



*Taxi driver Michael Kane (inset from a detective magazine) had a regular stand here for several years, in front of the County National Bank at the southeast corner of Main and South streets in Bennington. This picture dates to the 1920s when the building was the Bennington post office. After Kane's murder the Bennington selectmen ordered that there would be no more taxi stands at this location. Bennington Museum collection*

## TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION

# Shedding new light on the Michael Kane murder case

*Warren F. Broderick*

**T**he Michael Kane murder first came to my attention in the early 1990s while I was working on the first edition of the *Natural Areas of Rensselaer County, New York* for the Rensselaer-Taconic Land Conservancy. While exploring Tibbitts State Forest in Hoosick I was astounded to find a roadside marker resembling a marble gravestone stating that Mike Kane was “killed here by unknown assassin” on July 26, 1930. This was near the place where young Franklin Brown of Hoosick was beaten to death by Andreas Hall in 1847; Hall was executed in Troy in 1849 for this crime and a subsequent robbery and murder of an elderly Petersburg couple.

Roadside memorials are a tradition in New England and eastern New York. In fact, a marble obelisk erected in 1806 in Potter Hill, a few miles to the west, commemorates an early gentleman who died from a fall off his wagon. But a memorial to the victim of an “assassination” sounded unique. Exploring the case unlocked an amazing Prohibition-era story filled with exciting events, riveting court testimony, fascinating characters, and remarkable coincidences and ironies.

A few years before my discovery, in 1984, when the New York State Department of Transportation was reconstructing State Route 7, the memorial was removed for safekeeping and subsequently replaced after a formal request for its preservation was received from the town of Hoosick. At the time two brief articles about the murder appeared in the *Troy Record*. Then a story on the case appeared in the [*Hoosick Falls*] *Press/Post* in 1987. Carleton Reed mentioned the murder in his 1992 book *Hoosick Falls as I Remember*. Joe Parks, while Bennington Museum librarian, wrote about the crime in the *Bennington Banner* in 1994. In 2004 Philip Leonard and Charles Filkins included the Mike Kane murder story in a booklet *Three Hoosick Areas Murders 1902-1930* issued by the Hoosick Township Historical Society. More recently Joe Hall related the story on his “Bygone Bennington” show on radio station WBTV AM 1370.

While these published accounts were for the most part accurate, I became curious about what other information on the case could be located. Most of the research to date had been conducted in a selection of Bennington and Troy newspaper articles. Local and state government records and other original source materials appeared not to have been consulted. This article begins with summary of the Michael Kane case followed by a documentation study of what new information was unearthed in a wide variety of records found in three states – and why this newly discovered evidence is so critical.

## ***A Murder Most Foul***

Michael Kane, who emigrated to Bennington from his native Waterford, Ireland, circa 1887, with his mother, sister, and grandmother, worked as a laborer and teamster until 1921 when he purchased a garage and opened a taxi business at 334 Main Street. He maintained his stand near the clock in front of the former County National Bank (the current People’s United Bank) on the southeast corner of Bennington’s Putnam Square. Kane never married and lived with his mother, Margaret Kane, widow of Hugh McGuire, in a modest home at 130 McCall Street. “Mike” or “Mickey” was tall, handsome, and athletic, known by all in Bennington



*Santu's Auto Park in 1930, the present Man of Kent Tavern on N.Y. Route 7, was where two young men had been swimming before they noticed the murder scene nearby.*

*Hoosick Township  
Historical Society*

for his affable and generous nature as well as his flamboyant appearance. He enjoyed racing, gambling, cigars, and attractive women and was often seen in fashionable attire sporting gold and diamonds and flashing a large roll of bills. He traveled frequently to the Capital District of New York and also to Montreal, and some speculated that he supplemented his income by alcohol smuggling, which became lucrative soon after Prohibition took effect in 1920.

