Two books were published in 2018 that discuss at length the Sicilian extortion ring that operated out of Marion, Ohio in 1909. One of these is *Inspector Oldfield and the Black Hand Society, America's Original Gangsters and the U.S. Postal Detective who Brought Them to Justice*, by William Oldfield and Victoria Bruce (N.Y.: Touchstone). The other is *Ohio's Black Hand Syndicate, The Birth of Organized Crime in America*, by David Meyers and Elise Meyers Walker (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press). The former deals with the subject from the point of view of the primary author's grandfather, Inspector Frank Oldfield. The latter is, as the title implies, a more generalized view of the birth of organized crime in America.

The references to local persons in these books are scattered, which makes it difficult to follow their stories. This article is an attempt to present the subject from the point of view of the one man, a potential victim, who first had the courage to stand up to the gang, and who apparently had police friends to direct him to the Post Office detectives: Columbus fruit dealer John Amicon.
In Chillicothe

John Amicon, the hero of this story, was born in 1868 in Forlì del Sannio, a village in the region of Molise, about 7 miles northwest of Isernia. It is east-southeast of Rome and historically was in the Kingdom of Naples, later the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. He came to America about 1883 and was sent west to Ohio, to work on the Midland Division of the B&O Railroad, in Clinton County, east of Cincinnati. He became water boy for a gang working on a trestle. He was afraid of heights, though, so he quit and, having saved up $20, he took the B&O east to Chillicothe.

In Chillicothe he worked at a store; then he bought a bag of peanuts and sold them on his own account. Then in 1885 he purchased half interest in the store and six months later became its sole owner. In 1887 he established himself as a wholesaler of fruits, candies, groceries, etc. By 1894 he and his brothers Charles, Andrew, and Joseph, operating as John Amicon and Brothers, had two stores, one at 60 W. Water Street, opposite the Ohio & Erie Canal, and the other a block south, at 22 W. Second. They all lived at 30 1/2 W. Water, a house facing the alley behind Water St.

Meanwhile, John became a citizen on March 27, 1889. He found the love of his life, Teresa Rosasco, a native of Genoa, Italy, whom he married on March 17, 1894. Their son John was baptized at St. Peter Church in 1896 by Father Migeel.

In Columbus

Business

Leaving Andrew and Joseph with the fruit store on West Second in Chillicothe, brothers John and Charles Amicon moved to Columbus in the summer of 1896, having capital of about $30,000 between them. They opened a produce store first at 117 and then at 135-137 E. Town St. in the commission district. They took Antonio Onorato as partner and became John Amicon Brothers and Company. "When the Amicons did not go under in two months the merchants were astonished." This was due, at least in small part, to hiring Richard H. (Herman) Holland as general manager. Holland had been working in the commission business in Columbus for several years and helped steer the partnership into the channels that made their business grow. Holland had been born in Philadelphia in 1870 but came to Columbus as a boy. He stayed with the Amicons' firm for sixteen years.

Expansion of the business was rapid. By the spring of 1903 they opened and occupied a warehouse at Naghten and Third streets, with a basement and three storeys, nearly 16,000 square feet in all. Its banana rooms could hold five thousand bunches. They opened a branch in Springfield, O. in 1904, which expanded in 1909. In 1905 they opened a branch in Bluefield, W. Va., for sales to the mining communities. They had a second branch store at 108 E. Town Street in Columbus and a warehouse covering two acres in Seneca, New York, to collect produce for distribution across the country. They opened a branch in Marion, Ohio, in 1906 and one in Parkersburg, W. Va. in 1910. By 1909 they were grossing over a million dollars a year and employing about 200.

