

**CHARLES EDWARD “ED” BALLARD:
A LIFE OF TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY, 1874-1936**

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Hillham is a tiny village in Dubois County, Indiana, a few miles southwest of French Lick, in nearby Orange County, where there have been famed mineral springs and related hotels since the 1840s. On June 28, 1874, Charles Edward Ballard was born in the family’s log cabin to Jim Ballard, who was a stone mason, and Mary Elizabeth Ballard, who took in laundry from the area’s hotels. Ed was one of the couple’s seven children, six sons and one daughter. His was, at best, a hardscrabble childhood existence. Ed left school after fourth grade to go to work to help support his family. This young man, born into poverty in southern Indiana, went on to realize the American dream. He became a successful hotelier, casino operator, circus king, large-scale farmer, businessman, and philanthropist. In the latter years of his life, he was one of the wealthiest people in Indiana. This is his story.

From an early age, Ed gave evidence of the work ethic and ambition that would characterize his entire life. When he was ten, he left school and went to work as a pin setter in the bowling alley of the West Baden Springs Hotel. This was the end of Ed’s formal education and the beginning of a significant relationship with the renowned hotel. He collected laundry from the hotels to take to his mother and returned it the next day. It was common at this time for children in the area to leave school and go to work to help support their families. The local school went only through the fifth grade, after which more affluent families sent their sons and daughters to Paoli, ten miles away, for further education. At age sixteen, in 1890, Ed became a rural mail carrier, riding on horseback to Orleans in northern Orange County to pick up the mail, back to West Baden where it was sorted, and then he delivered it to farmers in the area. By the end of 1893, sensing more opportunity, he

took a job as a bartender in a Paoli saloon, where he set up a limited poker game in a back room facing an alley. This was his first documented involvement with gambling, at age nineteen, which would play such an important role for the remainder of his life, this despite the fact that gambling was illegal across the United States until Nevada legalized it in 1931. It turned out he had a knack for games of chance and people skills. The next year, the twenty-year-old left Paoli to work at the Dead Rat Saloon in West Baden, located directly across the street from the West Baden Springs Hotel where he had worked as a child. The saloon was on the first floor and Ed ran a card game upstairs. With his driving ambition, he soon owned the Dead Rat and gave it an upgrade. Colonel Lee Sinclair, owner of the West Baden Hotel and favorably inclined toward the young Ed Ballard, ran advertisements in his hotel's weekly *West Baden Journal* plugging Ballard's establishment and restaurant, which served the finest brand liquors and wines, domestic cigars, and Baltimore oysters at all hours..

One day in early 1895, when Ed was twenty-one, Sinclair's West Baden Hotel ran out of ice while hosting a large convention. Hotels and businesses in that day operated their own ice houses, cutting ice from rivers and ponds in the winters and storing it all year long, and Ed had done the same for the Dead Rat. When the messenger arrived from the hotel asking for ice, Ed provided it and asked him to tell the Colonel he could have anything he needed. Sinclair noted and remembered this generous offer. Later that year, according to Ballard's son's recollection, Sinclair relieved the manager of the hotel casino of his duties and asked Ballard to take over. Thus, Ed returned to the hotel he first worked for at age ten setting pins in the bowling alley. Little did he know that years down the road he would own the impressive hotel. It should be noted that a hotel casino at the time typically included activities such as billiards, bowling, ping pong, card games, and shuffleboard, in addition to gambling.

Ed was quite successful over the next five years, earning enough money managing the West Baden Springs Hotel casino to buy extensive real estate and farmland in the Springs Valley. An article in the June 13, 1901, edition of the *Indianapolis Sun* stated that Ballard had made \$35,000 (\$1,062,826 today) in the last two years running the hotel's casino. Then disaster struck on June 14, 1901, when the hotel caught fire and the casino was no more. But, luckily for Ed, Thomas Taggart and a group of investors had just negotiated the purchase of the nearby French Lick Springs Hotel from a syndicate of Louisville businessmen. Taggart was wrapping up his third and final term as mayor of Indianapolis and was a frequent visitor to the Valley. He was also Democratic national committeeman from Indiana and the state party's political boss, giving him significant political influence on both state and national stages, since Indiana was a swing state at that time. In the fall of 1901, Taggart asked the twenty-seven-year-old Ballard to set up a casino in a white frame cottage on the grounds of his French Lick hotel. However, we are not able to document exactly how long, or on what terms, the Taggart-Ballard gaming relationship continued. When Lee Sinclair rebuilt his hotel, Ballard resumed his management of its casino. Al Brown also operated a casino, Brown's Club, across the street from the French Lick Springs Hotel. Though not formally associated with the hotel, it shared the same style brick exterior as well as heating system, so the connection was obvious. Brown had built his club in 1906 and two years later Ballard had an operational interest in it. When Brown left the Valley in 1915, he sold Brown's Club, the Indiana Hotel, and thirteen cottages to Ballard for a reported \$100,000 (\$2,555,594 today) that December.

