LOUISE VINCIQUERRA

NEBRASKA'S BOOTLEGGER QUEEN

BY KYLIE KINLEY

On the afternoon of October 17, 1925, a Ford Sedan careened through the neighborhood of 27th and D Streets in Lincoln, Nebraska. "Queen" Louise Vinciquerra sat in the passenger seat with two gallons of illegal moonshine whiskey on her lap. Her future second husband, ex-Prohibition agent Earl Haning, was at the wheel. A mutual acquaintance named Joseph Holder crouched in the back seat with the burlap sacks that had hidden the jugs only moments earlier. Karl Schmidt, a federal prohibition agent for Nebraska, pursued them for over a mile through Lincoln neighborhoods and finally edged his car closer.

The trio knew they were caught.

Vinciquerra picked up the jugs and smashed them one after the other against the car's interior. Broken glass sliced her hand, and the moonshine soaked into her dress.[1] Haning stopped the car, and when Agent Schmidt wrenched open the car door, the whiskey ran down the running boards and seeped from Vinciquerra's skirt. Schmidt borrowed an empty milk bottle from a neighborhood housewife, mopped up what evidence he could, and arrested Haning and Vinciquerra on a charge of conspiracy to violate the prohibition laws.[2]

Haning and Vinciquerra were convicted in March 1926, but served no time and won on appeal in 1927. Joseph Holder served as a government witness and was not charged. At first Vinciquerra said she was on her way to a Nebraska football game. Later she said she was in Lincoln to get a suit of clothes for her brother.[3] Either way, she claimed that she met Haning unexpectedly while waiting for a streetcar. Her defense was that she couldn't have conspired to violate prohibition laws because she had no idea the moonshine was in the car. Her lawyer argued that the car chase and consequent breaking of the jugs prevented Louise's transportation and since transportation was the sole reason why she had entered Haning's car, no conspiracy had been committed.[4] Consequently, Federal Judge Walter Henry Sanborn of the Court of Appeals for the Eight Circuit, reversed their conviction.

So Vinciquerra and her lover Haning went free, and no one was surprised.

Louise Vinciquerra was the queen of Nebraska bootleggers, and she bribed, argued, or charmed her way out of court more times before she was thirty than many male bootleggers did in their entire careers. The authorities and her peers often underestimated her because she was a woman, and she swindled them appropriately. She was a mother of two, a shrewd businesswoman, a champion for her family members, a habitual criminal, and a ruthless human being.

During Prohibition—one of the most violent, chaotic, and politically and socially charged periods in American and Nebraskan history—Louise Vinciquerra navigated a world hostile to immigrants, bootleggers, and women—and she was all three. She was certainly not the only female bootlegger in Nebraska, but she was probably the best, and without doubt the boldest. Her career and her personal life give twenty-first century readers insights into those tempestuous times, and challenge stereotypes of women's roles in Prohibition. Vinciquerra's story also adds another lens to our understanding of organized crime in Omaha under crime boss Tom Dennison.

Many Prohibition scholars focus on women as the force that brought about national Prohibition from January 17, 1920, to December 5, 1933. Many Nebraskans, particularly German Catholics, opposed women's suffrage because they feared women would vote for Prohibition.[5] Nationally, famous Prohibitionist women included Carrie Nation, Kansas's axe-wielding temperance fiend, and Susan B. Anthony, whose anti-alcohol views came from genuine horror at the rampant alcoholism, domestic abuse, and deplorable child welfare conditions that could be directly tied to the country's dependence on alcohol.[6] Americans drank an average per-capita equivalent of 90 bottles of 80-proof liquor each year, which breaks down to about four shots a day. Modern-day alcohol consumption is about a third of this. The pre-Prohibition era remains the highest measured volume of alcohol consumption in U.S. history.[7]

Women were often assumed to favor Prohibition simply because of their sex. Women who opposed Prohibition, even on moral grounds, were dismissed, bullied, and even threatened by other women, particularly by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).[8] Women who went so far as to manufacture, smuggle, sell, or even drink alcohol were regarded with shock that they could betray the mothering, morally superior instincts of their sex. Or they were pitied, as people assumed they were selling hooch from financial desperation or out of loyalty to a husband or a male relative. At first, women were even used as protection against police raids; police were reluctant to search cars with women in them, and they would never search for flasks or bottles hidden under skirts.[9]

Many records exist of women, especially working class and immigrant women, who manufactured alcohol to make money. Their stated reasons ranged from a need to buy Easter dresses for their children, to supplementing an existing laundry business.[10] Courts seemed more sympathetic to a woman who was supporting her family than the one who was merely supporting her man. Either way, they were sensationalized in the press, and a favorite title for these women was "bootlegging queen." Probably the most famous was "Bahama Queen Cleo" Lythgoe, a rum smuggler who fought in gun battles and against economic sexism from men who declared "no skirts" and offered her insultingly low prices for her smuggled goods.[11]

Louise Vinciquerra occupied an even smaller sphere of female bootleggers. She wasn't extending

Left: Louise Vinciquerra, circa 1928. Adams County (Nebraska) Historical Society Photograph Collection

"Yes, I have made $45,000 since October, 1921, but I have spent easily two-thirds of it. Easy come, easy go."

a previous restaurant or grocery business.[12] She was a mother, but she wasn't selling alcohol solely to support her family. Her world in South Omaha was far removed from hotel ballrooms and campaign rallies of anti-prohibition women groups. Her Prohibition experience was more violent and favored corn whiskey over cocktails. And, like a sliver of other enterprising Prohibition women, she bootlegged because she loved it, and she was good at it.

Louise Pirruccello was born in Lentini, Sicily, around 1900 and immigrated to Omaha in about 1910, part of a wave of Italian immigration that grew Omaha's Italian population from less than 500 in 1900 to 2,361 by the end of the decade.[13] She married Sebastiano Vinciquerra when she was thirteen. By age fifteen she had given birth to her two sons, Carl and Sam.

Vinciquerra made her first federal court appearance at age twenty-two, when she was fined $200 on November 17, 1922.[14] Because the Volstead Act was a federal law enabling Prohibition enforcement, its violators were tried in federal court. At one point, liquor violations constituted two-thirds of all federal criminal indictments.[15] Much to the frustration of federal judges such as Judge Joseph William Woodrough, who often tried Vinciquerra's cases, most defendants were petty offenders, and the crime bosses never appeared in court.[16]

Still, these were rosy Prohibition days for both sides. Bootlegging was highly profitable and not very competitive.[17] Prohibition authorities were making enough arrests to feel that they were upholding their end of the experiment. The *Omaha World-Herald* said Omaha was "a city where the wheels of justice move more swiftly in enforcement of Prohibition than anywhere else in the country… practically all cases in Omaha are disposed of within twenty-four hours."[18]

In fact, those wheels of justice were heavily influenced by crime boss Tom Dennison, who ruled Omaha's underworld and its political sphere for nearly forty years, from the 1890s to the early 1930s. Standing six feet tall and weighing 200 pounds, Dennison was usually immaculately dressed and tastefully adorned with flawless diamonds. Even so, he preferred to avoid public attention. He had built his fortune as a frontier gambling house proprietor, and he ran Omaha like he played poker—he never missed anything, and he was relentless.[19]

Vinciquerra, on the other hand, loved the limelight. While the extent of their association is murky, Vinciquerra's bootlegging success depended on Dennison's approval and involvement, and there is some evidence that he bankrolled her court cases because she was a good distraction from his more nefarious operations.[20] He controlled much of the police force. Bootleggers paid Dennison's collector and bought from Dennison-approved wholesalers. If they followed the rules, their homes and stills avoided raids.[21]

Vinciquerra didn't know much about those "wheels of justice" at this time. After her 1922 fine, she continued selling alcohol. Indeed, she thought so little of the laws that she distributed cards among high school and university students advertising her liquor. Many Omahans looked the other way where bootlegging was concerned. The city had a thriving red light district, with saloons, gambling houses, and an estimated one hundred brothels and 2,500 prostitutes within city limits.[22] It was even once called the "wickedest city in the United States."[23] But some citizens drew the line at selling booze to minors. While Vinciquerra created and distributed the fliers, her husband, Sebastiano, was also involved. His case was brought to trial, and he was fined $100 on April 3, 1923, for conducting a bootlegging establishment.[24] Vinciquerra did not appear in court for this incident, but it was the launch pad for her notoriety.

