

REC 0030 Guide to the Murder, Inc. investigation records, 1929-1966, bulk 1940-1951

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Language: English

Description rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Original processing and finding aid by Jim McGrath, 2006. Revision of original finding aid, remediation of inventory, and EAD encoding by staff archivist Cristina Stubbe, 2023.

New York City Department of Records and Information Services,
Municipal Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	New York City Department of Records and Information Services, Municipal Archives
Creator:	New York (State). Office of the District Attorney (Kings County)
Source:	New York (State). Office of the District Attorney (Kings County)
Title:	Murder, Inc. investigation records
ID:	REC 0030
Date [inclusive]:	1929-1966
Date [bulk]:	bulk 1940-1951
Physical Description:	25.75 Cubic Feet 17 half cubic foot boxes, 5 oversized boxes, 1 suitcase
Physical Location:	Materials are stored onsite at 31 Chambers Street in Manhattan.
Language of the Material:	English.
Abstract:	Murder, Inc. was a profit-making enterprise, with the main sources of income being gambling, loansharking, and racketeering. Despite the name, the members of Murder, Inc. were not a gang of hired assassins. They used murder as a means of silencing or intimidating rivals, opponents, and potential witnesses. The Murder, Inc. papers (inclusive dates: 1929-1966, bulk dates: 1940-1951) include case files relating to the investigation and prosecution of the Murder, Inc. crime ring by the Kings County District Attorney's office, District Attorney's subject files for cases investigated as part of Murder, Inc. but which, for unknown reasons, never came to trial, and index card collections, which include but are not limited to a substantial number of telephone wiretap transcripts, and they also provide references to testimony and criminal affiliations for an enormous number of persons associated in some way with the Murder, Inc. investigation.

Preferred Citation

Identification of item, date; Murder, Inc. investigation records, 1929-1966, bulk 1940-1951; REC0030; Series name; box number; folder number; Municipal Archives, City of New York

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Biographical/Historical Information

Murder Inc.

The name "Murder, Inc." was an invention of the press; the gang members themselves called the organization "the Combination," because the larger criminal network had been formed from a number of smaller gangs. Abe Reles, the informant whose testimony was largely responsible for the downfall of Murder, Inc., was a member of a criminal group originating in Brownsville; next door in Ocean Hill, the local gang included Harry Maione, Frank Abbando, and Vito Gurino. Over time these two groups fused under the leadership of Albert Anastasia, the waterfront boss in Manhattan, and then joined forces with Louis Buchalter's racket, which controlled the Manhattan garment industry and was influential in the trucking unions as well.

Investigators finally broke the ring in 1940, when they arrested Abe Reles for the murder of Alexander Alpert. Reles, evidently miffed by some perceived slight from the gang, volunteered to become a state's witness against virtually anyone he could incriminate. Almost all of the major murder files in the collection contain a statement from Reles, which for most cases would have been the starting point for the investigation. In time, other gangsters began to talk as well, including triggerman Allie Tannenbaum, Joe Liberto, and Angelo Catalano. The Kings County District Attorney kept the witnesses under twenty-four hour police guard at the Half Moon Hotel in Coney Island. Despite these precautions, in November 1941 Reles fell to his death from the sixth floor window of the hotel. Though the scene appeared to indicate that Reles had been attempting to escape from the locked-down sixth floor to the unsecured fifth, suspicions were immediately raised that Reles had been "helped" out the window in order to prevent his testimony against Albert Anastasia, the waterfront boss who allegedly gave the okay on every murder the gang committed.

Reles' death was investigated repeatedly, first in 1941, then again in 1945, and finally for a third time in 1951. The "People v. John Doe" investigation is by far the largest in the Murder, Inc. collection. While the initial investigation was limited to establishing the cause of Reles' fall, subsequent investigations had other agendas. In 1945, new Republican District Attorney George Beldock began a grand jury investigation into the actions of his Democratic predecessor in office, William O'Dwyer, to determine whether O'Dwyer was involved in criminal activity or had improperly allowed certain cases to sit untried. As part of the larger examination of the District Attorney's office, Reles' death was once again scrutinized, this time for evidence of dereliction of duty. In 1951, as Cold War paranoia elevated the threat of organized crime to national significance, District Attorney Miles McDonald began a grand jury investigation of Albert Anastasia, at that time still running the gangs on the waterfront. McDonald focused on the death of Reles as possible evidence of a cover-up.

