

# South Haven Bandit Raid

Presentation to the Annandale History Club

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## The Big News Events in 1903 were:

The Wright Brothers achieve the first powered sustained controlled flight in a heavier-than-air machine, with a pilot aboard (Orville Wright is the pilot).

The first Ford Motor Company was officially incorporated, and sold its first automobile.

The [United States of America](#) and [Panama](#) sign treaty to build the Panama Canal.

Henri Becquerel, Pierre Curie and Marie Curie awarded Nobel Prize in Physics (for research in radiation phenomena).

First box of Crayola crayons was sold.

## Sports in 1903

### In [Baseball](#):

The 1903 World Series was won by the Boston Americans over the Pittsburgh Pirates

- The First Tour de France [cycling](#) race was won by Maurice Garin.

In national news, Cole Younger had been paroled from Stillwater State Prison and had joined Frank James touring the country with the "James Younger Wild West Show." The American Bankers Association had posted a \$4,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of Robert, not George, LeRoy Parker and Harry Longabaugh. It was never claimed. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid actually had been in South America off and on for over two years by that time.

"Free Silver" and "Home Rule" were the political topics of discussion in barbershops and saloons across the country. Neither topic mattered much to the men without jobs or money. These were the men who, in desperation, began to take their share from those who had. As the old saying goes, when you got nothing, you got nothing to

lose. At least in jail you could count on three meals a day and a dry bed.

In Marysville Township on September 12th, Thomas May shot and killed his uncle Martin Day for circulating rumors about his birth that reflected on him. In the December Circuit Court term Thomas pled guilty to first degree manslaughter and was sentenced to life in prison.

The headline on the center front page of the Annandale Advocate-Post for Thursday October 8, 1903 read:  
A bad gang captured  
Sheriff and citizens posse capture bandit gang at South Haven  
Killing one and wounding three badly, two slightly injured.  
No member of the posse injured.

# Annandale Advocate-Post.

ANNANDALE, MINN., THURSDAY, OCT. 8, 1903.

Number 44.

## A Bad Gang Captured.

**Sheriff and Citizens Posse capture Bandit Gang at South Haven, killing one, and wounding three badly and two slightly. No member of posse injured.**

During several weeks past there has been some bold thieving going on about Annandale. Several cellars were robbed of eatables, and stuff was stolen from the railway construction crew's car. On Wednesday, last week, a stranger applied to Theo. Gunnary for some clothing and was taken to the store (now closed) to examine the goods. He looked them over the suits and selected one that suited him and promised to return for it next day. Last night the store was entered and this suit and a lot of goods were taken. Friday morning it was reported that six suspicious characters were playing hobo and living in a box-car at South Haven, and that they had a lot of clothing apparently new trying to sell it to various parties. Mr. Gunnary went

## Health and Education Govern the World.

**The Weak, Sickly and Emaciated Can Hope for But Little Success.**

By Dr. J. F. LANDRY, Minneapolis, Minn.

In compiling the statistics of the different races of people of the world, it is of interest to note the article of diet, the manner in which it is taken and the extent of medical attendance as practiced in the civilized world. It has been demonstrated conclusively that the meat-eaters are the strongest, healthiest and the best educated people in the world; therefore it is reasonable to believe that they are the people who govern the world. As demonstrated by Dr. Landry, the American people consume on an average of six pounds of meat per week; the English, four; the German, three; the French, two; and the Italian, one-half. Statistics prove that epidemics of contagious diseases more

Had almost given up hope when she heard of Dr. Landry. His treatment soon cured her and she is now thankful to him.

Mrs. Mike Schoen, Watkins, Minn., cured of chronic female troubles after many years of suffering. No experiments or operations were necessary to cure Mrs. Schoen.

Mrs. H. C. Antonsen, Perham, Minn., cured of chronic gout of the neck. Only a few months' treatment was necessary to cause the growth to almost entirely disappear.

Mrs. Mary Gassner, Perham, Minn., cured of falling of the womb and female troubles with a few months' treatment.

