

## THE ROBBERY

Raymond Nugent is apparently called “Crane Neck” by his friends due to his pronounced Adam’s apple. He lives in Toledo with his wife and two children and “commutes” between this city and Chicago. By ‘commute’ it is meant that Nugent commits various crimes in Chicago and other locations and then flees to Toledo to lay low until the heat is off. In Toledo, he uses the name Joseph C. Baker, and his wife and children use the same last name. But now, Nugent has learned from a tipster that the American Railway Express Company, located at Toledo’s Union Station, is handling large amounts of cash, traveler’s checks and other securities. Nugent foolishly decides to commit a crime in his adopted home town. Since the Express shipments use multiple guards, he will need help to pull this job. He contacts his friends in Chicago, with whom he has pulled dozens of jobs. In addition to their usual cohorts, the men enlist the aid of a specialist, a “yegg” named Old Charlie. “Yegg” was the slang term for a safecracker. Old Charlie is significantly older than the other members of the gang. At the age of 51 he has already far surpassed the average life expectancy of 35 for the typical gangster. The five men join Nugent in Toledo to monitor the activities of the Express Company and to plan the robbery about two weeks before the actual job . . .

The five men who joined Nugent in Toledo were Gus Winkeler, Charles “Old Charlie” Fitzgerald, Fred “Killer” Burke, Bob Carey and Fred Goetz.<sup>1</sup> Goetz was better known to some as “Shotgun George” Zeigler. All of the gang members were experienced criminals and all, with the possible exception of Fitzgerald, were practiced killers. The gang planned the mechanics of the robbery, including their escape route. Believing the Express company truck would hold additional payroll monies and securities on that day, the robbery was planned for Monday, April 16, 1928.<sup>2</sup>

The gang used three stolen cars in the robbery, a Packard and two Chrysler automobiles. One of the Chryslers was parked near the Express office to watch the loading of the company truck. The Packard was parked nearby, out of sight. The five men in the Packard were armed with two Thompson submachine guns, sawed-off shotguns and rifles.

*The second Chrysler had already been left in a wooded area of Scott Park. This vehicle was supposed to have contained the nitroglycerine and fuses needed to blow open the safes. Obviously, the gang wanted to travel in a vehicle loaded with explosives the minimum distance, especially if they were pursued by police.*

The Express truck was loaded with three safes. Three guards were seated in the back of the truck, George Baldwin, 35, of 229 Leland Avenue, Herman Steinman, of 318 Jefferson Avenue and Paul Stewart, of 631 S. Erie Street, an Express company detective. Carl Mitchell was assigned as the driver.<sup>3</sup> After the loading was completed, the driver of the Chrysler signaled the five men in the Packard which then pulled onto Knapp Street behind the truck as it left shortly after 9:00 AM. As the Express truck traveled from Wade Street toward Broadway on Knapp it slowed to a stop at Broadway. Immediately, one of the gang members from the Packard jumped on the running board of the vehicle, pointing a pistol at the back of the driver’s head.<sup>4</sup> Three more of the gang, pointing their weapons, surprised the three guards in the rear of the truck and quickly disarmed them.

The first suspect then entered the front seat of the Express truck, while two others joined the guards in the rear of the truck. The gang member in front then began giving Mitchell driving directions. The gangsters told the Express employees not to look at them with, at one point, Mitchell being struck in the face. Steinman was told to remove his glasses. Mitchell was told to turn left on Broadway to Western Avenue. He then was told to turn right onto Western Avenue, driving to Detroit Avenue. Mitchell was then told to turn onto Detroit Avenue and the vehicle traveled under the Fearing Avenue railway overpass. The truck then turned north onto Parkside Boulevard. Stewart was told to turn off Parkside and to stop in a wooded area between Hill and Nebraska Avenues. He was told to get in the back of the truck with the guards. As he exited the front of the truck, Mitchell observed three cars parked nearby the wooded area.<sup>5</sup>

*These were the two autos used in the robbery by the gang, which arrived at the prearranged location just prior to the Express truck, and the third car left at the location earlier.*

Two of the gang members bound and gagged the employees. Adhesive tape was used to cover their eyes and to tie their hands behind their backs. Two of the three safes were then removed from the truck, and the guards’ weapons were thrown into the brush. One of the suspect’s rifles and a number of cartridges were left on the floor of the truck.<sup>6</sup>

*It was the plan of the gang to blow open the safes at this location in the wooded area and to then split up, leaving in the three cars to later divide the take at Nugent's address on Upton Avenue. The use of the three vehicles would ensure that at least some of the gang would escape in the event of a police pursuit. However, Nugent, never a particularly bright individual, forgot to place the explosives in the third vehicle.<sup>7</sup> This forced the gang to load two of the safes in the cars in order to transport them to Upton Avenue.*

While the other five gang members cursed Nugent, John White, 21, son of Russell B. White, the manager of the express company, was seated in a University of Toledo classroom overlooking the thicket and observed the suspicious activity around the Express truck.<sup>8</sup>

The University of Toledo was founded in 1872 by Jesup W. Scott. Originally, the school was located in two downtown buildings. After outgrowing that space, the school was relocated to land Scott had donated to the city. This area was named Scott Park and this part of the university today is known as the Community and Technical College or the Scott Park campus. This was the location of the school attended by John White at the time of the robbery.

White ran outside and entered his own car, driving it to the wooded area. He was confronted by one of the gang at gunpoint and was locked in the truck with the employees. The suspects then fled in White's car and two of the other autos, leaving behind the sedan used in the robbery.<sup>9</sup>

As the robbers returned to Nugent's address at 2304 Upton Avenue, Fred Goetz was at the wheel of one of the cars. He made too sharp of a left turn from Bancroft onto Upton. This caused the stolen safe, which was propped up on the back seat of the auto, to tip over, knocking out the glass in the right, rear door.<sup>10</sup> This was observed by a citizen in another vehicle, who followed the car driven by Goetz and saw it turn into the alley behind 2304. He reported the Goetz auto to police as being operated recklessly. Patrolmen John Biskupski and George Zientara, assigned to Station No. 4, located at Monroe and Bancroft Streets, were dispatched on this report of a possible drunk driver.

*The Toledo Police Department did not begin using radios in police cars until the end of 1930.<sup>11</sup> Prior to the use of radios, officers were normally dispatched to incidents either via calls directly placed to their assigned station or through the use of call boxes, from which the officers were required to check in periodically. It is unknown whether Officers Biskupski and Zientara received this call at their station or via a call box. In either case, the officers would have been relatively close by the Upton address and responded quickly.*

Off Parkside Boulevard, Paul Stewart, the only Express company employee with his hands bound in front, untied himself and his companions. They ran to a telephone and reported the robbery.<sup>12</sup>

*The escape of the employees and their notification of the police would not have occurred in time for the information on the robbery to have been relayed to Officers Biskupski and Zientara or other units. Instead, the officers simply responded to the mentioned report of a reckless operator.*