The Detective In The Derby

by

Ercole Joseph Gaudioso

She was the editor of a Virginia magazine. Her phone voice, intelligent and full of Dixie, conjured a vision of Scarlet O'Hara. We finished discussing an article I'd written about two NYPD undercover cops and the conversation turned to my job at the New York State Organized Crime Task Force. Then we spoke about Virginia. "Any jobs for me down there?" I asked, not real seriously, "Any organized crime in your beautiful state that needs investigating?"

Quickly, she said, "Oh, I bet. We even have pizza parlors down here now."

No insult intended. Her thoughts had rambled to a place where too many American thoughts ramble. Lots of documented reasons for it – TV and Hollywood, politicians and news media – careless disseminators of information, who fail to inform Scarlet and the rest of us that Italians hold no monopoly on organized crime, or that when Italian organized crime takes a hit, many of the guys with the sleepy eyes, battering rams and handcuffs have names that end in vowels. Off the top of my head: Maddalone, Poccia, Perrotta. DiMarco, Natale, Pizzo, Palmieri. Galasso and Cipullo, the undercovers in that article.

And my hero, Lieutenant Giuseppe Petrosino.

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Before 1880, the population of Italian immigrants in the United States counted 25,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The area that would become New York City's biggest Little Italy with 500,000 first and second generation Italians was then populated by an almost unnoticeable number of Italians, nearly all from the north-central area of Italy. Many of them had been educated professionally or vocationally and left home not only for economic opportunity, but because of their disappointment in the politics of the long awaited Italian reunification.

Prospero Petrosino may have felt a part of that group of self-exiles who came to New York City before 1880. A tailor, who worked hard to support his family, he was not as poor as

the majority of his *paesani* in Padula, province of Salerno; and maybe when he left there in the summer of 1873 with his wife and six children, he was encouraged by the successes of previous Padula emigrants, a certain assurance that America was a place of promise and acceptance.

Prospero set up home and a tailor shop on the legendary East side of Manhattan where his children would grow up in an environment free of the prejudices that would come later.

One of the Petrosino sons, thirteen year old Giuseppe, adapted smoothly to the new world. With another thirteen year old, he established a newspaper and shoeshine stand outside 300 Mulberry Street, Police Headquarters, working that enterprise during the day and closing up shop in time for night classes in English.

By sixteen Giuseppe – Joe by this time – had learned the ways of the street. He'd observed the best and the worst in the continual parade in and out of 300 Mulberry. At seventeen, a citizen now, he worked in a stockbroker's office on Broome Street. A year later he took a job with the city as a "white winger," or street cleaner; not a prestigious job, but a steady one, the city's sanitation duties fixed within the structure of the Police Department, where he would work under the command of a captain who would become the famous and infamous Inspector Alexander "Clubber" Williams.

In 1880, the twenty year old Petrosino a supervisor, waves of Italians, ninety percent of them from the south, began arriving in New York City. Too many of these immigrants appeared, according to outsiders and to other southerners as well, "dirty, quarrelsome, lacking any desire" to become part of America and "ready to pull knives at the slightest provocation."

From the smallest towns of Sicily, from Naples and Calabria, these mostly agricultural peasants or *contadini*, were abandoning plots of land they farmed for aristocrats, who had little concern for their tenants or for agricultural improvements. The *contadini* still labored with the same kind of wooden plows their Roman ancestors used two thousand years earlier.

Centuries of economic abuse, a high rate of illiteracy, exploitation by the government and ignored by the Church, the patriarchal families of isolated communities bonded and survived under an intense distrust of outsiders, both ecclesiastic and government.

Unification, achieved in 1860, had the workings to benefit the country, but the industrial and educated north continued to dominate politics. The northerner considered the southerner as

barbaric and as exploitable as Africans, did nothing to improve *La Miseria,* nothing to discourage the growing exodus.

Emigrants fled not to Brazil and Argentina the way many before had; economic conditions had changed there. Instead, crammed into steerage holds of steamers, they departed for *L'America,* to *Nuovo York* and Little Italys north, south and west, taking with them a continued distrust of outsiders and committing themselves to the security of isolation and the ignorance of opportunities for upward mobility.

Few possessed the cunning required for criminality and most held onto the fears and superstitions that made them perfect victims for the practitioners of *La Mala Vita* (one of many "brotherhood" gangs, somewhat organized, but in this case a phrase to describe a criminal way of life) who traveled with them. And in the alleys, streets and tenements of New York City, these bad guys – fugitives and escapees, forgers and buyers of Italian passports, who would help make Joe Petrosino a legend – arrived too.

