



Nero Wolfe's Gotham: New York City in the 30s and 40s

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NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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1930s

Broadway in the 1930s



Bofinger, E.M.. Times Square theaters by day, 46th and Broadway, south from 47th Street, New York City. January 1938. Photograph. NYC Municipal Archives.

Girl Crazy

- George Gershwin playing "I Got Rhythm" from Girl Crazy



Judge Joseph Force Crater

- April 1930 - became an Associate Justice of the New York Supreme Court for New York County at the age of 41
- Vanished the night of August 6, 1930
- Last seen leaving a restaurant on West 45th Street
- Dinner companions, William Klein and Sally Lou Ritz, originally said they saw him get into a taxi cab
- Later changed their story saying they entered a taxi outside the restaurant while Crater walked down the street

CRATER PAPERS DESTROYED AS HE DISAPPEARS

Continued from Page 1

tioned and admitted that he had been visiting the apartment, looking over the envelopes addressed to the jurist but denied that he had taken any of them away with him.

Police to Meet Wagner

Detective Lowenthal, a personal friend of the jurist, has been assigned to meet Crater's former law associate, United States Senator Robert F. Wagner, when the Bremen, on which Wagner is returning from Europe, docks this afternoon. Detectives Sheridan and Fitzgerald also have been assigned to duty in the search for Crater, Mulrooney said.

Mulrooney, on his search for Mara, said he had found that the confidential clerk left for his vacation some time during the last two weeks and that his parents said they had no idea where he had gone. The Commissioner said Crater's family had given the police no co-operation in their search and that this had hampered their efforts.

Check Sanitariums

On the chance that Crater may have gone to some sanitarium or health resort in Westchester, these places are being checked. Mulrooney said Mrs. Crater has given no intimation that she intends to return to New York shortly. He said he understood that she expected to confer with "some one" about her husband's disappearance at her Maine home. The police guess is that the "some one" is Senator Wagner.

STILL MISSING



Justice Joseph F. Crater

business affairs. His disappearance is as much of a mystery to me as to you; therefore I can give you no reason for such act. I cannot understand it."

Reports from Great Pond, Me., where Crater has a summer home, stated that inquiries made at the Crater residence brought the reply from persons who declined to identify themselves that "Justice Crater and his wife were on a business trip." Other reports, however, were that Mrs. Crater had not heard from

"Crater Destroyed Papers As He Quit Office, Police Say." *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 4 September 1930: 1- 2. Print.

Judge Joseph Force Crater

- Crater enjoyed **New York City's nightlife**
- Involved with **several showgirls**
- Was spending time at his **summer home in Maine** with his **wife** when he told her he must make a **quick trip to NYC**
- Traveled to NYC on **August 3rd**
- Promised to be back by her **birthday August 9th**
- At first **Stella** was **upset** that he had missed her birthday but assumed he had been held up on **political or legal business**
- His **friends and colleagues** thought he was in **Maine**
- After a **week**, Stella began **telephoning** his friends in **New York**

Grand Central Station



New York Central System. *Vaulted main room of Grand Central Terminal, New York City. 1935-1941.* Photograph. WPA Federal Writers Project. NYC Municipal Archives.

Chrysler Building

- **Walter P. Chrysler** commissioned architect **William Van Alen** to design a 40-story tower at 42nd Street and Lexington Avenue
- Ground breaking occurred on **September 19, 1928**
- Construction completed on **May 20, 1930**
- Chrysler Building opened on **May 27, 1930**
- **Tallest building in the world** from **May 27, 1930 to April 30, 1931**



Detroit Publishing Co. Chrysler Building, New York, N.Y. ca. 1930. 1 negative : glass ; 8 x 10 in. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



The Empire State Building

- **Tallest building** in the world from **1931 to 1970**
- **January 22, 1930** - Excavation begins
- **March 17, 1930** - Construction begins with 3,000 workers building 4.5 floors per week
- **April 1931** - At completion, it becomes the tallest building in the world
- **May 1, 1931** - President Herbert Hoover turns on the building's lights, officially opening it, by pressing a button in Washington, D.C.

Eddows, New York. *Empire State Building, New York City*. c. 1931 May 18. Photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Mayor Jimmy Walker

- Also known as "**Beau James**"
- **Mayor of New York City** from **January 1, 1926** to **September 1, 1932**
- **Style and exploits** made his name synonymous with the **Jazz Age**
- Created the **Department of Sanitation**, unified **New York's public hospitals**, improved many **parks and playgrounds**, and guided the **Board of Transportation** to enter into contract for the construction of an expanded subway system
- Known to conduct **city business** from a **box seat** in **Yankee Stadium**
- **Resigned in 1932**, after formal charges of corruption had been filed
- Walker left for Europe, divorcing his wife and marrying actress Betty Compton



Unknown. [Mayor Jimmy Walker.] ca. 1925-1935. Photograph. Museum of the City of New York.

