

THE KILLING OF SEELY HOUK (PART TWO):

THE BLACK HAND AND THE *SOCIETA DI MUTUO SOCORSO E BENEFICIENZA DI SAN ROCCO*

by Louis S. Warren

(The first part of this article, about events surrounding the murder in 1906 of a Pennsylvania Game Commission official in the New Castle area, appeared in the Fall 1992 *Pittsburgh History*.)

AS investigators came to see it, the murder of Seely Houk was the culmination of a sequence of events which began in 1905. In August or September of that year, a young immigrant named Luigi Rittorto went hunting for ground hogs near Hillsville. Borrowing a double-barrelled shotgun and a dog from his employer, a Hillsville store owner, he headed into the woods. He did not have a hunting license. He knew from neighbors' warnings that he should watch out for "the police." The same neighbors told him that if caught hunting, he would spend one year in the penitentiary and pay a \$50 fine, a huge sum for a man who earned only \$10 and board each month.

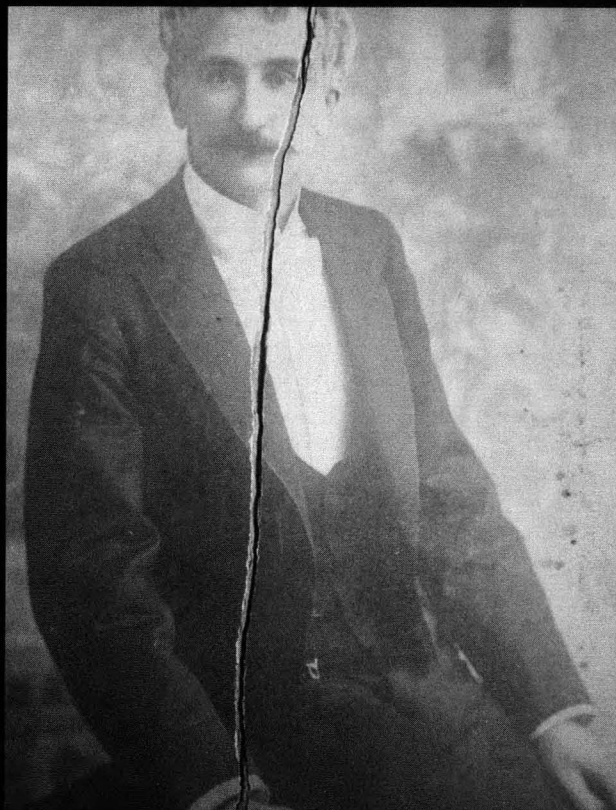
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In the woods, he saw an armed man, a man he later identified from photos as Houk, approaching him from the direction of one of the quarries. Fearing that this was the policeman, Rittorto immediately began to run. He heard a shot but kept running. He must have been terrified, for in his haste he caught his stomach on a barbed wire fence and tore the flesh, and ran through thick briars which shredded the skin on his hands. He made a detour of two or three miles to avoid going through the woods where he might be apprehended. By the time he arrived at home, he was bleeding profusely. Rittorto told his employer what had happened. The older man reassured him that he was safe now that he had reached home. Nevertheless, the young man was so frightened that afternoon that he could not eat, wondering if at any moment the game warden might walk through the door and arrest him.³⁴

Detectives took a special interest in what purportedly happened next. The evening Rittorto returned, his employer noticed that his dog was missing. Either that night or the next day, the store owner found his dog dead in the woods, where Houk had killed it. Others would later recall that the man threatened to kill Houk in retribution for the dog's death.³⁵ The incident supplied prosecutors with a motive for Houk's murder, and many people, Italians and non-Italians alike, would come to believe that the man not only made the threat but acted on it. His name was Rocco Racco. He was a founding member of a shadowy Hillsville organization called the *Società di Mutuo Soccorso e Beneficienza di San Rocco*; the Mutual Aid and Beneficial Society of Saint Rocco. To authorities and the larger public, Racco's organization had another name: *Mano Nera*, or the Black Hand.³⁶

Racco would hang for Houk's murder. It would be easy to speculate that Racco's society was as much a protective as a criminal organization, and that he killed the game warden to avenge his countrymen and protect the community interest. It is tempting to consider that in the cultural understanding of the immigrant community, the Black Hand was considered the "proper" vehicle for dealing with Houk.