Since many, if not most, of the papers produced during the 1941 and 1945 investigations were incorporated into the 1951 material, all three investigations have been arranged under the heading "People v. John Doe." Many of the documents from the earlier grand juries are stamped as exhibits for the 1951 grand jury. Researchers interested in the subject are cautioned to date documents carefully, since it is not always clear when certain materials were produced.

By and large, the Murder, Inc. trials represented a success for the District Attorney's office. A substantial number of criminals, among them Louis Buchalter, Emmanuel Weiss, Louis Capone, Frank Abbando, Harry Maione, Martin Goldstein, and Harry Strauss, were convicted of murder and executed. The criminal presence preying on organized labor in New York, however, was not eliminated.

District Attorney

Pursuant to Article 13, section 13 of the New York State Constitution, District Attorneys are elected constitutional officers. Section 927 of the County Law imposes upon District Attorneys the duty to protect the public by investigating and prosecuting criminal conduct in the counties in which they hold office.

Prior to 1847, District Attorneys were appointed by the governor. Presently, District Attorneys are elected every four years by the constituents of their respective counties. In the five counties of New York City, the function of the District Attorney is to enforce criminal law. The District Attorney institutes and conducts criminal prosecutions; the office, however, has no civil jurisdiction whatsoever.

Until the court system in New York City was reorganized in 1962 the Kings County District Attorney would first institute a prosecution before the nearest magistrate who would hold the accused for trial in Criminal Court, if the offense was a misdemeanor. The District Attorney was also empowered to bring a case directly to the grand jury, if the offense was a felony. If, on hearing the evidence, the grand jury does not find an indictment against the accused, the District Attorney may, with the consent of a Supreme Court justice, present the case to a different grand jury; but a District Attorney has no legal power to force or prevent action on the part of the grand jury.

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Scope and Content Note

The Murder, Inc. papers (inclusive dates: 1929-1966, bulk dates: 1940-1951) are divided into three series. The first contains case files relating to the investigation and prosecution of the Murder, Inc. crime ring by the Kings County District Attorney's office. These are further subdivided by trial or investigation. The second series consists of District Attorney's subject files for cases investigated as part of Murder, Inc. but which, for unknown reasons, never came

to trial. The last series encompasses a number of index card collections, the largest of which indexes a substantial number of telephone wiretap transcripts and also provides references to testimony and criminal affiliations for an enormous number of persons associated in some way with the Murder, Inc. investigation.

The case files which have survived intact generally consist of materials generated by the initial police investigation (which may precede the trial by years, in some cases), notes taken by the district attorneys, correspondence, pleadings (documents filed with the court), witness statements and interviews, evidence, and trial transcripts. Only a few cases will have all these materials; most contain only a partial record.

These papers have suffered from intensive use by both the district attorney's office and researchers over the years. As a result the files are frequently in worn or bad condition, and may be incomplete. Not all of the volumes of trial transcripts known to have existed are still present in the collection. And since many of these documents were originally printed on war-grade, onionskin paper, they have deteriorated badly over time. While much of the collection remains perfectly legible, researchers should be aware that not all documents will be in a usable condition.

In a few instances, artifacts or especially fragile items have been removed from the collection for special preservation measures. Separation sheets will indicate where these items belong in the collection.

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Arrangement

The records are divided into three series:

Series Outline

- I District Attorney's case files, 1929-1966
- II District Attorney's subject files, 1934-1959
- III Index cards, circa 1929-1966

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

New York City Department of Records and Information Services, Municipal Archives

Revision Description

Revision of original finding aid, remediation of inventory, and EAD encoding by staff archivist Cristina Stubbe. 2023

Conditions Governing Access

Collection is open for research. Portions of this collection are restricted under United States privacy laws. Advance notice is required for using original material. Please [contact us](#) to arrange access.

Processing Information

This collection was partially processed by Jim McGrath in 2006. He also created an accompanying finding aid. The collection was microfilmed in 2008.

In 2023, the collection was revised by Cristina Stubbe. The revisions included processing the subject files series in the collection, confirming the extent, and creating the EAD3 finding aid and resource record.