Family

John and his family's first home in Columbus was at 332 S. Fifth St., half a block north of Mound, while Charles lived at 162 Neil, now Neilston. In September 1898 John purchased the brick houses at 625 and 629 Mohawk Street. The two-story house at 629 became John and Teresa's home and the smaller house at 625 became that of Charles and his wife. These houses were only about two blocks from St. Mary's Church, but the Amicons took the somewhat inconvenient route of joining the newly formed Italian parish, St. John the Baptist. The first recorded marriage of St. John the Baptist Parish was that of Charles Amicon and Maria Bova, in March 1897, in the Cathedral tower room baptistry, where the congregation met until their church was dedicated. Maria was daughter of Salvatore Bova, a native of Sicily. In 1898 John and Teresa's son Antonio was baptized at St. John, as were their later children.
Charles's first wife Maria died in 1902. Two years later he married Lenora Rosselli, a native of Naples, Italy at St. Rafael Church in Springfield. They lived in the house on Mohawk Street until about 1907, when they moved to 50 North Grant Ave. With them lived Lenora's nephew and niece, Victor and Frances or Francesca Ditore.

Parish

John was closely involved with St. John the Baptist Parish. At first the parish seemed to be developing well. The cornerstone of the church at Lincoln and Hamlet streets on the north side was laid in May 1898 by Bishop Watterson, Msgr. Joseph Jessing of the Pontifical College Josephinum, and Father Alexander Cestelli, the pastor. The church was dedicated in an imposing ceremony in September by Msgr. Sebastiano Martinelli, Apostolic Delegate, with local clergy participating and Bishop Watterson in attendance. But all was not well. The church property was held in the name of Father Cestelli and there was a huge debt. The members of the parish probably had only a vague idea of the situation, for Father Cestelli "acted as self-appointed trustee, committee, treasurer, secretary, and collector." Bishop Moeller, who was installed as third Bishop of Columbus in August, 1900, was afraid the church would have to be sold for its debts.

Bishop Moeller's initial act toward stabilizing the parish was to contact prominent lay members. On December 4 he sent a note to Peter Albanese of the Columbus police force, asking him to visit him the next day concerning the parish. On December 7 he sent notes to Miss L. Onorato of East Mound St. (Mrs. Lillie, wife of Antonio Onorato, the Amicons' former partner) and Frank Nardini and John Amicon, both at 135 E. Town St., Amicon's store, asking that they see him on Monday Dec. 10 or on Tuesday. He apparently pointed out the problems to these members of St. John the Baptist and urged them to get the congregation stirred up.

The congregation met on Sunday, Dec. 30 and explored such questions as: how large was the debt, in whose name was the property held, and could the congregation assume the debt. They formed a committee, consisting of Peter Albanese, P. Bellisari, L. Nassano, Victor P. Churches, B. (probably Bonaventura) Serra, P. Schive (perhaps Schiavo), John Amicon, and D. Riggio, who met with the bishop on Dec. 31 and told him the congregation was willing to assume the debt and asked him to appoint trustees to take charge of the matter. They intended to go to the courthouse and determine ownership of the property, and, if it was in Father Cestelli's name, to take steps to have it made over to the "corporate body" of the church. They were slightly off-course, for there was no legal corporate body of the congregation and Catholic parish property in Ohio was held in the name of the bishop.

The bishop continued to work out the problem of ownership of the property and on March 9 Father Cestelli, by his attorney, transferred it to the bishop. After some work on the part of the committee, on that same date Bishop Moeller sent a letter to the congregation. He commended them on their resolve to keep their church from being sold. The audit committee had found that amounts paid out plus additional bills and debts had
brought the total expenditures of the parish on its property to $22,578. Over $8,000 had been paid, leaving a debt of $14,294.49. The Bishop appointed as parish councilmen Henry Marzetti, Treasurer; Frank Peirone, Secretary; Joseph Marzetti, Assistant Secretary; Peter Albanese; and John Amicon. Meanwhile a new pastor, Father Vittorio Sovilla, had been appointed, who would be president of the committee. It is said that at that time five families pledged to contribute $500 (seemingly $100 each per year) to the parish for five years. One has to wonder whether these five families were not represented by the five committee members.

