

The Chicago Corruption Walking Tour

by Paul Dailing

In honor of 1,001 Chicago Afternoon's 950th story, I'm releasing the first chapter of an expanded version of my popular Chicago Corruption Walking Tour. To learn more about the tour and to read press coverage from NPR's Marketplace, NBC, Reuters, WBEZ, the Chicago Reader and more, visit 1001chicago.com/corruption.

If you are a publisher or literary agent interested in the project, please reach out to me at 1001chicago@gmail.com. If you are not, please enjoy the read and share this pdf with everyone you know who might enjoy it, particularly if they're publishers or literary agents.

*Best,
Paul*

*“A sum of money is a leading character in this tale about people,
just as a sum of honey might properly be a leading character in a tale about bees.”*

-- Former City News Bureau of Chicago reporter Kurt Vonnegut

The Chicago Corruption Walking Tour: A History Book for Explorers

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Address: The intersection of Harrison Street and State Street

GPS coordinates: 41.874558, -87.62759

By 'L': 100 feet north of the Red Line Harrison stop

By bus: #29 bus, Harrison/Congress stop

By Metra: Four blocks east and one block south of the LaSalle Street Station (Rock Island District) or three blocks west and two blocks south of the Van Buren Street Station (South Shore Line, Metra Electric Line)

By Divvy: 150 feet north of the State St. & Harrison St. bike-share dock

Stop 1: Blood, Ballots, and Black Jack's Ears

Black Jack Yattaw had no ears.

At least not according to a *Chicago Tribune* article from 1900, seven years after Black Jack was carried by a chorus of angels to -- if you're of those beliefs -- hell.

He was "the hero of as many rough-and-tumble fights as a prize bulldog, and bore almost as many scars as mementoes of his battles. Both his ears were gone, and the scars on his face were enough to frighten a timid man into a quick decline," according to the article, a paean to the days when political battles ended in blood and knives, written in the first year of and with a sniff of disdain for the 20th century.

In the 21st century, you should be standing on an average street corner by Roosevelt University. Students either from the college or the college prep high school on the kitty-corner hustle by with books and earbuds. A "Media School" that promises careers in broadcasting on a series of train ads has set up shop on the northwest corner, hoping to monetize the intersection's educational cred with some combination of transitive magic and scam.

Green Line and Orange Line tracks run above a parking lot to your southeast. Hotels and offices surround. It's just a street corner. Average. Run of the mill.

Enjoy it. Because if this book has its way, it's the last street corner you'll see.

You'll look at the parking lot just south of you and, instead of Nissans and early bird rates, see the \$1.15 billion sweetheart deal that quadrupled the cost of street parking. You'll

look up at the stoplight and see the \$2 million bribery scheme that installed the digital eyes that track us, or look at Jones College Prep and see the \$23 million of district contracts Chicago Public Schools CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett steered to her former boss in exchange for a 10-percent cut. The 'L' train rumbling to your east will make you see the blackmail and prostitutes that put our transit in the air. The Panda Express fast-food Chinese restaurant a few doors to your north will make you see the imprisoned developer who raised millions for aldermen and presidents. A bit north of that, the aluminum fire owl jutting from the Harold Washington Library will make you see the Council Wars, when a pairing called "the Eddies" ground the city to a halt rather than take orders from the first black mayor.

We could start anywhere in any city and find a story to tell. But this book starts here, at an average Chicago street corner where a ballot led to murder.

Black Jack Yattaw's biography says more about 19th century journalism than it does about him. He was born in Rochester, N.Y., according to the *Chicago Daily Globe*; Syracuse, N.Y., according to the *Chicago Times*; Scotland, according to the *Daily Inter Ocean*; and Portugal if you read the *Chicago Tribune*.

He was 45, 47, 53, or 54 when he died of pneumonia, typhoid fever, or typhoid pneumonia on April 19 or 20, 1893.¹ He came to Chicago as a farmer or sailor before or after the Great Fire.

Personality-wise, he was "as bold a rover as ever cruised on the Spanish main" in the *Times*, was "a harmless crank" who "would cry and whine when [the local police sergeant] started to take him in" in the *Chicago Daily News*. He was "never in the Bridewell but once" in the *Evening Post*, but "In the last ten years the police court records of Chicago show more

¹ This last disagreement is a matter of minutes, as all sources consulted agree he died around the midnight separating the two dates.

cases against Yattaw than any other prisoner” in the *Globe*. His ears were either fine, nicked, sliced off in a knife fight, or had been cropped by authorities out east as punishment for some undisclosed crime. He never killed a man or he did.