As appealing as such a scenario might seem, the available evidence indicates nothing of the kind. Houk's corpse was the only hard evidence the Pinkertons gathered. The circumstances of the killing — two shotgun blasts in the body, one at point-blank range, and the anchoring of the corpse — suggested that whoever shot Houk meant to kill him, and that they were confident enough not to feel a rapid retreat from the body was necessary.



Seely Houk, the slain deputy game commissioner of Lawrence County.

These facts are enough to indicate that members of the society were probably responsible. Deducing who murdered Houk from the trial testimony requires descent into an inescapable web of lies and deceit, for the testimony which sent Racco to the executioner came from rivals within the organization. In the end, whether Racco killed Houk or some other Black Hand member did, it seems likely that Houk's activities threatened the tenuous control which Black Hand leaders maintained in Hillsville, and that his murder was intended not so much to protect people from him as to protect Black Hand positions in the community.

The Saint Rocco Society was one of the countless entities associated with the Black Hand symbol at the start of the century. The threatening symbol of the black handprint was so pervasive among criminals — mostly but not entirely in Italian communities — that for many non-Italians the symbol became synonymous with all Italian crime until after World War I.³⁷ Most Black Hand agents did not leave written records, and it is difficult to say what their activities may have represented in local context.

We are fortunate, therefore, that one member of the Hillsville Black Hand left an extraordinary record. He was an undercover agent of the Pinkerton Detective

Agency, the prominent investigative firm whose services were retained by the game commission to discover who murdered Houk. Known in the records only as Operative #89s, or by his initials D.P., his superiors dispatched him to Hillsville in the summer of 1906. There he rented a bed at a boarding house, and, in what must rank as one of the least attractive covert assignments in history, he became a quarry laborer. He remained in Hillsville for about a year and a half. During that time he became a leading member of "the society," or as members called it on other occasions, "the association," and befriended its one-time president, Rocco Racco. From this vantage point he wrote daily reports which he secretly mailed to his Pinkerton superiors.³⁸

D.P.'s observations of the Hillsville "society" help us frame some useful notions of the forces which led to Houk's demise. What is most striking about D.P.'s account is its portrayal of society leaders who, like *mafiosi* in southern Italy, attempted to dominate local society by monopolizing the links between Hillsville residents and the outside world.³⁹ Although a localized operation, the society extended its reach into virtually every sphere of local life.

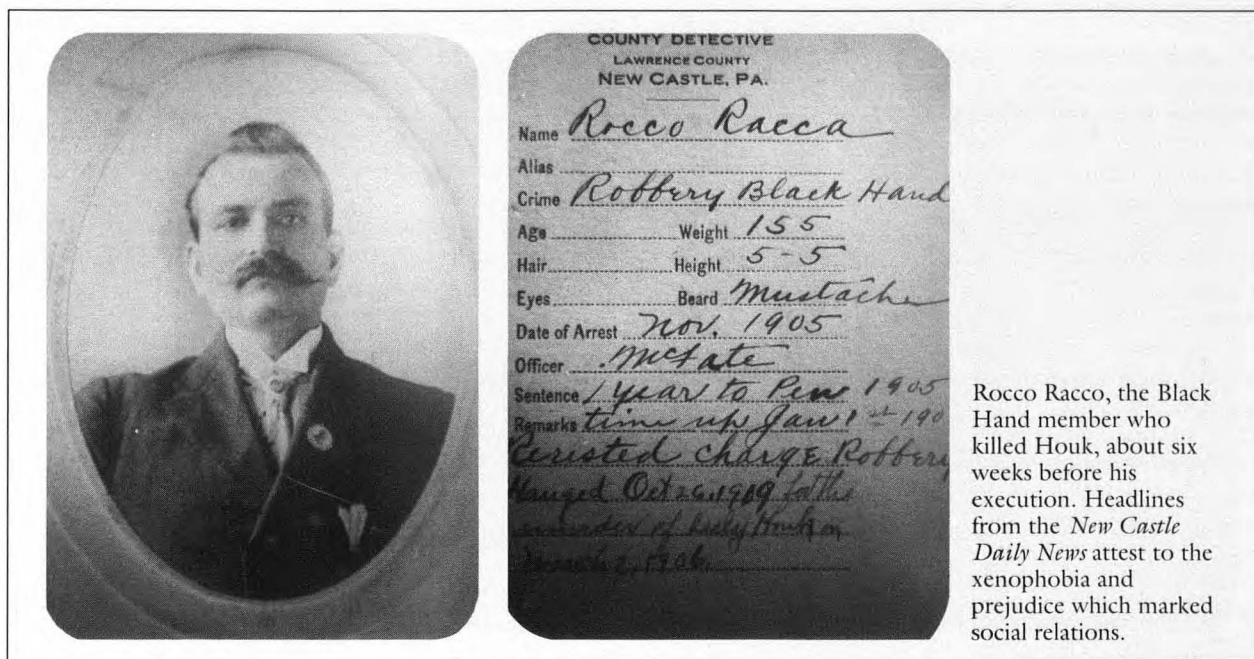
The society had a strong grip on local channels to outside markets. While Racco was society president, all members were required to buy their groceries from his store.⁴⁰ Society leaders also maintained a virtual monopoly on beer sales in Hillsville.⁴¹ At the workplace, society leaders held important positions. At least one member served as a labor contractor, bringing on extra laborers when needed, in return for a fee from owners, and other leaders gave special concessions to members. In return for a cash payment, Racco would move a favored underling into one of the better-paying quarry stations, and he also exploited a position of minor authority in the quarries to obtain additional, unearned pay for cohorts.⁴²

