto under the care of Alberto Agueci and John Papalia in January 1960, while he was on the lam after being charged with drug trafficking in New York (while at Alberto Agueci’s Toronto home he received a phone call from Anthony Strollo ordering him back to New York to give himself up to police).

Regardless of how and when the partnership started, it was a perfect fit for both sides: Alberto Agueci had access to substantial quantities of heroin in Sicily, but he lacked a distribution system in a large North American market. The Genovese Family had a large market and a distribution network, but did not have a reliable supplier. Agueci informed Magaddino of their plans and was guaranteed a healthy percentage of the drug profits. In return, he pledged legal help and bail money if his men ran into trouble. Magaddino’s influence over heroin trafficking now stretched from Southern Ontario through to western New York and the Ohio Valley all the way to New York City. In the early 1960s, police intelligence indicated that his organization included two Ontario residents who worked as drug wholesalers (Alberto Agueci and John Papalia), six who operated as local suppliers in Southern Ontario and the Buffalo-Niagara Falls region of New York, and two Buffalo residents who smuggled the heroin across the U.S.-Canada border.

Before being imported into North America, the heroin was first transported from laboratories in France to Agueci’s Sicilian hometown of Salemi where it would be sewn into quilts or secreted in false-bottomed suitcases. From there it would be carried to New York City by unwitting Italians travelling via passenger ships. Helping out with the Italian end of the operation was Salvatore Valenti, a mafia-connected travel agent in Sicily whose job was to arrange for the voyage of the Italian nationals and to ensure the drug-laden luggage found its way into their hands. When the ocean liners arrived in New York, the Italian passengers would be met by Matteo Palermi, a Sicilian immigrant living in New York who would pick up the suitcases and deliver them to the Brooklyn bakery where he worked. Once the suitcases were safely in his possession, Palermi would contact Agueci or Rinaldo and tell them how many “boys” (code word for the number of kilos in each suitcase) had arrived. The luggage was then picked up from Palermi and the heroin removed, diluted, and sold to wholesale and retail customers throughout New York City, including other Genovese soldiers like Joseph Valachi and Salvatore Maneri. Rinaldo would turn over the funds generated from the sales to Vincent Mauro or Frank Caruso who would then provide a cut, in the form of $5,000 bank drafts, to John Papalia. In addition to the unsuspecting Italian tourist couriers, Alberto Agueci and Papalia also had Scopelliti, an Ontario-based mafia prospect in his early twenties, make at least one trip to Italy to smuggle heroin to New York. Smaller quantities of heroin were also brought into Canada via Toronto, where it would be repackaged and spirited across the border to be distributed in western New York by Magaddino Family members or in Detroit where it was wholesaled by Nicholas Cicchini.
By the end of the 1950s, dozens of kilos of heroin were being shipped to New York without a hitch. Things were going so well that steamer trunks were now being used to accommodate larger quantities and plans were afoot to make a one-time purchase of 300 kilos. By the summer of 1960, however, the well-laid plans of Agueci et al. began to go astray. One steamer trunk arriving in New York had the wrong address and was almost intercepted by U.S. Customs at the harbour. But what ultimately exposed the drug ring was the arrest of a low-level trafficker working for Joseph Valachi named Ralph Wagner, who squealed on his supplier. This not only led police to lay heroin trafficking charges against Valachi in late 1959, but it also prompted around-the-clock surveillance of other Genovese Family members. The police attention bore fruit on October 21, 1960, when Matteo Palermi and Salvatore Rinaldo were arrested in New York in possession of a trunk containing 10 kilos of heroin that had just been unloaded from a passenger ship. Under intense interrogation, the two men provided information that allowed police to piece together the French, Italian, American, and Canadian cells that made up the international heroin smuggling network. In January 1961, a multi-force investigation was launched comprising the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics, the RCMP, and Italian and French law enforcement agencies. In Toronto, police turned up one frantic telegram from Alberto Agueci inquiring about the mislabelled steamer trunk and also learned that numerous Italians living in Canada had made return trips to their homeland at his expense. Under intense interrogation, the two men provided information that allowed police to piece together the French, Italian, American, and Canadian cells that made up the international heroin smuggling network. In January 1961, a multi-force investigation was launched comprising the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics, the RCMP, and Italian and French law enforcement agencies. In Toronto, police turned up one frantic telegram from Alberto Agueci inquiring about the mislabelled steamer trunk and also learned that numerous Italians living in Canada had made return trips to their homeland at his expense. At the same time, federal and municipal police were zeroing in on the main Genovese Family members behind the operation, Italian police were investigating the Sicilian suppliers, and French authorities were positioning themselves to shut down the Corsican heroin processing plants.

The day of reckoning arrived on May 22, 1961, when a New York grand jury indicted twenty-four people alleged to be part of the international drug ring, including Vincent Mauro, Frank Caruso, Salvatore Rinaldo, Salvatore Maneri, Matteo Palermi, Joseph Valachi, John Papalia, Alberto Agueci, Vito Agueci, and Rocco Scopelliti. In announcing the indictments, U.S. district attorney Robert Morgenthau estimated that, since 1958, the conspirators had smuggled more than 110 pounds of pure heroin, worth around $7 million, into New York City. The district attorney’s office later announced that in the previous ten years, mafia groups based in Sicily, America, and Canada had been working together to smuggle heroin with a street value of more than $150 million into the U.S.

Two days after the indictments, police in New York launched a series of pre-dawn raids arresting twelve of the accused. A few days later, the Agueci brothers and twenty-one-year-old Rocco Scopelliti were picked up in Toronto. John Papalia was out on bail after his arrest for the Bluestein beating and once again had disappeared. Following a telephone tip, Toronto police tracked him down and arrested him on Toronto’s Yonge Street the morning of June 13, a few hours after the RCMP had moved his name to the top of their Most Wanted list. Almost immediately, U.S. authorities began extradition hearings against the Canadian suspects. The Agueci brothers and Scopelliti were ordered to be extradited around the middle of June after an Ontario magistrate permitted the withdrawal of their Canadian charges. On July 7, 1961, Papalia was ordered extradited to the U.S. Four days later he would be convicted of assaulting Bluestein, a conviction he welcomed, thinking it would prevent him from being sent to the U.S. Canadian justice officials would not be so accommodating and pushed for his extradition, a process that would drag through the courts for almost a full year.

Of the twenty-four people indicted, eleven were put on trial in a New York courtroom in November 1961. Absent from this initial trial were the four men most responsible for the drug conspiracy: Alberto Agueci, John Papalia, Vincent Mauro, and Frank Caruso. Most of those charged had been released on bail, including Mauro, Caruso, and Salvatore Maneri who took the opportunity to flee the country. Vito Agueci and Rocco Scopelliti were unable to come up with bail money and languished in a New York jail while Alberto Agueci had to sell his home in order to post his $20,000 bail. Although Magaddino had agreed to provide bail money for his Canadian dope peddlers, the Agueci brothers and Scopelliti soon discovered he was not a man of his word. Furious over this betrayal, Alberto stormed his way to Buffalo to confront Magaddino sometime in the summer of 1961. Some say he threatened to reveal the
don’s involvement in the heroin smuggling conspiracy if he did not come up with the bail money. Other reports suggest he threatened Magaddino with death. Either way, Magaddino never relented and Agueci would pay the ultimate price for his insolence.

On October 8, 1961, Alberto bid his wife farewell as he left Toronto to travel to New York for his preliminary hearing. He would never make it. When Agueci failed to show up for his trial, it was assumed that he had jumped bail. However, on November 23, 1961, about halfway through the initial trial, two hunters stumbled across the charred, mutilated remains of his body in a field near a Rochester interchange of the New York State Freeway. Agueci was not only murdered, he had first been tortured. A blowtorch had been applied to his face, blinding him. His ankles and wrists were bound with nylon cord and he had been tied to a tree with barbed wire. The blowtorch was also applied to his genitals, which were then cut off and shoved into his mouth. Eight teeth had been knocked out and three ribs were split. About 30 pounds of flesh had been filleted off his body while he was still alive. What was left of his remains was doused in gasoline and set aflame. Police believe his torment may have lasted for several days before he was finally put out of his misery. His ghastly torture and murder was meant to be a signal to anyone else who entertained ideas of threatening Don Magaddino.

Despite the absence of the main conspirators, the trial went ahead as scheduled and continued until the end of December. Prosecutors argued that John Papalia and Alberto Agueci purchased around 100 kilos of heroin in Italy and arranged for its transport to Canada and the United States. Among the evidence presented in court was ten plastic bags filled with 10 kilos of pure heroin discovered in the false bottom of a trunk seized from Salvatore Rinaldo, who told the court that Agueci and Papalia were his suppliers. Matteo Palermi testified that he was first approached in October 1958 by Alberto Agueci who told him he would be smuggling diamonds, not heroin. Palermi informed the court that it was Agueci who often picked up the drug-filled luggage from him and confessed to taking a suitcase with 10 kilos of heroin from Rocco Scopelliti at Pier 84 on the Hudson River on August 10, 1960. Palermi said he had been paid $300 for his work and when he demanded more money, Agueci told him they could not afford it, as they needed every cent for a deposit on 300 kilos of heroin. When the jury delivered their verdict, all eleven of the defendants were found guilty. Joseph Valachi received twenty years, Vito Agueci was sentenced to fifteen, and Rocco Scopelliti was given ten years. When the sentences were handed out in January 1962, U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy called the investigation and subsequent convictions, “the deepest penetration the federal government has ever made in the illegal international traffic of drugs.”

The unravelling of the international heroin ring did not end with these convictions. In February 1962, sixty-seven-year-old Nicholas Cicchini of Windsor was convicted of conspiring to traffic in heroin and possession of counterfeit money. Cicchini was snared in April 1961 after a drug dealing associate named John Simon sold heroin to an undercover agent working for the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics in Windsor. On May 1, the agent was referred to Cicchini by Simon, who boasted to the agent that he could obtain large quantities of heroin and counterfeit money. The 100 percent pure heroin could be purchased for $11,000 a kilo, while fake American cash could be bought at the price of $35 for $100 bills and $15 and $50 bills. On May 8, Simon met the agent at a tavern near Windsor and handed him a cigarette box containing a small amount of heroin. The agent then drove to the parking lot of a nightclub where he was introduced to Cicchini. After some negotiating, Cicchini agreed to sell half a kilo for $5,500 and promised his customer he would introduce him to his source from whom he could obtain larger quantities. On May 11, 1961, Cicchini met the agent again in the same parking lot, and was paid $5,500 in marked money in return for a brown paper package containing half a kilo of heroin that later tested to be 99.2 percent pure. On May 24, the agent once again met with Cicchini, who advised him that due to the arrest of his suppliers in Toronto he could not come up with a previously promised delivery of four kilos for at least a month. He did, however, offer to sell the agent another kilogram for $10,500 as well as $1 million worth of counterfeit U.S. dollars. The agent asked Cicchini if he could arrange a meeting with his suppliers, but was told “You’ll never meet them.” On July 9, another rendezvous was held, at which time Cicchini advised
the agent that because of the recent arrests, he could no longer supply him with heroin. Realizing that Cicchini was not bluffing, police moved in and arrested him. Along with Simon, Cicchini was charged with various narcotics and counterfeiting offences. At the conclusion of their trial in January 1962, the two defendants were convicted and sentenced. Cicchini received twelve years while Simon was handed six years.

Around the time that Cicchini and Simon were being prosecuted, Vincent Mauro, Frank Caruso, and Salvatore Maneri were being tracked down in Spain following an international manhunt. When the fugitives were arrested in Barcelona they were all carrying false Canadian passports in the names of three Hamilton, Ontario, residents (most likely supplied by Canadian lawyer and Magadino Family member Harold Bordonaro). The three men were deported to the United States to stand trial on the drug charges, along with thirty-seven-year-old John Papalia, who was finally extradited to the U.S. in March 1962. A year later, on March 4, 1963, the long-awaited trial of John Papalia, Frank Caruso, Vincent Mauro, and Salvatore Maneri came to an abrupt end, a mere two hours after jury selection was completed. The four defendants decided to change their pleas to guilty. As a result, Papalia received a ten-year sentence, while the three New York men received fifteen-year terms. Anthony Strollo was able to escape any charges that arose from the drug busts, although a month following the convictions he disappeared from his New Jersey home and was never seen again. It is widely believed that he was murdered on the orders of Vito Genovese, who held his underboss responsible for the mistakes that led to the dismantling of the drug ring.

In April 1963, Settimo Accardi, who had been on the lam since 1955, was arrested in Italy and flown back to New York to answer federal narcotics charges. This time, the judge set Accardi’s bail at a record-setting $500,000, an amount that assured the prisoner would not have the opportunity to escape justice again. On August 25, 1964, the sixty-year-old was sentenced to a fifteen-year term and a $16,000 fine. After being imprisoned in Atlanta, Accardi told fellow inmate Vito Agueci that in September 1960 Stefano Magaddino had refused to pay for $20,000 worth of heroin that Accardi had sold him as punishment for smuggling drugs while living in Toronto without his consent. Accardi told Agueci that he had not responded to an invitation to meet with Magaddino because, as the New York Times reported, “he knew his days would have been numbered.”

The arrests of the mafia-connected heroin traffickers continued in the summer of 1963 when the RCMP broke up a ring headed by Charles Cipolla, which was supplying Toronto and Hamilton. The five-month undercover investigation resulted in the confiscation of heroin worth around $120,000 on the streets and the arrest of twelve people, although only five were charged. Fifty-year-old Charles Cipolla, described by one newspaper as the “short, swarthy owner of a Guelph fruit store and restaurant,” was sentenced to twenty years’ imprisonment, the stiffest sentence for a drug offence handed down in Ontario to date.

“COMPARATIVELY FREE OF ORGANIZED GANGSTERISM”

The years 1963 and 1964 continued to be high-profile ones for organized crime in Ontario. In 1963, the U.S. Senate Committee on Organized Crime heard mafia turncoat Joseph Valachi proclaim that the Cosa Nostra stretched into Ontario. At the same hearings, senior officers with the Buffalo Police Department testified that in Toronto, Hamilton, Guelph, and Niagara Falls, Ontario, there were at least twenty members of a crime syndicate headed by the “irrefutable lord paramount” Stefano Magaddino. The presentation was accompanied by an organizational chart entitled “The Magaddino Empire of Organized Crime.” On the right hand of the chart, in a square marked “Canada,” were the names of the Vito and Alberto Agueci, Charles and Frank Cipolla, Dan Gasbarrini, John Papalia and his two brothers, as well as Paul and Albert Volpe.

In March 1963, Mr. Justice Roach presented his report on organized gambling in Ontario to the provincial government. He acknowledged that it had reached a “staggering” volume, but concluded that little evidence existed suggesting “there was organized crime in the province in any alarming extent except in the field of organized gambling.” He also denied the existence of the mafia in Canada, writing, “There is no evidence before me that it does subsist in organized crime or that any of the activities of those engaged in organized
crime were in any way associated with the Mafia.” The findings certainly contradicted recent events, and some observers later accused Roach of whitewashing the commission’s findings in order to take the pressure off the provincial attorney general and the Conservative government, which had been accused of corruption and the failure to take sufficient action against organized crime in the province. Yet, Justice Roach was not the only one in denial over the existence of the mafia in Ontario. Two years before he appointed the respected jurist to head the commission, Ontario Attorney General Kelso Roberts declared that Canada was “comparatively free of organized gangsterism.” When Detroit police commissioner Harry Toy stated publicly in 1948 that Windsor was now part of Detroit’s network of booties, the chairman of the Windsor Police Commission snorted, “It is difficult to believe that a responsible public official of Detroit would make such scurrilous statements about a ‘friendly’ neighbour, its police force and its citizens generally.” In the early 1960s, Toronto’s chief of police disputed a report that a local “numbers racket” was flourishing and didn’t believe the mafia was active in the city. In his statements before the Roach Commission, Hamilton’s chief constable Leonard G. Lawrence did not believe that organized crime had a hand in narcotics trafficking or gambling operations in the city, nor did Hamilton play host to any sort of mafia organization.