July of 1930 had already been an eventful month for Kane, the 42-year-old taxi owner and former amateur pugilist. On July 6 he had helped police subdue John Kelley, an escaped felon, with a strong blow to his chin. July 26 would be more eventful. Around noon a dark-haired man wearing a blue suit and a panama hat, and carrying a briefcase, hailed Kane's taxi at the stand for a ride to Troy. The taxi, a 1927 Buick said to be worth a thousand dollars, required a tire repair at Marshall's Garage at South and Hillside Streets, and while they waited for the vehicle the mystery passenger remained unrecognized by any Bennington resident. After the repair, the cab traveled west into New York State and after passing through the long covered wooden bridge over the Hoosic River continued on the State Road (the current NY 7) into a wooded area known as Shingle Hollow, the present Tibbitts State Forest. It was followed closely by a 1926 Chevrolet coach.

At the first curve in the road west of the stone schoolhouse the mystery passenger, identified six years later as William Franco, rose up in the back seat and shot Mike Kane in the head with a .38-caliber revolver and then fractured his skull with a blunt instrument. The final blow would prove fatal, so Franco managed to steer the car off the edge of the highway into some trees without sustaining any injury himself. The Chevrolet, driven by

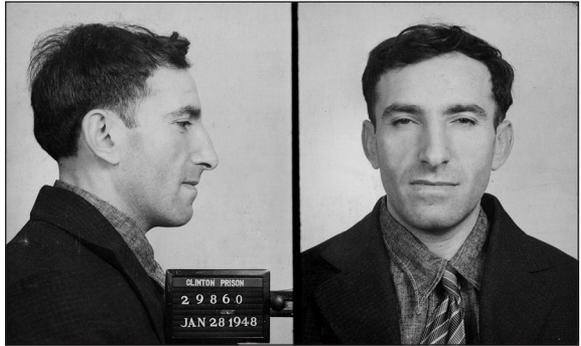
Harry Pincus, soon pulled onto the shoulder of the road, shielding the view of the Buick taxi from any curious passerby. Pincus and his companion, an attractive red-head then known as “Jean Mack,” served as lookouts while pretending to be dealing with automotive trouble. Franco robbed Kane of his money and jewelry, leaving less than \$100 in cash in his pockets.

A few witnesses passed along the road. William King and his wife were traveling from their home in Watervliet, N.Y., to an American Legion convention in Williamstown, Mass., and offered assistance, which Pincus rudely declined. “And you’d better keep on going, if you know what’s good for you,” he barked at them. Soon a farmhand, Albert Center, walked by and was likewise told to keep moving by Franco, who had emerged from the underbrush. Forrest and Carleton Reed were walking west to swim at Santu’s Auto Park, the present Man of Kent Tavern, and their offer was likewise rebuked.

After the Chevrolet had departed, William Miller, a bee keeper from Hoosick, and George Markham from Hoosick Falls, both noticed the deceased Mike Kane in his Buick and rushed to the nearest telephone to notify Town Constable Henry Myers, a former deputy sheriff. When Myers arrived he verified the fatality and made an emergency call to the Rensselaer County sheriff’s office. By this time Mack and Pincus were on the way to Troy and eventually, Brooklyn. Franco hid in the woods for a while and then rode to Troy by hitching rides, one in a farmer’s wagon. That afternoon, near the Tomhannock Reservoir, the wife of Sheriff Herman Schneider noticed Pincus’s car speeding west toward Troy.

The first state police personnel to arrive on the scene were Sergeant William E. Cashin and Trooper Ted Monahan. Cashin’s involvement would soon take charge of the investigation. Bill Cashin (1904-1998) possessed a remarkable memory, organizational skills, and a fascination for improving the relatively new science of fingerprint and other identification technology. His unflinching persistence, even following his transfer in 1936 from the state police to become director of the newly organized Bureau of Criminal Investigation, would be vital in identifying the murderers of Michael Kane and bringing them to justice.