The society could offer services which were probably indispensable to some immigrants, such as the guarantee of board payments for new arrivals and of credit payments in the event of misfortune.⁴³ The association also paid compensation to sick, injured, or disabled members.⁴⁴ In all likelihood, these benefits were not as extensive as they might initially seem, and like mafia-type gangs in southern Italy, a benevolent cause was often no more than a ruse to secure members' money for the leaders' own use.⁴⁵ Yet even the slightest compensation for illness or injury, or the least help with obtaining and keeping a good job, was more than most immigrants could expect from their employers or the government. As one Pinkerton operative reported from Hillsville, to some members the society represented more than a criminal organization. "The black hand society state that the society is for the good of its members, like a labor union, and its inferior members believe this."⁴⁶

Society influence extended to the religious lives of Hillsville residents. Even after he no longer led the



Political cartoon in the *Youngstown Vindicator* suggests widespread knowledge of the secret society of Italians (the Black Hand) in the area.



Rocco Racco, the Black Hand member who killed Houk, about six weeks before his execution. Headlines from the *New Castle Daily News* attest to the xenophobia and prejudice which marked social relations.

society, Racco was president of both major church groups in Hillsville, the St. Lucy Society and the St. Rocco Society (a church society distinctive from the society under investigation); these positions required that he play a central role in major church festivals.⁴⁷ He was godfather to dozens of children in the area, making him a central figure in local families.⁴⁸

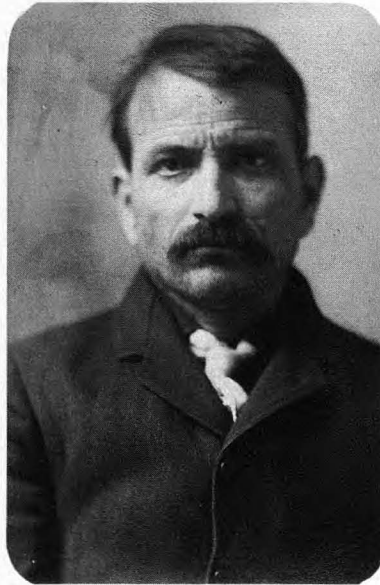
Perhaps the society's most valuable tool was the monopoly they attempted to maintain on criminal, especially criminally violent, behavior. Illegal activity had to be sanctioned by the society, or the perpetrators could face severe penalties, as when D.P. reported that "lots of people paid \$200 and \$300 for stealing chickens."⁴⁹ Society leaders preferred that violence also remain under their control. After mediating an altercation in which one man was stabbed, one of the society's leading figures even warned D.P. against using personal violence to settle a score. "He recommends me to behave myself, and not do any fighting, but to leave everything to the association to settle, and they will punish the one that needs it."⁵⁰

The society maintained its pervasive influence in these diverse social arenas with the orthodox technique of control in mafia-type organizations: terror. Even after Racco was no longer a ranking society member, he enthusiastically led armed forays into nearby Lowellville to kill individuals who had somehow slighted society members.⁵¹ The society's most prominent activity was extortion of Hillsville's quarry workers. Any Hillsville man was a potential society "member," insofar as he might be made to pay "dues."⁵² Those who refused to make payments might face the ordeal of Nick Ciurleo. Having repeatedly refused to pay a \$100 "initiation fee," he endured a beating by dozens of society men who then took turns spitting on him before they covered

him with excrement. Other men acquiesced to the payment of weekly dues in varying amounts, but never attended meetings or became involved in society activities, and were thus "members" only to the extent that they were buying protection from the type of treatment meted out to Ciurleo.⁵³ When one society leader told an investigator that almost all the Italians in the Hillsville vicinity were "members," he was probably not exaggerating.⁵⁴

