

Searching for Charley Ross

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One day, in late June 1924, Walter Lewis Ross sat at a desk, thought of his long lost brother, and drafted a statement for the newspapers. Although the fifty-four-year-old investment banker with the Manhattan firm of Post and Flagg was a man of energy (at thirty-one years old, Ross had purchased a seat on the New York Stock Exchange), he must have regretted this added chore. After fifty years of pain and loss, Walter had become weary of the subject he agreed to discuss: the kidnapping of his younger brother, Charles Brewster.¹

Speaking for the family — his brother Henry and three sisters, Sophia, Marian, and Ann — Walter decided to make his statement brief. There was nothing much to add. And yet, while the children felt an obligation to mark the fiftieth anniversary of a family tragedy, if only to honor their long-deceased parents Christian and Sarah Ann, no one felt more of a duty than Walter. He was the last person in the family to see their brother alive.²

While the kidnapping certainly had shaped Walter's life, it did not consume him. He married Julia Peabody Chandler and together they raised five children. They enjoyed a proper social life that included a listing in the *Social Register* and membership at the Germantown Cricket Club. Ross had an ambitious career, first as a clerk with Drexel and Co., then starting his own firm in Philadelphia, and finally, in 1899, his position in the New York Stock Exchange. He could see a similar ambition in his son, Walter Jr., who recently joined his Uncle Henry's Tacony Crucible Company as vice-president. Indeed, no one in Philadelphia could deny that Walter Ross had made several savvy financial decisions; the smartest deal of his career was still three years away.³

Several days later, Walter's elegy to his lost brother appeared city-wide in *The Inquirer*, *The Record*, and *The Bulletin*, many of the same dailies that had covered the kidnapping fifty years earlier. "It is the fiftieth anniversary of a great sorrow to us," the statement began. "We have long since despaired. We are constantly in receipt of letters and visits from people claiming to be my brother. Of course, we have never given up all hope that some day he may return but each of these incidents has only opened the wounds of our sorrow, recalling a tragedy that has hung over our family for these long years."⁴

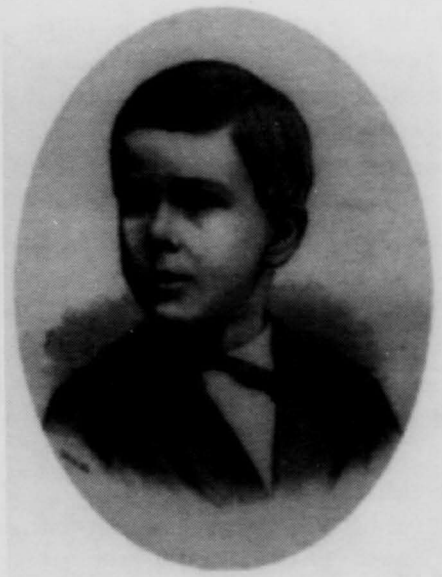
Once the newspapers marked the anniversary, Walter must have felt relieved. Not only had he served his family; he honored his lost brother, who, Walter Ross probably thought, had been killed by his captors in the winter of 1874. But as the summer progressed, the family's wound, incredibly, burst open again, as details about the murder of a boy named Bobby Franks unfolded in a Chicago courtroom.

Courtesy of
The Father's Story of Charley Ross



Charley Ross

Courtesy of
The Father's Story of Charley Ross



Walter Ross

Courtesy of
The Blair Family Collection



Gustave Blair/Charley Ross

Courtesy of
The Germantown Historical Society



Walter Ross

Courtesy of Christian K. Ross, *The Father's Story of Charley Ross*, John E. Potter (Philadelphia 1876)

July 3
 Mr. Rot - be not uneasy
 you son Charly bruster
 be at wit we is
 got him and no power
 on earth can deliver
 out of our hand - You
 wil hav two pay us
 befor you git him from
 us - an pay us a big
 cent. to - if you put
 the cops hunting for him
 you is only defeating
 you own end - we is
 got him fith so no living
 power can gits him
 from us a live - if
 any aprock is maid
 to his hidin place
 that is the signal
 for his instant
 annihilation - if you
 regard his lif puts no
 one to search for him
 you monny can feck
 him out alive an
 no other existin powers
 dont deceive yourself an
 think the detectives
 can git him from us
 for that is one imposel
 you here from us
 in few day

A few weeks later, on July 30, 1924, newspapers reported that Franks' killers, two wealthy young men named Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold, Jr., had used the Ross kidnapping as a "model." By summer's end, court psychologists offered a chilling motive. The Chicago youths considered the Philadelphia kidnapping the "perfect crime." By abducting a classmate on a blustery spring day in 1924, they intended to duplicate the infamy of the Ross case, the first ransom kidnapping in America.⁵

On July 1, 1874, as Christian K. Ross left his Philadelphia dry goods store, two men abducted his children, four-year old Charley and six-year-old Walter, in front of their mansion in the city's Germantown neighborhood. The kidnappers returned the older boy within hours but held Charley for nearly six months. In a series of twenty-three ransom letters, the abductors demanded \$20,000 or the boy's life. The first deliberately misspelled letter arrived on Independence Day.⁶

Mr. Ros —

be not uneasy you son Churly bruster he al writ. we is got him and no powers on earth can deliver out of our hand—you will hav two pay us befor you git him from us— an pay us a big cent to —if yu put the cops hunting for him yu is only defeeting yu own end—we is got him fitt so no living power can gits him from us a live....if yu regard his lif puts no one to search for him. yu mony can fech him out alive an no other existin powers. dont deceve yuself an think the detectives can git him from us for that is one imposebel. you here from us in few day.

On July 31, 1874, the kidnappers suspended correspondence and ordered Ross to take the midnight express train bound for Albany, New York. At some point along the 750-mile journey, the kidnappers told the distraught father they would signal him to drop a valise filled with \$20,000 onto the tracks. Charley would be returned ten hours later. Ross made the wrenching trip. The kidnappers' signal never came.

Meanwhile, detectives from Philadelphia and New York, the Pinkerton Agency, and the United States Secret Service searched for the boy. It was considered one of the largest manhunts of the nineteenth century.⁷ While Philadelphia police searched house-to-house, the Pinkertons spread details of the kidnapping around the world. Within weeks, hundreds of sightings of the lost boy poured into Philadelphia, some postmarked from as far away as Europe. Although the family followed every lead, none led to their lost child.

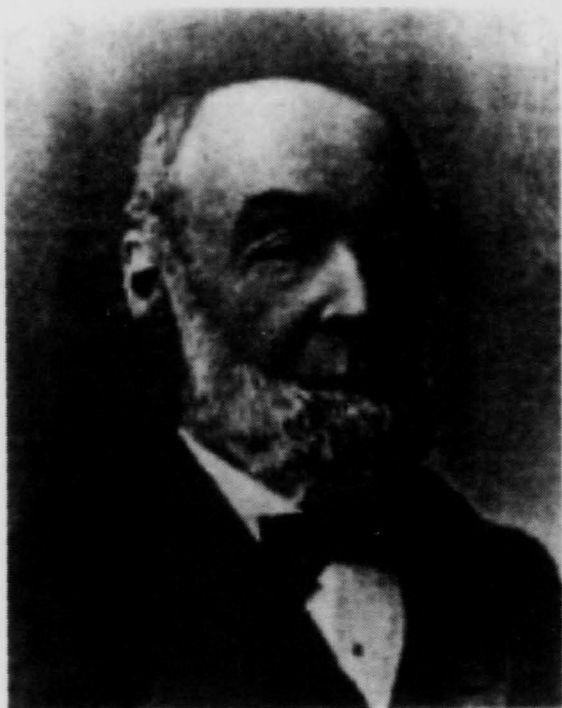
New York detectives received one promising tip. In the hope of winning a \$20,000 citizens' award, an informant named Clinton "Gil" Mosher told police he suspected his brother, a petty thief named William Mosher and his criminal partner Joseph Douglass, might be the kidnappers. Detectives had

their first real lead. By October, however, the family decided to break with the police and pay the ransom. On November 18, Charley's uncle, Henry Lewis, arranged to meet the kidnappers in New York's Fifth Avenue Hotel. They never showed up. Correspondence with the kidnappers subsequently ended.