One high-ranking law enforcement official whose take on the existence of the mafia in Ontario was not so blinkered was RCMP commissioner C.W. Harvison. In a press conference at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto on August 16, 1963, the head Mountie appeared to disagree with his colleagues and the Roach Commission report released just a few months earlier. He suggested that mafia crime syndicates from America were making incursions into Canada, and were involved in drug trafficking, counterfeiting, bootlegging, and stock market manipulation. The controversy provoked by his comments, combined with the discovery of corruption within the OPP’s anti-gambling squad, led to yet another provincial commission in Ontario, this one headed by Judge Bruce Macdonald, who delivered his report on January 31, 1964. In startling contrast to the conclusions of the Roach Commission, Justice Macdonald asserted, “Organized crime has existed in Ontario and in some cases still does, in varying degrees from time to time as conditions change.” He also stated there was solid evidence that American criminal syndicates had infiltrated Ontario. Although no one group had a monopoly over a particular region or criminal activity, he did confirm that “certain persons to wit: Alberto and Vito Agueci, John Papalia and possibly Rocco Scopelliti and in all likelihood several others having known contacts and associations with them and others in Canada and in the United States, were members of the so-called mafia or Cosa Nostra and made unsuccessful efforts to obtain control of certain organized criminal operations in Ontario.”

The political storm that was brewing over whether the mafia existed in Canada escalated even further in December 1964 when Justice Macdonald revealed that the Windsor-based mobster Onofrio Minaudo was provided a visa to enter Canada in 1960, despite being deported just two years earlier. After his presence in the country was discovered in 1961, Minaudo was ordered to be immediately deported, but for some reason was allowed to stay until 1964, even though he had been convicted of drug trafficking and other offences in 1962. Macdonald told the press that his commission never received a reply from the federal minister of immigration Guy Favreau when he tried to find out why Minaudo was allowed to remain in Canada. A day after Macdonald’s public comments, two members of the federal New Democratic Party filed a series of written questions asking the Liberal government in Ottawa for information about the deportation of Minaudo. They also inquired about Giuseppe Catalanotte, who was deported from Canada on November 5, 1964, more than a year after the order was actually made.

A native of Arcano, Italy, Catalanotte was one of the Detroit mob’s most vicious enforcers and was suspected of numerous murders during the 1930s. Like Minaudo, he settled in Windsor after entering Canada on a short-term visitor’s visa in 1957. He obtained the visa from the Canadian embassy in Cuba, where he ended up after being deported from the United States for convictions ranging from drug trafficking to extortion. The scandal was heightened when External Affairs Minister Paul Martin admitted that, as a private lawyer, he had received a “normal legal fee” from Minaudo in 1960 after making representations to the
Immigration Appeal Board that his deportation order be squashed. The petition was somewhat successful in that Minaudo was allowed another six months in the country. Martin and the appeal board were cleared of any wrongdoing or corruption, but the affair tainted both considerably (some say it put an end to Martin’s aspirations to be leader of the federal Liberal Party). After finally being deported from Canada, Minaudo settled in the Sicilian village of Custonaci. In May 1965, his sixty-year-old, bullet-riddled body was found by Italian police, who suspected he may have been killed in revenge for murders he committed in that country forty years earlier. “The people in that area of Sicily never forget,” a Canadian embassy official in Rome told the media. “There, vendettas run for generations.” The FBI had another theory: they believed that senior members of the Detroit mafia had ordered the hit after finding out that Minaudo, whom they no longer welcomed in their territory, intended to sneak back into Canada. Giuseppe Catalanotte, who relocated to the same Sicilian province as Minaudo, disappeared in 1966, despite being under police surveillance.

Throughout all of this, Canadian immigration officials were busy deporting other Detroit gangsters. In September 1965, fifty-eight-year-old Sam Finazzo, a ranking member with the Detroit mob, was arrested while entertaining friends at his cottage in Kingsville, Ontario. He was expelled soon after due to his criminal record. In July 1966, the heirs to Detroit’s mafia leadership, Anthony (Big Tony) Giacalone and Domenic (Fats) Corrado, were arrested in Montreal after they stepped off a plane from Windsor. Following an immigration hearing, the pair, who said they were travelling to the religious shrine at Ste. Anne de Beaupré in Quebec, were deported back to the U.S.

MR. LUPPINO

Q: How long have you known Natale Luppino?
A: I have known his brother between fifteen and twenty years.

Q: That is Jim Luppino?
A: Yes.

Q: Is his name Vincenzo and he is called Jim?
A: I never called him Vincenzo. It is Jimmy, I know him as.

Q: Do you know Giacomo Luppino?
A: Who’s Giacomo?

Q: Is that his father?
A: I know his father but I didn’t realize his name was Giacomo.

Q: What did you understand his father’s name to be?
A: Mr. Luppino.

—Testimony by Paul Volpe before a 1974 Royal Commission investigating violence and corruption within Ontario’s construction industry

During the mid-1950s, John Papalia would be joined in Hamilton by another powerful mafioso and future Magaddino Family member named Giacomo Luppino. Born in 1900 in the village of Oppido in Calabria, Luppino came to Canada in 1955, already a member of an ’Ndrangheta clan in Italy. Settling in Hamilton, he would go on to be Magaddino’s most trusted and reliable Ontario lieutenant and one of the most respected mafia dons in Canada. While little is known about Luppino’s initial years in Canada, it was around the late 1950s or early 1960s that he and Santo Scibetta were chosen by Magaddino to oversee his Ontario interests. Influenced by his Calabrian roots, the organization Luppino set up in Ontario reflected the structure, rules, and codes of the ’Ndrangheta.

He was the capo decina of the Hamilton wing of the Magaddino Family, but was also in charge of decinas in other regions of Ontario. In keeping with ’Ndrangheta organizational tradition, different areas of the province were broken into aubbocatos, distinct territories that separated different families or wings of a family. Luppino became the capo di tutti capi over all of Magaddino’s branches in Ontario, putting him in charge of decinas operating in such aubbocatos as Hamilton, Guelph, Oakville, and Toronto. In one revealing police recording, Luppino used a business analogy to describe the organization of the ’Ndrangheta in Ontario and the different branches he oversaw in the province, “It is the same as saying there is a company at Hamilton, at Toronto and there is a head of each. Toronto represents the centre and Hamilton represents the commanding point. In Oakville, there are two, but all these aubbocatos are represented by one. In other words, we have to play the way I say.”
Following the lead of the mafia’s ruling commission in the U.S., Luppino also established La Camera di Controllo. Made up of the heads of the various decinas in Ontario, the goal of this “board of control” was to ensure co-operation, to avoid territorial infringement, and to resolve any problems that may arise. The board, which answered to Magaddino, was reflective of Luppino’s great reverence towards his boss, his respect for the American mafia Commission (which he once called “eight of the best”) and his adherence to the traditional role of the mafioso as a mediator and arbitrator. Luppino has been described as “a master strategist” who built bridges and brokered deals between different mafia leaders. He was frequently consulted by mob figures from throughout North America and intervened to settle numerous disputes that arose over the years. By setting up the Camera, he forged strong relationships with other ‘Ndrangheta leaders in Ontario and also maintained ties with the Montreal mafia through a cordial relationship with Vic Cotroni and later, with his future son-in-law, Paolo Violi.

Notwithstanding the respect and influence Luppino garnered from other mafia leaders, there was no doubt that the source of his power emanated from his close association with Magaddino. He was extremely deferential to his don and also delighted in any opportunity he had to meet with him. Police once recorded a fawning Luppino gush about the highlight of a Buffalo wedding he attended — that Magaddino had talked to him at the reception for a whole twenty minutes! Magaddino also respected and often heeded Luppino’s advice, which was most apparent in 1966 after Luppino talked him out of any reprisals against Vic Cotroni, who had met with the son of rival Joseph Bonanno.

Luppino was largely illiterate and spoke little English (although he once confessed to his wife that he wished he could speak the language because “people here are much easier to cheat than in Italy”). He was a mafioso in the classical sense in that he lived a modest life, believing that it was not wealth but respect and honour that defined the worth of any man. At one point, police wiretaps caught Luppino lamenting that his sons did not come to seek his counsel, which to him was a sign of disrespect. One Hamilton police investigator, who for several years secretly monitored the movements of Luppino, recounted the time that “old man Luppino” arrived for a meeting and “everyone went around kissing his ring like he was the Pope and showed him a tremendous amount of respect.” Luppino revelled in such displays and, according to the police officer, “he’d rather have someone call him Mr. Luppino than give him $10,000.” In one conversation with his like-minded son-in-law Paolo, both complained about how the American mafia, with its emphasis on making money, had lost the “old country ways of operation” and conflicted with the traditional ways of the mafioso.

Like other mafia traditionalists, Luppino shunned material wealth. He lived in a humble bungalow in a quiet Hamilton neighbourhood, where he grew tomatoes and often strolled down the street greeting his neighbours. Upon his death in 1987, he was described by some who lived on the block as a quiet, kind man who sat on his veranda and passed out candy to children. But Luppino’s home was also his control centre and the site for numerous visits from other mafiosi who came to pay tribute, seek his counsel, broker a deal, or settle a dispute. As one newspaper obituary said of him, “He wielded authority from the back yard of his modest home in Hamilton, where visitors from as far away as Italy came to talk about murder and extortion next to a clothesline of flapping laundry.” Neighbours acknowledged that he constantly had people visiting his home, but he would make sure their cars never blocked the driveways of other houses on the street.

Beginning in 1967, police began a five-year surveillance operation on Luppino, which included wiretapping his Hamilton home. Information gleaned from “Operation Orbit” provided great insight into the life of the mafia don and the existence and structure of his ‘Ndrangheta organization. In one recording, Luppino and a visitor laughed out loud about the way the mafia was portrayed in a television crime show and spoke about how there were no initiation rites or ceremonies. However, it became clear that Luppino did follow some time-honoured ‘Ndrangheta customs. Made members had to pay dues and pass along a percentage of all profits from criminal or legal activities to him. He was also recorded discussing how one obligation of an ‘Ndrangheta group was to make financial contributions to a “welfare assistance program” to help its members.
through difficult times. At one point, Luppino told a young mafioso in Toronto to take a collection across Southern Ontario to care for the widow of an associate and her six children. Despite his paternalistic nature, Luppino was still the head of a criminal group that made money from extortion, loansharking, fraud, counterfeiting, migrant smuggling, drug trafficking, and murder. Remarkably, although his reign lasted for more than thirty years, Luppino was never charged with any criminal offence in Canada.

"YOU KNOW, UH, 'NDRINA"

While Mr. Luppino ruled his criminal fiefdom with the backing of Stefano Magaddino, Toronto was home to other 'Ndrangheta clans that were connected to Antonio Marci, the capo crimini (boss of all bosses) in Calabria. During the 1950s and 1960s, Marci forged a loose network of 'Ndrangheta cells in the United States, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, South America, and Australia, in part to facilitate his international heroin smuggling operation. Each cell was based on 'Ndrangheta tradition: a small family of blood relatives formed the nucleus while other members and associates were related through marriage or godparenthood. While each cell generally followed this template, and worked with one another, for the most part they operated autonomously from Marci. Some of the original members of the Toronto cell, which was founded in the late 1950s, had already been inducted into the Honoured Society in Italy, while their sons and other younger recruits took the ritual oath in Toronto. Because most of the Society men that were transplanted in Toronto hailed from a small port on the eastern coast of Reggio di Calabria called Siderno Marina, police began to refer to the Toronto cell as the Siderno Group.

The undisputed head of the Siderno Group up until his death in 1980 was Michele (Mike) Racco. Born on December 12, 1913, in Siderno Marina, Racco was already a member of the 'Ndrangheta before he immigrated to Canada in the early 1950s. Short, with bulging eyes, heavy lids, and thick eyebrows that made his face look almost reptilian, Racco established an 'Ndrina cell in Toronto that grew steadily as he recruited men of Calabrian descent locally and from Italy. By the early 1960s, Racco established a local commission (a crimini) which settled disputes and maintained discipline among the city's 'Ndrina members. As the head of this ruling board, Racco became the capo crimini for Toronto.

From his small bakery on St. Clair Avenue in the city's Italian district, Racco oversaw a secret criminal society that at any one time included between fifty and one hundred members and which was involved in bootlegging, counterfeiting, extortion, immigrant smuggling, and drug trafficking. The bakery was also a popular meeting place for members of the Honoured Society and, like Luppino, Racco played the role of the traditional mafia don. He rarely became directly involved in criminal activities; instead, his job was to help create opportunities for other Siderno Group members. He valued respect and honour over money and saw himself as a padrone to his constituents, providing jobs and loans to community members and safe passage to Canada for Italian immigrants. Racco was much sought after for advice or to solve disputes and maintained strong ties with like-minded criminals, among them Giacomo Luppino in Hamilton, Vic Cotroni in Montreal, Paul Volpe in Toronto, as well as...
as members of other 'Ndrangheta cells in the United States and abroad. Police intercepted one telephone call from the U.S. in which the man on the other end solicited Racco’s advice on how to resolve a territorial dispute between two 'Ndrina clans in New York. At one point during the conversation the man on the other end of the line appeared to have difficulty understanding Racco, who responded in frustration, “Jesus Christ, I can't really go into details here. You know, uh, 'Ndrina.” Although Racco preferred mediation to violence, he is suspected of sanctioning the death of two Toronto 'Ndrangheta members in the late 1960s.

Among those who sat on the original crimi
with Racco was Rocco Zito. Born in Fiumara, Calabria, in 1928, his father, Domenic, was a member of the Vincenzo Crupi group, which was involved in petty smuggling, rustling, and extortion in the 1930s. Italian authorities considered the group to be an 'Ndrangheta clan, a designation that would later be used by Canadian authorities to deny his father landed immigrant status. Zito was believed to have become a member of the 'Ndrangheta before he tried to sneak into North America in 1949, first as a stowaway on a New York–bound ship and again after trying to cross into Texas from Mexico. Both times he was captured and deported. In 1952, a murder charge levelled against him was dismissed by Italian courts and three years later he legally entered Canada via Montreal where he began working for the mafia transporting bootlegged liquor to Toronto. By the late 1950s, Zito had relocated to Toronto where he became an enforcer for Alberto Agueci. When Paolo Violi was arrested on liquor offences in 1960, police found Zito’s telephone number in his pocket. Zito was granted Canadian citizenship in 1961, the same year police found an illegal still in his home, which cost him a criminal conviction and a $100 fine. The following year, he was observed attending a meeting in Hamilton at the home of Giacomo Luppino along with other known mafiosi from Quebec, Ontario, and Buffalo. The purpose of the meeting, according to police, was to plan a network of stills across Ontario and Quebec. The following year Zito became a member of the Toronto crimi.

Zito also firmly adhered to the traditions expected of the mafioso. He kept a low profile and lived with his wife and five daughters in a small bungalow in Toronto. He maintained a wide circle of contacts and was always available to dispense advice, make a deal, or loan money. Like Luppino and Racco, he was continuously meeting and working with fellow gangsters from Ontario, Quebec, the U.S., and Italy. When Tommasso Buscetta was in Toronto in the late 1960s, he met frequently with Zito. In 1970, Zito was observed by police with Paolo Gambino, the brother of Carlo, New York City's most powerful crime boss at the time. After meeting with Vic Cotroni and Paolo Violi in Montreal, Gambino travelled to Toronto to work with Zito in establishing a heroin pipeline through Toronto (Zito later told police that Gambino was a neighbour of his cousin in New York who had come to seek advice on a personal matter). Zito was also observed having lunch in Toronto with Frank Cotoni in the early 1980s. According to one police report, during a private party held in 1985 at a Toronto restaurant, Don Zito’s hand was kissed by at least twenty-five men. Following the death of Mike Racco in 1980, Zito was elevated to the head of the crimi in Toronto, but he was forced to vacate the post in 1986 when he was convicted of killing Rosario Sciarrino, a freelance photographer who had borrowed $20,000 from Zito in 1981. After falling behind on his payments, and allegedly insulting Zito when the two men met on January 13, 1986, Sciarrino was shot and killed. An autopsy revealed that Sciarrino had also been beaten with a heavy object, resulting in more than a dozen fractures to his face and head. Zito surrendered to police four days later and was charged with second-degree murder. He was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to four and a half years in jail.