Society power in the community depended on a dual ability: to terrorize on the one hand, reducing potential rivals to submission through the mere threat of force; and to monopolize on the other, dominating all possible links between Hillsville residents and the greater world. Seely Houk was a threat because his aggressive enforcement of the law meant that state authority was becoming a force to be reckoned with in Hillsville, eroding the society's monopoly on intimidation. In the countryside, society men probably initiated much of the widely-reported cattle rustling and crop damage, a common tactic of *mafiosi* in southern Italy when dealing with farmers who refused to pay protection money.⁵⁵ Houk's presence challenged the society's pretensions to dominance in the hinterlands of the community. There is no indication that the organization monopolized hunting. But Houk's aggressive enforcement of the game laws erected a barrier between local immigrants and part of the natural world upon which they relied for subsistence, highlighting a connection between Hillsville residents and the greater world which the society did not control.





FORM 100-12-104-10M-AD.

P. N. D. A. No.

Name Rocco Racco

Alias

Residence Hillville, Pa.

Nativity Italian Color White

Occupation

Criminal Occupation Leader, Black Hand

Age 35 Height 5' 5"

Weight 155 Build

Complexion

Color of Hair

Eyes Nose

Style of Beard Mustache

Color of Same

Date of Arrest Nov. 1905 and Jan. 1908

Where Arrested

Crime Charged Rioting

Peculiarities of Build

Features, Scars, Marks, Baldness, Etc.

Racco, shown here shortly after his arrest in 1908, was godfather to dozens of local children and a president of prominent church societies.



state authority. If the mere sight of Houk could send Italian hunters like Luigi Rittorto running to the protection of Racco, then it might eventually happen that some would run to the "policeman" for protection from the society. It seems almost without doubt that Houk had arrested society leaders in his patrols, and to these men it must have been doubly clear that the society's monopoly on intimidation was slipping. His shooting of Racco's dog could only have underlined for all who understood society operations that Houk presented its leaders with a dilemma which they could not long evade. A supervisor in the quarry recalled that the day Houk's body was found, three Italian workers "were very curious to learn who it was and on learning that it was Houk, they lost all curios[i]ty...." Although the supervisor did not believe these men had anything to do with the murder, it seemed "they were expecting something of the sort to happen."⁵⁶

It might seem that local immigrants gave their loyalty to the society out of some sense of shared community. In truth, society leaders like Racco were hated. After Racco's arrest, D.P. reported that "of all the people who know Rocco Racco, there is not one to say a good word for him, and they do not care for him at all," and that

If Houk's activity was a challenge to the society even when he was hated, its men must have wondered what might happen if some local parties made him an ally. Houk was known to local immigrants not just as a game warden, but as "the game policeman," the representative of

Hillville people generally seemed "very little interested in the future welfare of Rocco Racco."⁵⁷ Indeed, the organization survived because Hillville Italians were new to the United States, unfamiliar with its laws and their own legal prerogatives, largely unable to speak English, often isolated from friends or family, and, if we can assume that Hillville was like many other Italian settlements, because the community was transient and society actions were probably seen as temporary difficulties. The community hatred for Racco was a typical response by Italian immigrants to Black Hand agents in general, and no doubt extended to the other society leaders.

Houk's killing of Racco's dog became widely known in the area, and not just among Italians. Houk's friends who knew of the incident, including Alderman Haus, warned the game warden to be extremely careful lest "the Italians hurt him." Another man, a local Italian, claimed that Houk had told him, "Yes, I killed Rocco Racco's dog, but I am not afraid of him killing me; if he is any quicker on the trigger than I am let him try it."⁵⁸

If anyone did threaten Houk, nothing happened to him for some time after he killed Racco's dog. But in the early months of 1906, events within the society made it an increasingly unstable organization prone to sudden violence. Sometime before spring of 1906, the unity of the society's upper echelon — Racco, Ferdinando Surace, and Giuseppe Bagnato — dissolved into a fractious contest for the organization's leadership, with Racco on one side, Bagnato and Surace on the other. It is impossible to determine the causes, but they involved a strike in February, during which Racco acted as a watchman to protect the owners' equipment from violent strikers.

