

The Gophers - Part Five by Michael Flynn

Nine months after Owney Madden shot and killed a man aboard a Ninth Avenue trolley he found himself at the wrong end of a gun when a gang of Hudson Dusters shot him eleven times at the Arbor Dance Hall in West 52nd Street.

The first detective on the scene asked him the question all wounded gangsters refuse to answer. "It's nobody's business but mine" as Owney gasped through the pain. "The boys 'll get 'em."

By the time he was carried into the ambulance there was little sign of life. The doctor told the driver to head for the morgue. Then Madden rallied and the vehicle was rerouted to the hospital. They dug six bullets out of his body but left the other five as too deeply imbedded and dangerous to remove. Besides, even after the operation, the doctors gave him less than ten hours to live.

Among Madden's visitors at the hospital were top gunmen such as Bill Tammany, Chick Hyland, Hoppo McArdle, Arthur Bieler and Ray Callahan. They came not only to praise Owney but to make plans to bury his enemies.

The first of his would-be killers to die was Silent Bert Fitzgerald who was forever silenced by one shot from Callahan's revolver less than twelve hours after the ambush at the Arbor. Before the week was out two more members of the Duster hit squad were murdered. Twenty-two days after Madden was cut down, during which time another two Dusters had been hunted to their death, he was released from the hospital.

One of those who attempted to take advantage of Madden's misfortune was Little Patsy Doyle, the leader of a rival faction of the Gophers. Little Patsy, like Owney, was also a murderer but instead of being widely hailed as a killer he was more generally known as being crazy, also an honorific title in the Hell's Kitchen underworld but one not so deadly glorious as the former. The fact that Doyle was going out with Madden's girlfriend, Freda Horner, just months after Madden had murdered a man for a similar breach of courtship etiquette, showed him to be a worthy and possibly suicidal opponent.

Now he spread the rumor that Owney was crippled for life and he, Little Patsy, was taking over the neighborhood. The feud was temporarily interrupted when Doyle became a victim of the latest police crackdown on the gangs and was convicted of beating up a cop.

By the summer of 1914 the police drive against the underworld had broken the power of the gangs. Madden, who had once commanded five hundred Gophers, was down to about forty or fifty hoodlums. In June Tanner Smith, leader of a Chelsea gang known as the Marginals and Madden's chief ally, was sentenced to prison after a daylight gunfight with Hudson Dusters. The following month Little Patsy Doyle was paroled and not only immediately took up with Freda Horner again but resumed his attempt to take over Owney's territory.

In October Madden was busted by detectives and charged with burglary. He believed, or at least told others, that Doyle was the instigator behind the arrest. Where Doyle had once spread the rumor that Madden was permanently crippled Madden now put out the word that Little Patsy was a police informer. In Hell's Kitchen you were better off a cripple than a rat.

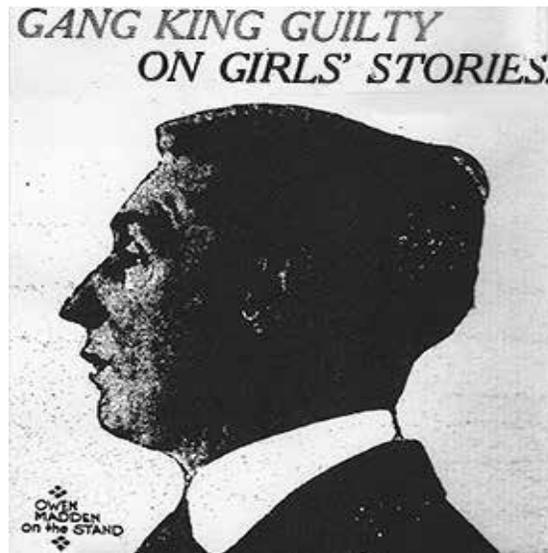
Meanwhile the war between the Gophers and the Hudson Dusters intensified. Casualties among the gangsters were unknown but during one two week period six innocent bystanders were caught in the crossfire that echoed in the dark streets.

On Saturday night October 24, the day following Madden's arrest for burglary, the Gophers raided into Duster territory and skirmished in West 11th Street. One passerby was wounded and an old watchman on his way home from work was killed. On their way back to the neighborhood they ran into another band of Dusters at Eight Avenue and West 14th Street and there was another shootout.

On Election Night November 3, the Hudson Dusters retaliated and the gangs fought it out on Tenth Avenue in the

middle of a political parade. Among the three wounded bystanders was an eleven year old girl who was riding on a float. Four nights later the Gophers invaded the Duster domain again and one innocent passerby was hot in the face.