Bread Lines



New York, New York. Bread line beside the Brooklyn Bridge approach. between 1930 and 1935? 1 negative : safety ; 4 x 5 inches or smaller.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.



Fiorello LaGuardia

- Mayor of New York City from January 1, 1934 through December 31, 1945
- First descendant of Southern or Eastern European immigrants ever elected mayor of New York City
- His father was Italian, his mother was Jewish from Trieste in the Austro-Hungarian empire

Palumbo, Fred. *Mayor La Guardia speaks over WNYC on Grade A milk from Budget Room.* 1940 March 23. Photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington.

Fiorello LaGuardia



- Long-time supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt, particularly the “New Deal”
- 20% of the jobs offered by the Civil Works Administration were based in NYC
- Four thousand projects employed 200,000 workers during the three-month-long program
- La Guardia competed aggressively for Public Works Administration and other federal funds
- By 1935, New York City was capturing one-seventh of the federal outlay for relief

Harris & Ewing. New York Mayor urges action on housing bill before adjournment. Washington, D.C., Aug 3. Asserting that thousands of inhabitants are living in cities in “firetraps” and “dangerous surroundings” Fiorello La Guardia, Mayor of New York City and President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, appealed to the House Banking and Currency Committee today to speed action on the Wasgner-Steagall Housing Bill before adjournment. La Guardia said that he was representing his organization so that no time would be lost through duplication of testimony by other mayors, 8/3/37. [19]37 August 3. Photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt



Unknown. [Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes administering the oath of office to Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the east portico of the U.S. Capitol, March 4, 1933]. 1933 March 4. Photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Prohibition



[New York City Deputy Police Commissioner John A. Leach, right, watching agents pour liquor into sewer following a raid during the height of prohibition]. 1921? Photograph. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection at the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Charles 'Lucky' Luciano



- Seen by many as the **father of modern organized crime** in America
- **First official boss** of the modern **Genovese crime family**
- Instrumental in the development of the **National Crime Syndicate** in the United States

Abe Reles

- Also known as “Kid Twist”
- Known for **enforcing the law of the Mafia Families**
- Ran a group called **Murder Incorporated** whose **punishment for disobedience was death**
- **Implicated in a number of killings in 1940**
- Realizing that he **faced execution** if convicted, Reles became a **government witness**
- Reles became known as “**The Canary Who Could Sing, But Couldn't Fly**”



[Abe Reles, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing right]. between 1930 and 1941. Photograph. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection.

Nancy Titterton

- 34-year-old writer and book reviewer
- Wife of **Lewis Titterton**, an NBC radio executive
- **April 10th, 1936** - Good Friday
- Found **dead** in the empty bathtub in her apartment at **22 Beekman Place**
- **Police Commissioner Lewis Valentine** assigned **65 detectives** to the case
- Called in **Alexander Gettler** - Bellevue Hospital biochemist who was considered a **forensics genius**



"Locale of Authoress' Murder, a Baffling Mystery Story." *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. 12 April 1936: A3. Print.