Surace and Bagnato considered Racco's action treasonous, tantamount to cooperation with the police. In an event which may have been related, Surace leveled allegations of adultery against Racco — sleeping with another society member's wife. Such charges eventually led to Racco being found guilty in a trial within the organization. The verdict carried the sentence of death, from which Racco saved himself by paying heavy fines to Surace and Bagnato. These episodes show clearly that by late February 1906, Racco's position in the organization was in serious jeopardy.⁵⁹

Houk's death, when seen in the perspective of the struggle for control of the society, begins to seem almost predictable: as hated as he was, with no local connections to either side in the struggle, he probably became a potential target of both. Sources from within the society eventually told investigators that in March of 1906, Racco fulfilled his promise to kill the game protector. Allegedly Racco hid in the woods with his brother-in-law, Vincenzo Murdocca, waiting for Houk. Both men carried double-barrelled shotguns. Murdocca fired a shot to catch the game warden's attention. Houk entered the woods, whereupon Murdocca shot him in the face. Immediately thereafter, Racco stepped up to Houk and fired two shots into the game warden's body. Later the same day they put the body in the river.⁶⁰ Racco's own desire to retain power in the society could have motivated him to kill the hated warden; what better way of countering charges of cooperating with the police than to kill "the game policeman"? Certainly the parallels between this story and the known physical facts of the murder lent the story credibility, and it

proved damning in court.

Yet the story, at least as told, does not ring true. The description of the murder came from none other than Ferdinando Surace, Racco's rival who had, by the time of the murder trial, replaced him as president of the society. Surace claimed that Racco invited him to his cellar one cold spring day in 1906. After pouring some wine for them both, Racco said, "I have got a sin on my conscience and I want to confess it to you, but you have to swear that you will never tell it to any one."⁶¹ Surace duly swore, and Racco told him the story of how he and Murdocca had murdered Houk that very day.

This testimony seems implausible. Seely Houk was killed on March 2, 1906. By that time, Racco and Surace were feuding for control of the society. Racco's society trial for adultery, on charges which Surace lodged against him, was only days away. Why would Racco have invited him in for wine? Why would he tell his chief rival this incriminating story? Add to this the fact that investigators only extracted it from Surace after he had been in jail for months awaiting his own trial on various charges associated with his Black Hand activities, and it seems even less likely that the story contained the whole truth. Surace's underlings, in jail with him, would confirm the basic outline of Surace's testimony, but it seems most likely that they and their leader had concocted a story about who killed Houk in order to appease aggressive officials, to garner lighter sentences for themselves, and not least to dispose of Racco.

Surace's veracity at the trial was in part attributable to rumors, supposedly widespread in Hillsville, that Racco had killed the hated game warden.⁶² Yet D.P., who



FORM 100-12-104-10M-AD.

P. N. D. A. No.

Name *Giuseppe Calaute*

Alias *Joe Calaute*

Residence

Nativity *Italian* Color *White*

Occupation

Criminal Occupation *Blackhand*

Age *20* Height *5' 1 3/4"*

Weight *150* Build

Complexion

Color of Hair

Eyes

Style of Beard *Slight*

Color of Same

Date of Arrest

Where Arrested *Spokane, W. I.*

Crime Charged *Murder*

Peculiarities of Build

Features, Scars, Marks, Baldness, Etc.

Speaks little English

Hillsville resident Joseph Calaute was accused but another man was convicted of murdering Squire Duff, whose death a few months before Houk's was the first public indication of hostility between long-time landowners and Italian hunters.

listened carefully for such rumors, did not report them. At least one highly-placed society member, Salvatore Candido, told authorities that Surace must have had something to do with the murder, and another Pinkerton operative reported rumors that Bagnato had killed the game warden.⁶³ The rumor mill was simply reflecting the popular experience of Hillsville residents: Houk was widely hated, and his murderer would be found

among men who were capable of such abhorrent behavior, namely the society leaders.

The jury believed Surace. In October of 1909, Rocco Racco was hanged for the murder of Seely Houk.⁶⁴

LOCAL PEOPLE, LOCAL AUTHORITY, AND STATE WILDLIFE LAWS

On March 2, 1906, Houk rode to Hillsville in the wagon of farmer Silas Martin. It was a little after 5 p.m. when Houk mentioned that he was going to "keep a sharp watch" on the Hillsville quarry workers, "as the evenings were long now and the men would be hunting after supper." He had warrants for the arrest of two men, and wanted to catch them as they left work that day. The game warden walked off through the fields, towards the Johnson quarry.

