Organized Crime in the Mail

Postal Inspectors
vs.
Early Mafia “Black Hand” Terror

July 14, 2007

Smithsonian
National Postal Museum

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It’s 1908
Your Local Post Office
Early Post Office Inspectors

William Goddard, Surveyor 1776

J. Frank Oldfield, Inspector 1908
Today’s Postal Inspectors

Forensic document examiner analyzing handwriting samples of Joseph Newman’s signature and traced forgeries

Postal Inspectors on stakeout

Images provided by the National Postal Museum and the US Postal Inspection Service

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Who were these guys?

Images provided by the National Postal Museum and the Ron Pry Historical Collection
The First "Untouchables"
CHARACTERISTIC ATTITUDES OF OHIO SLEUTHS WHO HUNT BLACK HANDERS

INSPECTOR GLEFIELD, POSTMASTER HARRY KURTH, OF COLUMBUS, AND INSPECTOR HUTCHES.

REIK SECRETARY TO HITCHCOCK.

Postmaster General Announces New Appointment—In Government Employ About Ten Years and Served in Cuba Until Health Failed.

Postmaster General Hitchcock has announced the appointment of George W. Reik, of Baltimore, Md., as his private secretary at an annual salary of $2,500.

Mr. Reik has been in the Government service about ten years. He was originally appointed a temporary employee at the headquarters of the Department in Cuba, at Havana, in August, 1899, but was compelled to resign on account of illness in February, 1900. He was restored to a clerical position.
Early Mafia Organizations

“The Black Hand”
Which “hand” is which?

The tables turned.
"The Society of the Bananas"
Culture of Silence
Above the Law

By Laws and Regulations of
the Society of Bananas.

Art. 1. The person who tries to reveal the secrets of this society will be punished with death.

Art. 2. A member who offends one of his companions, staining his honor, will be punished according to Art. 1;

Art. 3. The member who tries to do harm to another branch of the society or to the family of other companions, if this harm shall have been grave, will be undressed and marked on his body with the mark of infamy and called with word of contempt, "Swindler," and if the offense is more grave, he will be stabbed.
Ritual and Membership
The Crimes and the Victims

ITALIANS SEEK PROTECTION AGAINST BLACK HAND

Long List of Crimes Moves Them to Urge Acting Mayor Mitchel to Help in Breaking up Criminal Bands.

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Your Money or Your Life (or limb)
Extortion and Protection
Gov. Ex. #10.

De Camilli:

From one of our secret spies we have learned that you have informed the police, contrary to our warning. Therefore it is time to die, and on the first occasion you will feel a bullet un your stomach. Coward. You have willed it and you will die like a dog.

The Terrible Black Hand.
Mr. Gatto Giuseppe.

We warn you again to send us $10,000. Beware that if you go to the police, you will be made into pieces, wherever you go, so search for a way to pay us the above sum of money. If not, your head will fly in the air. Our society is great and has no fear, neither of the police, nor anyone else.

Therefore beware! the time is short and you must do it quickly.

Look out for your head.

The firm of

Black hand.
Sebastiano Letter

Dear Fabio Sebastiano,

Dennison, Ohio.

We have written you two other letters and you have pretended not to understand them. Is it not so? But mind it well; this is the first and last time that we will write you, and if with this letter you do not consign (deliver) the sum of $400 your life will be ended. Do not think that you can escape the hangman, for already there are back of you twenty guards. Thus if you do not wish to suffer some evil result, you will be in the center of the street which goes from Boswell to Cronait on Sunday, August 1st, at 11.30 o'clock and there you will wait for a person and to him you will pay your dues. Do not think it will be well for you to deliver this letter to the police, it will be worse for you.

That’s all, we do not talk much. We believe that on the day designated you will not fail to comply with our demands. With true esteem we salute you.

The Cavalry of the Black Hand.

If you do not fulfill all that which we seek from you, your bones will be in here.
Target: Your Family Business
Silencing Public Outcry
From Humble Appearances
Follow The Money
STATEMENT OF FABIANO CIACIOLO.

State of Ohio, } as:
Lucas County, }

Toledo, Ohio, December 8, 1909.

Fabiano Ciacciolo, being first duly sworn, deposes and
says, that he is a resident of Cincinnati, Ohio, residing at
626 Mound Street, and is engaged in the fruit business. That
his family is composed of his wife, Agostina, and ten (10) chil-
dren; that while he resided at 526 West Sixth Street, Cincin-
nati, Ohio, he received a letter mailed at Cincinnati, de-
manding that he pay the sum of Ten Thousand Dollars ($10,000.00),
Nov. 15, 1900.

