

ITALIAN HERITAGE & CULTURE COMMITTEE OF NEW YORK, INC.



Giuseppe “Joe” Petrosino was an NYPD officer who was a pioneer in the fight against organized crime. The various crime fighting techniques that he pioneered during his law enforcement career are still practiced by various agencies in the fight against crime.

Early Years: In 1874, Petrosino and his family emigrated to the U.S. from Padula in southern Italy. On October 19, 1883 he joined the New York City Police Department, thereby becoming friends with the Police Commissioner of New York Theodore Roosevelt. On July 20, 1895, Roosevelt promoted him to Detective Sergeant of the homicide division, making him the first Italian-American to lead this division. The pinnacle of his career came in December 1908 when he was promoted to Lieutenant and was placed in charge of the Italian squad, an elite corps of Italian-American detectives specifically assembled to deal with the criminal activities of organizations like the Mafia, which Petrosino saw as a shame to decent Italians.

The Black Hand & Enrico Caruso: When the famous Italian tenor Enrico Caruso was performing at the Metropolitan Opera House and was blackmailed for money in exchange for his life it was Petrosino who convinced Caruso to help him catch those behind the blackmail.

Assassination of William McKinley: A second

notable case in Petrosino's stint with the Italian squad was his infiltration of the Italian-based anarchist organization that assassinated King Umberto I of Italy. During his mission, he discovered evidence that the organization intended to assassinate President William McKinley during his trip to Buffalo. Petrosino warned the Secret Service, but McKinley ignored the warning and as a result was assassinated by Leon Czolgosz on September 6, 1901.

Petrosino's investigations into Mafia activities led him to Don Vito Cascio Ferro, the godfather of New York. In 1903, Petrosino arrested him on suspicion of murder, but Cascio Ferro was acquitted. He later returned to Sicily, where he became increasingly involved with the Sicilian Mafia.

In 1909, Petrosino made plans to travel to Palermo, Sicily on a top secret mission. However, due to the misjudgment of New York Police Commissioner Thomas Bingham, the New York Herald published the story of Petrosino's mission on February 20, 1909.

On March 12, 1909, after arriving in Palermo, Petrosino was to meet an informant at the city's Piazza Marina. While waiting for the informant to arrive Petrosino was shot to death by Mafia assassins. Vito Cascio Ferro was arrested and acquitted. Ironically Ferro died in prison after serving 16 years for a murder he probably did not commit.

On April 12, 1909, Petrosino's funeral, which was attended by 250,000 people, was held in Manhattan.

New York City declared the day of his burial a holiday to allow citizens to attend his funeral. A small plaza north of the old NYPD headquarters at 240 Center Street was renamed in his memory.

Another recognition includes a small park in Greenwich Village, NY, formerly known as Kenmare Square, renamed Lieutenant Joseph Petrosino Square Park in 1987.

Italian Heritage & Culture Committee of New York, Inc.

For more than thirty years the IHCC has organized events, concerts, exhibits and lectures, celebrating Italian culture. Each year a theme representative of the history and culture of Italy and Italian Americans is highlighted.

Web Site - www.italyculturemonth.org

The IHCC promotes Italian culture by focusing on schools and taking a leadership role in promoting Italy and its cultural contributions.