Locale of Authoress' Murder, a Baffling Mystery Story

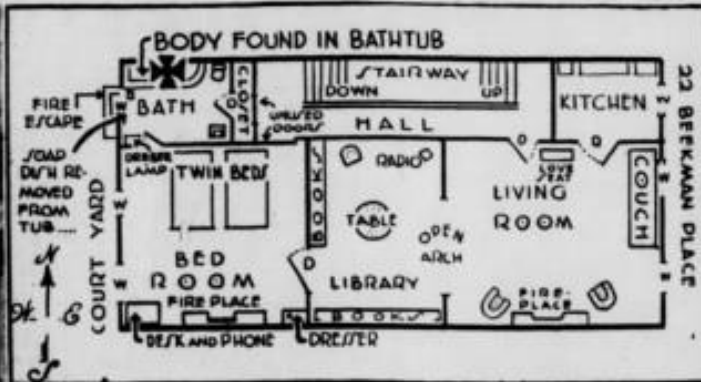
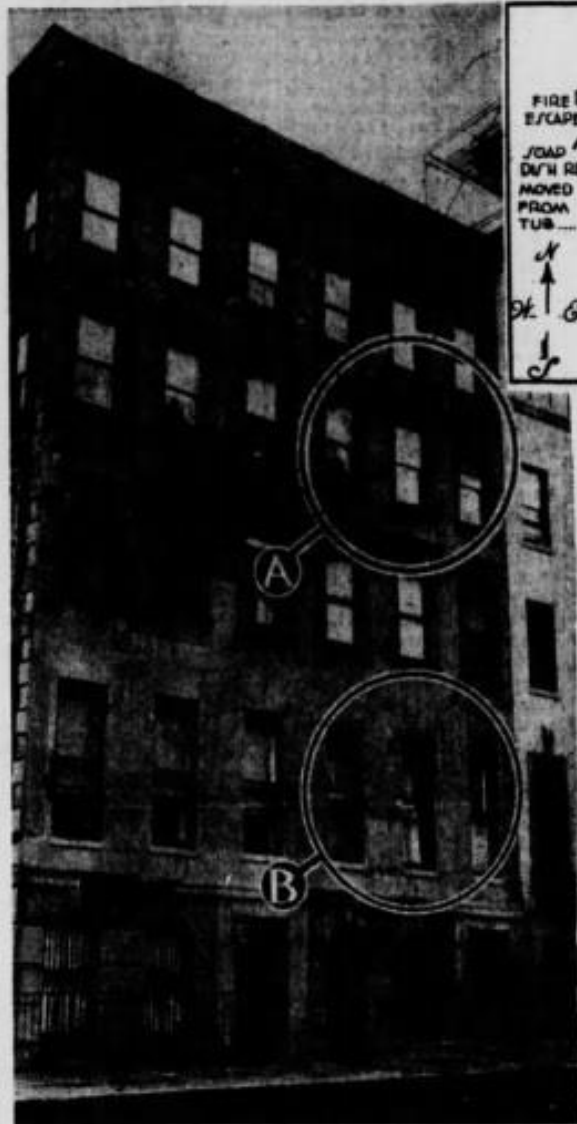


Diagram of the apartment in which Nancy Evans Tiverton was found strangled to death with a pair of pink pajamas.



Rubber-gloved detective holds the victim's fountain pen found in the bedroom,



Eagle Staff Photos.

Detective at the Poplar St. laboratories, in Brooklyn, examining the fountain pen, under the microscope, for possible fingerprints. Note on the table, the knots in the pajamas with which the young author was strangled. Other clothes are those she wore when found in the dry bath tub.

The fashionable apartment house at 22 Beekman Place, Manhattan, in which the murder occurred, showing (a) the apartment and (b) the apartment of the Countess Alice Hoyos who, in describing a young intruder to police, has furnished the only tangible clue to date in the case.

Beekman Place



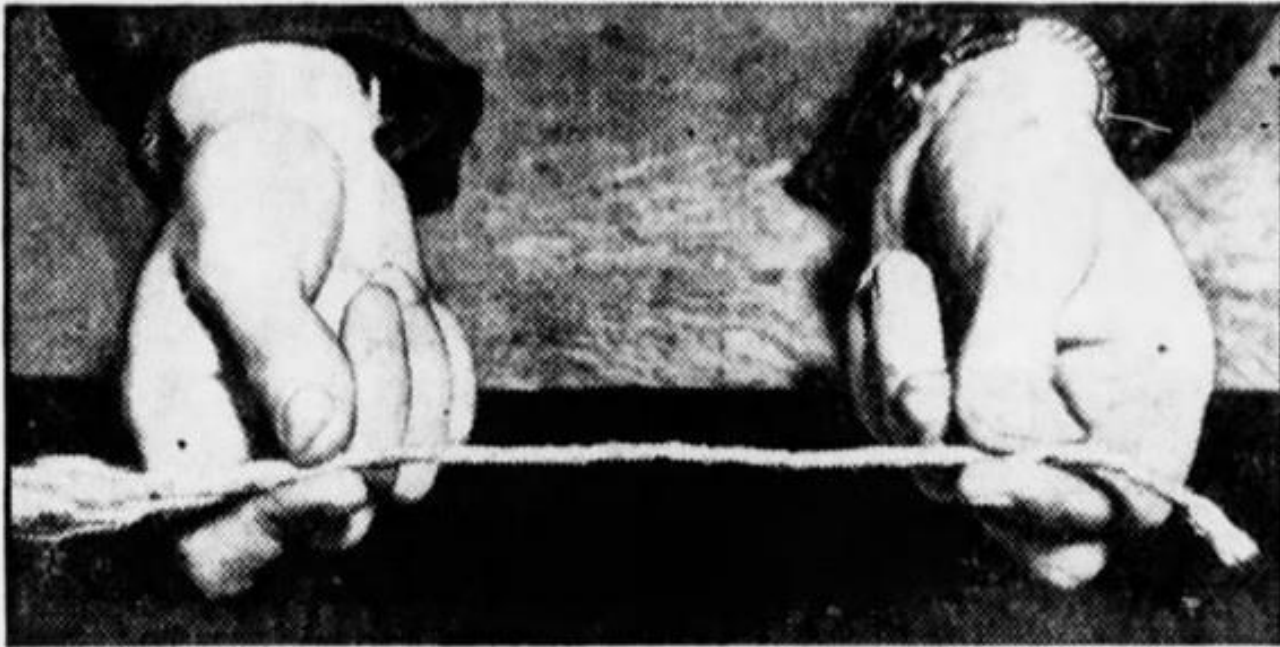
Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc. William Paley [residence], 29 Beekman Place. 27 February 1937. Photograph. Museum of the City of New York.