It wasn't until the late 1960s that a spate of violent events provided police with their first glimpse into the existence of the Honoured Society in Toronto. On January 6, 1967, thirty-four-year-old Salvatore Triumbari, the president of Cynar Dry Ltd., was shot and killed outside his Toronto home. Shortly after his death, the Cynar bottling plant was set ablaze causing $100,000 in damages. On June 29, 1969, forty-three-year-old Filippo Vendemini was killed in the parking lot behind his Bloor Street shoe store. The next day, the Toronto Star reported that he had been killed “in the traditional, make-sure Mafia way: he was shot once...
in the chest as he left his car, then dispatched with two more bullets in the head as he lay on the ground.” Powder burns were found on his head wounds, indicating the killer stood over him and fired the shots from no more than a foot away. Vendemini was a former employee of Cynar Dry Ltd. before opening his shoe store in October 1968.

Toronto police suspected that the mafia was behind the two murders, but only had circumstantial evidence. Both men had immigrated to Canada in the early 1950s from Siderno Marina and, by the early 1970s, information had surfaced that they were members of the mafia in Canada. As journalist Peter Moon describes in a 1971 article on the ‘Ndrangheta in Ontario, Vendemini’s final hours strongly suggest that his murder was gang related. “The first phone call made by the Vendemini family after he was shot was to a family friend named Rocco Zito. The last man to see Vendemini alive, apart from his killer, was a member of the Montreal mafia. Vendemini drove the man to Hamilton where they met a member of the Hamilton mafia. Vendemini then drove the Montreal man to the Toronto airport and returned home to where his killer waited. When the police searched Vendemini’s body they found $600 in cash in his pants’ pockets and the telephone number of two Montreal mafia members.” A few years later, police reported that Triumbari had held an initiation meeting for the Honoured Society in the basement of his house the night before he was murdered. Police initially suspected both men were killed over control of illicit liquor sold in Ontario as Vendemini was known to have taken part in the bootlegging operations set up in the 1950s by mafia groups. The commonly accepted theory, however, is that Michele Racco, at the behest of senior ‘Ndrangheta leaders in Calabria, ordered the deaths of the two because of their involvement in the ritual disfigurement of an ‘Ndrina member in Italy.

Around the time of the murders, Italian shopkeepers in Toronto were experiencing a rash of violent attacks; store owners and employees were beaten or shot at and their stores were bombed or set on fire. A classified Toronto police memo from 1971 stated, “a closer check of the many fires in the Toronto area has disclosed a number of incendiary fires in the Italian Community. There were thirty-two fires in the Toronto area in 1970 that were connected with the Italian problem.” Cosimo Racco and Ernest Commisso, who together operated several bakeries in Toronto and who had no involvement in the Honoured Society, were the targets of a number of attacks. On July 17, 1968, two shotgun blasts were fired from a passing car at Cosimo Racco and his wife. On March 28, 1969, the home of Ernest Commisso was broken into by thieves who stole jewellery, liquor, cheques, and cash. In the early morning of March 31, 1969, a bomb shattered the storefront windows at the Commisso Brothers and Racco Italian Bakery on Kingcourt Street in the suburb of York. On June 2, 1969, Ernest’s brother Anthony was shot three times in the legs. A bakery opened by former employees of Commisso and Racco was decimated by dynamite on June 16, 1970, and, less than ten days later, a nearby bakery was also destroyed by dynamite. On December 20, 1972, dynamite tore a hole in the roof of the Commissio Brothers and Racco Bakery. This was the second bombing of the bakery and the fourteenth reported bomb blast in 1972 targeting Italian businesses.

Despite the ongoing violence, police had little success in gaining the co-operation of the victims or other informants. One Italian merchant complained to police that he was threatened if he did not pay $2,000 to an Italian man who police already suspected of shaking down other shop owners. Police arrested the extortionist, but when his case came to trial, the merchant changed his story, testifying it was all a misunderstanding and that the man was simply asking for a loan. As a result, the charges were dropped. Even without the co-operation of victims, police were becoming certain that the violence was part of an extortion racket carried out by a secret ‘Ndrangheta society that was now publicly being called the “Siderno Group.” A July 7, 1972, article in the Toronto Star was one of the first to link the violence and extortion attempts to this newly discovered criminal syndicate:

The Siderno Group, some of whose members belonged to the Mafia in Calabria, have brought an extortion technique with them that is peculiar to Calabria, according to Italian police. Victims receive anonymous letters which order them to carry a stated sum of money with them while they drive or walk along a
route outlined in the letters. The letter tells the victim that somewhere along the route he will encounter a sign giving him further directions or he will meet “our representative.” Invariably the terrified victim follows the instructions only to find there is no sign and no “representative.” All this increases his fear.

The Star reported that “a full family” of the Honoured Society had established itself in Toronto. “While the group’s members are for the most part unostentatious in the way they live — many operate small businesses or work in factories — they have grown powerful enough to earn the respect and co-operation of other organized criminal groups.”

Michele Racco used his power to bring an end to the extortion-related violence, but by that time a police task force had already accumulated a wealth of information on the Siderno Group. On March 30, 1971, police wiretaps picked up a phone conversation between two men who discussed an upcoming meeting where “youth of honours” were “brought forward” for initiation into the Society. Two of the six new recruits were the sons of senior Siderno Group leaders, Vincenzo (Jimmy) Deleo and Michele Racco. Based on the recordings, police scrambled to set up a surveillance team around the Ossington Avenue home where the meeting was to take place. When some of the twenty men attending the meeting began to leave around 9:35 p.m. police raided the house. At 10:30 p.m. Jimmy Deleo phoned Mike Racco and told him police had “blocked all the lanes over there, they’ve surrounded the place.”

On April 14, police intercepted a phone call from Mike Racco to another Society member named Santo Femina in which they discussed the possibility of having a meeting at either Femina’s house or that of fellow member Frank Caccamo. Racco cautioned that only a small number of people should attend to avoid suspicion, “If we are going to get together at Caccamo’s home fifteen or twenty people at most. Then we do it during the daytime. But if we say were going to be too many, it’s not right. But if we decide that all of us should get together, then we squeeze ourselves and make it Friday night.”

“Compare Mike,” Femina replied, “some of the older fellows you could tell not to come because they already know what’s going on. But to the young guys, the new ones that came in, you know they don’t know each other. They don’t know how things are. They don’t know this one or that one. But to satisfy them also, we all are going to meet.”

The meeting they discussed was held on April 30, 1971, at the home of another Society member named Cosimo Stalteri, and police counted at least twenty-three men in attendance. While police were collecting information from their surveillance, they still did not have enough to lay charges or to prove the existence of a criminal organization. The evidence they so desired would be provided to them courtesy of Mike Racco’s firebrand son, Domenic, whose actions over the next year would trigger a cycle of events that would irreversibly confirm the existence of the ’Ndrangheta in Toronto. Born and raised in Toronto, Domenic surrounded himself with the sons of other Siderno Group members. With his Mediterranean good looks, he could be as charming as his father. But unlike his restrained padre, Domenic Racco was impulsive, erratic and ill tempered — characteristics that would emerge with dire consequences on July 19, 1971. That evening, the nineteen-year-old was out with his friends and fellow “youths of honour,” eighteen-year-old Frank Commissio and nineteen-year-old Joseph Deleo. After getting into a shouting match with another group of young men outside a bowling alley on Yonge Street, an infuriated Domenic rushed home where he retrieved a gun. Intent on avenging his honour, he returned to the scene and fired six shots at the men who had hurled anti-Italian insults his way. Although five of the bullets found their mark, all three of the victims survived the shooting.

On July 30, police arrested and charged Commissio and Deleo with attempted murder. Police also announced a search was under way for Domenic Racco, who had disappeared. After corroborating the mob connections of the three boys, police used the shooting to snare other suspected members of the Siderno Group. They raided homes and businesses of the young men’s relatives, where they found weapons, explosives, and counterfeit money. At least seven other people were arrested, including Joseph Deleo’s fifty-year-old father, Vincenzo, who was charged with being an accessory after the fact to the shooting and possession
of a prohibited weapon (a switchblade). In other raids, police arrested Giuseppe Fragomeni, Francesco (Frank) Caccamo, and Antonio Stalteri. Michele Racco was also arrested and charged after a gun was found in his bakery (he was later acquitted of the charge). On August 25, Domenic, who had fled to Albany, New York, where he hid out in the home of an 'Ndrina member, returned to Toronto via a chartered plane and surrendered to police. At the conclusion of his trial on January 26, 1972, he was found guilty of three counts of attempted murder and a week later he was sentenced to ten years.

Although none of those arrested provided any revealing information on the 'Ndrangheta in Toronto, police did make one discovery that would prove to be a significant breakthrough in their efforts to prove the existence of the secret society in North America. When searching the home of thirty-three-year-old Francesco Caccamo, police found a twenty-seven-page document, handwritten in an antiquated Italian script, in his kitchen cupboards. Experts from Canada and Italy would later conclude that the papers outlined the rites and structure of the Honorata Società. It was the first time such an authentic document had fallen into the hands of police in North America. The heading on the first page was Come Formare una Società (“How to Form a Society”) and the preamble partially read: “My stomach is a tomb, my mouth a bleated work of humility.” Another section dictates the initiation rites of an inductee who symbolically vows to take “a bloody dagger in my hand and a serpent in my mouth” should he betray the Honoured Society. A 1972 Globe and Mail article described the remainder of the document as a “a tangle of centuries old archaic Italian, the phrases laced with flowery, mystic imagery dealing with such matters as collecting opinions from society members, punishing members who don’t surrender their guns at meetings, catechism-like initiation rituals and the proper words to be used when separating a member from the group.”

Dr. Alberto Sabatino, the head of a special mafia investigative unit in Italy, testified at Caccamo’s trial on weapons and currency counterfeiting charges that the papers were “for a certainty” one of the condizi (sets of rules and ritual) of the Honorata Società and that, in the thousands of raids conducted by Italian police in the past ten years only two similar documents had been found. Sabatino said the papers outlined the basic structure of a 'Ndrina cell, which includes three levels or ranks — camorrista, the highest rank; picciotto, a middle rank; and “youths of honour,” the lowest rank. There were also references to the pledges and obligations of members, the most important being a vow of silence. Sabatino pointed out that the Italian word d’umilta appears throughout the document and should be interpreted the same as the word omerta, the Sicilian Mafia’s oath of secrecy. The document also refers to the term mastro di sgarru, another important obligation of members that has to do with vendettas against enemies of the Society. Another term was baciletta, which Sabatino defined as “extorted money” collected by Society members that should be “given to the ones who need it, the ones who have been arrested, for the defence lawyers, to help the people the police are looking for.”

Sabatino and other experts told the court that whoever was in possession of the papers held a high rank in the Society. This testimony prompted the Crown to paint Frank Caccamo, a construction foreman who arrived to Canada in 1959, as the maestro di giornato of the 'Ndrangheta in Toronto. “He was always there for meetings,” one Crown attorney argued. “They had to have him there to ensure compliance with the rules.” At the conclusion of his trial in August 1972, Caccamo was found guilty on all charges. More significantly, in his summation the trial judge stated that the document found in Caccamo’s home was an authentic set of rules and rituals for a secret criminal society and, because it was in his possession, Caccamo was associated with this Society. On that basis, the loaded gun found in Caccamo’s home must be for a purpose dangerous to the public peace. This decision and the authenticity of the document were upheld by an Ontario appeals court and the Supreme Court of Canada. This meant that Ontario became the first jurisdiction in North America, and the first outside of Italy, to recognize the existence of the Honoured Society as a secret criminal organization. The sentencing judge accused Caccamo of leading a “Jekyll and Hyde existence” and imprisoned him for one and a half years. He also recommended that he be deported to Italy upon release. In 1976, the
Immigration Department began deportation hearings against Caccamo on the grounds that he belonged to a subversive organization.

That same year, Domenic Racco would once again give in to his impulsive, violent, honour-obsessed temperament. While behind bars, he paid his twenty-two-year-old cousin and American ‘Ndrina clan member Frank Archino, Jr. to travel to Toronto from his home in upstate New York to lay a “real good beating” on his brother-in-law Antonio Commisso. Racco had learned that Commissio refused to repay a debt and therefore had dishonoured the family. The scheme to injure Commisso became known to police when a Toronto constable pulled over a car carrying Archino and his twenty-year-old accomplice, George Mickley, for a routine traffic check. Their suspicious behaviour led to a more thorough search of the car, which turned up a .38-calibre pistol hidden in the spare tire along with directions to Commissio’s home. Police were also given a mislabelled and unsigned letter at a Canada Post depot that was traced to Domenic Racco. The letter included two $100 bills and maps to Commissio’s home and place of work. The letter, in Racco’s handwriting, made it clear that Commissio was to be beaten, and if necessary, shot, but not killed: “If Possible — Just a Real Good Beating. Without Doing Anything Else. If not Possible — Then Just GO Ahead As Originally Planned. Blast The Legs. But Remember NO HIGHER Than The LEGS. IMPORTANT — NO DEATH.” The letter innocently concluded, “Once you’ve received this, send me a card saying Hi just to let me know you got it.”

Based on Archino’s confessions, Domenic Racco, Archino, and Mickley were charged in November 1976 with conspiring to wound Commisso. When the case came to court in March 1977, however, Racco was able to intimidate his cousin to such an extent that Archino changed his testimony halfway through the preliminary hearing. From the prisoner’s dock in the courtroom, Domenic reportedly made a number of hand motions and other gestures that warned Archino of the penalty of testifying against a fellow ‘Ndrina member. If his threatening pantomimes were not enough, there were also reports that enforcers from the Siderno Group were occupying the front rows of the courtroom’s public seating area. When Archino was put on the stand he declared that police forced him to sign a statement saying that Racco had asked him to shoot Commissio, an about-face that prompted Racco to burst out laughing. The judge had no option but to acquit Domenic of the charges. While Racco avoided another criminal sentence, further damage had already been done to the ‘Ndrangheta. Before recanting his confession in court, Archino had given police extensive information on the Honoured Society in Toronto and New York. When asked why he would follow Racco’s orders, Archino told police, “For the honour of the family.” When asked what he meant by “family” Archino replied, “Italian, the organization.” Archino admitted to being an ‘Ndrangheta member, having gone through an initiation ceremony in Toronto, and also identified Domenic Racco and his father as members. After serving his sentence for conspiring to wound Commissio, as well as additional counts of perjury and contempt of court, Archino moved back to New York where he later became the business agent for Local 452 of the International Laborers Union in Troy. Archino disappeared in September 1993 after embezzling $570,000 from the union.

“I KNOW HOW THIS GUY PERFORMS”

When Mike Racco was searching for a good lawyer to defend his son on his attempted murder charges, he turned to Paul Volpe. Not only did Volpe refer his own lawyer, David Humphrey, but he also arranged for Humphrey to escort Domenic back to Toronto to face arrest. A classified 1977 RCMP intelligence report on Volpe described him as a “central figure in a large criminal organization of well known criminals involved in various known and unknown criminal activities.” Police investigations also revealed “that Paul Volpe was extremely well established with other major Canadian organized criminals,” although law enforcement agencies have “achieved little success in gathering evidence against Volpe. This is due entirely to the fact that Paul Volpe, consistent with classical organized crime behaviour, has remained both insulated and...
isolated from direct criminal activity.” Notwithstanding the assistance Volpe provided to Mike Racco or his connections with other mob figures, Volpe had more than his fair share of rivals and enemies. Although he was one of the initial Canadian members of the Magaddino Family, he was disliked and distrusted by many of his mafia contemporaries because of his stubborn independence, his duplicitous demeanour, his high-profile stature, and his constant intrusions into the territories of other mafia groups. He had fallen in such disfavour with Stefano Magaddino that it was rumoured he came close to putting a contract on Volpe’s life in 1968, but was dissuaded from doing so by Giacomo Luppino. Volpe’s list of enemies grew to be so long, that police had no shortage of suspects in his untimely death.

Appropriately enough, Volpe means “fox” in Italian and, as Peter Edwards and Antonio Nicaso make clear, “like his vulpine name-sake, Paul Volpe was clever and a loner by nature.” He was regarded by many of his peers as—a troublesome and distant, a man who jealously guarded his secrets and the fortune he had gained through loan-sharking, gambling and labour racketeering. They would also suspiciously eye him as a bit of a moralist, someone who looked upon lucrative businesses like pornography, prostitution and narcotics trafficking as dirty and beneath his dignity. As a statement of the distance Volpe maintained from traditional mob figures, he settled outside Toronto’s mob enclaves in Woodbridge, St. Clair West and College Street, preferring instead to live apart in Schomberg, northwest of Toronto, in a flood-lit Tudor mansion with a turret that he had bought from a county court judge. A large Canadian flag flew outside the manor, which, fittingly, was called Fox Hill.