Her next move is bewildering. She could have just quit printing flyers that advertised to high school students or adjusted her market. Instead, Vinciquerra called reporters to her home. She announced her "retirement" from bootlegging so she could spend more time with her sons, who were seven and eight. She boasted of making $45,000 in the last seventeen months on bootlegging, a salary four and half times what Nebraska's governor made during the same period.[25]

"Yes, I have made $45,000 since October, 1921, but I have spent easily two-thirds of it," Vinciquerra told reporters. "Easy come, easy go. I have sold only wine, rye whiskey and 188 proof alcohol and I have been careful to test all of the liquor I have sold. I was born in Italy and I know liquor. I have never manufactured liquor, have bought the best that could be obtained, have not allowed any 'parties' in my home, and have never sold to minors when I knew it."[26]

Vinciquerra's immigrant status points to one of the contributing factors to Prohibition's ultimate failure: immigrant populations were even more likely than the native population to use alcohol for social, religious, or medicinal purposes.[27] Consequently,

Vinciquerra did know a lot about alcohol, and her expensively-furnished home was proof of her ability to move and sell alcohol effectively. When the reporter visited, it was also festooned with flowers that were tokens of sympathy from friends on "the occasion of her husband's recent arrest," which suggests that her community thought Sebastiano getting arrested was a good joke and sent flowers to be ironic, or it was a genuine moment for grief, such as a death in the family. Vinciquerra also told reporters that she was the mastermind behind the bootlegging business, and that she managed the place more than three-fourths of the time.[28]

The day after the story ran, April 6, 1923, Vinciquerra was in jail. Before she was arrested, she asked permission to "doll up," was refused, and then had the further gall to ask Prohibition Agent Robert "Raiding Bob" Samardick to detour to her uncle's house on the way so he could take care of her bond.

"I'm not a chauffeur," Samardick replied.

Other Prohibition authorities were similarly unamused.

"She ought to be able to pay because she's told the whole world she had made $45,000 by bootlegging," said Assistant District Attorney George Keyser. "She can't expect to violate the law and then come out openly and boast to newspapermen how clever she was. This sort of stuff don't go with the government."[29]

Later that day, reporters caught up with Vinciquerra again, but this time she was subdued and nursing a headache.

"I am sorry I talked so much about the money I made bootlegging for it has done nothing but get me in trouble since," she said.[30] Vinciquerra was a brazen individual, but bragging about her income to a reporter was perhaps the most uncalculated move of her career. The only clue as to why she would abandon her sense of self-preservation was that she also possessed a great deal of pride. The article says Vinciquerra "was stung by the statement of a welfare worker, she said, that she had accepted charity." Mrs. Rogers, a disgruntled mother who testified in Sebastiano's trial about selling alcohol to minors, had remarked that the Human Society had helped Vinciquerra when she came to the agency after Sebastiano allegedly beat her in 1920.[31] While Vinciquerra loved making and spending money, she also preferred to handle her own problems. Mrs. Rogers's testimony about her asking for help apparently needled her so much that she decided to bring attention to her prowess and her wealth instead of her vulnerability.

Louise Vinciquerra, circa 1922, around the time of her first appearance in federal court. Adams County (Nebraska) Historical Society Photograph Collection

Unconcerned about her pride, Omaha authorities were determined to make an example of Vinciquerra, and "the 'Queen of Omaha bootleggers' found the law staring at her from a different direction" when she was summoned to appear before the Douglas County Commissioners on April 8, 1923, to explain why her income taxes didn't reflect $45,000 worth of income. This was the first time she was called "queen of the Omaha bootleggers" in the press.[32] The title followed her the rest of her life.

But Vinciquerra's troubles did not keep her from running her business, which was so successful that her patrons' cars filled the street and blocked traffic near her home at 810 Forest Avenue just a few weeks later in April 1923.

As a result of a complaint about the traffic, police raided her house and found only three pints

The indexed want ads make it easy to find just the thing you need. Read them over.

Morning World-Herald.

STATE FORECASTS.
Nebraska: Somewhat unsettled, probably local showers today and tomorrow except fair today in southeast portion; somewhat cooler today in east and central portion.
Iowa: Generally fair today and probably tomorrow; somewhat warmer in extreme east portion and cooler in west.

VOL. LIX.—No. 9. Entered as Second-Class Matter at Postoffice, Omaha, Nebraska. OMAHA, NEBRASKA, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1923.—TWENTY PAGES. PRICE TWO CENTS.

BLAMES OFFICERS FOR FRACTURED SKULL

WON'T PROSECUTE MILFORD GIRL, 15, WHO SLEW "HAND"

Jury Finds Anton Lana Killed by Firearms Held by Alby Vajgrt.

PROSECUTOR ANNOUNCES WILL MAKE NO ARRESTS

Girl Tells Story of Innocent Affection, Persecution and Desperation.

DEBS CONFIDENT HIS DREAM TO COME TRUE

Socialist Leader, Here for Address, Says "Masses Will Own Everything."

TELLS OF PRISON LIFE

STRESEMANN ASKS FRANCE, BELGIUM TO FRAME ACCORD

Chancellor Says Germany Sincerely Wishes to Restore Normal Relations.

TO RESUME DELIVERIES ACCOUNT REPARATIONS

BY HENRY WALES.

Stinnes' Demands Spurned By Stresemann's Cabinet

Proposals to Fill Industrial Barons' Pockets Will Not Be Considered—Communists Would Try Him for Treason.

BY JOHN CLAYTON.

WALTON TO RESIGN IF ANTI-KLAN BILL PASSES ASSEMBLY

Oklahoma Governor Makes New Challenge to Administration Opponents.

"WILL PROTECT PEOPLE AND RESTORE HARMONY"

GERMAN WAR MINISTER

Above is the latest photo of Germany's war minister, Herr Dr. Geßler, who was recently given control to enforce the martial law edict clamped on Germany during the wri-

VINCIQUERRA AND HANING TAKEN BY SAMARDICK, FEE

Former Is Semiconscious at Hospital; Suspended Federal Agent Gives Bond.

"FIGHT OR GET KILLED," DECLARES SAMARDICK

Omaha World-Herald, October 10, 1923, p.1

of alcohol, one bottle of corn whiskey, and some crème de menthe hidden under a mattress.

