Chapter 1
Death of a Godfather

A man lay in a pool of his own blood on a Hamilton sidewalk struggling for breath. It was May 31, 1997. His death was the start of a revolution that decided who was in charge of organized crime in Ontario.

He wasn't a Hells Angel or an Outlaw. And he certainly wasn't a Loner or Para-Dice Rider or anything like that. He wasn't a biker at all, and neither was the man who killed him.

No, he was John "Johnny Pops" Papalia. He was the Godfather of the Hamilton Mafia, and the primary source of cocaine and other drugs — as well as a mastermind of prostitution, loan-sharking and other products delivered via organized crime — in Southern Ontario.

John "Johnny Pops" Papalia

Born in 1921 to a Calabrian family in Hamilton, Papalia dropped out of school at 13, so he could get into the family

business — organized crime. His father, Antonio, was one of a close-knit group of Italians in Hamilton that ran liquor into the U.S. during prohibition (the same men smuggled liquor *into* Canada during its own, earlier era of prohibition). "I grew up in the '30s, and you'd see a guy who couldn't read or write but who had a car and was putting food on the table," Johnny said proudly. "He was a bootlegger, and you looked up to him." Antonio was also a prime suspect in the assassination of Rocco Perri, Hamilton's first Godfather.

John Papalia developed an even more profound mistrust of authority than you'd expect, even from someone who spent their whole life involved in organized crime. It happened when his beloved father was confined at an internment camp during World War II. His crime was being a prominent Italian. Johnny is said to have taken it hard.

With prohibition long over in both countries and most of the Hamilton Mafia veterans and leaders involuntarily working in Northern Ontario, Johnny did what he could to get by. That generally meant burglaries. He was so successful at it that he started a prosperous fencing operation in an abandoned ice warehouse at the corner of Railway and Mulberry Streets, across the road from where he lived with his mother, Rosie, whose cousins had been involved with Perri's business. Papalia was not a big man — maybe five-foot-eight and slight — but he had a reputation for extreme violence, and was rarely messed with.

He was first arrested in 1945 for a burglary, but he didn't see any real jail time until 1947, when he was caught running an illegal gambling house in his warehouse. Inside, he met a successful Toronto heroin dealer named Harvey Chernick (who, in turn, was being supplied by Sicilian Antonio Sylvestro). In the almost two years they were behind bars together, Chernick taught him the trade and hooked him up with suppliers.

Almost as soon he started selling heroin, Johnny got caught. A cop spotted him making a deal in front of Toronto's busy Union Station and took him in. But Papalia was, above all, resourceful. At his trial, he told the judge that he wasn't selling a drug, but buying one. In the days before sophisticated forensics, he convinced the judge that the white power he had wasn't heroin, but a patent

medicine cooked up by a friend. It was the only thing, he said, that helped relieve the pain of his syphilis.

The judge — apparently believing nobody would admit in a public forum to having syphilis unless he really had it — bought the story and gave him two years less a day if he promised to see a doctor when he was released.

Papalia did his time and was rewarded for keeping his mouth shut with an apprenticeship in Montreal with some friends of Sylvestro's — Luigi Greco and Carmine Galante. Both were big-time mobsters, who had met with the likes of Lucky Luciano and had strong ties with the Manhattan-based Bonanno crime family. In fact, Galante had been Joseph Bonanno's personal driver and had been sent to Montreal by him specifically in an attempt to dominate the city's drug trade.

After he had learned the ropes, Papalia went back to Hamilton where he bought a taxi company on the city's heavily Italian James Street North. The cops believed that the cabs were just a front for a gambling ring. When one of the drivers, Tony Coposodi, was executed with two bullets to the back of the head, suspicions that the bootlegger's boy was up to no good increased.

Throughout the '50s, Papalia played the part of the area Godfather with great gusto. He had big, fancy cars, wore expensive suits, squired around lots of pretty women and always carried at least $1,000 in cash with him. He always liked to flash what he called "reds and browns" ($50 and $100 bills) wherever he went.