Paul Volpe was born in Toronto on January 29, 1927, to Elizabeth and Vito Volpe. Not long after Paul’s birth, his father — a tailor with no criminal background, but little ambition or reliability — abandoned his wife, who was left to bring up six children: Frank, Eugene, Albert, Joseph, Paul, and Laura. Beginning in the late 1940s, Paul was delivering bootlegged liquor for his older brother, Albert, and by the 1950s he was helping to organize underground poker games along with Albert and Eugene. His experience with these seemingly innocent, yet profitable, criminal activities, his observations of the other street-level criminals and vice rackets that abounded around his home on Walton Street in downtown Toronto, and a growing friendship with Vincenzo (Jimmy) Luppino all helped to whet young Paul Volpe’s criminal appetite. He was now determined to enter the big time of crime: membership in a mafia family.

Around 1957, after visiting New York City on several occasions to establish a connection with one of the major crime families there, he was able to meet and begin working for Vito de Filippo, a member of the Bonanno organization (who, nine years later, would be arrested in Montreal along with Bill Bonanno after meeting with Vic Cotroni and Paolo Violi). De Filippo was impressed with Volpe’s money-making abilities, while his physically imposing stature, complete with broad shoulders and thick neck, also conveyed the impression that he was ready-made for the life of a gangster. Volpe also clearly benefited from the relationship, according to his biographer James Dubro:
Volpe realized that working for Vito gave him invaluable entrée into the secret world of the traditional Sicilian Mafia, a connection that could help establish him in his home base in Toronto. As a native-born Canadian, Paul Volpe didn't naturally possess the old-world, secret-society traditions. He didn't even speak Italian, let alone understand the intricacies of the Mafia societies, and he had been born and bred and was now based in the more cosmopolitan, sophisticated world of Toronto, rather than the tightly-knit Hamilton Italian community. Through Vito de Filippo, Volpe found out that successes in the criminal underworld depended a lot on building up a larger-than-life image and becoming a “name” to be reckoned with. This required connections to top criminals, establishing “respect” through both contacts and intimidation, and an ability to put together a well-oiled criminal machine. The Mafia was to be his ticket to success.

Sometime during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Volpe was able to use his New York mafia connections, as well as his friendship with Jimmy Luppino, to become a member of the Magaddino Family. Sponsored by Jimmy and Harold Bordonaro, and initiated in Hamilton, Volpe became one of Magaddino's Toronto representatives during the 1960s, which helped to fill the void left by John Papalia's imprisonment in 1962. While he had already made an enemy of Papalia by operating in Hamilton, Volpe wisely ingratiated himself with Luppino and the Bordonaro families. His mafia links first came to public attention in 1963 when Buffalo police named him and his brother Albert as two of the twenty Canadian members of the Magaddino crime syndicate. By this time, Paul was active in loansharking, gambling, and fraud in Toronto but, due to his new-found public infamy and the resulting police attention, he and Vito de Filippo fled North America and began running a casino in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. With investments from mafia families in Buffalo, New York, and Montreal, the two were able to turn the casino into a moderate success. Homesick for Toronto, however, Volpe returned to Canada in 1965 and, three years later, he had completely divested himself of his Haitian adventure.

Volpe made news again in 1965, when he and his brothers Albert and Eugene embarked on a fraud-and-extortion scheme that targeted Toronto stock promoter Richard Angle. After going to police, Angle was fitted with a miniature radio microphone and transmitter to gather evidence at future meetings with Volpe and his associates. At one meeting held in a Toronto hotel room in March 1965, Angle was pressured by Volpe to cough up $17,500. Also attending the meeting was a man from Buffalo who called himself “Mr. Palmer.” The mysterious Mr. Palmer was in fact Pasquale Natarelli (a.k.a. Pat Titters), a top lieutenant in the Magaddino Family. The police recorder captured efforts by Natarelli to convince Angle that by agreeing to their demands he would be protected by powerful forces:

“Look, I mean, I don't know how else to convince you, Dick. Look, look. With us, with us, its like having City Hall behind you. You can't make a mistake. … I don't care, I don't care who you. … what you do, how you do it, who you hurt. You know Dick, with us you're always right. … From this moment on, you go home and sleep like a baby, with peace of mind, all right? Untroubled, believe me, because if you get in trouble you'll know that our word is bigger than a police .45 or all the money in the world. … Nobody at any time will ever bother you. If they bother you, you get in touch with me and we’ll take anybody that’s on your back right off.”

In blunter terms, Natarelli told Angle that he better come up with the money “or blood will run in the streets of Toronto.” These threats were backed up by the presence of another Buffalo mafia enforcer, a 285-pound behemoth that Palmer called “Cicci” and who made menacing motions with a fork as he sat in the corner of the hotel room. In a subsequent conversation with Volpe, Angle inquired about the man with the fork. “You’re lucky he didn’t have an ice pick in his hand,” Volpe replied. “I know how this guy performs.” Police believed the recordings proved that Angle was being defrauded and extorted and on March 17, 1965, Paul, his brothers, and Natarelli were arrested and charged.
Their trial began in September 1965, but was aborted when a juror complained he couldn’t understand English. An appeal was launched by the Crown, but the judge in the second trial also ended it without a verdict when the jury reported itself deadlocked. In the third trial, Paul Volpe had one of his enforcers, David McGoran, offer a bribe to a juror, who contacted police. McGoran was arrested and later convicted of jury tampering, but his interference forced Judge Harry Waisberg to declare a third mistrial in November 1965. In the fourth trial, the defendants were acquitted, but the Crown appealed this verdict, charging that the judge had misdirected the jury. The Supreme Court of Canada agreed and ordered a fifth trial, which was unprecedented in Ontario legal history. As this trial drew near, Paul and Eugene Volpe agreed to a bargain that would see them plead guilty to a lesser charge. On June 21, 1968, Paul Volpe was sentenced to two years, just three days after he was married to an ex-model from Denmark. His brother Eugene was sentenced to three months, while Alberto Natarelli avoided the trial by skipping the country. Pasquale Natarelli was also unavailable for the Canadian trial, having already been sentenced to twenty-six years in an American penitentiary for conspiring to rob a Brink’s armoured truck and to steal $500,000 in jewels from a Beverly Hills hotel. Richard Angle continued to work as a stock promoter, although following the trial Revenue Canada seized $120,000 he had transferred to Bermuda, on the grounds of tax evasion. Angle contended the transfer was simply to put the funds out of reach of Paul Volpe.

After being released from prison in 1969, Volpe enjoyed boom times for the next ten years. His success was based on a potent mix of ambition, brains, charisma, charm, greed, treachery, intimidation, leadership skills, business acumen, connections, and the ability to surround himself with capable associates and subordinates. Terms used by friend and foe to describe Volpe ranged from the very negative (“ego-centric,” “materialistic,” “unscrupulous,” “a human parasite”), to the very positive (“engaging,” “very likeable,” “essentially decent,” a “fascinating, intelligent, interesting guy”). Volpe always looked the part of the gangster, wearing the latest in loud Italian fashions, driving expensive cars, carrying around large wads of cash — all the trappings that projected the image of a powerful, wealthy made guy who deserved respect. But he also deviated from the mobster stereotype; he rarely swore, didn’t drink, didn’t smoke, and doted on his Danish wife, who was a vice-president of a high-end women’s fashion store in Toronto. He loved to garden and watch movies, although his greatest sense of satisfaction seemed to be derived from scamming people. He was a great judge of the wants and vulnerabilities of others and once he got his hooks into a victim, he wouldn’t let go until he had shaken every last penny loose. He could be very loyal to his closest associates, but he had little compunction about betraying anyone if it meant another buck for him.

Volpe’s success was also due to a partnership with another habitual Toronto criminal named Nathan Klegerman, an abstemious, gregarious, part-time University of Toronto philosophy student who specialized in fencing stolen diamonds and who has been described as possessing “a canny deviousness, intelligence, tremendous efficiency, and great organizational skills.” Klegerman was initially drawn to Volpe in order to cash in on the latter’s notoriety and began using him as hired muscle. When Klegerman was charged with possession of $80,000 in stolen gems in 1964, he claimed that he did not know the jewels were stolen when he offered them as collateral for $1 million in loans. Klegerman was convicted of possession of stolen goods and was sentenced to prison.

During the 1970s, the two enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership. Volpe provided Klegerman with clout and protection within the criminal world and Klegerman introduced Volpe to new ways of making money, such as jewellery theft and stock market frauds. He also helped Volpe run his criminal rackets as a more cost-effective, businesslike enterprise and oversaw the pair’s most profitable joint venture: loansharking. “Klegerman’s ingenuity and organizational ability and Volpe’s charisma and ‘respect’ on the street made for a formidable criminal combination,” James Dubro noted. Klegerman’s contacts in the crime world also proved to be of great benefit to Volpe who, like John Papalia, eschewed the traditional tight-knit Italian mafia family for a multicultural network of criminal specialists. Together, they established a highly profitable and versatile criminal organization. “Volpe had natural
management skills and was a born talent-spotter. Working in a Canadian context, he naturally went for the best people, regardless of their backgrounds, when structuring his crime family. Creatively, Volpe brought together under his leadership an ethnic mix of people with diverse talents and skills.” Among the specialized talent that Volpe and Klegerman recruited was Chuck Yanover, an enforcer and weapons expert, the loan shark Murray Feldberg, Ron Mooney, who specialized in burglaries and crooked card games, Sam Shirose, a card shark who organized poker games on behalf of Volpe, and enforcers David McGoran, Ian Rosenberg, and Fred Wang.

Volpe also continued to work with other mafia colleagues, and by the early 1970s, he and Natale Lupino, whose son was Volpe's godchild, had their eye on Toronto's construction industry. Much of the construction in Toronto's postwar housing and commercial building boom was carried out by firms owned by Italian-Canadians, with the labour being chiefly provided by Italian immigrants. For opportunistic ethnic Italian criminals like Volpe and Lupino, this presented an opening to extort unions and construction firms while hiding behind contractors, supervisors, and immigrant labourers frightened into silence. The result, according to a 1974 report by Justice Harold Waisberg who was appointed to head a Royal Commission that investigated violence and corruption in Ontario's construction sector, was that between 1968 and 1974, “a sinister array of characters was introduced to this industry.”

The events that paved the way for Volpe and Lupino to infiltrate the construction industry began with a meeting at a Toronto restaurant in the spring of 1971. It was here that Cesido Romanelli, the owner of several Toronto-area construction, drywall, and lathing firms, agreed to hire Natale Lupino as an “escort” for $150 a week. Romanelli would later employ Joseph Domenic Zappia of Ottawa as another escort for eastern Ontario. When he was officially hired by Romanelli Construction in May 1971, Lupino had little experience in the industry, although his previous convictions for fraud and assault made him an ideal candidate for the tasks he was hired to carry out. Lupino was used by Romanelli to intimidate unions representing the tradesmen working for him, not only to ensure union peace, but to help him gain control over the unions themselves. Around the same time, Volpe began working for A. Gus Simone, business manager of Local 562 of the Lathers International Union. Simone was allied with the Toronto Building and Construction Trades Council, which at the time was backing a drive by five affiliated unions to organize concrete workers. Volpe and Lupino were brought in by Simone to “convince” the heads of other rival unions to join Simone's cause, while Romanelli served as the “bag man” for a group of contractors who made payoffs to the corrupt Simone in return for a steady supply of quality workers and to ensure labour peace.

One of the most prominent targets of Romanelli's hired goons was Jean-Guy Denis, business manager of Local 124 of the Plasterers Union. Denis was pushing for an agreement with Romanelli, but the contractor's response was to try to persuade Denis to allow his company to use piece workers on his Ottawa jobs. Romanelli was involved in several large construction projects in Ottawa at the time and either wanted the unions in his pocket or the jobs to be performed by non-union workers. The two could not reach a compromise, and when their talks broke down, Lupino and Zappia paid Denis a visit and demanded he set up a separate union and provide membership to people of Romanelli's and Lupino's choosing. Denis rejected their offer. At another meeting, Lupino offered Denis a bribe of five cents an hour for every hour worked by his seven hundred to eight hundred men if he would stay off the job and let someone else take over as head of the local. Again Denis turned Lupino down. Denis would testify before the Royal Commission that on the evening of January 8, 1973, two men forced their way into his house. He was not home at the time but his sixteen-year-old son was. The men beat the teenager so savagely that he had to spend a week in hospital with a concussion and internal injuries that required surgery. Jean-Guy, who fought in the Second World War, still would not give in and as a result his own life would be threatened several times.

Lupino and Volpe also terrorized independent contractors and union leaders to force them to join with Romanelli and Simone. According to Toronto police records, between 1968 and 1972 there were 234 acts of wilful damage, twenty-three acts of arson, fifteen assaults, and five explosions, as well as numer-
ous thefts and break-ins at Ontario construction sites. Among the many acts of violence was the bombing of two lathing companies in 1972 and the shooting of Bruno Zanini, a union organizer and former labour reporter for the *Toronto Telegram* who was conducting a freelance investigation into labour racketeering. He told police that a man wearing a stocking over his head shone a light in his eyes in the parking garage of his apartment building and then fired two shots, one of which struck him in the leg. Acme Lathing Ltd. was twice bombed with dynamite and, on July 3, 1972, its office was strafed with automatic gunfire. Another company, Gemini Lathing Ltd., was also bombed. At the time, the two companies were engaged in merger talks, which led police to believe that Cesido Romanelli, who also owned a lathing company, was trying to prevent the creation of a powerful competitor. Although neither the police nor the Royal Commission could prove it, Paul Volpe was hired to assure such a merger did not happen.

Toronto police received a break in their investigation into the attacks when a woman called to complain that she had found dynamite in her fridge. This tipped off investigators to Thomas Kiroff, a former member of the Vagabonds Motorcycle Club, and Volpe enforcer Charles Yanover (a.k.a. Chuck the Bike). Yanover was later photographed on a custom-made motorcycle that matched the description of the one seen in front of Acme the night of the shooting. Witnesses testifying before the Royal Commission stated that around the time of the bombings, Kiroff had given about fifteen sticks of dynamite with fuse and blasting caps, similar to those used in the bombings, to several people for safekeeping. When searching an apartment used as a safe house by Yanover, police found rifle barrels used in the strafing of the Acme Lathing building. Justice Waisberg contended that a number of cheques made out by Romanelli to Zappia, but cashed by Natale Lupino, were payments for the shooting and bombings of Acme and Gemini companies.

On December 19, 1974, Judge Waisberg produced his two-volume report, which acknowledged that organized crime had infiltrated Toronto’s construction industry. He concluded that Volpe, Lupino, Zappia, Yanover, and Kiroff were most likely responsible for the violence that plagued the industry and had been hired and paid by Romanelli. His report asserted that union boss Gus Simone was conspiring with contractors such as Romanelli and had received “numerous gifts of labour and material from contractors who were in contractual relations with his union.” The report also expressed surprise that Simone could afford a home worth $100,000, which he built in 1972, on a declared annual salary of $17,000.

The Waisberg report exploded onto the headlines when it was tabled in the provincial legislature in 1974. The *Globe and Mail* gave it front-page coverage and Paul Volpe, Natale Lupino, and Chuck Yanover figured prominently in the articles. Following the release of the report, police continued their investigations into the many allegations made during the inquiry. Cesido Romanelli, Natale Lupino, and Joseph Zappia were charged with perjuring themselves at the commission and while Zappia and Lupino were convicted, Romanelli was found not guilty. In 1976, Gus Simone was fined $20,000 after he pleaded guilty in tax court for failing to report $43,210 in income, much of it under-the-table payments from contractors. Despite this conviction, he went on to become the business manager for Local 675 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners.