"If you had gotten here earlier, you would have found more," Vinciquerra told them.[33]

Vinciquerra managed to stay out of trouble for two months before she was arrested again in June 1923. Prohibition agents "raided a dilapidated, one-story house at the northeast corner of Second and Cedar streets," a home that Vinciquerra rented, and found equipment, mash, jugs, and three gallons of liquor.[34] Vinciquerra responded by suing Samardick and Dan B. Butler, police commissioner, for $25,000 in damages for false arrest and imprisonment. While such a suit seems extravagant, even for Louise, it was later revealed in court that crime boss Dennison bankrolled this suit because it took attention away from his own doings.[35]

"Oh, that's just part of the program," Butler said when he was informed of Vinciquerra's suit. "Just as long as we can close up places like hers I don't mind. They'd better get busy down in Washington, however, and regulate this immigration system better. As it is now, these people come over here, don't even take the trouble to learn our language—bootleg all they please, and they ride around on Fourth of July with American flags on their fine automobiles."[36]

While typical of the time, Commissioner Butler's xenophobia is ironic; Robert "Raiding Bob" Samardick— ruthless and violent upholder of Prohibition laws and one of Omaha's few honest law enforcement agents—was from Serbia. Samardick alternately served as a policeman, federal Prohibition agent, federal parole officer, and, later, as Omaha's chief of police. Early on in his career, he resigned in protest of the corruption he saw on the Omaha police force. However, he was not afraid to beat men or women he arrested or chop through doors with an axe when in pursuit of upholding the letter of the law. He also entered screaming matches with criminals and his superiors alike.[37]

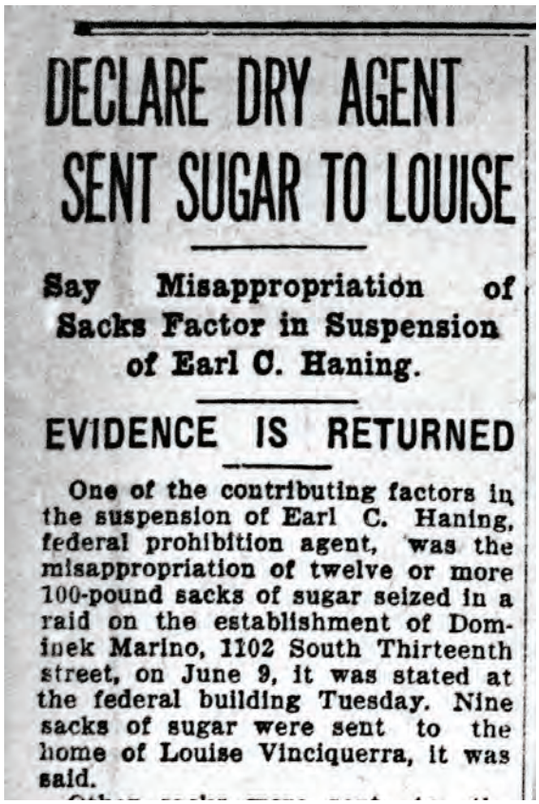
Vinciquerra was exactly the kind of flippant rule-breaker that Samardick despised.

"That's a laugh!" Samardick said in response to a claim in Vinciquerra's lawsuit that he refused to leave the room while she dressed and then threatened to choke her. "She declared she would not go to jail. I tried to reason with her. She cursed me, calling me names. I took her by the arm and led her to the car. As far as choking her while in the car, I sat in the front seat with the driver, and she sat in the rear seat with Commissioner Butler."[38]

In other words, Samardick might have wanted to choke her, but he couldn't reach her from his spot in the front seat.

Later, after it had served its purpose of being a distraction, the suit was dropped. Louise continued to have run-ins with Prohibition agents, but one in particular, Earl Haning, was no longer interested in arresting her.

Haning's first experience on the other side of Prohibition enforcement was at Vinciquerra's house in September 1923. After agents raided the house, he was found a half block away leading Vinciquerra's sons away from the chaos. He and



DECLARE DRY AGENT SENT SUGAR TO LOUISE

Say Misappropriation of Sacks Factor in Suspension of Earl C. Haning.

EVIDENCE IS RETURNED

One of the contributing factors in the suspension of Earl C. Haning, federal prohibition agent, was the misappropriation of twelve or more 100-pound sacks of sugar seized in a raid on the establishment of Dominek Marino, 1102 South Thirteenth street, on June 9, it was stated at the federal building Tuesday. Nine sacks of sugar were sent to the home of Louise Vinciquerra, it was said.

Omaha World-Herald, October 10, 1923, p.9

Vinciquerra were charged with the sale of whiskey and wine. Haning's boss, U.S. Rohrer, Prohibition director for Nebraska, immediately came to Haning's defense and said he had never suspended Haning and didn't expect to do so.[39]

But Haning wasn't just protecting Vinciquerra's children. He was also sending her romantic gifts, such as nine sacks of sugar that he raided from one of her competitors. In addition, Haning had become part of a bootlegging ring with Sebastiano and Vinciquerra. He and Sebastiano were arrested on October 10, 1923, in a raid on a farmhouse seven miles west of Irvington. Three stills were found in a barn, and "Raiding Bob" Samardick gave Sebastiano a black eye and a cut on the forehead that was so severe it was originally categorized as a "fractured skull." Haning was fired as a result of this arrest.[40]

Sebastiano was recovered enough to get arrested in Lincoln just three weeks later, where he was delivering six gallons of liquor with Haning's brother Paul.[41] Lincoln had a much drier outlook on Prohibition and took liquor violations more seriously than did Omaha.[42] Omaha papers tended to glorify bootlegger exploits, but the Lincoln paper ridiculed them. Sebastiano was "crowned king of the royal boozers in Lincoln Monday morning… the head of the house of hooch nobility found the crowning distasteful and in order to return to his subjects at Omaha, paid $100 and permitted his royal car, a Nash roadster one week old, to be confiscated."[43] It appears that the money and the car were no longer being used for bail because the papers report that Sebastiano couldn't make his $3,000 bond and was back in a Lincoln jail by November 8. He was incarcerated for much of the next few months.

Vinciquerra had legal woes of her own, but she stayed out of jail. She had moved to Council Bluffs in late summer or early fall of 1923 in an attempt to get away from the Omaha police. She told reporters that she was "like a poor, hunted deer, seeking a cool place in the forest shade away from the hunters."[44]

But Vinciquerra's house at 730 Avenue F in Council Bluffs was raided in September 1923, right before Haning and the liquor ring were caught in October. Even in Iowa, Vinciquerra could not escape "Raiding Bob." Newell Roberts of Carter Lake, on the request of Samardick, testified that Vinciquerra had sold him liquor on September 20, 1923. Her trial was scheduled for May 1924. Vinciquerra's name stayed out of the papers during the waning months of 1923.

But that changed when she preoccupied herself with a murder in early 1924. On New Year's Eve 1923, she traveled by car to Council Bluffs with a man named Peter Sferas. After they stopped at a hotel together, Sferas told her that he had "got" Vinciquerra's cousin, Louise Salerno, when she was a child. Sferas was also Louise Salerno's uncle by marriage. He told Louise Vinciquerra he would kill her if she ever told anyone else.

"But I was not afraid," Vinciquerra testified later.[45]

She was testifying because two weeks after the New Year's Eve conversation, Louise Salerno shot Peter Sferas to death.

"Slays Uncle She Says Stole Honor" a banner headline screamed on January 14, 1924. Another read: "Married [sic] Slays Man She Asserts Talked About Her—Pierce Street Beauty Summons Man to House; Greets Him With Two Pistols. Wronged as a Child; Says He Told Secret."[46] The following day the *Omaha World-Herald* ran photos of Louise Salerno's sisters, Helen and Antoinette Pirruccello, ages fifteen and twelve.[47] They said Sferas had attempted to rape them, and he had given them money. The paper reported delicately that the girls "had been annoyed by Sferas."[48]

More than any other publicity about Louise Vinciquerra, this case illuminates the world she

Louise Salerno, sister-in-law of Louise Vinciquerra. *Omaha Bee,* January 15, 924, p.2

and many women—especially young immigrant women—experienced during the Prohibition era. Sexual molestation, domestic abuse, and lack of education and opportunity are evident, but so is an unassailable loyalty to each other.

