

L.A. SHERIFFS' MUSEUM

By Chris Miller and Mike Fratantoni
Los Angeles Sheriffs' Museum

PROHIBITION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY, PART 3: THE END OF PROHIBITION

The beginning of the end of Prohibition occurred on February 14, 1929, when a Cadillac full of men pulled up to a warehouse on Clark Street in Chicago. Two of the occupants were dressed in police uniforms and two in plain clothes. All of them worked for Al Capone and were there to kill George "Bugs" Moran and his gang. As it turned out, Bugs wasn't there, but that didn't matter. All seven of Moran's men were forced to face a wall, and once they had their backs turned and their hands in the air, Capone's thugs let loose, riddling their bodies with multiple gunshots. The

murderers dressed in plain clothes walked out of the warehouse with their hands in the air, followed by the fake police officers, who were pointing guns at their backs. The purpose was to make it appear that the shooters were being arrested. They entered the Cadillac and made their getaway. This brutal shooting came to be known as the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

News of the shocking massacre spread throughout the nation. Violence and bloodshed due to gangsters involved in bootlegging was disturbing, but this time, they had finally gone too far. On March 4, 1929, three weeks after the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, Herbert Hoover was sworn in as America's 31st president. During

Hoover's inaugural address, he said that one of the greatest dangers facing the country was a disregard and disobedience of the law, adding that a large part of the responsibility rested directly upon the people who continued to drink, thus supporting and even encouraging crime. If citizens didn't like a law, their duty was to work for a repeal.

In the 1920s, the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment was formed. To reach the masses and encourage repeal of the 18th Amendment, it began printing pamphlets that detailed the failures of Prohibition: the fierce violence involving gangsters, official corruption and the continual flow of illegal alcohol.



A re-enactment of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre



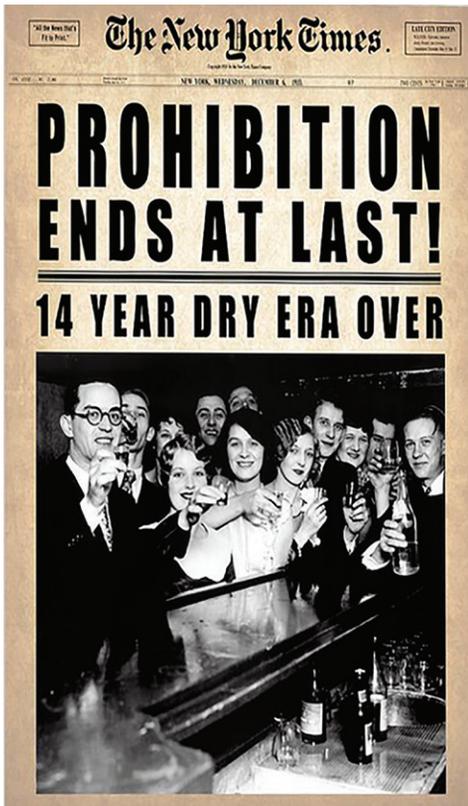
Protests during the Great Depression



Gangsters shot during the St. Valentine's Day Massacre



Citizens burn a Prohibition poster.



Headlines marking the end of Prohibition

The stock market crash of 1929 plunged America into the Great Depression. While millions were out of work and could barely feed their families, precious government funds were being wasted on enforcing liquor laws. The *New York Telegraph* declared that the two main issues of the 1930 mid-term elections were hunger and thirst — hunger for food and jobs, and thirst for alcohol. The suffering and deprivation caused people to realize that if Prohibition were repealed, hundreds of thousands of jobs would be created, and the tax revenues generated would provide large sums of money for the government.

During Prohibition, LAPD and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department had more



Liquor Detail during a raid in Newhall in 1925. Deputy Pilcher (left) was later killed in the line of duty.

officers killed than at any other time in their history. It is likely that most of the deputies and officers killed were the honest ones who were trying to enforce the law.

In 1929, a new law increased penalties for first-time violators from six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine to up to five years in prison and a fine of \$10,000. By 1930, these tougher penalties, along with increased enforcement, had filled federal prisons in record numbers. Atlanta's federal prison had almost 4,000 inmates and was only built to house 2,000. In order to avoid paying large liquor taxes, moonshiners in rural areas continued to make home brew. Zigzagging through overgrown wilderness areas to avoid being caught by revenuers or tax men, smugglers sharpened their driving skills to the point that some went on to win trophies in racecar competitions. In 1933, the 21st Amendment was passed and Prohibition came to an end.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF PROHIBITION

During the 13 years of Prohibition, crime,

especially violent crime, increased dramatically. Bloody gang wars escalated as rivals fought to hijack shipments of alcohol from each other. More law enforcement officers were killed across the country than during any other period. After Prohibition ended, the Federal Prohibition Bureau became the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, known as ATF.