Paul Volpe’s top enforcer, Chuck Yanover, emerged from the Royal Commission and subsequent police investigations relatively unscathed and would go on to have a varied and eccentric criminal career. A gun-loving, motorcycle-riding, criminal mercenary at heart, Yanover was described by fellow biker and mob hit man Cecil Kirby as standing about 5-feet-9-inches tall, with “thick glasses that hide ferret-like eyes” and “heavy lips and a long nose” that fill out “a Weasel-like face.” In 1976, the thirty-one-year-old Yanover was arrested as part of an extortion plot and, when police raided his home, they seized a folding rifle that could hold up to twenty-five rounds of ammunition. In April 1977, he was arrested again on weapons charges when police found two loaded rifles and a large quantity of ammunition in his home. In 1979, Yanover was convicted on his 1976 extortion and weapons charges and sentenced to eighteen months. Three years later, in perhaps one of the most outlandish cases to be heard in a Toronto court, Yanover was one of two defendants who admitted to plotting the assassination
of the South Korean president and then defrauding the North Korean men who allegedly sponsored the planned hit. In 1981, Yanover and Alexander Gerol were promised between $200,000 and $400,000 by the North Korean men to kill President Chun Doo Hwan. The assassination was to take place while Chun golfed with Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos at a resort on the island, in what one bemused attorney referred to as “the annual dictator’s golf tournament.” Yanover pledged to his North Korean clients that he would “muster the Sixth Fleet for a three-pronged amphibious landing in the Philippines with helicopters and armies,” according to his defence lawyer. Yanover and Gerol were charged with attempted murder and conspiracy to commit fraud. On February 17, 1984, Yanover was sentenced to two years, but only on the offence of defrauding the North Koreans after the judge accepted Yanover’s argument that he was only interested in the money and never intended to carry out the assassination. At the time of the sentencing, he was already serving nine years for bombing a Toronto disco on January 9, 1980, as well as for his role in an unsuccessful plan to overthrow the government of Dominica.

Paul Volpe also emerged unscathed from the inquiry. When he was forced to testify before the commission, Volpe, who called himself an independent “labour consultant,” gave very little away, although he raised a few eyebrows when he presented a net worth statement indicating his most significant asset was $55,500 in cash (technically, this was true as most of his assets were registered in his wife’s name). Neither Judge Waisberg nor the police could directly implicate Volpe in any of the violence and he escaped criminal charges. In subsequent years, Volpe continued to have influence with at least one trade union leader. In the late 1970s, Volpe referred two men to Gus Simone who appointed them international representatives of Local 1190 of the Carpenters Union, which at the time was involved in a bitter dispute with another union over residential housing construction. The dispute became the subject of a police investigation when a series of fires caused about $3 million in damages to houses under construction. The two men appointed representatives were Cesido Romanelli, who held the job for three weeks before his death from natural causes on January 17, 1983, and Peter Scarcella, a Volpe lieutenant. At the time of his appointment, Scarcella was on probation after pleading guilty in January 1982 to three counts of offering secret commissions in connection with a scandal involving Metro Toronto municipal garbage dumps.

The publicity surrounding the Royal Commission actually bolstered Volpe’s gangland reputation. But it also raised his profile among police and for the next ten years he would be in and out of court on a number of charges. In September 1977, Volpe and others were arrested for conspiring to keep a common betting house. The charges were laid following several joint federal, provincial, and municipal police investigations that began in 1975 and focussed on his gambling and loansharking operations. As part of one investigation, police raided Volpe’s Toronto Bridge Club on Bathurst Street, which offered numerous games of chance and also housed a bookmaking operation with direct connections to American-based gambling syndicates that supplied daily betting lines. Targeted in another investigation dubbed “Project Oblong” was Flite Investments, a lending company Volpe operated with Klegerman and fronted by associate Murray Feldberg. Flite Investments was essentially a loansharking operation that Volpe and Klegerman used to provide operating capital to other criminals at usurious rates. A police report that summarized the surveillance conducted as part of Project Oblong conceded that the “entire investigation was confused by the endless parade of unidentified individuals” who were approaching Volpe for money to finance a legal or illegal scheme. “Paul often entered into these schemes, but regardless of the outcome he was ‘guaranteed’ his money — a solid investment. It became obvious that Paul Volpe would become involved in almost any scheme or ‘scam’ which suggested a large profit. Due to Paul’s position and authority, as well as the respect and fear he commanded from the criminal element, Paul’s money would be returned even when it was a losing scheme.” Volpe and Klegerman were also putting tens of thousands of dollars on the streets by blackmailing a manager at a Bank of Montreal branch. They had filmed him while engaged in a homosexual act, and used this to force him to provide more than $300,000 in loans to Volpe associ-
ates and clients, none of whom had any intention of paying the loans back. When police decided to wrap up their surveillance in 1978, dozens of people were arrested and convicted of various offences relating to loansharking, gambling, infiltration of legitimate businesses, bank fraud, corruption, extortion, theft, hijacking, fencing of stolen goods, stock fraud, money laundering, and tax fraud.

Between 1976 and 1981, Volpe, his brothers, Nathan Klegerman, and others were charged with even more offences that resulted from various police investigations. In 1976, they were accused of conspiring to smuggle $1.6 million in diamonds into Canada. In 1978, they were in court after being connected to a fraud scheme dating back to 1972 in which they purchased diamonds and other gems from merchants with bad cheques, worthless stocks, and unpaid promissory notes. In total, the scam netted gems with a retail value of $2.5 million. One victim, the Zahler Diamond Company, sold them $450,000 worth of diamonds between 1972 and 1975. On February 4, 1980, Volpe was sentenced to eight months for the illegal possession of electronic wiretap equipment, which was found in his home by police in 1977. At his trial Volpe said he purchased the devices as part of his hobby of collecting electronic gadgets. After an appeal, his sentence was reduced to sixty days. Also in 1980, he pleaded guilty to running an illegal gambling operation out of the Toronto Bridge Club and was fined $8,000. In 1981, he and three other men were charged with conspiracy to commit fraud and criminal breach of trust over a proposed $4.5 million sale of the Citytv building on Queen Street in November 1980. (Police said a deposit was placed on the building by one potential buyer, but it was subsequently sold to another buyer. While Volpe was charged, he was unwittingly roped into the fraud by a corrupt lawyer.) In September 1981, the Volpe brothers and Nathan Klegerman pleaded not guilty to charges arising from their fraud against the Zahler Diamond Co. After a mistrial due to the illness of one juror, the accused were acquitted of all charges.

In 1977, Volpe began investing in real estate in Atlantic City, like so many others who were trying to capitalize on the 1976 law that legalized gambling in the coastal resort town. In 1980, New Jersey law enforcement authorities, who were monitoring Volpe's investments, stated that all his transactions up to this point were legal. Yet, true to form, Volpe was not content to make money simply by flipping real estate. He also began defrauding others who invested with him. When any property was sold at a profit, the money was reinvested immediately so when his partners wanted to cash in, they were told the money was tied up. And Volpe “just kept on doing that,” one New Jersey police official told the media in 1983, “pyramiding the property, utilizing the investors’ money.” When investors pushed Volpe to get their money back he used “strong-arm tactics to keep control of that money.” If the investors insisted, Volpe would only provide them with their original investment and no more. “Then, eventually, the organized crime people control the property, and although they’re not turning it over, they can see that in a couple of years they can probably turn it over at a profit. Then, so they won’t have to meet mortgage payments, they may put that property in receivership or bankruptcy to tie everything up for a period of time. Then they start a new company which ultimately takes control of the property.” Among those Volpe cheated was John Cocomile, a Toronto lawyer who had invested more than $200,000 and was told he could expect a profit of at least $1 million within two or three years. Volpe had secretly sold the property, however, and refused to share the profits. Volpe did eventually agree to pay Cocomile $12,000, but his payment was accompanied by the following terms: “if you cash the cheque I’ll break your fucking neck.”

Volpe’s Atlantic City venture was yet another example of his talent for making money, his inveterate dishonesty, and his refusal to limit his operations to his home base of Toronto. Atlantic City was outside the Magaddino Family territory, but Volpe was able to secure the backing of Angelo Bruno, the head of the Philadelphia mob. Part of the conditions was that Volpe would provide a cut to Bruno and would also have to work with Nicodemo (Little Nicky) Scarfo, Bruno’s hotheaded and homicidal representative in Atlantic City. Around the time Volpe was making his move into New Jersey, Scarfo was positioning himself to take over the Bruno family, which resulted in at least a dozen deaths, including the March 1980 murder of
Angelo Bruno. When Scarfo became the new head of the family, he was far more aggressive than his predecessor in ensuring Volpe cut him in on his real estate action in Atlantic City. This included sending three of his men to Volpe’s Toronto home to request a “donation” to the “Philadelphia Church.”

“**I KNOW YOU’LL KILL ME, VIC**”

When Paul Volpe was released from jail on his extortion charges in the late 1960s, he was joined on the street by John Papalia, who in January 1968 was paroled from his U.S. narcotics conviction on humanitarian grounds because he was suffering from tuberculosis. When Papalia returned to Hamilton his health miraculously recovered and he immediately began to re-establish his presence in Southern Ontario’s underworld. But he now faced competition from other mobsters, including those in the Luppino family, the Siderno Group, and Paul Volpe, not to mention other emerging crime groups, like the outlaw motorcycle gangs. Ontario’s gangland became even more factionalized when Stefano Magaddino died of natural causes on July 19, 1974. His death caused a split in the family as two of his lieutenants, Joe Todaro and Salvatore (Sam) Pieri, jockeyed for power. Magaddino’s passing and the resulting interregnum was the beginning of the end for his family’s sway over its members in Southern Ontario, who were increasingly exercising their independence. This was most apparent with Paul Volpe, who persisted in solidifying his reputation as a lone wolf. The family squabbles also put Volpe, who pledged whatever loyalty he could muster to Sam Pieri, on a collision course with John Papalia, who aligned himself with the Todaro faction of the family.

Once back in Hamilton, Papalia was reunited with his long-time criminal acquaintances. Using a popular Hamilton nightspot called Diamond Jim’s as his headquarters, he threw himself back into gambling, loansharking, extortion, drug trafficking, and money laundering. One frequenter of Diamond Jim’s described how Papalia audaciously coordinated his rackets from his new command post:

It was just like in the movies. “The man” always had a table reserved for him up front centre. He’d arrive in his big car and first his boys would go in and check out the place. Then Papalia would come in, dressed in a flashy suit, sunglasses, his hat pulled down. He’d sit down at his table with his boys around him, and he’d deal right there. He was that brazen about it. You’d see the guys come up to him — mainly young guys dealing in street drugs. He’d talk to them, money would change hands, they’d go away and someone else would come. That was Papalia’s style, never gave a damn about anybody.

Papalia also began investing in real estate and legitimate businesses in Hamilton, including bars, restaurants, autobody repair shops, and construction firms. In addition to funds generated by his criminal activities, the investments were also being made with money sent from American crime syndicates as part of an international money laundering operation put together by mafia financier extraordinaire Meyer Lansky. Arrangements to launder U.S. mob money through Canada were allegedly made at February 24, 1970, meeting in Acapulco, which was attended by Lansky, John Papalia, Vic Cotroni, and Paolo Violi, among others. The idea was to send criminally generated cash from the U.S. to Canada where it would be laundered and the funds reinvested in U.S. enterprises in order to return the money south of the border. Other Canadians, in particular John Pullman of Toronto, were identified as key Lansky associates, and facilitated his money laundering interests in Canada primarily through real estate investments. In 1974, an article appeared in the *Toronto Star* based on an interview with Inspector Thomas Venner of the RCMP’s intelligence unit in Toronto. The article asserted that “laundered crime money is invested in every kind of business” in Metro Toronto, which included “investments in hotels, restaurants, small shopping plazas, and increasingly, in recent months, real estate.” A 1975 police report from British Columbia estimated that, in the previous two years, more than $6 million from “two major crime families based in New York and New Jersey” was invested “in vice establishments on Yonge Street in Toronto.” According to a 1970 edition of the *Hamilton Spectator*, that city “also became one of the major centres for the investment of money gained
through organized crime across North America, and the Hamilton Mafia became important in the laundering of money gained by illegal means.”

Papalia’s brash return to Hamilton did not go unnoticed by the police or the media. On August 31, 1971, he was remanded to appear in court to face an assault charge after throwing a court clerk off the veranda of his Railway Street home while being served with a summons. Papalia apologized in court and the clerk withdrew the charges. In 1974, he and five others were arrested following raids on the Monarch Vending Company and two Papalia associates, Michael Dipaulo and Tom Campisi, were charged with illegal betting and bookmaking offences. John and his brothers Frank and Rocco were also charged with assaulting and obstructing a police officer, while his close associate Donald LeBarre was arrested after police found marijuana in his home. Papalia’s name was also splashed over the newspapers when allegations became public that Clinton Duke, a businessman with a criminal past and ties to Papalia and Stefano Magaddino, was on friendly terms with senior Ontario Provincial Police officials (a subsequent provincial inquiry found no improper conduct on the part of the police officers).

Police were also becoming aware of the cooperation between mafiosi from Hamilton and Montreal. On October 16, 1968, Paolo Violi travelled from Montreal and met with Dan Gasbarrini at Giacomo Luppino’s home. On June 22, 1972, a veritable who’s who of the Canadian mafia turned out for the wedding between Domenic Luppino and the daughter of Siderno Group member Remo Commissio. Among those attending the wedding were John Papalia, Paul Volpe, Paolo Violi, Vic Cotroni, Pietro Sciarra, Frank Sylvestro, Rocco Scopelliti, and the entire Luppino and Commissio clans. Also in attendance was Giuseppe Settecasi, the mafia family head for the Sicilian province of Agrigento who was passing through Ontario after his unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the disputes between the Calabrian and Sicilian factions of the Montreal mafia. On February 19, 1974, John Papalia travelled to Montreal where he met with Violi and Cotroni for three days. The purpose of this meeting, as well as subsequent ones held with Vancouver mob boss Joe Gentile, was to hatch a scheme spearheaded by Violi in which shell companies would be set up to launder money.

A year later, Papalia, Cotroni, and Violi were charged with conspiracy to commit extortion. The con, dreamed up by Sheldon (Sonny) Swartz, a semilegitimate businessman with loose ties to Papalia, involved defrauding Stanley Bader, a Toronto stock promoter who had partnered with Swartz in a money-lending/loan-shark business. In 1973, Swartz and Papalia conspired to trick Bader out of $200,000 by telling him that a recent scam he pulled in Montreal had victimized Vic Cotroni, who they claimed was going to kill Bader unless the money was returned. To add credibility to the swindle, Papalia made a cameo appearance before Bader as the Cotroni enforcer. Bader was told that of the $300,000 he had originally defrauded in Montreal, Swartz had already provided “The Enforcer” with $100,000, but Bader would have to produce the other $200,000. The story was completely fictitious (and was being perpetrated without the knowledge of Cotroni), but a gullible and terrified Bader was convinced and gave Swartz a suitcase with the full amount in hundred-dollar bills. Celebrations over the financial windfall
were short-lived for Swartz and Papalia, however. Bader grew suspicious and in early 1974 he started making discreet inquiries in Montreal mob circles. Vic Cotroni and Paolo Violi soon heard about the threats they supposedly made and became furious, not because the family’s name had been used without their knowledge or consent, but because they did not receive a cut of the money. Papalia was confronted by Cotroni and Violi who demanded $150,000 from him. This order was recorded by a police wiretap, which exposed the original scam. In the most business-like terms, Violi told Papalia, “You, Johnny, know these things, that [we] have to work all together but instead you did it alone. You used our names. Don’t you want us to be friends? Bring $150,000 and no one will know anything. ... Be aware that we don’t like crooked things ... and we respect each other but with us you have to come straight.” Cotroni was less diplomatic, warning Pops that if he did not cough up the money, “we’ll kill you.” Papalia acknowledged Cotroni’s power and sincerity by simply replying, “I know you’ll kill me, Vic.”

Based on the wiretap evidence, co-operation from Bader, and a follow-up investigation, Papalia, Cotroni, Violi, and Swartz were arrested in November 1975. The following year, the four were convicted of extortion in a Toronto courtroom and sentenced to six years. Violi and Cotroni appealed their sentence, arguing that since their involvement was secondary to the original offence, they deserved a lesser sentence than Swartz and Bader. An Ontario Court of Appeal agreed and reduced their sentence to six months. The fifty-three-year-old Papalia had no such luck and was kept out of circulation until 1982. That same year, Stanley Bader was greeted at the front door of his Miami home with a hail of bullets. It had been almost a month since the last threatening call warned him, “Look over your shoulder — you won’t live out the week.” Another phone call to Bader told him, “This is in revenge for five years ago.”