From physical evidence, investigators pieced together what happened next. As evening came on, Houk entered the woods, probably on his customary patrol route. Thirty feet from the warden, a shotgun blast ripped the air, catching him in the face, neck, and chest, and catapulting him onto his back. An assailant stepped up to the prostrate form, lowered a shotgun loaded with

No. 6 birdshot to Houk's mouth, and pulled the trigger.⁶⁵

This horrible vignette, and Racco's ostensible connection with it, became a near-legend at the game commission, in which Houk became a conservationist martyr to the Italian poaching menace. The hanging of Racco signaled the close of the game commission's troubles in the New Castle area. With convictions of dozens of Hillsville men for Black Hand-related activity, the society was broken. Bagnato fled, Racco was dead, and Surace was in jail.⁶⁶

Like all mafia-type organizations, the society functioned best where state authority was weak. It could not function in a setting where undercover detectives became trusted cohorts, and where the state could muster blatant force to impose its rule, as it did when a contingent of State Police temporarily occupied Hillsville during the "Black Hand trials" which ultimately sent many society men to prison.⁶⁷ The shooting of the "game policeman," rather than securing society control, brought its downfall.

It is likely that not all of the armed confrontations between Italian immigrants and game wardens involved Black Hand gangs. The burden of the game laws, and the fear which they inspired, probably motivated some poachers to take a chance on shooting at the "game policeman" rather than face the terror of jail in a strange country. But the arrival of state authority in the hunting grounds represented a challenge to Black Hand supremacy, which depended to a large degree on maintaining its monopoly of in-



Ku Klux Klan march in downtown New Castle, 1925. Hate groups such as the KKK exploited tensions between local citizens and immigrants in dozens of Western Pennsylvania's industrial towns.

timidation. The defense of these local monopolies was behind three Black Hand letters sent to the game commission in the early 1900s, and probably does much to explain the pattern of violent response to the game laws in Italian immigrant communities generally.

After 1907, the game commission reported no more Italian attacks on game wardens.⁶⁸ In 1909, largely as a result of the Houk case, the commission secured passage of legislation banning hunting and the ownership of firearms by non-naturalized immigrants. Consequently, the agency reported that by 1910 it was "a rare thing indeed...to receive a complaint charging an alien" with a game law violation.⁶⁹

The story of Houk's murder and the game commission's campaign against the Black Hand came to dominate the history of Italian immigrant experience under the game laws. But in truth, the story of Luigi Rittorto was more representative. On that day when he fled Houk, he typified the travail of numerous immigrants who relied on subsistence hunting for food. Such people were frequently without recourse to legal counsel, and without means to pay the heavy fines imposed on them for breaking the game laws.

But Rittorto's cooperation with detectives who interviewed him in 1908, before Racco's murder trial, was also typical of most immigrants. Rittorto was eager to testify against his former employer, and told investigators "that he was glad that Rocco Racco and the rest of his band who were members of the Black Hand Society were in the Penitentiary; that since he has been there Hillsville has become a Paradise."⁷⁰

Only the testimony of Italian immigrants like Rittorto allowed state authorities to crush the Black Hand, but many of the same immigrants never accepted state game laws which did not allow non-citizens to hunt. Resistance to the game laws became less violent, more covert. Hillsville residents recall that non-naturalized immigrants frequently hunted for groundhogs, birds, and rabbits in the fields and forests surrounding the little town until the 1930s. They avoided game wardens, and learned to hunt "on the sneak."⁷¹

The murder case showed the existence of an organized ethnic community, with its own informal rules and methods of enforcement, that was largely unknown to naturalized Americans. It should be remembered that it was a high-ranking society member who first implicated Racco, citing an Italian proverb, "He who eats has to pay."⁷² A rough translation is that a person who gained from immoral activity must eventually pay the consequences. By this social logic, Racco would pay for killing Houk and for his other transgressions. Houk also paid, with his life, for his vindictive activities and his aggressive intrusion into local life. With the maturation of American-born children, the growth of successful citizenship applications, and the improvement of wages during the 1940s, the hunting of animals for subsistence began to disappear in immigrant communities. Children of immigrants joined other American recreational hunters

and turned increasingly to recreational deer hunting. Among this generation of Italian-Americans, the early anti-Italian game laws became curious relics. But to their predecessors, the non-citizen immigrants who poached quietly in the farm fields and hills around Hillsville, there was no doubt that the laws imposed a great hardship. By enforcing the game laws, the state was taking a bite out of local livelihoods, hard won in the limestone quarries. If ensuring welfare of self and family meant an occasional trip to the fields for a groundhog, a rabbit, or a brace of sparrows, then state authorities and the game laws deserved little attention beyond watchfulness, a skill most valuable in missions of stealth, and one in which the Hillsville hunters were clearly well-schooled. ■

