

Caught by Surprise

John Dillinger was a murdering bank robber who always managed to get away. That is, until he showed up in Tucson, 75 years ago this month.

By KENDALL WRIGHT

Turns out, Tucson in January wasn't such a great idea for John Dillinger. The weather was nice, and the Hotel Congress offered first-rate accommodations, but it was the cops that ruined things. To the surprise of everyone,

TUCSON

including Dillinger himself, the local police did what the FBI couldn't and captured the notorious gangster on January 25, 1934.

"Well I'll be damned!" Dillinger exclaimed, amazed that Tucson's bush-league police officers nabbed him without firing a single shot — something the combined forces of several states and the FBI had been trying to do for almost a year.

Seventy-five years later, the city still celebrates the historic moment during its annual Dillinger Days event, which features re-enactments of the arrest, live music, tours, lectures and an antique car show. This year's event takes place on January 24.

Back in the '30s, things were less festive. It was the Great Depression, and Dillinger dominated the headlines for a series of bank robberies and murders across the United States. In a period of eight months, Dillinger and his gang had robbed more than five banks, plundered four police arsenals and ruthlessly mur-

dered several people involved. What's more, he was frustrating law enforcement agencies along the way.

It was after a bank robbery in East Chicago, Indiana, during which an officer was killed, that Dillinger and his mob headed south to Tucson to hole up for a while.



John Dillinger

They were staying on the third floor of the Hotel Congress, under aliases, when a fire broke out. After being told of the fire by the desk attendant working the switchboard, the gang fled down aerial ladders but forgot their luggage. With the encouragement of a \$12 tip from the gangsters, a couple of firefighters retrieved the heavy bags, discovering afterward that they'd been packed with a small arsenal of weapons and \$23,816 in cash.

A few days later, one of the same firemen recognized Dillinger's men in a story in *True Detective* magazine. A subsequent tip led to a stakeout at a house on North Second Avenue,

where Dillinger was eventually captured. Although the arrest occurred without a bloody shootout, it put Tucson police in the history books as the law enforcement agency that finally captured Public Enemy No. 1.

For more information on Dillinger Days, call 520-622-8848, ext. 267 or visit visittucson.org.

50 years ago
IN ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

The January 1959 issue of *Arizona Highways* made a point. Fun intended. It featured "Cactusland, U.S.A.," with Arizona as its capital. Among other things, the issue included a colorful portfolio of cactus blooms and detailed illustrations of cactus spines, as well as a story about crenates' curative powers. No prescription necessary.

This month in history

■ ON JANUARY 1, 1895, the Sisters of Mercy opened St. Joseph's Sanatorium, a 12-bed hospital in an adobe cottage located at Fourth and Polk streets in Phoenix. The nuns



devoted their lives to caring for tuberculosis patients.

■ IN JANUARY 1890, two teachers from Tucson were reinstated after being discharged from their duties for enforcing corporal punishment.

■ ON JANUARY 8, 1774, Juan Bautista de Anza set out



from Tubac on his first expedition to California, where he eventually located the sites for Presidio de San Francisco and Mission San Francisco de Asis.

■ IN JANUARY 1899, the Fifteenth Territorial Legislature met in Prescott and voted to move the capital to Phoenix. Then they promptly adjourned and reconvened in Phoenix.

■ IN JANUARY 1865, trapper James Ohio Pattie traveled along the San

Francisco River in Eastern Arizona and, along with a companion, trapped 250 beavers in 14 days. Pattie is believed to be the first American citizen to travel in Arizona.