**VIOLENT, LEAN, CUTTHROAT, AND VINDICTIVE**

Two years before John Papalia was released from jail, Michele Racco, the respected head of Toronto’s Siderno Group, died of cancer at the age of sixty-six. Attendance at his funeral, held on a cold day in January 1980, was a testament to his influential status in the criminal world. His pallbearers included other members of the Toronto crimini, while cars bearing licence plates from New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Connecticut, and Quebec lined the two-mile-long procession. It was one of the biggest funerals ever held in Toronto. With Racco gone, the Siderno Group was now without its founder, its leader, and its moderating influence. His son Domenic, who by this time had been released from prison on his 1972 attempted-murder charge, was now trying to replace his father. But it was Rocco Zito who assumed the post of capo crimini due to his seniority and because most of the other senior Sidernese mafiosi in Toronto were wary of Domenic’s ongoing erratic and violent nature (which was made even more acute by his cocaine addiction). Domenic’s leadership aspirations were also being challenged by another powerful faction of the Siderno Group: the Commisso brothers.

It was in 1961 that sixteen-year-old Cosimo Commisso and his fourteen- and thirteen-year-old brothers, Rocco and Michele, immigrated to Canada along with their widowed mother. Despite their youth, all arrived with a family history of ‘Ndrangheta involvement. The father of the three boys, Girolomo Commisso, was a member of an ‘Ndrina clan in the Siderno area of Italy until he was gunned down in a feud in 1948. When they arrived in Toronto, the fatherless boys were taken under the wing of Michele Racco. By the 1970s, Rocco (or Remo, as he was usually called) began assembling his own ‘Ndrina clan, anointing himself capo bastone (head of the family), with his older brother, Cosimo, assuming the position of sotto capo (underboss). By the middle part of the decade, Remo had been given a seat on the governing crimini in Toronto (around the same time his cousin, Cosimo Commisso, was taking over as the capofamiglia of the Calabrian Mafia in Italy after his predecessor, Antonio Macri, was murdered by rivals). As James Dubro relates in his 1985 book, *Mob Rule,* “the most serious, structured, and respected group within the Siderno mafia in Toronto was to be that run by Remo Commissio. The fashionable Remo, who was often seen wearing silk scarves around his neck, established his pre-eminent position through a combination of ruthlessness and ‘connections’ — in
the United States, Hamilton, Montreal, Toronto, and, most significantly, in the old country itself.” By the end of the 1970s, Remo and his brothers had put together a criminal enterprise that “rivalled the best of the Sicilian Mafia structures existing in the United States and which was, in terms of pure muscle and audacity, one of the most powerful mafia groups in Canada.” Together, Remo and Cosimo “controlled a criminal organization that imported and distributed heroin with the Vancouver mob and the Calabrian Mafia in Italy, fenced stolen goods across North America, printed and distributed counterfeit money throughout Canada and the United States, ran a vast extortion network in Ontario, arranged insurance and land frauds in the Toronto area, and engaged in contract killings and contract-enforcement work across Canada and the United States — the whole gamut of violent criminal activities one usually associates with the Mafia.”

Their first notable run-in with the law occurred in August 1976 when Cosimo and Remo were flown to Vancouver from Toronto with a police escort to face charges of counterfeiting currency, which stemmed from a raid on a Vancouver warehouse that uncovered $1.3 million in near-perfect American tens, twenties, and fifties. Among the others arrested was Vancouver mobster Camelo Gallo, who pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges. The brothers also generated considerable revenue through their infiltration of Toronto’s construction industry. As Cecil Kirby states in his biography, when he began working for the Commissos as an enforcer in 1976, “I learned quickly that their big thing for making money was the construction industry. They probably made more from extortions in the construction industry than they did from trafficking in heroin — and it was a helluva lot safer.” They had positioned themselves as a collection agency for contractors trying to settle outstanding debts. “The Commissos would collect money owed to a contractor and take a percentage of it. They didn’t let legal technicalities or stalling tactics get in the way.” The brothers also used trade unions to shake down companies and individuals who owed money to their contractor clients. For a fee or a percentage of what was owed a contractor, the Commissos would send “union goons” to visit construction company managers and extract payments by way of beatings, shootings, bombings or wildcat strikes. When they were not extorting contractors, they were rigging bids on government construction contracts by intimidating companies that competed against their clients. “Once their man got the bid, they became his partners,” according to Kirby, “and their people — plasterers, electricians, plumbers, cement suppliers — would be used on the job. They’d inflate the cost of the job, pocket the profits, and run like thieves while the public or business paid the price.”

Like other organized criminals, the Commissos relied heavily on intimidation and violence. Not only was the threat of violence used as a basis for their extortion-fused activities, but the brothers were personally involved in carrying out vendettas against their enemies. As children and teenagers, Remo and Cosimo were raised on ’Ndrangheta style and they were taught that no act of aggression against the family should be forgotten or go unpunished. Remo travelled to Italy at least twice during the 1970s for the purpose of murdering enemies, carrying out vendettas, and recapturing the family’s honour. When assassins injured their uncle Vincenzo Commissio as part of the successful attack on his boss, Antonio Macri, in January 1975, the Comissio nephews exacted revenge the same year.
by slaughtering members of their rival family in their home in Italy. In 1982, Remo avenged the murder of his father committed more than thirty years prior after travelling to a small Calabrian town and slaughtering the sons of his father’s suspected killers. As James Dubro puts it, “Remo Commisso has always believed in the old country and the old values, the Mafia the way it used to be: violent, lean, cutthroat, and vindictive.” His brother was no less vicious, according to Cecil Kirby, “Cosimo wasn’t tough — he was homicidal. He’d kill you as soon as look at you if he thought you were crossing him, if he thought it was good for business, or if he thought you had insulted him or his family. The lives of other people meant nothing to him.”

In carrying out their reign of violence in North America, the Commisso brothers relied on paid enforcers and none was used more or became as infamous as Cecil Kirby, an outlaw biker-turned-freelance-hit-man. Kirby’s biographer, Thomas Renner, describes him as small framed, but solidly built with sky-blue eyes, curly, reddish-blond hair and an “impish, almost boyish face that often breaks into an infectious smile.” An RCMP officer assigned to handle Kirby after he became an informant characterized him as “schizophrenic.” He had a “dual personality” that “ranges from a very kind person to a vicious, hot-tempered, violent individual who is quite capable of killing.”

Kirby came to the Commissos brothers in the spring of 1976, when he was just twenty years old. He had just left the Satan’s Choice Motorcycle Club, which he had joined in 1969. On orders from the Comissos, he carried out a spree of violence, using a specialty of many biker enforcers — explosives. When Kirby became a police informant in 1980, he told his handlers that he could provide evidence on at least eighteen bombings, several extortions, and three arsons that he carried out for the Commissos.

One of Kirby’s first assignments in the fall of 1976 was to blow up a car belonging to Antonio Burgas Pinheiro, a Brampton-based salesman for Appia Beverages Ltd., which competed against another beverage company controlled by Siderno Group members. On November 11, 1976, Kirby left a stick of dynamite in the mailbox of the owner of Pozzebona Construction to persuade him to pay a plastering bill to a Comisso client more promptly. In December 1976, Kirby was promised $10,000 to kill one Dennis Mason who was to testify against a Comisso ally in an upcoming trial. Kirby was given five sticks of dynamite by Cosimo, which he attached to Mason’s car, but the dynamite failed to explode and even if it did, he had targeted the wrong Dennis Mason. On May 3, 1977, he dynamited the Wah Kew Chop Suey House on Elizabeth Street in Toronto after the Commissos had been contracted by the Kung Lok, a local Chinese criminal group. According to Kirby, the restaurant was targeted because it was running a gambling operation without the permission of the Kung Lok leaders, who couldn’t do the job themselves because they were under intense scrutiny by Toronto police. One restaurant employee was killed in the explosion.

In 1978, Kirby received $2,000 after he placed a bomb at the doorstep of Ben Freedman, a construction contractor who was in debt to subcontractors and who had hired the Comissos as their collection agency. In March and April 1978, Kirby set off bombs at two Mississauga apartment buildings owned by brothers Jerry and Roman Humeniuk, who owed money to some electrical contractors. Kirby also detonated an explosive at the home of Dr. Roman Humeniuk. In May 1978, Kirby was instructed to extort money from Max Zentner of Montreal, a developer who was in debt to a Comisso associate. Kirby was to target Zentner’s partner, John Ryan of Hamilton and, on August 1, 1978, Kirby blew up Ryan’s car in his driveway and received $3,000 in return. During the summer of 1978, Kirby was busy setting fires at a tavern and a home in Toronto as well as a hotel in Acton, Ontario. In July 1980, he was instructed by Cosimo to bomb the home of Maury Kalen on behalf of Willie Obront over a $100,000 debt that Kalen allegedly owed to him. Kirby detonated a stick of dynamite at Kalen’s Toronto home, but discovered later that the intended victim no longer lived at that address.

Between June and August 1978, Kirby travelled to Montreal on several occasions to murder Irving Kott, an occasional associate of Willie Obront and Vic Cotroni, who made millions from manipulating the stock market. The Comissos told Kirby they were acting on behalf of one of Kott’s business partners who would benefit financially from his death, but Kirby believed it was Vic Cotroni who wanted him dead because he thought
Kott had cheated him in one of his stock market scams. After an aborted attempt to shoot him, Kirby planted an explosive in Kott's car, but when it was detonated the intended victim was nowhere near. Instead, two innocent passersby were injured. In the fall of 1980, Remo directed Kirby to break the arms or the legs of Alphonso Gallucci who owed $54,000 to a Commisso associate. At first Kirby agreed, but then changed his mind because of the lack of advance money.

By this time, Kirby was growing weary of the Commisso brothers' demands, especially given their growing stinginess in providing advances and final payments and the consistently incorrect information on targets they were providing him. He also feared that sooner or later he would become one of their victims, given all he knew about their criminal affairs. So, in November 1980, Cecil Kirby contacted the RCMP and volunteered his services as an informant, an almost unheard-of offer for someone in Kirby's position. His contract with the Mounties, which was negotiated (and revised) in 1981, promised him immunity from prosecution for his past crimes, police protection for him and his family, and an expense allowance of $1,950 a month. In return, Kirby agreed to provide everything he knew about the Commisso and even became an undercover agent to collect more damning evidence that could be used against the brothers, who still looked upon Kirby as their number-one enforcer.

In February 1981, Kirby informed his RCMP handler, Constable Mark Murphy, that Cosimo Commisso had told him he was to meet with someone from New York who wanted Kirby to travel to Connecticut to kill "some broad that was causing a problem." The unnamed New Yorker turned out to be Vincenzo (Vincent) Melia, a Canadian citizen who led an 'Ndrina group in Connecticut. Melia suspected his brother's girlfriend, Helen Nafplotis, was a police informant and he had contacted Cosimo to arrange for a hired killer as part of what James Dubro called a "hit-man exchange program" between Canadian and American 'Ndrangheta groups. Melia met Kirby on February 22, 1981, at a motel in Stamford, Connecticut, and supplied him with a .38-calibre revolver, the keys to the home of Nafplotis, her picture, a car, and $5,000 in cash. Kirby was promised another $5,000 when there was proof of the murder. After working with the FBI in Connecticut, who placed the woman in a protection program, Kirby returned to Canada and met with Cosimo to inform him that the job had been carried out. At one point Cosimo asked Kirby, who had been fitted with a police recording device, "But you did it? When you did it, Tuesday?" The RCMP now had Cosimo Commissio for conspiracy to commit murder.

If this was not enough evidence for the police, the Commisso brothers tasked Kirby with his most important assignment to date: the assassination of Paul Volpe. Cosimo had already asked Kirby to kill Volpe lieutenant Peter Scarcella, who was also working with the Commisso and who Cosimo suspected was providing Volpe with information on their operations. Cosimo called off the hit, however, most likely because he could not receive permission from his superiors, either in Toronto or the U.S. The reasons are still unclear as to why the Commisso asked Kirby to eliminate Volpe. No doubt, they saw him as a competitor and also had a personal dislike for the man, having been cheated by Volpe in a real estate deal. There were also suspicions that Vic Cotroni had ordered the hit or at least had relayed orders from New York to the Commisso, perhaps as retribution for Volpe's intrusion on American territory through his New Jersey excursions. Volpe was also becoming an embarrassment to the mob due to his high-profile nature, which included naively agreeing to an extensive media interview that became a prominent part of two groundbreaking documentaries on organized crime in Canada aired on the CBC in 1977 and 1979. Whatever the reason, a police recording of a discussion between Cecil Kirby and Cosimo Commissio on March 31, 1981, reveals that the decision to kill Volpe was conditional on approval from a higher authority:

C.K.: What about Volpe?
C.C.: I'm waiting for an answer, O.K.?
C.K.: Alright.
C.C.: And maybe we know next week. You see what I mean?
C.K.: O.K.
C.K.: Someone else.
C.C.: Right. O.K., you see what I mean?
Whoever the higher authority may have been, Cosimo did receive the go-ahead. On April 23, 1981, he told Kirby that Scarcella was no longer a target, while hinting that Remo had a more important one in mind:

C.C.: We gonna put you on the payroll and when things are done you gonna get a bonus for it. Ah, Scarcella, forget about it for now. Just don't worry about it for now.
C.K.: For how long?
C.C.: A month, two months, we don't know yet. There's another guy.
C.K.: What the fuck's going on?
C.C.: There's another guy that I want you to take care of instead of him. He [Remo] wants to do another guy.
C.K.: You don't want to do him, you want to do another guy?
C.C.: Yes, not him for now, O.K.?
C.K.: Well, who the fuck is this other guy?
C.C.: Ah, I'll show you, next week you'll see.
C.K.: Another guy?

C.C.: Yeah.
C.K.: Holy fuck. Make up your minds. What, a close friend of Scarcella's?
C.C.: Yes.
C.K.: Not Volpe?
C.C.: I'll show him. Maybe you know the guy a little bit. But don't worry about his name, you see him, O.K.?

Cosimo later told Kirby that Volpe was in fact the target and offered him $20,000 for the hit. When Kirby informed his shocked police handlers, a plan was put in place to carry out a mock assassination in an attempt to entrap Remo Commisso. As James Dubro points out, "the police had more than enough evidence against Cosimo Commisso, but lacked hard evidence against Remo Commisso, for whom his older brother was acting as a kind of insulation. It was decided that Kirby's final sting would be to obtain admissible evidence on the murder contracts against Remo Commisso, who, as we have seen, was considered to be the real leader of the Commisso family." Police already had Kirby's agreement to double-cross the Commissons; now all they needed was the support of the intended victim. Constable Murphy along with Sergeant Al Cooke of the Toronto police visited Volpe at his home and, after telling him a contract had been taken out on his life, persuaded him to go along with a plan to convince Remo Commisso that Kirby had actually carried out their orders. Not only did Volpe agree to help out, but he also consented to hand over his wallet to police, which would then be taken by Kirby to Remo as proof that he had fulfilled the contract. The two police officers also convinced Volpe that he and his wife should spend the day at the RCMP's Toronto headquarters for safekeeping.

Despite his unpredictable nature, Volpe's agreement with all of these requests must have been a great surprise to police. As Dubro observes, "This ready cooperation with the police, as well as his willingness to strike back through official channels instead of using his own muscle and power to retaliate against the Commissos for their lack of respect, was a major breach of mob etiquette, and it was to cost Volpe dearly when the extent of his co-operation became generally known on the street."
On the morning of May 16, 1981, while Volpe and his wife were enjoying some Mountie hospitality, Cecil Kirby met with Constable Murphy and was given Volpe’s wallet. By 11:15 a.m., Kirby, who was body-packed with listening devices, arrived at Remo Commisso’s home. After greeting Kirby at the front door, Remo escorted his visitor to the bathroom and turned on the faucet in the sink. Despite the attempt to muffle their conversation police did pick up sufficient incriminating evidence against Remo Commisso:

C.K.: Volpe he’s dead.
R.C.: How come?
C.K.: I just killed him an hour ago … Cosimo told me you and he wanted it.
R.C.: …you should never come here.
C.K.: I need some money okay, okay … I need some money and I want to get … out of the country.
R.C.: Tell me how I’m going to get it to you?
C.K.: Well a thousand or something just to get me out of here … [pulling Volpe’s wallet out] I took this right out of his back pocket.
R.C.: You should have thrown [it] away … All right, don’t worry; we’ll take care of you. You know we respect you like a brother. Don’t worry.

