A Most Striking Character: Pat Murnan of Columbus
by Donald M. Schlegel
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The Business - Later Years
During this period Pat’s gambling business was coming back to the fore. His main operation was on the south side of Broad Street, just west of High, variously listed as 9 1/2, 13 1/2 or 15 1/2 West Broad, in the three buildings that stood just east of the Wyandotte Building. Doersam’s Restaurant occupied various parts of the ground level over the years. According to Bob Thomas, “the place was entered by a corridor and then a long, narrow staircase up to the rooms. There was a ‘lookout window’ in a wall on the west side and a bolted door at the top of the stairs.” The space consisted of two floors, each with three rooms. The gambling equipment, in the east and center rooms on the upper floor, included (in 1937) a crap table, a black-jack table, a chuck-luck table and cage, two roulette tables, a faro table, and a poker table.

This by no means was Pat’s only gambling location. In 1931 he was renting some rooms on South Wall St. There he set up a gambling ‘club’ that offered roulette, craps, stud poker, and black-jack. The rooms were protected by two doors, in series, each with a lookout; a third man in a nook overlooked the gambling room and the inner door and controlled the door locks electrically. Temporary locations also were used, sometimes to serve a specific clientele, such as those who came to town for races. Groveport (the Woods Club), Shadeville, and a house on Murnan’s farm west of Alton (the Western Club) also are mentioned.

For the most part, the police did not bother Pat. In this they reflected the general attitude of the city. The newspapers of 1902 quoted the Columbus Safety Director, who stated, “that he would permit gambling. He insisted that gambling could not be prevented and he said he had ideas as to its regulation. He said that a great many people come into the city for a
good time.” In an editorial the *Columbus Daily Press* remarked, “Gambling exists in this city in many forms. It exists at what are known as gambling ‘joints,’ the proprietors and hangers on of which are pointed to with scorn by the stock gamblers. When the stock gamblers pay money to legislators it is for the purpose of ‘protecting vested rights.’ When a plain gambler does the same he is an unfit member of society.”

However, problems with the law cropped up when political purposes were served.

**1902 Arrest**

The only such incident prior to the year 1917 had occurred in 1902. That year the Citizens’ League of Columbus began a crusade against gambling, claiming that there were thirty gambling houses in the city. The city safety director and the Democratic *Columbus Daily Press* both thought the League was working in the interest of the Republican Party to embarrass the Democratic city administration. The League had a constable go to arrest Pat on Friday afternoon, August 1, at his South High location. Murnan had been tipped off and closed his upstairs rooms for the day, but he was arrested in his saloon and was quickly released on bond. The constable seized a rickety old roulette table as evidence. Police also arrested Guy Gobble and John Alexander (called the Black Prince), both operators of gambling houses on North High Street.

Murnan was charged with conducting a gambling resort and at a preliminary hearing the magistrate found Murnan guilty and bound him over to the police court for a full trial. Murnan declared after that hearing that he was willing to bet $100 that he would never be convicted by a jury of twelve men.

The Citizen’s League swore another affidavit against Murnan and filed it in Worthington. Two constables came from Worthington to Murnan’s saloon on August 14, arrested him, and took him north, where he was bound over for another trial. The multiple actions against Murnan brought statements from “a prominent business man” and a prominent Republican attorney in the *Columbus Daily Press* to the effect that the League’s acts smacked of persecution and disrespected the local courts, were intended to bolster the “forlorn hope” of a Republican congressional candidate, and showed absolute ignorance of the law. At Murnan’s jury trial on August 21 the earlier testimony was repeated, but the first two witnesses against him denied portions of their earlier testimony. The League’s third witness threw another wrench into their plans, testifying that the League’s agent had asked him to report that he had gambled at Murnan’s place and lost, though he did not see Murnan in the room and saw nobody gamble there. After additional testimony pointing to the political nature of the League’s attacks, Murnan was acquitted by the jury. He likewise was acquitted in Worthington when the prosecution’s witness failed to appear.