He had protection-racket money coming in from Montreal and extortion-racket money and gambling-house money coming in from Toronto, in addition to what he made in Hamilton. Although he had many slices of many different pies there, the bulk of his money came from an ingenious loan-sharking scheme. He would lend money to anyone, especially business owners. They would agree to pay back $6 for every $5 borrowed. If it wasn't repaid in a week, every $5 of the new balance would require a $6 repayment the following week. Few could afford this outrageous 1,040 percent annual interest. Traditionally when a debtor defaults to the Mafia, they take what they can from him and then kill or severely injure him. And there's little doubt that Papalia and his men did plenty of that, but he gave some business owners

another option. They could just put in his vending machines — he had since set up a company at his old Railway Street headquarters called Monarch Vending Machines — with all the profits going back to him. Of course, the debt wouldn't be forgiven, just some of the interest knocked off. It was incredibly lucrative — because much of what they sold in the vending machines was stolen through truck hijackings or warehouse burglaries — and it even gave him the veneer of a legitimate business.

Papalia made the big time in 1959. He was the only Canadian invited to a meeting in New York that set up what was later to be known as "the French Connection." Joe Valachi, the minor-league gangster who later turned world-famous informant, was in attendance and testified that he knew of Papalia as a capo (boss) who ran much of Southern Ontario under the auspices of the Buffalo-based Magaddino Family.

The plan was to source high-grade heroin from the Middle East, funnel it through France and then ship it to New York, the distribution point for North America.

Papalia worked extensively with the Sicilian Agueci brothers until 1961, when Vito Agueci was arrested and the Magaddinos had Alberto Agueci murdered. But that didn't slow Papalia down. He found new European connections — including Sicilians working out of France — to keep the heroin supply steady. And he understood that it was just business. There were no hard feelings between him and the Magaddinos over the dismissal of the Aguecis.

Back home, Papalia became a victim of his own ambition. For years he had been involved in an extortion racket with a group of mostly Jewish bar owners, but he decided he wanted it all. One man, Max Bluestein, refused to play ball, so Papalia and his men showed up at his Yonge Street jazz club, the Town Tavern. When Bluestein exited the bar, Papalia and his men beat him nearly to death with a metal pipe. No less a celebrity than Pierre Berton referred to it as a "semi-execution," and made it the focus of a personal anti-organized crime campaign in his newspaper column.

But not a single one of the literally hundreds of people who witnessed the beating outside the popular nightclub on the country's busiest stretch of pavement came forward to testify

against Papalia. Even Bluestein claimed not to know who did it to him.

But a marked increase of police raids on his and his associates' businesses convinced Papalia — or, more likely his boss, Magaddino — that he should turn himself in. He got 18 months.

After almost a year in prison, Papalia was indicted by the Americans for his involvement in the French Connection. As he was being led to the airplane to take him south of the border, a couple of reporters caught his eye. "I'm being kidnapped! Help me!" he screamed at them. "They're taking me someplace I don't want to go!"

Indeed they were. Papalia was sentenced to ten years in a West Pennsylvania prison. But, just as he had convinced a Toronto judge he needed heroin for his syphilis, Papalia fooled the U.S. Justice Department into thinking he had tuberculosis. They let him out after less than five years on compassionate grounds. When a group of American reporters met him at the gate on his release, he refused to talk with them, claiming not to be important enough to warrant their time. "Look, fellows, I'm a sick man," he told them. "I'm not even a spit in the ocean; I'm a nothing."

Back in Hamilton, he was greeted with a big party and great a show of fealty from his old crew. But he also received some bad news. While Papalia was in prison, the Magaddinos had turned over some of his interests in Toronto to his much-hated rival from Woodbridge, Paul Volpe. It enraged Johnny Pops. Not only was Volpe young and loud-mouthed, representing the new generation of gangsters Papalia had no use for, but he also freely admitted to having a homosexual relationship when he was younger. Papalia considered him to be an absolute abomination.

Humiliated over the ascension of Volpe, Papalia met with acting Ontario boss Giacomo Luppino (also from Hamilton) to see if he could get his Toronto businesses back. He didn't, but he appeared to have a new job.

On June 6, 1969, police saw Papalia visit Luppino at a restaurant on College Street in Toronto. The next day, the bullet-riddled body of Filippo Vendemini was discovered in the parking lot behind his small Bloor Street West shoe store. When his

wife, Giuseppina, found him, her screaming was so loud that a couple of neighbors called police to report a woman was being assaulted.

The police determined that the former extortionist and smuggler was said to have owed money to the wrong people. Under questioning, Giuseppina (who was pregnant with the couple's sixth child) provided little of value other than the fact that Filippo had been on the phone frequently with a man named Vincenzo. And she described a man she'd seen him with the day before he died.