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When Joe Petrosino made up his mind to be a cop, some alleged it was because he hated the Sicilians for barring him from their gangs because he was not Sicilian. But most agreed his motivation was borne of the desire to redeem the honor of his country, to show Italians to the world as honest and hard working, family oriented and peaceful.

As a "white winger," he'd become a confidant and "trusted agent" of his boss, Captain Williams, who, in 1881, returned to the matters of patrol and crime. Williams appreciated Petrosino's value. Fluent in almost every dialect in Little Italy, himself an immigrant, Petrosino couldn't help but understand *La Mala Vita*; knew why its victims would not go to the police – outsiders, government – for protection. Little Italy, according to Williams, needed Joe Petrosino.

But he was about five feet, two inches tall, well below the five feet, seven-and-one-half inch requirement for the Police Department. Squat and with a round face marked by the small pox he'd suffered as a child, it was difficult for him to look good. A member of the Italian Parliament, Luigi Barzini, would know and describe him:

> A stout, strong man. His clean-shaven face was coarsely featured and marred by light pocking; at first sight he did not attract. But in that butcher's face there was the impress of a stubborn will and of courage, something that made one think of a

> mastiff. There was more of the wrestler than of the policeman in Petrosino. One sensed that he was better at thrashing the evildoer than at finding him.

After political maneuvers by Captain Williams, on October 19, 1883, at twenty-three years old, Joe Petrosino became New York's shortest cop. But built like a fire hydrant, he bragged that the generosity of his violence compensated for what he often complained about as "America's liberal laws" and the frustration of trials, lawyers and political interference; that if the system cut loose a murderer, kidnapper, bomb thrower, Petrosino needed to insure that the bad guy would remember him.

During his first assignment, a foot post on East 13th Street, a black man, his name reported only as Washington, was attacked by three men. The brand new cop rescued the man and left his three attackers beaten and sprawled on the sidewalk.

Stories of Petrosino's skill and eagerness at fisticuffs splattered the newspapers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and helped propel his career. In 1890 he was made a detective, put away his uniform and replaced it with business suits, Prince Albert overcoats and, to help his height, double-soled shoes and a tall derby. In newspapers he became "the detective in the derby." In photos Petrosino looks pretty sharp; a real swell, as they used to say.

In those days police brutality was less of an issue than it is now and, when it came to bad guys, the art of the baton was appreciated, particularly by one Police Commissioner who advocated walking softly and carrying a big stick. On July 20, 1895, Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt, known by his cops as "Silk Socks," promoted Petrosino to Detective Sergeant. The first time an Italian had achieved that rank and, already assigned to Homicide, Petrosino worked only major Italian related investigations.

As Italian crime and victimization in the big cities became known around the country, so did the detective in the derby. A relationship developed between Petrosino and Roosevelt, both dedicated crime fighters. The men saw each other frequently and, while the Italian press was largely unkind to Petrosino, he was a sweetheart of the American press and never lost an opportunity to praise Roosevelt, never ignored a chance to talk with reporters.

Ominously perhaps, he had let his work rule his life, had left neighborhood and friends to live in a bachelor apartment on the fourth floor of 233 Lafayette Street, saying he wanted to keep

his family free from reprisals (though by some accounts he was a loner and his family saw him rarely). His closets contained a wardrobe of disguises. He could be a beggar, a gangster, a bartender, a Hasidic Jew; as a Sicilian laborer he dug the tunnels and roads of Manhattan.

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On the night of July 17, 1898, two cops on Leonard Street, a dividing line between Chinatown and Little Italy, heard screams coming from Baxter Street. They found forty-two year old Natale Brogno bloody and dead on the ground and, near him with a bloodstained knife in his hand, twenty-five year old Angelo Carboni. Brogno and Carboni, from the same Sicilian village, had become engaged in a dispute inside the Trinacria Café, a Sicilian hangout in the vicinity of the crime scene.

Carboni claimed that in the dark he and Brogno had fought with fists. Brogno fell, Carboni bent down to lift him, found the knife in Brogno's back, took it out, and that was why he had the knife in his hand. No one believed the story (who would?), Carboni was convicted and sentenced to death.