Annual parish income and debt reduction were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Debt Paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>$1,781</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>$2,585</td>
<td>$1,373</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>$2,549</td>
<td>$875</td>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>$1,638</td>
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<td>1907</td>
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<tr>
<td>1908</td>
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<td>$265</td>
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<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>$1,365</td>
<td>$529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>$1,671</td>
<td>$1,231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reduction in income from 1907 to 1908 and 1909, along with the lesser reduction in the debt in those years, was caused at least in part by actions taken by Bishop Hartley in 1906 to limit Father Sovilla's service to only the Italians. The pastors of the territorial parishes had complained that many English-speaking members were going to St. John the Baptist to avoid their duties at the older parishes, while the Italian community was geographically scattered and mostly preferred to attend their neighborhood churches. Another reason for the reduced performance probably was that the five-year pledges of the five prominent members had expired. Another possible reason was the appearance of the Black Hand or the Society of the Banana, which sapped the resources of the Italian community.

**The Society of the Banana**

The Society's operations were especially vicious in the early 1900s. They carried on as they had in the old country, where the Mafia and Camorra threatened people with violence unless they were paid specified amounts of money. "Black Hand" was a generic symbol of extortionists and other Italian gangs, from the symbol used to sign their written threats. Throughout the Italian communities in the United States, the people were in mortal terror of the blackmailers and would not give police any assistance for fear of vengeance, even if convictions were obtained. As late as 1907 police and other authorities believed the crimes were being carried out by individuals or small, local gangs and that there was no national or even local head of a Black Hand society. Probably the first to go beyond this wide-spread but local pattern of crime was "The Society of the Banana and Faithful Friends," named and headed by Salvatore Arrigo of Cincinnati. He was replaced by Salvatore "Sam" Lima of Marion, Ohio in March 1909. Lima's fruit store and family home were at 135 N. Main Street. The Society worked in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Indiana and had connections on the west coast. It was estimated by U.S. Attorney William Day that over a two year period the Society had demanded in total at least $200,000 from every Italian of means in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago. The most active members, who were brought to trial in 1910, lived in Marion, Dennison, Cincinnati, Columbus, and...
Bellefontaine in Ohio and Pittsburgh and Meadville in Pennsylvania.

Local Black Hand Victims
Some of the earliest "Black Hand" attacks in Columbus were carried out by local thugs, unconnected with any organization, involving small amounts of money and beatings. Many such events centered at Roberts's saloon at 74 East Chestnut Street. Conatto Quatrone paid $5; Joe Roduto (probably Rotondo) $20; Pasquale Pauletto $50. Joe Fote and Joe Lombardo refused to pay and were beaten, the latter in November, 1906. Columbus Police Sergeant Peter Albanese soon began putting the saloon out of business and arresting suspicious characters found there and at other hangouts.13 In 1907 Joseph Colluccio, a sweeper at Union Station, was beaten up for refusing to pay tribute. The following winter he was threatened by letter.14 But the threats, danger, and amounts of money soon ramped up.

Salvatore Tonti (1854-1942)
Born in Forli del Sannio, the same place as the Amicons, Salvatore immigrated in 1882. In 1896 he purchased a lot with a storeroom on the southwest corner of West Town Street and Cypress Avenue. In July 1905 he received a letter threatening to blow up his property unless $200 was paid. For several nights he stood guard in his basement with a revolver. He reported the threat to the police, but internal conflicts between police and detectives scotched any follow-up.15 This is the earliest known threat in Columbus involving a significant amount of money and a bomb threat.

(To be concluded)

NOTES
Bishops’ correspondence and parish financial reports are held by the Archives, Diocese of Columbus.
1) Columbus Dispatch, Jan. 22, 1911.
2) Columbus Dispatch, June 27, 1909.
4) Columbus Dispatch, Sunday Jan. 22, 1911.
5) Franklin Co. Recorder, Deed Record 311/3.
6) Jan. 1, 1901, Peter Bellisari, c/o M. C. Lilley Co. to Bishop Moeller.
7) Columbus Dispatch, Dec. 31, 1900.
8) Deed Records 337/210 and 211.
13) Columbus Dispatch, Nov. 8 and Nov. 10, 1906.
15) Columbus Dispatch, July 24, 1905.

