

CHRONOLOGY

Petrosino's Mission to Italy

At the beginning of 1909, Joe Petrosino, Head of the Italian Squad of the New York Police, is sent to Italy by the Police Commissioner Theodore Bingham on a secret mission. His brief is to acquire first-hand information on Sicilian Mafia members who had expatriated to America and also to procure a list of well-known Sicilian Mafia members, who *could eventually* expatriate. The detective was also charged with creating a network of informers from the New York Police Force, independently of the official Italian police force. With this list of Sicilian delinquents, the New York Police intended expelling a number of undesirable Mafia members, who had come to the States, and at the same time clamp down on those who intended to move over.

- 9.2.1909** Joe Petrosino leaves New York aboard the *S/S Duca di Genova*, bound for Genoa. He embarked under the assumed name of Simone Velletri, a Jewish merchant.
- 17.2.1909** Two Sicilian members of the Black Hand Society, Carlo Costantino (alias either Giovanni Pecoraio or Tommaso Petto) and Antonio Passannanti disembark in Naples, coming from New York. Both return to their home town, Partinico, which is approx. 30 km. from Palermo. They had set sail at more or less the same time as Petrosino. Both Costantino and Passannanti had been implicated in the *uomo nel barile*, ("man in the barrel") case, which had been investigated by the Italo-American policeman.
- 20.2.1909** The *New York Herald* writes about Petrosino's "secret" mission to Italy. The information was provided by the very head of the New York Police, Counciller Theodore Bingham.
- 21.2.1909** The *Duca di Genova* lands in Genoa at 6h in the morning. It docked with approx. twenty-six hours delay. On disembarking, Petrosino is driven to the railway station, where he takes the first train to Rome, the through train from Paris. He reaches Rome at 20.20h. He takes a room at the *Hotel Inghilterra*, under the name of Guglielmo Simone.

- 22.2.1909 The public offices are closed. Petrosino visits Rome in the company of two journalists, Camillo Cianfarra and Guido Memmo, who had him recognized as he walked around the city.
- 23.2.1909 Petrosino meets the American Ambassador to Rome, Lloyd A. Griscom, who introduces him to the Italian Authorities the following day.
- 25.2.1909 Petrosino encounters Francesco Leonardi, Chief of the Italian Police, who provides him with a letter of introduction to the local Chiefs of Police.
- 27.2.1909 Joe Petrosino leaves Rome by train. He stops off briefly at his home town, Padula, in Campania, to visit his brother. This latter shows Joe the Italian newspaper, *Il Pungolo*, which reports on his "secret" trip. The detective then takes the ferry from Naples to Palermo
- 28.2.1909 Joe arrives in the port in Palermo at 8h in the morning. He takes a room at the *Hotel de France* in Piazza Marina, a short distance from the port. He is shown to room number 16, and is registered under the name of Simone Valenti di Giudea. A few hours later he meets the American Consul to Palermo, William A. Bishop, to whom he discloses the nature of his mission to Palermo, and his plans. He opens an account at the *Banca Commerciale*, where he requests that his post be delivered. He rents a typewriter and proceeds to collect information at the Palermo Courthouse, which was also located in Piazza Marina at the time, adjacent to the *Hotel de France*. During his stay in Palermo, Petrosino frequently had his meals at the *Caffè Oreto*, also in the Piazza.
- 28.2 - 5.3.09 Petrosino carries out investigations on his own, without contacting the Italian Police. Most likely his informants were people he had met in the States, who had returned to Sicily. He met with Mr. Bishop, the Consul, on a daily basis.
- 6.3.1909 Petrosino encounters Baldassare Ceola, the Chief of Police in Palermo and the Province (62 years old and a native of Trentino), and together with Mr. Ceola he also encounters *Cavalier Poli*, head of the Flying Squad. Both members of the police force claim that Petrosino refused a police escort or police protec-

tion of any kind, and also refused to give his address in Palermo. Over the course of the following days, Petrosino frequently encountered Poli, and information was exchanged regarding the Italo-Americans suspected of criminal activity, within the context of the former's brief.