The following years went very well for Ed Ballard. The minutes of the January 13, 1903, annual meeting of the board of directors of the West Baden National Bank indicate that the twenty-eight-year-old Ballard was elected a director and held the next largest block of stock after the extended Sinclair family, who had founded the bank the year before. By about 1905, he was able to purchase

several thousand acres of wheat land in Manitoba province in Canada, near the town of DuFrost, just north of the U.S. border.

1913 was a banner year for Ballard. And the month of June was the center of it all. He had had a fascination with circuses since childhood, one of the premier forms of entertainment of the time. So, happily, he joined a syndicate of seven investors to buy The Carl Hagenbeck and Great Wallace Show from Ben Wallace of Peru, Indiana, on June 11. There had been catastrophic floods that spring on the Mississinewa and Wabash rivers near the circus winter quarters, leading to a likely bargain deal. The syndicate was based in Indianapolis and included John Talbot (president); C.E. Corey (secretary-treasurer and Wallace's nephew); and brewery owner Crawford Fairbanks of Terre Haute. Ballard served as vice president. This was one of the leading circuses of the day, traveling the country on over fifty wooden railroad cars that were each sixty feet long. Corey was the experienced Hagenbeck-Wallace "leg man" who provided circus know-how while Ballard possessed management skills, laid out routes to attract the biggest crowds, and provided financial backing. By late 1915, all investors except Corey and Fairbanks had sold their interests to Ballard. While this circus had wintered on Wallace's expansive Circus Farm property southeast of Peru, Ballard now embarked upon a major building project on one hundred acres between the towns of West Baden and French Lick to establish a circus winter quarters of barns, shops, cage dens, offices, dormitories for employees, cook house, garages, and railroad car facilities. Thus, he plunged into the big-time circus business that June, but, even more importantly, he married Ada Fern Finfrock, called Dolly by everyone, four days later on June 15 (although the wedding notice in *The Springs Valley Herald* reported June 25). Dolly, a native of Decatur, Illinois, had come to West Baden with her younger sister Alberta after their mother's death to live with their Aunt Jesse and Uncle Lewis Sutton who built the spacious Sutton House hotel in 1905-06. Dolly helped with the work at the hotel and was well-liked and popular with everyone. The wedding took place at the home of another aunt and

uncle, Gretchen and Walter Grant. Ed had courted her in a gallant manner, as related by his son many years later. There was a considerable age gap between the bride and groom. Dolly, born on September 18, 1890, was twenty-two years old at her marriage, while Ed was days away from his thirty-ninth birthday at the end of the month. They were a celebrated couple in the Springs Valley with the promise of a lifetime of happiness together, which indeed was the case. It proved to be a great match.

The newlyweds moved into an elegantly furnished apartment on the second floor of Brown's Club, located across the street from the French Lick Springs Hotel. The apartment had private entrances to the gaming room and a downstairs walkway. To the great delight of the couple, a son, Charles Edward Ballard, called Charley Ed, was born on March 21, 1914. By the summer of 1915, Dolly was pregnant again, this time giving birth to a daughter, Mary Elizabeth, named after Ed's mother, on April 8, 1916. Now their family was complete.

In addition to building a family, Ed and Dolly planned and built their family home, a colonial mansion, which they had discussed during their courtship and early marriage. It was located on the boulevard between West Baden and French Lick on what eventually came to be known as Ballard's Corner. The house was named Beechwood, a nod toward the sixty-seven beech trees said to be on the property. Beechwood became a notable landmark in the Springs Valley, a tangible affirmation that the local boy born into poverty had indeed achieved wealth and success. Fireplaces of marble came from France and Greece, fountains and statuary from Italy, and black walnut paneling from Circassia on the northeastern Black Sea coast. Antique furniture, objets d'art, and paintings collected from all over the world filled the mansion. A custom concert grand piano made of hand-painted bird's-eye maple graced the music room and was favored by good friend Irving Berlin when he visited years later. The library was impressive with its custom leather-bound, gold-embossed,

gold-leaf-edged literary classics. Though he had only a fourth-grade formal education, Ballard was a life-long learner. He was intelligent, articulate, and urbane. His son wrote many years later that “books provided joyful times for him.” Beechwood was completed in the spring of 1916, just in time for Mary Elizabeth’s birth in April. It came with a considerable staff, including a gardener, maids, cook and kitchen help, drivers, and a tutor and nurse for the children.