Alternate Forms Available

This collection has been microfilmed. Microfilm is available on-site or via interlibrary loan. Due to the fragility of the materials, we request that researchers use these surrogate copies when available. Please [contact us](#) to arrange access.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Murder Inc. investigation records were created and managed by the Kings County District Attorney. In 1975, this office transferred the records to the the Municipal Archives and Research Center, a predecessor to the New York City Municipal Archives, and were accessioned as ACC-1975-015.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)
- Kings County (N.Y.)
- Trials
- Court proceedings
- Criminal court records
- New York (State). Office of the District Attorney (Kings County)

Collection Inventory

District Attorney's case files, 1929-1966

Physical Description: 10.25 Cubic Feet

Scope and Contents

This series consists of the district attorney's case files for the major Murder, Inc. trials and investigations. Most of the trials were conducted by Assistant District Attorney Burton Turkus in 1940 and 1941. The case files consist of materials generated by the initial police investigation (which may precede the trial by years, in some cases), notes taken by the district attorneys, correspondence, pleadings (documents filed with the court), witness statements and interviews, evidence, and trial transcripts. Only a few cases will have all these materials; most contain only a partial record. In total, these documents represent the best available record of the Kings County District Attorney's investigation into the crime ring known as Murder, Inc. Although grouped separately, these files remain a part of the Kings County District Attorney's Records.

The trials and investigations represented in this collection include indictments against such figures as Louis Capone, Frank Abbando, Sebastian Aloi, Louis Buchalter, Irving Nitzburg, Harry Strauss, Vito Gurino, Jack Parisi, Vito Genovese, and Abe Reles along with others.

Arrangement

The series is arranged alphabetically by defendants' last names and then alphabetically by sub-heading.

Existence and Location of Copies:

Existence and Location of Copies

The suitcase included in this series has been photographed. Due to the fragility of the material, we request that researchers use this digital copy. To access the photographs, contact:

Title/Description	Instances	
People v. Abbando and Golob: Correspondence, 1940-1942	box 1	folder 1
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People v. Abbandando and Golob: Material Witness - Gertrude Gurino, 1940	box 1	folder 3
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People v. Abbandando and Golob: Police Investigation, 1935, 1939-1942, undated	box 1	folder 5
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People v. Abbandando and Golob: Witness Interviews, 1935, 1940, 1942	box 1	folder 7
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People v. Genovese et al.: Material Witnesses - Rosario Palmeri, 1944-1945	box 13	folder 206
People v. Genovese et al.: Material Witnesses - John Tafuri, 1944, 1946	box 13	folder 207
People v. Genovese et al.: Miscellaneous Evidence and Photos, 1934, 1941, 1945-1946, undated	box 13	folder 208
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People v. Genovese et al.: Trial Transcripts, 1944, 1946	box 13	folder 213
People v. Genovese et al.: Wiretap Authorizations, 1945-1946	box 13	folder 214
People v. Genovese et al.: Witness Interviews, 1 of 2, 1934, 1944	box 13	folder 215
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People v. Goldstein and Strauss: Trial Sheets, 1940	box 14	folder 222

People v. Goldstein and Strauss: Witness Statements and Interviews, 1940, undated	box 14	folder 223
People v. Vito Gurino et al.: District Attorney's Papers, 1940, 1942	box 14	folder 224
People v. Vito Gurino et al.: Material Witness - Getrude Gurino, 1940	box 14	folder 225
People v. Vito Gurino et al.: Police Investigation, 1939-1941, undated	box 14	folder 226
People v. Vito Gurino et al.: Trial Sheets and Indictments, 1940	box 14	folder 227
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People v. Irving Nitzberg: Appeals Court Documents, 1941-1942, undated	box 14	folder 229
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Correspondence, 1940-1943	box 14	folder 230
People v. Irving Nitzberg: District Attorney's notes, 1938-1941, undated	box 14	folder 231
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Forensic Reports, 1939-1940	box 14	folder 232
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Information re: Albert Schuman (murder victim), 1939, undated	box 14	folder 233
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Miscellaneous Evidence, 1940-1941	box 14	folder 234
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Newspaper Article, 1939	box 14	folder 235
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Pleadings, 1941 February 25-1942 February 27	box 14	folder 236
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People v. Irving Nitzberg: Pre-Trial Summaries, undated	box 14	folder 238
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Telephone Wiretaps, 1941 April	box 14	folder 239
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People v. Irving Nitzberg: Trial Transcripts, 1 of 3, 1940 July 1-2	box 14	folder 241
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People v. Irving Nitzberg: Trial Transcripts, 3 of 3, 1942 March 2-9	box 15	folder 243
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Witness Interviews, 1939-1941	box 15	folder 244
People v. Irving Nitzberg: Witness Statements, 1941, undated	box 15	folder 245

