

1945

## Meet the Gang

Bernard Rosenberg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bernard Rosenberg, Meet the Gang, 36 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 98 (1945-1946)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

## "MEET THE GANG"

Bernard Rosenberg

The author is a member of the New York Bar, practicing in Brooklyn. He is a member of the American Bar Association, of the American Society of Public Administration, of the American Parole Association and the American Academy of Political and Social Science. He was formerly Director of the Commission on Economic Problems of the American Jewish Congress, Counsel to the Public Administration Alumni Association of New York University and Case Staff member of the New York State Division of Parole. His articles have appeared in popular and technical periodicals.—EDITOR.

He had been an inmate at Sing Sing Prison for a "stick-up with a gun," and he went by the name of "Pete the Bug." The prison records showed that Pete had an I.Q. of one hundred eighteen—the mark of a person of superior intelligence. Yet, there was his monicker bearing proof that Pete was not completely "right in the head."

I asked around, and finally the reason for "Bug's" name filtered through by way of his brother. Pete was a "nut," a "Billy Noodle," a "guy" who thought that every girl he met was in love with him.

Name labeling is a regular practice in "the stir," and in the neighborhoods where "the boys" come from. They size each other up, and then, put their findings in pithy nicknames—names which explain the man in a word—his weakness, his racket, how he works, or some peculiarity about him.

Doesn't the name "Cue-Ball" describe succinctly a young fellow with no hair on his head? Doesn't "Satchels" convey the picture of a man with feet as large as barge boats? What better way is there to characterize someone who has "the face of an angel, and the heart of a killer," than by tagging him "Baby-Face," "Angel," "Sonny," or "Christ-Kid?" Doesn't the name "One-Lung" clearly point to a "T.B. case;" "Hop-a-Long" to a cripple; "Boozehound" to a drunk; "Gabby" to a fellow who talks too much; and "Tool" to a man who is used by others to do the dirty work?

"Pincushion Mike" got his monicker from his method of working. He would stand at busy street corners and stick needles into his arms, cheeks, and legs until a crowd gathered. Then, while Mike gave his one-man show, his brother, "Nick the Dip," would go to work—his fingers hooking wallets out of the pockets of the audience.

William Poole of the notorious Bowery Boys used a butcher knife when he fought in gang wars and when he had a private job to do now and then. His sobriquet was "Butcher Bill." "Butcher," it is said, was able to place a knife through an inch of pine wood at a distance of twenty feet.

Many criminals are labeled "Barber," but this does not mean that they are in the business of giving haircuts. Their racket is often that of slashing the cheek of a "stool-pigeon" for a price.

Sometimes names of knife-men point up the cutting instrument used by them in carrying out an assignment. Riley of the Gopher Gang wielded a razor when he worked, and he was called "Razor Riley." "Tony the Shiv" was as skillful with a blade as any surgeon could be.

Every type of work has its trade-name and many a criminal is marked by the trade he follows. The man who sits in the car while other members of the outfit "heist the joint" is known as a "lookout." "Bull" is a strong man—one who uses physical force to get what he wants. "Fence" is a receiver of stolen goods; "Fly" is a second story man, and "peterman" is a safe-cracker. So a man may be known as "Bull Frankie," "Oscar the Fence," "Tom the Fly," and "Peterman Joe," depending upon the "occupation" he follows.

Mimi Lepreuil was called "Golden Hand." His name resulted from his success in lifting large sums of money when he picked pockets. Joe Golden, head of a "confidence mob," went by the name of "The Butter Kid," and Nathan Kaplan became "Kid Dropper," because as a youngster, he was expert in "the drop," one of the oldest of the confidence games.

Johnny was in the business of stealing automobiles. One day "coppers" shot at the car which Johnny was driving and pouf went the tires of the automobile. Johnny was arrested and "sent up the river to do a bit." Johnny was baptized anew while up in "the can." He was nicknamed "Johnny Flat-Tire."

One day a would-be tough guy named Tony decided to "knock-off" a house of prostitution for the dough he thought he could take. Tony talked it over with "Abie the Lug," and that night they stuck the place up. Why not mix business and pleasure, Tony thought after collecting the sum of thirty dollars and forty-two cents. He handed his gun to "The Lug" and selected a cute blonde. Poor Tony! The police walked in at the most inopportune moment. But, don't think "the boys" in the Big House didn't learn about Tony mixing business and pleasure. Tony became "Tony the Jerk," in no time.

A beautiful beard and a large handlebar moustache gave one thug the name of "Don Whiskerandos," while "Diamond Charley's" name was the result of wearing sparklers on his shirt-front. "Diamond Charley" could well afford sparklers. He had made his fortune selling "knockout drops" to harlots and thugs.

"Dandy Johnny Dolan" was the fashion plate of his day. He wore red and blue bordered kerchiefs, carried a cane with a

swagger, and oiled his hair. "Handsome Sam" and "Gentleman Joe" and "Dan the Dude" ran "Dandy Johnny" a close second when it came to wearing finery. The discerning eye of "the boys," on the other hand, quickly labeled other thugs "Sloppy Joe," "Dirty-Face Ike," and "Slobbery Jim."