Ed Ballard, shy, quiet, and mild-mannered, was now just forty-one years old, but he had been building considerable wealth over the last decade and a half. Work was his hobby and he had very little social life. One relative noted that he enjoyed gardening, which was his only hobby, if it could be called one. Around 1915, he formed the Lost River Investment Company as a holding company for his properties and business interests. For the latter, Ballard owned many business enterprises wholly or outright, but in others he had either a controlling or minority stake. The company offices were located in his Classical Revival-style Homestead Hotel, which he had built in 1913, across the street from the entrance to Lee Sinclair’s West Baden Springs Hotel. Three women handled his far-flung business affairs and his generous philanthropy to cherished causes, always trying to honor his wish for anonymity. What follows is a likely partial list of entities held by the Lost River Investment Company at its founding: In the Springs Valley and nearby, there was Beechwood, circus winter quarters, considerable farm land, rental properties, Brown’s Club, Homestead Hotel, Colonial Hotel (later Hoosier Club), Roundtop Inn, livery stable, water and power plants, ice house, West Baden National Bank stock, and farm properties along the White River west of Bedford; in Canada, thousands of acres of wheat land in Manitoba; in Florida, he had the Palm Island Club on Biscayne Bay at Miami Beach, Tea House Plantation (which he later gave to the American Legion), and beachfront property in Manatee County, near Bradenton (which he gave to the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) for a monument to DeSoto); and, finally, interests in the casino at the

Hotel Nacional de Cuba in Havana, a casino in Saratoga Springs, New York, the Kentucky Club in Hot Springs, Arkansas, casinos onboard ocean liners, and the Congress Hotel in Chicago.

It should be noted that Ed Ballard felt a strong connection to the land that he owned. Like his neighbor in the Springs Valley, Thomas Taggart of the French Lick Springs Hotel, Ballard had a well-developed sense of aesthetics and appreciated beauty, refinement, and good taste. He made sure that his properties were attractive and well maintained. As his son wrote in a family memoir *The Ballards In Indiana*, his father had a reputation for turning his farms “into beauty spots with manicured fields, neatly painted fences, immaculately kept barns, visible proof that utility and beauty could go hand in hand.” One of his favorite properties was the rustic Camp Farm on the White River, west of Bedford in Lawrence County. There were three cabins on the farm, which he purchased in 1926, and he often took his young son and friends there for fun outings. To add to Camp Farm’s attraction for youngsters, Ballard, who was an animal lover, housed his retired and ailing circus animals on this property.

Sadly, tragedy, along with success, would become a common part of the Ballards’ lives. The first brush with tragedy came at 3:56 A.M. on June 22, 1918, at Ivanhoe, a section of Gary, Indiana. An empty troop train crashed into the second section of Ballard’s circus train in the dead of night, mainly sleeping cars, killing eighty-six members of the circus and injuring another 179. It was the worst circus rail disaster in history. Ballard was at his Congress Hotel on Michigan Avenue in Chicago when notified of the accident by his secretary. Ballard mourned these deaths like family. He took care of all funeral expenses and purchased a 35-by-24-foot burial lot at Woodlawn Cemetery on Cermak Road in nearby Forest Park, Illinois. He paid every claim, likely \$300,000 (\$5,128,112 today), along with Crawford Fairbanks, the only other shareholder of the circus at this point. Despite this disaster, the show went on and the tour was completed, but he sold the circus,

which had gone into receivership, at year's end. When asked what he would want people to know about his grandfather that they might not know, grandson Edward N. Ballard told me that the circus train tragedy "broke his heart."