Police now had enough evidence on the Commisso brothers. In May 1981, thirty-six-year-old Cosimo, thirty-four-year-old Remo, and thirty-three-year-old Michele were arrested in Toronto and charged with three counts of attempted murder and counselling to commit assault causing bodily harm. At the same time, the FBI arrested fifty-two-year-old Vincenzo Melia and twenty-four-year-old Jerry Russo in Connecticut and charged them with conspiracy to commit murder. In July of that year, both men were ordered by a U.S. district court judge to be extradited to Canada. Vincenzo Melia was later convicted in a Canadian court and received nine years for his role in plotting the murder of Helen Nafplotis. In August, the three Commisso bothers pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit murder. Remo and Cosimo were sentenced to eight years in jail, while Michele received a two-and-a-half-year sentence. Two years later, based on evidence provided by Cecil Kirby, Cosimo and Remo were slapped with an additional thirty-nine charges resulting from offences that took place between 1976 and 1980. Following another trial, Cosimo was sentenced to an additional eight years while Remo received another six. In total, Cosimo received more than twenty-one years, while Remo was given fourteen and a half years for conspiracy to commit murder, counselling to commit murder, possession of property obtained by crime, conspiracy to commit extortion, counselling another person to commit an indictable offence, causing bodily harm, and conspiracy to defraud. Not long after the Commisso were convicted of these offences, Paul Volpe contacted the RCMP to tell them a $100,000 contract had been put out on Cecil Kirby, who was now in a witness protection program. This was his way of saying thank-you to the Mounties and to Kirby.

MEETING WITH PEOPLE “FROM OVER THERE”

Paul Volpe was lucky enough to escape one attempt on his life. But circumstances were conspiring to remove any remaining hopes that he could escape the contract that was still hanging over his head. In 1981, Sam Pieri, one of Paul Volpe’s last remaining supporters in the Magaddino Family, died. Volpe was now even more isolated and dangerously unprotected from his enemies while his standing within the family was rapidly deteriorating. For a number of years he refused to pay tribute, and his foray into Atlantic City only confirmed his maverick status. Joe Todaro, who was now in control of the Buffalo family, wanted nothing to do with Volpe. Other American mafiosi, especially Nicky Scarfo, began treating Volpe as a pariah. Todaro’s ascension to the leadership of the Buffalo mob also bolstered his biggest Canadian supporter, John Papalia, who never hid his desire to get rid of his rival. Volpe was also losing many of his key associates and enforcers. Nate Klegerman had fled Canada to escape a number of criminal charges, Chuck Yanover was in and out of jail, and Fred Wang was dead of a drug overdose. On April 22, 1977, the bodies of Volpe enforcer Ian Rosenberg and his girlfriend, Julie Lipson, were found by their five-year-old child. Both had been shot in the head while sleeping. The hit was
most likely ordered by Volpe because Rosenberg had become extremely erratic and unreliable and Volpe worried that he was co-operating with police after being charged with extortion.

On Sunday, November 13, 1983, Paul Volpe, dressed in a white turtleneck sweater and green corduroy trousers, informed his wife that he would be having lunch with Pietro Scarcella and then had to go to the airport where he would be meeting with people “from over there.” This was most likely a reference to American mobsters, either from the Magaddino or Scarfo family. He said that he should be home by early evening. When he failed to show up that night, Volpe’s wife became frantic. On Monday morning, she nervously called their lawyer, David Humphrey, who contacted the Toronto police. After he informed them of Volpe’s planned meeting at the airport, police searched the airport parking lots for the leased BMW he was driving. They eventually found the car on the second level of the Terminal Two garage. After spotting blood on the tailgate, they opened the trunk and discovered Volpe’s lifeless fifty-five-year-old body, curled up in a foetal position and lying in a pool of his own blood. There was so much blood that police thought his throat had been slashed. Upon closer inspection it was discovered that Volpe’s killers had shot him in the back of the head.

Scarcella confirmed with police that he had lunched with Volpe that day, but his boss had driven away on his own. Investigators determined that Volpe had been killed almost immediately after he left Scarcella as the time recorded on the airport parking lot stub was a little less than half an hour after he drove away from the restaurant. Police reasoned that he was most likely shot at one of the numerous construction sites near the airport, which would have been abandoned on a Sunday. His body was then stuffed into the trunk of his car and driven to the airport parking lot by one of the killers. Volpe’s murder would never be solved, in part because there was no shortage of potential suspects or motives. He already had enemies in Ontario — such as John Papalia and the Commissio brothers — who would have dearly liked him out of the way. He had alienated himself from the Magaddino Family, had stepped on the toes of the vicious Nicky Scarfo, and had defrauded dozens, if not hundreds, of people, including fellow mobsters. His high-profile TV and court appearances were also a great cause of concern to his mafia colleagues who desired anonymity, plus there was lingering embarrassment that Volpe was still around a full two years after he was originally slated to die. If that were not enough, his co-operation with the police over the planned hit by the Commissio brothers was an inexcusable sin in mafia circles. As Chuck Yanover wrote in a letter from jail, “Paul got what he deserved, nice guy or not, since he did what he did when he broke the code of ethics.”

The most plausible theory is that Volpe’s meeting that Sunday was with members of the Todaro-led Magaddino Family. The murder was performed in clear mafia fashion, according to Peter Edwards and Antonio Nicaso: “Mob protocol dictated that the killer must be from Volpe’s own crime family, the Buffalo mob. He was their responsibility and his death would ensure greater harmony, both inside their ranks and with the Philadelphia mob.” The shot from behind also suggests that Volpe trusted his killer enough to turn his back on him. Another theory behind the murder was that it was ordered by Frank Cotroni who was making a move into Toronto and wanted Volpe out of the way. Regardless of who ordered the assassination or actually pulled the trigger, it would have to have been sanctioned by the Magaddino Family and perhaps even New York’s Mafia Commission.

**THEY WERE INTERESTED IN COLLECTING THE MONEY**

When plans were afoot to stage the first assassination attempt on Paul Volpe, Cecil Kirby’s RCMP handler Mark Murphy told him that Volpe’s good friend Jimmy Luppino used to visit him every day in Toronto until it became known that a contract was taken out on his life. If this was true, it speaks volumes about the tenuous nature of friendships and loyalties among those who belong to the Honoured Society. The anecdote may also reflect personally on Jimmy Luppino, another typical brutish thug raised within the ‘Ndrangheta tradition. Like his father, Jimmy relied heavily on the most tried-and-true of his profession’s criminal calling — extortion, backed up by violence and intimidation. His reputation became so notorious in Hamilton that he admitted to “renting” out his name...
for $1,000 to other criminals to be used during their own extortion bids. His brother Natale was equally violent and, by the mid-1970s, had been convicted of assault, possession of a deadly weapon, and extortion. Of the ten children sired by the fertile Giacomo Luppino, his five sons, Jimmy, Natale, Rocco, Antonio, and John would become the public face of the family’s criminal province. And like loyal sons and devotees to the time-honoured custom of *omerta*, they protected their father at all costs.

The extortion plots hatched by the brothers and their associates mostly victimized businesses, often to gain a monopoly in a particular industry. In September 1978, forty-one-year-old Rocco Luppino, along with Domenic Musitano, the owner and operator of a Hamilton haulage company, and Angelo Natale, president of the Ontario Haulers Association, were charged with conspiracy to commit extortion after police discovered a protection racket operating within Ontario’s independent trucking industry. Freelance truck drivers were threatened with violence, damage to their trucks, and a loss of business if they refused to join the Haulers Association. Police officials stated that if the conspiracy had succeeded, the association could eventually have gained a monopoly over the trucking industry in Ontario. The extortion ring was also trying to influence the issuing of public commercial vehicle licences in order to control the dump truck industry in Southern Ontario. All three were convicted of extortion-related offences in 1979.

In 1981, forty-nine-year-old Antonio (“Tony”) Luppino, his thirty-four-year-old brother, Johnny, and twenty-nine-year-old Geraldo (“Gerry”) Fumo were all convicted in connection with the fraudulent takeover of Tops Continental Meats of Hamilton. As part of his testimony in court, Domenic Returra, the owner of the meat-packing and pasta plant, said the accused began by offering their services in collecting delinquent accounts and eventually ended up controlling 60 percent of the business. Returra’s troubles began when he mentioned to a salesman that he was having problems collecting money from his customers. Before long he was paid a visit by the three men. Returra offered them ten cents on each dollar collected, but the men had grander ideas. Demanding to see his books, they told Returra that they were interested in buying the company and wanted a glimpse into its financial state. Afterwards, they forced him to sign a contract that handed over shares in the company. Among the tactics used to persuade Returra to sign was a visit by Luppino brother-in-law Paulo Violi. At the end of the six-month trial, Tony Luppino received fifteen months in jail while John was handed twelve months, and Gerry Fumo, eighteen months. The trial received extensive publicity in the local and national media, not only because of the high-profile nature of the defendants, but because of the precedent set in the case of *Regina vs. Fumo and Luppino and Luppino*, whereby county court Judge McWilliams recognized the existence of a secret criminal organization known as “’Ndrina.”

Among the close associates of the Luppino family were brothers Domenic and Anthony Musitano. Born in 1937 and 1947, respectively, they ran a real estate business, a bakery, a haulage company, and a scrapyard in Hamilton, when they were not tending to their criminal enterprises. Domenic — whose physical appearance has been described as a stuffed olive (“short, rotund, and with grey-green pop eyes”) and a cross between actor Danny DeVito and a bowling ball — had a legendary temper; in his younger days he was sentenced to seven years after shooting and seriously wounding a fellow motorist who honked at him one too many times. Domenic’s violent ways were passed down to him from his uncle Angelo Musitano, who had served seven years in a Calabrian jail for the mentally disturbed after shooting another man during a fight at the age of twenty. Shortly after he was released in 1937, the “Beast of Delianova,” as he was so appropriately nicknamed, shot and killed his widowed sister for becoming pregnant out of wedlock. After murdering the brother of the man who impregnated her, as well as another local farmer who owed him money, Musitano went to France where he boarded a ship bound for Canada. Not long after, an Italian court found him guilty of murder and sentenced him *in absentia* to thirty years. By that time Musitano had arrived safely in Canada and took up residence in Hamilton. For the next twenty-five years he lived under the alias Jim D’Augustino, bleach salesman. On May 8, 1963, Hamilton police received a letter from Interpol requesting assistance in locating “one Angelo Musitano, killer” who was believed to be living in
the city. Almost two years later, on March 3, 1965, he was captured in the kitchen of his brother Pasquale’s home and deported to Italy where he began serving his thirty-year sentence.

Like the Luppinos, Domenic and Anthony Musitano’s bread and butter was extortion and they embarked on their own reign of terror in Hamilton during the late 1970s. Between December 1978 and June 1980, at least six explosions ripped through Italian businesses in the city. The first occurred on December 29, 1978, at the Genuine Bakery owned by Gino Meranageli, causing more than $10,000 damage. On May 3, 1979, La Favorita Bakery had its windows blown out by a large blast, causing more than $15,000 in damages. Police determined that the explosion was caused by the ignition of gasoline that had been poured into the store through a hole drilled in the roof. This would not be the last time the bakery was targeted. On June 3, 1980, several sticks of dynamite stuffed into a cardboard tube were discovered undetonated in the doorway of the store. Other local businesses owned by Italian-Canadians were also preyed upon. On November 10, 1979, Grand Prix Motors, owned by Gino Bartolozzi, was rocked by an explosion that destroyed part of the car dealership. Bertulia D’Agostino, who at the time was operating Alba Collision, told the Hamilton Spectator that many Italian business owners had been approached about paying protection money. She recounted how she was visited by two men shortly after her body shop was opened in 1978 and advised that it would be in her best interest to sign over 50 percent of the business to them. The visit was preceded by a flower delivery from the two men offering congratulations and good luck in her new venture. After she repeatedly turned down the partnership offer, the body shop became the victim of arson in September 1980. In April 1981, D’Agostino’s home was also set ablaze. Rope that had been soaked in gasoline was placed inside the house and shredded newspaper was used to ignite the fire. Damage to the home was estimated at $65,000.

As the bombings and arsons continued, police were able to close in on the perpetrators. Their first big lead was the discovery of the unexploded dynamite at La Favorita Bakery. After identifying the source the explosives, police began an intensive investigation that involved thousands of hours of physical surveillance, informant work, and wiretaps. In October 1980, police arrested four suspects: Anthony Musitano, Douglas Cummings, Elizabeth Wala, and Leslie Russell Lethbridge. Cummings, who was nicknamed “Fingers” because he lost two of his appendages in an industrial accident, was a former member of the Wild Ones Motorcycle Club. He admitted to being hired by Anthony Musitano to coordinate the bombings after meeting him at a cockfight arranged by the Wild Ones at Cummings’ farm. Cummings and Lethbridge were also responsible for assembling the bombs and obtained their dynamite through biker contacts working at a quarry. When Cummings became the chief suspect in the bombings, police began around-the-clock surveillance on him. Bugs were planted in his car and the home he shared with Elizabeth Wala, and police recorded one conversation in which Wala expressed concern over whether they would be paid for their botched attempt to dynamite La Favorita Bakery. She then provided police with their most solid lead as to who was ultimately behind the bombings:

He won’t be happy with that bakery. Because remember, we phoned him to get paid the next day …We’ve been working for the … Mafia …
Everything that's been done is got to do with them … Those gang fights with the Mafia, all those places that have been blown up and all that, all it is is just the Mafia dispute, eh, and all they’re doing is blowing each other up. They [police] finally got rid of the fucking bikers. Now they got to worry about the Mafia. Don’t get no rest in this city … Everybody’s running around with bombs, it’s true … You know this is bomb city, right? This place has more bombings than any other city in the whole of Canada for the size of it, I’d say.

In January 1983, Anthony Musitano, Douglas Cummings, Elizabeth Wala, and Leslie Lethbridge were found guilty on explosive conspiracy charges. Musitano and Cummings were sentenced to life imprisonment, while Lethbridge was handed an eighteen-year term. Wala was given fifteen years. Two years later, the Ontario Court of Appeal reduced Musitano’s and Cummings’ sentences to fifteen years, Lethbridge had his reduced by five years and Wala’s sentence was cut to seven years.

The investigation led police and the media to examine more closely the relationship between the local mafia and outlaw bikers. In October of 1980, the Hamilton Spectator reported that a “group headed by Giaccomo Luppino of Ottawa Street South, the closest thing Canada has to a Hollywood-style ‘Godfather,’ has established a pipeline with the bikers for contract work.” The newspaper goes on to say, “the bikers are being played for suckers in the incidents, taking all of the heat and very little of the profit. Paid by the mob anywhere from $400 to $1,000 an assignment, the bikers have placed bombs or incendiary devices at extortion targets. The extortionists, meanwhile, reap greater rewards, from $25,000 cash to complete takeovers of businesses worth more than $100,000.”

O
tober 22, 1978. 8:35 a.m. We were on a stakeout at the Tim Hortons on King Street West when I heard the news from headquarters: Domenic Racco was granted a conditional release. He was twenty-nine years old. Parole officials deem him no threat to society. I begged to differ. I’m a cop. I work bunko.

As soon as Domenic was back on the street, he began trafficking in narcotics. Cocaine to be precise. Domenic saw narcotics as the surefire way to get ahead in the mob and get rich at the same time. He believed he has the divine right to “inherit his father’s mantle of power and respect” and to be anointed the all-powerful leader of the ‘Ndrangheta in Toronto. But it’s got to be a fixed race to let a wild horse like Racco win. You see Domenic was not just selling cocaine. He was abusing it. And if reefer is the flame, and heroin the fuse, then cocaine is the bomb. With cocaine, the idea is to get so high that you don’t know who or what you are. There is no such thing as a quickie or one to be sociable. In coke-snorting circles if you’re not flying you’re a square. And “flying”
means you don’t know who you are or what you’re doing. No matter how you slice it, that’s dangerous. I know. I’m a cop.

**February 1982.** Domenic Racco is arrested following a narcotics investigation. Cocaine with a street value of $200,000 is seized. We suspect his wholesaler is Domenic Musitano. He had strong ties to Domenic’s father, Michele, before he died. We believe Musitano fronts Racco the cocaine to sell in Toronto. He is paid back with a cut from the Raccos’ narcotics revenue. But we can’t prove it.