Or he killed many.

History is more agreed-upon than known. And it isn’t written by winners or losers, but by whomever best waterproofs their primary source documents.

What is agreed upon is that Black Jack’s bumboat moored near the harbor breakwall by what’s now Buckingham Fountain was the roughest, toughest, most prostitute-laden floating saloon ever to buck liquor and gambling laws by circumventing jurisdictional boundaries. The boat was on the lake side of the breakwall, so was out of city jurisdiction. It wasn’t steam-powered, so the Custom House had no say. Although the breakwall was technically a pier owned by the federal government, Yattaw anchored to the lake bed instead of the wall and spread a plank between pier and boat for people to board. Since the boat wasn’t touching U.S. government property, it was outside of federal jurisdiction. And so on.

In August 1885, city, state, and federal officials gathered at the Custom House, a rickety post-Fire federal building on the block now known for a safety-red modern sculpture called Flamingo, to determine who, if anyone, could nab the floating tavern. Mid-debate, U.S. Commissioner “Uncle Phil” Hoyne² pulled out a copy of the original act that put Illinois in the Union. That act put the eastern edge of the state in the middle of Lake Michigan, rather than the

² This is *not* the Hoyne of Hoyne Avenue. That was Philip’s brother Thomas Hoyne, who for 28 days in 1876 was one of two men claiming to be mayor. The year before, Chicago had signed onto the Illinois Cities and Villages Act, which moved mayoral elections from November to April and extended mayoral terms from one year to two. Mayor Harvey Colvin claimed this gave him another year. Others interpreted the act as starting two-year terms with the next guy. Thomas Hoyne ran on April 16, 1876 as an independent in a write-in campaign, winning handily since neither major party nominated a candidate. The city council and most departments supported Hoyne; the comptroller and police supported Colvin. A police barricade around City Hall both kept riots at bay and entrenched Colvin in the office. On June 5, the Cook County courts declared Hoyne’s election illegal. The city held a special election a week later, electing Monroe Heath. In August, the city attorney retroactively declared Hoyne had in fact been mayor, not in recognition of his claim but so the city department heads he appointed could get paid.

lakefront. Yattaw was within Illinois' jurisdiction, so could have been charged under state law, if the mayor or state's attorney had any interest in going after him. They didn't.

The pirate was political, you see, as much operative as outlaw. It was an era when no one thought otherwise about Second Ward enforcer Yattaw and Second Ward Alderman James Appleton settling a dispute with a bloody, public fistfight -- Appleton won -- or about public jobs and contracts arranged over shots in an alderman's bar. Tavern ownership became a common trade among Chicago politicians in the late 1800s. By 1892, 13 of the city council's 68 aldermen were on record as bar owners. By the time of the 1895-96 council, it was 18. Barkeepers found that people coming in to beg political favors were willing, thirsty patrons, and people looking to get elected or otherwise extend their political influence learned the value of being the center of a community hub.

"So it happened that saloonkeepers sought Aldermanic nominations and politicians seeking Aldermanic nominations became saloonkeepers, so that at one time it seemed as if the sole business of the Council was to represent and legislate for the saloon interests of Chicago," the *Tribune* wrote in 1900.

The era of the saloonkeeper alderman was more democratic in a way, easier for a low-income Chicagoan to find favor at the corner bar than at City Hall. But despite your notions of your grit, rebel cred, and ability to throw back grog with the boys at the bumboat, they were wolves. You, I, and anyone else from the era of changing your profile photo to a fresh "I Voted!" sticker would have been just a few more sheep. Black Jack Yattaw was one of a hundred, of a thousand savages working the corner of crime and politics in various official and unofficial capacities in Chicago's then-34 wards. He wasn't special. He wasn't unique among operators and operatives. In popular culture, Yattaw only survived through a nod in the "Are you a Christian?" section of Nelson Algren's 1951 prose poem "Chicago: City on the Make," splitting a

sentence with a professional thief named John the Baptist in a list of oddly named Chicago criminals Algren cherry-picked from the centuries, wielding noms de guerre like Duffy the Goat, Hungry Joe Lewis, Jew Kid Grabiner, and Fancy Tom O'Brien, the King of the Bunko Men. The populace these infidels fed off suffered a greater lumping in Algren's work: "anonymous thousands living in anonymous rows along anonymous streets, under an anonymous moon."