The murder investigation involved various agencies including Sheriffs Perry Gardner of Bennington County and Schneider of Rensselaer County, Rensselaer County Coroner Charles Cote and District Attorney Charles H. Ranney. Soon it would be overseen by Troop G of the New York State Police headquartered at that time in its South Lake Avenue barracks in Troy. An autopsy at the Robson funeral home in Hoosick Falls was conducted by doctors W.C. Clark, James McKenna, and Frank Cahill. The coroner’s investigation, held in Troy, confirmed that blunt force trauma to Kane’s



*Mugshots of murderer William Franco, top, and murder accessories Harry Pincus and Jean Mack, were issued by the New York Department of Correction.*

*(Image of Jean Mack courtesy of Hoosick Township Historical Society)*



head had indeed been the fatal blow. Once the body was returned to his mother in Bennington, a wake was scheduled. Hundreds of people attended the funeral service at St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church, which was followed by interment in Park Lawn Cemetery, Lot 201, Section B. The *Bennington Evening Banner's* editorial on July 31 commented: "his name is on every mouth . . . and the excitement of the affair has not died down . . . he was a land mark of Bennington."

Many of the initial leads in the investigation proved fruitless. Kane's murder was not connected to his alcohol transportation activities or his gambling or his former boxing interests. Even possible connections to gang activity, organized crime, and narcotic trafficking were investigated. Sheriff

Gardner combed Kane's office and found some evidence that he had been transporting liquor from Canada. Bennington selectmen ordered that no future taxi stand would ever be located at Mike's site.

A New York City taxi driver, Harry Vestes, staying in Bennington at the time, was cleared after providing a solid alibi. Other local suspects were soon cleared of any involvement. The best evidence by far turned out to be the license plate number (6K-4692) of the Chevrolet, issued to Harry Pincus, a chauffeur, with an address of Clarkson Avenue in Brooklyn. The Kings had recorded the license number before stopping at the Robert Bowie home in North Petersburg to call authorities. "Wanted" posters issued by the state police and Rensselaer County sheriff featured a photo of Pincus and his description: "5'4" in height, about 150 pounds, 34 years of age, White, Jewish descent, Brown Hair, Brown Eyes, stocky build," taken from his driver's license.

Some thought he was the Harry Pincus who had lived in Hoosick Falls between about 1889 and 1915. But that Harry, son of Louis Pincus, a clothing and dry goods merchant, and then the owner of a store in White Plains, was unrelated. Harry Pincus, the owner of the Chevrolet, was related to a Pincus family living nearby in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. His brothers, Abraham and Edward, lived and worked in Pittsfield, and Harry did as well for two periods of time in the 1920s. Harry Pincus was strong and muscular for his weight, and was an accomplished swimmer, well known in Berkshire County and adjoining eastern New York for various aquatic stunts. He was best known for his ability to pull boats containing people while swimming. Bennington resident William Lonergan recognized the photograph of Pincus as a competitive amateur wrestler and carnival performer.

Such notoriety helped law-enforcement personnel to identify Pincus following the Kane murder. A photo of Harry Pincus, taken at Rudd's Beach between Albany and Schenectady, at an Albany Jewish organization outing in August of 1927, appeared in the Albany press and was recognized by State Trooper John J. Morrissey (1896-1961). Morrissey's meticulous work would prove useful to Bill Cashin during his investigation. But Harry Pincus the murder suspect, while seeming to vanish into thin air, had moved in fact to Newark, New Jersey.

As the state police continued to work on the case with due diligence, Bennington residents became frustrated at the seeming lack of progress in solving the brutal murder of their townsman. One of Mike's best friends was Frederick M. "Pop" Harrington (1865-1935), a respected local trucker. On the morning of August 26, 1932, Harrington placed the marble memorial stone at the site of the murder on the Troy-Bennington road. Likely cut at the monument works of Harry B. Spear on Grandview Street, the slab



*This roadside marker, resembling a gravestone, is located where Mike Kane was “killed by unknown assassin” on July 30, 1930. It was placed by a friend just off the road near the eastern end of the Tibbitts Forest section of N.Y. Route 7.*

*Warren F. Broderick*

resembled a simple old-style gravestone. It read “MIKE KANE / Killed here by / unknown assassin / July 26, 1930.” Sadly, “Pop” did not survive long enough to see Kane’s killers brought to justice.