Both Vinciquerra and Salerno described the shooting as spontaneous. However, it appears that once Louise Vinciquerra discovered that a man had raped her cousin for nearly a decade, he was soon dead. Their stories eventually firmed up the motive to be self-defense instead of revenge, but that wasn't until several weeks after the shooting.

Salerno said she confronted Sferas because of his advances on her younger sisters, but her reaction suggests that Vinciquerra's support also played a role. Vinciquerra helped Salerno question her sisters, watched as Salerno loaded two pistols, and then took Salerno's little girl into another room. Vinciquerra apparently understood that while a jury might acquit a woman for killing her molester, a jury was less likely to acquit two people for a premeditated revenge killing, even if those two people were women.

The papers focused on Salerno in reporting the details of the murder. She had telephoned Sferas and said they needed to talk. When he arrived fifteen minutes later, she accused him of trying to molest her sisters. According to Salerno, he kept his hand in his pocket and told her to shut up.

"Then you got to pay," Salerno said, and started shooting. Unhappy with her first shot, she followed him out of the house, emptying the gun as she ran out into the street. Louise Marino, a young girl on her way to the movies, was shot in her arm. Sferas, shot twice, ran into a pool hall and died on the floor.[49]

Salerno said later that she was certain that Sferas had been holding a gun in his pocket, and that she had shot in self-defense. Vinciquerra gave mixed statements about this.

"Louise (Salerno) had two guns and told me that if one did not get him the other would," Vinciquerra said. The gun, which Salerno could "almost swear to God she saw in Sferas' hand" was not found on Sferas' person.[50]

Vinciquerra changed some details when she told the story a second time. In the second version, Salerno had the pistols because she had become afraid after talking to a violent Sferas on the phone. Aspects of the story that suggested that Salerno was incensed, revengeful, and fully supported by Vinciquerra quietly disappeared from the second version.[51]

By the time the case went to trial in May 1924, Salerno was calm and collected, her story apparently well-rehearsed. Sferas had been a boarder at her parents' house when he started assaulting her. Later, he married Salerno's aunt.

Then the day of the terrible cyclone here in 1913, he stopped me in the hallway and asked me for a phone number. I looked for it in the telephone book. While I was doing that, he became familiar with me and I fought him off. He finally pushed me down in the hallway and assaulted me. I began to cry and he warned me that he would kill us all if I told my parents. He seemed to be my master, for I always feared him and many times he forced me to meet him in outhouses and barns where he assaulted me.[52]

Louise Salerno's husband, Tony, was supportive of his wife.

"If she'd told us, we'd taken care of him," he said. "But she didn't want to get us into trouble. That's why she did it herself. It shows what kind of a woman she is."

"It wasn't Tony's business," Louise Salerno explained. "If Sferas ever was going to pay for what he did, it had to be to me."[53]

Violence was familiar to this family. Tony Pirrucello, who was Louise Salerno's father and who ran the pool hall where Sferas ran to die, had been convicted of shooting Vinciquerra's husband Sebastiano two years earlier. Tony Salerno's brother had recently been slain by a Prohibition agent.[54]

When Salerno was indicted on a charge of second-degree murder in Sferas's death, both she and Louise Vinciquerra wept.[55] The *Omaha Bee* described Salerno as having "only a remnant of the beauty which has made her the pride of Little Italy." When Salerno was eventually led screaming from the courtroom, the *Bee* noted that at that time, she shed no tears.[56]

While Salerno awaited trial, Vinciquerra was sued for the more than $2,000 in rent she owed on the falling-down house at Second and Cedar that had been raided in June 1923. Vinciquerra went to trial on the Carter Lake liquor charges in early May 1924. Sebastiano was in jail, but Earl Haning was a staunch support for her through the trial—until his wife had him arrested on desertion charges and hauled back to her in Lincoln.[57]

On May 2, 1924, Vinciquerra—who arrived at court alone and fifteen minutes late—received her first substantial punishment for bootlegging: sixty days imprisonment and a $500 fine. She was taken into the marshal's office, where she wept furiously and refused to be consoled. Then Haning arrived, pushing his way into the room. He calmed her and telephoned a relative to take her home.[58]

But Vinciquerra still avoided going to jail for her crimes. Two days later, the United States Circuit Court of Appeals chastised Federal Judge Woodrough for letting jurors smell and handle liquor as an exhibit in a bootlegging case, which was an error because it was making the jurors witnesses in determining whether the liquid was whisky or not. This had also happened during Vinciquerra's trial, so she appealed her conviction, won, and never started her sixty-day sentence.[59]

Louise Vinciquerra in court with her lawyers, undated. Reprinted with permission from *The Omaha World-Herald*.

WEATHER FORECAST
Partly cloudy and warmer Sunday.
CITY EDITION

THE OMAHA SUNDAY BEE

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

VOL. 55—NO. 19. OMAHA, SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 18, 1925. XX FIVE CENTS

BOOTLEGGER QUEEN ARRESTED

Washington Held to Tie by Nebraska

Here's How Gen. Duncan, Army-Bred, Takes Up His Duties in Civilian Life

Six Bandits Get $45,000 in Chicago

Opera Cinderella, 18, Sings Eight Hours Day Preparing for Debut

Louise and Pal Nabbed at Lincoln

This break allowed Vinciquerra to disappear in time for Louise Salerno's trial, which started just a few weeks later in May 1924. When Vinciquerra's name was called as a state witness, she was reputed to be in Oklahoma. The *World-Herald* even referred to her on May 28, 1924, as the "*former* 'Queen of Omaha's bootleggers.'" Without an eyewitness to the shooting, the jury acquitted Louise Salerno on May 30.[60]

Omaha was not without its Queen of the Bootleggers for long. Vinciquerra was back by July 1924, when she met with federal Prohibition officer Elmer Thomas. The reason for the meeting wasn't made clear, but reporters who attended recorded a startling occurrence: "Raiding Bob" Samardick gave Vinciquerra a rose.[61]

Bob Samardick was not a romantic man. Either he was mocking her with a sarcastic "welcome back" gift, or perhaps he needed something. His motivation isn't certain, but in November Vinciquerra testified before a federal grand jury.[62] Her testimony was not made public. During this time, she and her children lived in Wichita, Kansas, where she supposedly ran a restaurant.

Two months later, in January 1925, Vinciquerra, Haning, Sebastiano, and six other men were indicted on charges of operating a still six miles west of Irvington in 1923.[63] This was the incident which had ended Haning's law enforcement career and given Samardick an opportunity to nearly bash in Sebastiano's skull.

The courts were determined to make an example out of this liquor ring. Vinciquerra, Sebastiano, Haning, and two associates named Tony Curtese and Frank DeWolfe all agreed to plead guilty and testify for the government. The other four men, Joe St. Lucas, Tony Nanfito, Rosario Gibilsco, and Sam Gibilisco, stood trial. The trial opened on July 9, 1925.[64]

Vinciquerra and the others testified that they had manufactured hundreds of gallons of hooch and that Rosario, the Gibilisco brothers, and Sebastiano Vinciquerra had transported it.

