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WYANDOTTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

November 2023

VOLUME 11

Best Wishes
for A
Most Happy
THANKSGIVING



Here's The Pie For Pumpkin Eaters!

IF THAT Peter, Peter feller had given his wife this recipe, he coulda kept her very happy in the kitchen. Yep, it's pumpkin pie like you never tasted before . . . smooth, spicy, rich in the extra flavor KARO® Syrup adds to all good things. There's a trick to the crust too! There's Karo in it — to make it nice and brown, and help prevent sogginess. Just try this recipe, Ladies, and then thank me.

the KARO kid

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PUMPKIN PIE

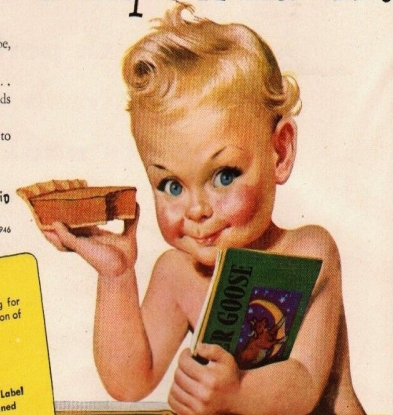
THE CRUST

Follow your favorite pastry recipe. With a recipe calling for 2 cups of flour, replace 1 tablespoon water with 1 tablespoon of Karo Syrup. Combine with the water and add as usual.

THE FILLING

6 tablespoons brown sugar	3 eggs
1/2 teaspoon salt	1 1/2 cups milk
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon	1/2 cup Karo Syrup, Blue Label
1/2 teaspoon ginger	1 1/2 cups pumpkin, canned
1/2 teaspoon cloves	1/2 recipe pastry

Mix sugar and spices. Add eggs; beat slightly. Add remaining ingredients; blend well. Pour into 9-inch pie pan lined with pastry rolled to 1/8 inch and having high, fluted edge. Bake in hot oven (450° F.) 1 hour or until silver knife comes out clean. Serve with little pumpkins made from soft cheese, as a garnish.



1946

FROM THE PREZ-

After WWI ended, President Wilson proclaimed the first Armistice day be celebrated on November 11, 1919. Today we know Armistice day as Veterans Day. I would like to take a moment to thank all of our members who have served for their service, we truly do appreciate you!



Join us

on Friday, November 10, 2023 at 7pm to listen to former detective Dan Galeski speak about some of the crimes he encountered including the famous DeLisle case.

Wyandotte beer baron was ambushed 85 years ago

By Thomas Hunt

Giuseppe “Joe” Tocco parked his trademark scarlet sedan on Wyandotte’s Antoine Street near the intersection with McKinley. It was about half past nine, Monday night, May 2, 1938. His residence was around the block at 238 Felice Street, but the Detroit-area rackets chief wasn’t headed home yet. He walked a short way down the street toward the home of his close associate James Palazzolo when firearms erupted from the darkness.

Tocco bolted, slipping between houses and making his way to the rear porch of the Palazzolo home. At least two gunmen followed. As he climbed stairs to the porch door, 215 Antoine, more shots were fired. Slugs cracked through glass in the door and a nearby window. Inside, the hand of Rose Palazzolo, wife of James, was cut by flying glass. Tocco stumbled through the doorway with seven wounds in his back. James Palazzolo was not home. Tony Bozzo of 245 Antoine Street was summoned, and he drove Tocco to Wyandotte General Hospital.

Doctors tended to Tocco’s wounds, determining that they were inflicted by shotgun and pistol fire. Detectives explored the shooting scene and took statements from witnesses. Assistant Prosecutor Harry B. Letzer was called to the hospital and questioned Tocco. The forty-seven-year-old mafioso with a lengthy police record, including eleven arrests dating back to 1915, initially refused to make any statement. Later, he did provide some information about the incident, describing his movements as he attempted to elude his assailants. He said he did not see the gunmen’s faces and had no idea who they were.

