

### Louis Herbert "The Fixer" Blonger

Louis Blonger was born on May 13, 1849, in Swanton, Vermont, and the family moved to the lead mining village of Shullsburg, Wisconsin, when he was five years old. He was only 15 years old when he joined the Union Army during the Civil War. Since he was too young to join the battles, he learned to play the fife, helping the marching soldiers to stay in step.

After the war, he and his older brother Sam headed west in hopes of making a fortune in the new mining camps that were springing up everywhere. For more than 20 years they traveled all over the west and did a lot more gambling than prospecting, they also participated in a lot of con games.

They even served as lawmen in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for a time and supposedly provided some protection for the Earp bunch after they had to flee Arizona following their murderous Vendetta Ride.

They settled in Denver, Colorado, by the 1880s and were running saloons and by the '90s were wealthy men from their investments in mining claims, gambling interests and providing ladies of the evening to their clients. They were also heavy into the con games. In 1896, they gained complete control of all the confidence action in the Denver area.



**"The Fixer"**

They went so far as establishing a fake stock exchange where one of Blonger's employees would bring a potential client and allow him to witness the employee getting huge returns on a stock and then reinvesting it back into the stock. The client's greed would cause him to invest a large sum, and the stock would mysteriously lose all of its value. The employee would get highly outraged, maybe even start a fight before he and the new customer would be ejected from the exchange to console one another over their big lose. The Blongers would stay out of trouble, because all of these "marks" would be from out of town and because they were paying off the police chief and other important government officials. The Blonger Brothers influenced elections and political appointments in order to protect their racket and shield their gang members from prosecution.

In 1914, Sam Blonger died and was buried in Denver's Riverside Cemetery. By then Louis had taken on a new second in command named Adolph W. "Kid" Duff. Duff was a long time gambler, opium dealer and

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pickpocket. Together they were able to grow the business and increase the profits.

In 1920, Blonger was at the top of the world. People believed he owned Denver and he surely owned the chief of police. He had a direct line from his office to the chief's office. He could fix any arrest with a phone call. That was also the year that things started taking a turn for the worse for Blonger and a turn for the good for Denver society.

Also in 1920, an army colonel and World War I hero by the name of Philip S. Van Cise decided to run for district attorney. Blonger offered him a \$25,000 donation and all Van Cise would need to do was fix the bond for any member of Blonger's mob that might be arrested at \$1,000. Van Cise turned out to be an honest man with plans to clean up Denver and he rejected Blonger's proposal. Van Cise was elected without Blonger's help and began an investigation into Blonger's activities and established his own force of local citizens. It took him 15 months using special investigators, hidden dictaphones and interviews with victims from across the country before he had the evidence to perform a secret raid that was to put Blonger out of business and in jail.

At dawn on August 14, 1922, Van Cise and a large force of chosen lawmen swept down on Blonger's organization, arresting people in their homes, in the street, at breakfast and in their offices. Among those arrested was Blonger and Duff. The trial cost the two men large portions of their fortune and they were sure they would be acquitted. They were wrong and both were sentenced to 7 to 10 years. That was to be a life sentence for Blonger as he died on April 20, 1924, five months after entering prison. He was buried in Denver's Fairmount Cemetery.

Duff, in the meantime, was out on bond pending another court case and committed suicide.

Van Cise was the winner of a Distinguished Service Medal during World War I. He died on December 7, 1969 and is buried in Denver's Fort Logan National Cemetery.

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**Sources: *Outlaw Tales of Colorado, Lou Blonger* by Jan Murphy**