A reporter commented on Vinciquerra's much-changed demeanor:

"Mrs. Vinciquerra, once the haughty, flippant 'bootleg queen' who all but snapped her fingers in the faces of Prohibition agents and dared them to catch her, presented a vastly different picture in court Thursday. She kept her head down low and tears continually fell from her eyes. She and the others who plead [*sic*] guilty sat apart from the other defendants."[65]

Haning testified that he had joined the group in June 1923. He and the eight others had paid $150 each to become stockholders. The business never made him much money, he said. Vinciquerra was the group's treasurer.[66]

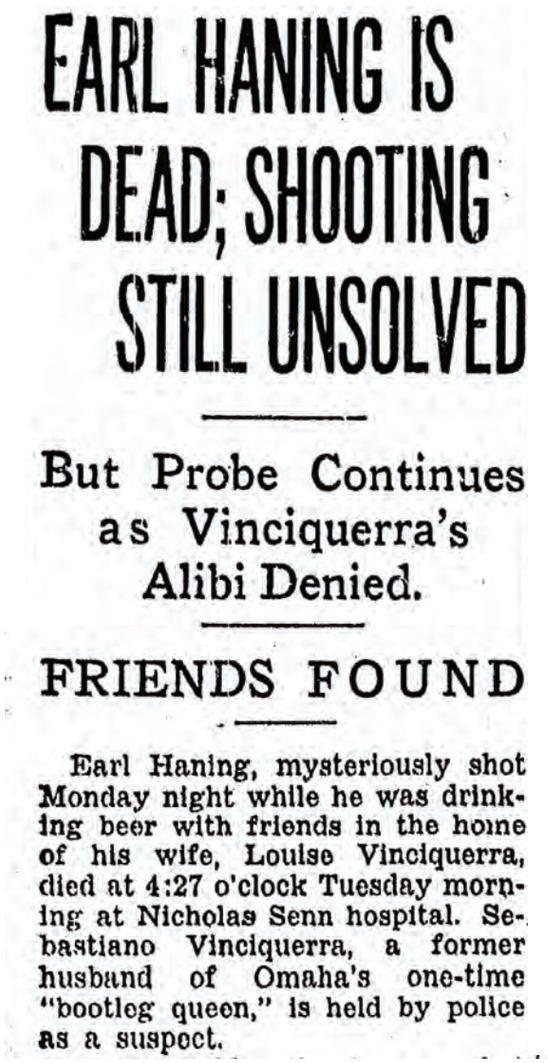
Haning further testified that after the group members were arrested, Tony Nanfito (who had been Vinciquerra's bondsman for years) and Joe St. Lucas approached Haning and promised to pay him $1,000 if he would help save St. Lucas, who had a respectable job at Union Pacific. The $1,000 would support Vinciquerra and her two children, and hire an attorney for Haning. They also promised to use their connections to make sure Haning wouldn't go to trial.

But when Nanfito and St. Lucas reneged on their deal, "I decided to be a man," Haning said. "Make a clean breast of the whole affair and throw myself upon the mercy of the court."[67]

Reporters described Vinciquerra as morose when the trial began on July 9, but by July 11 she seemed renewed. The *Scottsbluff Herald* commented: "Knowing that her testimony might mean that she would be 'bumped off' by former associates, now bitter enemies, Vinciquerra went through with her bargain with federal officers and turned state's evidence."[68] The fact that a paper in western Nebraska covered this story shows Vinciquerra's influence not just in Omaha, but across the entire state.

Louise Vinciquerra, circa 1928. Adams County (Nebraska) Historical Society Photograph Collection

Omaha World-Herald,
July 5, 1933, p. 1



EARL HANING IS DEAD; SHOOTING STILL UNSOLVED

But Probe Continues as Vinciquerra's Alibi Denied.

FRIENDS FOUND

Earl Haning, mysteriously shot Monday night while he was drinking beer with friends in the home of his wife, Louise Vinciquerra, died at 4:27 o'clock Tuesday morning at Nicholas Senn hospital. Sebastiano Vinciquerra, a former husband of Omaha's one-time "bootleg queen," is held by police as a suspect.

On the stand, Vinciquerra didn't shed tears or shield herself with her husband's or lover's misdeeds, as many female bootleggers did. When she got annoyed with defense counsel Raymond T. Coffey's questions about the kind of company she invited to her house, she retorted,

"You were there, too, weren't you? You ought to know as well as me."

Coffey hurriedly took the stand and denied that he had ever been to Vinciquerra's home. Later, St. Lucas swore that he just happened to be at Vinciquerra's house because he was with Tony Nanfito, who was there about a bond:

"Then, after she had gotten me into this—some time later—she called me on the telephone, said she was heartbroken at what she had done and intended to get me out of this mess. She said she'd take poison before she testified against me. She said she had been forced by Bob Samardick to say what she did about us in the first place when he threatened to put her on trial before Judge McGee on an old case and recommend three years in case she was found guilty."[69] Vinciquerra's panic is understandable; Judge John McGee handed down harsh sentences for minor liquor infractions so often that his nickname was "Ten-year" McGee.[70]

Vinciquerra, however, didn't act like someone who was heartbroken about the "mess" she had gotten Nanfito and St. Lucas into. Nanfito became so disgusted that he decided to withdraw his bond for Vinciquerra and have her jailed. She broke for the door as soon as he yelled, "I want to have her put in jail." Nanfito caught her arm, but she jerked away, fled down the stairs, and climbed into a waiting car.[71]

Ill will toward Vinciquerra continued when the trial re-convened after the weekend. The defense brought in witnesses to discredit her character and weaken the validity of her testimony.

"I've known her (Vinciquerra) twenty years, and couldn't believe her if I tried," testified Mrs. Josephine Randoni of 1907 South Seventeenth Street. "She would 'sell' the city of Omaha."[72]

The defense lawyers offered to call "fifty more witnesses who would testify similarly," but the court allowed only seven to testify against Vinciquerra.[73]

During the trial, police raided a house where Vinciquerra and Haning had supposedly been living. Haning's eighteen-year-old son, Dean, was arrested but released without charges. Dean told reporters that "they ransacked the house and took a bottle of flavoring syrup and a bottle of home brew, belonging to an aged woman who owns the house." Vinciquerra was unruffled.

"They probably were trying to scare me," she said.[74]

The next day the jury deliberated only a little more than an hour before finding all four of the defendants guilty. On September 10, 1925, St. Lucas, Nanfito, and the Gibilisco brothers were each sentenced to seven months in jail and fined $500 for each of the seven counts on which they were convicted. The sentences were to run concurrently, but each defendant was still responsible for $3,500 in fines. More startling, the sentencing of Vinciquerra, Haning, Sebastiano, Curtese, and DeWolfe was "postponed indefinitely." Vinciquerra was reported as having being present in the corridor, but disappeared before the sentence was read.[75]

The status of Vinciquerra and Haning's relationship is unclear at this point. He had been in love with her for nearly two years, and Sebastiano had been in jail for some time. Haning's wife, as she had done two years earlier, had Haning arrested on an abandonment charge. Haning's father paid a $500 bond for his release. Mrs. Jesse Haning "testified that Earl left home two years ago and for a year did nothing toward the support of his family."[76] This is only the second time that Jesse Haning demanded that Earl return home, and it also coincides with a time in which Earl was publicly known to be with Vinciquerra, suggesting that Jesse only really cared when Earl's association with Vinciquerra was splashed all over the papers.

The story that opened this article, which detailed the 1925 arrest in Lincoln of Vinciquerra and Haning, shows that they were spending time together by then, either romantically or professionally. The first definite sign that they were lovers, though, occurred in March 1926, when Vinciquerra asked Sebastiano for a divorce, and he responded by emptying a revolver at her while she slept.

Two of the bullets hit the pillow to the left of her head, two hit at the right, and a fifth lodged in the wall above her head. The sixth cylinder clicked empty, and Vinciquerra grabbed a revolver of her own and began firing it at Sebastiano, chasing him out of the house and two blocks away, where he escaped into a waiting car.

