

Mobfiles

Mobsters, Molls and Murder

George Anastasia

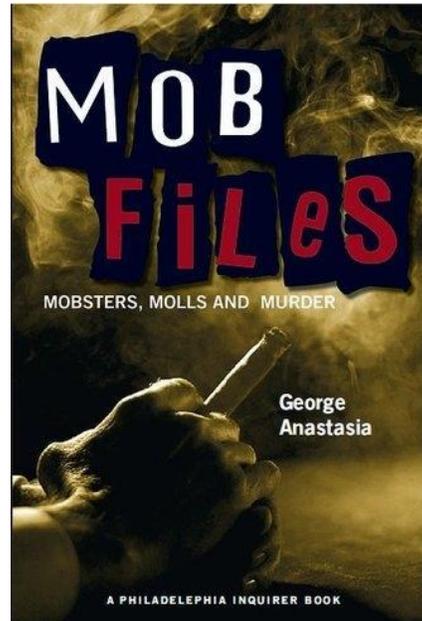
From the Prologue

In 1976 my newspaper, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, sent me to Atlantic City to cover the start of the casino gambling era. In addition to writing stories about the “unique form of urban renewal” that was going to spark an economic renaissance, I was told to track the presence of the mob.

Part of the big debate during the run-up to the referendum in which voters approved the legalization was the question of whether casinos would bring organized crime to the city. Of course the answer was that the mob already *was* in the city, but the issue became a hot topic and remained so after the dice started rolling.

In those days, I wrote about the mob in conjunction with other stories about how the city was being revitalized. Then in 1980 Angelo Bruno, the longtime Mafia boss of Philadelphia and South Jersey, was assassinated.

Bruno was gunned down as he sat in a car smoking a cigarette in front of his row house near 10th Street and Snyder Avenue in South Philly. It was a Friday night. I remember it well because my brother-in-law was getting married the next day and I was at a rehearsal dinner when the hit went down. Consequently, I didn't cover the Bruno murder. But I guess it would be fair to say I've been writing about the aftermath for the past 25 years.



The slaying of Don Angelo was the seminal event in the demise of the Philadelphia crime family. Everything that came after—the chaos, the petty jealousies and the wanton violence—stem from that night. Bruno had been boss for 21 years. He ran a quiet, highly efficient organization.

He was from the old school. Don't call attention to yourself. Make money, not headlines. And he made a ton of it. Bruno was a millionaire a couple of times over when he got popped. A lot of the guys in his crime family, however, weren't as well off. And that may have contributed to the disgruntlement that led to his killing. It certainly was a factor in what followed.

Greed and treachery replaced whatever honor and loyalty had existed.

I began writing more and more about the organization. And by the 1990s, I had made it my beat.

I think it's fair to say that during that period the Philadelphia branch of La Cosa Nostra had become the most dysfunctional mob family in America. There have been six mob bosses during the period I have been writing about the organization: Bruno, Phil Testa, Nicky Scarfo, John Stanfa, Ralph Natale and Joey Merlino.

Bruno and Testa were killed. Scarfo, Stanfa, Merlino and Natale are doing time, although Natale is in a protected witness wing of a federal prison. After he was indicted and looking at a potential life sentence for drug dealing, he cut a deal with the feds, becoming the first sitting American Mafia boss to turn publicly on his organization.

In fact, over the past 20 years, the Philadelphia family has had more cooperators per capita than any other crime family in the country. Omerta is like the city's famous Liberty Bell. Cracked and inoperable.

The sometimes sensational testimony of those turncoats and the hours and hours of secretly recorded conversations from FBI wiretaps and from wiseguys wearing body wires have laid the organization bare. Honor and loyalty? Forgetaboutit. Secrecy is also a thing of the past.

Couple those factors with more sophisticated law enforcement techniques and the devastating application of the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act and you have a formula for investigative success.

In case after case, the Philadelphia family has taken a hit.