But one more chance remained to save the child. New York Police Superintendent George Washington Walling had secretly opened negotiations with William Westervelt, Bill Mosher's brother-in-law. Walling offered Westervelt, a disgraced former New York City policeman, a deal: in exchange for information about Mosher and Douglass, Westervelt would receive his old job back and the \$20,000 reward. On the basis of Westervelt's leads, police tracked the two suspects through the Mid-Atlantic region that winter but never found the men. They never would. Westervelt was the third member of the gang of four.

On December 14, 1874, the dragnet ended in Bay Ridge, New York, with a failed burglary and an early morning gun battle. When it was over, Mosher and Douglass were dead, but not before Douglass confessed to the crime. "It's no use lying now," he told an eyewitness. "Mosher and I stole Charley Ross from Germantown." Where was the stolen child? Douglass insisted that only his dead conspirator knew.

Courtesy of The Germantown Historical Society



Christian K. Ross

While New York Police searched the kidnappers' boat and nearly every vessel on the Hudson, no substantial clues were ever found. Two weeks later, police reluctantly ended their search for the Philadelphia boy. Almost a year later, in September 1875, a jury convicted William Westervelt of conspiracy to kidnap. During his incarceration at Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, however, Westervelt denied involvement in the crime. He served a six-year sentence and then vanished. Apparently, he died in 1890 on the Lower East Side, New York.⁸

But the boy's parents never stopped searching. In 1876, Christian Ross wrote a bestseller *The Father's Story of Charley Ross*, in the hope that, one day, his son would recognize some part of his early life and return. For twenty-seven years, until his death in 1897, Christian K. Ross traveled the world in search of Charley.

His wife Sarah Ann continued the family's effort for fifteen more years until her death in 1912. At that time, the Ross children estimated the family had investigated more than one thousand individuals, all claiming to be their lost relative.⁹

While the American public largely forgot about Charley Ross after Westervelt's 1875 trial, more than fifty years later, the kidnapping still captured the imagination of numerous writers. Journalists, dime store novelists, mystery writers, amateur historians and crime anthologists all re-told the narrative in periodicals such as *The Daily Graphic* and *Headline Detective* and books entitled *Mysteries of the Missing* and *The Snatch Racket*.¹⁰

Indeed, the case most likely would have remained a fixture of the detective genre had Loeb and Leopold not reintroduced the Victorian tragedy to a wider audience as the "perfect crime." But conceding the two periods of popular interest in 1874 and 1924, why has the crime's impact on American culture, and on Philadelphia in particular, largely been muted?

The story was, after all, dramatic: the first ransom kidnapping in America. The setting was alluring: 1870s Philadelphia, on the eve of the Nation's Centennial. In fact, the tale had nearly all of the elements of a narrative classic, from its Victorian portrait of good and evil to its echo of the Prodigal Son. Why, then, is this Philadelphia story not known as the New World's "Oliver Twist?"

The answer comes, in part, from Aristotle's *Poetics*: "A whole is that which has beginning, middle and end."¹¹ Unfortunately, for the Ross family, as well as generations of would be dramatists, America's first kidnapped child was never found. As *The Ladies Home Journal* noted on the crime's fiftieth anniversary, "The fate of Charley Ross is one of the secret things which belong to God."¹²

Without a definitive ending to the case, it seemed, the story failed to take on lasting cultural significance. The possible exception is the single parental admonition: don't take candy from strangers. (Mosher and Douglass originally lured the Ross boys with sweets and the promise of fireworks.)¹³ A more fruitful explanation may be that the kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh, Jr., on the evening of March 1, 1932, dislodged the Ross case from collective memory. Americans, it seemed, only had enough cultural space for one kidnapped child named Charles.¹⁴

Recently, however, a new generation of social historians, most notably Paula S. Fass with her 1997 book *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America*,

have rediscovered Philadelphia's kidnapped son. Specifically, Fass argues the Charley Ross case is historically significant since it set the pattern for all future ransom kidnappings in America. Indeed, while we may not be able to recall Charley Ross by name, many of our collective notions about the crime — from the deliberately misspelled ransom letters to the demand for payment in small unmarked bills, from the midnight rendezvous with a kidnapper to the great fear of never knowing the fate of an abducted child — originate with his story.¹⁵

It could be argued, then, that Americans lost little Charley Ross twice: first as a child in 1874 and then as an icon in 1932. But more than 125 years later, the icon may be poised for a return. Remarkably, newly discovered documents, combined with the latest DNA testing, may finally determine what happened to Charley Ross, America's "archetypal" kidnapped child.¹⁶

In 1926, two years after newspapers reported the Leopold and Loeb connection, the old Ross home on East Washington Lane was torn down. In the years since the crime, the Victorian Italianate mansion set back from the road had become one of Philadelphia's best known tourist attractions. "This old high standing house on Washington Lane has a melancholy interest all its own," one contemporary wrote in *Ladies Home Journal*, "It is preeminently Philadelphia's House of Sorrow."¹⁷

By the 1920's, however, the "Ross home" actually had become something of a misnomer. Years before, Walter's mother had willed the old mansion to the Cliveden Presbyterian Church's Board of Trustees, who used it for services and Sunday school. By October in 1926, however, the congregation decided to raze the dilapidated building to make way for a larger meeting place. For Walter Ross, any sentimental feelings for Number 9 Washington Lane that autumn must have been offset by an even greater sense of relief. In the years since his father's death, the mansion on the hill had become a beacon not just for tourists but for the hundreds of men who had come to Philadelphia, all claiming to be Charley Ross.¹⁸

Their names were as varied as their stories. William Van Hodge, of Galveston in 1903, William Grant Eyster, of Pittsburgh in 1909, Charles Rogers, of New York and Mack Pointer of Wichita in 1922; George W. Brown, of Philadelphia in 1923; Daniel Peters of York, Pennsylvania in 1925; Julius Coleman Dellinger, of Asheville, North Carolina, C.W. De Witt of Kansas City and W.C. McHale, of North Carolina in 1926. Even a man from Los Angeles named Charles E. Ross thought he was Charley Ross. Although Walter publicly kept open the possibility that his brother would return, as the years passed and the number of claimants increased, even this view changed.¹⁹

At one point, in 1926, Walter's comments regarding the announcement of yet another Charley Ross — "Ridiculous," "false," "nonsensical" — were so harsh editors at *The Record* felt they needed to provide context. "The attitude

of the Ross family in refusing to take seriously the latest report of the discovery of Charley Ross is not strange," they wrote. "Since the kidnapping over a half-century ago, the family has been deluded and victimized by impostors on innumerable occasions."²⁰

The old mansion's demise, however, offered Walter a respite from the pretenders. He took full advantage. After twenty-five years, Ross decided to sell his seat on the New York Exchange and retire. In 1899, he had purchased it for the record price of \$29,000. After three bids fell through, Ross finally sold the seat to William D. Stewart, Jr., in November 1927, for another record sum: \$270,000. It was arguably the greatest deal of his career since two years later Wall Street and the country would be in financial ruin with the Great Crash.²¹

