



# Augie's Secrets: The Minneapolis Mob and the King of the Hennepin Strip

*Neal Karlen*

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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.

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