

GEORGE BEAHON

## "In This Corner"



This was on prime time television, this creep sitting in front of the cameras and members of the Special Crime Commission in Washington. At first I really thought it was a monstrous put-on. Then fragments of his testimony became part of the network commentators' reviews, and the next day the wire services had it big all over the newspapers. Straight up.

It happened too late for Jimmy Breslin, who could have produced a super extra chapter for his book about the bumbling Mafia, "The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight."

Making the entire scene more gross, the film showed "specials," enforcement officers who stood facing the chamber crowd, looking into the committee's audience to make certain nobody unloaded a grease gun to wipe out this chirping cat they would have you believe was now No. 1 on the Mafia's hit list.

The way this deranged con man told it, (he acted like a mixed-up, out-of-work race track tout), he worked with a mob that fixed horse races up and down the Atlantic Coast. He gave a pseudonym — it may have been Bobby Byrnes but it's not worth looking up — and to their complete shame, the TV and newspaper editors bought his story. Hysterical. He explained how easily his outfit made big score after big score, wagering on the so-called sophisticated betting forms, Quinella, Exacta (or Perfecta), Twin Doubles, Superfectas, et cetera.

These, of course, are betting devices wherein the player must pick the order of finish 1-2 or 2-1 (Quinella), or exactly 1-2 (Perfecta or Exacta), or 1-2 in successive races (Twin Double) or 1-2-3 or even 1-2-3-4 in the other super-supers. They are designed for and produce enormous payoffs and attract the \$2 guy who hopes to bet out for his career, as well as the plungers. (In some of the later forms you have the same chance as in the Irish Sweeps, except you are less likely to be sold a counterfeit ticket.)

To begin to shoot down this witness, the Mafia does not bother trying to fix horse races. Some trainers and jocks do, and usually get caught or go broke. A fix is rarely really successful because so many wolves are in with the caper the price comes back too small to pay the nut. And the mob long ago agreed it is more profitable to book than to bet. Especially when you deal a 40 to 1 limit on Exactas which might pay 1,000 to 1 on track. Even better, sell protection or extract percentages from "legitimate bookies," if there are such animals outside of OTB.

Our idiot witness says his format was simple. He chose the race, then tranquilized all but two or three of the dozen horses, thus betting on the only possible winning combinations capable of making it around the track without falling asleep in the gate.

Well, never mind that it takes different doses of "slows" to stop different horses, same as different humans require various strengths of sedatives. (In one abortive attempt to stop a horse at a harness track out West two years ago, a trotter fell asleep in the paddock before the call to action.)

Our genius' modus operandi, he revealed while glancing anxiously at the galleries to make sure he was not about to be ventilated, was to dash into the stable area, pick out his nine equine subjects, apply his needles and then wait for the mutuel machines to open.

That the committee and all those editors would accept the testimony of an admitted thief was a slur

on the entire racing industry, which is better policed than golf or even auto racing. (You could include the major sports, also. And would you trust a chess player if you were inclined to believe in dурping?)

What's so absurd is this man claiming access to the stable area, to administer his drugs. To begin with, credentials to enter the backstretch are not easily come by. Then a wanderer is eligible to get a pitchfork in the Adam's Apple if he strolls too close to a man's horses. Racetrackers do not approve of spooking around their barns, which makes the spook eligible also to become cole-slaved by any number of large, vicious dogs, best friends to many racehorses.

An intruder also is eligible to be picked up and booked by security cops. Carrying a hypodermic will guarantee him a shot for free lodging in the slammer.

More ludicrous is the man claiming to locate the right nine horses. Some very important trainers who handle 20 to 25 animals can't quickly tell you one from another. Their swipes and grooms, sentimentally attached to caring for only a few animals each, are not always right. Often they walk the wrong horse to the paddock for a race, whereupon the identifier notes the wrong lip tattoo, and the groom is rewarded with a fine by the stewards for the delay or scratch caused by the error.

Therefore it is inconceivable, even without security, our fixer could cover an area of 1,200 stalls, locate his nine prime targets, and apply his medication. A team of vets couldn't do it on a given day.