Sitting in his Chestnut Hill mansion above Lincoln Drive or on his estate by Lake Saranac, New York, in the fall of 1929, Walter Ross must have felt blessed. After years of hard work, he had secured financial independence and, at the last moment, narrowly avoided a repeat of his father's gravest mistake — bankruptcy. As Walter had known from a young age, even if his father had wanted to pay the \$20,000 ransom fifty years before, he was unable. Six months earlier, the Panic of 1873 had bankrupted him.²²

Walter's acumen on Wall Street, as well as his older brother Henry's own successful business (he had died leaving his wife a million-dollar estate), proved that the Ross brothers had learned their family's lesson well. Nevertheless, despite his best efforts, Walter soon found himself in his father's place.²³

On the evening of November 29, 1931, Ross' eldest son, thirty-eight-year-old Walter Jr., left the Philadelphia suburb of Newtown, Bucks County, in a heavy fog, to return to his Chestnut Hill home. As his car nearly reached the end of Campbell's Bridge around 8:30 p.m., the steel girders buckled, left their concrete moorings, and a 200-foot section of the iron span collapsed. Ross's vehicle plunged into the Neshaminy Creek thirty-five feet below. He died instantly. A week later, state investigators determined that, hours before the accident, a truck exceeding the weight limit had weakened the ancient structure.²⁴

On a December morning, in 1931, Walter Ross buried his eldest son in a Pennsylvania graveyard. Despite his vast wealth, he could not insulate his family from misfortune. Like his father, he had lost a son. If Walter Ross held even the slightest hope that his brother would return, that notion probably ended with his own son's death one winter's evening on a crippled bridge in Bucks County. Unfortunately for Walter, the most determined Charley Ross claimant had yet to make his case.

"This is the story of Gustave Blair," an article in *The Philadelphia Record* of April 17, 1932, began. "It is a weird tale, pieced together over a period of more than a year during which I have been in communication with Blair's

son, Ralph Max Blair, of Seattle.”²⁵ The author, Irma Benjamin, went on to detail a complex story, not unlike the other claimants’ conspiracies. Blair said that along with Mosher, Douglass, and Westervelt, there was a fourth man: John Hawk.²⁶

In the spring of 1874, a then fifteen-year-old Hawk returned to Lee County, Illinois, near a river valley called Mulligan Slough. He asked a former landlord, a farmer named Rinear Miller, if he would lend him his eleven-year-old son Lincoln for the summer. (Hawk told the elder Miller he was heading East and wanted young Lincoln as a playmate for his sister’s child.) Rinear Miller agreed.²⁷

Hawk and young Lincoln left for Pennsylvania on the train in the late summer of 1874. But instead of minding Hawk’s nephew, Lincoln spent the early fall guarding a four-year-old child in a Pennsylvania cave. When the young Miller asked the child his name he said it was “Charley Ross.”²⁸

Sometime that fall, Hawk returned to Lee County with Lincoln and Charley Ross. Claiming that his sister had died suddenly, Hawk left the boy in the care of the Miller Family.²⁹ But given the widespread publicity of the case, the Millers eventually grew suspicious that the child in their possession was not Hawk’s nephew but the kidnapped boy.³⁰

In an argument over Charley’s fate several years later, Rinear Miller killed John Hawk and buried his body. Miller kept the murder and the boy’s true identity a secret. (He feared authorities would suspect he had been involved in the kidnapping.) He also swore Lincoln to silence. He then adopted Charley Ross and renamed him Nelson, after the Millers’ youngest child, who had recently died.³¹

Years later, when Nelson Miller, now a young man, suspected that he was not related to the family, Rinear Miller threatened to kill him. Fearing for his safety, Nelson changed his name and fled to Canada. Many years after Rinear’s death, Lincoln confirmed Blair’s “real” identity and revealed the circumstances of his abduction. Eventually, Blair settled in Illinois as a carpenter and set about to prove his claim.³²

Walter Ross did not pay much attention to the article about Gustave Blair of Illinois in 1932, particularly given the timing of the announcement only weeks after the Lindbergh kidnapping,³³ or the appearance H. Robertson of Missouri; or William Bromson of New York or Charles Phillips, of West Virginia; or L.D. Bond of Ohio. Nevertheless, two years later, Blair tried to contact Walter Ross to arrange an appointment to discuss his story. Ross ignored him.³⁴

“Ever so often somebody bobs up and claims to be my kidnapped brother,” Walter told a *Bulletin* reporter, when asked for his reaction to Blair. “We have heard of this man before and have determined to our own satisfaction that there is nothing to his story.” Walter then went to Lake Saranac, in the sum-

mer of 1936, to give his youngest daughter Julia away in marriage. Blair was not deterred. He told reporters of his planned trip to Philadelphia in order to prove his claim.³⁵

Two years later, in January 1938, Blair retired to Phoenix, raised enough money to make it to Philadelphia, and went on the radio show "We the People" to discuss his case. Although Walter Ross ignored these latest actions, Blair's next move was even more difficult for the retired stockbroker to dismiss. A year later, he sued Walter, now seventy, in an Arizona civil court for recognition as his lost brother. But when court papers arrived at 7924 Lincoln Drive, Walter ignored them, too.³⁶

Three months later, however, on May 8, 1939, the sixty-nine-year-old carpenter entered a Maricopa County Courthouse in Phoenix for the last time. After seven years of research, thousands of dollars in legal fees, and a surprise witness, his ailing stepbrother Lincoln Miller, he came to hear the verdict in the civil action *Blair v. Ross*.

Although Judge G.A. Rogers had ruled in February in a default judgment that Blair was the "only and original" Charley Ross, the carpenter requested a jury verdict. Eight minutes after the Judge's instructions, twelve men had their decision. Gustave Blair was the lost boy, legally entitled to change his name. His second wife, Cora, fainted at the news.³⁷

In Philadelphia, Walter Ross refused to recognize the court's decision. "Blair is evidently just another one of those cranks who have been bothering us for the last 65 years," he told the Associated Press. "The idea that my brother is still alive is not only absurd but the man's story seems unconvincing." When the retired carpenter again made plans to see Walter in Philadelphia, the latter fled to his New York retreat.³⁸

Walter Ross's latest action finally exasperated Blair. In the newspapers, the retired carpenter threatened to sue the family for his share of his father's estate, even though Walter vehemently had denied the existence of a trust fund. "If my older brother lives for five years," Blair finally proclaimed to reporters in late May, "he'll seek me out and admit our kinship." But he never would. Four years later, Walter Lewis Ross was dead.³⁹

On July 24, 1943, the last witness to America's first kidnapping for ransom was buried in St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, outside Philadelphia. In the end, Walter Ross had done his best. He succeeded in a difficult world of finance. He raised a family. Above all, he had not allowed his father's obsession to become his own: in order to live, he let Charley Ross die.⁴⁰

In the fall of 1997, while researching a book proposal on the Philadelphia kidnapping (I had been raised a few miles from the site of the old Ross home), I discovered a 125-year-old newspaper article that suggested striking similarities between Blair's fourth man, John Hawk, and a member of Mosher's gang of four. In the *Newark Courier* piece from 1875, reprinted in the *New York*

Times, a reporter interviewed the local stable keeper, where Mosher and Douglass kept the horse used in the kidnapping.