On Tuesday morning, doctors transfused blood from Tocco’s brother Peter into their rapidly fading patient. At four o’clock that afternoon, Tocco succumbed to his wounds. An autopsy revealed the primary causes of death were internal hemorrhage resulting from a wound to his kidney and hemorrhage into the spinal cord. Tocco was survived by his wife Agata Consiglio Tocco, four grown children and a four-year-old son.

After a funeral Mass at St. Elizabeth’s Catholic Church, Tocco was interred at Mount Carmel Cemetery. A press report indicated that he was buried within a gray mother-of-pearl coffin, lined with cream-colored satin and valued at \$1,050 (about \$22,800 in current dollars).

Joe Tocco was born December 19, 1890, in Terrasini, a coastal community in Sicily’s Palermo province. His parents were Salvatore and Rosalina Mocerri Tocco. He was only about fifteen when he sailed to America and settled with relatives in the Detroit area. The Downriver village of Ford City (founded a few years earlier by chemical company owner John Baptiste Ford and absorbed into the city of Wyandotte in 1922) soon became home to Joe Tocco and his brother Pietro. Tocco appears to have entered the local rackets with the Ford City-based Giannola gang.

In early July 1912, Joseph Tocco married Agata Consiglio, seventeen, in a Roman Catholic ceremony in Wyandotte. Son Salvatore was born to the couple in late 1914, and daughter Rosalia followed in early 1916. As 1918 opened, son Vincenzo was born to Joe and Agata Tocco. Twin daughters, Eva and Phyllis arrived in October of the following year.

The Prohibition Era opened with Joe Tocco and his family apparently in financial difficulty. The U.S. Census compiled in January 1920 found the family living in a rented portion of the Consiglio home, 37 Phyllis Street. Tocco reported working as a carpenter. Just two days after being noted on the census, daughter Phyllis died. She was just three months old. The cause of death was listed as inanition, with “improper feeding” noted as a contributory cause.

Tocco fortunes changed with entry into bootlegging rackets. He began a profitable partnership with Cesare “Chester” LaMare, an immigrant from the southern Italian mainland who ran produce companies and cafes in Hamtramck. Over time, Tocco became known as “the beer baron of Wyandotte,” though his underworld influence stretched beyond the community’s boundaries.

Tocco's daughters Agatha and Josephine were born in 1921 and 1923. Tocco declared his intention to become a U.S. citizen in 1926. At that time, he was a resident of 42 Felice Street. His citizenship was approved by summer of 1928, after he had moved his family into a spacious new home – described by one newspaper as a twenty-room mansion – at 238 Felice. Early in 1929, Tocco took daughter Rosalia and son Vincenzo on a trip to his native Italy. They returned aboard the steamer *Roma*, arriving in New York harbor in March. About six months later, the family suffered a tragic loss. Tocco's youngest child, six-year-old Josephine, was crushed to death by an automobile on August 30.

In the later Prohibition period, LaMare and Tocco became influential within the Ford Motor Company facilities in the Detroit area. Noting sporadic violence among Sicilian workers, Ford officials formed a relationship with the mobsters in the interest of maintaining order and Tocco became a frequent visitor to company management.

For the 1930 U.S. Census, the value of the Tocco home at 238 Felice Street was estimated at \$18,000. (\$325,000 in current dollars). A close friend and business associate "Black Ben" Sciacca lived nearby at 256 Felice, in a home valued at half that amount.

Unlike his partner LaMare, Tocco avoided assassination in the early 1930s, but those were still troubling years for him. Authorities believed he had some role in what became known as the Wyandotte Massacre. A little after eight o'clock on Friday night, November 6, 1931, three gunmen burst into a speakeasy run by Charles Tear at 3331 Biddle Avenue and let loose with a hail of slugs from two pistols and a shotgun. Tear, Joe Rivetts and bartender John Pellitier were killed. The gunmen were gone in about a minute, escaping in a brown sedan driven by a fourth man. Police knew that Rivetts, formerly operator of his own speakeasy, had serious trouble with an Italian bootlegging gang in the area. Two weeks earlier, after Rivetts refused to buy beer from the organization, gangster Joe Evola went by Rivetts's place, Oak Avenue and First Street, to kill him. Rivetts was quicker on the draw and fatally shot Evola. Officially, Rivetts's action was justified as an act of self-defense. Police assumed that gangsters saw things differently and wanted to settle the score with Rivetts and his allies.