Within The Walls Performed Again
In June 2014 we ran an article by Mike Finn titled "The Prison Play of Father Hartke." The three-act play, Within the Walls, written by Dominican Vincent Ferrer Hartke in 1933 and set in the Ohio Penitentiary, portrayed the interactions of a chaplain with the prisoners. It was performed three times in Columbus and Somerset, twice in Washington, D.C., and once in Wisconsin. Mike recently found an article in the Columbus Dispatch of Aug. 2, 1934, indicating the play was performed one more time, in Columbus. The play was to be performed at St. Vincent's Orphanage, as a benefit for that institution, on August 7. The cast was composed of alumni and students of Holy Rosary High School, with important roles played by Sam Roderick, James Sweeney, Philip Baehr, Joseph Carr, Edward Dotter, Richard Marzluf, Charles Leib, James Schulte, Robert Dwyer, Carl Nash Gutterdam, and Thomas Boyden. We are pleased to report that the play was put to this good use.
Abstracts from *The Catholic Telegraph*
(continued, from Vol. XLIV, No. 2)

March 9, 1864
Bishop Rosecrans will confer Holy Orders at 7 a.m. in the Cathedral next Saturday.

March 16, 1864
Bishop Rosecrans administered tonsure and conferred minor orders on one candidate on the 12th in the Cathedral. On Saturday the 13th he ordained two subdeacons; a deacon; and Rev. Francis Xavier Specht to the priesthood.

March 30, 1864
Confirmation will be administered at Steubenville on April 10 by Bishop Rosecrans; Rev. Aug. Toebbe will give instructions in German during the prior week.

Subscribers, First Quarter, 1864
(name, post office, issue date)
W. M. Anderson, Circleville 3/2
Wm. Bennett, Oakfield 3/9
James Boulger, Chillicothe 1/20
St. Brossmer, Grove City (by Rev. Mr. J. B. Hemsteger) 2/3
Joseph Buckle, Newark 3/30
T. Bucy, Portsmouth 1/27
J. E. Butler, Ironton 2/10
M. Dittoe, Somerset 2/10
Peter Dittoe, Somerset 3/30
M. A. Doughtery, Lancaster 1/20
Rev. Mr. Duffy, Circleville 1/27
James Durbin, Wilkesville 3/2
W. M. Edwards, Chauncey 2/24
F. Ewing, Lancaster 2/17
P. B. Ewing, Lancaster 2/17
Rev. H. Fehlings, Delaware 3/9
Jacob Fink, Somerset 1/13
W. Fink, Zanesville 2/17
Rev. Mr. E. Fitzgerald, Columbus 2/17
C. Gallagher, Temperanceville 2/17
J. Gallagher, Temperanceville 1/6
J. Gallagher, Temperanceville 3/2
C. F. Garaghty, Lancaster 2/17
B. Gorham, Chillicothe 3/30
Sist. Louise Hayden Sup., Zanesville 1/20
Pat. Healy, Ironton 3/2
Rev. Charles F. Hone, Logan 2/3
Rev. Mr. J. M. Jacquet, Temperanceville 2/17
Ph. Kelly, Portsmouth 1/27
Rev. Killenbarg, Pomeroy 2/10
King Brothers, Mineral City 1/20
Kishtine & Co., Zanesville 1/20
Rev. D. Klueber, Enoch 1/20
Mrs. Lawrence, Portsmouth 1/27
Jos. Long, Portsmouth 1/27
Th. McDonnell, Delaware 2/3
John McNally, Frankfort 3/9
Sarah McNally, Chillicothe 1/20
Paul Marzluff, Chillicothe 1/20
Martin Miller, Delaware 3/2
Miss S. Mills, Lancaster 3/2
Mrs. Nolan, Newark 3/2
Rev. O'Donohoe, Portsmouth 1/27
Rev. Ph. O'Donoghoe, Ironton 2/17
J. O'Rourke, Zanesville 2/10
J. Piper, Lancaster 2/3
Jos. Piper, Lancaster 2/10
William Poland, Frankfort 3/9
Jos. Rodenfels, Canal Winchester 3/9
J. B. Rottinghaus, Portsmouth 3/30
Rev. M. D. Ryan, Marietta 2/3
P. Ryan, Zanesville 2/17
L. Sapp, Danville 3/2
James Sheeran, New Lexington 3/30
J. P. Smith, Circleville 3/2
J. Vasseriot, Marietta 2/17
Jos. Walker, Somerset 1/20
J. A. Williams, Columbus 1/27
Rev. Winands, Ironton 3/2
Jac. Zink, Somerset 2/17