The pirate Yattaw was just another name on the list, just entertaining enough to keep the newsmen writing about him, even if they couldn't decide whether he was from Scotland, Portugal, or upstate New York.

A saloonkeeper on land as well as water, Yattaw was deep in Second Ward Republican politics from the 1870s to 1890s. Harrison Street, where you're standing, was the boundary at the time between the First and Second wards. The First ran north to the river, the Second ran south to 16th Street. They were both low-income immigrant communities in slum conditions, with the alleyways delivering unnumbered opportunities to find a drink, a card game, some companionship by the hour, or a savage beating under an anonymous moon.

If you're picturing a modern election with silent grade-school gyms and sticker-dealing old ladies, you're not going to understand how a poll watcher in the 1884 presidential election ended up dead a block from where you're standing. To understand this story -- and the rest of the stories of democracy and fraud in this book -- here's a quick look at how that noble American experiment we were taught in school never actually looked like that.

From colonial days through the late 1800s, Election Day was raucous and drunken, and your vote was considered public knowledge. Depending on region and era, a vote could be anything from a shout of support on the courthouse steps to party-line ballots deposited in view of everyone, with the voters' names and picks running in the next edition of the local paper. The

secret ballot and private voting booth we consider so sacred in the 2000s simply did not exist. It's the Britain in us, back from before we were we. Voting in secret was seen as cowardly and unmanly, a "vile Venetian juggle" that would "destroy the noble generous openness that is characteristic of Englishmen," as the colonial governor of South Carolina put it in 1744.³

How much our nation of immigrants, slaves, and expropriated natives inherited British sensibilities is up for debate, but we did inherit their common law. And their taste for hooch Alcohol was a constant in early American elections, either as reward from the candidate after a vote well-cast or a pre-voting reminder that your guy is quite a guy. "Swilling the planters with bumbo," as the ridiculously pre-Revolutionarily named Theodorick Bland of Cawsons called it in 1765, was a British tradition made colonial. An idealistic 23-year-old George Washington tried to go without the bumbo⁴ in his 1755 run to represent Frederick County in the Virginia House of Burgesses. He was eviscerated, getting 40 votes compared to the 271 his looser-with-the-free-hooch opponent received.

When Washington ran again in 1758, he did it providing the 391 Frederick County voters "and unnumbered hangers-on" 28 gallons of rum, 50 gallons of rum punch, 34 gallons of wine, 46 gallons of beer, and two gallons of cider royal⁵ on Election Day. This time, he got 331 votes and stayed in the House of Burgesses up until the Revolutionary War.

The tradition continued after the Colonies became the States. In one voice-vote race in Virginia in 1799, voters would push their way through a throng around the courthouse, state their preference in front of the candidates and a few election judges, get a personal and delightfully old timey thank you from the candidate they voted for ("May you live a thousand

³ James Glen had been governor since 1738 but didn't show up in South Carolina until 1743, when he discovered the locals he had ruled for a half-decade had developed a secret ballot, a property tax, representative allocation based on population, and other political oddities he deemed counter to the mishmash of case law, statute, and tradition that makes up the British constitution.

⁴ Rum, water, sugar, nutmeg. Bumbo.

⁵ Concentrated cider with honey.

years” and “I thank you, sir” aplenty), and then head back out to the courthouse lawn to join the rager.

“Liquor in abundance was on the court green for the friends of either party,” went one account of the race. “A barrel of whiskey for all, with the head knocked in, and the majority took it straight. Independent of the political excitement, the liquor added fuel to the flame. Fights became common, and every now and then there would be a knock-down and drag-out affray, to quell which required all the power of the county justices.”⁶

When a region opted for a paper ballot, it wasn’t what you’re thinking either. Starting with the Colonies’ first paper ballot -- picking the new pastor of a church in Salem, Mass., in 1629 -- the ballots were whatever scraps of paper the voters had on them. In some places, voters walked up to a big, public list and signed beneath the name of the candidate they liked. That, like the voice vote, became impractical as cities grew. During the 1800s, paper ballots evolved into tickets each political party would print up for its own voters, listing only its own candidates. Voters either clipped these ballots out of partisan newspapers or party operatives called ticket peddlers handed them out at the polling places, sometimes with a nice, spendable reward folded inside.