Wurts Bros. 1 Beekman Place. View of remodeled lobby. 29 September 1941. Photograph. Museum of the City of New York.



Gottscho, Samuel H. J.A. Reynolds [residence]. Stairhall toward entrance door. 17 March 1928. Photograph. Museum of the City of New York.



This 13-inch string found beneath the ravished body of Nancy Titterton literally tied John Fiorenza to the electric chair.

- Inspector Francis Kear – “I regret to say that... in this case, clues are very scarce.”
- When the body was removed from the tub, police found the killer had overlooked a **13-inch piece of string** underneath the corpse
- Detectives found a **single light-colored hair** on the bedspread that was presumed to come from Mrs. Titterton

Strangler Off to Prison



Eagle Staff Photo

Off for the death house in Sing Sing this afternoon went John Fiorenza, convicted slayer of Nancy Evans Titterton. Fiorenza is handcuffed to another prisoner, who is smiling because he is only going to serve a prison term.

Carnegie Deli



Michcock, JT. Photo of the exterior of the Carnegie Deli. 18 May 2006. Online.

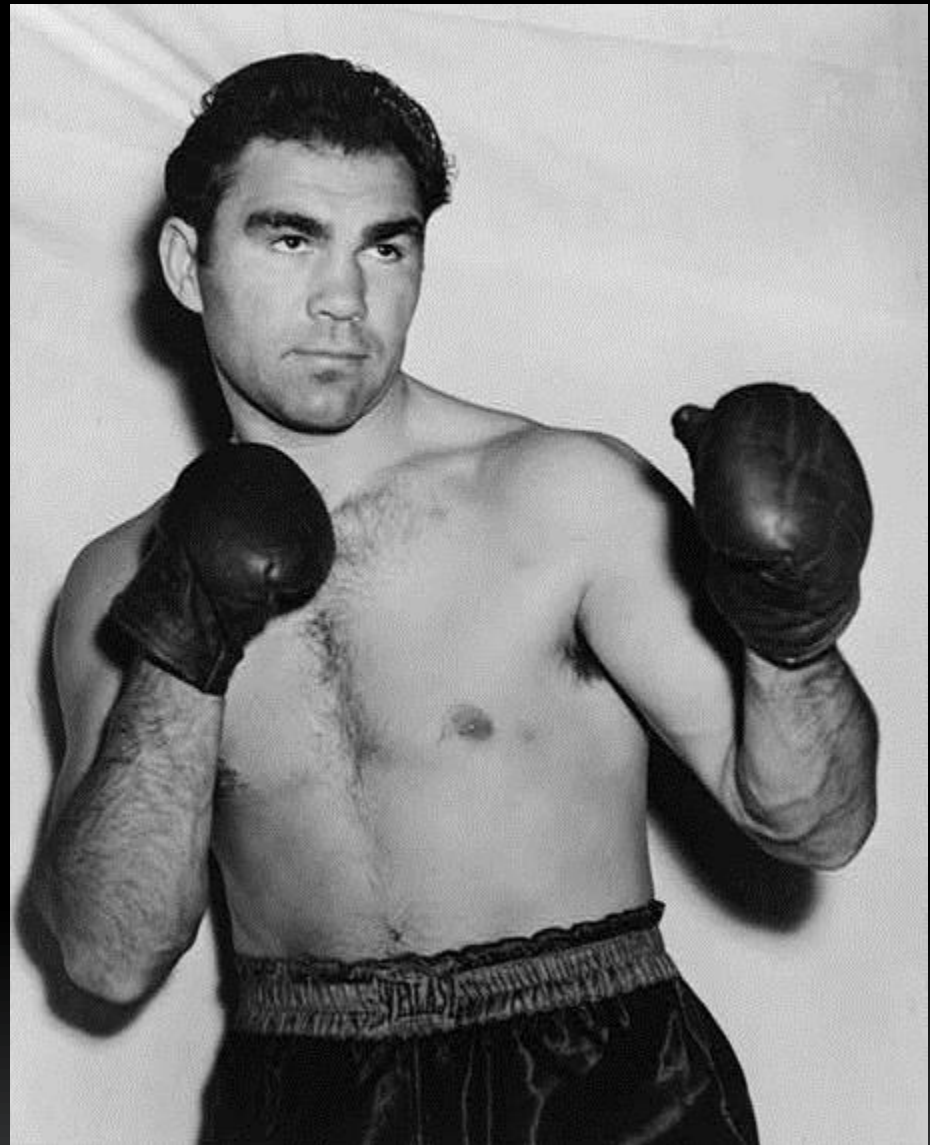
The League of Frightened Men (1937)