The police soon tracked down Vincenzo Sicari, a Montreal pizzeria owner who had worked for Salvatore "Sammy" Triumbari, an extortionist whose murder two years earlier had gone unsolved. Sicari told them that he and Vendemini had gone to Hamilton to visit a mutual friend. Then Vendemini drove him to Toronto International Airport. The next thing he heard, Vendemini was dead.

On July 28, 1969, Papalia was again seen with Luppino in Toronto. Later that day, Sicari's body was found in the same neighborhood as Vendemini's.

It was at about this time that many started referring to Papalia as "the Enforcer" in reverent tones. Although respected by everyone who knew him, Papalia was far from well liked. He had a habit of stealing his friends' wives and girlfriends and then dumping them. He had little tolerance for young wannabes and would viciously taunt and punish them for minor mistakes and transgressions. "We had to respect him because of his role," said one Hamilton man who worked with him. "But he got on everybody's nerves."

Over the years, Papalia maintained his control over Hamilton and most of Southern Ontario, but his interests in Toronto dwindled as Volpe's star rose. Papalia ruled Hamilton like a sultan, establishing the Gold Key Club in the mid-1970s. No storefront hole where old men would quietly sip espressos, this ostentatious nightclub boasted a luxurious lounge, private rooms and an elaborate discotheque. Only members and their guests — usually dates and local celebrities — could get in. "There wasn't actually any gold key," said Sergeant John Harris of the Hamilton police.

"They used a password that changed from time to time, just like in gangster movies."

It had a huge illuminated sign that hung over Main Street. Across Wentworth Avenue was Cathedral High School, where the next generation of members was expected to come from. And across Main was a 24-hour coffee shop. There was always at least one cop in the front window. "Nobody ever went in or out of there without us knowing about it," one retired cop who pulled Gold Key duty told me. "We knew who they all were, but they didn't care."

Not everyone in the Gold Key Club could trace their roots back to Sicily or Calabria. A lot of non-Italians worked at the club or with the members. Papalia himself married a woman of Irish descent he met at the club. Shirley Ryce was a bartender there when she caught Johnny's eye. A tall blonde, her dad had been a bookie with close ties to Papalia's sphere of influence.

He declared bankruptcy in 1982, but somehow managed to be chauffeured around town and show off his still-thick wad of bills. Things got immeasurably better for him on November 13, 1983 when Paul Volpe's body was found curled up in the trunk of his wife's BMW in a long-term parking lot at the Toronto airport. With him out of the way, and Luppino a doddering 84-year-old, the Magaddinos had no choice but to put Papalia in charge of Ontario.

He expanded everywhere. A joint task force arrested 10 men in Toronto's Greektown on Danforth Avenue, including two they knew were friends of Papalia's, in December 1985. But they couldn't get anything to stick to Johnny Pops. "Yeah, I know the people they charged — they're friends of mine," he told a reporter. "But that doesn't mean I was involved; I wasn't, because I wouldn't have anything to do with Greeks — I don't like them, I don't like their restaurants, I don't like their food."

Well into the '90s, Papalia was the undisputed Godfather in Hamilton, especially after Luppino died in 1987. He owned an entire city block among his vast real estate holdings. His companies were the biggest vending-machine and liquor-dispensing equipment firms in Canada. He made millions, and laughed about it in the media.

But eventually ill health — particularly his troublesome gallstones — did what his enemies and law enforcement never could, it slowed him down. The old man didn't get out much after about 1994 or so. He'd make the short trip from his easy chair in his 14th-floor Market Street penthouse apartment to the black leather couch at Monarch Vending. At the penthouse, he spent most of his time in his big leather chair watching old movies on his big-screen TV. And at the business, he generally chatted with the old guard or dozed off. He lived that way until the day he was shot and killed on the way to Monarch from his home.

At the time, some speculated that he was suffering from the early stages of Alzheimer's. But everybody still did what the old man said. And one of his rules was that his men were never to deal with the Hells Angels. He'd seen what they'd done in Montreal, and he didn't trust them. And it was probably that pronouncement that kept Hells Angels out of Ontario for so very long. While Hells Angels could probably have taken on the Outlaws and every other biker gang in the province, they would not have picked a fight with Papalia and his boys. Because then they'd also be looking at war with the Magaddinos, Cotronis, Violis, Musitanos and potentially even the Rizzutos. It was not a good plan.