**1917 Trials**

A similar, politically inspired series of events took place in 1917, involving charges of police protection, a raid on a gambling house, and a charge of assault. The Safety Committee of city council, claiming that the gambling hall proprietors were buying protection from the police, conducted hearings that summer. Homer Byers, who formerly had worked for Murnan’s Taxicab Company and had accompanied Pat and Grace on their trip to California in 1915, spoke before the committee. Byers had been arrested in April on grand larceny charges for stealing three tires from Murnan Taxicab. At the hearings Byers testified regarding Murnan’s connection with the Pine club and another gambling house. He also accused Murnan of bribing Safety Director Michael Barry. “On one occasion, Byers testified, Murnan folded up some money in bills, put these into an envelope, pocketed the envelop and was then driven by him (Byers) directly to Director Barry’s home.” On hearing this, “Said Murnan last night: ‘I’ll take
an oath that I never gave Mike Barry 1 cent, and that Homer Byers lied when he said he drove me to Barry’s home with a package of money.” He said that Byers confessed he perjured himself in testifying concerning the street car strike, and is under indictment for alleged theft of tires from the Murman garage.\(^{32}\) Murnan was not charged in this investigation.

In October the sheriff raided a gambling house in Shadeville. Although he found no patrons there, arrest warrants were filed against Murnan and Walter Hicks as owner and manager, respectively. Each posted an appearance bond. On October 26 Murman was indicted by the grand jury for keeping a place where gambling was permitted and exhibiting gambling apparatus for gain. Murman went to the sheriff’s office and was released on bond.\(^{33}\) (Unfortunately, no information regarding the outcome of this case has been found.)

Meanwhile, Homer Byers charged that Murman, with no provocation, had brutally assaulted him at Broad and High, cutting him in the face. A charge of assault and battery was formally filed and Murman pleaded not guilty at a hearing on October 19. A week later he was fined $25 and costs. Byers promised a jury case over the matter and in May 1918 the case came before a jury, which returned a verdict in favor of Murman. Byers “had uttered threats that he’d ‘get’ Murman” after being arrested for allegedly stealing Murman’s tires and had assumed a menacing attitude towards Murman just before the blow was struck.\(^{34}\)

**Later Incidents**

Three other incidents, beginning in the 1920s, seem to have been less politically motivated, but the police raids were ill-timed and were not a deterrent to the business. In the summer of 1921 during the Grand Circuit meeting at the Driving Park, Murman and another “well-known Columbus gambler” rented a house on Parsons Avenue for the week to set up entertainment for the out of town visitors. They equipped the front door with trick locks and brought in two roulette wheels, craps tables, faro layouts, stud poker tables; plenty of comfortable chairs, curtains cash boxes; and plenty of cheer, including spiked cider, whisky, moonshine, home-brew, and anything else a gambler could want. A still was set up to keep the supply coming. After a week of work, the pay was high, setting a record that had not been surpassed during the days when gambling was wide open in the city.

A police raid on Sunday, July 31, after the action had wound down, cornered twelve men in the house, some of them workers and the rest visitors. Murman chuckled to himself as the men gave false names to the police and, as they were loaded into the police vehicle, Murman slipped out the back door. On Monday he went to police headquarters, pleaded not guilty to the charge of conducting a game of chance, and asked that his case be continued. He was the only one of the men cornered at the house who appeared for a hearing, all the others having forfeited their bonds. The case against him was dismissed in August.\(^{35}\)

In 1925 Murman, Walter P. Hicks, Earl C. Gardner, Louis J. Casbarro, and Elmer J. Hughes joined forces to incorporate and open The Woods Club, a “rendezvous for students of English literature.” Located at Walnut Heights near Groveport, it included a gambling room. It came under investigation in July and on August 14, as some forty men were gambling there, police raided it. Pleas of not guilty to charges of owning and operating a gambling den were entered for all five of the well-known gamblers. The charges against Gardner were dropped and the other four men changed their pleas to guilty and each was fined $100 and costs. Mr. Hughes suggested that he pay the fine on the installment plan, to which the judge retorted, “No, you didn’t shoot craps on the installment plan.”\(^{36}\)

In 1931 Murman was renting some rooms at 115 1/2 South Wall st. There he set up a gambling ‘club’ that offered roulette, craps, stud poker,
and black-jack. Just before midnight on April 8, members of the police vice squad overcame all three lookouts and smashed both doors, cornering Murnan and 42 other men. Sixteen of the men were arrested and taken to the police station, where Murnan was charged with operating a gambling house and the others, including Brocky Jones and Louis Casbarro, with being in a gambling house. They all posted bond and were released. At Murnan’s trial on May 5 police witnesses admitted that they had seen no gambling but the presence of gambling paraphernalia and the fact that fourteen others had already pleaded guilty of gambling was enough to convict Murnan. He was found guilty and fined $150. The ruling was immediately appealed but was affirmed in October.37