### ***She Cried in Her Beer***

A major development in the case occurred in 1936 when an informant reported to the New York City Police Department that he had overheard in a Brooklyn bar a woman named Jean Mack admitting to a friend that she had been an accomplice to an upstate murder of a taxi driver six years ago. Jean spoke about how her former boyfriend, William Franco, who had recently rejected her and married another woman, planned and executed the crime. Whether Jean Mack had previously threatened to expose Franco remains a matter of conjecture. Once the state police were informed, they traveled to New York City and arrested Jean and Franco after intense questioning at the state police barracks at Valhalla. Dominick Ambrosino, a friend of the murderers, was also detained as a material witness. A confession Franco gave at that time was later ruled inadmissible in court due to physical evidence that he had been beaten with a rubber hose by troopers. Following the arrests, Major John A. Warner, state police superintendent, claimed that the case was solved after six years due to “experienced investigators devoting untiring efforts and energy towards the solution of this crime.”

William Franco (1900-1982) was the son of Italian immigrants and worked for his family plumbing business in Brooklyn. His previous criminal record consisted of only a minor gambling conviction in Jersey City. A

## Officials Testify in Franco Murder Trial



—Staff photo  
Asst. Dist. Atty. Charles G. Maloy, left, and Director William E. Cashin, State Bureau of Criminal Investigation, who testified this morning at the Franco trial, the former being called to the stand as a witness for the defense and Director Cashin by the state.

*A photograph from the Albany Knickerbocker News shows two principals in the case, Charles G. Maloy, assistant district attorney for Rensselaer County, and William E. Cashin of the state Bureau of Criminal Investigation.*

*Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library*

former amateur prize fighter, Franco was 5 foot 8 ½ inches tall, weighed 178 pounds, had dark hair, and was identified by witnesses as Mike Kane's mysterious passenger. In June 1933 Franco had married a woman named Catherine and they resided at 15 South Oxford Street at the time of his arrest. Franco was arraigned before Hoosick Town Justice Theodore Wruck on the morning of December 17 and he was sent to the Rensselaer County jail without bail, charged with first degree murder.

On Monday, December 21, a grand jury in Troy began to review the case against Franco. By this time Franco's father and wife had come to Troy to support his son. He was formally arraigned in Troy on January 11 and his trial was set for January 25.

The woman known as "Jean Mack" was given material witness status for her testimony for the prosecution and detained in the Rensselaer County jail. Her real name was Helen Macavage Kerinski, but that fact was not known until her death some twelve years later. During cross examination, Jean testified that she could not remember her maiden name, her father's name, nor her place or date of birth. Nonetheless, her detailed testimony about the planning and execution of the Kane murder was seen as highly credible by the jurors. District Attorney Charles Ranney in his summation admitted that Jean never said she was "of unblemished reputation . . . but when it came to the all-important thing here she said that she hated him for

the crime of murder, and she is not a woman scorned.”

Jean/Helen was presumably born in Wyoming, Pennsylvania, circa 1906-1909. Because of her stage career, her involvement in prostitution, and her generally risqué lifestyle, she used different assumed names. She reportedly came to New York City in the 1920s to pursue a career on the stage and appeared as a singer and dancer in Earl Carroll's *Vanities*, which ran for nearly a year at this somewhat notorious Broadway theater. She was charged with prostitution, but not tried or convicted, in New York City on December 13, 1929, and at the Franco trial she admitted marrying Tommy Mack in Brooklyn, a young chauffeur, about 1926 – the date and details she could no longer remember, being barely fifteen years old at the time.

While in jail in February 1937 Jean/Helen attempted to commit suicide by slashing her wrists but was rescued without serious injury due to prompt action by the jail matron. She admitted having dated William Franco and clearly testified that she planned the murder along with Franco once Harry Pincus had brought Mike Kane's fearless display of cash and jewelry to their attention. They plotted the Kane murder in the Plaza Cafeteria on Havemeyer Avenue in Brooklyn in July of 1930 a few days prior to the act. While Pincus had selected Mike Kane as the robbery victim, Franco determined he would be the one carrying a weapon and Pincus would drive the getaway car and serve as “muscle” if needed; and Jean would serve as their lookout. On July 25 the trio rode from Brooklyn to Albany in Pincus's car and they spent the night there in a hotel on Broadway before heading to Hoosick the next day. They were so broke that Jean was forced to pawn some jewelry before traveling to Albany. She also testified that back in Brooklyn on July 28 when she asked William Franco if he had killed Mike



Front Page Detective magazine in October 1948 published this article called “River Grave for a Broadway Cutie,” which told the story of the murder of Jean Mack by a boyfriend.