The shooting of these innocent citizens increased the tempo of the police drive against the gangs. The West Side gangs were hit particularly hard and the Gophers held the unenviable record of having more members arrested than any other gang in the city.



Among their casualties were Chick Hyland and Bill Tammany, Madden's chief lieutenants. Hyland was sentenced to twenty years for killing a bartender who refused to serve him. Tammany was sentenced to fifteen years for sticking up a saloon on his way back home from a gunfight with Hudson Dusters. Sixteen other Gophers had also been arrested; three had gone away for five years, nine for lesser terms and only four cases, including Madden's, were yet to be disposed of.

In the interim between his arrest and as yet unscheduled trial Madden busied himself in ways to avoid a fate similar to Tanner Smith and the others; there were witnesses to be intimidated and influential officials to be paid off. By this time Doyle had been deserted by most of his followers who saw, even if he did not, that his cause was lost. Freda was also getting restless. Perhaps she saw from recent newspaper accounts that the Gophers did not always shoot the person they were aiming at. On November 25 she moved out of Doyle's flat in West 43rd Street and resumed her affair with Madden and Owney saw an opportunity to get rid of Little Patsy.

A light snow was falling on the Saturday night of November 28, 1914 when Little Patsy was lured to Oetner's saloon on the corner of Eighth Avenue and West 41st Street. That afternoon he had received a telephone call from Margie Everdeane, Freda's best friend. She said Freda wanted to make up. When he entered the saloon that night he expected to meet Freda but found death instead. The gunmen pumped six bullets into his chest.

Two days later Freda Horner and Margie Everdeane were locked up. The following night Madden and nine others were arrested in a series of raids led by Detective Patrick Flood who was born and raised in Hell's Kitchen. On December 16 Madden, Bieler and McArdle were indicted for first degree murder. In relation to the city-wide police drive against the underworld Owney's Gophers held the record for the number of men in a single gang to be charged with homicide.

Owney Madden's trial for murder in the first degree opened on May 24, 1915. The newspapers remarked that during the preceding five months while he was being held in the Tombs the number of stickups around the city had sharply decreased.

Security was tight. A squad of a dozen policemen pa-

trolled the corridors and friends of Madden were barred from the courtroom unless they were scheduled to testify. The deputy police commissioner headed "a heavy guard of detectives" and "for the first time since he took office" the district attorney was accompanied by a cop.

In his opening address the prosecutor charged that Madden, because of gang rivalry, had ordered Arthur Bieler and John McArdle to kill Patsy Doyle. The States chief witnesses, he said, would be Freda Horner and Margie Everdeane.

In April the girls had testified at the trial of McArdle which ended in his conviction for second degree manslaughter and a sentence of thirteen years. Bieler then pleaded down to first degree manslaughter and got eighteen years. At McArdle's trial they had sworn under oath that Madden knew nothing about the murder but now, at Owney's trial, they changed their stories and accused him of complicity. Everdeane even placed him at the scene of the killing as an onlooker.

The jury was out for seven hours and returned with a verdict of guilty but for the lesser crime of manslaughter in the first degree. Judge Nott immediately intoned the maximum sentence of ten to twenty years.

On October 7 Freda Horner and Margie Everdeane appeared before Judge Nott and testified that Madden had been framed. They recanted their earlier testimony and swore they had lied at the trial because Assistant District Attorney Walter Devel threatened to implicate them in them in the murder unless they cooperated. They said they were given statements to commit to memory for the trial. They also stated that Detective Flood had taken them on outings and coached them on what to say and how to say it to make the testimony plausible.

"I knew Owney Madden was being framed anyway," said Freda, "and all I cared about was to save myself from prison."

Madden's attorney filed a motion for a new trial. The judge not only denied it but had Freda and Margie arrested for perjury in the recantation of their trial testimony.

Owney stayed in Sing Sing. When a criminal was sentenced to prison for more than five years it was the custom of the underworld to speak of him in the past tense.

In the saloons of the West Side the Gophers would boast and small hero-worshipping boys coming in to fill the family growler with beer would stop and listen in awe. Individual acts of bravery would be related again and again and continue to be repeated down through the years. They would recount the bloody exploits of Razor Reilly, Newburgh Gallagher and Owney Madden and evoke the names of their own war dead.

The criminal heroes of these streets and those days would pass from headlines to history but were kept alive in Hell's Kitchen legend as their tales were retold from the stoops to the saloons. And when the last participant had gone to the Valhalla of the Gophers these names and their deeds would continue to be told by old men who first heard them as boys.

Michael Flynn was born and raised in Hell's Kitchen. Flynn wrote previously for the New York Daily News and the Chelsea-Clinton News.

If George Washington Carver
can CREATE 325 inventions
with a peanut,
think of what you
can CREATE
with an
education.