May 7, 1921, was a warm, sunny spring day in the Springs Valley. Seven-year-old son Charley Ed, called Chaddy because his little sister could not say his full nickname, was eager to get outside and play with his friend Russel Brothers. The two hitched one of the family's ponies to a cart and headed to the circus winter quarters behind Beechwood. Chaddy stopped the pony on an incline to get drinks for both the boys and the pony. As he started to board the cart again, the pony bolted and his left leg became entangled in the spokes as the wheel turned. His screams brought men from the winter quarters, who helped take him home. Dolly cut away the trouser leg to reveal his mangled limb. Two local doctors were summoned to Beechwood and agreed he needed to be taken to Louisville as there was no hospital in Orange County. They arranged Chaddy in the family's 1921 Pierce-Arrow automobile and relative Newell Ballard drove the long trip over rough gravel roads. Ed was on the road with the circus when notified and soon joined them in Louisville. A young doctor who had served as a field surgeon in World War I recognized the early signs of gangrene and recommended amputation, since this was before the discovery of antibiotics. And so Chaddy's left leg was amputated, another loss that Ballard mourned for the remainder of his days. The family remained in Louisville for several weeks as guests of their friend J. Graham Brown, builder and owner of the Brown Hotel, as their son received additional treatment. Despite losing his leg, Chaddy went on to lead an active and vigorous childhood and then adulthood.

The children Chaddy and Mary received their early education at the elementary school in West Baden, though their house was actually located in the town of French Lick. Because of frequent family travel due to Ed's far-flung business enterprises, they had a tutor and attended schools in

Havana, Cuba, where Chaddy attended first grade, and Miami Beach. Their school in the latter city was the Ida Fisher School, built by Hoosier Carl Fisher, developer of Miami Beach, in honor of his wife. In the late 1920s, both children were sent to La Villa School in Lausanne, Switzerland, where the instruction was in French. This Swiss city, on the shores of Lake Geneva, in the southwest of the country, counted many finishing schools for the children of the wealthy, principally Europeans. Chaddy and Mary were sent abroad quite possibly because of kidnapping threats. Chad completed his secondary education at Milford Academy in Milford, Connecticut, which his father bailed out of bankruptcy about 1932 during the Great Depression, before enrolling at Yale. Mary attended the Bennett School for Girls in Millbrook, New York, and then Marymount College in nearby Tarrytown, New York.

In 1921, Ballard had joined with well-known circus businessmen Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers to establish the American Circus Corporation, which became the largest circus corporation in the history of the circus. Mugivan served as president, Bowers as vice president, and the wealthy Ballard provided financing. The executive offices of the corporation were on the second floor of the Wabash Valley Bank and Trust in Peru, while the entire third floor housed the circus wardrobe department. Ben Wallace, from whom Ballard and partners had purchased the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus in 1913, had vowed never to sell his extensive circus winter quarters along the Mississinewa and Wabash as long as he lived. He rented the facility to various circuses until his death in early 1921. But that fall, the Wallace heirs sold the winter quarters, 500 acres of land, the railroad car shops north of town, and miscellaneous circus property to the American Circus Corporation for approximately \$500,000 (\$7,209,916 today). Major construction and renovation projects were soon under way. The American Circus Corporation, over time, included five circuses under its umbrella: Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson, Sparks, Al G. Barnes, and Sells-Floto. Ballard, Mugivan, and

Bowers were truly the “circus kings” of the 1920s. To illustrate the point, their circuses traveled on 145 railroad cars while John Ringling mustered just 90.

Colonel Lee Sinclair built a magnificent hotel – the “Eighth Wonder of the World” – after fire destroyed the original hotel back in June 1901. And, almost miraculously, the construction was completed within a year. The structure included the largest unsupported dome in the world, a true engineering marvel. For the next three decades after its grand opening in 1902, the West Baden Springs Hotel became a watering hole for the nation’s social, economic, and political elites. Its elegant casino, managed by Ballard, acquired the nickname the “Monte Carlo of America.” Ed, as we have seen, had a longstanding and good relationship with Colonel Sinclair and his family. As Ballard’s wealth increased, he made loans to the Sinclairs as they navigated cash flow challenges amidst various renovations and enhancements to the hotel. Two events, in particular, had a significant impact on the hotel’s management and financial well-being. First, Colonel Sinclair, the mastermind behind both the earlier and new hotels, died on September 7, 1916, leaving his majority interest to his wife Caroline (“Caddie”) Persise Sinclair and daughter Lillian Sinclair Rexford. His wife’s Persise family of Salem also had a significant stake in the hotel. With his demise, Lillian’s husband Charles Rexford took over management, with his wife having a major voice in decisions regarding the hotel. In 1917, after a major fire, the couple began an extensive renovation and redecoration of the hotel, adding amenities to compete with the neighboring French Lick Springs Hotel. The construction of an upland golf course on the side of Mt. Airie above the hotel was already under way in 1915, designed by renowned golf course architect Thomas Bendelow, and was completed in 1917. A major transformation of the atrium was begun, making it into a Greco-Roman-style Pompeian Court. Rustic Indiana-made Old Hickory furniture was replaced with fancier items and the eye-popping Rookwood Pottery fireplace surround was added. All guest rooms and the dining room were re-decorated. Outside, the wooden Apollo, Hygeia, and Sprudel