(Note: footnote numbers continue from part one, in the Fall 1992 issue.)

³⁴ Pinkerton Report 5/27/08, Report of Agent #10, Pennsylvania Game Commission Library, Harrisburg, Pa. Pinkerton detectives investigating the murder sent daily reports to their superiors in Philadelphia. The hand-written reports were transcribed on a typewriter at the central office, and carbon copies were sent to the Pennsylvania Game Commission. These copies are still on file in the game commission library in Harrisburg, and photocopies of those can be found at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania in Pittsburgh. Hereafter these reports will be denoted "PR," followed by the date of the relevant report.

³⁵ PR 6/5/08, Report of Agent #10.

³⁶ PR 5/27/08, Report of Agent #10.

³⁷ For a comprehensive discussion of the pervasive Black Hand phenomenon, see Thomas Monroe Pitkin and Francesco Cordasco, *The Black Hand: A Chapter in Ethnic Crime* (Totowa, N.J.: 1977). For an account based on extensive interviews with the Pinkerton detective who did the undercover work, see James D. Horan, *The Pinkertons: The Detective Dynasty That Made History* (Bonanza Books, 1967), ch. 35.

³⁸ Pinkerton agents were not disinterested observers, and their reports should be treated with great care. However, arguments for the credibility of D.P.'s reports seem convincing. First, D.P.'s assignment was to collect information which would convict Racco of Houk's murder. He did not succeed. The information which convicted Racco came in trial, from testimony of other society members. If D.P. stooped to blatant fabrication, why wouldn't he invent a confession by Racco, or some other evidence to convince a jury of Racco's guilt? Secondly, D.P. himself seemingly avoided even small license, not once referring to Racco's organization as "the Black Hand." In his reports, it is always referred to as "the Association" or "the Society." That the society was known as "*mano nera*" in Hillsville seems likely, insofar as descendants of immigrants who lived in the area at the time refer openly and frequently to the Black Hand, and since other undercover agents reported casual complaints from Italians about "*mano nera*" in Hillsville. (The numerous reports of these agents are in the New Castle Public Library, "The Black Hand Society in Lawrence County,

1906,” unpublished collection, vols. 1 and 3). Again, if D.P. had been interested in sensationalizing his reports, it seems most likely he would have included references to “the Black Hand” therein.

³⁹ This is not to argue that the Hillsville Black Hand was an organizational off-shoot of some mafia-type society in southern Italy. It formed after a cultural diaspora, in which some local men were adapting behavior learned in their homeland to new conditions in America. See Francis A.J. Ianni, 1-22. Mafia-type activity could extend to any number of possible arenas, but the principal method of operation of mafia groups in southern Italy was the domination of all possible connections between the peasant village and the outside world. Monopolizing these junctures facilitated control of the peasants, and thus of the countryside. See Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village: A Story of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs* (New York: 1974).

⁴⁰ See Candido’s interview with FPD, 3/28/08.

⁴¹ PR 7/3/06; 7/15/06 (for some reason, there are two separate reports by D.P. for this date; only one mentions beer selling); 12/29/06.

⁴² Racco used his position of authority at Johnson Quarry to garner extra pay for himself and his cohorts by crediting them with more stone than they had actually quarried. PR 10/13/06, 10/14/06.

⁴³ For guarantee board payments see PR 1/16/07; for credit management see PR 9/3/06.

⁴⁴ PR 10/15/06; 10/16/06; 1/9/07; 4/6/07.

⁴⁵ See Blok, 154, and Candido’s interview with detectives, PR 3/28/08.

⁴⁶ See PR 4/6/07, reports of Pinkerton Agent #37, “The Black Hand Society in Lawrence County, 1906,” Vol. 1, New Castle Public Library, New Castle.