Racco makes two crucial mistakes in his dope peddling business with Musitano. First, too much of the cocaine fronted to him never makes it to the streets. Instead, it goes up his nose. Second, he begins to move into Hamilton’s cocaine market. But that market is under the control of the Musitano family. Perhaps he has snorted most of the cocaine provided to him by the Musitanos. Perhaps the Musitanos demand that Racco pay them for the narcotics seized in 1982. Perhaps it is both. Whatever the reason, Domenic Racco owes Musitano a large amount of narcotics money. Possibly as much as $500,000. Despite their attempts to collect the money owed to them, Racco cannot or will not pay.

**Tuesday, March 1, 1983.** Domenic’s brother Tony is handed a life sentence in the Millhaven maximum security prison near Kingston, Ontario. His sentence is the result of his conviction under **Canadian Criminal Code** Section 81(1), conspiracy to possess explosive substances with intent to cause explosions. But Tony continues to offer advice to family members who visit him regularly in jail. It is at Millhaven that the conspiracy to murder Domenic Racco is hatched. Domenic and Tony Musitano’s patience with Racco had run out. They seek permission from the leaders of the Siderno group. With Racco’s father now out of the picture, the plan to murder him is set in motion.

We secretly record the Musitanos’ conversations at their home, at their scrapyard, over the telephone, and at Millhaven. Our wiretaps pick up conversations about killing “the one from Toronto.” But at the time we still don’t know who it is they are going to hit.

**Monday, November 21, 1983.** We were responding to a call for service at the Dunkin’ Donuts on John Street when we get a dispatch from headquarters that Giuseppe Avignone is visiting his uncle Tony Musitano at Millhaven. He is accompanied by a family associate named Giuseppe Chiarelli. Our wiretaps pick up their discussion about the planned hit:

Chiarelli: …who’s gonna do it?
Avignone: … it’s up to you.
Musitano: What’s the name … Mike?
Chiarelli: He can’t do it no more Tony.
Musitano: His brother?
Avignone: No. Rosario is too scared.

Tony Musitano suggests a bunkmate from the Millhaven maximum-security prison. His name is William Rankin. He is due to be released soon and may be interested in the job. Rankin is a degenerate alcoholic and narcotics abuser who has been in and out of prison since he was seventeen. He has been charged more times than a dying automobile battery. Rankin takes the job and Musitano tells him to get hold of Avignone as soon as he is released from jail:

Avignone: Um, tell this guy when he comes down to kill him, he owes me nothin’.
Musitano: He can look after that when he comes out. That’s no problem …
Avignone: Tell him… tell him we gotta that … you guys want December 7th?
Musitano: Yeah.
Avignone: Tell him to get a hold of me as soon as he comes out. The next night after that, he’s happy.

**Wednesday, December 7, 1983.** Rankin is released from prison and is picked up by Peter Majeste. Majeste is a criminal associate of Rankin’s. Avignone meets with Rankin, who is promised $20,000 for the murder. Rankin recruits a couple of other two-bit punks from Hamilton to help carry out the contract, thirty-six-year-old Graham Court, and thirty-three-year-old Peter Denis Monaghan.
Thursday, December 8, 1983. We record another conversation at Millhaven maximum security prison. This time it is between Tony Musitano, Giuseppe Avignone, Joe Spanno, Vince Nicoletti, and Joe Chiarelli. The men discuss the hit and their plans for paying Rankin:

Avignone: Tonight we are busy, eh? Don't you two disappear.
Musitano: What's on tonight?
Avignone: Going for a ride. Just in case, you know, just in case we forget to … So you are sure this guy knows what he has gotta do? That bastard's not going to get all cash after he does it.
Musitano: Yeah, well, I hope so, you know.
Avignone: Well, when you told him half up front.
Musitano: Well, you can work that out with him Thursday?
Avignone: He's gonna come around and …
Musitano: I know. He knows nothin's for free.

Friday, December 9, 1983. 9:30 a.m. Racco is busier than a one-legged tap dancer. He visits his lawyer Meyer Feldman who hands him a cheque for $21,506.83. The money is from the sale of real estate property Racco and his mother owned. Racco immediately goes to his bank and deposits the cheque. He then asks to withdraw more than $20,000 in cash. The teller tells him the bank does not have that much cash on hand. So she gives him a certified cheque for $8,000 and $12,500 in large bills.

Friday, December 9, 1983. 8:48 p.m. Racco signs in at the RCMP headquarters as part of his bail conditions for his narcotics trafficking charges.

Friday, December 9, 1983. 9:00 p.m. Racco heads to Oakville where he meets with Domenic Musitano. At the meeting Racco endorses the $8,000 cheque over to Musitano. Racco is still unaware of his fate. Racco is so thick he couldn't smell a rat in a room full of cheese.

Saturday, December 10, 1983. 1:30 a.m. Racco returns to his apartment at 1333 Bloor Street West in Mississauga, Ontario. He is grievously assaulted by two men and then forced into a brown Pontiac station wagon and driven to a field outside of Hamilton, in a town called Milton.

Saturday, December 10, 1983. 9:22 a.m. Rankin calls Giuseppe Avignone and tells him he needs to see him in person. The two meet at a Tim Hortons at the corner of King and Caroline. Coincidently, two police surveillance teams are already at the scene. Rankin is overhead demanding the $20,000 owed to him. Musitano tells Rankin that his payment will not all be in cash and it will not all be delivered at once.

Saturday, December 10, 1983. 10:15 a.m. We get a call that the body of Domenic Racco has been discovered sprawled across an abandoned railway spur approximately 150 feet off Derry Road in Milton. So I ask the girl to make my coffee and cruller to go and we head out to Milton. Once at the scene, we find three sets of footprints in the snow leading to his body. Only two sets leave the scene. Racco had been shot three times in the head and twice in the chest with a .38-calibre revolver. He was as cold as a three-day-old cup of coffee in a Regina snowbank.

Sunday, December 11, 1983, 9:00 a.m. My partner, Bill Cannon, and I meet with our boss, Captain Stubing, to discuss the Racco hit. We were too late to help Domenic. But at least we can bring his killers to justice. That's my job. I am a cop. The Musitanos are now our number one suspects in the murder.

Thursday: Captain.  
Stubing: Joe.  
Cannon: Captain.  
Stubing: Bill.  
Thursday: Racco.  
Stubing: Check.  
Thursday: Musitanos.  
Stubing: Hmm.  
Thursday: Rankin.  
Stubing: Check.
Thursday: We think we heard what we need to know.
Stubing: Where?
Thursday: Tim Hortons.
Cannon: On King Street.
Thursday: Check.
Stubing: At the corner of James?
Cannon: No, the other one.
Stubing: The one across from the park?
Thursday: No, a block from there.
Stubing: On the corner of Queen Street?
Thursday: No sorry. Another block over.
Cannon: You know the one at King and Caroline?
Stubing: Yes.
Cannon: Right across the street from that one.
Stubing: Check.
Cannon: Check.
Thursday: We have surveillance teams at every Tims in the city.
Stubing: Check
Cannon: In case Musitano and Rankin meet again.
Stubing: Uh-huh.
Thursday: Bill and I are off to stake out D & M Scrapyard.
Stubing: Check.
Cannon: It's owned by Domenic Musitano.
Stubing: Check.
Cannon: Right across the street from that one.
Thursday: Check.
Stubing: Joe?
Thursday: Yes, Captain?
Stubing: Are you stopping by the Tim Hortons on your way?
Thursday: Uh-huh.
Stubing: Can you pick me up a medium double-double and a honey dip?
Thursday: Check.
Stubing: Check.
Cannon: Check.

Monday, December 12, 1983. Racco's murder is all over the news. Even with all the heat, Domenic Musitano still tries to cash Racco's certified cheque for $8,000. He sends Avignone to give it to Edward Greenspan. He was once Racco's lawyer. Greenspan's secretary tells him that Racco had just been murdered. They will not accept the cheque. Avignone becomes so distraught the secretary has to help him from the office.

Meanwhile, William Rankin is becoming more and more of a problem for the Musitanos. He is getting drunk and bragging about his "connections" with the mob.

Thursday, December 22, 1983. Rankin is in a serious automobile accident. He is driving a brown Dodge that Avignone gave him as partial payment for carrying out the murder. He runs from the scene faster than a junkie hepped up on goofballs. We find out the plates are stolen. Then we strike gold. The car's ownership is traced to D & M Scrapyard. Bingo.
We are now trailing Domenic Musitano twenty-four hours a day. Sooner or later he will slip up. They always do. They get nervous or sloppy. That's when we catch them. That's my job. I'm a cop.

Sunday, February 5, 1984. A family conference is held at Millhaven maximum security prison. Domenic Musitano consults with his brother Tony about what to do with "Billy" Rankin, who has been shooting his mouth off around town:

Tony: Yeah, been busy.
Tony: Yeah, I've been reading the paper with that guy here
Domenic: Ah [expletive], he's crazy
Tony: Huh?
Domenic: That guy you sent down, the [expletive] apple. What's his name?
Tony: I dunno.
Domenic: Billy-y-y.
Tony: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
Domenic: He's going around Hamilton braggin' that he worked for them [the Commissoes].
Tony: Oh yeah?
Domenic: I ain't, if they connect him with me it will come down on your [expletive] head ... I'm tired of giving him the money.
Tony: Twenty thou... [Tony then asks about the "screws" — the police.]
Domenic: Screws asking about ... this Billy guy ...
But I heard this before that he [Rankin] goes out in Hamilton braggin’ in the [expletive] joints, you know, bars that he is working for the Commissos so ah … ah …

Tony: 'Cuz he was in with Michael [Michele Commisso].

Domenic: I don’t know who he was in with. I’m just telling you, tell those guys [the Commissos] if the guy goes near them he’s no [expletive] good. He’s N.G. … Drunk. Drunk every day. Smashed my car. Everything else … I got cops, one street, the other street, the other corner, behind me … I can’t even go to the toilet I’m telling you.

With each passing day, evidence of the Musitano’s role in Racco’s death becomes clearer. Our next big break is when William Rankin’s friend Peter Majeste is arrested for driving without a licence. He is the other half of a half-wit. He is pulled over in the same brown Pontiac station wagon that witnesses spotted in front of Racco’s apartment the night he was abducted. The car is seized because of an overdue rental payment. Our forensic department inspects the car and takes wool and animal fibres from the seats. They match the clothes Racco was wearing at the time of his death. Polyester fibres from the car seat upholstery are also found on the overcoat worn by Racco.

Friday, March 8, 1984. Rankin drinks himself into a stupor, gets into his car and hits a lamp standard. The responding police officers find a photograph on the back seat. It is a picture of Rankin and Anthony Musitano taken at the Millhaven maximum security prison. Written on the back is the following: “Domenic: As you can see your brother sends his respect with me to you. Yes, he’s the person I listen to and respect. His words and mine concur. No other person, family or otherwise. You were told to help me so please do not ever attempt to project the illusion that I am responsible to you. Talk to Tony. Capice! Bill.” The photo is Rankin’s one-way ticket back to jail. His alibis are thinner than the gold on a Las Vegas wedding ring. We take him in for questioning and he spills his guts like an alcoholic after a three-day bender.

Tuesday, March 20, 1984. Arrest warrants are issued for Anthony Musitano, Domenic Musitano, Giuseppe Avignone, and William Rankin. The charge: *Canadian Criminal Code Section 465(1)*, conspiracy to commit murder. A search of 48 Colbourne Street in Hamilton locates two loaded handguns under the basement staircase. Both are .38 calibre. One is a Smith & Wesson. Ballistics proves that it is the same weapon that killed Domenic Racco.

Monday, February 18, 1985. In the Ontario Supreme Court in the jurisdiction of the Township of Milton, thirty-eight-year-old Anthony Musitano, twenty-three-year-old Giuseppe Avignone, and thirty-three-year-old William Rankin plead guilty to conspiring to murder Domenic Racco. All three are sentenced to prison terms of between five and twelve years. Anthony Musitano receives twelve years to be served concurrent with the life term he began in 1983. “If Anthony Musitano is not the worst offender in the worst offence he comes microscopically close to it,” Judge Osborne tells the courtroom.

Thursday, January 11, 1990. Graham Court and Peter Monaghan are in custody awaiting trial for the 1984 slaying of Hamilton grocery store owner William Rutledge when they are charged with the murder of Domenic Racco. The investigation into the Racco murder is re-opened after Graham Court makes incriminating statements to a police informant about the murder while in a police holding cell after being charged with the Rutledge murder. He tells the informant how he and Monaghan grabbed Racco at his apartment, knocked him unconscious with a billy bat and then took him to the train tracks where he was shot five times. He tells the informant they were paid $4,700 and a small quantity of cocaine for the job. The informant reports the information to us. He talks to us for hours. We ask him for just the facts. Court and Monaghan are tried and found guilty in 1991. But the sentences are overturned by an Ontario appeals judge. He cites allegations of systematic abuses by police and prosecutors. The audio tape recording made of the confession
to the informant mysteriously disappeared while the Crown counsel did not disclose contradictory evidence to the defence counsel.

Justice sometimes comes late. Sometimes it never comes at all. But it has no expiry date. Sure, we can’t take every punk mobster off the street. We can’t change the world. Just our little corner of it. I know that upholding justice may seem “square” to some people. And being a police officer may seem like an endless, thankless job. We also make mistakes. We are only human. But it’s a job that still has to be done. And I am damn glad to do it.

**OPEN CITIES**

For some provincial politicians the high-profile, back-to-back murders of Paul Volpe and Domenic Racco was proof positive that organized crime in Ontario was out of control. In January 1984, a member of the provincial Liberal Party demanded a Quebec-style public inquiry, arguing, it “appears to be a completely runaway situation in organized crime.” The reality was that the two murders were symptomatic of Ontario’s fractured and factionalized criminal underworld. In reference to the mafia’s attempts to dominate Toronto, James Dubro wrote in 1985 that the city “was always considered too large, disparate, and broken up to be handled by one family, and hence it became a more opportune ground for independents and new mafia groupings; and Italians then, as now, were not the only ones interested in or organized enough to run effective organized crime operations.” In short, Toronto and, to a lesser extent, Hamilton were “open cities”; that is, they were “open to many different mob groups operating simultaneously in different areas.”

Stefano Magaddino considered most of Ontario his turf, but was thwarted in his attempts to monopolize the province’s most profitable criminal rackets. While the mafia families in Hamilton were firmly united under Giacomo Luppino, Toronto’s largest mob operations were divided between Paul Volpe’s organization, which had become virtually independent of Buffalo, and the Siderno group. The growing tension between these two factions were fuelled by a combination of Volpe’s arrogance, the passing of Michelle Racco, the brutal ambitions of the Comisso brothers, as well as the American mafia’s last-ditch effort to display its muscle in the city.

Whatever power or dominance the Italian mafia did have within Ontario’s criminal world ended in the 1980s. The deaths of Paul Volpe, Michelle Racco and Domenic Racco, the jailing of Rocco Zito, the Comisso brothers, and the Musitanos, and the infighting within the Magaddino Family created a power vacuum that could not be filled by the mafia or the 'Ndrangheta. The symbolic end came with the 1987 death of Giacomo Luppino, whose last fifteen years were not kind to him. His power and influence was already waning following the death of Stefano Magaddino. He was under constant police surveillance, his sons were in and out of jail, and criminal trials were exposing the existence of the 'Ndrangheta in Hamilton. His son-in-law Paolo was murdered in 1978, while his loving wife died in February 1982. The onset of senility in the early 1980s relegated him to St. Joseph’s Hospital and it was there that he died on March 19, 1987, at the age of eighty-eight. The 150-car procession at his funeral was the last great mafia burial to be held in Canada, yet few mob leaders attended. His sons tried to take the place of their father, but simply did not have the clout or the connections he enjoyed. Johnny Papalia was spending so much time in jail that he was unable to wield any real power and had already lost a significant amount of credibility after failing to co-opt Max Bluestein in the early 1960s.

The power vacuum created in the late 1980s opened the door for an even greater fractionalization of Ontario’s organized crime scene as a diverse range of professional criminals, including the Chinese triads, outlaw motorcycle gangs, Russian criminal groups, the Colombian “cocaine cowboys,” as well as mafia groups imported from Quebec and Sicily, crowded into the province. The future of organized crime in Canada would be a continuation of the past and current trends. Like Quebec, Ontario would continue to be a branch plant for a number of foreign criminal organizations representing a diverse range of nationalities and ethnicities. By the time Giacomo Luppino had passed away, a new chapter in the history of organized crime in Ontario and Canada was already under way.