spring pavilions were rebuilt with stone and brick and the Billiard and Bowling Pavilion was constructed. Just north of the main entrance, the West Baden National Bank building was built. The second significant event was American participation in World War I, which led to the U.S. government converting the hotel into Base Hospital #35 from October 1918 to April 1919. More renovations were completed after the Army departed, including returning the interior to hotel use, building the sunken garden and fountain, and a new porch, verandas, and East Terrace. The Rexfords could afford neither the earlier extensive renovations nor the major changes necessary to return the hotel to its original purpose, but they proceeded in any case. Ed Ballard appears to have been a key piece of their financial support.

There is little documentation for Ballard's financial interest in the West Baden Springs Hotel, either before his purchase or, in fact, for the purchase itself. We know that Ballard loaned money to the cash-strapped Sinclair-Rexford family, most notably a \$300,000 (\$4,609,196 today) loan that was repaid in an agreement dated March 15, 1922. This had helped fund the major renovations of the 1917-22 period. Ballard seems to have had a substantial stake in the hotel for some time, possibly dating as far back as 1901. Local legend suggests that Ballard paid \$500,000 and forgave the remaining debt owed him when he assumed full control of the hotel, likely in September 1923.

James M. Vaughn explores this topic, as well as all aspects of the hotel's history, in his comprehensive and thoroughly researched book *The Dome in the Valley: The History and Rebirth of the West Baden Springs Hotel*.

With the acquisition of the West Baden Springs Hotel in 1923, Ballard reached the zenith of his success. The decade of the Roaring Twenties was a very good one for him. The "Eighth Wonder of the World," an architectural marvel and gathering place of the nation's elite, was now the crown jewel of his vast business empire. He, a Republican, and Taggart, a Democrat, developed a working

relationship with whoever occupied the governor's office, including cash payments, that protected illegal gambling in the Valley. He headed the largest circus business in the country, had large real estate holdings in Indiana and Manitoba, operated casinos from New York to Hot Springs to Havana, and owned the Congress Hotel in Chicago and several smaller hotels in the Springs Valley . The family's lifestyle reflected this success and wealth. Beechwood was a magnificent home base and there was also a rustic Ballard family lodge, built ca. 1915, on 2,600 acres just outside of West Baden Springs. There were permanent apartments at the 33-story Savoy-Plaza Hotel in New York City, where the General Motors building now stands, at East 59th Street and Fifth Avenue, facing Central Park, and in the Gulf Stream Apartments on Miami Beach. At one point, the Ballards had rented a home on Palm Island, an eighty-two-acre man-made island in Biscayne Bay, and had a yacht at their disposal. And Chad and Mary were in boarding school in Switzerland in the latter part of the decade, which led to many trips to Europe.

World travel, in fact, was very much a part of the Ballard family life. In addition to Ed and Dolly visiting the children often in Lausanne, the family traveled extensively. For example, when Chaddy was ten and Mary eight years old, they sailed from New York City to Europe in October 1924 on the ship *Leviathan*. Chaddy would chat each day with a nicely dressed gentleman, who turned out to be Sir Thomas Lipton of tea fame. Amusingly, on one crossing to France on the *Ile de France*, Ed had his beloved chihuahua "Big Boy" that he carried in his pocket with just his head sticking out. "Big Boy" charmed fellow passenger, the Mexican actress Delores del Rio, who referred to the pet as "my fellow countryman." The chihuahua lived until age seventeen, when he was hit and killed by a car in Georgia as the Ballards returned home from Florida. Their driver, Bill Bird, great-uncle of NBA star Larry Bird, buried him in a nearby woods.

Ed Ballard had a much-deserved reputation for business success and the Midas touch. He seemed to have an intuitive sense about business deals and their timing. Nowhere was this more evident than in the decision to sell the American Circus Corporation. As the story goes, Ballard was having dinner one evening in Havana with his friend Frank Bruen, the director of Madison Square Garden in New York City. Bruen confided that he was having difficulty continuing to book the Ringling circus because owner John Ringling was now refusing to tear down for Saturday night sporting events during its run at the Garden. Ballard quickly arranged for his Sells-Floto circus to replace Ringling, agreeing to the tear-down request. As icing on the cake, he went out to Hollywood and recruited beloved cowboy hero Tom Mix to appear at the Garden with his circus. By all accounts, John Ringling was furious and demanded that one of them buy out the other. Ballard asked Ringling to make an offer, which he did, and Ballard accepted. The price tag was reportedly \$1,900,000 (\$28,679,444 today) in cash. The stock market crashed six weeks later.

