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### **"Little Hell" Little Sicily Neighborhood (now Cabrini-Green), Chicago, IL Prior: Swede Town Neighborhood**

The name “Little Hell” was derived from the large gas house that was located at Crosby and Hobbie streets whose night time flames lit the skies at night. The roaring thunder of the furnaces could be heard for blocks as coal was poured into the ovens and moistened with water from the Chicago River to create gas that was used for heating, cooking and lighting. Enormous tanks stored the gas during the day.



The Little Hell neighborhood on the North Side of Chicago, was bounded by La Salle Street on the east, Division Street on the North, Chicago Avenue on the South and the Chicago River to the west. Between 1880s and 1930, Chicagoans referred to the heart of the Little Hell slum as “Death Corner,” a wholly understandable moniker given that



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the intersection of West Oak Street and Milton Avenue (Milton Ave., changed names to Cleveland Ave. in 1909) was the scene of well over 100 unsolved murders.



The North Side's first great gangster, Dion O'Banion, was a product of this district. Since most of the vice districts in Chicago were on the South and West sides of the city, this area was more or less ignored for many years in the city's fight against crime. It is said that, in the first 51 days of 1906, the police made over 900 arrests.

For two decades, Chicago police remained “hampered at every turn by the silence of the Italian colony” — a reference to the large Italian-American population in the neighborhood.



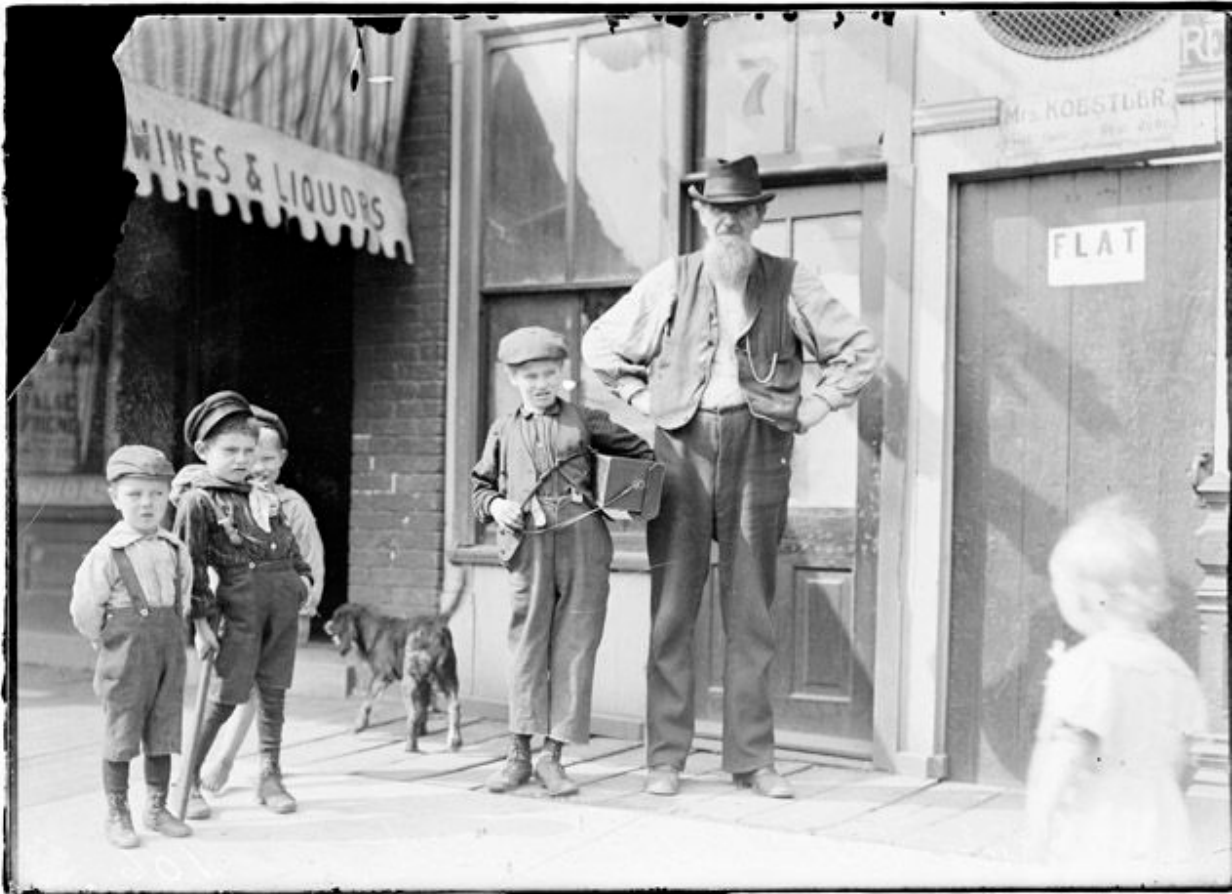
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Typically, as one newspaper story put it, victims would be “murdered before an audience that vanished with the last pistol flash, much as a loon dives beneath the sheltering water just at the moment the hunter’s gun spits out its flame and shot.” Death Corner, as the district’s “central gathering place,” had gained the “international reputation of being the site of more murders than any other territory of equal area in the world.”



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*Italian American boy, c.1902, Chicago. Probably taken in the Little Hell neighborhood.*

By the early 1920s, murders in Little Hell continued at the rate of more than 30 per year — more than one-third of the city's total, although Italians made up only five percent of the population. By this point, many Death Corner victims were casualties of the Prohibition-era “alcohol rivalries” between the bootlegging gangs of Giuseppe “Joe” Aiello and the infamous “Scarface” Al Capone, leader of Chicago’s most powerful mob. As notorious as Cabrini-Green would become, the violence of Little Hell may well have been worse.