Evils Avoided
Public opinion, at least in the early years, clearly considered Pat’s business a benign one. The newspapers claimed that gambling was among his lesser interests and that his honest methods were a bulwark against the influx of undesirable characters into Columbus. Officials frequently acknowledged his service in keeping Columbus clean of many evils that infested other cities. He was in position to know the ‘Who’s Who’ of the underworld, and when persons of undesirable character sought a foothold in the city, he saw to it that they made “hurried and confused exits across the corporation limits.”38

In addition, he vigorously discouraged gambling by those who could not afford to lose and stories of his generosity to this type were legion. When he learned that a player at his gaming tables had lost more than he could afford, the gambling king in many cases ordered the player’s losings returned.39

Good Influence on Grace
Pat seems to have treated Grace with great respect and had an increasingly positive influence on her. He provided a home for her aged mother, Mrs. Sarah Daugherty. At the end of 1915 he traded property in the south end for the house at 21 E. Oakland Avenue on the north side, which became Sarah’s home until her death three years later.40

Grace and Pat continued to live separately for a few years after their marriage. In August of 1917 she closed her “sporting house” at 140 South Front Street and converted it into a legitimate rooming house. She sold this property in 1918, as a site for part of the growing Lazarus Department Store; she used the proceeds to build a structure on a lot that was in Pat’s name, but he spoke of as hers.41

In 1919 Pat bought a 73-acre farm on North High Street, south of Worthington, stretching from the road to the Olentangy River.42 He named it Graceland Stock Farm, in Grace’s honor, and it was about this time that they began to live there together as husband and wife.43 They probably had their marriage blessed by the Church about this time. No record has been found, but it would be difficult to think of all the possible locations to search for a record of the ceremony. It may have been handled by one of Grace’s nephews, Monsignor James M. McDonough of Cleveland or Father Charles W. McDonough of Youngstown. The Murnans became members of Immaculate Conception Parish.

Pat wrote a deed for Graceland to Grace in 1922. It was a showplace and was said to have been in “an aristocratic district.”44 No photograph of Graceland seems to exist, but we know that the house had a hall, reception room, large living room, dining room, kitchen, and Grace’s bedroom on the first floor. On the second floor were four bedrooms, the one in the southeast apparently being Pat’s.45

In 1928 Pat bought the Foley farm of 723 acres in Prairie Township. It was on the south side of the National Road or West Broad Street, half way between the present Murnan Road and Darby Creek Road, including the present Darby Dan airstrip and extending south-southeast almost to the intersection of Murnan and Alton roads. He
rented this out as an operating farm. He soon owned over a hundred race horses, part of them at Graceland, part on the West Broad Street farm, and part in training at Latonia, Ky.

Pat also owned considerable real estate in the city. This included the house at 96 E. 18th Ave. where he and his mother had lived at various times; the building at 997-1001 N. Nigh St. at the southwest corner of Starr, containing three store-fronts and six apartments; a three-story building at 696 N. High St., housing a cafe and ten apartments; lots on Arcadia Ave.; and a lot in Sharon Heights. The building at 989-991 N. High St. was in Grace’s name and held a storefront and eight apartments, called the Murnan Apartments.

A Striking and Generous Character
Pat Murnan was a gregarious character and an honest man. Everyone in the city knew his friendly, Irish face and his spontaneous smile. His clothing was of the loudest hues and the biggest checks and shone with huge diamond studs. He was a tall man--well over six feet--and always carried a gold-headed cane.

His honesty was legendary. Pat’s niece once heard Mrs. Galvin tell Pat that he needn’t show her any legal papers to prove a point, for “you never told me a lie in your life.” Judge Barnes credited him with operating his disorderly business in an unusually orderly and honest manner.

Murnan naturally favored his own race and was a member of Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, but he was big-hearted and humanity-loving, a friend to every man regardless of his creed, race, or color. Besides all the help he gave to the many hard-luck boys who sought his aid, throughout his life he developed a passionate love for Columbus and he donated to churches, hospitals, schools and charitable organizations. He never permitted any publicity of these gifts and their total amount could not be estimated, but it was thought they totaled many thousands of dollars. “In his later years, when he became financially secure, it has been rumoured he gave away more money than he made. Many times he told his friends: ‘A man only needs so much money, and if he makes any more, he should give it to charity.’”

Pat’s employees were his “boys” and chief among them was Carl E. “Brocky” Jones, who was almost thirty years Pat’s junior and joined him about 1917 at some 24 years of age. Jones lived in one of Pat’s apartment buildings and took over Pat’s Broad Street gambling hall after his death; he survived Pat by only three months.