The system had a simpler flaw than bribery: The ballots were all different. Different colors, sizes, fonts, illustrations, logos.⁷ It was very easy to spot someone walking up to cast a vote for the other side and dissuade that wrong-headed suffragist through a kind word, an intimidating word, a delicately gestured-to noose, or a good old American punch in the face.

⁶ This race was so tight and consistently tied the parties started going to the homes of people who hadn’t voted to drag them to the polls. This included two local parsons. The second parson voted for the candidate the first parson didn’t, telling his friend it was solely to cancel out his vote “and now we shall hear no complaints of the clergy interfering in elections.” The eventual winner of the boozy, violent, parson-nabbing contest was future Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall.

⁷ Depending on region and era, Republican ballots were decorated with eagles, elephants, log cabins, or Abraham Lincoln. Democratic ballots had roosters, donkeys, five-pointed stars, or, if accounts can be trusted of efforts to trick newly enfranchised but mostly illiterate black voters in the 1876 presidential election into thinking they were voting Republican, Abraham Lincoln.

Election Day grew into an arms race, with both sides hiring the most intimidating, most violent, and most heavily armed poll watchers they could find.

A rarer use of big nasties -- one alleged more often than proven -- was for "cooping." That's when vagrants and drunks in large cities were kidnapped off the street or out of bars and beaten, drugged, plied with booze, intimidated, coaxed, flattered, bribed, plied with more booze, and kept in a "coop" of other shanghaied citizenry to be let free only after voting in multiple costumes multiple times in multiple locations.⁸

Despite/because of the chaos of booze, bribes, and violence, voter turnout was at record levels across the nation in the 1800s. Presidential elections that gather around 50 percent turnout in our modern times brought turnouts in the high 70s or low 80s.⁹ Some parishes in Louisiana were reporting 112 to 140 percent voter turnout during the Gilded Age, a combination of voter fraud and, to a lesser degree, the fact more people came out for elections than censuses. Elections were more fun.

⁸ Some historians think Edgar Allan Poe was a victim of cooping, as he was found delirious on an election day in 1849 by a polling place in Baltimore wearing shabby clothing that didn't look like his, dying under a doctor's care before he could explain what happened. I'm skeptical. Many of the details came from Poe's doctor, who spent the rest of his life dining out on increasingly dramatic retellings of the writer's death. At various points, Dr. Moran told people Poe's last words were "Lord help my poor soul," "Self-murderer, there is a gulf beyond the stream. Where is the buoy, lifeboat, ship of fire, sea of brass? Test, shore no more!", or an improvised deathbed couplet that both accepted Jesus and rhymed. The cooping theory is possible but unprovable, a fable made suspicious by every teller's urge to give E.A. Poe an appropriately spooky death.

⁹ You might have seen somewhere that the highest voter turnout in history was for Obama's first presidential election. That's also true, but based on comparing the number of voters to the general population, including kids, ex-cons, and others who couldn't vote even if they wanted to. In the 1800s, the difference between voters and population was even greater, since only certain white men could vote. First this was law, then in the Jim Crow era, oppressive local rules, murder, and the threat of murder kept black voter turnout low. Even among whites, the nation in the 1800s was a sample platter of eligibilities divvied state by state. Women could vote in the Wyoming territory as early as 1869, but nationally didn't get the vote until 1920. According to a 1918 breakdown by a University of Chicago scholar, a criminal could vote in Maine, New Hampshire, or Texas in 1860, but a pauper couldn't. Students, soldiers, and sailors couldn't vote in New York, but people legally deemed insane or idiots could. When doing the math on voter turnout, it's more telling to compare the number of people who *did* vote to the number of people who *could* vote, not the population. And eligibility was a moving target throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1871, a few months before Chicago burned in the Great Fire, Illinois passed a law banning the sale or free giveaway of alcohol within a mile of any polling place on any election day. The ordinance left enforcement to local authorities, so party operatives' ability to ply voters with booze depended on how much a town's current mayor cared about that particular liquor law. Compliance varied, which was unsurprising considering the elected figures tasked with enforcing the law stood to gain when it was broken. It wasn't leaving the fox in charge of the henhouse. It was leaving the fox in charge of the fox hunt.