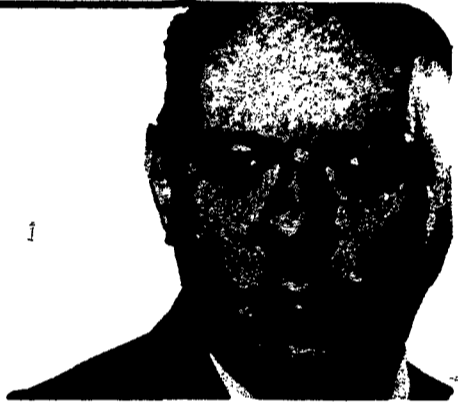
Hopefully, considering some intelligence gleaned since this TV spectacular, the testimony didn't soak in.

To begin with, not one member of the commission was familiar with terms like Quinella, Exacta, Superfecta.

And the chairman. He didn't know about this new fangled parimutuel wagering at horse parks. He thought bookies still were licensed to handle the action on-track. Anyone else out there remember Saratoga Trunk?

BOB CONSIDINE

## On the Line



Our dear state's latest gimmick to skin the resident suckers is the "Summer Special" Lottery. It is a mixture of a madman's dream and the January White Sale.

For only \$3 you can buy two chances from the New York State Lottery Commission, which has licensed 8,000 agents through a state that once was so moral it would not permit Sunday baseball.

The grand prize: \$50,000 a year for life

The stately N.Y. Times figured out that if a winner lived 70 years after hitting the jackpot he'd collect \$3,500,000. The biggest prizes now known in the U.S. lottery dodge are New Jersey's and New York's \$1,000,000 payoffs. Actually, the winner of the "Summer Special" can demand that sum in cash, instead of the \$50,000 a year for life, if he feels he is not long for this wicked world.

It won't be long before New York adds casino gambling to its on and off-course horsebetting, lottery, bingo and whatnot. Owners of resorts and spas throughout the state are building seemingly senseless additions to their hotels and clubs, what with the recession and the freeze on salaries. There's a method in their madness. They are getting ready to open casinos in which the rich, the blue collar guy, and the welfare folks will be given the honor of losing their money — in handsome surroundings — on craps, roulette, blackjack, chemin de fer, and by cranking sterile slot machines.

Some of the joints now getting ready for the windfall are run by characters who look like extras in the hood-laden "The Godfather." One wonders if one of the announced excuses for the new permissiveness — "take gambling out of the hands of the mobs" — will quite make it. The mobs probably will wind up advising the state and the cities how to wring more and more money out of the suckers.

Jimmy Walker's launching pad for his soaring flight as a New York politician was that he pushed a bill through the state assembly to permit the Yankees, Giants and Dodgers to open their ballparks on the Sabbath, and made boxing in New York public: took it out of the "clubs" and their preposterous hoax that both battlers were "members."

## Father Atwell is on vacation. His column will be resumed upon his return.

There used to be large signs painted on the fences of the ballparks stating: "NO GAMBLING." Characters of the half-world like Frank Costello and Frank Erickson were once prone to be thrown in the can by Mayor LaGuardia for accepting a bet on a race horse.

Now, the official attitude of the state and its city fathers is that you're a bit disloyal — if not seditious — if you don't drop into an off-course betting parlor now and then. These joints have become littered ghettos administered by generally incompetent political hacks, as overpaid as they are underpolite.

LaGuardia, "The Little Flower," liked to rave and rant against "tin horn gamblers," most of whom were gentlemen and quite well fixed financially. One of the fiery little man's favorite camera poses was beating a seized slot machine to death with a sledgehammer.

One of these days we'll have the slots in Times Square, like pay phones. Damon Runyon's "biggest floating dice game in the world" will be replaced by the tables in the posh hotels and such night clubs as have resisted the drought. Gambling will become, if it already hasn't achieved that goal, as much a part of the economy of the Empire State as personal, corporate and real estate taxes, the inheritance bite and other traditional methods of raising working capital.

