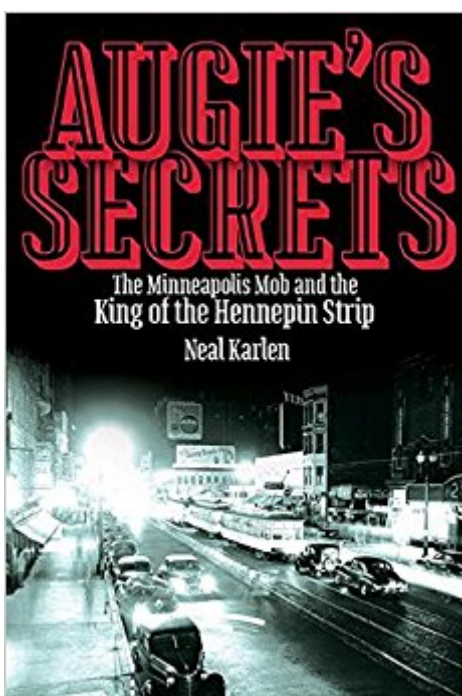


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Augie's Secrets: The Minneapolis Mob And The King Of The Hennepin Strip



Synopsis

There's an old Yiddish saying: two people can keep a secret if one of them is dead. But two living people could keep a secret--as long as one of them was Augie. Augie Ratner, the proprietor of Augie's Theater Lounge & Bar on Hennepin Avenue, was the unofficial mayor of Minneapolis's downtown strip in the 1940s and '50s. In a few blocks between the swanky clubs and restaurants on Eighth Street and the sleazy flophouses and bars of the Gateway District, the city's shakers-and-movers and shake-down artists mingled. Gangsters and celebrities, comedians and politicians, the rich and the famous and the infamous--all of them met at Augie's: Jimmy Hoffa, Henny Youngman, Kid Cann, John Dillinger, Jack Dempsey, Peggy Lee, Groucho Marx, Lenny Bruce, and Gypsy Rose Lee. Augie Ratner knew everyone, and everyone knew and liked Augie, and they told him everything. Mixing careful research with long suppressed family and community stories, Neal Karlen, Augie's great-nephew, tells the real story of the seamy underside of Minneapolis, where Jewish mobsters controlled the liquor trade, invented the point spread in sports betting, and ran national sports gambling operations. Even after Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey supposedly cleaned up the town, organized crime quietly flourished. And Augie was at the center, observing it all. Neal Karlen has been a staff writer at Newsweek, a Rolling Stone Contributing Editor, and a regular contributor to the New York Times and a score of other national publications. He is the author of eight books.

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Customer Reviews

"Karlen offers a loving, page turning...colorful and impressively researched account of the Midwest underworld and his fascinating great-uncle that feels right out of Damon Runyon. He serves up innumerable subplots about the Minneapolis Mob's crucial role in the nation's bootlegging, bookmaking and other illicit activities....entertaining and nostalgic, it's a lost world revived by Karlen in all its eccentric swagger and hard-boiled madcap edginess."-The Minneapolis Star Tribune,Ã Â

Let me save you some time and money: Augie's Secret is that he knew a few mobsters, Henny Youngman, and was well liked by the characters of his era. The other secret revealed in the book is that, while I'm sure Augie was a character, he in no way should have a book written about him. It would take a very strong writer to make this book remotely interesting, and trust me, this is no strong writer.

The Minneapolis Mob was in its death throes when I was growing up in the 1950s, but I could hear its whispered secrets when I hung around my cousins at Thanksgiving gatherings or Saturday night feasts at the gigantic Nankin Cafe just off Hennepin Avenue. The more colorful cousins left for Nevada as Minneapolis was shutting down and Vegas was opening up, and their departure left me wondering what they were escaping and what they were still looking for. Augie's Secrets gives up the answers -- not just exhuming Augie himself, but bringing him and the avenue back to life. I've walked up and down that street for more than 50 years, and finally, thanks to Karlen, I've been able to smell the cigar smoke and the corned beef and get a look inside the fancy restaurants and smoky strip joints. Full disclosure: I was a minor source for the book. I had heard about and talked about many of the characters described between its covers. Now, after reading Augie's Secrets, I'm surprised and often delighted to learn that the DNA of the Minneapolis of my youth is alive and well. The descendants of the Minneapolis Mob may even have more clout than their parents and grandparents did. It's just that the Jewish pioneers were forced to operate on the margins and now the children and grandchildren have been forced to go legit. Karlen leaves us to wonder whether that's such a great thing.

Interesting read for someone who's new to Minneapolis. We moved here in 98, work downtown near Augie's. Figured the book would give some color to the facades and names downtown like Augie's, Brass Rail, etc. Had driven through Minne in the 70s, remembered Hennepin as a pretty run down area - this kind of gives an idea of how much was going on downtown many more years ago. It's not an exhaustive history, don't think it was meant to be. More of a retelling of family stories with some

extra detail thrown in. As such, it hit the mark for me. Interesting characters, more history about Minneapolis and its characters, and if I'm interested I can dig into those characters some more. For now this was an enjoyable read - so enjoyable that I lent it out, have no idea to whom and now need to order another. lol

I have some history with a good many of the places and some of the people mentioned in the book. From 1949 through 1960 I spent entirely too much time in some of the places mentioned. Regretfully, most of Augie's real secrets are nowhere to be found and the overall tone of the book is off-putting. Augie's secrets, and he had a few, remain secret at the end of this book.

Very disappointed with this book! Karlen didn't do his homework~most of the "facts" in the book are of public record. Misspelling of names, wrong locations of incidents. Those of us older folks, who remember these things as they happened, or are actually related to some of the people mentioned & have personal experience with some of the "events revealed" find this book inaccurate. Perhaps Karlen's memories of his uncle's (Auggie Rattner) stories were not researched for accuracy? In any case, I would NOT recommend this book, anyone with "insider" information of these events would probably either be disappointed, and others looking for some true details of this period will be safer to do their own research. Reminded me of the childrens game of "Telephone"~ lost a lot of fact in re-telling of events.

If you are interested in the not so "old days" in Minneapolis and what went on before urban renewal, you will be delighted to read this book and will be surprised at some of the not so "solid citizen" names you will recognize--names that now have had mud washed off and are remembered with pride! Easy to read and makes you wish you were downtown at that time and knew your way around. Augie would've helped ya!

Although it was an interesting book and brought back memories of Hennepin Avenue and "the strip," it was somewhat disorganized. I can remember my parents talking about the "Jewish mafia" in Minneapolis, and at the time dismissing it as innuendo and rumor. So I found the information that there WAS a "Jewish mafia" eye-opening. So, despite the book's occasional failings, I would recommend the it to anyone who lives/lived in Minneapolis who wants to learn more about its somewhat-seedy history.

I made it through about three chapters of this books just hoping that it would get better or at least mildly interesting. Unfortunately, it got worse the more I read and I had to give up. I passed the book on to a fellow Minnesota history enthusiast. She only made it to the fifth chapter before throwing in the towel. It sounded like a good book, but it was painful to read.

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