

LOOKING BACK

Racy stories of gangsters, guns and molls

Vintage pulps written by Freeport man

BY HARRIETT GUSTASON
For The Journal-Standard

Unbeknownst by many folks today, is the fact that a young man reared and educated in Freeport wrote racy, engrossing gangster stories for pulp magazines in the late 1920s and early '30s. Pulp fiction, as that expression was known, was a genre unto itself when crime was blatantly coarse and rampant throughout the country, even in conservative little Freeport, as Prohibition dangled.

Richard Credicott, 1924 graduate of Freeport High School and son of an owner of the historic Oak Brand Dairy, had 18 of his gangster stories published in popular pulp magazines that were sold on every newsstand throughout the country during the late 1920s and early '30s. Those Credicott stories were lost to posterity along with most of that printed pulp, until two men who recognized their value got on the case.

A Revival

A new book, its first printing in November 2011, includes all of the crime stories penned by Richard Credicott, Freeport native. The book, titled, "If Only She Had a Machine Gun," sports on its cover a sultry, gun-flashing woman in red, a gangster's moll.

Editors, John Locke and Rob Preston, have collected all of Credicott's stories and compiled them into the book published late last year by Off-Trail Publications of Elkhorn, Calif. The book encompasses - besides all the Richard Credicott stories - an extensive forward by Locke enlarging on each of the stories and including a comprehensive history of the pulp fiction genre. Also, of exceptional interest to area residents will be the account written by Dave Credicott, son of the pulp fiction writer, about his father and life in Freeport.

Through their contact with Dave and extensive research, the editors learned that Richard Credicott was an honor student at Freeport High, bright scholastically and socially. He supplied the illustrations for the 1922 yearbook, "Polaris," and the next year served as art editor. Locke saw in the author's art work both his sense of humor and a rebellious nature.

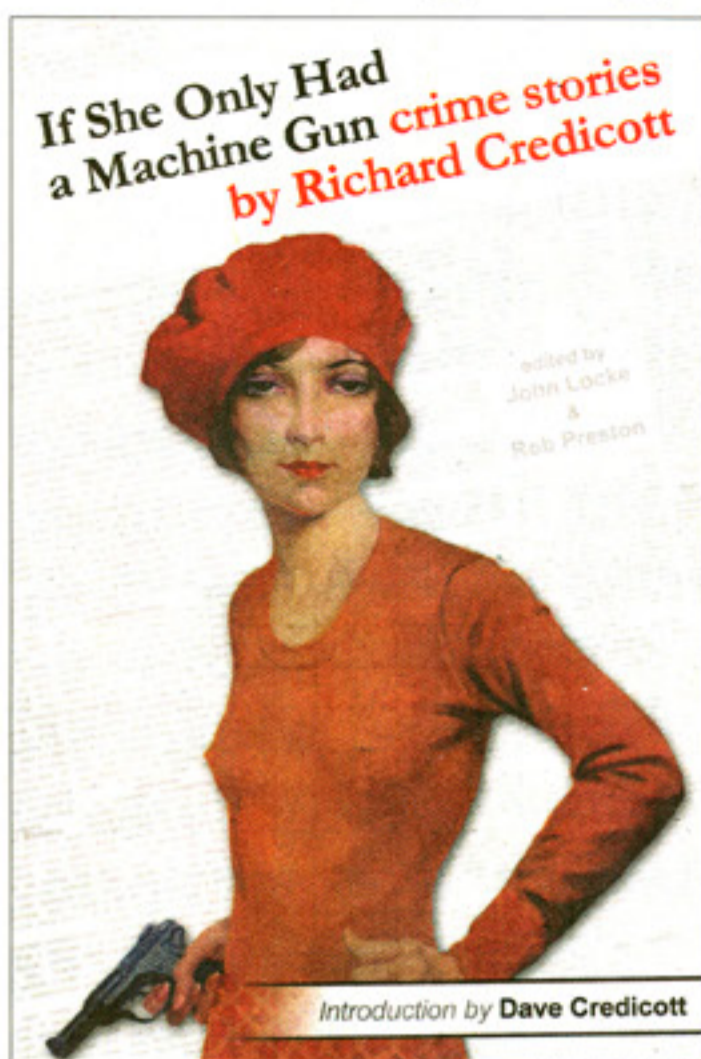
Richard's artistic endeavors were already full of "quips, malaprops and mischievous gags," Locke noted. His command of English had been augmented through courses in both Latin and Spanish and indications of his writing affinity and prowess emerged early on. Richard also reported for the school newspaper, "The Polaris Weekly."

Locke and Preston classify Credicott's work as "terrific," written by "an imaginative young man from Freeport." The book claims "glimpses of Freeport during the tempestuous '20s, including the experiences of some real-life Freeport gangsters."