Betting on pro football, hockey, big-time basketball, golf, etc., will follow as the cost of running the state and caring for its multitudes on welfare burgeons. It is not ludicrous to predict that we are well along the way to legalized marijuana sales, taxed by the authorities. Beyond that lies legalized prostitution, following a campaign aimed at "ridding" the state and its teeming cities of pimps and V.D. Some future governor will be placed in charge of the girls, to give the enterprise a touch of dignity.

Crazy? Well, just remember. Sunday baseball in New York was once as verboten as bear-baiting.



FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

## On The Right Side

On Sunday, July 2, I went to Corning to view the results of the June floods and to observe the workings of the human spirit under stress. First stop was at St. Vincent's. The school had been inundated up to the second floor. Fathers Hogan and Schmidt, the Sisters and a hundred others from the area had been rescued from the second floor by boats. Father Brill was taken from the second floor of the rectory. This gives an idea of the height and might of the waters.

By Sunday the waters had receded, leaving basements full of filthy water, and first floors covered with muck and slime. Physically the territory was dismaying; yet the greatness of the human spirit was manifest. The grounds and buildings were bustling with men, women and children. I wondered: "Who are they all?" Many turned out to be relatives of the assistant, Father Schmidt, and their friends. Melvin Schmidt is president of the Parish Council at St. Margaret Mary's, Rochester. The Schmidt brothers, their wives and children and friends, including a doctor, a lawyer and a Kodak man were busy with several parishioners in the dirtiest kind of clean up job, and all happy as bees in clumps of honeysuckle. Pastor Joseph F. Hogan was escorting the parish lawyer to sundry locations of damage.

At the school three Army Reserve soldiers were manning the pumps and hoses to remove the filthy water and slime from the basement. One was from Spencer; one from Dryden; one from Buffalo. Parents and other relatives who are accustomed to hear their men in the military service villified as murderers, dope addicts, torturers can be proud of our military men. These had volunteered to come for this emergency, one even closing his shop to be of service. They were shocked at the avarice of civilian hustlers who were hiring themselves out to pump water from the cellars of the people at extortionist prices. One soldier said: "Why sir, these people are entitled to get this free. That's what we are here for. It's a terrible thing to see men gouging money from people who have troubles enough."

The damage at St. Patrick's paralleled St. Vincent's. Father Sweeney was in the church with a group of men, some of whom I recognized as parishioners. All had shovels, pails,

brooms hoses, and were hard at it. At the rectory I found Father Davis reading his breviary in thanksgiving. "I hear St. Vincent's and Painted Post had Mass outside. What did you do?" I enquired. Fr. D. replied: "The church was cleaned enough to hold Mass inside. The people are good. I have a poem by Metcalfe which I read to our own people this morning, since it is so appropriate. It reads:

I thank you, St. Patrick for the noble part you played/In teaching men to trust in God, and never be afraid.

In the yard I met a cheerful young man who wore a hard, yellow hat bearing the word "electric". He beamed: "Things are coming fine, Father." "Good. Where do you come from?" "I'm Bob Jeffers from Williamson, and St. Mary's parish in Ontario. I'm a friend of Father Sweeney and have a lot of Cursillo friends in the area. I have a four days' vacation so decided to come and help." Points for the Cursillo Movement which is highly to be recommended.

St. Mary's is high up and was spared. The school became a Red Cross Center. The historic and immense convent housed elderly refugees and nursing Sisters. The rectory became a priory, with Father Tom Brennan the Prior and the dispossessed area clergy his Community.

So on to Painted Post where the devastation was similar. I introduced myself to a man in a hard hat working on a suction hose. He replied: "I'm Dr. Shirmer, deputy vice-mayor. Father Rogers just left to get a door over-town. Take a look around. We're getting there."

Pondering over all I had seen and heard and smelled, one scene gave the general spirit of the people. I had swung to a back street which was badly damaged. A man in his mid-thirties, his wife and two children were leaning against some soggy furniture, set to drying. I stopped and talked with the man. "Is the foundation of your house secure?" "Oh, yes. It's concrete, it's dirty but it's strong." "What now?" I asked. The man nodded his head: "Why we just go at it and set things right again."

I left with humble admiration at the greatness of the human spirit manifested by these wonderful people.