Only once did his generosity and trust of others get him into deep trouble. Once he told a friend, “I need a mouthpiece -- Old Whiskers (Uncle Sam) has got the finger on me.’ Pat went on to say that he had a little ‘eye-talian’ boy working for him who had fouled up his books on his income tax reports.” In 1933 Murnan and Louis Casbarro were indicted in Federal court for income tax evasion for the 1930 tax year. Each pleaded not guilty but Murnan was fined $1,500 and Casbarro $800 by a federal judge in June, 1934.

On the night of Sept. 12, 1935 Murnan heard a disturbance in front of his establishment near Broad & High and went to investigate. Two men known as “Yellow” and “Bootleg Frank” had started to fight. When a crowd gathered around, John Radcliff, a friend of “Bootleg Frank”, in a state of intoxication, drew a knife and threatened the crowd. Murnan took a mace from David Deshler, one of his employees, and went toward Radcliff to disarm him, but Radcliff gave him a three-inch gash on the right temple. Murnan was taken to Grant Hospital in a weakened condition, having lost a large amount of blood. As Murnan recovered he went to Magnetic Springs for a rest and also spent some time at Mt. Carmel Hospital. At Radcliffe’s trial in March, 1937,
Pat appeared in a wheelchair to testify. A jury found Radcliffe guilty of assault and battery.\(^5^4\)

After that incident Pat’s health gradually failed. He died of a heart attack at Graceland on the evening of Wednesday, May 12, 1937, attended by his wife and a nurse. He received conditional last rights from Father Fagan, pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, presumably after the heart attack and his apparent death.

At Egan-Ryan funeral home, “They who paid tribute were not of any one walk of life. They were young and old, well-dressed and shabbily garbed, but it was noticeable how many of those who came to bow their heads wore the plainest clothing. There were a number who passed his bier leaning on canes. Friends said Pat’s charities had continued to issue from his bedside ...As he lay awaiting this morning’s solemn requiem Mass, he held, entwined in his right hand, a rosary of black, wooden beads, the gift to him some time ago of the bishop of his Church.”

His funeral was a solemn requiem Mass at St. Joseph Cathedral, offered by his pastor, Father John J. Fagan, Msgr. John J. Murphy (as deacon), and Father Raymond S. Bauschard (as subdeacon). It was attended by both those who controlled large business institutions and those who depended on charity for their daily bread. Honorary pallbearers included Joseph F. Carr, Earl Doersam (proprietor of the restaurant below the gambling hall), long-time friend Alfred Carey, sergeant of detectives of the Detroit Police Department George Milay, and Louis Casbarro, a life-long friend and rival gambler. In the sanctuary were Msgr. James M. McDonough of Cleveland and Fathers Charles W. McDonough of Youngstown and E. C. McEniry, O.P., chaplain at Mt. Carmel Hospital, and J. A. Sullivan, O.P.\(^5^5\) Burial was at St. Joseph Cemetery, in St. Agnes Section, lot 269.

The Columbus Dispatch editorialized, “By his death Columbus has lost a striking character. Many people in all stations of life have lost a true and sincere friend and a great many worthy institutions have lost a loyal and dependable benefactor. ‘Pat’ Murnan’s courage, initiative, honesty and humanity are qualities admired by upstanding men everywhere.”

Grace Murnan died at Graceland two years later, on November 16, 1939, and was buried from Immaculate Conception Parish.

The Murnan and Devaney families squabbled over Pat and Grace’s estate in various courts for almost a decade. In the end the bulk of it, some $167,000, a sizable fortune to be left during the Great Depression, went to the estate of Grace’s half-brother, James Devaney of Cannelton, West Virginia. Grace’s name survives in that of Graceland Shopping Center, which in time was built on the southern half of the Graceland Stock Farm. Pat’s name survives in Murnan Road, which still runs south from West Broad Street along the edge of what became Darby Dan Farm.