Hanging around the streets and bars, gathering intelligence on other matters, Petrosino learned of the rumor that Carboni was going to the electric chair for someone else. Petrosino looked into the investigation from scratch, refusing to look at reports of the patrol force or the Detective Bureau. From informants he learned that Carboni was an honest, working man with a family; that the victim, Brogno, had many enemies and that one of them, sixty-two year old Salvatore Ceramello, known for violence, had been in the Trinacria Café the evening of the fight and had not been seen since.

Petrosino set out on a month long search that took him to Jersey City, Philadelphia, Montreal and Nova Scotia and back to New York where he found a cousin of Ceramello. In various disguises he followed the cousin to the Bronx, back to Philadelphia, then to a house on the outskirts of Baltimore.

He knocked on the door. A woman answered.

Petrosino identified himself as being from the Board of Health investigating a case of smallpox. Inside he found the man he'd followed and an older man, who was chopping wood at the stove.

He asked that man, “What is your name?”

“My name is Fiani.”

“Your name is Ceramello,” Petrosino said, snatched the hatchet and clicked on the cuffs.

Angelo Carboni was released from prison a week before his execution date. Salvatore Ceramello took his seat.

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> If you have not sufficient courage you may go to people who enjoy an honorable reputation and be careful as to whom you go. Thus you may stop us from persecuting you as you have been adjudged to give money or life. Woe upon you if you do not resolve to buy your future happiness, you can do from us by giving the money demanded.

This letter and others like it, estimated at thousands through the years, were signed with a crudely drawn black hand or fist, sometimes gripping a knife or a gun. Knives or coffins edged some letters, skulls emphasized a threat, promised a punishment for ignoring a demand for money. Meaningful communication for a people born into a culture packed with stories of Sicily’s Mafia, Napoli’s Camorra, Calabria’s Fibbia; and folklore that whispered of gangsters like Lupo the Wolf, capable of casting the awful, evil eye and commanding other magical powers; fearful people who crossed themselves at the mention of *La Mano Nera,* and who, upon receiving a Black Hand note, paid immediately because ignored demands had resulted in murders and maimings, assaults and bombings.

The newspapers referred to a Black Hand Society and little doubt remained in Little Italy that the Black Hand was as organized and powerful as was the Mafia back in Sicily

Lupo the Wolf was Ignazio Lupo, also known to use his mother’s maiden name of Saietta. The most notorious of New York City Black Handers, he maintained, with his brother-in-law, Joe Morello, a stable up in Harlem’s Little Italy. Located at 323 East 107th Street, the stable would become known as the “Murder Stable,” burial site for more than 60 enemies and recalcitrant Black Hand targets.

Lupo and Morello paraded their activities through the streets of Little Italys, fortifying the perception that they were magically protected and untouchable. As with the mention of the Black Hand, people crossed themselves when they heard of Lupo or Morello.

But Petrosino found no evidence of Black Hand leadership, hierarchy or structure. Black

Hand letters, written in a mixture of dialects, the menacing hand drawn in variously crude designs, indicated an absence of organization. Arrests of individuals for Black Hand shakedowns, none connected to one another, some not even Italian, further fortified Petrosino's certainty.

An anarchist Society of the Black Hand did exist, its history in Europe. But politics had nothing to do with extortion in New York City. While most immigrants ignored that explanation and chose to comply with Black Hand demands, some refused.

Gaetano Costa, successful butcher from Brooklyn received a demand:

> You have more money than we have. We know of your wealth and that you are alone in this country. We want $1000, which you are to put in a loaf of bread and hand to a man who comes in to buy meat and pulls out a red handkerchief.

Costa ignored the man with the handkerchief and was shot and killed in his butcher shop. Though it was known that the killers worked for Lupo the Wolf, lips remained sealed and no one was ever charged.

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On December 22, 1898, Antonio Sperduto was wandering along the Bowery in desperate condition. Cops couldn't understand what he was saying and connected him with Petrosino. Sperduto told the detective that he'd left his wife and four kids in San Piero Patti, Sicily, about six months earlier. Almost immediately he began work digging subway tunnels. To save money, he lived on virtually nothing but bread and milk and when the job ended and he'd given the hiring agent and his foreman their "cuts," he had a savings of one hundred and two dollars, just enough to bring his family to America. He had gone to the steamship line office to set up their passage and after leaving, a stranger approached him.

"He was well dressed and he seemed glad to see me," Sperduto said.