April 6, 1864
Last Sunday, April 3, Bishop Rosecrans administered Confirmation at St. Joseph Church in Cincinnati in the morning and at St. Francis Church in the afternoon.

Four Sisters of Charity leave this week to take charge of the general military hospital in Gallipolis.
April 20, 1864

MISSION AND CONFIRMATION
AT STEUBENVILLE.

The week before last a mission was preached, at Steubenville, in English by the Right Rev. Bishop ROSECRANS, and in German by the Rev. A. M. TOEBBE, with most consoling fruits.

There were two discourses daily in each language and the children were instructed, morning and evening, with a fine attendance at each, but an overflowing one at half-past seven, P.M.

On Friday and Saturday the confessionals were thronged, though the Rev. Father HUBER, of Wellsburgh, Va. lightened the labors of his confreres.

On Sunday the children received their first communion, at the Bishop's Mass, at 8 o'clock.

At 10 o'clock Solemn High Mass was celebrated by the Rev A. M. TOEBBE, assisted by the Rev. E. THIENPONT, Pastor of Steubenville, as deacon, and Rev. Father HUBER as subdeacon. The bishop preached on the REAL PRESENCE, to a very crowded congregation.

At Pontifical Vespers the bishop preached again, and administered the Holy Sacrament of Confirmation to ninety-one persons, including some fifteen from the Virginia side of the river. The crowd in the afternoon was almost appalling. All the confirmandi and many children had to find place in the sanctuary, leaving only the platform of the Altar to the celebrant and ministers.

The choir did its part very creditably. The Misses CAROLINE and MARY STENDLEY would go very far towards making a choir themselves; and the organist, Mr. FEIST, was very ready and accurate.

Among those confirmed were two or three converts.

(To be continued)

Holy Cross Parish, Columbus
Baptisms, 1846-1851
(Continued, from Vol. XLIV, No. 5)

1847, continued
Oct. 3 Susan, born Nov. 16, 1846, daughter of James Hattoway and Lydia Powel; spons. Edward Leeds and Martha Clark. WS
same day Lina, born Sept. 17, daughter of Johann Eiermann and Christina Ölgötz; spons. Georg and Margarete Eiermann. WS
same day Helena, born Oct. 10, daughter of Adam Reichelt and Kunigunda Köhler; spons. Martin Kämmerer and Helena Wingart. WS
Oct. 27 Katharine, born Oct. 21, daughter of Joseph Rudolph and Katharine Schlitt; spons. Katharine and Heinrich Cuhn. WS
Nov. 1 Ludwig, born Oct. 18, son of Ludwig Frey and Mar. Anna Müller; spons. Heinrich Frey and Margarete Eisel. WS
Nov. 14 Anna Katharine, born Nov. 6, daughter of Karl Schallet and Mar. Agatha Murat; spons. Lorenz and Eva Murat. WS
same day Maria, wife of Karl Prozer. WS
same day Mar. Rachel Lea, five years old, daughter of Jos. Prazer and Maria; spons. Michael and Elisabeth Strickfaden. WS
Nov. 21 Joanna Mar. Agnes, wife of Demetrius Thomas. WS
same day Johann Miller, born Nov. 17, son of Joseph Müller and Maria born Müller; spons. Johann Uri and Margarete Gärtner. WS
Nov. 27 Katharine and Emma, born Nov. 26, daughters of Valentin Hettesheimer and Margar. Kiefer; sons. Joseph Kiefer and Katharine Hinderschitt. WS
Nov. 28 Jacob, born Nov. 7, son of Philip Lenk and Mar. Anna Freund; spons. Jacob Frank and Elisab. Raab. WS