Every problem with the American vote was also going on in Australia, so in the 1850s our friends down under invented the modern secret ballot. It was printed by the state, listed all the candidates from all the parties, and was filled out in a private voting booth. America saw its first "Australian ballot" in Louisville, Kentucky, during the 1888 presidential race. Illinois' first secret ballot was a vote on a liquor license in the small town of Berlin in 1891.

In prep for the new system, two weeks before the race the village sent "a deputation of six solid men of the place" 15 miles away to the capitol to learn from a cadre of Springfield lawyers how to teach Berlin to vote. On July 20, 1891, in "a veritable sweat-box" constructed by his son in the corner of the village squire's office, town elder Moses Bucher, 87, became the first Illinoisan to vote in private. The saloon in question closed its doors election day, as it was within 100 feet of the polling place. After a 35-33 pro-temperance vote, it never opened again.¹⁰

Despite the learning curve that took the democracy from screaming the preferred candidate's name between swigs of bumbo to sober lines leading to a silent, sweaty box, the secret ballot would be nationwide by 1892.

¹⁰ Despite the two weeks of night school leading up to the election, two Berliners still goofed at the polls, scratching out the option they didn't like instead of marking next to the one they did. The papers still printed the names of all the voters and their picks after the race. At this time, the "secret" in "secret ballot" only applied up to the moment the vote was cast.

So on Election Day 1884, in the nation's last presidential election before those sneaky Australian ballots came to the land, bearded, battle-scarred, possibly earless, and absolutely terrifying Black Jack Yattaw showed up for duty. The bumboat brawler had been deputized a U.S. marshal to protect the sanctity of the vote at the Third Precinct of the Second Ward.

The polling place was on the intersection where you're standing right now.

Nov. 4, 1884 started with men.

"A lot of shivering men in seedy garb gathered at the dawn of the bleak morning in front of the local headquarters of the leading parties yesterday... Thinly clad, and with a kind of forbidding look about them, they were, nevertheless, an important factor in the expected turmoil of the great day. They were the ticket peddlers and heelers, whose patriotism is gauged by the compensation of a day's freezing and shivering at the polls," the *Chicago Herald* wrote the next day.

It started with paper.

"There were the Independent Republican tickets with Cleveland and Hendricks' names and electors and Republican state and county tickets; there were the 'greeny' tickets, straight Republican, with the names of Democratic electors pasted in the proper place, or vice versa; there were 'combinations' with the Republican national and Democratic state and county tickets, and they were all placed where they would do the most good."

It started with booze and bribes.

"Attached to each package of tickets was an envelope containing the 'stuff.' This was eagerly grasped by the patriots for hire, and then each one went off in a shuffling gait to his particular precinct, where the 'stuff' was quickly converted to the ardent, which could be had by

way of the back doors of such establishments as were 'closed in obedience to the order of his Honor the Mayor'--at least so the placards on the glass panes of the front door read."

And the election was off.

Election Day 1884 was a gray, wet drizzle in which voters stuck in lines a hundred deep an hour before the polls opened were blattered by rain and an uncomfortable northwesterly wind that never quite manage either to relent or storm. The ticket peddlers and heelers helped voters get the right party's ballot and vote the right way all grim day, rallying and goading the crowds with speeches, one-on-one gladhands, and sometimes-good-natured jeers and barbs at the other party's pack, all fueled by repeated trips to the closed-not-closed barkeeps.

"The voters, however, kept comparatively sober, and the result was that the election was not marked by as many heinous brawls as was expected," the *Herald* wrote.

The press played a role in inciting those brawls, doing their part to instill paranoia, fear, anger, and, in the case of Republican-leaning *Evening Journal*, a near-Trumpian call to arms.

"If the Democrats win the election in Cook county it will be by disfranchising hundreds, if not thousands, of Republican voters and by frauds at the polls or in counting the ballots when the polls close at 7 o'clock this evening. They should be watched."

