

0. DISASTER at the LITTLE BOHEMIA - Story Preface

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This FBI photograph depicts the front of the Little Bohemia resort as it appeared at the time of Dillinger's visit (in April, 1934). The FBI grants permission to use this image, provided that the FBI is credited.

After his Crown-Point escape, Dillinger had to stay out of sight.

In early April, of 1934, he and Billie drove to Mooseville where they visited John's dad at the family's farm in Indiana. Johnnie, who loved fast cars like the Essex Terraplane, was right when he suggested officials wouldn't look for him in such an obvious place.

The informant network, however, was active—and frequently accurate. Billie was arrested at Chicago's Tumble Inn, soon after the Mooresville trip, as she talked with Larry Strong about a safe place for her and John to stay.

Purvis himself was involved with her capture, but neither he nor his agents searched any of the cars in front of the bar. If they had, they'd have seen Dillinger (waiting for Billie) and Pat Cherrington (Billie's friend) sitting in a car, right in front of the Tumble Inn.

Because there were so many agents surrounding the bar, Johnnie could do nothing to help Billie. She was ultimately transferred to St. Paul (Minnesota) where she was charged with harboring a fugitive. Johnnie paid for her defense, but Billie was convicted and given a two-year sentence.

Dillinger, meanwhile, was making plans to remain out of public view (at a resort in Manitowish Waters, Wisconsin) and to have plastic surgery to change his appearance. Among other things, he wanted to remove a significant identifying facial feature—a dimple on his chin.

In late April, while snow was still on the ground in parts of northern Wisconsin, Johnnie (now with his hair dyed red) and his gang members traveled to the Little Bohemia resort. Another notorious gangster—Baby Face Nelson—met them there.

Located in a remote lake area, the resort was a perfect place to rest and hide—so long as no one tipped-off Purvis. Nan Wanatka, who owned the Little Bohemia with her husband, soon became concerned about their guests. Who were these men? Were they gangsters?

After Emil, her husband, correctly guessed one of the men was Dillinger, Nan wanted to call-in the authorities. She wrote a note to her brother-in-law and slipped it inside a cigarette pack.

A local fishing guide, pretending he'd left his cigarettes at home, borrowed the pack of cigarettes from Nan. The guide, actually Nan's brother, delivered the note to its intended recipient—Henry Voss.

Voss contacted Purvis who quickly gathered whatever forces he could on short notice. They'd have to fly into Rhinelander, about fifty miles away from Manitowish. (He chartered a Northwest Airways plane for 35-cents-per-mile.)

Another group of agents would fly in to Duluth. No one bothered to call local police forces or to coordinate efforts with anyone who really knew the north-Wisconsin area.

The federal agents arrived at the Little Bohemia on April 23rd—a Sunday night—without a plan of attack.

Never before had the Bureau of Investigation attempted a raid quite like this one, and no one bothered to set up roadblocks. None of the participating agents had been trained for massed gunfights, and everyone present

knew the Bureau had a bad gunfight-record. They also knew the gangsters were deadly shots.

As they drove into the resort with their car lights off, the agents heard barking dogs. Purvis and his men hadn't known about Nan's dogs—two collies named Shadow and Prince. Perhaps they also hadn't expected other customers to be at the resort's bar. When three of those customers left in their car, without knowing there were federal agents lying-in-wait, only two survived the ensuing gunfire.

Dillinger, and his gang members, were able to escape through the inn's rear window, forced to leave some of their weapons behind. Under the cover of night, they made it safely to the resort's beach.

Purvis, however, firmly believed that he and his agents had the gangsters surrounded. He continued to believe that misguided notion until daylight revealed the truth.

A total of three people were dead, including Agent Carter Baum (who originally went for help, in a Ford coupe, but was killed by Baby Face Nelson at a nearby home owned by the Alvin Koerner family). Dillinger, however, had disappeared. As Bryan Burrough observers in his book, *Public Enemies*:

...it was the fourth time in twenty-three days agents had been within a baseball's toss of Dillinger without capturing him. (Burrough, *Public Enemies*, page 308.)

Newspapers around the country referred to the disaster as the Battle at Little Bohemia. The Bureau was utterly embarrassed, and Hoover was furious. He appointed another special agent, Sam Cowley, to take control of the Chicago office (where Mel Purvis was now second-in-command).

Johnnie, himself, decided it was a good time to finally have that plastic surgery.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DISASTER-at-the-LITTLE-BOHEMIA-Public-Enemies>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DISASTER-at-the-LITTLE-BOHEMIA-Public-Enemies>

Media Stream



Dillinger - With Wooden Gun at Family Home

Dillinger family photo, online courtesy Rocky Mountain News.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-With-Wooden-Gun-at-Family-Home>



Dillinger Car - 1933 Essex Terraplane 8

Photo by Sandy Jones (the car collector who sold the automobile to the National Museum of Crime and Punishment).

Image online, courtesy Rocky Mountain News.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Car-1933-Essex-Terraplane-8>



Mooreseville, Indiana - April, 1934

AP Photo, online courtesy National Archives.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Mooreseville-Indiana-April-1934>



Dillinger Home - Mooresville, Indiana

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Home-Mooresville-Indiana>



John Dillinger with Billie Frechette

Dillinger family photo, online courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-Dillinger-with-Billie-Frechette>



Billie Frechette - Arrest Photo

Photo of Billie Frechette, by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. Image online, courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Billie-Frechette-Arrest-Photo>



Manitowish Waters - Location

Image online, courtesy Epodunk.com website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Manitowish-Waters-Location>



Little Bohemia Resort - Front View

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Resort-Front-View>



Lester Gillis - Baby Face Nelson

Image online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lester-Gillis-Baby-Face-Nelson>



Little Bohemia Resort - Emil Wanatka

Image online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Resort-Emil-Wanatka>



Sam Cowley - Special Agent in Charge

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Sam-Cowley-Special-Agent-in-Charge>



Little Bohemia - Entrance Used by Purvis and Agents

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Entrance-Used-by-Purvis-and-Agents>



Nan Wanatka and Her Little Bohemia Dogs

Photo by AP. Image online, courtesy The Post-Crescent.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Nan-Wanatka-and-Her-Little-Bohemia-Dogs>



Little Bohemia - Car in Which Civilian Died

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Car-in-Which-Civilian-Died>



Little Bohemia - Dillinger Escapes Through Window

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Dillinger-Escapes-Through-Window>



Little Bohemia - Beach Provides Route of Escape

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Beach-Provides-Route-of-Escape>



Little Bohemia - Carter Baum Killed

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Carter-Baum-Killed>



Little Bohemia - Ford Coupe Used to Get Help

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Ford-Coupe-Used-to-Get-Help>



Little Bohemia - Alvin Koerner Home

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Little-Bohemia-Alvin-Koerner-Home>



Dillinger - Weapons Left at Little Bohemia

Photo online, courtesy FBI.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dillinger-Weapons-Left-at-Little-Bohemia>



Billie Frechette - Charged in St. Paul

AP Photo online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Billie-Frechette-Charged-in-St.-Paul>



Billie Frechette - During St. Paul Trial

AP Photo, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Billie-Frechette-During-St.-Paul-Trial>



Essex Terraplane - Car Owned by John Dillinger

Video clip online, courtesy Archive.org.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Essex-Terraplane-Car-Owned-by-John-Dillinger>