Kane, Franco told her “Yes, I did.” The state reimbursed Jean Mack \$282 for her travel and lodging expenses in Troy.

By the time of the actual trial, Franco’s father and wife had come to Troy to support him at the January 25 trial. The defendant requested public defenders, and Troy attorney Charles F. Meehan and Harold W. Founks were assigned on March 2; earlier, prominent New York City criminal defense attorneys Michael Winter and Leo Healey had withdrawn due to Franco’s lack of funds.

Rensselaer County spent \$2,2215.15 (sic) to cover salaries and expenses of these publicly designated defenders. County Judge James F. Brearton allowed only \$1 per person to cover jurors’ daily meal expenses and denied reimbursement for their cigars. Jury selection began on March 8 and prospective jurors were asked if they could find a person guilty of murder if the death penalty were the sentence. Judge Brearton banned photography in the courtroom. Testimony began on March 12 and the jury returned a guilty verdict on the 19th following 157 minutes of deliberation. Interviewed by a *Times Record* reporter following his conviction, William Franco professed his innocence and stated that, “I guess the jury must have been affected by sex,” a clear reference to the attractive Jean Mack’s appearance on the witness stand.

Defense attorney Meehan requested the verdict be set aside because “certain [potentially prejudicial] exhibits, including a photograph of the deceased in his coffin,” were viewed by the jury during their deliberation; this motion was denied. On March 22 Judge Brearton sentenced Franco to death in the electric chair at Sing Sing Prison, but an appeal was immediately filed, staying his execution scheduled for April 26.

On April 19 the appeal was filed directly with the New York State Court of Appeals. Arguments were heard in Albany on October 18, and on the January 18, 1937, the court denied the appeal by a 4-3 vote. The dissenting judges – one of them was Irving Lehman, the governor’s brother – felt uncomfortable that Franco’s confession resulted from a beating during his interrogation even though this confession had been ruled inadmissible by the trial judge. His execution was rescheduled for March 27, but on February 25 Governor Herbert H. Lehman commuted his sentence to life imprisonment.

William Franco had been housed in Sing Sing Prison at Ossining, but following the commutation was transferred to Auburn Prison until August 17, 1956, when he was transferred to Attica, the state maximum-security prison. He was paroled on November 19, 1963, and finally discharged on January 22, 1969. Franco returned to New York City and died in Long Island City, Queens, on November 1, 1982. “Jean Mack” returned to New

York City and would not resurface in this area until 1940.

## *Fingered by Fate*

The New York State Police continued to search for Harry Pincus and one lead even brought them to Newark in 1936, but Harry could not be located. Bill Cashin continued to assist the investigation even though he had left the state police for the new Bureau of Criminal Investigation that year. One trooper involved in the case, Luke Conlon, had joined the Newark Police Department but a tip he received that Pincus was seen in Newark produced no positive results at that time.

A series of circumstances led to Harry Pincus's arrest on September 1, 1940. Newark Patrolman John P. McEnroe had read an article about the Kane murder in the current issue of *Headline Detective* magazine entitled "Murder Clue of the Jilted Blonde." The article contained a picture of the wanted man and subsequently Sgt. Luke Conlon located a "wanted" poster for Pincus in police headquarters. Initially, Harry could not be located because he was still recuperating from a head injury at his father-in-law's farm in Berks County, Pennsylvania. But he returned to Newark to obtain medicine and to file an official report at police headquarters regarding the rebellious behavior of his runaway daughter, Catherine. Sgt. Conlon and others immediately noticed the similarity between Newark glazier "Jack Brenner" and the wanted Harry Pincus. Conlon followed Jack/Harry and detained him at Marvin Goldberger's Glass Store. Oddly, Jack Brenner had previously replaced glass windows at city police stations.