The League of Frightened Men. Theatrical Movie Poster. IMPAwards.com. 1937. Web.

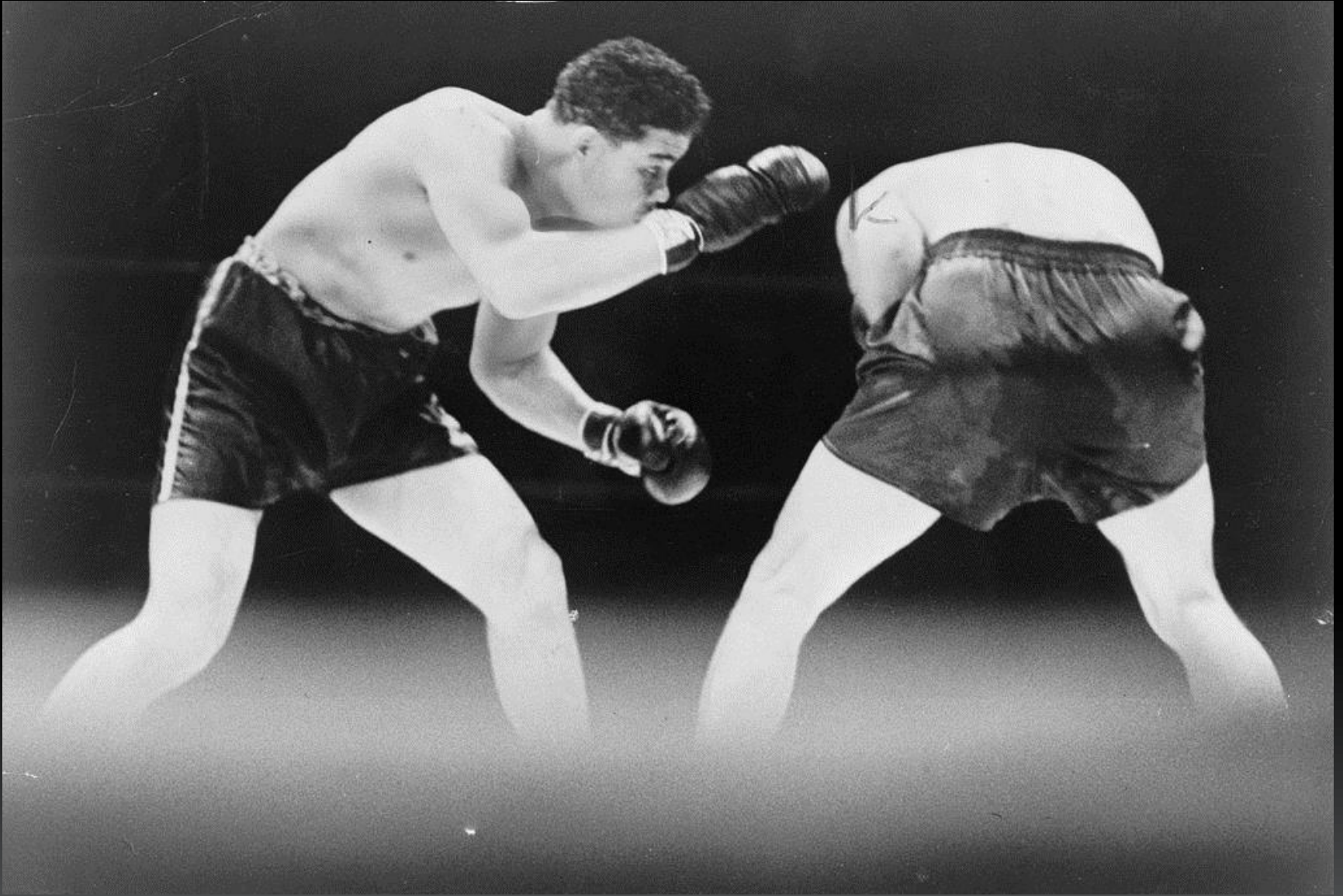
Max Schmeling

- Yankee Stadium - June 19, 1936
- Schmeling achieved a **knockout** in the twelfth after noticing a weakness when Louis threw a left jab
- Embraced by Hitler and the Nazis
- Portrayed as an example of **German manhood** and the **superiority of the Aryan race**
- **Rematch - June 22, 1938**
- The fight ended after **two minutes and four seconds** of the first round when **Schmeling's seconds threw in the towel**
- Two of the most talked about boxing matches of the 20th Century



Greene, William C. *Max Schmeling, half-length portrait, standing, wearing boxing trunks and gloves, facing right.* 1938. Photograph. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection at the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling



[Joe Louis looks for an opening during boxing match with Max Schmeling] / World-Telegram staff photo. 1936 Jun 20. Photograph. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection at Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Abraham Lincoln Brigade



Lincoln vets in the 1946 New York May Day Parade. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives.

Picasso's Guernica



Picasso, Pablo. Guernica. 1937. Oil on Canvas. Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain.

Blonde gets off scot-free for blowing away her . . .

Nazi loverboy

In the steamiest murder trial of the decade, there was never any doubt that honey-blonde Vera Stretz had blasted the life from her wealthy lover, Fritz Gebhardt — but an all-male jury set her scot-free!

It was 1933 and war clouds over Europe were threatening to drift to our own shores. The sordid details of unbefiled lust and forbidden passions were a welcome diversion for a nation not yet willing to fight another world war.

The New York City newspapers that covered the trial had a field day.

The scorching stories had all the elements of a banned-Boston novel — seduction, perversion and a murder committed at the hands of a Hispanic female duke trying to preserve the sanctity of her body from a cruel man.

And there was the added note of international intrigue. Gebhardt was a German industrialist and an air ace once decorated by Hindenburg for his combat feats with the legendary Red Baron.