"For six hundred dollars he was willing to kill me," Vinciquerra said, referring to the value of the car the couple owned together. "We've got a sports model automobile, and he thinks I should give him six hundred dollars to keep the car. And for that, he would shoot me. Why, I've given him five hundred dollars since he got out. But I'm through with him. I just want him to let me alone. I'm not afraid of him, though. No man can make me run."

She also said that she had moved to her current house at 2002 N. 48th Street in Omaha to "rear her two boys in a proper environment."[77]

The Vinciquerra family's new neighborhood was more family-friendly than some of her previous houses. The *World-Herald* even ran a photo of an elaborate and dangerous-looking wooden roller coaster that the neighborhood children built. In the photo, Sam Vinciquerra is perched in the car and ready for his turn to ride.[78]

Sebastiano was arrested for shooting at her, but he claimed Vinciquerra had framed him, and he was never charged. Vinciquerra's relatives were unhappy with this decision. In 1926 one of her cousins shot Sebastiano, wounding him in the scalp.[79]

Vinciquerra moved on to her next problem: her looming trial in Lincoln, where she and Haning were charged with conspiracy to violate the liquor laws. She and Haning were convicted on March 25, 1926, after the jury deliberated twenty-two hours, but their sentencing was deferred upon appeal, which they won in August 1927.[80] The United States Court of Appeals reversed the conviction because there was not enough evidence to prove that Vinciquerra knew the liquor was in the car when Haning picked her up; therefore, there could be no conspiracy.[81]

Vinciquerra was by now so famous that her name appeared in an *Omaha World-Herald* Public Pulse letter arguing that Prohibition was a failure: "Now our bootlegger is a respected citizen and if convicted he gets a light sentence and is turned loose to practice his trade again. Our women-leggers are lauded for their beauty. Louise Vinciquerra has been given much publicity as Queen of the Bootleggers and our daily papers speak of her as Beautiful Louise. There is a certain element of sporting blood in the American people which causes them to feel that they will not be denied something which they feel they are entitled to enjoy."[82]

Haning and Vinciquerra showed little concern for their Lincoln conviction while they waited for the appeal trial. They built a successful bootlegging route across western Nebraska in communities such as Grand Island, Hastings, Minden, Kearney, Indianola, and McCook. They were arrested in March 1926, days before their Lincoln conspiracy conviction, at a gas station in McCook. Haning was charged with carrying a concealed weapon, and soon after, Vinciquerra served a considerable jail sentence in Beaver City on a liquor charge in Furnas County.[83] Haning received an eighteen-month prison sentence and served it in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. It's unclear why Vinciquerra served in a county jail instead of a federal institution, or what exact charge Haning was serving time for, because the sentencing for their conspiracy case was deferred.[84]

After they served their sentences, the pair continued their bootlegging business throughout the small towns of Nebraska.[85] But Vinciquerra's luck ran out on a highway near Friend on September 23, 1927. She and Haning led Deputy State Sheriff Frank Weygint on a high-speed chase

Two of the bullets hit the pillow to the left of her head, two hit at the right, and fifth lodged in the wall above her head. The sixth cylinder clicked empty.

in Vinciquerra's Buick Master Six touring car before Haning lost control and wrecked it. They were both thrown from the vehicle. Haning then lunged for his shotgun as the unarmed Weygint approached, but Weygint tackled him and the men fought until Haning gave up.[86]

It soon became apparent why Haning and Vinciquerra were so desperate to get away: the deputy found sixty gallons of liquor in the car. Haning was given a year in the state penitentiary and a $500 fine while Vinciquerra was sentenced to sixty days in jail and fined $100.[87]

The sentence marked the beginning of a low period for Vinciquerra. Gone was the glamorous and haughty woman who had captivated reporters. She was losing money as more and more bootleggers crowded the market and as the government became more organized in its prosecution efforts. In July 1928, ten months after wrecking her luxury Buick touring car, Vinciquerra filed a poverty affidavit with federal banking officers after she was arrested for writing a bad check. She then disappeared before her court date and forfeited her $1,500 bond.[88] She resurfaced in August 1928 at a jail in Holdrege, where she and Haning had been arrested and jailed on concealed weapons charges, the same offense that McCook law enforcement had charged them with in March 1926. Police did not find any alcohol in their Willys-Knight sedan, but "the car carried a rank odor of hooch," according to *The Holdrege Citizen*. *The Citizen* also reported that Haning had just been released from the state penitentiary on July 21, 1928.[89] In addition, the sedan's license plate was registered to a Ford; Vinciquerra was subsequently charged with operation of a motor vehicle without proper license registration. Haning was then transported to serve a ninety-day sentence on an outstanding liquor charge from 1926 in McCook. Vinciquerra paid her fines for the concealed carry charge and the improper registration charge and was released.[90]

After Haning was released early, Vinciquerra and Haning decided that if they were going to keep getting arrested together, they might as well marry. They were wed on October 27, 1928, at a Methodist parsonage in Glendale, Iowa. When *World-Herald* reporters went to her house, the usually chatty Vinciquerra was reticent: "At her home, 2002 North Forty Eighth Street, Monday night, the new Mrs. Haning said she had 'nothing to say.'"[91]

Vinciquerra stayed out of the news for much of 1929, and she and Haning spent part of 1929 in Italy. Their house was still watched, and, while they were gone, federal officers found twenty barrels of fermenting mash during a raid on September 8, 1929. Whoever was using her house was not a good houseguest; upon her return to Omaha in October 1929, Vinciquerra filed a complaint with police that she was missing her vacuum cleaner, her kitchen sink, her silverware, and some other furnishings. Her next appearance in the papers concerned a ninety-day sentence for liquor possession from Federal Judge Woodrough in May 1931, which she appealed in July.[92]

Her North 48th Street home was raided again on August 15. This time authorities seized ninety gallons of liquor and arrested Jack Thomas, an African American man who was found alone in the house. The house was raided again on September 20, and a woman named Marion Ringle was arrested and three gallons of liquor were found. Police raided again in December but found only one gallon of liquor. Vinciquerra was charged with sale and possession of liquor for all three raids. [93]

Vinciquerra's charges from the August raid were dismissed and Haning and Jack Thomas were charged instead.[94] In December, 1931, after three years of marriage, Vinciquerra filed for divorce from Haning.

"I told him to get out about a week ago," Vinciquerra said. "We can't get along together. I'd rather live here alone with my boys."[95] She charged cruelty, the same charge she made against Sebastiano when they divorced. Almost fifty years later, Sam Vinciquerra disputed the charge in a letter. "My dad was cruel and brutal to her, a typical Sicilian custom in those days. [Haning] was kind and gentle to her. Haning was kind and gentle with us, but he was a shrewd, vicious, and dangerous man when pursed by liquor law men," Sam wrote in 1974.[96]

But Haning had loved Vinciquerra for the better part of a decade, and he refused to quit. They reconciled within months, and Haning was with her one night in April 1932, when Sebastiano came to the house on 48th Street. Vinciquerra and Sebastiano quarreled over a liquor deal. Sebastiano threatened his ex-wife, who ran upstairs. Haning ran downstairs and started shooting at Sebastiano, who responded with gunfire of his own. Carl, seventeen, and Sam, sixteen, were in the yard and rushed inside to find their father critically wounded in the stomach and back, and their stepfather shot in the elbow. Vinciquerra called the police while Haning fled on foot. The police dug nine bullets out of the stairwell

Olympic boxer Carl Vinciquerra, left, with his mother, Louise, and brother, Sam (second from right), 1936. Adams County (Nebraska) Historical Society Photograph Collection

and out of the walls of the kitchen and dining room.[97]

Both Vinciquerra and Sebastiano told police that Haning shot first, though it's unclear how Vinciquerra would know since she was upstairs when the gun battle started.