People v. Irving Nitzberg: Witnesses, 1935, 1940, 1942	box 15	folder 246
People v. Jack Parisi: Correspondence, 1939-1966	box 15	folder 247
People v. Jack Parisi: District Attorney's notes, undated	box 15	folder 248
People v. Jack Parisi: Extradition - Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, 1941, 1949, undated	box 15	folder 249
People v. Jack Parisi: Jury List, 1950	box 15	folder 250
People v. Jack Parisi: Material Witness - Sol Bernstein, 1940	box 15	folder 251
People v. Jack Parisi: Material Witness - Angelo Catalano, 1942, 1949-1950	box 15	folder 252
People v. Jack Parisi: Material Witness - Albert Tannenbaum, 1949-1950	box 16	folder 253
People v. Jack Parisi: Material Witnesses - Eugenio Salvese and Cesare Rotundo, 1940-1941	box 16	folder 254
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People v. Jack Parisi: Police Investigation, 1936, 1939-1944, undated	box 16	folder 256
People v. Jack Parisi: Telephone Wiretaps, 1 of 2, 1940	box 16	folder 257
People v. Jack Parisi: Telephone Wiretaps, 2 of 2, 1940	box 16	folder 258
People v. Jack Parisi: Telephone Wiretaps, 3 of 3, 1940	box 16	folder 259
People v. Jack Parisi: Trial Sheets and Indictments, 1940, 1942, 1944, 1950	box 16	folder 260
People v. Jack Parisi: Trial Transcripts, 1940 April 8-1950 April 13	box 16	folder 261
People v. Jack Parisi: Witness Interviews, 1939, 1949	box 16	folder 262
People v. Jack Parisi: Witness Statements, 1940, 1942, 1951, undated	box 16	folder 263
People v. Abe Reles, 1940	box 16	folder 264
Newspapers - People v. John Doe, 1951	box 16	folder 265
People v. John Doe: evidence - bedsheets in suitcase, 1941	box 18	folder 266

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District Attorney's subject files, 1934-1959

Physical Description: .5 Cubic Feet

Scope and Contents

This series consists of the district attorney's subject files for Murder, Inc. investigations which were never brought to trial. The documents indicate investigations carried out not only in Brooklyn but

also in upstate New York, New Jersey and California. The records include correspondence, transcripts, memoranda, reports, mug shots and criminal records, crime photos and bullets.

The information represented in this series include investigative records against such figures as Albert Anastasia, the Shapiro brothers, Abraham "Petty" Levine, Mike Spataro, Irving Penn, "John-the-Polack," John Bagdonowitz (Begdone), Joseph Salerno, George de Feo, Whitey Fiedman, "Tootie," and Rubin Smith. There are also investigative files regarding the murder of Dutch Schultz and Robert Vacarino, as well as more information on Abe Reles. It also includes files on Detective Frank Bals, who was chief investigator for Mayor O'Dwyer when he was the District Attorney. His miscellaneous papers include notes on investigations into William Thalís and Abraham Edelstein among others, memorandums of murders that related to Murder, Inc.'s activities in Brooklyn, and handwritten notes regarding various cases.

Arrangement

The series is arranged alphabetically by folder heading and then alphabetically by sub-heading.