The keeper described the horse's owner as a young man in his late teens, much like Blair's sixteen-year-old kidnapper. "Mr. Van Fleet [the stable keeper] states that on Friday, the 22nd of October last, a well-dressed boy, seventeen or eighteen years of age, brought a horse to his stables to be kept until the following Monday..."⁴¹

In addition, the stable keeper placed the young man with Mosher. The reporter wrote: "During the last visit he [the older man] said he would send another horse to the stable in a few days and take this one away. He is described as a man about fifty years of age with gray side whiskers. There is every reason to believe this man was Mosher."⁴²

The stable keeper's observations also seemed indirectly to support Hawk's story to Rinear Miller about visiting his elder sister back East. A few days later, Van Fleet ran into the young man on the Mulberry Street Horse car. He was not alone. As Van Fleet told the reporter, "He was accompanied by a lady, about twenty-five years of age and quite genteel in manners and dress."

In addition, several details in Lincoln Miller's 1939 testimony, published for the first time in *Pennsylvania History*, seem to be corroborated by contemporary documents. For example, in 1939, Miller testified that Hawk and he "traveled at least a part of two days and maybe a part of three" from a Pennsylvania train depot before reaching the child.⁴³ On July 13, 1874, Mosher mailed Ransom Letter Number 5 in Philadelphia. He posted his next ransom letter, noting that he had just visited Charley, *three* days later on July 16, 1874, in Philadelphia.⁴⁴

Miller told the court that John Hawk kept Charley Ross captive in a "...hilly sort of forest or country....It was not a town."⁴⁵ On July 16, 1874, William Mosher wrote, in Ransom Letter Number 7, "Ross, the reason we did not [immediately] respond to your answer was that we had to go a bit out in the country...[to see Charley]"⁴⁶ Significantly, Miller's testimony was in direct contrast to the popular explanation that the boy had been held on a boat in the Hudson River.

Miller testified in the civil trial that the boy gave his name as "Charley Ross." A 1874 Pinkerton Detective Agency Flyer noted that the child knew his name as "Charley Ross" or, if pressed, "Charley Brewster Ross."⁴⁷ Miller also testified that he guarded the child in a cave. Miller told the Court, "[Hawk] went back to a cave and found this boy there with another man."⁴⁸ On July 6, 1874, Mosher alluded to a cave in ransom letter Number 2, "This is the lever that moves the *rock* that hides him from you — \$20,000."⁴⁹

Miller told the court Charley Ross was "timid, of course, or backward like any child would be among strangers, crying many times for his mama."⁵⁰ Mosher had given a similar report about the boy's disposition. After visiting

Charley, he wrote in ransom letter Number 11 that he was upset and most of all, "He is afraid he won't get home in time to go to Atlantic City with his mother..."⁵¹

Miller also testified in 1939 that he returned to Illinois with John Hawk and Charley Ross sometime in 1874.⁵² Remarkably, on December 10, 1874, Mosher told several acquaintances that he had just returned from Chicago. A *New York Evening Telegram* reporter noted, "In connection with the frequent trips of Mosher to Chicago, it is surmised that this principal may be located there and possibly the missing boy is in his charge."⁵³

Also, during the secret negotiations for the child's release, Mosher told Christian Ross specifically in ransom letters 13, 16, 17, 22, and 22½ to use the code word "John" in newspaper personals when he replied to the kidnappers' demands — arguably a reference to John Hawk.⁵⁴ Finally, a review of census records reveals that a John W. Hawk, age twenty, lived in Lee County in the spring of 1880 as an unemployed farm laborer. Where did he come from? The census listed his place of birth as Pennsylvania.⁵⁵

While Miller testified that he had not read *The Father's Story*,⁵⁶ it must be noted that neither Blair nor Miller was cross-examined by an attorney for the Ross Family. If they had been, Ross's attorney would have mentioned the explanation advanced by the original police informant, Clinton "Gil" Mosher. In July, 1897, a month after Christian Ross's death, Gil's son, Ellsworth, said that his father had told him, prior to his death, that Charley Ross had been killed.⁵⁷

The child's body had been sealed in the walls of the Mosher's former restaurant on 55 Grand Street, New York. Ellsworth also said that his father told him that workman found the skeleton of a young child when they demolished the building in 1881.⁵⁸ According to Bill Mosher's wife, Martha, she and her husband did tend an oyster bar on Grand Street. They lived in the basement with their four children in the late 1860's. However, the couple abandoned the restaurant in 1870, four years prior to the kidnapping, after their eldest child died. They, apparently, never returned.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, if a key police informant told his son that Charley Ross had been killed in 1874, how did the widespread notion that the boy *survived* the death of Mosher and Douglass persist? This view originated with Mosher's wife, Martha. In 1875, she told a reporter "I am sure [Charley Ross] is living and will turn up before long. I am sure that he is living as I am that I breathe. I would not believe him dead unless I should see his dead body before me."⁶⁰

While neither Gil nor Martha Mosher's stories can be independently verified, it should be emphasized that of the thousands of individuals who, by 1943, had claimed to be Charley Ross only one — Gustave Blair — provided a witness who agreed to testify under oath. But was Blair *really* the lost child? Remarkably, a new DNA test developed by retired University of Virginia pa-

thologist Dr. Eugene Foster (and recently employed to identify a probable relationship between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson) may yet provide an answer to the Philadelphia mystery.

Recently, a granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Blair's, Grace Elaine Burdzinski and Ruth Bukowski of Downers Grove, Illinois, secured a blood sample from the last known male descendant in their family, a son of Gustave Blair. If a male-line Ross descendant (preferably two with different fathers) agrees to cooperate, Blair's descendants hope to commission Foster's Y chromosome DNA test.⁶¹

"There has always been a nagging, unresolved question in our family as to whether our ancestor, Gustave Blair, really was Charley Brewster Ross," Ruth Bukowski recently said. "A DNA test could now give closure to the relentless and passionate past efforts to find and establish the identity of Charley Ross. We believe this test would appropriately honor Gustave and Walter's memories and give solace to their descendants on both sides."⁶² Christian K. Ross, it seems, would have approved.

