

Police display gun recovered from Dillinger bank robbery

BY STEVEN K. ROGSTAD

Racine Police have the Thompson submachine gun that famous gangster John Dillinger grabbed from police during his robbery of the American Bank and Trust in Downtown Racine on Nov. 20, 1933. The gun was recovered by authorities in Arizona on Jan. 17, 1934 and is on display in the lobby of the Racine Police Station at 730 Center St.

The name "John Dillinger" is prominently engraved on the weapon's butt stock. Another artifact on display is a single bullet, which was recovered from the American Bank and Trust after the robbery, and believed to have come from one of the Dillinger Gang.

John Herbert Dillinger [June 22, 1903 – July 22, 1934] was dubbed Public Enemy No. 1 by

the F.B.I. and had an extensive record of crimes to his credit prior to his arrival in Racine that November afternoon. Convicted at age 16 in 1924 for slugging a Moorsville, Ind, grocer in an attempted robbery, he was sentenced to 10 to 21 years in the Indiana State Reformatory. On May 22, 1933, he was freed on parole after being transferred to Michigan City's Indiana State Prison as an "incurable" after two unsuccessful escape attempts.

According to a 2008 article in The Journal Times, "the famous gangster and his gang



robbed \$28,000 from the American Bank and Trust, located at Fifth and Main streets, the current location of Racine Art Museum. They shot a bank teller and a police officer during the robbery, but no one was killed. They took some hostages with them as they left, putting them on the running boards of their cars so police would not shoot at them. The hostages were later released."

Dillinger was never caught for the Racine robbery, continued to rob banks, elude authorities, and even escape from a jail after arrest. Dillinger knew his future

was bleak at best. "I'm traveling a one-way road, and I'm not fooling myself as to what the end will be," he reportedly confided to a friend. "If I surrender, I know it means the electric chair. If I go on, it's just a question of how much time I have left."

He was gunned down outside the Biograph Theatre in Chicago by authorities in an ambush on July 22, 1934.

Steven K. Rogstad is past president of Preservation Racine, Inc. and currently serves on the board for the Racine Heritage Museum.



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