\textbf{NOTES}

24) Thomas, Robert, op. cit.
25) Franklin County Probate Court, estate 80074.
27) \textit{Columbus Press}, Aug. 21, 1902
31) \textit{Ohio State Journal} (hereafter OSJ), May 1 and July 31, 1917
35) OSJ, Aug 1, Aug 2, and Aug. 25, 1921
36) OSJ, Aug. 13, Aug. 20, and Aug. 23, 1925
37) OSJ, Apr 9, May 6, May 17, May 20, and Oct.
T6L2 [1974 note: John Canny Jr. has lot of 6 graves, 2 buried]
+ Grace Boyle 1884-1971
SSJ: 1971, Aug. 11, Grace Boyle, 86 [cemetery listed as St. Joseph, W.J.]
{CANNY: John 1889-1978
   Catherine Boyle 1881-1974
SSJ: 1974, Nov. 4, Catherine Canny, 93
CANNY: John P. 1921-2001  Rohna Survivor
footstone: John P. Canney SGT US ARMY
WORLD WAR II  SEP 19 1921 + OCT 13 2001  PURPLE HEART

Along Fence, from road northwest:

{GEETING: Hattie E. 1876-1963
   William G. 1883-1958
SSJ: 1963, Mar. 10, Mrs. Hattie Geeting, 83
Jerry Corriden 1862-1960
SSJ: 1960, Aug. 5, Jeremiah Corriden, 98
Mary Corriden 1862-1937
WJV: 1937, Aug. 2, Mary Corrigen, age 68

{DAWSON: Ralph C. 1900-1958
   Margaret M. 1907-1993

New development of NE Section -- in rear

Row 1
Thomas M. Vacheresse SP 4 US ARMY  MAY 8 1937 + JAN 3 1977
SSJ: 1977, Jan. 3, Thomas Vacheresse, 39, "2 flush graves"
Andrew W. Harbrecht 1896-1987
{CRON: (Father) John W. May 21, 1925-[blank]
   (Mother) Mary Marjorie Hines Apr. 2, 1929-Oct. 30, 1994
[KAISER: Earl Nov. 21, 1919-Sept. 9, 1995
   Kathleen Sept. 20, 1926-[blank]

Row 2
Lawrence Tinkler S1 US NAVY WORLD WAR II NOV 20 1918 MAY 30 2000
Dorothy A. Zimmerman 1925+1990
Wentford Parsons SSGT US ARMY WORLD WAR II JAN 11 1913 + JUNE 22 1979
(Father) Ludwig Waas Feb. 15, 1897-July 18, 1982
Elizabeth Waas Lovelace May 5, 1927-[blank]
Helen Victor Lovelace Sept. 7, 1926-[blank]
The above three are on a lot with central marker 'WAAS LOVELACE BIRES' and...
three graves in Row 3.

Earl Thomas Kaiser  TEC 4 US ARMY NOV 21 1919 + SEP 9 1995

Row 3
[behind Lawrence Tinkler] (Mother) Geraldine Tinkler 1920-1976
SSJ: 1976, Jan. 17, Geraldine Tinkler, 55
[husband bought two graves]
{BUSCEMI: Anthony J. 1913+[blank]}
{ Ann E. 1911+1976}
SSJ: 1976, Apr. 12, Ann Buscemi, 64 [husband bought two graves]
Elizabeth E. McDaniels Sept. 28, 1914-Dec. 19, 1976
SSJ: 1976, Dec. 19, Elizabeth McDaniels, 68
Julia A. Shaver 1915-1982
{BENDER: Albert J. Aug. 21, 1918-May 7, 1985
{ Beatrice G. Nov. 1, 1925-Jan. 17, 1997
[FRERICKS: Joan 1927-[blank]}
[ Alfred J. 1919-1993
footstone: Alfred J. Frericks 1ST LT US ARMY WORLD WAR II JAN 24 1919 + JAN 3 1993
{BIDWELL: Bob July 11, 1937-June 10, 1995
{ Noriann July 7, 1941-[blank]

Row 4
Noah Richardson 1858-1926
SSJ: 1926, Feb. 25, Noe Joseph Richardson, born Lilly Chapel, age 68; convert
Zachary T. Taylor June 14, 1999, Asleep in Jesus

Row 5
{CLOSSON: George R. May 13, 1916-[blank]}
[PETIT: Bernard J. 1924-2001
[ Ica 1926-[blank]

Row 7
{MANGER: Donald Leo (Husband, Dad & Grandpa) 1937-2002
{ Charlotte Ann (Wife, Mom & Grandma) 1939-[blank]

Row 12 [? against fence]
{Leslie J. Polczinski 1954-1994
{Luke J. Polczinski 1958-[blank]}
{Jesse D. Blount 1930-[blank]
{Marjorie K. Blount 1945-[blank]
(Son, Brother, Friend)
(Daughter) Logan Elizabeth Denes Feb. 24, 1994-July 24, 1997

{BARKER: Marie A. 1899-1996
{ Walter F. 1911-1991
Christine Lovelace Bires Aug. 13, 1947-[blank]
Douglas John Bires Oct. 9, 1949-[blank]