And, at the time of his death in isolationist America, Gebhardt was a personal friend of First Field Marshal Hermann Goring.

Vera's pedigree was far more modest.

But at 31, she was a breath-taking, blue-eyed beauty who had become entangled in a sizzling transatlantic love affair with the already married Gebhardt.

But the 42-year-old German loverboy was a two-timing dirt-chaser and, during one of his frequent trips to New York, Vera learned of his tryst with another woman. She decided it was time to dump her darling Fritz.

On the night of November 12, Gebhardt was staying in room 2214 in New York's Beck-

Steamy murder trial shocked pre-war U.S.

man Towers. Vera was in room 2212.

She testified that Gebhardt, feigning illness, summoned Vera to his room.

Throwing a coat over her silken singlet, she went to his side.

As she rummaged through a drawer in his room for a heating pad, she came across a revolver Gebhardt had once taken from her "so you won't hurt yourself."

"He came up behind me and caught my elbow and said, 'I'm not sick.'"

"I just wanted to see if you still loved me."

"I said, 'I hate you. I'll scream if you don't let me go.'"

She said Gebhardt shouted, "You damned . . . you're just like the others. But I'll make you do everything I like before you leave this room."

At 2:30 a.m., four shots rang out in room 2214. The first one on the scene was Patrolman John Holden. Vera told him she had just shot Gebhardt.

On April 2, 1934 — after deliberating only two hours and seven minutes — the 12-man jury rendered its verdict:

Not guilty! Self-defense!

GERMAN big shot Fritz Gebhardt, below, is flanked by Vera Stretz and an unidentified woman. Vera, in photo at right, admitted killing the wealthy Gebhardt but claimed she did in self-defense.



New York, November 16, 1932

I am Stretz, being of good mind. Unless this is the very last will, I amby revoking all previous wills. I have only thing I wish to be passed to my friends. I will ask him to give to my friends. Alice Clinton, 100 East 74 St New York City, and to Williamina Canfield Dumbart and to Nashville Road Bethel, Connecticut. I am by personal blowing up both debts. and they may desire.

Vera Stretz

VERA STRETZ will dated two days before the killing, was offered as evidence she had planned murder-suicide.

Expert tips on how to live longer

Top medical researchers have identified seven health tips that have been found to prolong life.