Fred J. Robertson's child, Park Rapids, Minn., cured of scrofula, nervousness, swollen

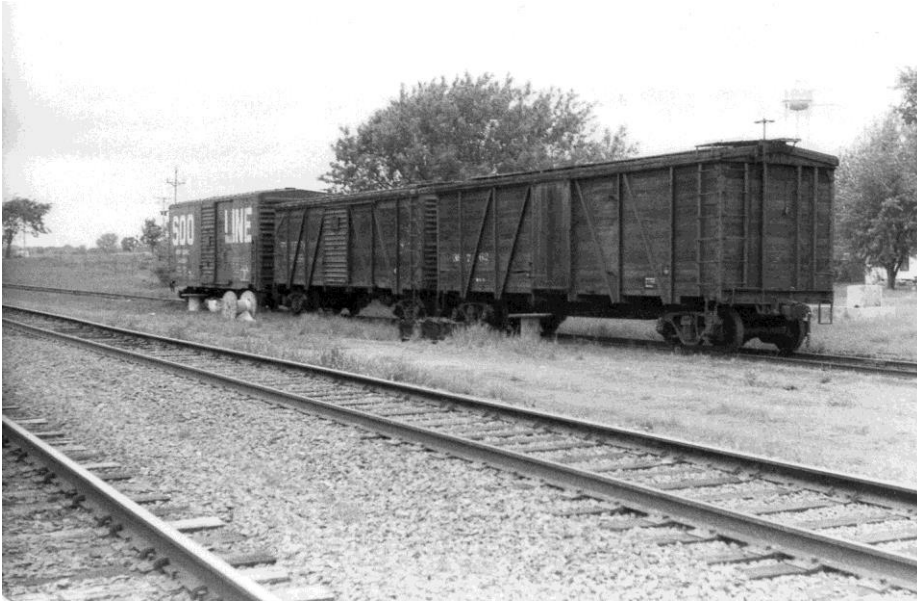
1903 was a bad year. The country was in recession and unemployment was rampant. The condition was aggravated by the mustering out of thousands of Spanish-American War veterans.

These men faced a bleak future; joblessness, inflation and very little promise of work of any kind.



Where it all began. Main Street Annandale just as it looked in 1903. Photo courtesy of Elwyn's Studio, Annandale

This was the way of the world, Wright County and Annandale in October, 1903 when a stranger walked in to the store of H.T. (Theo) Gunnary on Wednesday September 30<sup>th</sup>. He looked over the goods, picked out a new suit and said that he would return for it the next day. That night the store was broken into. That suit, about a hundred dollars' worth of other goods and a small amount of cash was stolen. There were no leads, no witnesses, so there was no kind of pursuit.



The railroad siding where the outlaws holed up in the boxcar in South Haven. Author Photo

The morning of Friday October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Mr. Gunnary was called to South Haven by Village Constable Rinehart Marquardt. Six men were living in a box car on a siding in South Haven and had set up a store selling dry goods and other merchandise from it. The contents of the car became evidence in the case against them in court. Along with the merchandise was a large quantity of dynamite, railroad torpedoes, guns and ammunition.

What the heck is a railroad torpedo?

A railway detonator is a coin-sized device that is used to make a loud sound as a warning signal to train drivers. It is placed on the top of the rail, usually secured with two lead straps, one on each side. When the wheel of the train passes over, it explodes emitting a loud bang. It was invented in 1841 by English inventor Edward Alfred Cowper.

The original uses of detonators were:

As a warning, caution or stop signal in dense fog, when signals are difficult to see

A warning of a train stopped on the line ahead by an incident or accident—the train crew are usually responsible for placing the detonators

A warning of ongoing engineering works ahead

Torpedoes are essentially obsolete in the U.S. as soundproof construction of modern locomotive cabs renders them useless. Today they're used to alert crews working on the rails if a silent runaway train or train carriage is approaching. On a high-speed line, detonators may need to be placed on both rails. As with all explosives, detonators can become unstable over time and must therefore be replaced regularly. They are triggered by pressure rather than impact. This makes them safe during transport, as they normally cannot detonate in a bag or storage container. Detonating them by striking with a hammer does work.