And, although it would have been in their best interest to do so, the Hells Angels did not kill Papalia.

It was one his own. Sort of. Papalia and his old friend Dominic Musitano both operated out of headquarters on Railway Street. Compared to Papalia, who by this time ruled all of Ontario and answered only to the Magaddinos, the Musitanos were small-time. "They were not at the same level of Papalia," said Canadian organized-crime expert Antonio Nicaso. "For many years, the Musitano family lived in the shadow of Papalia."

Their relationship was grudging at best, with paranoid, willful Papalia not always trusting the short-tempered and secretive Musitano. And they had one consistent bone of contention — whom they'd hire.

Johnny was dead set against bikers of any stripe, but Dominic (and his brother Antonio) used them all the time for all kinds of jobs. They sold his coke, they bombed businesses that fell behind

in their payments and they made witnesses' minds change about testifying.

Dominic, the only potential threat among the Italians to Papalia's power structure, suffered a massive coronary in 1985, and his ability to lead diminished consistently until he died of a stroke in 1991. Antonio, also known as Tony, didn't have Dominic's leadership ability and, in any case, he wasn't able to act in any significant way with so many parole restrictions stemming from convictions for conspiracy to commit murder, six bombings, two attempted bombings and two arsons.

So the Musitanos' business fell to Dominic's two sons: Pasquale (better known as Pat) and Angelo (better known as Ang). They represented a different breed; they were, according to many who knew them, North American kids who learned about the Mafia from movies and TV, rather than from the old Sicilian or Calabrian traditions. "They were totally different in terms of character than Papalia; he always tried to keep a low profile — he was a very old-fashioned boss in that sense," said Nicaso. "They are the new face of organized crime — they like to show off."

Both Ang, who was a heavy man, and Pat, who was truly obese, liked to wear expensive tailor-made suits and lots and lots of jewelry. And they liked to, as one cop told me, "play at being gangsters." They got in contact with a lowlife named Kenny Murdock. They had known him since they were both young children because he used to drive their dad around. They also remembered that, back in 1985, just before his heart attack, their dad had hired Murdock to kill a man named Salvatore Alaimo.

It was typical of how Dominic did business. Alaimo had no beef with the Musitanos; he was just a janitor at the now-defunct but then-enormous Stelco steel plant. It was Alaimo's brother, Gianni, who was in deep to the Musitanos with gambling debts. Dominic's logic was that a dead man won't pay his debts, so it was pointless to kill Gianni. But there are other ways to get a man to pay.

When the Musitano boys got in touch with Murdock in 1997, he was delighted. Without much else positive in his life, he had developed a great deal of fondness for and dedication to the family, and thought of the boys kind of like nephews. The boys

didn't know it at the time, but Murdock had met Dominic in Collins Bay Institution in Kingston and Dominic asked him to take care of his boys if anything ever happened to him. In effect, that made Murdock the Godfather's godfather. The Musitanos gave Murdock a list of four names and indicated they wanted them all killed. They promised him $10,000 cash and a nice big bag of cocaine.

Kenny Murdock

The first name on the list was Johnny Pops. And on May 31, 1997, Murdock shot him dead on Railway Street.

The next name on the list was Carmen Barillaro. Johnny Pops was a secretive, paranoid man who left no clear line of succession. But it was obvious to anyone who knew the situation that, with Johnny Pops dead, the crown would be hoisted by his right-hand man, Barillaro, who ran the Niagara Falls family.

Barillaro was an old friend of Papalia's, and the two moved seamlessly from running heroin to cocaine as fashions changed. He'd gotten in some trouble over the years, too. Caught trafficking in 1979, he was also arrested in 1989 for hiring a woman to kill a debtor — she chickened out and turned informant — and again in 1992 after getting caught with seven kilograms of cocaine and 900 kilograms of weed.

By 1997, though, he was free and clearly the successor to Papalia. His reign lasted less than two months. On July 23, 1997, Ang drove Murdock to Barillaro's house. He parked around the corner so he would not be recognized. Murdock walked up to the house and knocked on the door. When Barillaro answered, he made something up about wanting to know if the Corvette in the driveway was for sale. Suspicious, or perhaps recognizing him, Barillaro tried to shut the door on him. Murdock burst in and killed the older man then fled back to Ang's still-running car.

With Papalia and Barillaro gone, there were no Mafiosi left in Ontario of any merit other than the Musitano brothers. They were now in charge.