The shadow of the Great Depression now fell across the United States. Even with his business acumen and golden touch, Ballard, of course, could not escape its impact. And a most vulnerable asset was the grand West Baden Springs Hotel, which he had owned outright for six years at the time of the Great Crash. So what to do? The story was the same at West Baden as all across the country, as the hotel emptied out when the news came across the wires at the Logan & Bryan stock brokerage in the hotel. Ballard kept the hotel open for the subsequent 1929-30 and 1930-31 seasons, but finally closed the doors in the fall of 1931. He hoped to re-open in spring 1932 amid more favorable economic conditions. He did, in fact, open the hotel again in May 1932, but then closed for good on July 1 that year. After unsuccessful overtures to the U.S. government to buy the property, Ballard entertained an idea attributed to his close friend Robert C. Graham of Washington, Indiana, who was a wealthy auto and truck manufacturer, entrepreneur, and devout lay Catholic. Graham suggested the distinctive hotel might find a second life as a Catholic retreat house. That

idea was rejected because of the sheer size of the building and property. However, this led to further conversations with religious orders about other possible uses. In the end, the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus decided to convert the hotel into a Jesuit seminary and Rome gave its approval. Ballard called a family conference with Dolly and the children at their apartment in New York City in spring 1934 to discuss what to do with the hotel. Chad and Mary were attending school in the area. They all agreed that Ballard should give the West Baden Springs Hotel property to the Jesuits for \$1. The common story, corroborated by grandson Edward Ballard, is that Ballard spurned offers from Midwestern organized crime figures because he didn't want "that element" in the Valley. The gift was a remarkable example of Ballard's longtime quiet philanthropy, but he no doubt enjoyed a substantial income tax deduction for future years. The hotel's value was approximately \$3,420,000 (\$65,877,111 today), so it was an extraordinary gift indeed. The Jesuits took possession on June 28, 1934, which was Ballard's sixtieth birthday. The grateful order asked permission to name the seminary Ballard College, but Ed declined and asked them to name it West Baden College, which they did. This transaction was fundamentally important to the eventual restoration of the West Baden Springs Hotel because it put the property in the hands of people who would use and maintain it for the next thirty years.

Regarding any relationship between Ballard and organized crime, it would be a stretch of the imagination to believe he did not rub elbows with at least some mob figures given his wide-ranging casino and gambling interests. At the same time, there is no evidence that he, or Thomas Taggart next door at French Lick Springs, ever allowed organized crime into the Springs Valley. We do know that Chicago crime figures tried to muscle their way into the lucrative gambling scene in the Valley, bombing the casino veranda at the French Lick hotel and the casino gaming room of the West Baden Springs Hotel in 1906. But evidence suggests that Ballard and Taggart resisted and kept the gambling profits flowing into their own coffers. On the other hand, we do know that Ballard

had a fairly close relationship with “Big Jim” Colosimo, the organized crime boss of Chicago in the 1910s and a frequent visitor to the Springs Valley. When Colosimo married his second wife, operatic soprano Dale Winter on the steps of the West Baden Springs Hotel in April 1920, he asked Ballard to provide circus acts on the hotel lawn for his guests’ entertainment. The show business newspaper *Variety* even carried an account of the wedding at West Baden. When Colosimo was gunned down a month later in Chicago, both Ed and cousin Norman Ballard were named honorary pallbearers at his funeral, along with a host of judges, politicians, and government and opera figures. And, interestingly, Al Capone was a neighbor several doors away at their rented house on Palm Island in Florida. Son Chad Ballard did not deny but rather minimized Capone’s visits to the West Baden Springs Hotel: “Al Capone never spent much time there. People just say he did because it sounds exciting.”