Naming a man because of a physical deformity is a very common practice with "the boys." There was "One-Armed Charley," "Three-Fingered Jack," "Frankie the Cripple," "Blind Tommie," and "Single-Sight John."

Jackson's humpback got him the sobriquet of "Humpty Jackson." Jackson was unusual not only because of his appearance but because of the books he read and his knowledge of languages. "Humpty" read Voltaire, Herbert Spencer, Darwin, and Huxley for enjoyment. "Humpty" also had a fair knowledge of Latin and Greek. But "Humpty's" accomplishments didn't stop him from carrying three revolvers on his person—one in his pocket, one in his derby, and one strapped under his hump.

The partial paralysis of his facial muscles gave the vicious killer Mulraney the name of "Happy Jack," a name no one dared call him to his face.

Sometimes taste for certain food gives a man his monicker. "Chuck Connors" got his name because he loved chuck steak broiled over a street fire. "Mush Riley's" name grew out of his fondness for cornmeal mush soaked in hot brandy, and Malloy's liking for boiled oysters caused him to be known as "Boiled Oysters Malloy." One ruffian had a liking for drinking human blood. He soon had the tag "Ludwig the Bloodsucker."

A man is often called by the place of his origin. So there is "London Izzy," "Boston Pete," "Johnny Spanish," "Italian Dave," and "Mike the Mick."

Now and then, "the boys" get into a puckish turn of mind. One convict was named "Muscles" although his arms were as thin as straw and a good, strong wind would have pushed him flat on his face. Another was tagged "Broadway." Actually, "Broadway" was a Bowery bum and "the boys" kidded him by making believe he was "big time."

Women, like their boy friends, also acquire nicknames. "Sadie the Goat" worked hand in glove with her escorts to get possession of Mr. Respectable Citizen's pocketbook. Sadie would lower her head, move forward and butt Mr. Citizen right in the middle of his belly. Mr. Citizen would gasp, but not for long. Sadie's boy friend had eased his pain by slugging him into unconsciousness.

"Hell-Cat Maggie" fought for the Dead Rabbits gang. She had her front teeth filed to points and her nails covered with brass in order to do a good job in a "free-for-all."

"Battle Annie" was no slouch either when it came to waging war. She was a leader of the Lady Gophers of Hell's Kitchen. "Ida the Goose" came from there too. So did "Cora the Blonde."

Because she wore galluses or suspenders to keep her skirt from falling, she was called "Gallus Mag." "Gallus" was quite a "gal." She stood over six feet in height, and was the bouncer in a dive called the "Hole-in-the-Wall." She carried a pistol in her belt and a bludgeon suspended from her wrist. "Mag" had an unpleasant habit. She enjoyed biting off a customer's ear now and then and pickling it in a jar of alcohol.

Fredericka Mandelbaum was matronly looking. Fredericka had a soft spot in her heart for female pickpockets. Fredericka got herself called "Marm" or mother as a result. "Marm" was one of the most successful fences in the country, having handled from five to ten million dollars worth of stolen merchandise. It is said that "Marm" was also a "Fagin." She ran a school where young boys and girls were taught to become pickpockets and sneak thieves.

"Plug Ugly," a notorious negro pickpocket, got her monicker when members of her "mob" tried to describe her face in words. One of "the boys" said that she was so terrible-looking that she reminded him "of a row of yellow-mud houses down south." But ugly or not, "Plug" was certainly "big time." She was arrested fifty-six times, used twenty-eight aliases, and was involved in six felonies.

It doesn't take much imagination to picture in your mind's eye "Lizzie, the Dove," "Gentle Maggie," and "Pretty Kitty," does it? How about "Little Lost Chicken" for a forlorn-looking young girl? "Little Lost Chicken," however, wasn't as pathetic as she seemed. She was a first-class thief and pickpocket.

"Steam-Schooner Ruby" got her name because of her tank-like capacity for drinking steam beer, and "Big Louise" weighed three hundred pounds.

Can you think of a better name to describe the owner of a half-dozen houses of ill-fame than that of "Red-Light Lizzie?" What about "Jane, the Grabber," for a woman whose racket was abducting young girls for houses of prostitution? Doesn't "Sparrow" sort of fit a young piece of sugar who flits from lover to lover?

But alas, "the boys" did make a mistake once in sizing up a member of a "mob." Eddie Jackson, pickpocket out of Chicago, got himself called "Eddie the Immune" because he had served only ten days in houses of correction for the first ten years of his professional career. "The boys" gave him his name

too soon, however. The next thirty years brought Eddie's misfortune. He served ten years in "the stir."

It seldom fails. Ask a man with a record what his monicker is, and invariably he will say that he has none, or that he is called Charlie, or Joey, or Oscar depending upon what his birth name is. You see, "the boys" don't like to hand out their working names. Often they're too embarrassing, and they give law enforcing agents too much ammunition in apprehending criminals.

The story is told of a social worker who once tried to get an inmate's nickname from him.

"What do 'the boys' call you?" she asked.

"Number 9899."

"But Number 9899 is not a name."

The convict shook his head. "Oh yes it is, Miss," he said. "It's my 'pen' name, isn't it?"