

Capone made regular stops in Johnson City en route to Miami

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JOHNSON CITY - Al Capone was a regular in Johnson City, according to Jim Jones. His father, the late **R.M. "Ray" Jones**, ran a service station near what today is a parking lot for the downtown business district that fronts on State of Franklin Road. Then it was known as the Jobe Street parking lot. Jones grew up listening to his dad and his dad's friend **Johnny Hall**, a Johnson City policeman, reminisce about the visits.

Capone never traveled without heavy security and always in armored Cadillac limousines, after several attempts on his life were made in Chicago. Eternal vigilance was the price of success for a gangster. For this reason, when Capone went to his vacation home in Miami, he used the same caravan of armored Cadillacs and the same retinue of bodyguards that he used to move around Chicago.

Ray Jones said the word got around quickly when Capone was coming through Johnson City. "He'd usually stay a day or a night, rarely two days and two nights," Jones said. "There were no interstate highways in those days. He may have had other regular stops along the way. When you had a paved road back then you were in high heaven."

Somebody would come by the station to tell Ray to clear the books of any other service work for the days in question. Once Capone arrived and was safely ensconced at the John Sevier, where he would book the entire third floor, the cars would show up for whatever service was desired, whether it was tires, oil changes or whatever. The bodyguard would supervise the servicing of the cars.

At all other times the cars would be lined up at the Roan Street entrance to the hotel and an armed guard was with them 24 hours a day. "If anyone accidentally got off the elevator on the third floor they would be met by a large man in a suit with a bulge under the arm," Jones said.

According to the police officer Johnny Hall, a Capone visit was a vacation for the police force. "There would be no crime in Johnson City while he was here. None," Jones said. The Southern Railway station was across the street from the John Sevier Hotel and was connected to the hotel by a tunnel under the street. "This was Capone's escape route if anything happened to his cars or bodyguard," Jones said.

He heard that the bodyguards were nice and polite, but ever watchful. "They always paid more than the asking price and the men who worked on the cars each got \$5 tips in a day when a mechanic earned \$8-9 a week," Jones said.

He said any stories about Capone visiting a local brothel were incorrect. "He didn't go to the girls, they came to him. I don't know where the story came from about him staying at Montrose Court. He stayed at the John Sevier. The man lived in hotels, and this was what he did in Chicago."