Then Petrosino told him the rest of the story. "He addressed you by your name and said he had known you as a boy in Sicily and he invited you for a drink to celebrate the meeting. You went with him."

"And I had a drink and woke up in a dark alley, in my vomit and my wallet was gone."

Petrosino locked up one Giuseppe Giuliano for the robbery and in 1899, in a connected investigation, locked up 112 conspirators of the "Insurance Gang." Pretending to be insurance salesmen, they would persuade their simple compatriots to take out life insurance on credit. The insured then had his policy without having laid out a penny, for it was the friendly agent who advanced the premium and, for the simple matter of security, made himself the beneficiary, a detail that later would be simple to change.

People who bought the insurance seldom survived the year.

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Gaetano Bresci lived in "a large Italian colony" in Paterson, New Jersey, many of its members having come from the north-central region of Italy and were connected with a European anarchist movement. On July 30, 1900, in Monza, near Milan, Bresci assassinated King Umberto of Italy.

A few days after the assassination and in cooperation with the United States Secret Service with whom he'd worked counterfeiting investigations, Petrosino, with identification as newly arrived Italian immigrant, Pietro Moretti, took a room in Bertoldi's Hotel, quarters for many of the Paterson anarchists. For three months "Moretti" worked as an unskilled laborer, lived in the hotel and learned that before the King's assassination, Bresci had lived there with his Irish wife, Sophie Knieland.

Shortly before the three month operation ended, Petrosino discovered Bresci's affiliation with the real Black Hand Society of Europe and, from Sophie Knieland, learned that Bresci had been chosen by lot as Umberto's executioner. He learned too that the anarchists had also targeted Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany, Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary, and the President of the United States, William McKinley.

Upon hearing Petrosino's warning, McKinley responded, "I don't fall into that category. Why should they kill me when they're perfectly free to vote against me?" His Vice President and Petrosino's old boss, Teddy Roosevelt, said, "I certainly hope it will not be the anarchists who will make me President."

On December 6, 1901, at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, Leo Czolgosz, a Pole, shot and killed President McKinley. In Czolgosz's wallet cops found a

newspaper clipping that reported Bresci's act, but investigators could not connect the Pole to any anarchist movement.

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July 23, 1902. Two kids in Brooklyn, preparing for a swim where Seventy-third Street meets the bay, were hiding their clothes in the tall grass, when they found a barrel. They looked into it and called the cops.

The body inside, a man with all the major bones in his body broken, his throat slit ear to ear, would be identified as Joe Catania, boss of the Brooklyn end of a Palermo-New York counterfeit money operation run by Joe Morello, brother-in-law to Lupo the Wolf. When Catania's drinking got him talking too much, he needed to be killed.

April 14, 1903, Manhattan, six in the morning. From her fifth floor window, Carmelina Zillo looked down on East 11th Street near 3rd Avenue. Where the sidewalk edged a vacant lot, sat a barrel. A widow with four kids, Carmelina could not ignore the possibility that it contained something valuable, or that someone would give her something for it. She dressed, went down to the street, looked into the barrel and fainted. Somebody called the cops.

Patrolman John O'Brien responded and examined the barrel. Sticking out from sawdust was a man's head. The case would become known as "the man who was cut to pieces" and, more popularly, "the man in the barrel case."

Petrosino responded and, after a preliminary investigation, addressed the press who quoted him as saying, "The man in the barrel was certainly an Italian and probably a Sicilian. I think he was murdered to settle a quarrel in some gang or other."

A reporter asked if he would attribute the crime to the Black Hand. He replied, "I've told you many times before that the 'Black Hand' doesn't exist as a functioning organization. It's the newspapers that have built up the myth of an octopus that's supposed to have the whole of New York City in its tentacles," and went on to say that small gangs, not connected to one another have appropriated the name to frighten their victims.

He had the crime scene photographed and examined, traced the barrel to a German confectioner at 365 Washington Street, and connected the sawdust to The Star of Italy, a bar and Sicilian hangout at 260 Elizabeth Street. The two locations shared a common alley and

detectives established that the man in the barrel had been killed in The Star of Italy and one of the confectioner's barrels appropriated for the disposal.