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same day Karl, born Nov. 17, son of Cyrill Frech and Euphemia Herman; spons.
Wendelin Saile and Barb. Elisab. Behr. WS
Nov. 30 Maria Anna, born Oct. 6, daughter of
Johann Frey and Mar. Anna Uri; spons.
Peter Uri and Margarete Frey. WS
Dec. 9 (at Delaware) Magdalena, born Oct. 27, daughter of Peter Emmerich and Magdal.
Schmidt; spons. Heinrich Linder and
Margr. Edelmann. WS
Dec. 12 Thomas, born Sept 13, son of William Miller and Mary Gaw; spons John McNamy
and Helen Clark. WS
Dörr; spons. Edward Leeds and Elisab.
Kronenbitter. WS

1848
Jan. 2 Wilhelm, born Dec. 23, son of Johann Frank and Maria Klaus; spons. Bernhhrd Klaus and Agnes Frank. WS
same day Theresa, born Dec. 17, daughter of Dominic Weiler and Mar. Marg. Herzog; spons. Katharine Herzog. WS
Jan. 3 Florentina, born Dec.24, daughter of Jacob Frank and Elisabeth Engler; spons. Anton Engler and Florentina Frank. WS
Jan. 11 Barbara Elisabeth, twin of the above, same sponsors. WS
Jan. 16 Mary, born Dec. 13, daughter of Robert Garrett and Bridget McCabe; spons. Mary Kinsella and Peter Uri. J. M. Young
same day Elizabeth, born June 16, daughter of Peter Collins and Elizabeth Malone; spons. Elizabeth Leeds. JMY
Jan. 23 Lorenz, born Dec. 13, son of Lorenz Winesdörfer and M. Anna Koppe; spons.
Jacob Reinhardt and Margarete Schöp. WS
same day Maria Katharine, born Jan. 13, daughter of Johann Siefert and Barbara Reinhardt; spons. Peter Reinhardt and
Katharina Klee. WS
same day Nancy Ann, born Feb. 21, 1847, daughter of Michael Marr and Johanna
Robert; spons. Jacob Kronenbitter. WS
Ignaz König and Sidonia Rieg. WS
Feb. 6 Maria, born Jan. 7, daughter of C. Karl Boppert and A. M. Rehbart [?]; spons.
Jacob and Elisabeth Roll. WS
Feb. 7 Bridget, born Dec. 15, daughter of Michael O Haren and Catherinen Croner [sponsors not listed]. WS
Feb. 13 Luise Cäcilie, born Jan. 1, daughter of Heinrich Frey and A. Maria Zimmer;
spons. Ludwig Frey and Adelheid Schlumberger. WS
Feb. 27 Rosanna, born Jan. 29, daughter of Nicolaus Hanauer and Katharine Wölfel;
spons. Ignatz R--- and Kath. Schwarz. WS
Mar. 5 Anna Maria, born Feb. 9, daughter of Johann Jochum and Margarete Becker;
spons. Cyril Frech and Katharine Frech. WS
Mar. 12 Heinrich, born Feb. 29, son of Johann Zimmer and Christina Weidner;
spons. Vincens Burkle and Margarete Schlumberger. WS
same day Johann, born Mar. 11, son of Johann Staudt and M. Eva Bamann; sons.
Georg and Margarete Eiermann. WS
Mar. 17 (W. Jefferson) John, born Jan. 18, 1847, son of Patrick O Mealy and Dalila
Casey; spons. Patrick Casey and Mary Mahoney. WS
(To be continued)