For voters who had more nuanced opinions than a party-line bid, the peddlers would assist with a deft slice of a hated candidate's name off a party ticket or a "paster" to glue a preferred name over someone else's. As treacherous as altering a ballot seems to our 21st-century sensibilities, these informal hacks and slashes were the first toddles toward a ballot that was able to represent the will of the people. If you liked the Republican national platform and what Democrats were doing locally, or just liked individual candidates on both sides, your options were vote against your conscience in half the races because a piece of paper told you to, or fix the piece of paper.

Watching over the chaos were the rowdiest thugs the U.S. Marshals Service could roust from the bars and deputize.

“As political contests have become more spirited the marshals, acting as party agents simply and having an eye only to party service, have fallen into the habit of scouring the slums for desperate men,” the *Chicago Herald* wrote in an editorial two days after the murder. “Instead of making an effort, as is the case with the police, to find trusty and reputable gentlemen, the exertion is usually directed toward the discovery and enrollment of blood-tubs and ruffians. The manifest purpose of the law under which these appointments are made is to intimidate voters of the party which does not chance to be in power, and no secret being made of this, it naturally follows that the more terrible a deputy marshal can be made the more good will his party receive from his services.”

Black Jack Yattaw was good at his job.

The pirate was one of U.S. Marshal “Long” Jones’ picks for a blood-tub Republican for the polling place at Harrison and State, along with an ex-cop named John Fletcher who had been dismissed for cowardice after a fellow officer’s murder, and an alcoholic hack driver named Big Jim Smith. Meanwhile, and conspicuously ignored by the Democrat-leaning *Herald*, the Democrat-led Cook County Board was filling the ranks of special constable with its own bruisers. The strongarms of Chicago were being divvied by party, given badges of competing agencies, and sent into polling places across the city armed, liquored, and told they were in charge.

“It was hardly to be expected that yesterday would pass without bloodshed,” the next day’s *Evening Journal* wrote.

The exact nature of what happened where you're standing hides somewhere between tales told 130 years ago by political hacks and goons on a witness stand trying to save their own skins, their lies, truths, and half-drunk reminiscences filtered through history by party-loyal newspapers hellbound to deify whichever gang happened to be on their side. In short, stories vary. But it started with the orderly procedure of electoral politics and ended with U.S. Deputy Marshal James Smith pointing a gun at Chicago Police Officer Edward Clare's face, drunkenly screaming some variation of how he would "kill any white sons of bitches who wore a tin star."¹¹

When the polls closed at 7 p.m., two-and-a-third hours after the sun finally gave up on the cold muck of a day, bustling representatives from each party headed to the back room to witness the vote-counting and ensure a shenanigan-free election. That was the job of the precinct committeemen, which for the Republican side in this particular precinct was a doctor named C.H. McAllister. Dr. McAllister was elsewhere when it was time to do his witnessing, so Fletcher, the Republican supervisor for the site, asked Yattaw to fill in. At this point, an argument broke out, either because a Democrat ticket peddler objected to a man hired to intimidate voters stepping into committeeman duties, or because a very drunk Smith started shouting he got to watch the counting if Yattaw did. Pushing, shoving, yelling, Democratic constables and Republican deputy marshals each rushed in to help their side, a partisan rumble that ended with a marshal gun in a cop face.

"I'll kill any white sons of bitches who wear a tin star."

Or some variation.

¹¹ Fletcher and Smith were black; Yattaw was white. Fletcher had been one of several black Chicago police officers in the 1800s, the first being James L. Shelton in 1871. African-Americans were fiercely loyal to the Party of Lincoln from Reconstruction through 1936, when more than 70 percent of black voters went for FDR over the GOP's Alf Landon. "Since President Franklin [Roosevelt] and the New Deal, being black and Republican was about as compatible as being black and aspiring to leadership in the Ku Klux Klan," the black-focused *Chicago Defender* newspaper wrote in 1976.

After Yattaw and Fletcher talked Smith down, Officer Clare arrested Yattaw and Smith in the name of the police. When Clare stepped outside to hail a paddy wagon, Yattaw and Fletcher arrested Smith in the name of the marshal's office. So Smith had now been arrested twice, once by his own agency. Fletcher and Yattaw -- who, remember, was also under arrest -- started hauling the double-arrested and still quite drunk Smith north to the Custom House to face the full brunt of the law, not from the Democrat-backed local police but from the Republican-led federal authorities who appointed Smith in the first place.