Subsequent investigation brought in the Secret Service and the investigation of a counterfeit ring with connections in New Orleans, Pittsburgh and Palermo. Eight Sicilians were arrested, among them the feared Joe Morello and Ignazio Lupo; Tommaso "The Ox" Petto, cop fighter and knife man who had killed the Manhattan man in the barrel; and Vito Cascio Ferro, two years in this country, on the run from murder charges in Sicily, documented there as a "Man of Respect," a subtle and respectful reference to a Mafia member. It was his smuggling operation (run by Morello) of counterfeit bills stashed in shipments of olive oil that talkative victim Joe Catania managed and who would mean more to Petrosino than any of the others.

That second barrel victim, identified as Benedetto Madonnia, also a counterfeiter, had not only been cutting in on Lupo's operation, but had demanded money on behalf of an incarcerated brother-in-law and member of the Lupo gang for his share in the funny-money proceeds.

With cash bundled in a handkerchief and delivered to court, all defendants made bail before Petrosino returned from a trip to Buffalo where he had dug up evidence connecting all his defendants with the counterfeit ring that would return them to the Tombs and indict Ferro, as the central conspirator in the "man in the barrel homicide."

The next day six of the eight were rearrested. Two had skipped. Ferro to New Orleans where his influence had already established a Mafia stronghold; on September 28, 1904 he would manage a return to Sicily, where danger of charges against him had disappeared. Petto vanished but would reappear in 1909.

Morello and Lupo stood trial for the manufacture and sale of counterfeit money, were convicted each received 25 years. According to some sources, however, their sentences were suspended—reason unknown.

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Petrosino had been adamant that there was no organization to the Black Hand, but he was challenged by some, not unfriendly newspaper reporters among them, who asked why, if there was no organization, why did the extortion stop after the payoff? Though this was not always the case, Petrosino reconsidered his thoughts when he learned, in 1903, of an emerging, less bloody

method of extortion that would become known as protection, with demands tailored to the victim's ability to pay. Signs of organization, according to Petrosino. "It's our own stupid laws," he said, "that have allowed them to organize."

With this new form of extortion, a regular payment would keep victims on a regular tax with fixed due dates and amounts instead of lump sum demands. One victim told Petrosino:

> They came to see me the other evening. There were three of them, with ugly faces, but elegantly dressed and very polite. They knew I'd received knife letters in the past and so they offered me their protection. "Just have faith in us," they said with their hands on their hearts, "and from now on nobody will touch a hair of your head or your family's."

Petrosino had no way of knowing yet that the new, "benevolent" method of protection (that still exists today) had been implemented by Vito Cascio Ferro, the "man of respect," who carried a photo of Petrosino in his wallet, vowing, "I swear that I will kill this man with my own hands."

Ferro's philosophy about extortion was to skim the cream off the milk "without breaking the bottle," to not throw people into bankruptcy with ridiculous demands for money. "Offer them protection instead, help them to make their businesses prosperous and not only will they be happy, but they'll kiss your hands out of gratitude."

In Sicily, the uneducated but intelligent Ferro would establish Mafia control of a dozen cities, organizing and controlling all the trades, even assigning steady beats for beggars. He associated with royalty and politicians.

Court and police records that once named him an anarchist and a criminal, now represented him as one who conducts "himself irreproachably . . . has formed new and legitimate friendships with Baron Inglese and the Honorable De Michele Ferranti."

At the end of 1904, the "man of respect," held in high esteem by Joe Morello and Lupo the Wolf, set up what had already been established between New Orleans and Palermo, a Mafia communication, or "black bridge," between New York and Palermo.

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Petrosino had been asking for a squad of Italian speaking cops to cope with Black Handers even before he had determined that an organized Mafia and a Camorra existed. His

request had been refused many times, then, in January of 1905, five years after New York had been recognized as the biggest Italian city after Naples, Police Commissioner William McAdoo announced that the Board of Alderman had authorized a squad of five Sicilian speaking men to police Little Italy's half of a million Italians and Italian-Americans.

On January 20th, the Italian Squad was officially founded and manned by Peter Dondero, George Silva, John Lagomarsini, Ugo Cassidi who liked to be called Hugh Cassidy or Butch Cassidy, and Maurice Bonoil, French and Irish, but raised in Little Italy and spoke Sicilian as well as the others.

The squad began gathering intelligence of criminal activity in the City and in the State of New York. With intelligence came arrests and indictments, Petrosino encouraging his squad to use the methods to which he remained true. "If the courts send these criminals back into the streets, we'll make life so tough for them that they'll have to clear out whatever way they can."