⁴⁷ PR 7/16/06, PR 8/25/06.

⁴⁸ PR 10/21/06.

⁴⁹ PR 2/19/07.

⁵⁰ PR 8/6/06. The Society took special interest in controlling violence as they came under increasing pressure from detectives; see PR 9/12/06, 9/19/06.

⁵¹ “Rocco Racco was the principal who seemed to be determined to find the man and kill him.” PR 7/18/06.

⁵² I have found no evidence of any women members of the Society.

⁵³ See “Shocking Treatment of Nicolo Ciurleo by the Dread Black Hand Gang,” *New Castle News*, 7/23/07, 1, 6.

⁵⁴ PR 4/21/08.

⁵⁵ Blok, 151.

⁵⁶ PR 2/17/08.

⁵⁷ PR 10/15/06, 2/21/08.

⁵⁸ PR 6/5/08.

⁵⁹ *New Castle Daily News*, 9/18/08, 1, 4, and 10 covers Racco’s testimony at his own murder trial, which is confirmed by subsequent witnesses and the following sources. The strike itself was covered in *New Castle News*, 2/6/06, 1. For the calculated mendacity of the adultery charge, see PR 3/28/08, FPD’s report of interview with Salvatore Candido; also, PR 1/

20/07 indicates that “improper” sexual relations were within the society’s purview of social regulation. See also PR 2/21/07. Racco claimed he and Surace had fallen out over the strike, the adultery charge, and a dispute over division of extortion spoils. *New Castle News*, 9/19/08, 10. That Surace could make any accusations — true or otherwise — against the Black Hand president suggests that he had a powerful following of his own within the organization. By late February 1906, Racco’s grip was slipping rapidly. In an organization where men proved their ability to lead in large part by dispensing violence, a lengthy contest for leadership was potentially explosive, and the struggle within the society put Hillsville through its bloodiest passage. The *New Castle News* reported that in the period marking the end of 1905 and beginning of 1906 “men of all classes were attacked by Italians near Hillsville,” and many of them sent to nearby hospitals “with throats cut, faces slashed and bearing stiletto wounds.” Attempts by local police officers to resolve the violence met more: County Detective McFate was wounded in a shootout when he arrived in Hillsville to investigate Houk’s disappearance. “Gory History of Hillsville,” *New Castle Daily News*, 9/21/08, 2. (One Hillsville man even recalls his father telling him that “when I was born — nineteen six that was rough days. ’Five and ’six, them two years up here, was bad.” Interview with Frank Piscueneri, Parish Center, St. Lawrence Church, Hillsville, 4/29/91.)

Black Hand leaders from other locations — including New York, Sharon, and South Sharon — arrived in Hillsville at Surace’s request and a trial was held on March 10, 1906. Racco was found guilty of adultery and was sentenced to die but apparently managed to have the penalty set aside after he paid Bagnato \$500 and a lesser amount to Surace. (PR 3/28/08; *New Castle News*, 9/18/08, 1, 4; *New Castle News*, 9/19/08, 10.)

⁶⁰ PR 5/25/08, Reports of Agent #10; 5/28/08; 6/3/08.

⁶¹ PR 5/28/08, Reports of Agent #10.

⁶² PR 2/15/08, 5/25/08.

⁶³ PR 3/10/08, “Supt. FPD reports,” 4/6/07, Report of Agent #37, “The Black Hand Society in Lawrence County, 1906,” Vol. 1, New Castle Public Library, New Castle.

⁶⁴ *New Castle Daily News*, 10/26/09, 1.

⁶⁵ PR 2/12/08, Statement of Silas Martin to J.H.G.; 2/5/08; 2/24/08.

⁶⁶ “Bagnato Gone; So Has \$11,000 Italians’ Gold,” *New Castle Daily News*, 7/13/07.

⁶⁷ *New Castle Daily News*, 8/10/07, 2.

⁶⁸ In 1907, a number of game wardens were shot at from a distance, “more to notify the officer that the pursued was armed and to thus intimidate him, than to injure or to kill.” *Annual Report of the Game Commission 1907* (Harrisburg, Pa.), 15. Hereafter ARGC, followed by year of report.

⁶⁹ ARGC 1910, 19.

⁷⁰ PR 5/27/08, Report of Agent #10.

⁷¹ Interview with Joe Rich, Parish Center, St. Lawrence Church, Hillsville, Pa. 4/24/91.

⁷² PR 5/17/08, Report of Agent #10.