11.3.1909

Petrosino calls on the American Consul, Mr. Bishop, and communicates his intention to travel to Caltanissetta on the following day, March 12th, to collect information at the local courthouse. This is confidential information, insofar as Petrosino had promised not to leave Palermo without informing the police. In this specific instance, however, he did not intend to do so. Petrosino informs the Consul that the following day he has two appointments, one at 16h and the other, of considerable importance, at 21h. No further information was ever revealed regarding with whom the appointments were.

On leaving the Consulate, Petrosino is recognized by a certain Paolo Palazzotto, a local delinquent, who the former had had expelled from the States a few weeks previously. Palazzotto is accompanied by a Palermitan criminal, Ernesto Militano. That same evening the two are seen at the *Caffè Oretò*, while Petrosino is having dinner. They are accompanied by Francesco Nono and Salvatore Seminara, both local gangsters. The latter, had also been expelled from the States, as had Palazzotto, as a result of Petrosino's police work.



12.3.1909 At 6.30h Petrosino leaves for Caltanissetta by train. He returns to Palermo in the early afternoon. After his first appointment, he goes back to his hotel to continue working. He goes out again around 19.30h and heads for the *Caffè Oreo*. After dinner, he is joined by two men, who apparently he already knew and had been expecting. They talk briefly. The detective is seen to give them the nod, intending them to wait for him outside. He pays the bill at 20.45h and leaves the caffè. He covers approx 200 metres, along by the railing of *Villa Garibaldi*, the park in the centre of Piazza Marina. Five minutes after he has left the caffè, four shots are heard, three in rapid succession and then a later shot. Of all those present in the neighbourhood, at that time, including those at the bus stop and in the *Caffè Oreo*, the only one to run to Petrosino's side is a young sailor from Ancona, Alberto Cardella. This young man sees Petrosino fall to the ground and two men fleeing, in the dark, in the direction of the nearby Palazzo Partanna. Nothing more can be done to save the policeman. The sailor stays to watch over the body. Fifteen minutes go by before the police arrive on the scene. Meanwhile, the piazza is completely in the dark, as the gas lighting has been suddenly cut off. The corpse is examined by candlelight. It is established that Petrosino was unarmed. His Smith & Wesson had been left in the hotel. In his pockets, among other things, a postcard to his wife and daughter were found, together with his New York police badge, number 285.

Those present in the piazza at the time claim they neither saw nor understood what had happened. Both Paolo Palazzotto and Ernesto Militano are immediately arrested. The police organize a round-up, capturing all the recently-expelled Sicilians from the States, who possibly had reason to resent Petrosino. An eye-witness referred seeing both Carlo Costantino and Antonio Passannanti

the previous day in *Villa Garibaldi*, although he had believed them to have stayed on in the States.

Since returning to Sicily, the latter two had been kept under police surveillance. The reasons for their coming back to Italy, despite not being expelled from the States, and having well-established commercial activities, were obscure. The pair were ostensibly not short of money. On arriving back to Partinico, Costantino had sent a coded telegram to Giuseppe Morello, in New York. Morello was considered to be the boss of the Black Hand Society, and was implicated, alongside the pair in question, in the case of the *uomo nel barile* (man in the barrel).

Before they arrived back in Sicily, Vito Cascio Ferro, head of the Sicilian Mafia, had gone to Partinico to visit them. Ferro had also been implicated in the same crime (*uomo nel barile*) while in the States. Both Passannanti and Costantino had returned Cascio Ferro's visit, returning his call in his home town of Bisacquino.

Forty hours after the crime had been committed, the police had concentrated their investigations on fifteen individuals, all back from the United States and all linked either to the Mafia or the Black Hand Society:

Paolo Palazzotto, 27 years old, from Palermo
Ernesto Militano, 27 years old, from Palermo
Salvatore Seminara, 40 years old, from Palermo
Camillo Pericò, 44 years old, from Palermo
Francesco Pericò, 46 years old, from Palermo
Pasquale Enea, 40 years old, from Palermo
Carlo Costantino, 35 years old, from Partinico
Antonino Passannanti, 30 years old, from Partinico
Giovanni Ruisi, 40 years old, from Palermo
Giuseppe Bonfardeci, 28 years old, from Palermo
Giuseppe Fatta, 33 years old, from Palermo
Giovanni Dazzò, 36 years old, from Palermo
G. Battista Finazzo, 28 years old, from Palermo

Gaspare Tedeschi, 45 years old, from Palermo
Vito Cascio Ferro, 47 years old, from Bisacquino

Of these, only Passannanti and Cascio Ferro were not immediately tracked down. When Cascio was finally arrested, he denied ever having intended to go into hiding, and declared that he had spent the period between 6th and 14th March at the home of an Italian Member of Parliament, the Hon. De Michele Ferrantelli.

