

MARCH

MamaroneckHistoricalSociety.org

| MamaroneckHistory@gmail.com

Members Monthly Get-togethers!

Third Tuesday of every month (except January, July & August)
7:00 pm - 9:00 pm at
Woman's Club of
Mamaroneck, 504 Cortlandt Avenue.

7:00 - 8:00 will be 30 min presentation & 30 min Q & A on an different aspect of Mamaroneck history.

8:00 - 9:00 will be a Social and Informal Oral History. Here we break for refreshments and talk about the old days in Mamaroneck, growing up here, going to school, who's related to who, what businessess have come and gone, etc.

Next Get-together on Tuesday, April 18 Presentation: **Walter & Gene: The Story of Walter's Hot Dogs.**

A brief look at Walter and Gene Warrington's lives in Mamaroneck and the story of Walter's Hot Dogs, founded in 1919, celebrated 90 years in 2009 when the history was documented and submitted to the state and federal government for the 1928



August 2009, Walter's Hot Dogs 90th Anniversary

We are just people who are curious about Mamaroneck's past

For those of you who are new to the Mamaroneck Historical Society I just want to explain that Members are simply your neighbors who share an interest in Mamaroneck History.

When we do a project like restoring the DeLancey Family Burying Ground, we are volunteers, taking time from our own lives.

When we do research, we are only amateur historians. So when I got interested in March's topic of Henry Gironda ("Foot-and-a-half") and couldn't find anything online, I began to do a search through the contemporary newspaper accounts.



Stand to be included in the National Register of Historic Places.

Join us! Member Dues

Individual.....\$25

Family.....\$40

Senior/Student.....\$20

Checks payable to "The Mamaroneck Historical Society"

Mailing Address: **The Mamaroneck Historical Society, PO Box 776, Mamaroneck, NY 10543**

Coming Up!

Proposed Presentations

May 16 - **Old Mamaroneck - Pictures from Postcards - Michael Tripicco**

June 20 - **Exposing the Myths & Mistakes About the Founding of Mamaroneck**

July and August Summer Recess

September 19 - **Smugglers, Scoundrels & Land Swindlers - The Founding of Mamaroneck**

October 17 - **Heathcote Hill: The Battle for Mamaroneck**

November 21 - **Celebrating Veterans & Members Annual General Meeting**

December 19 - **Holiday Party - Where? Let us know what you think would be the most fun for the most Members.**

And although the actions I describe, and the quotes I give are taken from newspaper accounts, that doesn't mean it really happened that way.

Newspapers played rather loose with facts and took a lot of dramatic license but it's all I had to go by.

Here are some of the papers I used as sources:

- THE MAMARONECK DAILY TIMES
- THE YONKERS HERALD STATESMAN
- THE MOUNT VERNON DAILY ARGUS
- THE BRONXVILLE PRESS
- THE TARRY TOWN DAILY NEWS
- THE OSSINING CITIZEN-REGISTER
- THE NEW YORK TIMES

From all of the accounts printed through the years covered, I then tried to assemble an easy to follow chronological account that would give you a decent picture of what may have happened.

Please remember that all persons mentioned should be considered innocent of any crime unless they were convicted in a court of law.

All history is always only our best *guess* as to what happened.

peter

TUESDAY, APRIL 18 PRESENTATION

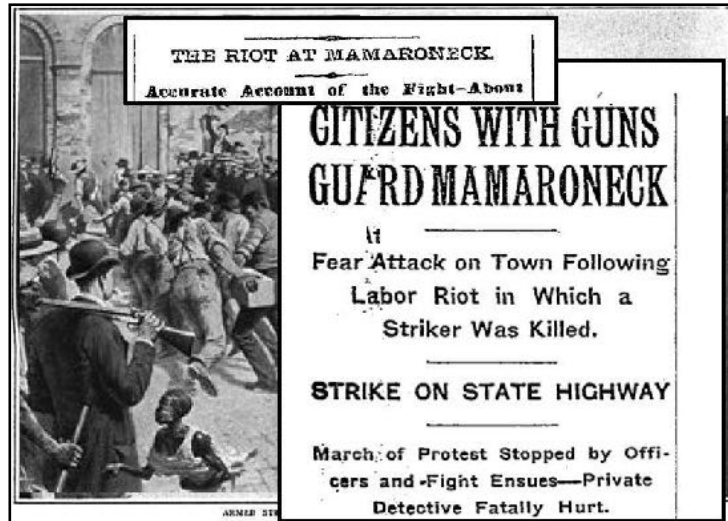
Walter & Gene

The Story of Walter's Hot Dogs



THE LEGEND OF FOOT-AND-A-HALF GIRONDA

From the March Members Monthly Get-together's Presentation (Part 1 of 2)



DATELINE: MAMARONECK APRIL 14 1913

The men of Mamaroneck are out tonight in the streets, armed with rifles, shotguns, and revolvers, and momentarily expecting an attack out of the dark, or an assault with bombs upon Police Headquarters.