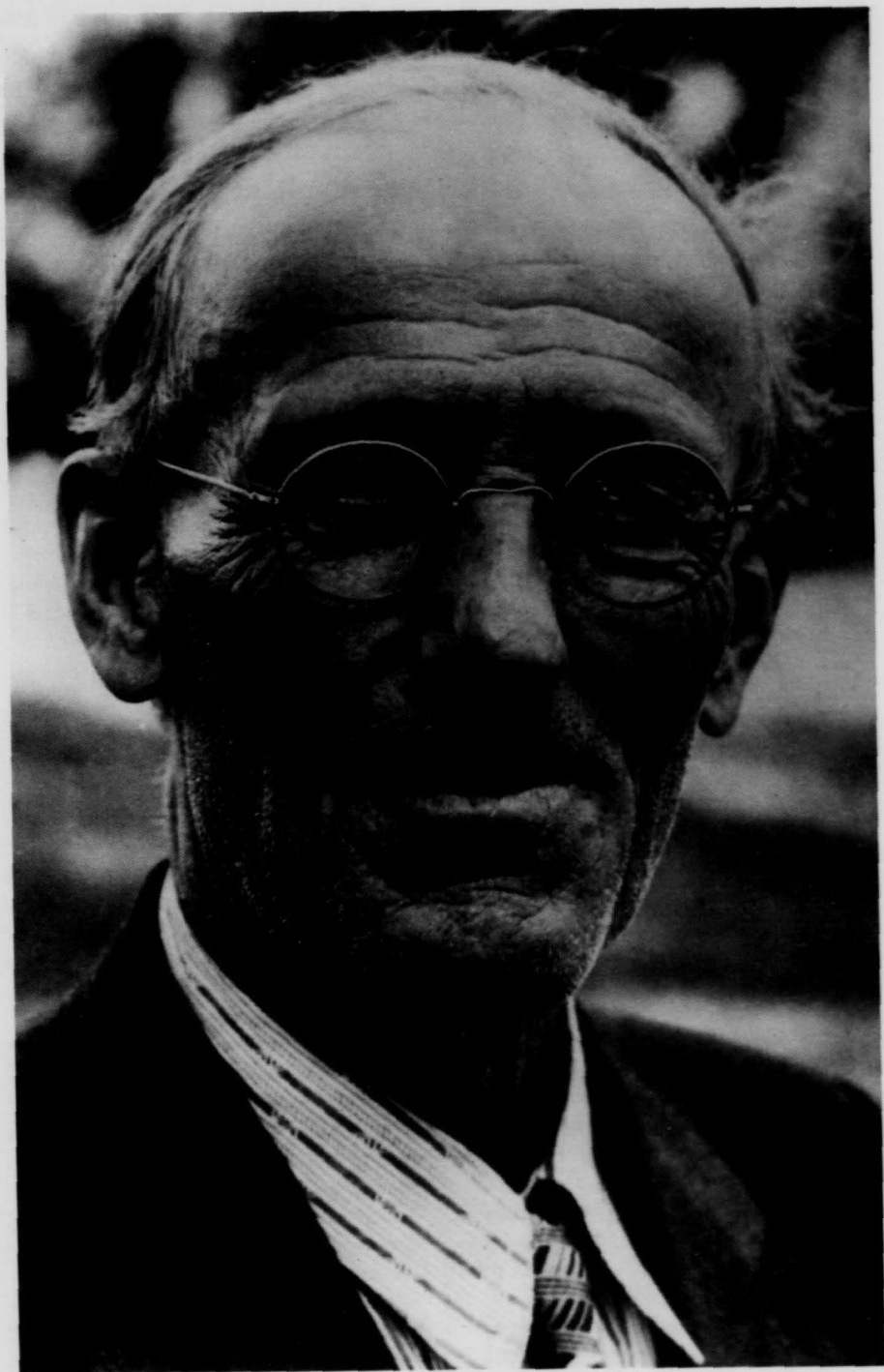
"Truly the ways of Providence are mysterious..." he wrote in 1879, "Yet I do not despair but that I will yet get some light by which the mystery will be made plain. To this end I zealously look into every circumstance that I hear of...believing that while it is a privilege to pray for light and aid, yet it is also a duty to use every means at my disposal to find out the truth..."⁶³

Indeed, if Foster's test is performed, and a genetic link discovered, it would not only solve one of the great crimes of the Gilded Age but also prove the words from Matthew 10:26 that Christian and Sarah Ann must have recited were not said in vain: "So have no fear....For nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known."⁶⁴

For more than 125 years, the kidnapping of Charley Ross signified the arrival of an ancient crime to the New World. Since then, the Ross case has continued to affect our modern perceptions of kidnapping for ransom, often unwittingly. From Leopold and Loeb to Lindbergh's baby to JonBenét Ramsey we can see the face of Charley Ross.⁶⁵

But in many ways, it may be Walter Ross who best symbolizes the modern reaction to the crime of ransom kidnapping. Ultimately, feelings of shock and sadness, anger and fascination often lead, as they did for Walter, to simple weariness. Indeed, even in our age of media excess, it is staggering to contemplate that from the moment Mosher and Douglass put Walter out of their wagon at Palmer and Richmond streets, Philadelphia he would witness sixty-seven years of press coverage regarding his brother Charley. Viewed in this context, Walter's reaction toward Gustave Blair is understandable. Nevertheless, given the enduring cultural influence of Charley Ross, it is important to search for a solution, if for no other reason than the chance to silence this kidnapping's quiet, yet lasting, allure as America's "original perfect crime."

Courtesy of New York Telegram and Sun Collection (Library of Congress)



Gustave Blair/Charley Ross

After the 1939 civil trial, Gustave Blair legally changed his name to Charles Brewster Ross. That July, he even made, what he called, a "very private mission" to Philadelphia to remarry under the name "Ross" in the church where the family's home had once stood. Given the family's refusal to accept his claim, however, the Cliveden Presbyterian's pastor rejected the couple's admission.⁶⁶

Four years after the verdict, the newly christened Charles Brewster Ross entered a Phoenix hospital. While he had failed to convince the family he was their lost relative, the retired carpenter, perhaps, offered a final argument. On December 13, 1943, the man known as Nelson Miller, Gustave Blair, and Charles Ross succumbed to influenza. Remarkably, it was on the same day, thirty-one years earlier, that Charley's mother Sarah Ann had collapsed, and died, of heart failure.⁶⁷

Notes

1. "\$250,000 for Exchange Seat," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, October 11, 1927, Temple University *Urban Archives*, Bulletin Files, "Walter L. Ross," Philadelphia, PA. Hereafter, referred to as *Urban Archives*. Evidence of Ross's Exchange Seat purchase in 1899 see, "Walter L. Ross, Older Brother of Charlie (*sic*), Dies" *Philadelphia Record*, July 23, 1943, p. 12.

Evidence of Walter Ross's weariness with Charley Ross is taken from a conversation with a columnist of the *Philadelphia Bulletin*. "More than once I heard Walter L. Ross, long a well known Philadelphia broker, mention his brother Charlie [*sic*], who was kidnapped fifty-two years ago last week. Mr. Ross as are other connections of the family with whom I have talked, is fully convinced his brother died many years ago. Rather wearily, he dismisses the recent report that Charlie Ross still lives." *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 7, 1926 "Char-

ley Ross" *Urban Archives*. Also see Walter's reaction to W.C. McHale's claim in 1926 that he was Charley Ross. "It's just another of the hundreds of Charley Ross[es] who have turned up in fifty years. I would rather not discuss the matter for it only causes new trouble for us." *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 7, 1926, *Urban Archives*. Also, "Playmate of Ross Believes Story of Claimant Correct," *Philadelphia Record*, June 8, 1926, *Urban Archives*. "He [Walter Ross] said the disappearance of his brother more than a half century ago was a tender matter in the family and he would not reopen the wound." I would like to thank Dr. Walter McDougall, University of Pennsylvania, for his assistance.

2. Evidence of Walter's siblings, Henry A. Ross, his elder brother comes from "Henry A. Ross Dies," *New York Times*, May 11, 1929, p. 19. For Ross's sisters, see Gustave Blair's 1939 Complaint, where he lists as the defendants,

"Walter L. Ross, Sophia Ross, Marian K. Ross and Anne C. Ross," *Blair v. Ross*, Superior Court of Maricopa County State of Arizona, Complaint #47088. Hereafter referred to as *Complaint*. Also see, Norman J. Zierold's, *Little Charley Ross: America's First Kidnapping for Ransom* (Little, Brown and Co., 1966), pp. 295-296. Christian K. Ross, *The Father's Story of Charley Ross*, (John E. Potter and Co., 1876), p. 29. Evidence of Walter's guilt comes only from his reaction as a child. He was so distraught by the experience that he was, at first, unable to speak. His guilt in adulthood is, admittedly, conjecture.

3. "Walter L. Ross is Dead at 74," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 22, 1943, *Urban Archives*. For evidence of Social Register see 1899 Philadelphia Social Register. Both Walter L. Ross and his brother Henry A. Ross were members. Evidence of Walter's association with Germantown Cricket Club and his career move from Drexel, Co. to his own firm, Walter L. Ross and Co., see "W.L. Ross Funeral To Be Tomorrow," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 23, 1943, p. 6. "Will of W.L. Ross, Jr.," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, December 9, 1931, *Urban Archives*. "Walter L. Ross, Jr." Folder. Ross, Jr. also was an engineer who worked for the firm Day & Zimmerman.