A mob followed, demanding Fletcher and Yattaw take Smith to the Harrison Street police station, where they could be sure he would actually face charges. Yattaw yelled back that they would never go to the police, so the federal agents trod on, joined by howling politicians and patriots from both parties. Some screamed for their heads, some screamed for the heads of the people screaming for their heads, and a man named Randall Woodfolk begged Fletcher for a gun so he could kill some white sons of bitches too.

If you take this book and walk a block west, you'll hit a street called Plymouth Court. There's a Starbucks there, and a self-park lot. There's a linotype factory turned luxury condo on the third corner and the Jones Prep teachers' lot on the fourth. This intersection is where disgraced ex-cop John Fletcher and floating whorehouse proprietor Julius Yattaw, in their roles as representatives of the nation's oldest federal law enforcement agency, started firing into the crowd. The mob scattered. A Democratic ticket peddler named Moses Zamonski was shot in the foot as he tried to run away. A special constable named William Curnane¹² was not as lucky. A

¹² If you're doing research on this, look up "Curran" or "Curnan." Those were the names the press attributed to him before the courts located his mother, who wrote from Canada to say, yes, that was her son and that the family's name is Curnane.

bullet struck him in the neck. He bled out on the floor of a butcher shop where he tried to find shelter. The spot where the constable died is now the condo complex parking lot.¹³

Fletcher, Yattaw, and Smith disappeared into the dark and rain, at some point popping up at the Custom House to turn Smith over to “Uncle Phil” Hoyne. Police arrested Fletcher and Smith there, squirreling them away to an undisclosed location to stymie the lynch mobs they feared would follow, but Black Jack had vanished again.

Police found Black Jack Yattaw at 8:30 p.m. back at the Third Precinct, Second Ward polling place on the corner of Harrison and State. He had returned to continue watching the counting of the votes.

The Republican gunplay at the Third Precinct of the Second Ward was an immediate scandal because, hey, dead body. No one realized what the Democrats pulled a mile and a half north, at the Second Precinct of the 18th Ward, for two weeks, until election canvassers opened an envelope containing the returns from the recent state senatorial race. This second scandal was ultimately more dangerous to democracy. It was also sort of stupid.

“The word ‘four’ in the sentence ‘Henry W. Leman had four hundred and twenty votes for State Senator,’ as it was originally written, had been erased, and the word ‘two’ had been written in its place. And the word ‘two’ opposite the name of Rudolph Brand, as originally written, had been erased, and the word ‘four’ written in its place, making the vote to appear to be four hundred and seventy-four instead of two hundred and seventy-four,” a later history of Chicago would recall.

¹³ Their defense at trial was that a group of special constables, unprovoked, started to threaten Smith in the polling place, so Yattaw and Fletcher arrested Smith for his protection. While “peacefully and lawfully proceeding to [the Custom House], ... they were assaulted and fired upon with pistols and other deadly weapons in the hands of a large body of armed men, among whom was said Curnan [sic.], greatly outnumbering your petitioners.” Then, they claimed, one of the special constables shot Curnane, one of their own men, for no reason. Not the silliest defense you’ll read in this book.

The *Chicago Tribune* the day after the discovery added the even sadder detail that the new numbers were written “in a peculiar shade of ink differently colored from the rest of the writing.”

Maybe today it's in the office towers and glitzy bars of River North or in that big community garden along Chicago Avenue. Maybe it's where the condos bloom by the former Cabrini-Green or in the last industrial holdouts on the southern half of Goose Island -- it doesn't matter. Wherever within the old 18th Ward it happened, someone committed a fraud parents would laugh at a grade schooler for pulling on a report card. They scribbled a two to a four and a four to a two in the wrong color.¹⁴

And that is the sum of American political history. All it's ever been, from Washington's bumbo to Black Jack's pistols to the modern fiddling and finagling with voter ID laws and gerrymandered borders, is a battle to switch two to four, to make the official version of the people's choice anything but what the people chose, justifying our sins as savvy because, jeez, have you seen the other guys? The scribblers in the 18th Ward and bloody Yattaw of the Second are more than some old timey stories to kick off our tour with insight and bloodshed. They're our baseline, the purest politicians. Their same mix of savvy, brutality, and true belief in a cause fuels civics today. The 1800s just used a cudgel while we prefer a spreadsheet.

