

INTRODUCTION

My family has long ties to Northwest Ohio and the city of Toledo. My father was born on the East Side of Toledo in 1922. He used to tell me stories related to him by his grandmother. She told of living in the area now known as downtown Toledo when Native Americans were still encamped nearby along the Maumee River. My father also spoke of Toledo's Roaring Twenties and the great depression. He particularly recalled being made to play indoors by his mother who told him, "the gangsters are out."

I am a gun collector, particularly interested in firearms which have some sort of historical significance. In 2012, while reading Tracie Hill's comprehensive book on the Thompson submachine gun, *The Ultimate Thompson Book*, I became interested in the mention of the murder of two Toledo policemen on Page 240 of that work. Upon further investigation I learned that the reference was to the murder of Officer George Zientara on April 16, 1928.

Believing that Officer Zientara's murder had never been solved, I did further extensive research and found ties with other reference works on the gangster era. Specifically, I found a connection between two Thompson submachine guns used in the St. Valentine's Day massacre of February 14, 1929—an event that eventually brought about the downfall of the Alphonse Capone empire in Chicago. These weapons have been displayed at two meetings of the Ohio Gun Collectors Association of which I am a member. They remain in the possession of the Berrien County, Michigan Sheriff's Department, the agency that originally confiscated them in 1929. Knowing that these weapons were still in firing condition, I hoped that a ballistics match could be made between the weapons' recently fired bullets and shell casings and bullets and casings from the Zientara murder scene. I subsequently learned that the rifling in the weapons' barrels was now severely worn, making a ballistics match doubtful.

Through contacts with William Helmer, I learned that a researcher, Neal Trickel, was in possession of the bullets and casings recovered from the scene of the St. Valentine's Day massacre in Chicago. This evidence was used by Calvin Goddard, the father of modern ballistics examination, to match the guns used in the massacre with bullets and casings taken from the guns recovered from the home of Fred "Killer" Burke in December 1929. Because Burke was a suspect in the Zientara slaying, I believed that a match was also possible in that case.

I returned to Toledo to learn that no ballistic evidence remained in the possession of the Toledo Police Department, and that the Zientara case had actually been "solved" many years ago with the identification of four of the suspects, although one of these was known and charged only under an alias. Although murder indictments and warrants were filed in 1930, none of these men were ever brought to Lucas County for trial.

This story does provide the most accurate description of the events of the Toledo robbery and the killing of Officer Zientara as the information available to me allows. The names and photographs of all six of the men involved in the crimes are included here. Again, this information was obtained from many other sources. The only information from me that is provided herein is that which was logically inferred from the available sources. Other historical information that may be beneficial to the reader is included in boxes in the text.

The reader must keep in mind that, although indictments were made, no one was ever convicted of the robbery or murder in the Toledo case and, although Fred Burke was charged in the Chicago massacre, no one was ever convicted of that crime.

Hopefully, the reader will realize the connection between the murder of Officer Zientara and one of the most infamous crimes in America's twentieth century. The fact that both crimes were perpetrated by five of the most violent and vicious killers of that era should give one an idea of the risks and danger that all law enforcement officers face each day.

Regrettably, no one will ever know with certainty all of the exact circumstances of these crimes. The one thing that can be said with truth and full reliance is that Officer Zientara died bravely in the service of his community and country.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Almost all of the information in this story was obtained from other sources, all of which are cited at the end of the text. I have simply put this information together in, hopefully, a cohesive and logical sequence. In particular I note the assistance of three authors who related information that is included herein. These interviews all took place in November 2012. I first spoke with Tracie Hill who is a fellow member of the Ohio Gun Collectors Association. Mr. Hill is likely the world's most knowledgeable authority on the Thompson submachine gun. Mr. Hill, in turn, referred me to William Helmer, probably the country's foremost authority on America's gangster era. He further referred me to Chriss Lyon who, at that time, was a 9-1-1 supervisor for Berrien County, Michigan. She advised me that she was in the process of writing a book on Fred Burke and his murder of Officer Charles Skalay in St. Joseph, Michigan in 1929.

Most of all, Officer Beth Thieman of the Toledo Police Department took time from her very busy schedule to provide me with documents, newspaper articles, photographs and other information relative to the American Railway Express Company robbery and the murder of Officer George Zientara in 1928. I could not have obtained most of this information otherwise. Her dedication to the department and its history should be obvious to any observer. Detective Scott Smith of the Scientific Investigation Unit also graciously provided assistance.