

Blue Island, IL Back in the Day ...

[November 9 ~ Transfer Inn Gambling House Blasted](#)

From The Keyboard Of Joe Gatrell

On this date in history - November 9, 1927 - the gambling house and dining hall known as the Transfer Inn, located at the southwest corner of 119th and Vincennes, was dynamite bombed. One man reportedly was killed and several others were injured in the early Wednesday morning explosion, which severely damaged the front corner of the building. A brief story about the bombing and a photo of the aftermath appeared in the November 10 Chicago Tribune.

JG ~ While the Transfer Inn was said to be owned by Blue Islanders James Hackett and Jimmy Blouin, it was Hackett who ran the operation. James Hackett was the Blue Island gambling boss from approximately 1900 until 1937. While he had stakes in local gambling operations and saloons, Jimmy Blouin was best known as a world championship bowler.

JG ~ More about James Hackett: he was an almost larger-than-life figure who was tremendously popular in Blue Island. He enjoyed hunting and fishing, and he did so with other legendary Blue Islanders such as George Roll and John Volp. Hackett also was a real estate investor who owned property in Blue Island and communities south and west of the city. In perhaps his most shrewd business move, during the Great Depression, he purchased Navajo Hills Country Club from the First National Bank for pennies on the dollar.

JG ~ James Hackett, his wife Adeline Weiss Hackett, and their son and daughter were members of St. Benedict Parish. The Hacketts were great contributors to the parish. This included monetary donations as well as the loan of Hackett slot machines for St. Benedict fund raising events.

JG ~ If James Hackett was so popular, why was the Transfer Inn the target of a bomb? Well, to quote from the most famous mob movie of all time, it was business, not personal.

JG ~ According to the Tribune, on the night of the bombing, the Chicago Police Department raided and closed all of the gambling houses in Chicago. This was a one-day event and done for show, but it still angered the Chicago crime bosses who lost revenue. Because the Transfer Inn was in Blue Island, where the fix always was in, Chicago cops could not shut down Hackett and Blouin.

JG ~ Chicago mobsters did what Chicago cops could not do and Blue Island cops would not do. They closed the Transfer Inn by force. KA-BOOM! The blast reportedly shook houses and shattered windows blocks away.

JG ~ Chicago gambling house opened the next day, but all the operators had to do was bail their guys out of jail, restock the liquor, and open the doors. James Hackett and Jimmy Blouin had to lead rescue efforts and make sure everyone was safe. According to legend, Hackett literally took command of the situation and in the wee hours led the rag-tag Blue Island police force. BIPD would not have another leader like that for almost 50 years when Marvin O'Lena became chief.

JG ~ James Hackett had many more exciting adventures before he died, reportedly after a gall bladder attack, in 1937. Hackett was rumored to have been given the Blue Island gambling franchise by Al Capone himself, and Hackett's grandson and namesake, attorney James Hackett, said that Capone once visited the Hackett home at 12916 Greenwood Avenue. James Hackett also was kidnapped twice by the same band of renegade kidnapers. On the first occasions, his family paid a large ransom. On the second, they paid a small one. And there is a legend that during the Great Depression that James Hackett saved the First National Bank from going under.

JG ~ Or perhaps he won 10 percent of the bank stock from some of its directors in a poker game. Either way, the life and times of Blue Island legend James Hackett were not dull.

[Jude Coyle I've both read and written about him. He is a very interesting character.](#)

Cindi Heffernan Is there more?

JG ~ There is much more about James Hackett. In addition to being a great sportsman, businessman, and philanthropist. He was a very proactive and influential member of the community. During his era, East Side residents wanted land for recreation. James Hackett was instrumental in the acquisition of Becker's Woods, which became Centennial Park.

JG ~ The great-granddaughter of James Hackett has created a blog dedicated to him and his wife. While not all of the information featured is accurate, it is very interesting, and you can see photos of James and Adeline Weiss Hackett.

JG ~ James Hackett, who was a native of New York State and came to Blue Island during the 1890s, is believed to have begun his first gambling games at the site of what is now First National Bank. As his fortune grew, he acquired businesses and properties. According to his grandsons, he and his wife owned the row of apartments near St. Francis Hospital and lived in one of them until they built the beautiful house at 12916 Greenwood in 1929.

JG ~ Another large home, the Robinson home already was on that lot, but James and Adeline Hackett wanted to live in the Silk Stocking District and at that precise location. So they purchased the lot. According to the agreement, the structure was to be moved to another location.

JG ~ In Blue Island during all eras, someone is against everything. Thus some residents complained that moving that large house to the 2700 block of Walnut Street, its intended destination, would destroy "the beautiful trees" along the route. Blue Island streets were much narrower then, and we do value our trees, sometimes more than people. I'll bet you never got into an argument with a tree!

JG ~ So a new arrangement was made, and the Robinson house was moved to the 2600 block of Maple Avenue instead. Blue Island complainers and trees were appeased. The Hacketts built their home for approximately \$38,000. I have informed Ray and Janet Cantelo that I will give them \$39,000 for the house, but they are not interested in my offer, which I thought was more than generous and adjusted for inflation. Hey, I'm a Blue Islander. I'm cheap!