Insisting that his name was Jack Brenner and that he was innocent of any crime, Pincus allowed the authorities to transport him to Troop G Barracks in Troy, where he was positively identified by his brothers, Abraham and Edward, from Pittsfield, and also by Massachusetts law-enforcement officials. His family and friends in Newark were stunned because all knew "Jack Brenner" as an industrious worker and diligent husband and father. Jack/Harry was charged with murder and remanded to the Rensselaer County Jail. He pleaded not guilty on September 9, 1940, and requested a jury trial in Rensselaer County Court. The case was subsequently transferred to a special term of State Supreme Court. "Jean Mack" came to Troy and agreed to testify as a witness for the prosecution.

Pincus was given a mental health examination at the request of his attorney, who feared lingering effects from a concussion. His trial was deferred to the December term of State Supreme Court (because County Court Judge Charles Ranney had been the prosecutor in the Franco trial in 1937) and Troy attorney Charles F. Meehan was appointed to serve as his defense counsel. Meehan was not allowed to resign as counsel (an assistant

counsel, David Rosenfeld, was assigned instead) and the trial was deferred again to the February 1941 term and then again to a special term in May before Judge Francis Murray. Jury selection for his trial opened on May 13. Pincus was accompanied by his wife, Mary Brenner, along with their younger adopted daughter, Ramona. Mary was wheeled into the courtroom in a body cast she wore following an auto accident that occurred the past December on her way to visit Harry in jail in Troy.

Before the trial had begun, and with only nine jurors selected, Harry Pincus pleaded guilty on May 19 to manslaughter in the first degree. District Attorney Earle Wiley thought the plea deal was wise given the death of some witnesses and loss of evidence since the murder took place nearly eleven years before. He also commented that Pincus “has been married and has been living a decent life . . . and never was convicted of any other crime.” Judge Bergan sentenced him to a term of not less than 7 ½ nor more than 15 years to be served in Clinton Prison at Dannemora. A contrite Harry Pincus professed his rehabilitation and devotion to his family before he left Troy to be incarcerated on September 21. He was paroled on July 30, 1945, and finally released on August 29, 1955. Harry is said to have returned to his highly supportive family in Newark, but could not be located and he may have instead removed with them to Pennsylvania. His date and place of death are not known.

### ***The Jilted Blonde Meets a Tragic End***

Jean Mack, as she was known, was not heard of again until her death in 1948. On June 8, 1948, Helen Macavage Kerinski (a.k.a. “Jean Mack”) was killed on the coal barge *Mineola* by her boyfriend, Charles Wolford, who in a drunken rage dumped her corpse into the Hudson River off Jersey City, New Jersey, the following day. He was arrested on June 13 and tried for manslaughter in the second degree in Kings County Court and sentenced on October 20 in a plea bargain to 3 ½ to 7 years in state prison. Wolford was so intoxicated that he did not realize that his common-law wife of ten years or longer had died from a blow to her head. Wolford, still intoxicated, had stripped off her clothes, tied her body with a rope and weighted it with a 35-pound iron object before dumping it into the river off Pier 18. Following an exhaustive and well-documented autopsy by the city medical examiner’s office, the body of the former showgirl was interred in potter’s field at Hart’s Island.

According to the article by Hal Langdon in *Front Page Detective* magazine a brother of hers came from Pennsylvania to help identify the body. He also supposedly informed police that Helen had been a slender, attractive young woman with dreams of fame on the “Great White Way.”

Sadly, Helen was remembered by most as the woman who “cried in her beer” at a Brooklyn bar in 1936 about the Kane murder and was overheard by an informant who contacted the state police. In truth, many details about the woman who was found dead as the “noosed nude” may never be known.