4. "Stole Charley Ross Just 50 Years Ago," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 30, 1924, *Urban Archives*.

5. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 7, 1926, *Urban Archives*. "Ridicule New Charley Ross," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 7, 1926, *Urban Archives*. "The theory generally accepted by the police...was that the boy was taken on board a boat in the vicinity of New York and that he died from neglect, mistreatment or disease, or that he was killed by his abductors." Also see *Little Charley Ross*, pp. 294-295. Also see note 57.

"Think Ross Case Model," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 30, 1924, *Urban Archives*. The two similarities between Leopold and Loeb and the Ross case are the demand that the family respond to the ransom in newspaper personals and that the exchange involve a train. Also, Paula S. Fass, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America*, Oxford University Press

(New York, 1997), p. 63. From Dr. H.S. Hulbert, psychologist for the defense, "In early childhood, [Loeb] was strongly impressed by a story of kidnapping in a book which he had read and the crime of kidnapping seemed to him to be the maximum crime and there had been growing...an ambition to commit kidnapping and make it a perfect mysterious crime and the carrying out of this ambition which had been fostered in his contemplations was the motive of the crime.... This boy [Loeb] early in life conceived the idea that there could be a crime that nobody could ever detect; that there could be one where the detective did not land his game. He had been interested in the story of Charley Ross."

For the crime as the first of its kind, see Fass, *Kidnapped*, p. 274n. "...I have never come across a documented case of ransom kidnapping [in America] before the Ross case. Christian claimed to be frequently asked about this matter and noted that in his own searches he came across none..."

6. Ross, *The Father's Story of Charley Ross*. For the text of the first ransom letter see Ross' book, p. 48. (The letter has been abbreviated for space).

7. Herbert Asbury, "Annals of Crime: Charley Ross," *The New Yorker*, September 26, 1936, pp. 61-64.

8. Westervelt's death date comes from a descendant's genealogical research. E-mail, August 8, 1999.

9. "Christian Ross Dead," *New York Times*, June 22, 1897, p. 1. Sarah Ann Ross obit, *Germantown Telegraph*, December 14, 1912, Germantown Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA, "Charley Ross Folder." I would like to thank Eliza Callard, Research Librarian, Germantown Historical Society for her assistance. The estimate that the Ross' parents had investigated more than a thousand individuals claiming to be Charley Ross is based upon Walter's statement in 1924 that his family had investigated 5,000 individuals. Norman Zierold's *Little Charley Ross*, p. 299. In 1932, however, Herbert Asbury estimated that "more than six hundred persons have claimed to be Charley Ross, and others still appear at the rate of two or three a year." Herbert Asbury, "Annals of Crime: Charley Ross," *The New Yorker*,

September 26, 1936, pp. 64.

10. *Daily Graphic*, December 18, 1874; *Headline Detective*, June 1941; Edward H. Smith, *Mysteries of the Missing*, Dial Press (New York, 1927) 1-22.; Edward Dean Sullivan, *The Snatch Racket*, Vanguard Press, (New York, 1932) pp. 133-34. The Story of Charley Ross also influenced numerous works of fiction. One of the latest examples is Sarah Smith's *The Vanished Child*, Ballantine Books, (New York, 1992).

11. John Bartlett and Justin Kaplan, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* Little, Brown, (Boston, 1992) p. 78.

12. Clarence Edward Macartney, "Charley Ross: The Unforgettable Lost Boy," *Ladies Home Journal*, 41 (July 1924), pp. 78.

13. A typical example comes from Elizabeth W. Coffin, *A Girl's Life in Germantown*, Sherman, French & Co., (Boston, 1916) p. 10. "One night while I was eating my supper a man appeared at the open window, and holding out promises of candy and other nice things asked me to go with him. Of course I wanted to go, and I called out to my sister May, who was at that moment in the kitchen.... The man suddenly left and my father came in just in time to see him run down the drive way, and join another man in a buggy and drive off. Then I was warned never to go anywhere with a stranger. Germantown was at that time still in deep gloom over the disappearance of Charlie [sic] Ross, whose parents lived about two miles from my home."

14. Fass, *Kidnapped*, p. 96, "By the seventeenth of March [1932], when the *New York Evening Journal* reprinted, side-by-side, the reward posters for the two boys in order to draw upon emotions still available in popular memory, it was hardly necessary any longer to evoke Charley Ross."

15. Fass, *Kidnapped*, p. 52, "The Charley Ross case was fundamental to the history of American child kidnapping not only because it set the terms of subsequent kidnappings in the motifs of train drops, ransom notes, and police bungling, but because it made clear that the parent-child bond...was the most important and resolute of obligations and the most necessary (if vulnerable) source of personal identity." Fass is the latest researcher in the

academy to study the Charley Ross case. See also, Earnest Kahlar Alix, *Ransom Kidnapping in America*, Southern Illinois University Press, (Carbondale, 1978).

16. Fass, *Kidnapped* p. 8

17. "Charlie Ross Home Razed for Church," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, October 26, 1926, *Urban Archives*. Clarence Edward Macartney, "Charley Ross: The Unforgettable Lost Boy," *Ladies Home Journal*, 41 (July 1924), pp. 74-78.

18. "Charlie Ross Home Razed for Church." Evidence that the house was Number 9 in 1874, see "Playmate of Ross Believes Story of Claimant Correct," *Philadelphia Record*, June 8, 1926, *Urban Archives*. Today, the address is 529 East Washington Lane. James Smart, "1874 Kidnapping Ensures Cliveden Church a Place in History," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, October 8, 1971, *Urban Archives*. "For years men came to his [the Rev. Harold P. Melcher's] door, who claimed to be the long-lost Charley. As late as the 1950's, he was still getting occasional letters from men in their 80's, who thought they were long lost Charley."

19. For William Van Hodge, "He May Be Charley Ross," *New York Times*, September 25, 1903, p. 6. For William Grant Eyster see, "Mrs. Ross Will Investigate the Eyster Claim," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, April 13, 1909, *Urban Archives*. For Charles Rogers see, "May Be 'Charley Ross'" *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, September [no date], 1922, *Urban Archives*. For George W. Brown, "New 'Charley Ross' Note," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, December 26, 1923, *Urban Archives*. For Mack Pointer, "Kansas Man Thinks He is Charley Ross," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, November 27, 1922, *Urban Archives*. For Daniel Peters, "Thinks He is 'Charlie' Ross," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, May 23, 1925, *Urban Archives*. For Julius Coleman Dellinger, "New Charlie Ross Claimant's Story," *Philadelphia Record*, April 18, 1926, *Urban Archives*. For C.W. De Witt, Inquirer Memo for City Desk, May 19, 1926, *Urban Archives*. For Charles E. Ross, "'Charley Ross Found Again,'" *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, June 17, 1926, *Urban Archives*.

20. "Ridiculous' Says Charley's Brother, *The*

Philadelphia Record, June 7, 1926, *Urban Archives*. "Self-Styled 'Genuine' Charley Rosses Numerous," *The Philadelphia Record*, June 7, 1926, *Urban Archives*.

21. "Walter L. Ross, Older Brother of Charlie, Dies" *Philadelphia Record*, July 23, 1943, p. 12.

22. Norman J. Zierold's *Little Charley Ross*, p. 92, 183.

23. "Charlie Ross' Brother Left Million Estate," *New York Times*, July 6, 1929, p. 15.

24. "W.L. Ross, Jr. Is Killed As Span Crashes," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, November 30, 1931, *Urban Archives*.

25. The story was, apparently, first reported by the *Seattle Times*. See, "U.S. Scans Kinship Claims," *Seattle Times*, April 3, 1932, p. 1.