¹⁴ The *Daily News* found out that, a few days after the two and four were spotted, the ballot box was taken to a saloon near the old courthouse at Dearborn and Hubbard to be stuffed with hastily added ballots to confirm the hastily scribbled numbers. The tickets were all new and clean, recently printed, and folded in the exact same manner. The forgers even put down Leman's father-in-law and brother-in-law as having voted for Brand. The race was vital in setting the razor-thin party majority down in Springfield, and the precinct was vital in the race since, overall, Democrat Brand had “won” the race by 10 votes. The state legislature and Gov. John Marshall Hamilton later flopped the results, giving Republican Leman his likely rightful seat. The printer who forged the hasty ballots flipped on the conspirators. There was a trial, fines, and jail time. “He is not as pretty as he once was, but he knows a heap more,” the *Trib* wrote after conspirator Joe Mackin was pardoned in 1889.

At 10 a.m. Jan. 30, 1885, the jury appeared before Judge Joseph E. Gary¹⁵ to announce the verdict in Curnane's murder. Smith was acquitted. Fletcher was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to two years hard labor. Black Jack Yattaw -- bumboat conman, political strongarm, possible killer, possible crank, possibly earless -- was cleared of all charges.

"He may be a very bad man but he was not on trial for that," Yattaw's lawyer told the *Tribune* after the acquittal.

Black Jack died a few years later, either a villain or some mild local color depending on where you got your news in 1893. The Floating Bethel Association bought the bumboat and converted it into a floating church ministering to sailors and orphans along the Chicago River.

The *Chicago Tribune* article from 1900 memorializing Black Jack's scarred, earless face was headed with portraits of Yattaw¹⁶ and the other "Last of the Old School Bosses" superimposed over sketches of men in suits punching, slashing, and shooting each other. The artist flanked the tableau with drawings of the Roman axes called "fasces."

That's where we get the word "fascism."

"Those who are still alive are most of them settled down, and in the days of their peaceful and quiet old age watch with something like contempt the careers of a new generation

¹⁵ A year later, Judge Gary would oversee a trial that sentenced seven anarchists to death and an eighth to 15 years in prison after dynamite was thrown at police during a workers' march asking for an eight-hour workday. Seven officers were killed in the Haymarket Affair (or Massacre, depending on your politics) and, in the ensuing riot, police started firing into the crowd, killing a still-unknown number of marchers. The jury sentenced the eight anarchists despite no evidence any of them were involved in the bombing, and only three were even at the march, facts Gary considered immaterial. He instructed the jury -- incorrectly -- that the law stated that if the bomb-throwing was advised and encouraged, "then those who gave such advice and encouragement are guilty of the murder." He also appointed bailiff Henry Ryce to select jurors who believed the men guilty. Gary even allowed a relative of a bomb victim onto the jury. Four of the anarchists were hanged, three were pardoned by Gov. John Peter Altgeld, and one killed himself in prison by biting into a blasting cap, blowing away a portion of his skull. He didn't die for six hours.

¹⁶ Drawn with, it should be mentioned, ears.

of political bosses, who depend more on intrigue and careful manipulation than upon the strength of their good right arms and their reputations as fighting men,” the article said.

You’re going to head north now, but if you were to go two blocks south, to State and Polk, you would be at the site of Ald. James “Jim d’App” Appleton’s saloon, where in 1886 a black political operative named Ike Rivers bit off d’App’s thumb and a chunk of his lip in a brawl over a political appointment to the post office. Later in this tour, you’ll see the site of the hotel where in 1895 Ald. Buck McCarthy bit off a piece of Ald. Joe Lammers’ ear. Don’t worry -- Buck got his comeuppance the next spring when Ald. Billy Webb flattened him in a sheep pen in Springfield.

The article with the shootings and brawls girded by fasces mourned the new crop of 20th-century politicians, calling a few out by name as symptoms of the new, weaker era.

“Of the present Aldermen from the First Ward ‘Hinky Dink’ Kenna is too small and slender in figure to ever cut much of a figure in a ‘mix-up,’ while the ‘Bath-House’ depends for popularity on his startling clothes and squeaky tenor voice. In the good old days, the fighting politicians of the First would have beaten the head off a candidate for office who wore vests covered with large pink polka dots and sang sentimental love ditties of his own composition.”

Tiny Hink and singing Bathhouse John found a new, 20th-century way to link politics and blood. We’ll meet them at the next stop.