Joe Tocco and a number of associates, friends and relatives were arrested, questioned and held for a time after the massacre. Authorities raided and destroyed Tocco breweries in Wyandotte, including two near his Felice Street home. A special inquiry was conducted into the triple-murder. Ultimately, Tocco was able to back up an alibi for November 6, and he was released.

Tocco's extravagant home exploded in flames at about nine o'clock Sunday night, February 21, 1932. Witnesses heard several minor explosions followed by a succession of three loud blasts, as the fire erupted. Tocco was traveling at that time (Ben Sciacca showed authorities a postcard Tocco recently sent him from Miami, Oklahoma), and Agata and the children were off in Detroit. No one was hurt. Investigators suspected arson. An arson expert from Detroit and an assistant prosecutor were called in to examine the matter. But it was apparently quietly resolved before Tocco returned to Wyandotte.

Around the middle of the decade, he partnered with Sam Rossi in the operation of the Kitty Kat Beer Garden. That establishment was located at 635 South Bayside Avenue in Detroit's Oakwood Heights section, just south of the River Rouge. Rossi's wife Gina, working as a waitress in the beer garden, apparently caught Tocco's eye. According to rumors, Tocco convinced Sam Rossi to return to his native Italy and leave the business and his wife (and, apparently, two school-age children) in Tocco's care. Using his influence in the local automotive industry, Tocco obtained a more profitable and less visible role for Mrs. Rossi, as he began a long-term affair with her.

In the same period, Tocco opened a gambling establishment at 311 South Fordson Street, also in Oakwood Heights. That business was closed near the end of 1937.

On the Friday before Tocco was murdered, April 29, 1938, two men showed up in Wyandotte looking for him. They went into the local police station asking for directions to “Bayview Avenue.” They were told that there was no such street in Wyandotte. One of the men said, “That’s where we were sent.” The men then tried another question: “Where does Joe Tocco run a beer garden.” They learned that the location was in Oakwood Heights. Whether the men were at all involved in Monday night’s shooting remains unknown.

Detectives investigating the murder of Joe Tocco quickly learned that he had spent the early part of the evening at Gina Rossi’s home and then drove over to Palazzolo’s house, where a meeting with rackets figures was to be held. Palazzolo and Tocco’s brother Peter were occupied with some errands and were slow to show up for the meeting. Mrs. Rossi apparently spoke briefly to a newspaper reporter after the shooting, but when the authorities went looking for her, the thirty-six-year-old woman and her children were gone. Her house was deserted, and she failed to show up for work. Police wondered if Sam Rossi had returned from Italy and reclaimed his family.

A partly loaded repeating shotgun was found discarded in a ditch about one hundred yards from where Tocco was shot. It contained four unfired shells. Detroit police used ballistics testing to determine that the shotgun was one of the murder weapons. They were unable to find any fingerprints on the firearm.

While Joe Tocco’s demise permitted Joseph Zerilli’s East Side Mafia to consolidate its control in the southeastern Michigan underworld, some imagined that other forces had been behind the killing, perhaps Tocco’s own family members.

Harry Herbert Bennett said as much when he discussed the Tocco murder in the February 1951 Kefauver hearings. Associate Counsel Burling directly asked Bennett, “Do you know who did it?” While Bennett’s officially transcribed answer in the hearing minutes appears to have been edited out, a news reporter recorded the exchange:

“No, but the police had a good idea,” Bennett said.

“Who?” Burling asked again.

Bennett replied, “They believe members of his family.”

However, Bennett conceded he knew more about the regional underworld than he was telling. He had made it a point during his years at Ford to keep in touch with bosses of area gangland factions. When first asked if he knew hoodlums like Tocco, Bennett replied, “Oh, sure. Everybody in Detroit knew him.... If you want to call them a hoodlum, there is Joe Tocco and Joe Marino and LaMare – the whole LaMare crowd.” Questioned about the still living leaders of other underworld factions, Bennett refused to answer: “Do you want me to get my head blown off out here?”

