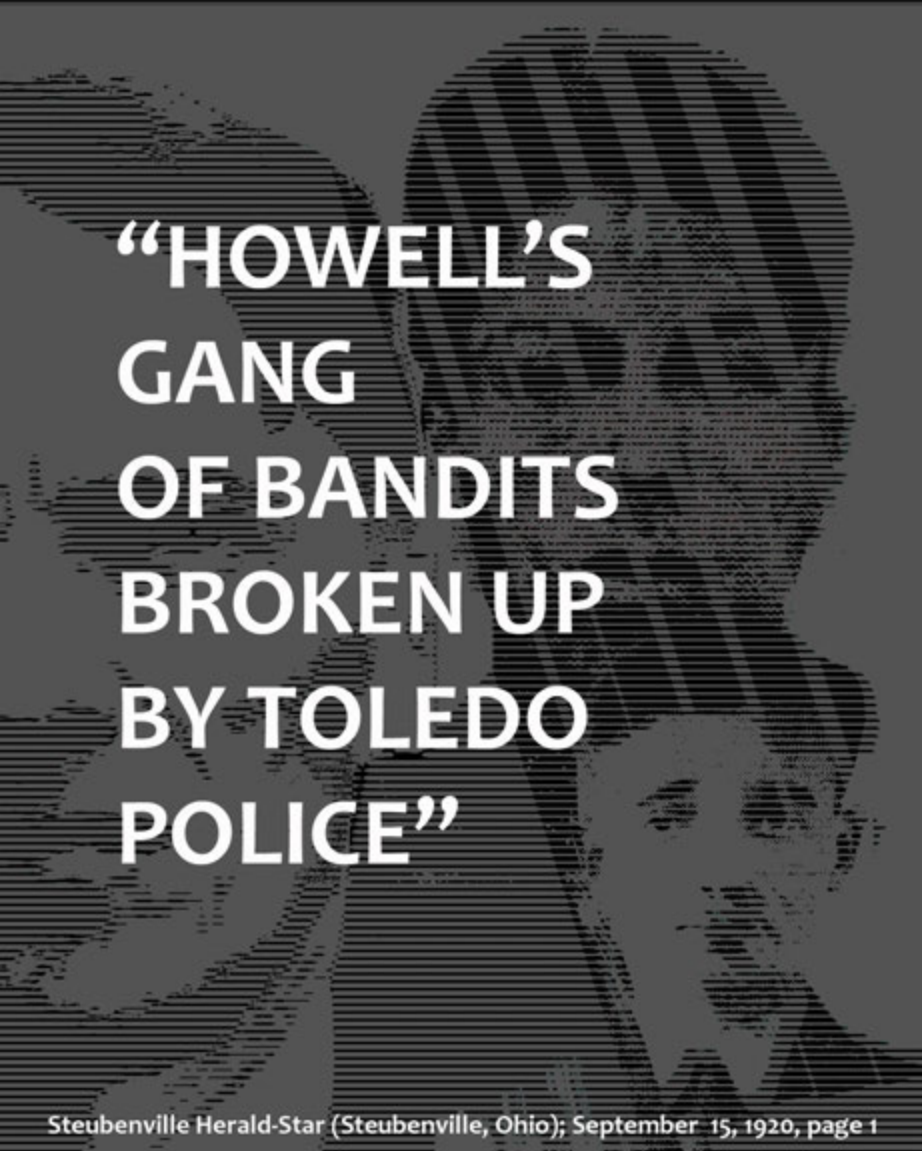


Dick Howell



Photograph courtesy of The Ohio History Connection



**“HOWELL’S
GANG
OF BANDITS
BROKEN UP
BY TOLEDO
POLICE”**

Steubenville Herald-Star (Steubenville, Ohio); September 15, 1920, page 1

**“FORMER TORONTO, O.,
BANDITS BATTLE
DETECTIVES”**

**“Archie Dennison Killed
but Cowboy Hill
Alias Joe Rivers
Expected to Recover
Same Gang Terrorized
This Section of State.”**

Steubenville Herald-Star (Steubenville, Ohio); September 15, 1920, page 1

1918: Steubenville, Ohio

In the fall of 1918 a young widow met a man at an interurban station in Steubenville, he called himself Joseph Muzzio. In Cleveland and Toledo this man was known as Arthur “Cowboy” Hill. In Toronto, Ohio, he was known as Joe Rivers and by the fall of 1918 was a member of a gang of bandits led by Perry “Dick” Howell.

The young woman was Emma Howell Irons, the sister of Dick Howell. At the time she met Cowboy Hill she was just 21 and was trying to raise two young girls by herself.

The Howell family consisted of nine children and Emma, born in 1897, was 19 years younger than Dick. In 1900 the family was still living in in the same household, but soon after that Emma was sent to live with a foster family, and was just 16 when she married William Lloyd Irons. In October of 1917, Irons died.

“... Daddy Joe...”

Late in the year of 1918 and during the early part of 1919, the gang that used Toronto, Ohio, as a base of operations had committed several robberies within the Ohio River valley. Cowboy Hill, the man who would become known as “Daddy Joe” to Emma’s young daughters, was an integral part of this gang. Emma later would deny she knew that the man she married was a criminal.

