HISTORY

Shelton Brothers Project

Why did the Shelton Brother pick Peoria during the 1900’s?

c.c.

The Shelton Brothers picked Peoria for many reasons. The first reason was that Peoria had a diverse variety of people that settled here. Since the different types of people with different cultures they had different tastes, new shows would play in Peoria before they tried to make it big on Broadway.
The second reason was Peoria also had roots in the business of breweries and distilleries. Many of Peoria's wealthy people came from the distilling industry.

The third reason was Gambling.

The Forth reason was Peoria had a reputation as a wide-open city

The Sheltons might never have had a presence in Peoria had it not been for a local gambling club operator named Clyde Garrison. An attempt was made to kidnap Garrison in 1930, possibly by the other gangs in an effort to take control of Peoria’s gambling operations. He fought off the kidnappers, but during the fight, his wife was killed. Garrison decided he needed more muscle to protect his Peoria operations and approached the Sheltons to provide that protection. During the 1930s, the Sheltons had a good working relationship with Garrison, protecting his interests as well as those of other Peoria gamblers, but they did not interfere with his role as the local gambling kingpin. That relationship changed in 1940.

Peoria had a reputation as a wide-open city, and by 1940, a number of factors combined to make it a gambling mecca. First, it was the second-largest city in Illinois at the time, and the largest metropolitan area south of Chicago. With the advent of World War II, Peoria was also located between two military camps, Camp Ellis in western Illinois and Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul. Peoria was popular with soldiers as well as locals. Second, there was an increase in the popularity of gambling all across the United States. The Depression was ending, people had jobs and money to spend, and gambling was a popular outlet. Finally, the political scene in Peoria was conducive to gambling. 1941 saw the election, again, of Mayor Woodruff, who was first elected in 1903 and served on and off again for 24 years. Mayor Woodruff was an advocate of the “Peoria liberal” attitude, which held that gambling and prostitution were inevitable but should be controlled and taxed in some manner. This was an ideal situation for the Sheltons. They controlled the slot machines, provided protection and had no tolerance for violence in Peoria from 1941 to 1945.

There was little or no gang violence, and there were economic benefits created by the gambling, it was tolerated. There were two Peorias: the genteel city above the bluff and the valley city teeming with gambling and vice.
Peoria was known as a great prosperity and industrial town. But it was even better for the Shelton Brothers.

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