And they weren't finished. Although the Musitanos had long hired and dealt with bikers, they didn't like the idea of any major competition in their hometown. Third on Murdock's list was former wrestler and biker Johnny K-9.

Although the Satan's Choice chapter had been slowed down significantly in Hamilton and had kicked K-9 out of the club, K-9 was still active in the city and, sources say, still selling cocaine he bought from Hells Angels. He was small-time, to be sure, but he was competition and he had connections the Musitanos did not want to deal with. Sure they ran the Hamilton Mafia now, but — with suspicions rapidly growing over their involvement with the deaths of Papalia and Barillaro — they didn't have many friends to call on if they had a war with Hells Angels.

On August 20, 1997, with a gun in his pocket, Murdock knocked on K-9's door. The big man answered and invited him in. Murdock shook his head. "John, I've been sent here to kill you," he said. "But I'm not going to do it." Stunned, all K-9 could do was thank him. Murdock told him to be careful and left.

There was a fourth name on the list, but it was never made public. At least three sources have told me that they believed the fourth name was that of Outlaws president Mario Parente.

Whether Murdock decided against killing that fourth target or not, he was apprehended on an earlier extortion warrant. After he was interrogated, the Hamilton cops played him an audiotape of his buddies, the Musitanos. The cops had bugged the Gathering Spot, their pizza restaurant on James Street North, and had recorded them talking about Murdock. They laughed at him, described what a scumbag they thought he was and joked about how much better off they'd be if he somehow met with a tragic accident. Murdock broke and turned informant. In exchange for his testimony, he received a 13-year sentence.

The Musitanos were immediately arrested. Both were charged with the murder of Papalia, and Ang was also charged with the murder of Barillaro. The whole ugly story came out. Murdock said that, despite the promise of $10,000 and a big bag of coke, he

Pat Musitano

only received $2,000. "But I would have done it for free," he testified, because of his love for the family.

The Musitanos — who, in court as well as on tape, made no secret of their disgust with their former employee — surprised the court by entering guilty pleas for conspiracy to murder Barillaro. In exchange, charges related to Papalia's murder were dropped. They were both sentenced to 10 years.

In the space of about a year, the Hamilton — and therefore Ontario — Mafia had effectively ceased to exist. Johnny Pops was dead. The only other man capable of leading, Barillaro, was dead. The Musitanos, flawed as they were, were also behind bars. What was left of the Magaddino Family were under so many legal restrictions and police surveillance that they were essentially handcuffed, and unable to act. But, in truth, there wasn't anybody in Hamilton or elsewhere in Ontario that was up to the task.

At least, there wasn't anyone among the Italians. There were still bikers. And, with biker-hating Papalia out of the way, they were more free than ever to wear their colors and operate their businesses. But there were problems there. The Outlaws were allegedly getting most of their coke from the Italians, and that source had effectively vanished. Satan's Choice, which had the most to gain because they could get an almost unlimited supply of cocaine from Quebec, were taken out of the picture at almost exactly the same time because of arrests linked to the bombing of a Sudbury Police station.

K-9's life was spared just in time for him — and the rest of his former gang — to be thrown behind bars. The chapter's clubhouse on Lottridge Street was taken by the Crown as evidence. Satan's Choice ceased to exist in Hamilton.

The resulting power vacuum affected the streets profoundly. Just months earlier, the province had been literally awash in cheap and easy vice, and now it had dried up almost completely. Keep

in mind that most of the drugs that organized criminals were dealing — cocaine, methamphetamine and still a little heroin — were extremely addictive, and that their other services (including gambling, prostitution and loan-sharking) were also in great demand. The people who used these products and services were suddenly desperate for a new source.

Although deprived of their obvious way into the city — K-9's Satan's Choice — Hells Angels were smart enough to take advantage of the situation in a big way. Hells Angels national president Walter Stadnick, through the Sherbrooke Chapter, got in touch with a Niagara region drug dealer named Gerald "Skinny" Ward. An all-time tough guy whose criminal record began when he was 18 years old and listed 21 different convictions by 1999, Ward had been allegedly selling Magaddino-supplied coke received through Hamilton for years.

Gerald "Skinny" Ward.