Mr. A. R. Holmes,  
Inspector in Charge,  
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sirs:

In the investigation of the Black-hand Cases against  
Salvatore Lima, Sebastian Lima, Antonio Lima, Severio Ventola,  
Salvatore Rizzo, and other Sicilians in various sections of  
Ohio and Pennsylvania under arrest awaiting action of the United  
States grand jury at Toledo, Ohio, on the charge of using the  
mails to extort money from wealthy Sicilians, I directed Inspector  
Oldfield, who had charge of the investigation relative to securing  
evidence necessary to a successful prosecution of the case against  
the parties suspected.

E. C. Clement, Inspector.

Office of Post Office Inspector.

Portland, Oregon, August 31st, 1900.

Mr. J. F. Oldfield,  
P. O. Inspector,  
Columbus, Ohio.

My Dear Oldfield:—

Referring to the black-hand letters and our correspondence I  
will say that the handwriting of the two men you have in mind, F. Lima and S. Cable,  
does not seem to fit with the handwriting on the letters we have.

I am enclosing you one of them, with the translation, and wish  
you would compare the writing with all that you have on hand and see if it  
fits with the handwriting of any of the bunch in this vicinity.

This may be the writing of Michelangelo Lima who recently  
left here to attempt to get your people out of jail, etc.

Hoping you can locate this man, I remain,  
Sincerely yours,

E. C. Clement

Post Office Inspector.
Warrants and Seizures
Memorandum of Salvatore Arrigo. 
arrested July 23rd, 1909, in Clearmont, County, 
9 miles northeast of Batavia, Ohio.

Salvatore Arrigo residence 1637 Hughes St.? Cin-
cinnati, Ohio, 67 years of age, born at Termini Imerese, 
Prov. Palermo, Italy.

Been a resident of the United States 33 years.

First located Louisville, Kentucky, conducted 
fruit stand there one year. From there went to Cin-
cinnati, Ohio, had a fruit stand there one year. 
Went from Cincinnati to Cynthiana, Ky., had a fruit 
stand there for four years. Went from Cynthiana Ky. 
to Cleveland, Ohio, remaining there 18 months running 
fruit stand. From Cleveland, Ohio he went to Washington 
D.C., and conducted a fruit stand there for four years, 
and part of this time was on a farm 12 miles out of 
Washington, D.C.
Analyzing The Evidence and Gang Structure

ORGANIZATION SOCIETY OF BANANAS.

FIRST - Book headed "Society of Bananas", giving list of names of Sicilians of local organization, including names of all parties under arrest and other names.

SECOND - By Laws governing the society found in connection with books obtained from safe of Salvator Lima by Inspectors Oldfield and Hutches, and John Gist.

THIRD - Introduction of letters of invitation in the handwriting of Salvator Lima, addressed to Vincenzo Arrigo, Cincinnati, Ohio, Frank Spadera, Cincinnati, Ohio, Orazio Runfola, Pittsburg, Pa., George and Giuseppe Nuzzo, Cleveland, Ohio, Severio Ventola, Columbus, Ohio, Salvator Demar, Bellefontaine, Ohio, and Pippino Galbo, Meadville, Pa., calling a meeting of the Society of Bananas, first on March 7, 1909, later changed to March 9, 1909. The testimony of Inspectors Oldfield, Hutches and Pate, J. B. Galloway, Deputy U.S.Revenue Collector, John D. Gist and Horace Williams, as to identification of persons who answered this call for meeting, as follows:-

Antonio Lima  
Sebastian Lima  
Severio Ventola  
Salvator Arrigo  
Francisco Spadera  
George Romana  
Salvator Lima  
Salvator Rizzi  
Salvator Demar  
Vincenzo Arrigo  
Orazio Runfola
Tracking the Undercover Message
Undercover Instructions

Under penalty of death, post this letter at once.
Stamp Marking
Early Forensics

• Translation and Deciphering Code
  – Seized Internal Communications from the Overseer (Salvatore Lima) and gang Presidents’ places of business and homes

• Handwriting Analysis and Comparison by Scientific Experts

• The Bertillon Card Identification System
Translation and Deciphering

Dearest friend:

Our Doctor by this time will have arrived in our land and let us wish him a happy voyage and safe return. I have closed the deal with him of some 5000 cases in Pittsburg, and he could not find more than 1200 — this is little, but by the 19th of June, I will ask him to complete the deal.