Title/Description	Instances	
Captain Frank Bals - miscellaneous papers, 1906, 1934-1941, undated	box 17	folder 1
Homicide reports, 1940	box 17	folder 2
Investigation in Los Angeles, California, 1940, 1941, undated	box 17	folder 3
Investigation in Newark, New Jersey, 1941, 1944, 1948, undated	box 17	folder 4
Investigations in Brooklyn: Albert Anastasia - Waterfront Rackets, 1939-1941, 1943, 1945-1947, undated	box 17	folder 5
Investigations in Brooklyn - miscellaneous murders, 1939-1940, undated	box 17	folder 6
Investigations in Brooklyn - Shapiro Brothers, 1935, 1940, undated	box 17	folder 7
Investigations in Brooklyn - shooting of Robert Vaccarino, 1939-1940, undated	box 17	folder 8
Investigations in Sullivan County, New York, 1936-1937, 1940-1941	box 17	folder 9
Miscellaneous documents and evidence, 1934, 1936-1937, 1939-1942, 1944, 1951, 1958, undated	box 17	folder 10
Mugshots and criminal records, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1936-1946	box 17	folder 11
Mugshots and criminal records, 1946, 1948-1949, 1951-1953, 1959, undated	box 17	folder 12

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Index cards, circa 1929-1966

Physical Description: 15 Cubic Feet**Arrangement**

This series consists of several index card collections containing information about aspects of the Murder, Inc. investigations. The cards are divided into five groups, the Murder, Inc. "Info File" (by far the largest), the Murder, Inc. "Phone File," the "Criminal Information File," and two small groups indexing the 1945 George Beldock grand jury investigation.

The Murder, Inc. "Info File" is a large series of 4x6 index cards containing information about people and places associated with the Murder, Inc. investigations. The date of the collection is unknown, but it appears to have been produced later in the investigative process, when the amount of material available began to overwhelm even those who used it on a daily basis. Each card contains a title in the top left-hand corner, by which the cards are alphabetized. Printed on the card beneath the title is information about the subject. This information varies considerably; in some cases nothing more than a "B" number or address is provided, while on other cards extensive criminal records or references to witness statements and testimony can be found. A substantial portion of the cards contain excerpts from the telephone surveillance logs produced by the police during their investigations. Seemingly every individual mentioned in the course of any recorded conversation is indexed, which means many ordinary, non-criminal people are in the "Info File" as well (among them, a pre-television Jackie Gleason). Researchers should be aware that many individuals appear on more than one card, and that the spellings of names are subject to considerable variation, especially for those names only overheard on the phone.

The "Phone File" is similar to the Info File but the index cards list only phone numbers, printed (and indexed) in the old style, e.g. Pennsylvania 6-5000. The phone numbers on the cards apparently correspond to incoming and outgoing phone numbers recorded by the police as part of their telephone surveillance operation. In addition to the phone numbers, the cards usually record the name and address of the person or company registered as the owner of that number, and occasionally other details as well.

The "Criminal Information File" is a small series of 3x5 index cards identifying some of the criminal figures associated with Murder, Inc. (or at least encountered in the course of the Murder, Inc. investigations) and the "B" numbers assigned to those criminals. Some additional information is often provided, such as a summarized criminal history or an address. The Criminal Information File is fairly small and decidedly less detailed than the large Info File series, which should be consulted first for information about particular individuals. However the Criminal Information File may be helpful as a supplement to the Info File, particularly for references to criminal "B" numbers.

The final two groups of index cards relate to the 1945 George Beldock grand jury investigation into the activities of his predecessor in the District Attorney's office, William O'Dwyer. One sequence of index cards lists the folder numbers of the original grand jury transcripts, and describes their contents. They are ordered from folder 1 to folder 43. The second set of cards lists the names of those who testified before the grand jury and provides the folder number or numbers in which their testimony can be found.

Thus the two sets complement each other; one is arranged by folder, with witnesses listed; the other is arranged by witness, with folders listed. These cards might provide a handy index for a researcher interested in the testimony of a specific individual before the grand jury, but since the amount of material being indexed is not all that substantial, most researchers will probably not need the index to locate the individual they are studying.

Title/Description	Instances
General information file, A-Dom, undated	box 1
General information file, Dom-Lev, undated	box 2
General information file, Lev-Ros, undated	box 3
General information file, Ros-Zyb, undated	

	box 4
Telephone number file, AC-CL, undated	box 4
Telephone number file, CO-WO, undated	box 5
Criminal information file, undated	box 5
George Beldock - Grand Jury, undated	box 5

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