The seven steps in a longer life include eating breakfast, eating moderately, eating regularly, using alcohol in moderation or not at all, not smoking, exercising and sleeping seven to eight hours a day.

"At every age, from 20 to 70 years, those who followed all seven health habits had better physical health than those who followed six. Six was bet-

ter than five, five better than four, four better than three and three better than two or fewer," said Dr. Lester Breslow.

"At age 45, a man with more than three of the habits had a

life expectancy of 22 more years — that is, to age 67, four in five habits, 73 years, and six to seven habits, 78 years."

said Breslow, a professor at the University of California in Los Angeles.

Rich folks' wealth totals \$2.4 trillion

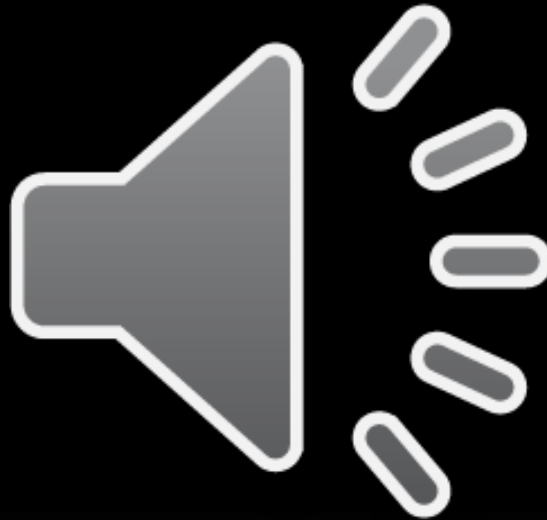
Amazing new figures released by the Internal Revenue Service reveal the richest Americans have a combined net worth of \$2,406,000,000,000.

Almost 28 percent of the nation's personal wealth is held by 2.8 percent of the adult population as of 1962, and the number of wealthy women is increasing faster than the total of rich men.

50 years after the Gebhardt murder, the supermarket tabloid *Weekly World News* recalled the case in a piece that perfectly captured the sensationalist tone of the original coverage.

"Blonde Gets Off Scot-Free for Blowing Away her Nazi Loverboy," *Weekly World News*, July 30, 1985, p.

March 31, 1943



Rodgers, Richard and Oscar Hammerstein II. "Oklahoma." Perf. Alfred Drake with the Oklahoma Chorus and Orchestra under the direction of Jay Blackton. Oklahoma (Act 2- Scene 2). Decca Personality Series, manufactured by Decca Records Inc, 1943.

Reinhard Hardegan



Hardegan, Reinhard. *Auf Gefechtsstationen! U-Boot im Einsatz gegen England und Amerika*. Boras: 1943.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt



Goldensky, Elias. *Franklin Delano Roosevelt, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing slightly left.* c1933 Dec 27. Photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Brooklyn Navy Yard



Photo # NH 93234 New York Navy Yard, Brooklyn, NY, 9 March 1944

Photo #: NH 93234. New York Navy Yard, Brooklyn, New York. 9 March 1944. U.S. Naval Historical Center Photograph. Department of the Navy. Naval Historical Center.

US Signal Corps Army Base Terminal



The "Well", US Signal Corps Army Base Terminal, Port of Embarkation. Ration cases from crate cars are hoisted to warehouse bins for storage, ca. 1945-1946. NYC Municipal Archives.

Grumman Aircraft Factory in Bethpage, Long Island



Penicillin

- Brooklyn-based Charles Pfizer and company invented what would become the life saving miracle drug **penicillin**
- Only distributed to **military personnel** during the war
- At the war's end Pfizer produced about **80 percent of all penicillin in the world**

Thanks to PENICILLIN
...He Will Come Home!



FROM ORDINARY
MOLD—
*the Greatest Healing
Agent of this War!*

The first germ, *penicillium notatum*, was found in a moldy loaf of bread, the greatest news since the discovery of penicillin. It was discovered by Professor Alexander Fleming in 1928. Named penicillin by its discoverer, it is the most potent weapon ever developed against many of the deadliest infections known to man. Because research in penicillin was already a part of Schenley's program, Schenley Laboratories, Inc. will be able to meet the problem of large-scale production of penicillin, which the great need for it was.


When the monstrous horde of this war has been reduced to piles of silver green in a lonely land, the greatest news since World War II may well be the discovery and development of penicillin. It will be the discovery and development of a new weapon against the enemy. It will be the discovery of a new life. The weapon, of course, is penicillin.