After gifting the Jesuits with the hotel, the Ballards lived largely at their apartments in New York and Miami Beach and traveled extensively, especially in Europe, during the next two and a half years. Giving the hotel to the Jesuits was not popular in the Springs Valley for several reasons. First, the property was removed from the tax rolls because it was now a non-profit seminary. This, of course, would have a significant impact on local tax revenues. Second, a seminary would offer fewer employment opportunities for townsfolk than the former resort. And finally, there were a good number of people in the area with anti-Catholic sentiment who did not welcome a major Catholic institution in their midst. So, after 1934, the Ballards largely stayed away from the Valley. Spending time in New York, Ballard had gotten into the business of financing Broadway shows in recent years. One play in particular, *New Faces*, featured two promising young actors, Henry Fonda and Imogene Coca. While attending one of the shows, he met Herbert Marshall, famed actor of the day, who told him about a prosthetic leg made of lightweight duraluminum and recommended it for Chad. Marshall confessed that, in fact, he had one himself. The prosthesis was made at 52 Baker

Street in London by technicians who had learned much from the tragedies of World War I. So, the Ballards and Chad, who had just finished his sophomore year at Yale, departed for England aboard the *Mauretania* in July 1935. During the sea journey home on the *Normandie*, Chad met John O'Hara, American author who wrote *Pal Joey*, *Butterfield 8*, and *10 North Frederick*, who became a lifelong friend and visited often at his Miami Farm outside of Peru, until O'Hara's death in 1970.

Starting about 1934, Ed Ballard began to divest himself of various holdings, including the West Baden Springs Hotel, as we have seen, most likely looking toward retirement. This view toward retiring to better enjoy his family and wealth may have been hastened by the early deaths of three of his younger brothers who appear to have been involved in various of Ballard's business activities. He sold the Homestead Hotel and Brown's Club to his cousin and confidant Norman Ballard. While he and partners had sold the American Circus Corporation and its winter quarters in Peru to John Ringling in 1929, he had held onto part of the acreage, often referred to as the Circus Farm. He gave this property to son Chad, who was an undergraduate at Yale at the time. Other properties were gifted or sold.

Ed and Dolly traveled to Europe in the late summer of 1936 and, according to news reports, returned to New York City, where Ed was hospitalized, with no mention of his ailment or condition. However, one Father O'Malley includes a note in his history of the West Baden Springs Hotel that Ballard was "crippled by diabetes." At some point, they also visited with their children while in New York and then headed down to Hot Springs, Arkansas, checking in at the Hotel Arlington, which was crowded with hundreds of delegates in town for the convention of the Arkansas Education Association. They were there for six weeks, most likely for Ed's further recuperation, and visited with their friend George Ryan, to whom Ballard had earlier sold his Kentucky Club casino in Hot Springs. Arriving later in town was Robert "Silver Bob" Alexander,

who had a long history with Ballard. The two of them had operated gambling houses together in West Baden and later Alexander had operated Ballard's Palm Island Club in Biscayne Bay at Miami Beach. When Ballard had sold the club, Alexander believed he deserved part of the proceeds, but Ballard disagreed, contending that Alexander only operated the club and had not shared in ownership. This dispute led to Alexander suing Ballard for \$250,000 for breach of contract, but the case was thrown out of court for lack of jurisdiction. The feud between the two was a bitter one and continued to fester. Alexander had also operated several gambling establishments in nightclubs in Detroit for the past twenty-five years, and, by the summer of 1936, was reportedly broke, having lately suffered heavy business losses. On Friday, November 6, Alexander met with Ed in the Ballard apartment and Ed reportedly expressed the belief afterward that they had worked out their differences. Later, they met again in Alexander's apartment, a meeting that ended in tragedy. At one point, Alexander pulled out a concealed gun and shot Ballard three times, once in the chest and two times in the right shoulder, mortally wounding him. Ballard fell to the floor, breaking a walking cane he was using at the time. Alexander then turned the gun on himself, dying later at the local hospital. Detective Chief Herbert Akers said he was convinced the Florida litigation was the cause of the whole incident. He and Coroner J.P. Randolph described the scene as a murder-suicide. It should be mentioned that Ed's son Chad, writing a family history almost five decades later, described the tragic events a bit differently. He wrote that the scene of the crime was in the Ballard suite and put friend George Ryan in the room, who later intimated that he was the actual killer of Alexander. Ryan, by the way, had been the subject of several criminal allegations in the first decade of the twentieth century and ended up killing himself in a back room of the Kentucky Club weeks later.