On January 1, 1906, a year after the Italian Squad was formed, Theodore Bingham, a personal friend of Teddy Roosevelt, became Police Commissioner. Within four months the Italian Squad became known as the Italian Legion with twenty-five men plus a detachment of ten in Brooklyn commanded by Sergeant Antonio Vachris (Vacarezza).

In November of that year, Petrosino was promoted to Lieutenant, the first Italian to achieve that rank. He, Vachris and Dondero and new member, Alex DeMartino, celebrated at Vincent Saulino's restaurant on the corner of Lafayette and Spring Streets where Petrosino was a steady customer. Saulino's daughter, thirty-seven year old Adelina, widowed and childless, had caught Petrosino's eye and, at forty-six, on that night of his promotion, Petrosino and a few glasses of wine proposed. On the first Sunday in April, 1907 they were married in St. Patrick's Old Cathedral. The Italian Squad attended as did Commissioner Bingham.

The groom was too busy for a honeymoon. The newlyweds set up home in Petrosino's apartment where Adelina found herself alone much of the time, something she'd anticipated, being married to a most famous and most hated cop. She learned to live with the anonymous threats, to never show herself at a window, especially at night.

Petrosino and the squad had been grinding out large numbers of deportment orders. It seems that much of their intelligence focused on the Neopolitan Camorra, a somewhat

differently organized version of the Sicilian Mafia. His success with the Mafia was never as complete as with the Camorra, probably because his roots and those of his sources had been nourished in the same soil and their words fell comfortably together. One story needs telling.

On April 17, 1907, armed with a deportment order, the Italian Squad visited an apartment up in Italian Harlem. Enrico Alfano, the Camorra boss of bosses, or "Grand Master" and fugitive from murder charges in Italy, was in that apartment with three men. Petrosino kicked down the door, kicked down Alfano and dragged him down the stairs and to the local precinct.

In 1911, in Italy, Alfano went to trial for murder, was convicted and, the Camorra, weak and depleted, some years later, became absorbed by the Sicilian Mafia.

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On November 30, 1908 Mrs. Adelina Petrosino gave birth to Adelina Bianca Giuseppina. Every day, as soon as he got off duty, Petrosino rushed home to a family life that he cherished and enjoyed. Then, on February 9, 1909, he left for Palermo.

The trip had been Police Commissioner Bingham's idea, based on the report and suggested investigative plan from a prior agent of the United States Customs Service. The agent requested and was granted anonymity by Bingham and by the Department of Justice.

The plan was to gather information from Italian law enforcement, letting them believe that Petrosino's purpose was general in nature; then, without the knowledge of the Italian authorities, the American Lieutentant would establish informants and devise a means of country to country communication. This would result in ongoing intelligence and allow American law enforcement to profile individuals and groups on both sides of the Atlantic likely to engage in criminal activity.

The operation was secret to all but a few, Petrosino's absence from the job announced as health related. He headed for Genoa aboard the liner *Duca di Genova*, carrying a notebook with two lists of names; one of known criminals connected to America and the other, names of potential informants who he would approach in Sicily. In his luggage sat his service .38.

For some months prior Petrosino had been investigating a group of Sicilians who, through trickery and threats, engaged in forced prostitution. Petrosino locked up the gang, sent its conspirators to prison, but its leader, twenty-seven year old Paolo Palazzotto beat the case.

Joe Corrao of the Italian Squad later locked up Palazzotto for some deportable offense, but before the prisoner got to Ellis Island, Petrosino "interviewed" him, knocked out his teeth with a fistful of keys and sent him to the hospital at Ellis Island, a delay in his expulsion that took him off the *Duca di Genova* passenger list. Petrosino didn't know that Palazzotto had booked the shipped, and didn't know that other bad guys who he had been instrumental in deporting were aboard, either coincidently or purposefully.

Petrosino traveled first class under an alias and told fellow travelers that he was going to Italy to seek treatment for an intestinal infection. He was recognized by at least one passenger who promised not to mention his name; Petrosino would later write that he had recognized one individual who he determined to be someone he had, at some time, arrested.

On his way to Naples on another ship that would dock on February 17, unknown to the Italian Legion, cop fighter Tommaso "The Ox" Petto sailed. After visiting with family, the Ox would travel to Bisaquino, Sicily to meet with Vito Cascio Ferro.

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From Genoa, Petrosino wrote his brother, Vincenzo, who'd returned from New York years earlier to the family home in Padula. Petrosino told Vincenzo the time he would arrive in Padula, that his visit was secret, to tell no one, not even his wife.

