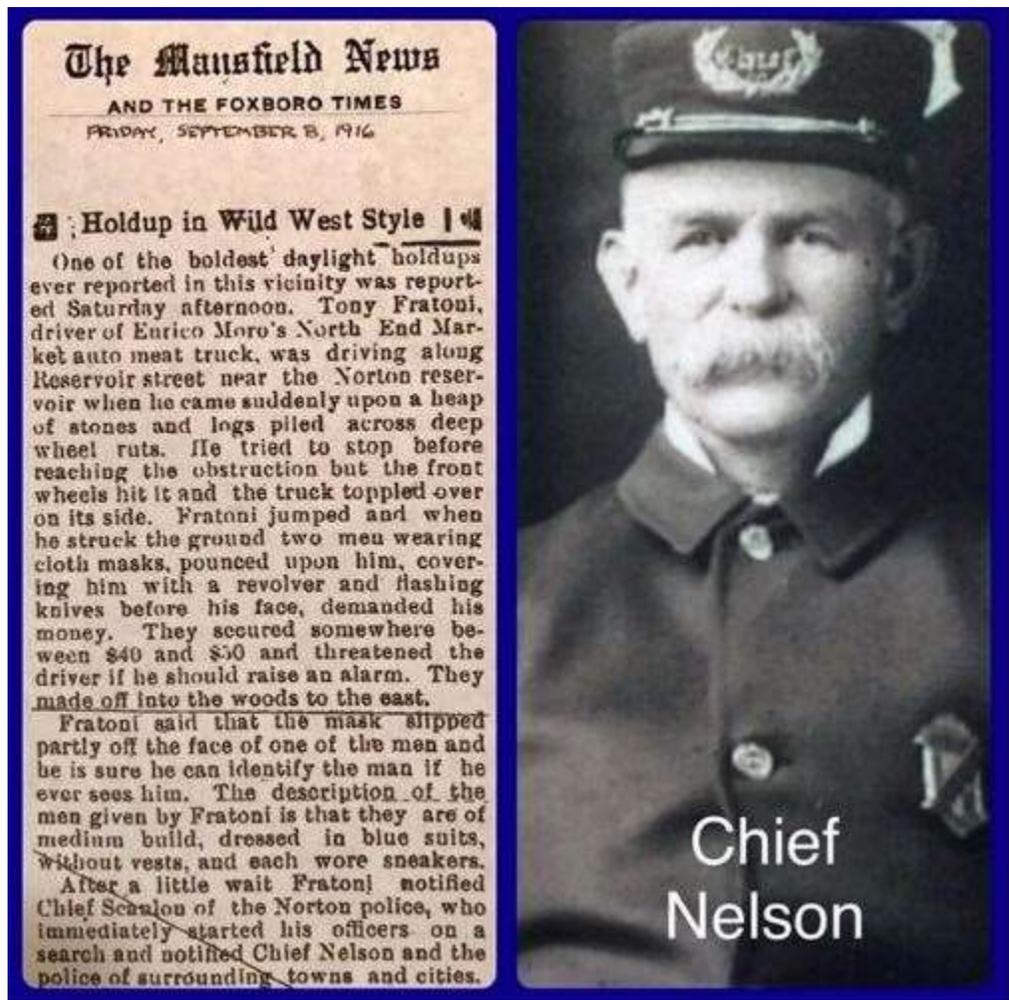


# Pair pulls off wild west style holdups in 1916

By Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco | mansfield@wickedlocal.com

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Thomas Nelson was Mansfield's police chief in 1916 when a rash of brazen robberies hit town. [Courtesy/Mansfield History Society]

In 1916, Mansfield was a quiet town of about 6,000 people. But that didn't prevent a frightening wave of highway robbery.

The trouble began on Sept. 2. Tony Fratoni was a driver for Moro's Market in Mansfield's North End. Fratoni was driving his route along Reservoir Street near the Mansfield/Norton line when he came upon a collection of logs and large stones in the road. He attempted to stop but hit the obstructions, knocking the truck on its side.

Fratoni managed to jump out with a leg injury, but soon found a man pointing a revolver in his face. He and an accomplice robbed Fratoni of somewhere between \$40 and \$50. They told him not to tell the cops, but Fratoni went to Norton police who

notified area law enforcement. Fratoni described the men as being of medium build, wearing blue suits and sneakers. Neighborhood residents reported seeing two men running through the woods. No suspects were found.

One week later, William Irving of Mansfield was driving down the same stretch of Reservoir Street when two masked men jumped in front of his car in an attempt to stop him. Narrowly missing the men, Irving sped past them and made his way downtown to notify Mansfield Chief of Police Thomas Nelson. Once again no suspects were found.

It appears the bandits struck again on Sept. 13, this time in Mansfield's Back Bay neighborhood. Alexander Gallipeau was making his usual deliveries for the Mansfield Dairy near the corner of Church Street and Chilson Avenue. The hour was about 3 a.m. Gallipeau soon saw a revolver in his face, and felt a second revolver in the back of his head. Gallipeau quickly gave the robbers his loose change but they threatened to "blow his head off" if he didn't "give up the whole of it." Gallipeau gave them another \$10 and the robbers were off.

As he usually did, Charles Corcoran, owner of the Mansfield Dairy, soon met up with Gallipeau on Pratt Street to collect empty milk bottles. The delivery man told his boss of his misfortune. As the two men talked one of the robbers emerged from the nearby woods.

"There's one of them now," Gallipeau exclaimed.

Gallipeau and Corcoran pursued the man, who ran back into the woods and fired a shot at his pursuers. Gallipeau was armed and returned fire, missing the robber. Gallipeau fired two more shots into the woods but to no avail. Chief Nelson soon fanned out with four officers on bicycles, but the robbers were able to elude them under the cover of darkness. Gallipeau's robbers matched the description given by Tony Fratoni.

"No need to go to the movies to witness bold hold ups," said the Mansfield News.

It was noted that there had been a string of several similar robberies between Boston and Providence. It appears no one was ever brought to justice in the Mansfield hold ups.

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