"I have had plenty of excuses to kill him if I had wanted to," Sebastiano said from his hospital room. "How about the time when he broke up my home, when he came in and took my wife, with the authority of the government back of him? If I had wanted to kill him I would have done it then."[98]

Sebastiano was not expected to survive his injuries, but he left the hospital three weeks later and was promptly arrested. He and Haning were brought to trial for carrying concealed weapons, and the presiding judge said he would consult immigration authorities to deport both Vinciquerra and Sebastiano.[99] No evidence can be found if either ever became a U.S. citizen. Haning and Sebastiano's trial was in January 1933, but the verdict was not reported in the newspapers.

Vinciquerra could not be deported, as she was about to serve as a key witness in a corruption trial that marked the beginning of the end for Omaha's organized crime syndicate. Seven politicians and police officers had been indicted for corruption in May 1932; the trial was to begin in October. Vinciquerra was subpoenaed to testify.[100]

Before the corruption trial began, in August 1932 Vinciquerra began serving her ninety-day sentence from a May 1931 conviction. On October 14, 1932, she was brought back to Omaha from Fremont to testify against the crime syndicate. Haning was at her side as she walked into the courtroom, even though their divorce suit was still active. The *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* described her as "neatly dressed and attractive, although the jail pallor has blanched her naturally olive skin."[101]

Vinciquerra testified that she had been told where she was "allowed" to buy liquor. If she paid to be part of the liquor syndicate, she was

Louise Vinciquerra. 1932. Reprinted with permission from *The Omaha World-Herald*

protected from raids, and "if I didn't, I'd have to leave town or do something else."[102] When she stopped paying the syndicate in October 1931 "because I got tired of fooling around with them," she was raided six times in forty days and fined every time. She also testified that when she spoke to government agents, they already knew everything about her operation. She offered six checks that she had paid to the syndicate as evidence of her involvement.[103]

Haning took the stand the next day and testified that Dennison had bankrolled Vinciquerra's 1923 suit against Robert Samardick and Dan Butler for false arrest and imprisonment. Dennison had offered to help and donated two hundred dollars for attorney's fees.[104] The suit was later dropped.

The jury considered the testimony of Vinciquerra, Haning, and many other witnesses, but failed to reach a verdict. Though in declining health, Tom Dennison still had enough energy to purportedly bribe and threaten jury members. After a hung jury in December 1932, Dennison went free. All charges were dropped against him in April 1933.[105]

Voters succeeded where the courts could not. Omahans voted out the remaining Dennison political allies in the 1933 city election. Dennison was seriously injured in a car accident in California on January 27, 1934, and died of his injuries nineteen days later.[106]

After Dennison's trial, Vinciquerra completed her jail sentence in Fremont, and then returned home to North 48th Street, where Haning joined her once again. He and some friends were drinking beer in Vinciquerra's basement on the night of July 3, 1933, when three bullets pierced the window screen and hit Haning in his chest and abdomen. When police arrived, Haning told them he had seen Sebastiano Vinciquerra's face through the screen. Sebastiano was arrested half an hour later and was brought to Haning's hospital room so the dying Haning could identify him.

"Well, you finally did it," Haning said when Sebastiano was brought in.[107] Haning died on July 4, and his death was reported in newspapers as far away as California, Washington, and Georgia with headlines such as "Shots Fatal to Ex-Dry at Beer Party" and "Gunshots Widow 'Bootleg Queen.'"[108] Sebastiano denied involvement; his alibi was that he had been driving around to find women and alcohol. His friend Allen Emmons testified that Sebastiano had been with him all night.

Vinciquerra told reporters that she and Haning had never been divorced and that he had been living at her house for the past four months.

"He said he just couldn't live without me," Vinciquerra said. "He had been living at my home since that time [when he returned from living in Norton, Kansas] trying to make up."[109]

Haning was survived by a son and a daughter from his first marriage, and by his stepsons Sam and Carl. He was buried at Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln. Sebastiano was found guilty of second-degree murder on October 12, 1933, and sentenced to fifteen years in prison.[110]

"He had it coming to him," Louise said of Sebastiano. "But it should have been first-degree murder, the chair."[111]

Federal Prohibition ended two months later, in December 1933. Vinciquerra found herself with her second husband dead, her first husband imprisoned, and her bootlegging livelihood presumably at an end. Her one bright spot was her sons, who were star athletes at Omaha Tech (Carl) and Creighton Prep (Sam). Carl, who was captain of the Omaha Tech football team, was once described as "one of those old-fashioned battering ram fullbacks."[112] He was also named to the *Omaha World-Herald's* "all-intercity football team" for 1933.[113]

The next year, the Nebraska Supreme Court threw out Sebastiano's conviction for the murder of Haning because of circumstantial evidence, and a retrial began in October 1934. On October 26, after Sebastiano took the stand in his own defense, the jury acquitted him.[114]

Vinciquerra was arrested for violating Prohibition laws for one of the last times in March 1934 (Nebraska state prohibition was in effect from January 1917 to November 1934). The *World-Herald* commented at length on the irony that eleven years had passed since Vinciquerra had called reporters to her home, boasted of earning $45,000 in seventeen months and announced that she "was retiring from the business for the sake of her two small sons."[115]

In 1935, Vinciquerra moved to Hastings, a town with a Methodist college, a squeaky-clean reputation, and a healthy dislike for strangers. And Vinciquerra was worse than a stranger; she was an infamous criminal. She opened a roadhouse, and by August 1935 was on trial on a liquor-related charge. Vinciquerra complained about city officials "popping in the papers what a bad woman I was." She said people in Hastings raised "a stink as soon as I got there. I'm as good as any woman in Hastings. I've got two good boys in a university."[116]

She was right. While Sam lived with Vinciquerra in Hastings, helping with his mother's roadhouse and playing football for Hastings College, Carl was a student at Creighton University and becoming a champion boxer in Omaha.[117] By May 1936 he had boxed his way onto the U.S. Olympic team. The *World-Herald* printed a photo showing Vinciquerra hanging on Carl's arm, with Sam smiling next to her. She is quoted as saying that "Carl has lifted the name of Vinciquerra to a high level."[118]

Before the Summer Olympics opened in Berlin on August 1, 1936, Vinciquerra announced her return to Omaha. She had tried to be part of Hastings's art scene, displaying some of her "especially fine Italian handiwork" in a textile exhibit at the Hastings Museum, but she couldn't fit in.[119] Saying she was "disgusted with Hastings, especially with the police department there," she now planned to open a nightclub in Omaha. The *World-Herald* noted that she had never attempted to obtain a liquor or beer license while in Hastings, which was the reason for numerous arrests and court appearances.[120]

Vinciquerra returned to a changed Omaha. Prohibition had been over for almost three years, and the political machine that had protected her from raids was gone. Omaha's authorities were determined to regulate liquor sales, and Vinciquerra was just as determined to spite them. Her new roadhouse, the Maple Grove Tavern at 42nd and L streets, was raided in August 1936 and again in September.[121]

"We've had just about enough of Queen Louise in the liquor business in Nebraska," Thomas Gass of the State Liquor Commission said in the hearing. "What good does it do to warn her?"[122]

Vinciquerra married a man named M. J. Dunley, and they opened a bar called the Paradise Lounge. Soon after, Vinciquerra was permanently enjoined from operating the Maple Grove Tavern because "craps games had been permitted at the tavern, brawls had taken place, drunken persons frequented the spots" and "noctur[n]al orgies had been countenanced."[123]

Though she capitalized on her bootlegging fame by using "Louise Vinciquerra Dunley" in newspaper ads for the Paradise Lounge, she also got tired of her notoriety.[124] In 1940, she testified for a man named George "Dutch" Volker who had been accused of creating a fake check scheme. When the attorney for the prosecution asked her, "I believe you were known as 'Queen Louise' during Prohibition days, weren't you?" she replied:

"The newspapers used to call me that but I never called myself by that name."[125]

Vinciquerra's name appeared in the newspapers less and less. She divorced Dunley after he went to prison for selling unregistered securities. Carl married July 14, 1939. In November, Sam and his wife lost their second-born child, a boy, whom they had named Sebastian.[126]

Sebastian's namesake, his grandfather Sebastiano Vinciquerra, continued his criminal enterprises for much of his life.[127] His third wife divorced him after less than three weeks of marriage, asking, "Why should I let him make a dog's life for me?" She also said she didn't want

"We've had just about enough of Queen Louise in the liquor business in Nebraska. What good does it do to warn her?"