The curse of tragedy had once again descended upon the Ballard family. Dolly notified the children, who were at Madison Square Garden in New York, where Mary was showing her prize-winning

English ponies. Chad had gone down to the city from New Haven to be with her for the show. George Ryan accompanied Dolly on the train to Louisville with her husband's body. The children left New York City immediately and met them there. Then the family made the sad journey home to West Baden, where the funeral was held on Monday, November 9. The *Indianapolis Star* had this description of the service: "The body reposed in a magnificent flower banked casket in the great atrium of the West Baden Springs Hotel, now the concourse of the Jesuits' West Baden College...A stone's throw from the scene of the funeral rites is the site of the bowling alley where Ballard began his climb to wealth and fame...The funeral service was given by Father Donnelly [The Reverend Thomas J. Donnelly, S.J.], rector of the College. He read from the scriptures and his brief sermon dwelt on the benevolences of Mr. Ballard." Following the short service, the funeral cortege traveled four miles north of the village to the graveyard of Ames Chapel Methodist Church, where Ballard's body was interred in the family lot. Thus, the fascinating story of Ed Ballard's life came to a close at the place it had begun.

After Ed's death, Dolly returned to Beechwood for a short time, but could not tolerate living there alone with all the memories. She packed up all the furnishings and stored them in Louisville. Eventually, she sold Beechwood to cousin Norman Ballard in 1943. She resided for the remainder of her life in a country club community in Rye, Westchester County, New York, and in the family's apartments in the Savoy-Plaza Hotel in New York City, where son Chad and daughter Mary also had apartments, and in the Gulf Stream Apartments on Miami Beach. Dolly had rheumatic fever and was plagued by severe health problems for years, dying on February 17, 1949, in her Miami Beach apartment, with her son at her side. The previous November, Dolly had been received into the Roman Catholic Church by the Very Reverend James F. Maguire, S.J., then president of West Baden College, who traveled to Rye for the occasion. The children took her home to West Baden, where

the Jesuits held her funeral in their chapel, now the hotel's lobby, off the atrium. She was buried beside her husband in the Ballard lot at Ames Chapel Methodist Church.

Son Chad, for his part, built an impressive manor house in 1941 on Miami Farm, part of the old Circus Farm property two miles southeast of Peru, having been gifted the land, as we have seen, about 1934 by his father. He had married Alicia Chimiak in 1938, who brought a daughter, Sylvia, into the marriage from a previous marriage. They subsequently had two sons, Edward Norman in 1940 and Chad Michael in 1941. The Ballard curse returned to Chad Ballard toward the end of his life. He had led a vigorous, engaged life, despite his handicap. But in 1979, at age sixty-five, he suffered a debilitating stroke and fell into a depression, feeling that he was a burden to his wife. He attempted to take his life one morning in April 1982, after Alicia returned from going into Peru to pick up their housekeeper and collecting the mail at the end of their long drive, as was her routine. To his surprise, she came into his room as he was about to shoot himself. Alicia tried to wrest the gun from him, he lost his balance, and the gun fired, shooting his wife in the back. She died from the gunshot wound and Chad did not seem to realize exactly what had happened. He was convicted of reckless homicide, fined by the court, given a suspended sentence, and ordered to write his family history, which served as an important source for this paper. Their beautiful home at Miami Farm was sold and the proceeds divided equally between the Indianapolis Museum of Art and a newly established Alicia Ballard Children's Home for abandoned and neglected children in Peru. Chad Ballard died in 1987 and is buried in the family lot in the Ames Chapel graveyard.

And daughter Mary lived on Miami Beach and married John Patrick Kelly, who had played football for the University of Chicago and then the New York Giants. They had one child, Patricia (Patty), born in 1946, before divorce ended the marriage. Mother and daughter were both horse women and each summer Mary would take Patty to live the dude ranch life in Birney, Montana. In 1959, Mary

purchased a 171-acre ranch in Big Horn, Wyoming, which she enjoyed tremendously, dividing her time between Miami Beach and the ranch. Mary died at age fifty-two in 1968 and is also buried with her parents and brother in West Baden. In subsequent years, all three Ballard grandchildren were buried in West Baden in the family lot.

Ed Ballard's life is a study in triumph and tragedy. While he achieved great wealth and success through a vast empire of hotels, casinos, circuses, and land, he and his family experienced great tragedy. Born into poverty in a log cabin in southern Indiana, he achieved respectability and legitimacy by building elegantly furnished homes, embracing both the East Coast and Europe for his family, and engaging in generous and quiet philanthropy. A larger-than-life figure in the Springs Valley, contemporary sources in French Lick estimated Ballard's wealth anywhere from \$20 million (\$368,905,035 today) to \$100 million (\$1,844,525,179 today), but the bond posted by Dolly as executrix of his estate was for \$1,200,000 (\$22,096,885 today). His earliest and arguably most lucrative business, illegal gambling, sometimes placed him in a world of questionable characters and risk. So ironic for a man who never gambled himself. This business, in the end, led to his death in a hotel room in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

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