When Petrosino got off the train in Padula, Vincenzo greeted him, but had not come alone. With him was a stranger to Petrosino, but a cousin, said Vincenzo. When Petrosino repeated that his trip was a secret, Vincenzo showed him a local newspaper, *Il Pugnolo,* and a story that had been reprinted from the New York Herald of February 20th. The article announced the establishment of a "Secret Service" by Police Commissioner Bingham and that Petrosino had traveled "to Sicily in order to obtain important information bearing on Italian criminals residing in the United States."

The source of the article pointed to Bingham. Explanations, one that Bingham was politically motivated, another that he'd become displeased with Petrosino, are both unlikely. The

most believable account says that the Police Commissioner had entrusted a reporter with the story, the reporter assuring him he wouldn't run it until the operation ended.

(Some years later it was disclosed that the list of names Petrosino carried to Palermo were those of known criminals living in the United States. Recent federal law had allowed for deportation of immigrants who had been convicted of a crime in any country; Petrosino would determine which names on his list of about 2,000 were eligible.)

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At the beginning of the 20th century, daytime Piazza Marina was the commercial center of Palermo. But at night, when its gas lights, one at each of the square's four corners, left most of the piazza in heavy shadow, few people visited.

Petrosino saw the square with its Garibaldi Garden and Monument for the first time at eight in the morning of February 28, 1909, when he arrived from Naples on a mail boat. At the Hotel de France he took room number 16 at five lire a night, registering with fictitious identification. That day he visited the American Consul, he'd been told to advise them of his arrival and purpose. At the *Banca Commerciale* he opened an account in his own name with 2,000 lire, money needed for informants, some or all of them he'd known in Little Italy and who had returned home.

In the afternoon he went to the Department of Penal Certificates in the courthouse to look into the records of individuals whose names appeared on his list. At another location he rented a typewriter for a month. In the evening, at the Café Oreto, he dined alone at a corner table, his back to the wall.

Later, in the hotel, he wrote a letter to Adelina, told her he'd seen the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo's Galleries and Saint Peter's Basilica. "It is beyond human imagination. What a huge, magnificent place!" He described his visit to the Italian Parliament, the Senate, the Ministry of Justice, and the home of the Queen Mother.

He revealed sadness at being away and his hope to see New York again very soon. He lied that, though the voyage was stormy and the ship docked twenty-six hours late, his appetite had not been affected and felt the ocean not at all. According to the ship's steward, Petrosino had been seasick during much of the trip and in a letter to Commissioner Bingham admitted as much.

After telling Adelina that the Italian police were not being cooperative, he closed: "Kiss my dear little girl for me and remember me to all our friends and relatives. A kiss from your affectionate husband." He signed it Giuseppe Petrosino.

In a letter to Commissioner Bingham, he ended by writing, "Wishing you . . . a long and happy life."

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Until March 6 he avoided contact with the Italian police, but on that day contacted the Palermo Police Chief, reputedly a reliable, honest man, Baldassare Ceola, who, eighteen months prior, had been moved from Milan to Palermo in order to clean the police administration of Mafia influence.

Ceola and Petrosino took a dislike to each other. Petrosino implied that Italian passports had been issued knowingly and illegally to known criminals and too many of them were showing up in the United States. Ceola tried to explain (an American) theory of rehabilitation but failed to explain why some criminals became so suddenly rehabilitated when seeking passage to America.

Knowing that Petrosino had been visiting the most dangerous areas of Palermo at night, Ceola offered him a bodyguard, Petrosino refused. Ceola asked where Petrosino was staying, Petrosino refused.

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On Friday, March 12, traveling through towns around Palermo, he made contact with informants, his 2,000 lire account down to about 800 lire. At about six in the evening, as the storm that had been threatening for twenty-four hours let go sheets of rain, Petrosino added to the bottom of his list of bad guys, "Vito Cascio Ferro, born in Sambuca Zabut, resident of Bisaquino, Province of Palermo, dreaded criminal."

It remains a mystery what he had learned that day that caused him to add Ferro's name to his list; one would think that it should have already been included.

At seven-thirty the rain stopped. Wearing a black suit and shoes, Petrosino took his long, gray overcoat, umbrella and derby and, skirting puddles around the Garibaldi Monument and Garden at the center of Piazza Marina and barely making out the dark outlines of buildings that framed the square, he walked across the plaza to the Café Oreto for dinner. Though the

restaurant was nearly empty, its bars were crowded with drinkers. Petrosino sat in the corner that had become his regular table.