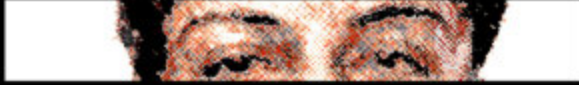
By the time Cowboy Hill (aka Joseph Muzzio and Joe Rivers) and Emma Howell Irons were married on January 19, 1919, police in three states were on the trail of the “Dick Howell Gang”. By mid-February of 1919 they had determined that Howell was certainly the gang’s leader and that his house in Toronto was their headquarters.



February
14, 1919,
Toronto,
Ohio

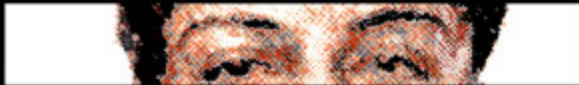
1918-1919

Dick Howell's original group of bandits started making raids on various small businesses and post offices in Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania in 1918 and by early 1919 they were notorious.



These raids were often clumsy and ham-handed hit-and-run robberies that usually led to shootouts with local constabulary. There also seemed to be very small amounts of money involved in these robberies. As a result of these crude and violent attempts at robbery the men involved were hunted by the county sheriffs and the police in nine separate places in Ohio and West Virginia.

On February 14, 1919, Dick Howell's residence was raided by the Toronto police and officers from Weirton, West Virginia. Dick Howell was captured along with his son-in-law, Harry Cottrell. Two other men, Edward Burton (Archie Dennison) and Joe Rivers (Cowboy Hill referred to as a Mexican), escaped, partially due to inaction by the officers from West Virginia.



Dick Howell and Harry Cottrell were put in jail in Toronto and Bob Howell, Dick's brother, was also arrested when he came to see Dick at the jail. These men were eventually taken to the Jefferson County jail in Steubenville. Dick Howell posted bail of \$1,000 and went into hiding, but may have been involved in a robbery in Bergholz, Ohio, in April of 1919. Bergholz is just 17 miles northwest of Steubenville, so Howell was not far away.

1919

In May of 1919 a piece of jewelry was discovered that connected the Howell gang with several more robberies of individual residences in Steubenville. As a result of this discovery Harry Cottrell was again placed in the county jail and asked if he knew where Howell was hiding. Cottrell stated that he had had no contact with Howell since he jumped bail.



Dick Howell was hiding out in a house near Canton, Ohio, and on November 29, 1919, he was spotted on a streetcar in Canton by Anthony Skotnickey, a Canton police detective. Skotnickey apprehended Howell but did not take him directly to a police station. Instead Skotnickey took Howell to his (Skotnickey's) home where they had dinner, along with Skotnickey's wife and child.

1919

1919

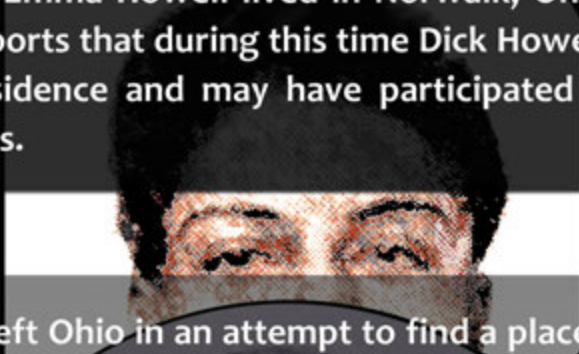
Canton, Ohio



From this point on the story varies based on who tells it, but Howell claimed that Skotnickey was open to a bribe in exchange for Howell's release. There was a dispute about the amount of the bribe; allegedly Skotnickey wanted more than Howell was willing to offer, so the detective was in the process of transporting Howell to police headquarters when Howell tried to take a gun from Skotnickey. This resulted in the gun firing and fatally wounding the policeman.

1920

During the first three months of 1920, Cowboy Hill and his wife Emma Howell lived in Norwalk, Ohio. There were reports that during this time Dick Howell visited their residence and may have participated in some robberies.



Howell left Ohio in an attempt to find a place to hide, but was eventually caught in Kentucky in May of 1920. He was tried and convicted of murder in June of 1920 and was executed on June 2, 1921.



The Friends of Cowboy Hill



1919

It didn't take long for a very large gang to form around Cowboy Hill. Whether or not Dick Howell was an active member of the gang after he jumped bail in Steubenville is a matter of debate. Whether or not the existence of this gang was the result of improvisation or the result of some idea conceived by Cowboy Hill, Archie Dennison, and others is still not clearly recorded. In retrospect, there seems as if there was a plan to organize and create a sustainable business (a syndicate) based primarily on crime. It is certain that these men extended their criminal activities beyond just the Detroit/Toledo region.

There is some circumstantial evidence to indicate that this gang's activities also extended beyond robbery of banks, post offices, and retail merchants. The gang may have also been involved in large-scale car theft, bootlegging, and drug smuggling. Since these types of crimes were ubiquitous and particularly clandestine this theory is impossible to prove.

Two members of the gang, Dutch Anderson and Gerald Chapman, specifically admitted that they had been involved in bootlegging of whiskey during the time period of 1919 to 1921. This admission was made in court in 1922.

Within a few weeks, a number of hardened criminals began to descend on the Detroit/Toledo area. It looks like a meeting was arranged.

Four of the gang members came out of Auburn Prison in New York in early 1919. This was soon after Cowboy Hill and Archie Dennison's escape from the trap in Toronto, Ohio, in February.

These four men were Joe Forrest, Leo Mitchell, George "Dutch" Anderson, and Gerald Chapman.

