

# LOUIS PIQUETTE

Last week I wrote about the Dillinger hideout near Cuba City, and introduced Louis P. Piquette, Dillinger's lawyer who was from the Platteville/Benton area. Piquette was an interesting man. Those who watched him in a courtroom universally described him as "flamboyant". The son of a blacksmith, he was described as a "short, chubby, middle-aged man of vitality and charm." He was well depicted in the 2009 movie "Public Enemies" by actor Peter Gerety



Louis Piquette never attended law school, but did pass the Illinois Bar Exam on his fourth try. He actually was an attorney in the City of Chicago Prosecuting Attorney's Office. His time as a prosecutor did not last long. He was soon part of a group of law enforcement officials who attended banquets thrown by Al Capone, and he was indicted along with a number of politicians for taking "rake-offs" from coal sales to city schools. He was never found guilty but decided to become a defense attorney in 1922, setting up his own practice with Arthur O'Leary

as his investigator. Both men were "shady" and were more than willing to bend rules to make a buck.

Piquette soon became the preferred defense attorney for organized crime figures. On June 9, 1930, "Jake" Lingle, a veteran crime reporter for the Chicago Tribune, was shot and killed. Leo V. Brothers, described as a union thug was accused of the crime and Piquette unsuccessfully defended him. In 1928 Piquette represented David C. Rockola, a slot machine mechanic who had promised to witness for the prosecution against James "High Pockets" O'Brien, a mobster who was paying off police to return impounded slot machines. At trial, Rockola took the fifth and refused to testify, ruining the prosecution. He later made millions manufacturing jukeboxes. Piquette is often alleged to have given Dillinger the wooden gun he used to escape from the Lake County Jail in Crown Point Indiana. That allegation is doubtful.

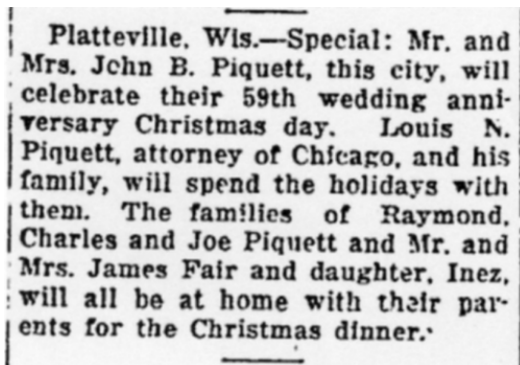


John Dillinger's lawyer, Louis Piquette, in the center with the white hair, at Dillinger's arraignment in Crown Point.

Piquette seems to have genuinely liked Dillinger, or was delusional about his character. In 1934 a widow, Eulalia Callender wrote him a letter saying that Dillinger could only have escaped from Crown Point with God's help.

Piquette replied: *"I, like you believe that it was the hand of God that enabled this young Christian soul to live on. From my experience with the party in question, I can safely tell you that he will rob no banks, but it is his firm intention to travel in the path of righteousness. He is a great student of the Bible."*

To escape the pressures of the big city, Piquette often returned to Platteville where the bulk of his family lived. For instance, on July 19, 1934 he left Chicago to visit his family. This was the same day that Anna Sage Betrayed Dillinger's whereabouts to Melvin Purvis, leading to his death at the Biograph Theater on July 22.



From the Dubuque telegraph Herald Christmas Day 1932

Louis Piquette arranged for Dillinger to hide out in the home of James "Jimmy" Probasco on May 24, 1934 in Chicago, and arranged during the period following for the Plastic surgery and fingerprint removal done by Dr. Wilhelm Loeser and Dr. Harold Bernard Cassidy. During this period Dillinger and Homer Van Meter, a fellow gang member, were planning more bank robberies. One of those plans involved Platteville, Wisconsin. This is the story as related by Allan May and Marilyn Bardsley in "John Dillinger":

*"On a sort of comical note, O'Leary one day returned to the law office and informed Piquette that Dillinger and Van Meter had formulated a plan to rob three banks at once in the town of*

*Platteville, Wisconsin — the attorney's hometown. Piquette and O'Leary drove immediately to the Probasco home where the lawyer pleaded with the two bank robbers to abandon the plan because his family and friends could be affected and that it would appear as though he had "cased" the banks for them. After Piquette threatened to drop him as a client, Dillinger relented. As Piquette and his investigator left the house, Van Meter glared at O'Leary and grunted, "Why don't you keep your mouth shut, anyway?""*

After Dillinger's death, the law came down on Piquette and those he had recruited to aid "Public Enemy Number One"



## PIQUETT ORDERED TO ILLINOIS PEN

CHICAGO, June 27 — Attorney Louis Piquett, former city prosecutor, today was given the maximum sentence of two years in the federal penitentiary and a \$10,000 fine by Federal Judge John L. Sullivan, for harboring Homer Van Meter, first lieutenant of John Dillinger.

Judge Sullivan pronounced sentence after denying a motion for a new trial. Piquett was found guilty of the charge last Tuesday

*June 27<sup>th</sup> 1935*

Louis Piquette entered Leavenworth on May 9, 1936, convicted of harboring fugitives. He was released January 11, 1938. There is no doubt of his guilt.

It seems that Grant County must claim an infamous son along with those celebrated more conventionally. Louis P. Piquette died of a heart attack in his apartment at 661 W. Sheridan in Chicago on December 12, 1951. Piquette is buried at Hillside cemetery in Platteville.