A few casual remarks made by one of the men in a saloon the night before were passed on to the police. Having heard of the Gunnary store robbery Constable Marquardt became suspicious and contacted Mr. Gunnary and asked him to come to South Haven. Mr. Gunnary made the trip and nonchalantly inspected the merchandise and positively identified his property.



A street scene for turn of the century South Haven. This shot may even include a member or two of the posse.  
Photo Wright County Historical Society

Mr. Gunnary signed a formal complaint, the details of the robbery and request for an arrest warrant was telegraphed to the Wright County Sheriff's office in Buffalo along with a request that he make the arrest. The warrant was issued and Sheriff W.G. Young, Deputy John Nugent, Jr. and County Attorney W.H. Cutting boarded the first train out of Buffalo and arrived in South Haven about 11 AM.

From this point on none of the many accounts seem to agree on what took place and in what sequence. In every account that I read or heard the one telling the tale or wrote a story or the father or uncle of who told me their account was the hero of the story. There were more heroes in the story than the number of guys who gave up their seat to the Big Bopper on the plane that killed Buddy Holly in 1959! This is about as close as I was able to determine the logical sequence of events.

According to the Buffalo Journal of October 9<sup>th</sup>, as the officers were standing on the rail station platform discussing a plan of action Constable Marquardt spotted one of the outlaws boarding the train the Sheriff and his party had just arrived on. They could see the man enter the car through the window so Young ran to the front of the car, Nugent boarded at the rear. As he entered the car he met a man with a newspaper under his arm. It was the outlaw so Nugent jumped him and after a short scuffle they had their first one in custody. South Haven didn't have a jail so they took the man to the feed mill and locked him in a storeroom.

Before word could get back to the outlaws they hurried to the freight car and tried to make the arrest. The men were making lunch at the back of the car and refused to come out. Young and Nugent jumped up into the car and left Marquardt to stand guard outside. While Young held two men with his pistol at one end of the car Nugent was searching another man that had been slicing bread in the rear. While he was occupied with the third man another crept up behind and jumped him. Young turned around to see what the commotion was. When he turned back he was looking down the barrels of four Colt 45 revolvers. He laid his pistol down when asked. In a quick maneuver Marquardt was also taken prisoner.

Using the lawmen as hostages the band marched them up the tracks to the feed mill where they secured the release of their friend. Armed with their own arsenal and the lawmen's weapons they backed them up against the wall of the feed mill and made sport of shooting as close to them as they dared. Now this raises a big question. Where the heck was County Attorney Cutting in all of this? No mention was ever made. The shooting roused the town. When the people discovered what was going on they took action and the outlaws were soon headed for the nearby woods.



Looking east on the Soo Line Tracks, the direction the outlaws headed out of town.

Author Photo

Dr. A.D. Haskell grabbed his shotgun and ran out of his office where he met C.M. King with his shot gun and both ran to the feed mill. As the gang ran east on the tracks, W.H. Cutting was firing after them with a 32 caliber pocket pistol. King and Haskell fired with their shotguns but with the short range of the pistol and the light shot in the shotguns it was no use. The heavy 45 caliber Colts kept them too far back to be effective.

As a posse was quickly formed they realized there wasn't a single rifle in all of South Haven. The best they could come up with were a few pistols and shotguns. Attorney Cutting stayed in South Haven and used the new telephone system to call for reinforcements and more guns from the surrounding towns. Embarrassed but re-armed the two officers led the chase.



It was near this point that the outlaws left the roadbed in favor of the nearby woods.

Author Photo

A team of men took a handcar from a siding and headed east on the Soo Line tracks in the direction the outlaws had taken. The rest of the posse headed out on foot, horseback and buggy. The bandits were soon located in a small wood about a mile east of town on the Vogel farm. When I wrote this in 1983 it was the Daniels farm. Skip to Picture #7. The Daniels farm as it appeared in 1983. Most of the timber the outlaws used for cover has been cleared.