- 13.3.1909** The news of the Petrosino homicide first appeared in the *New York Herald*.
The communication from the American Consul, Mr. Bishop, informing the NYPD of the crime arrived after the newspaper had already been circulated.

The Funeral

- 18.3.1909** Petrosino's body was brought from the Rotoli Cemetery morgue to the *Albergo dei Poveri*, where Professor Giacinto Vetere, who had travelled down on purpose from Naples, was given the task of embalming the body.
- 19.3.1909** The funeral rites for Mr. Petrosino were performed in Palermo, and the funeral procession stretched out across the city. Schools, trading activities and offices were all closed in mourning. An enormous number of people came to mourn Petrosino. When the funeral rites were over, the body was taken to the port and remained in safe-keeping there awaiting the ship for the United States.
- 23.3.1909** Petrosino's body left for New York aboard the English S/S *Slavonia*. It reached New York on 9th April.
- 12.4.1909** The funeral rites were again celebrated in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. On this occasion, approx. 200,000 people took part in the funeral procession.

The Investigations and the Trial

The investigations carried out by the Italian police were confirmed by the small number of anonymous letters, judged to be of a reliable nature. These were sent from the States and indicated Giuseppe Morello and his American accomplices as the instigators, and in Vito Cascio Ferro the organizer of the assassination, while the crime itself was committed by Antonino Passannanti and Carlo Costantino. A further hundred or so letters, such as are normally sent to the Police in cases of this nature, were not taken into consideration.

2.4.1909 The Chief of Police in Palermo, Baldassare Ceola, sent a conclusive report to the Court House in Palermo as a formal indictment, in which he cited Morello, Cascio Ferro, Passannanti and Costantino.

17.7.1909 Baldassare Ceola is relieved of office as Chief of Police in Palermo.

17.7.1909 The Mayor of New York discharges Theodore Bingham from office as Chief of the New York Police Department.

Following on the removal of Mr. Ceola from office, the investigations move in a different direction. The defendants are all released on bail.

March 1911 Giuseppe Morello, condemned in the States for money forgery and imprisoned in the Atlanta jail, confidentially informs Vice-Commissioner Flynn, who had previously worked in collaboration with Petrosino, that the detective had been murdered as a vendetta, by Carlo Costantino and Antonino Passannanti, and that the crime had been orchestrated by Vito Cascio Ferro. This latter malefactor had organized a network of pseudo-informers, which was to be used as bait to trap Petrosino, who was to be ensnared by the promise of precious secret information.

Morello's disclosures end up in the newspapers, but are not given much credit in Italy.

Subsequent to their publication in the press, Morello refuses to officially confirm what he had recently disclosed.

22.7.'11 On concluding the preliminary investigations, the

Court in Palermo releases all fifteen of those accused as being instrumental in the assassination of Petrosino for 'lack of evidence'. Curiously enough, the acquittal sentence does admit that there were serious charges against Vito Cascio Ferro, Carlo Costantino and Antonino Passannanti. Passannanti died after committing suicide in 1969, at ninety years of age. Carlo Costantino died in 1936 when he was sixty-two, in the mental hospital, where he ended up as a consequence of contracting syphilis. Vito Cascio Ferro, up to 1923 the respected and undisturbed boss of the Mafia, spent the last twenty years of his life in prison, dying when he was eighty-one, in 1943, alone, in the Pozzuoli prison (close to Naples). He had been abandoned during the Allied bombings. During the last years of his life, Cascio Ferro used to get satisfaction from claiming, albeit in vague terms, that he had been the one to assassinate Joe Petrosino.