The Sheriff's office and the Coroner's Office have been transformed into arsenals through the assembling here of all firearms obtainable in Westchester County.

At 9:45 this morning a pitched battle was being fought between New York City private detectives and the police of Mamaroneck on one side, and contract laborers employed on the State Highways on the other.

The detectives joined policemen in uniform, under command of Police Capt. O'Neill, and the force cut through Barry Avenue toward Railroad Avenue [now Halstead].

The first sign of trouble was when an Italian boy appeared on horseback. He was recognized at once as "Foot-and-a-Half," the young son of a local Italian labor agitator.

"There's young Foot-and-a-Half," cried out Police Capt. O'Neill. "He's out reconnoitring our position. Take him in if you can!"

Policemen who attempted to grab the boy's horse failed, and he got away back up Railroad Avenue.

When I came across this account of the 1913 Mamaroneck "Pick and Shovel" Italian laborers strike, I did wonder, "Who was this spunky little kid? Whatever happened to him? Did he stay in Mamaroneck? What kind of life did he make for himself?"

So I began my search online and eventually I found mention of him again in 1929, 16 years after his daring horseback ride.

MAMARONECK DAILY NEWS REPORTER PETER CAMPBELL MUGGED ON HALSTEAD AVENUE

On January 24, 1929, the “Daily News” (Daily Times?) published an article by reporter Peter Campbell, in which he alleged, among other things, that Henry Girona beat up a 17-year-old female who worked as a telephone operator at the Larchmont Telephone Exchange.

Girona was not happy about this! Allegedly, he had his associate, Angelo Caprizo (who used the alias Costello) recruit one Henry Martin Engstrom (known as Big Chick) to give Campbell a beat down.

Frank Girona, Henry’s brother, cashed a check for \$20.50 from which he would pay Big Chick for the assault.

Because Engstrom didn’t know Campbell, Caprizo was to go along to point him out and act as a favorable witness in event of trouble.

They met with Girona at a Mamaroneck lunch room located at Mamaroneck and Halstead.

But Girona put everything on hold.

He met with Campbell the next morning (in the Mamaroneck Police Station!?) and demanded that Campbell retract the story.

Campbell refused so Girona gave the go ahead for a beat down.

Caprizo and Big Chick positioned themselves on Halstead Avenue where they knew Campbell would be walking.

Campbell saw the two men coming towards him but did not recognize them.

As he came abreast and tried to pass, Caprizo walked on, but Big Chick struck him, and knocked him down, hitting him and kicking him.

Big Chick then walked on to join Caprizo, but 137 pound Campbell jumped up, ran after the 200 pound Big Chick and punched him in the back of the head.

Big Chick wheeled around and gave Campbell another beating, knocking him down again.

Both Campbell’s eyes were blackened, and his jaw was swollen.

There was a large swelling on the right side of his head, his teeth were loosened, and there was a hemorrhage in his left eye.

The reporter swore out a complaint.

The Police came for Engstrom.

Gironda assured Big Chick that he could provide a lawyer; that all costs would be covered.

But the Police didn't want Engstrom. They wanted Gironda.

They wanted him because they believed he was involved in an earlier incident.

In November of 1928, someone shot up Dominick Nardecchio's speakeasy, on Mamaroneck Avenue, in Mamaroneck.

A bystander was accidentally struck in the leg by a bullet.

The police claimed that at the time of that shooting, Gironda was attempting to frighten Nardecchio into installing his slot machines.

Gironda was never tried on, or even charged for, that shooting incident.

So the police wanted payback.

They offered Engstrom a deal, and he took it, agreeing to finger Gironda for the Campbell assault.

***TWO GUILTY IN BEATING OF
MAMARONECK MAN; Deposed
Constable and Aide Are Convicted as
Prosecutor Asks End of "Thug Rule."***

The jury deliberated six hours and 25 minutes and returned a verdict of guilty of second degree assault with a recommendaton of mercy.

Gironda was sentenced on March 1, 1929, to a year and three months, to be served at Sing Sing.

But that wasn't the end of that story.