Helen was reportedly fingerprinted as a publicity stunt when she appeared in the *Vanities* on Broadway in 1926, according to an article about her life and death that was published in a detective magazine. More likely, the fingerprinting occurred when she was twice charged with prostitution. She was arrested but not tried or convicted in New York City on December 13, 1929. A docket entry for Women’s Court, a division of Brooklyn Magistrate’s Court, identifies the person of interest as “Helen Mack.” She was also arrested for prostitution and pleaded guilty to “Vagrancy 4-C” on July 24, 1940, in Manhattan District 9 of New York City Magistrate’s Court. Her client was Charles Wolford, also known as Roy Winchell, and this event likely marked the start of their romantic relationship. Her fingerprints were available for comparison from the City Police Department when her corpse was discovered in 1948. As *Troy Record* columnist Herbert A. Calkins declared, “Jean Mack talked because of a homicide and homicide sealed her lips forever.”

Charles was described as a muscular, handsome man with dark, curly hair. He appears to have begun dating Helen some time following her celebrated break-up with William Franco in 1936. The confession given by Charles Wolford shows true remorse over his killing the woman who had lived as his common-law wife for a number of years.

### ***Original Source Records Consulted***

Charles Edgar Clinton Wolford was born in Illinois and was sometimes also known as Ray or Raymond Winchell. His parents moved to Pennsylvania by 1920. Charles was the first of seven children. As a young man he worked as a fireman in a power plant and served as an engineer in the U.S. Navy in World War I, and earned a living as a barge man for the rest of his life. He was married in 1915 and legally separated in 1924. His trouble with the law began in 1924 when he was involved in a car theft in Pennsylvania. In 1940 he paid a fine for aiding and abetting prostitution in New York City Magistrate’s Court. A severe alcohol problem affected him for the rest of his life. After serving his sentence in Sing Sing Prison he was paroled in 1952 but returned after a parole violation and finally released on July 24, 1955. Following his years in prison, Wolford settled in Queens and died at Long Island City on April 7, 1968. He was buried in Long Island National Cemetery at Farmingdale.

Authors of published accounts of the Michael Kane murder case seem to have mostly consulted previously published accounts and a few personal reminiscences, relying largely upon contemporary newspaper accounts. Newspaper staffers of the era covered the case in considerable detail and for the most part strove for accuracy. My research relied heavily on nearly 200 newspapers articles dating from 1927 to 1948 from Troy, Albany and Washington County, New York; the *Bennington Evening Banner*, *Berkshire Evening Eagle*; and newspapers from Newark and Jersey City. Three newspapers covering this period, the *Albany Press Knickerbocker* and the *Hoosick Falls Press* and *Hoosick Falls Standard Press*, no longer exist.

Local and state government records provided a great deal of valuable and accurate information. Sadly, few investigative records from the 1930s have survived from the Rensselaer and Bennington County sheriffs departments, Rensselaer County district attorney, and New York State Police, the lead agency, which as of 1936 had already compiled 50 pounds of pertinent documents. The only surviving series of state police records that proved useful are the State Police Scrapbooks, 1915-1959 [New York State Archives, Series B2031-69, vols. 6, 8, 9.]

Court records proved to be a most significant resource. Details of the Franco trial of 1937 and the subsequent appeal are precisely documented in more than 600 pages in New York State Court of Appeals, Cases and Briefs on Appeal, 1847-1999, a voluminous and underused series of 3,514.25 cubic feet, comprising 17,786 printed volumes, held by the New York State Archives [Series J2002, Vol. 571]. Duplicate copies are found at the New York State Library and filed with the county court case file at the Rensselaer County Clerk's office [Criminal Docket Vol. 20, p. 341; case index no. 34065.] Three typed volumes of the stenographer's notes, amounting to more than 2,000 pages, are on file there as well. These notes contain detailed interviews with prospective jurors not found in the printed court testimony. For the Harry Pincus trial of 1941, certain procedural documents only are on file with the county clerk [Supreme Court Minutes, Vol. 144, pp. 434-435; case index no. 39492.] Records (including the indictment, Charles Wolford's confession and his fingerprints) relating to the death of Helen Macavage Kerinski and her boyfriend's subsequent conviction are held by the Kings County Clerk [case no. 1221.]