A battle plan was laid out by the Sheriff but outlaw scouts heard every word of it and the band tried to slip away.

A report came in that the men had been seen crossing the road near the Vogel farm heading south for Lake Sylvia.



Looking toward the area where the outlaws were spotted crossing the road near the Vogel Farm.

Author Photo

A team of men were sent to cut off their escape route between the road and the safety of the timber surrounding the lake. As this maneuver was taking place Alex Kersten, Village President, (mayor?) and his brother Frank had already cut off the gang by outrunning them and taking up firing posts in the very timber they were trying to reach.



What was left of the woods that the outlaws were trying to reach surrounding Lake Sylvia in 1983.

Author Photo

Alex and Frank kept the outlaws pinned down in a small grove while reinforcements steadily arrived with better guns and ammunition. Soon there were some 25 men in the field well-armed with rifles and heavy shotguns.

The outlaws were pinned in a small bowl shaped, grassy knoll. The weedy area around it made it difficult for posse members to advance without becoming perfect targets. On the other side of the coin, there was no place for the outlaws to go, they were completely surrounded.

With the outlaws firmly contained an assault team was formed and commanded by Deputy Nugent. Heavy fire from the surrounding woods was poured into the bandits' position and at a signal the cover fire stopped and the assault team made their rush. In minutes the battle was over. The leader, whose name was reported to be Gerald Shannon of Rochester, New York, was killed. Three of the men were seriously injured and two suffered minor wounds.

The gang was taken back to South Haven, treated and boarded under heavy guard on the evening train and taken to Buffalo.



The old hotel where the injured outlaws were treated and held until the evening train to Buffalo. This building was burned to the ground in a fire that levelled much of the town in 1911. Wright Co. Hist. Society



WRIGHT COUNTY COURT HOUSE  
Buffalo, Minnesota

The Wright County Courthouse in Buffalo where the outlaws were jailed and tried in 1903. This building served until the 1950's when it was replaced by the current structure.

Most of the names given by the band were believed to be fictitious but the name of their leader Gerald Shannon was authenticated when a request was received from his parents through the Rochester Police that he be buried in Wright County.



Union Cemetery  
Author's photo

An unconfirmed report said that he was buried in an unmarked grave in Union Cemetery east of South Haven. That is the little cemetery at the intersection of County Road 3 and Highway 55 on the northeast corner across from Malco Tool.

Two of the men were so seriously wounded as to remain under doctors' care until their trial in the December term of the District Court. Tom Burns of Seattle, Washington, was hit in the face, head, three wounds in the back, one in the leg and one wound in each arm. James Martin of South Omaha was hit in both arms, the head and one lung. The other three were taken to the Hennepin County Jail in Minneapolis to await their trial as the Buffalo facility wasn't considered secure enough to hold them. Some Wright County citizens got riled about that. Seems they objected to the prices charged to incarcerate out of town prisoners.

As mentioned the case was tried in District Court in Buffalo in December, 1903. All were judged guilty and given terms at Stillwater State Prison. Some of the men issued threats against the members of the posse and the lawmen but nothing ever came of them.

Young and Nugent who were instrumental in capturing the band came away basically without a scratch later to die in a more unusual manner. Sheriff Young came away with a hole in his hat, that was it. The father of Deputy John Nugent was referred to as the most

popular man in Wright County. He was elected Sheriff for 25 years and was United States Marshall for Minnesota, postmaster of Buffalo and president of the Minnesota Sheriff's Association. Junior's actions in the capture of the bandit gang resulted in his later election as Sheriff.

Young never ran for Sheriff again. He moved to Canby, Minnesota and when fires broke out there in 1918 he joined the firefighters. He was trapped in an old well where he had jumped to escape the flames and suffocated.

Several years later Nugent, as Sheriff, was called out to a creamery near Crawford Lake to capture a man stealing butter. The creamery man was Richard Crawford. The two men arranged to take turns watching for the thief but somehow got their signals crossed. Crawford shot and killed Nugent.