But he was no biker. He didn't even own a motorcycle. He was just a local guy who sold drugs. Hells Angels reached out to him and he was delighted to hear from them. After a few meetings, Ward quickly became the top coke dealer in Hamilton and Niagara. "Ward was never a biker," Len Isnor, a biker specialist with the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), told me. "But Stadnick said, 'You're a Hells Angel now,' and so he became one pretty quickly."

In London, the Coates brothers and their friends were doing a decent business, much to the chagrin of the local Outlaws and the old Annihilators (who had become Loners, then Rock Machine and who were now prospective Bandidos).

In Toronto, Hells Angels supplied the Para-Dice Riders, and what was left of Satan's Choice. And, of course, there were still vestiges of Satan's Choice in Oshawa, Keswick, Simcoe County and Thunder Bay, and the enviably disciplined Kitchener Chapter, remained largely unscathed under the leadership of wily Andre Watteel.

Combined with the independent dealers throughout Northern Ontario, that put a lot of Hells Angels–friendly manpower in the province, even if there was not a single chapter there.

But it wasn't enough. Stadnick wanted Ontario — his own home — for his Hells Angels. So in the summer of 2000, he made a move unprecedented in size and cunning.

With a few exceptions due to bad blood, Stadnick offered Hells Angels membership to every significant motorcycle club in Ontario. And he made them an offer they could barely refuse. He offered Hells Angels membership patch-for-patch to these gangs with no questions asked and no probationary period. Take the deal, and you were a full-patch Hells Angel.

It was remarkable, and not just because it promised instant riches selling cocaine. It represented a chance to be a member of the premier organization in the field. And that is a big lure for many bikers, who crave the fear and respect their bikes and jackets inspire. It can hardly be overstated how much prestige the Hells Angels brand carries in the outlaw biker world. Isnor, who likened it to being invited to play for the Yankees after toiling in obscurity for the Royals or Pirates, put it succinctly: "Nobody makes movies about the Outlaws." To many, it was like winning the lottery.

Stadnick made the offer directly to Satan's Choice, the Para-Dice Riders, the Vagabonds, the Red Devils, Last Chance and the Windsor-based Lobos. Satan's Choice, Last Chance, the Lobos and all but 13 members of the Para-Dice Riders jumped at it. The fiercely independent Red Devils politely declined. So did the Vagabonds, who were still smarting from treatment meted out by Hells Angels to their president, David "Snorkel" Melanson, after he ran afoul of their drug-distribution network.

And Stadnick, through neutral representatives, let it be known that the offer was also open to any and all Outlaws and Bandidos, except the Ontario West Chapter. Stadnick made it very clear that he refused to negotiate with them.

The Bandidos — who had been Rock Machine just a year earlier — were especially responsive. Why should they be prospects for this club in Texas with a silly cartoon Mexican on their backs when they could be full-patch Hells Angels just by agreeing? Both

chapters that Stadnick made the offer to — Toronto and Ontario East, based in Kingston and Ottawa — agreed. Even Paul Porter, president of the Ontario East Chapter, who had been one of the founders and primary leaders of the Rock Machine during their vicious war with the Hells Angels in Montreal, changed sides. In his final message before donning his new colors, Porter wrote on a bikers' message board: "Hello to all the RMMC. I wish you all the best with your new colors. 'Bye my brothers." The only holdout of any significance in either chapter was Toronto Chapter president Frank Raso, an old Loner. He'd had enough of changing patches and left the outlaw biker world entirely.

Of course, the offer was made to the chapters, but not to everyone in them. Every chapter had a couple of guys who didn't meet Stadnick's standards and they were told in no uncertain terms that their presence was no longer desired. Denied Hells Angels membership and without their old clubs, those rejects accounted for more than a few disgruntled bikers on the streets of Ontario.

Even a few Outlaws, who had basically ruled Ontario's biker landscape since Satan's Choice founder Bernie Guindon landed in prison in 1977, considered Stadnick's offer. With so many arrests, the club had fallen into disarray with just 70 members in Ontario, and many openly mulled the idea of jumping to the bigger ship. Negotiating with Billy Miller, Raso's replacement in Toronto, some Outlaws — notably Dave "the Hammer" MacDonald of Hamilton and Shaun "Cheeks" Boshaw of London — agreed to patch over. And others, like Mario Parente's old friend and reputed No. 2 Kevin Legere, were openly considering it.