Prison records held by the state archives contain valuable and accurate personal and criminal history on inmates Franco, Pincus, and Wolford, including their mug shots. These include Inmate Summary Record Cards, 1890-1987 [series 21833]; Inmate Admission Ledgers, Clinton Prison, 1846-1948 [series B0098]; Inmate Admission Registers, Sing Sing Prison, 1842-1971 [series B0143]; Clinton Prison Inmate Case Files, 1930-1956

[series 14610-77] and Auburn Prison Inmate Case Files, 1912-1950 [series 14610-77A]. State Archives also holds the original commutation of the death sentence (no. 872) of William Franco in 1938, signed by Gov. Lehman, in series 13253-87.

The New York City Municipal Archives holds the death certificate and detailed medical examiner's report on the death of Jean Mack in 1948 as well as the first marriage certificate for Harry Pincus dating from 1917. Wanted posters for Harry Pincus issued by the Division of State Police and the Rensselaer County sheriff's office are preserved by the Bennington Museum and the Hoosick Township Historical Society respectively. The latter also owns Jean Mack's mug shot, which likely was once in the possession of the local police department.

State and federal censuses were consulted on Library Ancestry, where draft registration and military service records were also identified. City directories for a number of communities were consulted at various libraries. The estates of Michael Kane and his mother were located at the Bennington County Superior Court, Probate Division; these records have since been transferred to the Vermont State Archives at Middlesex. Deeds for properties owned by the Kanes, as well as Mike Kane's death and burial permits, are found at the Bennington town clerk's office. Park Lawn Cemetery maintains records relating to the Kane burial plot.

Five known detective magazines covered various aspects of the Michael Kane murder case as follows:

- ▣ Hal White, "Trailing New York's Gorilla Man," *Daring Detective* (15: 85), October 1941, pp. 44-47, 78.
- ▣ Ruby Cameron, "Death Parks a Car," *Real Detective* (M:4), October, 1941, pp. 44-47, 92-95.
- ▣ John Barton, "Mystery Passenger," *True Detective* (42:4), July, 1944, pp. 10-13, 100-101.
- ▣ "Murder Clue of the Jilted Blonde," *Headline Detective*, September, 1940. [This issue has not been located.]
- ▣ Hal Langdon, "River Grave for a Broadway Cutie," *Front Page Detective*, October, 1944, pp. 10-13, 51-54.

## ***A Never Ending Search***

Detective magazines, rarely consulted by historians, provided important details about this case and reproduced crime scene photos and portraits of principal characters that could not be located elsewhere. The provocative dialogue is clearly fictional and some information they contain has been proven erroneous. but these creative accounts recalling the case have proven to be both highly readable and informative.

A research project such as this one never truly ends. Undiscovered

newspaper accounts, from Hoosick Falls, for example, likely contain valuable information. Was Michael Kane truly involved with illegal alcohol smuggling? The whereabouts of Harry Pincus following his release from prison have yet to be determined. Many mysteries still surround the life of the elusive Helen Macavage Kerinski, a.k.a. "Jean Mack." Details vary from one newspaper account to another and details found in detective magazine articles are even less reliable. With the investigative records no longer in existence, these factual discrepancies are difficult to resolve. □

Q Have you any legal cause to show why the judgment of this court should not be pronounced against you?

A Well, I am not guilty. That is all.

-----

THE COURT: Do you want to say anything, Mr. Meehan?

MR. MEEHAN: No; there is nothing to say.

THE COURT: (Addressing the defendant) The jury in your case, William Franco, having rendered a verdict of murder in the first degree on the 19th day of March, 1937, the sentence and judgment of the court in your case is that you be put to death in the mode, manner and way and at the place prescribed and provided by law, on some day during the week beginning Monday, April 26, 1937. And the Agent and Warden of Sing Sing Prison is hereby directed to do the execution of this sentence upon some day within the week thus appointed. Remanded to the custody of the Sheriff.

The Sheriff is directed to deliver the prisoner to the Warden at Sing Sing Prison.

-----

F I N I S .

*The verdict of guilty, as written by County Court Judge James F. Brearton, speaks for itself. Rensselaer County Clerk's Office*