Every day, penicillin is performing some unbelievable act of healing on men in battle. Thousands of men will return home who otherwise would not have had a chance. Better will come and more of this precious thing is now available for civilian use... to save the lives of patients of every age.

A year ago, production of penicillin was difficult, costly. Today, due to specially devised methods of mass production, in use by Schenley Laboratories, Inc., and the 20 other firms designed by the government to make penicillin, it is available in great increasing quantity, at progressively lower cost.

Look to "THE DOCTOR RIGHT" against BACTERIAL DANGER. Penicillin is the answer. It is the great news since World War II.

SCHENLEY LABORATORIES, INC.
Lawrenceburg, Indiana
Producers of PENICILLIN-Schenley



Research and Development Division, Schenley Laboratories, Inc.,
Lawrenceburg, Indiana



Vendor in Times Square distributing New York Enquirer newspaper with headline "Japs Attack U.S., Hawaii, Philippines bombed by Airmen!" 1947, [from a photograph taken in 1941]. Photograph. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

- Rex Stout described himself as a "pro-Labor, pro-New Deal, pro-Roosevelt left liberal."
- Two days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Rex Stout formed the **Writers' War Board (WWB)**
- WWB became known as the "greatest propaganda machine in history"



Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, N.Y. / USHMM #2003ZWHR

'Lucky' Luciano

- 1943 - Luciano incarcerated at Dannemora prison in upstate New York
- Sometime between **May 15th** and **June 4th, 1942**, **Meyer Lansky** and a lawyer visited Luciano in prison to discuss working with **Naval Intelligence**
- Lansky explained that by co-operating with Naval intelligence, Lucky might well get a **reduction of his sentence**
- Luciano said he was **happy to help the government**
- Luciano knew the **important people on the waterfront** and if he asked them to get interested in the war effort – then they would

'Lucky' Luciano to Be Paroled and Deported

Albany, Jan. 3 (U.P.)—Gov. Thomas E. Dewey will parole for deportation Charles (Lucky) Luciano, whom he sent to prison almost ten years ago as public enemy No. 1 and "king" of a \$12,000,000 vice ring, reliable sources said today.

Dewey, who as special New York City prosecutor sent the burly racketeer to jail on 62 counts of compulsory prostitution, will act as soon as he completes a study of a report from the State Parole Board, it was said. The black-haired and aullen-faced gang leader had been sentenced to serve one term of from 10 to 20 years and two terms of 10 to 15.

Others on List

Luciano's name, according to reports, heads a list of several prisoners on the Governor's first deportation calendar since the war. He will be returned to Italy. Others are from Russia, China and England.

For nine and a half years, Luciano, once feared by the underworld, has been a "model prisoner" at Dannemora and Great Meadows prisons where he worked in the laundry. One prison official told the United Press that Luciano is "a man who knows how to serve time."

The gangster, who made application for commutation, was reported

to have aided the country's war effort by divulging important military information on Sicily.

Luciano was the first "big time" racketeer to fall in Dewey's drive to clean up New York City before he became Governor. Police picked the racketeer up at Hat Springs, Ark., in 1936 and brought him to New York for trial before a special "blue ribbon" grand jury.

Born in Italy.

He was born in Italy Nov. 11, 1897, and migrated to this country with his parents when he was 9 years old. It didn't take him long to become entangled with the law and at 14 he was sent to the Brooklyn Truant School when he quit school in the sixth grade.

Luciano gained the nickname "Lucky" on the night of Oct. 16, 1929, when he survived a gangland "ride" to Staten Island. His rise in the underworld was rapid. At one time he was head of the notorious Unione Siciliano, formerly an Al Capone outfit. He lived in New York's best hotels after working his way into profitable industrial rackets and the policy slip game.

The racketeer's police record was long and varied, but he usually was lucky and spent only a short time behind prison bars. In 1916 he was sent to prison for possessing narcotics.

"'Lucky' Luciano to Be Paroled and Deported." *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. 3 January 1946: 1. Print.

1945

- **Germany surrendered - May 7, 1945**
- Formally announced the next day
- **August 6th & 9th** - U.S. planes dropped atomic **bombs** on the Japanese cities of **Hiroshima** and **Nagasaki**
- **Bombs** were products of **Manhattan Project** research that began here in **1939**
- **Japan officially surrendered on September 2, 1945** aboard the **USS Missouri**—a battleship built in the **Brooklyn Navy Yard**
- **Crowded ships** brought American troops back to **New York harbor**



Official U.S. Navy photo courtesy of the New-York Historical Society



Official U.S. Navy photo courtesy of the New-York Historical Society