



0. ORGANIZED CRIME BEGINS IN CHICAGO - Story
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Michael Cassius McDonald—an Irish immigrant also known as “King Mike”—is credited with beginning organized crime in Chicago (in the 1870s). History tells us that he also coined two phrases: “There’s a sucker born every minute” and “Never give a sucker an even break.”

The Great Fire of Chicago did not permanently wipe out the brothels, saloons and gambling houses as many people had hoped. In 1896, during a trial where prostitutes were accused of robbing a customer, Chicago Judge Goggin observed:

Any man who goes down to the Levee deserves to get himself robbed.

A literal underworld had also developed in the city.

Chicago was built, in part, on the wetlands created by the Chicago River’s entrance into Lake Michigan. The streets in the city were often muddy. To eliminate that problem, city officials raised the level of streets, which meant that foundations of buildings also had to be raised.

Entire blocks were elevated by as much as ten feet. An underworld of passageways, streets and earthen rooms remained. Criminal elements moved in, as did saloons without liquor licenses. Reformers targeted alcohol as the root cause of the city’s problems.

In the 1870s, Michael Cassius McDonald organized gambling and saloon businesses so he (and they) could jointly oppose alcohol reform efforts. Called “Mike McDonald’s Democrats,” their political actions paid off.

Medill had resigned as Mayor and left the country for Paris. McDonald’s candidate, Harvey Colvin, beat the reform candidate in 1873. Now the way was paved for McDonald to create the first organized crime syndicate in Chicago wherein gamblers and politicians were aligned.

Later, politicians like “Hinky Dink” Kenna and “Bath-House John” Coughlin were known as “Lords of the Levee.” They owned saloons and votes which insured their tight control over Chicago’s First Ward.

Andy Craig, an ex-convict, became precinct captain.

According to an April 28, 1907 article (“The City of Chicago, A Study of the Great Immoralities”) in McClure’s Magazine, the consumption of liquor in Chicago (despite intervening reforms by people like Jane Addams) had reached staggering proportions:

The Chicago market is thoroughly saturated with beer, and incidentally with other liquor. Reckoning it out by population, every man, woman, and child in Chicago drank, in 1906, two and one-quarter barrels of beer,—that is, seventy gallons,—three and one-half times the average consumption in the United States... (See pages 578-579 of the McClure’s Magazine article.)

But the situation would get much worse before it got better.

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Media Stream



Hinky Dink Keena

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Bath-House John Coughlin

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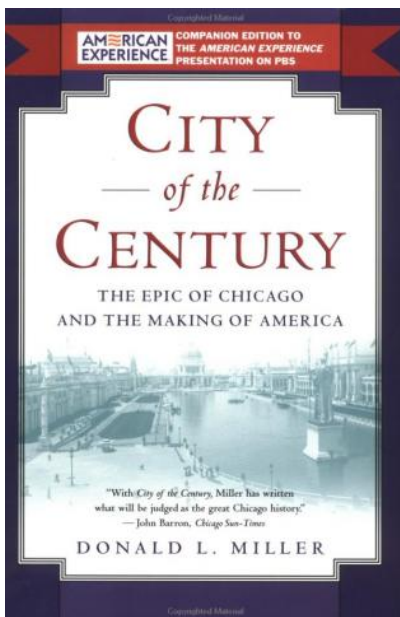


Andy Craig

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Saloon - View From the Street

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