26. "Son Insists Charlie Ross Is Living in Chicago; Says Farmer Killed Kidnapper and Reared Boy," *Philadelphia Record*, April 17, 1932, *Urban Archives*. The Blair narrative is also reconstructed from his *Complaint*. Also see, Powers and Larson, "Reporter's Transcript," *Blair v. Ross*, No. 47068, May 8, 1939, Superior Court of the State of Arizona, County of Maricopa, pp. 37-38. Hereafter referred to as *Reporter's Transcript*. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Blair descendants for a copy of the Court Reporter's Transcript. Maricopa County, apparently, destroyed all Superior Court documents, except Blair's original nine-page *Complaint*.

27. Miller testified that Hawk boarded with Rinear Miller. "Johnny Hawk came to our place in early [18]73 — He came home with the oldest brother of mine and he stayed there for some time and he went away and he returned and persuaded my father to let me go on this trip." *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 34.

28. "The boy told me his name was Charley. I said, 'What else,' and occasionally he said it was 'Charley Ross.'" *Reporter's Transcript* pp. 37-38. Also see, "Same Old Story, Family Declares of Blair's Claims," *Philadelphia Record*, May 10, 1939, *Urban Archives*. "Blair-Ross traces his identity from a fourth member, John Hawks (*sic*), a Lee county (Ill) farm youth, Hawks the Arizona Court record shows, returned to Illinois, "borrowed" Lincoln Miller, then 11, from his father, Rinear Miller, a farmer, and brought him to Pennsylvania as

a playmate for Charley." Press reports often spelled Hawk with an "s". Blair's 1939 *Complaint*, the *Reporter's Transcript*, and Census Records, however, referred to John Hawk. Evidence that Hawk and Lincoln Miller took the train comes from Blair's 1939 *Complaint*, p. 4. Also see, "Sixty-Nine-Year-Old Carpenter Proves to Court He is 'Only and Original' Charley Ross," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, May 9, 1939 p. 1. Also see *Reporter's Transcript*, pp. 34-35.

29. *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 38. Lincoln Miller testified, "When Johnny Hawk came home I said, 'This boy said his name was Charley Ross.'" Johnny Hawk said, "Well, don't pay any attention to what he says, he is my sister's child. She is dead and I am, I have taken him to take care of, and I have named him. His name is Charley," he said, "But it is Charley Hawk. He is my son, my boy."

30. Miller testified that five years later he heard Hawk say the boy was Charley Ross. "Finally I heard Johnny Hawk saw, 'You don't want to keep this boy here anyway, he is a stolen boy... This boy here has been kidnapped... this is... Ross's boy'" *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 47.

31. *Complaint*, p. 4. Also see, "Son' Insists Charlie Ross Is Living in Chicago; Says Farmer Killed Kidnapper and Reared Boy," *Philadelphia Record*, April 17, 1932, *Urban Archives*. Miller testified, "Well, my father and me talked that over and talked about restoring this boy to his father or to his parents, but we thought we would not be in good standing ourselves with the law, and we resolved to let the world know as soon as it did so, and that is what we tried to do." *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 50-51.

32. *Complaint*, p. 3-4.

33. The timing of the announcement was accidental. The United States Immigration Service had launched an investigation into the citizenship of Blair's son, Ralph Max Blair after they thought he had entered the country illegally from British Columbia in 1930. Investigators discovered his father's claim as the kidnapped child in the process of investigating Ralph Blair's place of birth. "U.S. Scans Kinship Claims," *Seattle Times*, April 3, 1932, p. 1. But why did Blair wait so long to announce his claim? His son implied that his father had wanted to gather enough evidence to convince

the family. "I cannot tell his story for him...I know that he is in a position now to prove these details as well as his true identity as Charles Brewster Ross."

34. H. Robertson, "Wants to Find W.L. Ross" *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, September 4, 1930, *Urban Archives*. Charles Phillips, "Mystery of Charlie Ross Kidnapping Comes to Life Again As West Virginian Reveals His Own Abduction in 1874," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 12, 1933, *Urban Archives*. William Bromson, "Calls Dead Man Charley Ross," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, November 28, 1932, *Urban Archives*. L.D. Bond, "Charlie Ross Appears Again," *Philadelphia Record*, June 16, 1934, *Urban Archives*.

35. "Not Charlie Ross," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, May 11, 1935, *Urban Archives*. Gustave Blair's trip, "Tonight Only," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, January 13, 1938, *Urban Archives*.

36. Blair's radio show, "We the People," "Tonight Only," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, January 13, 1938, *Urban Archives*. For Walter Ross' address, "Illinois Man Hopes to Prove Claim to Being Charlie Ross," May 12, 1935, *Philadelphia Record*, *Urban Archives*.

37. "Sixty-Nine-Year-Old Carpenter Proves to Court He Is Only and Original Charley Ross," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, May 9, 1939, p. 1.

38. "Court Recognizes 'Charley Ross'" *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, May 9, 1939, *Urban Archives*.

39. "Ross Case, 65 yrs. Old, Flares Anew," July 1, 1939, *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, *Urban Archives*. "His [Blair's] recognition by Arizona Courts, he contended, caused him to decide that if the family could not be brought amicably to his side he would file a Federal Court action in Philadelphia looking toward the ultimate sharing in a reputed trust fund left to the children of Christian and Sarah Ann Ross." For evidence that Blair didn't sue see, "Man Recognized By Court As 'Lost Charley Ross' Dies," *Arizona Republic*, December 16, 1943, p. 2. "Apparently, the move [suit for trust fund] was not made and the matter was never pursued." "Gustave Blair Identified By High Arizona Court As Lost Abduction Victim," *Philadelphia Record*, May 9, 1939, *Urban Archives*.

40. "W.L. Ross' Funeral To Be Tomorrow," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 23, 1943, p. 6.

41. "The Missing Charlie Ross," *New York Times*, January 10, 1875 p. 7. Unfortunately, while Miller gave a clear physical description of Hawk in the 1939 trial — "John Hawk was a very likely young fellow and he weighed about 125 pounds, of dark complexion, black wavy hair and black eyes" — Van Fleet does not offer any detailed description of the youth. *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 33. Indeed, I could not find any further references to Van Fleet's young man in the historical record. Even though a *New York Tribune* reporter wrote that detectives would advertise for him as a material witness in New York and New Jersey newspapers in early 1875. "Superintendent Walling is making strenuous efforts to find the young man who took the horse to Van Fleet's. He is to be advertised for, and if he comes forward Superintendent Walling said that he would not only insure his immunity from punishment or harm of any kind, but if he can give any information that may lead to the clearing up of the mystery of the fate of Charley Ross he is to be so liberally rewarded that his action will not be regretted." "A Remarkable Clew (*sic*) to Charley Ross," *New York Tribune*, January 12, 1875 p. 13. For additional research assistance on this point, I would like to thank the Newark Historical Society Library's Forest Turner.

42. One newspaper, however, questioned the appearance of Mosher at Van Fleets. After reprinting the *Courier* piece, *The New York World* noted, "All of the above is correct with the exception of the allusion to Mosher, it having been obtained beyond a doubt that the man who represented himself to be the owner of the horse was not Mosher." See, "The Search for Charlie Ross," January 12, 1875, *New York World*, p. 7. All other New York and Philadelphia papers, however, reported Mosher's appearance at Van Fleet's. Also, Mosher was in the Mid-Atlantic region — Philadelphia — in late October after trips to New York City, Rondout, N.Y., New Haven, CT, New Brunswick, N.J. and Newburg, N.Y. Ransom Letter 22, Ross, *The Father's Story*, p. 232, 237.