JG ~ The Hacketts owned a beautiful touring car. According to James Hackett, his grandparents were the first Blue Islanders to own an auto, although this never has been verified. The Hackett home on Greenwood was built with a chauffeur's quarters over the garage. There reportedly also was an (I can't believe I am going to say this) underground passageway (not a tunnel!) from the house to the garage. It has since been filled in. See, still no tunnels!

JG ~ After the two kidnappings, the chauffer carried a Tommy gun. According to Harry Robertson, one day he cut through the Hackett yard on his way home. Young Harry, age 9, was quite surprised to see the chauffeur/bodyguard standing there with it. According to a family friend, the Hackett garage also was the store room for the coins collected from all of the slot machines, which James Hackett introduced to Blue Island and which the family profitted from (though not here) into the 1960s. By the way, I'll bet that after his encounter with the Tommy-gun tote'n chauffeur, young Harry never though about soaping the Hackett's windows on Halloween or TPing their house.

JG ~ Can you imagine growing up in a family where, if you needed money for candy or a movie, you could go out to the garage, put your hand into a barrel, and grab a fistful of coins? How cool is that!

Renea Hensley-garza ty i enjoyed

JG ~ A problem with the biography of James Hackett, as with so many old-time, legendary Blue Islanders, is that much of the printed record no longer exists. In this case, an event from 1927, there are no surviving issues of the Sun-Standard from that year. Everything I found came from other newspapers and references to the event found years afterward. Those always were brief mentions that offered few details. Even the Hackett decendants do not have many details. It is very disappointing that we have lost so much of our colorful history. Blue Island was many things. Dull was not one of them.

Sharon Kleina-Gurgel Joe, really enjoy your stories, when is your book going to be available?

Cindi Heffernan We have a article about our house and one of the owners was championship bowler. Hmmm wonder if it is the same person. I need to find that article. Love your stories.

Kurt Wagner Harold Volp was a relative. what do you know about him or hi son?

JG ~ Thank you, Sharon and Cindi. The book is with an editor. I should hear from her soon. Then one more round of edits on this end before publication.

JG ~ Kurt, I'm going from memory, and I believe Harold was one of the sons of publisher John Volp. Harold was a Blue Island alderman. After the passing of their father, Wes and Harold operated the Sun-Standard until 1963, when they sold it to Bruce Sagan, who owned the Economist (now Southtown-Star) newspaper.

James Smith Cindi, was it Jimmy Blouin?

Jerry Palomo The corner building (119th and Vincennes...southwest corner) that you write about is the building where we first lived when my family came to Blue Island back around 1964. The corner of the building at 119th and Vincennes was a bar. We moved to a apt just to the west of the bar in the same building. It had a big store front window. There were many more apartments (ok 3 or 4) throughout the entire building. The landlord's last name was Lamore.

Cindi Heffernan James, I want to say yes. I need to find that article because it said his name.

JG ~ Thanks for that recollection, Jerry. The landlord was Michael LaMorte. We grew up with his grandson and namesake. The landlord's son and his family lived in THE Blue Island mansion, the Billy Webber house at Greenwood Avenue and York Street.

JG ~ After James Hackett died in 1937, the fix went off for his family. Adeline Weiss Hackett was not allowed to keep the gambling franchise. Her husband's business partner, Jimmy Blouin, abandoned her. It was a man's world, and John M. Hart and Babe Tuffanelli would not allow a woman to join the club.

JG ~ The Transfer Inn was boarded up and fell into disrepair. Whether Mr. LaMorte was the next owner or there was an owner in between is on record, but I do not have the information. Whoever owned it, did lease space to Babe Tuffanelli for his bookmaking operation. And it was a rough joint to drink in.

JG ~ There were apartments there. Quite a few Blue Islanders made that ramshackle green building their first stop on the way to somewhere. Bobby Benegas lived in one of the units before the building fell into such repair that it was purchased by the City of Blue Island and razed in 1975. There site now is a berm.

JG ~ You live near the library, Cindi, and it may have what you seek. I believe my predecessor as historian, the late Don Rizzs, wrote a story on your home. That feature appeared in the Sun-Standard, which is available downstairs at the library. You also may contact Jeri Osberg. Don's family gave Jeri his scrapbook with all of the stories.

JG ~ A disclaimer: I believe the owner of the building at 119th and Vincennes was Michael LaMorte. I will check my notes to make sure that it was not Dan LaMorte. If so, I will make a correction.

Rudy Ordaz I lived next door to Dan LaMorte on the east side. He was the owner of that building on 119 and Vincennes. Michael LaMorte was his son. Dan LaMorte had many properties in B.I. When I was a young kid Dan would have me help paint his buildings in the summer. Mike inherited the properties when Dan passed away.

JG ~ Thank you, Rudy, for clearing that up and saving me the time of going through notes.

Rudy Ordaz Anytime Joe. Best part of working for Dan was when we were done painting he would give me a glass of his homemade wine. Then tell me not to ride my bike !!

Cindi Heffernan Thanks Joe! I will go and check it out if I can't find my article. I love this kind of stuff.

Sharren Davis One of my brothers told me I went to a birthday party for BabeTuffanelli's daughter. Do you happen to know her name? I don't remember being friends with a little girl by that name.

Rudy Ordaz Shirley.

Bari L. Warnaar My Grandmother lived on Vincennes