CHANGES AFTER PROHIBITION

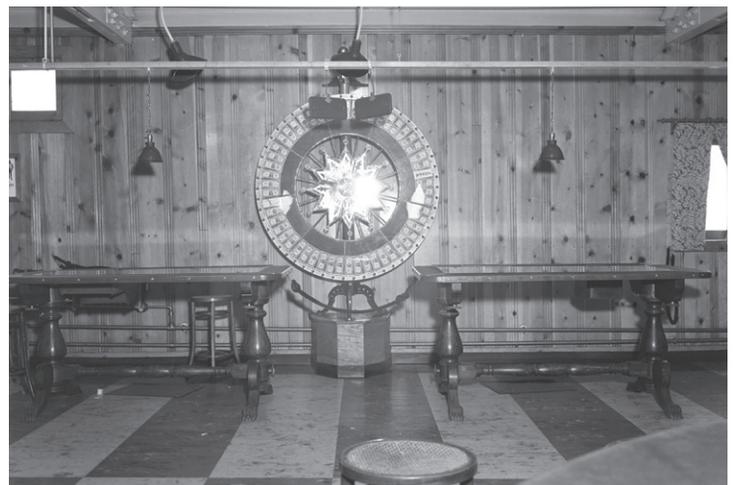
Once Prohibition ended, gangsters in Los Angeles moved from bootlegging to gambling and prostitution. Tony Cornero owned a gambling ship named the *Rex* and anchored it in international waters, three miles off the coast of Redondo Beach. For 25 cents, a water taxi would transport customers to the ship, where they could gamble at an onboard casino that included roulette, blackjack, poker and craps. The casino also had 300 slot machines and a bingo parlor that could accommodate 500 players.

When law enforcement officials attempted

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A shuttle boat drops off gamblers at the *Rex* gambling ship.



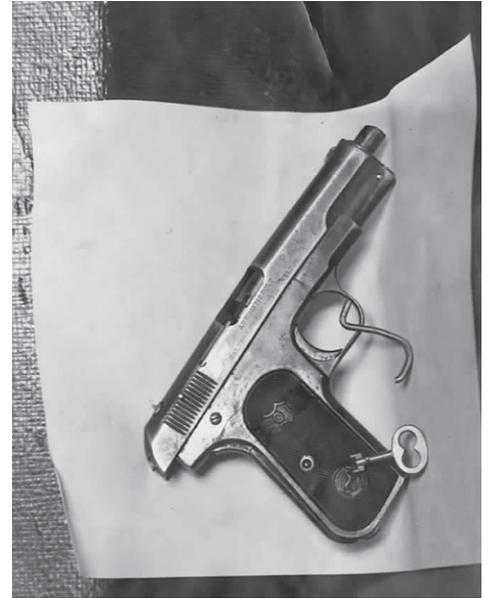
Inside the gambling ship *Rex*

to board the *Rex*, Cornero's men sprayed them with water from fire hoses. Doing some careful research, deputies discovered that, although the *Rex* was anchored three miles off the coast of Redondo Beach, a piece of land that jutted out put the vessel inside the three-mile limit and, hence, within the borders of Los Angeles County. Sheriff Biscailuz, accompanied by several deputies as well as photographers to document the raid, boarded the boat. Roulette wheels were destroyed with axes and craps tables and slot machines were thrown into the ocean.

In 1939, the U.S. Coast Guard seized the *Rex*, saying it would hamper preparations for a possible military conflict in the Pacific Ocean. In 1955, Cornero raised money from investors to build the Stardust Hotel in Las Vegas. During construction, Cornero was gambling at the Desert Inn, where he suffered a heart attack and died.

GANGSTER ALBERT MARCO

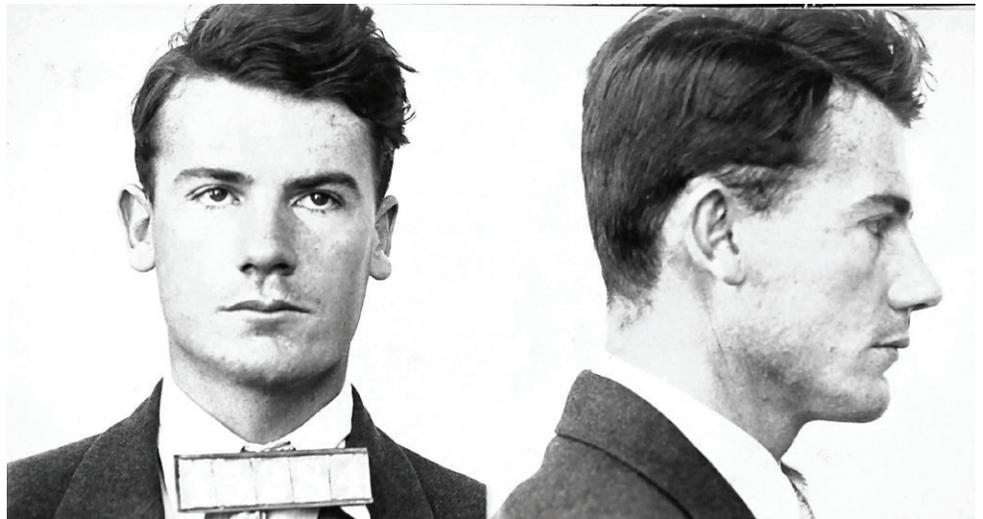
Albert Marco was arrested on June 28, 1928, and confined in the Hall of Justice Jail for assault with a deadly weapon after shooting two men. While Marco was being held, Jack Hawkins and Robert Hayes had unwillingly been transferred to the Hall of Justice Jail from San Quentin to testify before a grand jury on corruption involving L.A. city officials and LAPD officers. Fearing their lives were in danger and desperate to escape, the inmates contacted Marco and asked if he could help them obtain a gun. Marco agreed and encouraged his girlfriend, Kay Perry, to develop a personal relationship with Deputy William Stringfellow. Stringfellow violated jail rules by allowing Perry to bring contraband food and cigarettes into the jail. Eventually, she blackmailed him. Stringfellow took another deputy's gun from the jail gun locker and gave it to Marco, who then passed it on to Hawkins.