I advise you that I was in Cincinnati and that we changed the Boss of the Bananas which was the friend Arrigo Salvatore, as he is well advanced in years, and we have made our friend Franchi Giuseppe Spadafo Boss of the "Men", and all the friends honored me as overseer of Cleveland and Cincinnati, and this will serve for your guidance.

Nothing more.

Salute, etc.

Salvatore Lima
Handwriting Analysis

Written by Salvatore Arigo
July 24, 1909

Salvatore Arrigo
Salvatore Lima

Piri Castigis
Sarrius Ventala
Salvatore

Bronchi spatios

Handwriting of Salvatore Arrigo
Filmed by J.F. Oldfield & Geo. Pete
Identifying and Recording
The Trial
The Prosecution
Attorneys for the Defense in the Black Hand Trials

IDENTIFIES 14 AS MAFIA MEMBERS

Continued from First Page.

That they knew the men arrested in the case cited. When confronted with letters signed by them and found in the Lima house, most of the defendants acknowledged receiving them.

In one case Oldfield told how a letter was traced from the time it was posted in Columbus post office through the mails by other defendants.

Mr. Gary said that it would be proved that threatening letters had been written by Salvatore Lima, Pippo Gallo and Colupero Vicario, and that some of the letters were sent through the mails by other defendants.

Attorney John H. O'Leary made the opening statement for the defense. He said that he represented Salvatore and Sebastian Lima, Giuseppe Giusto and Salvatore Fossa, and that he would speak for them only. He denied that his defendants had taken part in the Lima Salvatore Lima bought $1,000 worth of money orders in a single day at Marion.

Threatening Letters Mailed.

The trial is being held for the purpose of determining the guilt or innocence of the defendants in the Black Hand operations.

Inspectors believe that they can convict the defendants of fraud in Ohio.

The defendants are expected to be tried for the Black Hand operation in Ohio.
“Overwhelming Evidence?”
Technical Difficulties

Government Loses First Round in the "Black Hand" Fight

Judge Tayler, on Motion of Defense Quashes Fourteen of the Fifteen Indictments Against Prisoners.

Special Venire for Grand Jury Is Ordered to Consider the Evidence—Defense Claims Letters Complained of By Postoffice Inspectors Were Never Mailed.

There was a tremendous sensation in the United States court on Monday morning when Judge Robert W. Tayler quashed 14 of the 15 indictments in the "Black Hand" cases on the ground that the indictment did not state a specific fact constituting a crime according to the United States statutes.
Success

PUT IT DOWN HARD, UNCLE

BLACK HAND

C.S.
SENTENCED TO PEN AT LEAVEWORTH

Eleven of Convicted Members of Organized Band Were Taken to U. S. Prison This Afternoon

MARFISI, ARRIGO AND RIZZO WERE GRANTED NEW TRIALS

Salvatore Lima, the Leader, Gets 16 Years. Others to Serve for Periods Ranging From Two to Ten Years--Three Released on Own Recognizance.
Rediscovery

- Scrapbooks handed down through family from Inspector John Frank Oldfield
- Case record from 1899 -1915
- Recent release permission
- Generous assistance and collaboration provided from US Postal Inspection Service and National Postal Museum
- Some items on exhibit today
- Continue research in preparation for book of Inspector cases and stories
Hands-on History

• Hands-on Historical viewing of “Source Materials” collection today after presentation

• Visit the Exhibit:
  – “Inspectors, The Silent Service”
  – http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/inspectors/index.html

• For more information on this story, you are welcome to contact Bill Oldfield:
  billoldfield@earthlink.net
INSPECTORS AND ORGANIZED CRIME: THE BLACK HAND

Some criminals used the mail instead of meeting in person to run their illegal enterprises. One such group, known as Legalese, used letters to extort money from victims and then extorted money in exchange for the return of the letters.

The Black Hand Gang

The Black Hand Gang was one of the most notorious criminal groups in the United States. They used letters to extort money from their victims and then extorted money in exchange for the return of the letters.

The Black Hand Gang's operations were highly organized and were able to evade detection by the authorities. The group's leaders were able to use their influence to obtain information about their victims and then use this information to extort money from them.

The Black Hand Gang was eventually brought to justice, and several of its members were found guilty of extortion and other crimes. The case against the Black Hand Gang was one of the most significant in the history of organized crime in the United States.