He ordered pasta with tomato sauce, fish, fried potatoes, cheese with pepper, fruit, and half of a liter of wine. During his meal two men entered the restaurant, walked to his table and remained standing during a brief conversation with Petrosino. Petrosino left lire on the table and, at eight-forty-five, walked out. He did not turn left toward the hotel, but walked straight ahead to the fence around the Garibaldi Garden. He walked six hundred and sixty feet.

Three shots. Another.

A sailor, Alberto Cardella, who had been at the terminus waiting for a streetcar, about a hundred feet away, ran to the scene. Other waiting passengers remained at the terminus or they fled. The sailor had seen Petrosino move away from the fence and fall to the ground while two men ran from the shadows and disappeared into an inner courtyard. He heard a carriage drive away. Looking down at Petrosino's body he saw Petrosino's umbrella and derby, and a revolver.

Suddenly, a break in the flow of gas to the street lights, probably intended to aid the flight of the killers, plunged the square into darkness. A passerby was sent for candles and a delayed investigation began with the arrival of a medical officer from Cardella's ship, the *Calabria,* police officials and a magistrate on the staff of the public prosecutor.

Three bullets had hit Joe Petrosino. One in the right shoulder, one in the right cheek, one in the throat. Later a bullet would be found in the fabric of his jacket. The bullets were fired at close range, the shooter or shooters facing him as he backed against the fence.

The revolver on the ground, from which one bullet had been fired, was not Petrosino's. His was in his hotel room; he had faith in whomever he left the restaurant to meet that night, probably the two men who had interrupted his meal. In Petrosino's pockets, among letters of introduction and his notebook, was a picture postcard addressed to his wife. It read, "A kiss for you and my little girl, who has spent three months [weeks] far from her daddy."

Witnesses were questioned, no one had seen anything, some hadn't even heard the shots. But suspects were gathered, questioned and released. One of them, Vito Cascio Ferro, would, years later, claim responsibility for the only crime in his lifetime, that he had personally killed

Lieutenant Giuseppe Petrosino. While it is believed he had ordered the hit, he was never arrested and it remains a question if he had been on the scene.

*

While researching information concerning the life and career of Joe Petrosino, I encountered much contradiction. Attempts at verification have been difficult and I have reported only what I feel the most genuine. As a result, I have probably omitted some facts.

As for the murder scene, a number of scenarios exist. Conflicting reports, gathered during and after the event, as to the number of men, one, two or three did the hit, where the initial two men met with Petrosino, the shots fired, witness statements, are impossible to count or discount at this time.

While law enforcement in Palermo and in New York had named a number of suspects, some of them having been arrested in Palermo, no sufficient evidence was gathered that provided a case.

A New York Times article of January 17, 1911, finds Morello and Lupo doing time in a Federal Prison for counterfeiting. This was the result of trial that occurred in 1910 and this leads to the possibility that, what I have found and reported as a suspended sentence for the two, may be an error, that the sentence was not suspended. In the article, Morello (here named Vincenzo, not Giuseppe) is reported to have made a statement naming Petrosino's killers. But, the article implies, even though his cooperation would have obtained his release from prison, he never signed that statement.

Morello would become one of New York's first Mafia bosses.

*

In New York, outrage at Petrosino's murder filled the papers more than had the assassination of President McKinley. The press generated a campaign against Italians. LET'S THROW THEM OUT! headed articles and editorials. Reporters and editors who had called Joe Petrosino "the loyal defender of New York," "the Number One enemy of the Black Hand" and "the heroic Lieutenant Petrosino," failed to recall that he was Italian.

The ship carrying Petrosino's body arrived in New York on April 9. A funeral service was held three days later in the Saint Patrick's Old Cathedral. The day was declared a holiday,

flags flew at half staff, the Police Band played "Verdi's Requiem." The hearse was followed by the widow Petrosino, family and friends, a thousand patrolmen, two thousand school children, sixty Italian associations and a crowd of two-hundred, fifty thousand. The march lasted five and a half hours and ended at Calvary Cemetery.

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In lower Manhattan, on the corner of Lafayette and Kenmare Streets sits the Lieutenant Giuseppe Petrosino Park and monument. It is small, littered and ignored.

Ercole Gaudioso is a retired police officer with the New York Police Department.