As soon as the judge announced the sentence, Henry Gironda made a startling promise:

He would "make a complete revelation of his dealings and relations with Mamaroneck police."

If Gironda had offered this information *before* his sentence was passed he might have received a more lenient sentence, but he didn't.

So why was Gironda doing this, if he had nothing to gain?

During his later court appearance he explained.

“I’ve been double crossed! I’m doing this of my own free will and I intend to tell the grand jury everything I know about conditions in Mamaroneck.”

As he made this statement, he sat composedly in the grand jury room in the district attorney’s office, dangling a baby upon his knee, the child of a relative, who sat near him, making the most of the opportunity to see Gironda on this short visit from Sing Sing prison.

***POLICE HEAD OUSTED AT
MAMARONECK; Chief and Two
Detectives Quit Under Fire at the
Request of Prosecutor. VICE
TOLERANCE CHARGED Accused by
Gironda, Under Sentence for Hiring
Man to Attack Newspaper Reporter.
Gironda Informed Prosecutor.
Resignations Called For.***

Angelo Caprizo testified before the grand jury, as did twenty five other residents of Mamaroneck, many of them the friends and former associates of Gironda and Caprizo.

After hearing Gironda’s full story, County Court Judge Coyne, brought in the accused Mamaroneck police officials one by one, to face Gironda and the charges he had made.

Detective Patterson admitted receiving a valuable watch and a diamond ring from Gironda.

He said he was uncertain whether or not he should retain them, so he merely held them in “safe keeping.”

Other police officials admitted receiving gifts too.

The District Attorney advised them all to resign, and they offered to do so, but the Village Manager refused to accept their offer.

In July of 1930, one month after Girona was released, he married the very girl Campbell had accused him of beating. The now 19 year old Larchmont Telephone Exchange operator Alexandra Held, of Myrtle Avenue, Harrison.

Girona stated that he was 26, a mechanic, and the son of Anselmo and the late Elizabeth Girona.

They were married by Father Biago Del Negro (Father Del) at 5 o'clock in St. Vito's Roman Catholic Church in Mamaroneck.

Henry's niece, Jeanette Lore, was the bridesmaid.

There was a large reception after the ceremony in Forester's Hall. I believe Forester's Hall was located on the top floor of La Casa Cafe, the building at Mamaroneck and Prospect, opposite what is now Nonna Carola Restaurant.

For their honeymoon, they spent a week at Atlantic City, and then Girona took his his bride first to Italy and then "to her people's home in Germany."



In 1932 there was a war going on in Westchester. Louis Pope, "the King of Westchester Bootleggers," was trying to take control of all the small rival beer sellers in the county.

Refusal to buy beer [from] specified dealers and refusal to sell the product at stipulated prices have brought beatings and threats to many speakeasy proprietors during the last several months.

But there was one guy who was not about to kowtow to Louis Pope. Henry 'Foot-and-a-Half' Girona, described as a short, thickset fellow, missing three fingers on his right hand, sold beer to whomever *he* pleased.

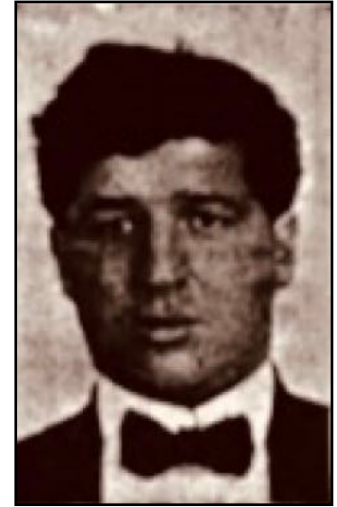


Louis Pope

By 1932 Henry had his own fancy speakeasy, called the Hihe at what was formerly numbered 393 (now 675) Mamaroneck Avenue, just past the Volunteer Firehouse.

From there, two nights each week, Henry ran a combination gambling den and drinking house, with nightly receipts ranging between \$300 and \$700.

Everything was going great for Henry. He was out of prison, had a thriving business, plenty of friends, and was married to the girl he loved.



Henry Gironda



But things were about to heat up for Henry.

Louis Pope decided he'd had enough of this troublemaker.

Around the third week in July of 1932, Louis Pope began his vendetta against Henry.

When Henry was up in Hawthorne, at the Roman Gardens resort, possibly supplying them with beer, four men grabbed him, and "took him for a ride."

They beat him, robbed him of \$5,000 cash, and a \$2,000 diamond ring, and then tossed him out of the car.

A few days later Gironda appeared in the *Harrison* police headquarters to make his report.