For more crime history visit www.writersofwrongs.com



CRIMES OF THE TIMES

By Suzanne Hudson

Bars in Wyandotte open on Sunday??? SHOCKING!!! In the late 1800s and early 1900s, it was shocking to residents. It was also a crime.

On March 29, 1898, two concerned citizens filed complaints about 19 saloons being open on Sunday. By March 31st all 20 saloon owners were in custody and appeared in court for arraignment. (Three defendants were women. Two of them jointly owned one of the saloons.) All entered pleas of "Not Guilty." On April 6th at 10:00 am, each posted a \$400 recognizance bond, provided the name of someone acceptable to the Court who would guarantee their appearance at trial and were released to stand trial in Wayne County Circuit Court on July 5th.

Another crime that seems quaint now was "Indecent Language before a Woman" and its variation of "Using Indecent, Immoral and Vulgar Language before a Child." But, indeed, early court cases exist for such offenses. On Nov. 8, 1899, Wyandotte adopted an ordinance prohibiting spitting on sidewalks and one prohibiting the use of toy pistols, sling shots, catapults and other dangerous toys and implements.

Court cases existed in the late 1890s for such transgressions as...

"Arson", "Bigamy", "Defrauding a Hotel", "Ejectment", "Exciting a Disturbance on a Public Street", "Following the Occupation of a Barber without a Certificate", "Garnishment", "Jumping onto Moving Railroad Cars", "Selling Spiritous Liquor to Minors", "Misdemeanor Killing Wild Ducks out of Season", "Unlawfully Entering Garden and Destroying Fruits and Vegetables"

JUNE REPORT SHOWS WYANDOTTE POLICE ACTIVITIES

The police report for the month of June shows in compact form what the department of Wyandotte is doing. It follows:

CAUSE OF ARREST	CONVICTED		SERVING			FINES
	RELEASED	FORFEIT	TIME	PENDING		
24 Violation parking ordinance.	24					\$ 24.00
3 Assault and battery	1	2				15.00
21 Speeding	13	4	4			205.00
2 Non-support	1	1		1		
52 Drunk and disorderly	23	23	6			300.00
19 Violation prohibition ordi....	19					1170.00
1 Contrib. delinquency minor..		1				
4 Larceny of automobile		4				
2 Violation jitney ordinance ..	2					15.00
1 Disturbing peace		1				
10 Reckless driving	4	5	1			65.00
9 Driving drunk	7	1			1	360.00
3 No operator license	1	2				10.00
14 Investigation		14				
2 Extortion		1			1	
4 Gambling	2	2				20.00
3 Disorderly person	2	1				80.00
2 Driving no light	1	1				10.00
2 Violation traffic ordinance ..	1	1				5.00
1 Violation building ordinance		1				
2 Shooting fireworks		2				
1 Robbery not armed					1	
182	101	67	11	1	3	\$2279.00
Complaints care for by the department						451
Ambulance runs						11
Ambulance fee collected						\$ 38.00
Ambulance fee uncollected						6.00
M. A. co. check for May						4.00
Junk sold by the department						87.00
Violation parking ordinance						24.00
Peddler license collected						17.00
Deposit forfeit						120.00

Looking at the list, one sees that most crimes have stood the test of time. Wanton vandalism still occurs, though the stakes are usually higher than produce. The two young men who jumped onto the moving railroad car in 1897 might now be charged with "Prohibited Conduct." Citations are issued for violations of fishing ordinances. Wages are garnished. People are evicted ("ejectment.") Folks still engage in disorderly conduct.

And these days there are infractions that are *crimes of our times*. One example would be texting or talking on a device while driving. Another is driving a vehicle with tinted windows.

N.B. Special thanks to the Honorable Elizabeth L DiSanto, Chief Judge, and Ms. Stacie Nevalo, Court Administrator, for access to the 27th Judicial District Court archives.

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Wyandotte Historical Society

Burns Home

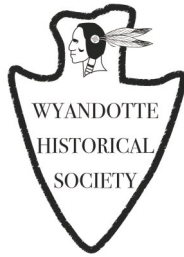
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