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"another shooting." Whether she was referring to Sebastiano shooting Haning or her own shooting of her former mother-in-law, she didn't make clear.[128] Sebastiano was then arrested and fined several more times before moving to Italy, where he lived the rest of his life. A convicted murderer who had been beaten with a pistol, shot at, shot up, and nearly killed countless times, Sebastiano lived to be seventy years old and died as a result of a fall.[129]

Vinciquerra left Omaha for Bisbee, Arizona, around 1942. She married for a fourth time in 1947 to a man with the last name of Rivera, and ran a cafe in a notorious area of Bisbee known as Brewery Gulch.[130]

On the evening of September 12, 1948, a twenty-one-year-old man named Tony Pacheco came to the café and asked for Vinciquerra. She was already in bed in her apartment above the café, and told employees to say she was indisposed. But something changed her mind. She dressed, came downstairs, and left with Pacheco. Witnesses at the café said the two announced they were going to purchase a car. Pacheco was supposed to drive the new car back to Bisbee for Vinciquerra.[131]

On a desert road between Bisbee and Tombstone, Pacheco robbed Vinciquerra and killed her with a single .45-caliber bullet.[132] He left her body and her purse about twenty feet from the highway. The car was found in March 1949, near Hermosilla, Mexico, 230 miles south of Bisbee. Pacheco was considered the top suspect, and was later found in a Mexican jail, serving time for robbery and other charges. Vinciquerra's family decided against having him extradited to the United States, trusting instead in the justice of a Mexican prison.[133]

In Vinciquerra's forty-eight years, she saw the fervor and failure of Prohibition, America's Noble Experiment, and she was part of the vibrant criminal underworld that followed its repeal. While many women of her social class brewed and sold alcohol to subsidize their incomes, Vinciquerra made bootlegging her career and created a statewide business. She proves that while women of the time period were put on pedestals as the moral saviors for a booze-drenched society, they were also successful at creating, drinking, selling, and moving hooch on a massive scale.

Vinciquerra's skeleton was discovered by a road maintenance crew out burning weeds in December 1948.[134] A flaming red ocotillo bush had grown up among her blackened bones—a crimson crown for Queen Louise.

NOTES

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[3] "Federal Jury Convicts Haning and Vinciquerra," *OWH*, Mar. 26, 1926, 7; "Vinciquerra-Haning Win," *OWH*, Aug. 27, 1927, 3; "Haning Vinciquerra Case Goes to Jury," *OWH*, Mar. 25, 1926, 2; "Liquor Trial Opened of Haning, Vinciquerra," *OWH*, Mar. 24, 1926, 2; Circuit Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit. Haning v. United States. 21 F.2d 508 (8th Cir. 1927).

[4] Ibid.

[5] Laura McKee Hickman, "Thou Shalt Not Vote: Anti-Suffrage in Nebraska, 1914-1920," *Nebraska History* 80 (1999): 55-65.

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[7] "Section 1: America Had a Drinking Problem," *American Spirts: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*. National Constitution Center: The Museum of We the People, 2016.

[8] Thomas M. Coffey, *The Long Thirst: Prohibition in America: 1920-1933* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1975), 295.

[9] Tanya Marie Sanchez, "The Feminine Side of Bootlegging," *Louisiana History* 41, No. 4 (Autumn 2000): 403-33; Fred Minnick, *Whiskey Women* (Lincoln: Potomac Books, 2013), 76.

[10] Mary Murphy, "Bootlegging Mothers and Drinking Daughters: Gender and Prohibition in Butte, Montana," *American Quarterly* 46, No. 2 (June 1994): 174-94.

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[12] Sanchez, "Feminine Side of Bootlegging," 403-33.

[13] Sam Vinciquerra, Personal correspondence to Adams County Historical Society, June 14, 1974. From files of the Adams County Historical Society, Hastings, NE; Orville D. Menard, *River City Empire: Tom Dennison's Omaha* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 42

[14] "Wisner Man Sent to Jail on Booze Charge," *OWH*, Nov. 17, 1922, 21.

[15] Nick Batter, "The Wayfaring Judge: Woodrough and Organized Crime in the U.S. District Court," *Nebraska History* 92 (2016): 78.

[16] Ibid.

[17] "Asserts Beer Makers' Profits $20,000 a Week," *OWH*, Apr. 11, 1923, 11.

[18] "Swiftest Justice Here in Prohibition Cases," *OWH*, Apr. 1, 1923, 1.

[19] John Kyle Davis, "The Gray Wolf: Tom Dennison of Omaha," *Nebraska History* 58 (1977): 25-52; Menard, *River City Empire*, 13.

[20] "Crawford Details His 'Work' for Dennison," *OWH*, Oct. 18, 1932.

[21] Menard, *River City Empire*, 200.

[22] Davis, "Gray Wolf," 31.

[23] Editorial, "The Truth About Omaha," *OWH*, May 10, 1909.

[24] "Woman Accuses Man of Selling Students Booze," *OWH*, Apr. 3, 1923, 4.

[25] Batter, "Wayfaring Judge," 73-90; *Nebraska Blue Book, 1922*, 137.

[26] "Louise Says Glad to Quit Booze Trade for Son's Sake," *OWH*, Apr. 5, 1923, 5.

[27] Kenneth D. Rose, *American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 27.

[28] "Louise Says Glad to Quit Booze Trade for Son's Sake," *OWH*, Apr. 5, 1923, 5.

[29] "Louise is Jailed," *OWH*, Apr. 6, 1923, 1.

[30] "Louise Sorry of Boast About Bootleg Profits," *OWH Evening*, Apr. 6, 1923, 1.

[31] "Cars of Louise's Patrons Block Traffic—Witness," *OWH*, Apr. 17, 1923, 1.

[32] "County Summons Louise for Quiz Upon Taxes," *OWH*, Apr. 8, 1923, 1.

[33] "Cars of Louise's Patrons Block Traffic—Witness," *OWH*, Apr. 17, 1923, 1.

[34] "Louise Vinciquerra Again Held on Hooch Charge," *OWH*, Jun. 26, 1923, 1.

[35] "Crawford Details His 'Work' for Dennison," *OWH*, Oct. 18, 1932.

[36] "Samardick and Butler Sued for Louise Arrest," *OWH*, July 5, 1923, 5.

[37] Batter, "Wayfaring Judge," 73-90; Philip D. Hart, "Omaha's 'UnTouchable' Robert 'Raiding Bob' Samardick," *Serb World U.S.A.* 12, No. 2 (Nov/Dec 1995): 52-59.

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