According to the Harrison desk sergeant, Gironda bore evidence of assault, with a black eye and dark bruises, which the desk sergeant thought might have been the result of an attempted branding on his face.

Although Henry never named his assailants, he did describe the car as being a green sedan.

Angelo Nardiello, who was an enforcer for Pope, later boasted of the assault on Gironda. *He* owned a green sedan.

If Louis Pope had intended Gironda's kidnapping, beating, attempted branding, just to scare him, to warn him off, now he decided he wanted Gironda dead.

One hour after Gironda made his complaint in Harrison Police Station, according to newspaper reports, Henry was standing outside his Mamaroneck Avenue speakeasy, Hihe.

A green "sedan rolled slowly past...and a fusillade of shots were fired at Gironda."

Gironda whipped out his revolver and fired back as the car sped off.



Despite the gun battle, the policeman on the beat did not report it until an hour and a half later, about 11:30 pm.

And a county wide alarm on the police teletype system was not sent out until 2:20 a.m. by which time the assailants were long gone.

Finally, New York City Police detectives raided an apartment in the Bronx, and arrested three men identified by witnesses.

All three were alleged members of Louis Pope's mob: Angelo Nardiello, Frank Lupo (alias 'Lupo the Wolf'), and Nathan Robinson.

Their story was that while they had, in fact, been inside Gironda's speakeasy on that night, they didn't do nothing.

They told the police that "four men took Gironda outside and stood him against the building, turning a machine gun on him as they drove away."

The driveby was followed up three days later. Girona reported to the Mamaroneck police that “he had received a telephone message in which he was warned: *Order your casket, you’ll need it.*”

The Village police did not like Girona.

That might be why they felt no rush to try to catch the criminals that had attacked him.

Now they plotted to close him down.

At midnight on Saturday, August 01, 1932, Mamaroneck police Chief Charles Stowell and 12 policemen raided Girona’s speakeasy, the Hihe.

In the raid on the speakeasy the police looked for the gun with which Girona had fired back at the gunmen, but all they found was a clip of cartridges.

They confiscated 24 quarts of gin, a large quantity of what the police described as low-quality Scotch and rye, and cases of beer.

They didn’t just confiscate the illegal liquor and beer they found there, they took axes (which they had borrowed from the Fire Department) and destroyed the place!

When they had finished, the interior of the once luxuriously equipped drinking place resembled the aftermath of a tornado.

Chief Stowell was proud of the raid, saying “I think this is a step to drive out the lawless element, to get rid of the beer barons, and gunmen, who are defying the police.”

He indicated that he might in the future follow his policy of wrecking known places where illicit drinking was conducted.

In addition to wrecking the Hihe resort, the police arrested Girona and his first lieutenant, Edward McCauley. Both were charged with “maintaining a public nuisance” and brought to trial at the Village Court on Prospect Avenue.



Early in the morning of the trial, lines began to form before the Police Court, and when the doors were opened at 2 o'clock, several hundred jammed their way to seats.

Anthony Sansone, Village Attorney, was the prosecutor. Frank A Saporito of Mount Vernon defended Gironda and McCauley. Gironda gave his age as 30, his occupation as a mechanic. He listed the speakeasy as his residence.

The evidence consisted of proving that there had been liquor for sale in the place.

On the witness stand, Chief of Police Stowell wasn't as quick to claim responsibility for wrecking the speakeasy. He claimed he had wrecked the place on written orders from Village Manager, Raymond Whitney.

None of the 12 policemen who raided the place, and did \$5,000 damage brandishing fireman's axes, could recall who actually handled the axes!

Many friends of Gironda showed their feelings by loud booing of policemen who testified against him. And numerous neighbors testified that contrary to being a public nuisance Gironda's speakeasy was "a very nice place."

After the case had been presented, Judge Holden instructed the jury that proving that there was selling of liquor at the speakeasy, was not sufficient in itself to constitute violation of the law against "operation of a public nuisance," as it did not present any direct proof of *disorderliness*.

It took the prosecution six hours to present their evidence.

It only took the jury 15 minutes to find Gironda and his lieutenant, Edward McCauley, *not guilty* of the charges of operating a public nuisance.

The crowd cheered the verdict and Gironda and McCauley walked out amid a welter of hand-clapping and back slapping.

(Part 2 will be published in the April newsletter.)

Next Members Get-together:

Walter & Gene: The Story of Walter's Hotdogs



**Tuesday, April 18,
7:00 pm**

Woman's Club

504 Cortlandt

Ave

Not a Member?

*RSVP for a guest pass from
petermfellows@gmail.com*