43. *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 35.

44. Ross, *The Father's Story*, p. 83-84 and 95-96. There is also a three day difference between Charley's abduction on July 1 and the first ransom letter mailed in Philadelphia on July 3. Also, Mosher stated early in the negotiations with Christian K. Ross that the kidnappers had kept Charley relatively close to Philadelphia. As Mosher noted, they held the boy "within a 100 miles of the city." Ransom Letter 11, *The Father's Story*, p. 117-118.

45. *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 35.

46. Ross, *The Father's Story*, pp. 95-96.

47. *Reporter's Transcript* p. 37-38. Pinkerton Flyer from "Tattered Handbill Describing Abduction of Ross Boy Found by Olney Optician," *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, July 20, 1939, *Urban Archives*.

48. *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 35. It is interesting to note that Miller testified in 1939 that this man was "an Italian." The crime of kidnapping was, apparently, known as an Italian crime so much so that the first edition of the *Trial of Westervelt* is entitled *American vs. Italian Brigandage*. Mosher makes reference to the fact that one of the gang may have been of European descent in Ransom Letter Number 21, "We told you that we were going to Europe last month; part of us did go but we expect them back in a few days and then we can settle the business if you are ready." Ross, *The Father's Story*, p. 227-229.

Stable Keeper Van Fleet also makes reference to another man, a "rough looking expressman, with a rickety wagon, who came to the stable [after Mosher] and asked for the horse but finding the charges for keeping had not been paid went away." "The Missing Charlie Ross," *New York Times*, January 10, 1875, p. 7. Perhaps William Westervelt told the truth, then, when he insisted he was not a member of the conspiracy?

49. Ross, *The Father's Story*, p. 70 (Emphasis added)

50. *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 38.

51. Ross, *The Father's Story*, p. 117-118.

52. *Reporter's Transcript*, p. 36. Questions regarding timeline were asked by Gustave Blair's attorney, John W. Ray. This is how Lincoln C. Miller testified:

Q: Then while you lived there [in cave], you say you might have stayed three or four weeks,

it might have been twice that long, and [then] where did you go?

A: Well, we proceeded home, as it terminated, I don't know, it just only — he told us we were going home and I presume eventually that is where we ended."

Q: You say "he"?

A: I mean Johnny Hawk and Gustave Blair and myself.

Q: You left there and finally wound up at your father's home, your home [in Lee County, Illinois]?

A: That is right.

53. *New York Evening Telegram* report cited in "The Ross Case," *Philadelphia Inquirer* December 22, 1874, p. 2. Also see, *The New York Herald*, "It has all along been believed the boy was concealed in Jersey or close to it...but it is now suspected the boy has been conveyed West and that would explain for Mosher's trip to Chicago." "Charley Ross," *New York Herald*, December 21, 1874, p. 6. The town of Compton — closest to Mulligan Slough — in Lee County is 80 miles west of Chicago.

54. For "John" see Ransom Letter 13, Ross, *The Father's Story*, pp. 136-137; Ransom Letter 16, p. 182, Ransom Letter 17, pp. 185-186; Ransom Letter 22, pp. 232, 237, Ransom Letter 22^{1/2}, pp. 237, 239.

55. United States Census, Lee County, Illinois, Township of Viola, 1880, Reel 225, p. 421. National Archives, Washington, D.C. Also, the Miller family, including Rinear and Lincoln, appeared in 1870 Census records for Lee County. In 1880, the family appeared again along with the addition of another child — Nelson Miller. Compare Census Records 1870, Lee County, Illinois, Township of Viola, Reel 246, p. 480 with 1880 Census cited above.

56. *The Reporter's Transcript*, p. 39.

57. Norman J. Zierold, *Little Charley Ross*, p. 294. Also see, "The Fate of Charley Ross," July 1897 reprint (incomplete) of *New York Journal* article, *Urban Archives*. Who would have killed Charley Ross? The *New York Journal* surmised that Martha Mosher and her brother William Westervelt had destroyed the child after Mosher and Douglass were killed at Bay Ridge.

58. "The Fate of Charley Ross," July 1897 re-

print (incomplete) of *New York Journal* article, *Urban Archives*.

59. "Charley Ross," *New York Herald*, December 21, 1874, p. 12. Where did the Mosher's go after leaving Grand Street? In 1874, Gil Mosher told the *New York Herald* that his brother "had not lived steadily in this city for any length of time since he gave up the saloon in Grand Street." "Charley Ross," *New York Herald*, December 22, 1874, p. 5. Martha Mosher listed two subsequent addresses, Columbia Street, New York and then Monroe Street, Philadelphia. "Charley Ross," *New York Herald*, December 20, 1874, p. 12.

60. "Charley Ross," *New York Herald*, September 2, 1875, p. 10.

61. Evidence of Blair descendants' hope to commission Foster's DNA test comes from interview on November 19, 1998. For Eugene Foster, Leef Smith, "Tests Link Jefferson, Slave's Son" *The Washington Post*, November 1, 1998, p. A1. Information about the preference of 2 male line descendants comes from letter from Dr. Foster on December 5, 1998. "Five to ten mil. of blood should be more than sufficient to yield a quantity of DNA for any testing that may be done...It will be preferable to have two [Ross descendants] who have different fathers." The Ross sample does not have to come from direct descendants. Indeed, Christian Ross had six brothers, Joseph, William, Henry, James, John and George. A male-line descendant of any of these individuals carries the same Y chromosome and could be used for comparison with the Blair sample.

62. Telephone interview with Ruth Bukowski June 21, 1999. In late June 1999, I sent an earlier draft of this article to two Ross descendants seeking comment. Unfortunately, as of December 1999, I had not received a reply. An earlier request regarding the existence of family papers, however, brought two responses. One descendant wrote, "Unfortunately, I have no family papers of the sort you are looking for nor have I ever seen any. We all grew up knowing about the kidnapping and my [rela-

tives] talked about it frequently. However if there are any papers I don't know where they might be." Correspondence, October 3, 1998. Another descendant noted there were no family papers from this period but suggested I check the Free Library of Philadelphia. There, I discovered an original copy of *The Trial of Westervelt*.

63. Norman J. Zierold, *Little Charley Ross*, p. 285.

64. Evidence of Christian Ross's religious faith comes from his letter to a friend, "No one but God knows, the suspense is terrible, but God, I know, can and will support me until I know how my dear little boy has been disposed of." Norman J. Zierold, *Little Charley Ross*, p. 224. For Sarah Ross see, "Charlie (sic) Ross' Mother Dead," Germantown Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA, "Charley Ross Folder" "Dr. Burns in whose home Mrs. Ross died is minister of the First Methodist Church, of which Mrs. Ross had been a member for more than half a century."

65. For a thorough examination of the similarities between ransom kidnappings in America see Fass, *Kidnapped*.

66. "Very private mission..." comes from "Charley Ross' Coy On Baring Plans," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 14, 1939, p. 3.

67. For evidence that Blair and Sarah Ann Ross died on the same day, compare, "Mother of Stolen Charley Ross Dead, Hoped to the Last," *Germantown Telegraph*, December 14, 1912, Germantown Historical Society Archives Folder "Charley Ross." The article says "Mrs. Ross death occurred on the eve of the thirty-six anniversary of the tragic death of her son's abductors." That occurred on December 14, 1874, thus she died on the 13th.

For Blair, "Kidnapped Ross Heir Claimant Dies, Aged 73," *Tucson Daily Citizen*, December 16, 1943, p. 4. The obituary reads "An attack of influenza proved fatal here Monday." The date of the obit on December 16, 1943 fell on a Thursday in 1943 and, thus, Blair died on the 13th, too.