A Son's Perspective

Dave Credicott, the son, was born in 1948 and was himself a graduate of Freeport High. Dave calls his contribution, simply, "Dad." Dave says they "were typical middle-class, living in a rented duplex house in Freeport." He said he learned to ice skate on the Taylor Park pond and was taught to drive by his father on the winding road "in this sprawling park." Dave describes a warm and humorous relationship that existed between him and his father.

At FHS, Dave may be remembered as accompanist for school musicals. He went on to become a church pianist and organist, a musical career which began with his mother's purchase of a mint



The crime stories written by Richard Credicott of Freeport are included in this book.



Richard Credicott



Richard Credicott drew this cartoon while in high school in Freeport. This appeared in the 1922 Polaris yearbook.

green piano for \$5.

Dave's tales of growing up in Freeport and working for his father at Freeport's legendary Oak Brand Dairy, are fetching in themselves. He tells of getting pulled out of Yellow Creek by the dam in Krape Park by his father. He says he enjoyed a bit of stature through his familial attachment to a company which made good ice cream. But, he found working for his father could mean assignments to the nasty jobs, like, for instance, stripping and re-finishing floors at the plant or cleaning rust from an ammonia refrigeration system. Dave wondered if his father had done that deliberately to steer him toward a broader choice of a lifetime pursuit.

The extent of his father's writing was a surprise even to Dave as he had only known of a couple of the stories. He was contacted by the editors after they discovered his existence through the Internet's Google. It had taken considerable work for the editors and a number of interested assisting associates and friends to acquire all 18 of the yarns.

Fiction of the Times

The process unfolds in an intriguing forward written by Locke, titled "Fictioneering in the Golden Age of Gangsters." Locke gives a brief history

and assessment of each of Richard Credicott's stories along with narrative on Richard's writing career and a colorful history of the fleeting pulp fiction genre. Locke found that the working class made up the "bedrock readers of the pulp fiction." A nickel or dime might buy one.

Writing for pulp fiction didn't pay much, sometimes as minimal as a penny per word. Then when the Depression pressed across the nation and most of the pulp publishers experienced great difficulties, many of the writers gave up. Apparently one of them was Richard Credicott. Locke found it ironic that "Richard's career ended at its peak of success." And to some of us, it remains a puzzle why a man with such a talent for writing did not tap some other vein.

A Change of Fancy

Locke goes on to say, however, that Richard's life doesn't end with his last story. He went on to work at the dairy with his brother, Edward, and others, with their father remaining as general manager. Locke discovered that about that time, February 1933, Richard became smitten with the game of bridge which seemed to coincide with his abandonment of writing. We can only surmise that this passion had much to do with his forsaking such a talent.

Richard became quite an expert player, joining in bridge tournaments at Hotel Freeport and other locations, advancing on to greater heights, even as far as the City of Chicago. He and his partner, Henry Raeppe, played for decades. Richard once hosted a championship tournament of the Freeport Bridge Association at the Oak Brand Creamery. Of course, ice cream products such as Eskimo pies and ice cream and cake were handy for refreshments.

Locke incorporates scads more of fascinating local history in his account than we can pursue here, all compelling reading. Edward took over the dairy after their father died, but Richard maintained a leading role in the broader industry, even serving as president of the Illinois Association of Ice Cream Manufacturers. Both he and Edward belonged to the local Rotary Club.

"Richard slipped away on Feb. 20, 1991," Locke wrote, "and left the treasure that we've unearthed eight decades after it was buried in some rather obscure magazines. This volume will remain a tribute to his life and talents."



Artwork for one of his crime stories

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Freeport Journal-Standard, May 6, 1918
Richard Credicott was co-owner of what was known as Oak Brand Dairy.

This Memorial Day
Remember...

those who have passed away and are especially dear to us.

Select one of the following verses:

1. We hold you in our thoughts and memories forever.
2. May God cradle you in His arms, now and forever.
3. Forever missed, never forgotten. May God hold you in the palm of His hand.
4. Thank you for the wonderful days we shared together. My prayers will be with you until we meet again.
5. The days we shared were sweet. I long to see you again in God's heavenly glory.
6. Your courage and bravery still inspire us all, and the memory of your smile fills us with joy and laughter.
7. Though out of sight, you'll forever be in my heart and mind.
8. The days may come and go, but the times we shared will always remain.
9. May the light of peace shine on your face for eternity.
10. May God's angels guide you and protect you throughout time.
11. You were a light in our life that burns forever in our hearts.
12. May God's graces shine over you for all time.
13. You are in our thoughts and prayers from morning to night and from year to year.
14. We send this message with a loving kiss for eternal rest and happiness.
15. May the Lord bless you with His graces and warm, loving heart.

John Doe
July 10, 1959 - May 5, 1980

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Tom and Mona Doe
and Family

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