The gun smuggled into the Hall of Justice Jail



Albert Marco in a booking photo



Jack Hawkins in a booking photo



Kay Perry, Marco's girlfriend, was involved in the plot to break him out of jail.



Robert Hayes in a booking photo



Sheriff Traeger and Deputy Casey Jones, 1929



Deputy Casey Jones, 1929

On January 21, 1929, Deputies R.A. “Casey” Jones and Tom Higgins from the Burglary Detail were on the jail elevator, escorting Hawkins and

Hayes back from court. The two inmates were cuffed together with one pair of handcuffs when Hawkins pulled a .32 automatic from under his

shirt and shot Jones in the neck. Both deputies returned fire, killing Hawkins. Jones was rushed to the hospital. The bullet had entered his throat and, due to this injury, for the rest of his life, Jones was only able to speak in a whisper.

After learning about Marco’s involvement in the escape attempt, deputies searched his cell and discovered \$10,000 in cash they assumed was payment for providing the gun. On April 1, 1929, Marco was convicted of the charge of assault with a deadly weapon and sent to San Quentin State Prison. After being paroled on April 7, 1933, Marco was deported to Italy.

TODAY

Alcoholics add to the homeless population, are arrested for domestic violence or die from alcohol-related illnesses, such as cirrhosis of the liver. In addition, thousands of people are injured or killed every year by drunk drivers. Gangs that once thrived by bootlegging entrenched themselves in other illegal activities, such as gambling operations, protection rackets and controlling labor unions. The idea behind Prohibition was to make society better, but instead, it created more problems. Making alcohol legal didn’t eliminate these problems; it simply changed them.

Edited by Jan Jenkins (ret. LASD). ☆

☆ **IN MEMORIAM** ☆

JAMES L. BIRMINGHAM	RETIRED 06-07-04, DECEASED 06-07-19	SERGEANT/TWIN TOWERS
JOHN M. BRADY	RETIRED 01-02-10, DECEASED 06-12-19	SENIOR DEPUTY/WAYSIDE
ROBERT V. COONEY	RETIRED 03-31-04, DECEASED 06-13-19	DEPUTY/MALIBU/LOST HILLS
WILLIAM E. DRESEN	RETIRED 06-06-89, DECEASED 06-18-19	SERGEANT/WALNUT
TIMOTHY W. EDWARDS	RETIRED 12-07-99, DECEASED 06-14-19	SERGEANT/IRC
JIMMY D. JACKSON	RETIRED 07-08-96, DECEASED 05-28-19	DEPUTY IV/TST STATEWIDE
KEITH MITCHELL	RETIRED 07-05-01, DECEASED 06-02-19	DEPUTY/SEB
EDMUND “NED” RODRIGUEZ	RETIRED 05-01-89, DECEASED 06-14-19	SERGEANT/SIB
DEENA ROSEN	RETIRED 11-18-91, DECEASED 06-24-19	DEPUTY/DETECTIVE DIVISION SPI
ROBERT R. ROSSI	RETIRED 03-18-91, DECEASED 06-04-19	DEPUTY/SCIENTIFIC SERVICES BUREAU
DWIGHT E. SHARP	RETIRED 01-02-91, DECEASED 08-19-18	DEPUTY/VICE DETAIL
DONALD B. STOTTS	RETIRED 03-31-05, DECEASED 05-24-19	DEPUTY/EOB
STEPHEN D. WARD	RETIRED 02-15-94, DECEASED 06-12-19	SERGEANT/COURT SERVICES EAST
AZALENE WHELCHER	RETIRED 01-01-82, DECEASED 06-14-19	DEPUTY IV/MCJ
ROSS J. WHIPPLE	RETIRED 03-31-83, DECEASED 06-05-19	DEPUTY/FIRESTONE STATION