Then Parente stepped in, warning the remaining Outlaws that jumping ship could result in extremely dire consequences. "Most of these guys are what we called 'paper Outlaws.' They were bikers first and foremost and the patch, the Outlaws name and organization, didn't mean all that much to them," Isnor said. "If it wasn't for Parente, who was an Outlaw through and through, they probably would have folded."

For support, Parente called James "Frank" Wheeler, the Outlaws international president in Indianapolis. Wheeler issued his own warning to the remaining Outlaws, and even met with

Hells Angels boss Ralph "Sonny" Barger, who agreed to get Stadnick to stop pursuing Ontario Outlaws for membership in exchange for a promise of peace.

But it was too late. The long run of the Outlaws at the top of a polyglot of biker gangs in Ontario came to an end on December 29, 1999 in Sorel. Outside the shabby Hells Angels clubhouse was a virtual wall of tough guys gathered from puppet clubs — the notorious Rockers from Laval and a local group called the Rowdy Crew. Just beyond them was a scattered throng of police and media types. They knew something was up, but they had no idea what or how big it would be.

A day earlier, Ontario Solicitor General David Tsubouchi — who had caught wind of what was going down — called a press conference at Queen's Park, Ontario's capital building. He announced the formation of a new police task force, the Biker Enforcement Unit (BEU). Then he claimed that outlaw motorcycle gangs were his "top priority" and vowed that it would "not be an easy ride" for them in his province.

Some came by chartered bus and some came by car, but the most conspicuous came by Harley. Even the most experienced and jaded cops were shocked to see Bandidos and Outlaws come to this summit. Then when the Hells Angels rather obviously moved in a well-marked industrial sewing machine, it dawned on them what was happening. And when the bikers started walking out of the clubhouse with brand-new Hells Angels patches — complete with top and bottom rockers — they realized that Ontario was now Hells Angels territory. They counted in the neighborhood of 180 of them. And they noticed that their bottom rocker simply read "Ontario" rather than individual chapters. Maybe it was a half-realization of Stadnick's dream of a single rocker for Canada, or maybe it was because they were dealing with too many chapters in too short a time to order enough rockers.

All of the new Hells Angels were recognized by at least some of the cops. And, of course, everyone knew who Guindon was when he came out of the clubhouse, appearing proud of his new jacket. But not everybody was that impressive. Many of the cops present were surprised that Hells Angels — considered the gold

standard among bikers — would accept such lowly gangs as the Lobos and Last Chance into their up-until-then-exclusive club. These were, after all, guys they called "mumblies" because of their drug-addled speech.

But what they didn't understand was that Hells Angels were thinking strategically, not tactically. They were after numbers and cities of importance. Any chapter, they believed, could be improved.

The following day, Hells Angels had chapters in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Simcoe County, Keswick, Kitchener, Oshawa and Toronto East that had formerly been Satan's Choice. The former Para-Dice Riders clubhouses in Toronto Center and Woodbridge now sported the winged skull. Last Chance gave them a small operation in Toronto West that was still looking for a clubhouse and the Lobos entrenched them in Windsor, an important border crossing. The former Bandidos provided more strength in Toronto (the members there were absorbed by the former Para-Dice Riders in Woodbridge) and Kingston. As a tip of the hat to Porter's weighty status, the Kingston Bandidos were given the Hells Angels' elite "Nomads" title, even though they contravened the original Nomads requirement by having a clubhouse. In this case, the title referred to their powerful status. The Hells Angels who had been operating in London quickly set up a clubhouse and chapter there. And from a strategic, financial and (at least for Stadnick) personal standpoint, Ward and his friends in Niagara Falls were persuaded to buy motorcycles and leather jackets and become the Hells Angels Niagara Chapter. They were to share Hamilton's rich drug market with Watteel's Kitchener Chapter.

That was a total of 13 Hells Angels chapters — admittedly of varying quality — in a province that had had none a day earlier. In fact, Toronto had a greater concentration of Hells Angels than any other city in the world.

Opposing them were largely dispirited Outlaw chapters in London, Sault Ste. Marie, Simcoe County, St. Catharines, Toronto, Windsor, Woodstock and, at least in theory, Montreal. The only club even close to being their allies were the last remaining

Bandidos just outside of London. And they were hardly organized or trustworthy enough to make much of a difference.

It was a tense time. Hells Angels had invaded Ontario and were determined to make it theirs. The Outlaws had an even stronger desire to hold onto the province that had been theirs for a very long time. Many of them prepared for the war that, despite the promise of peace, seemed inevitable.