

Meeting Notes

September 23, 2016



The Red Circle presents the *REAL* Red Circle

Special guest Charles Rooney

Reported by Carla Coupe

First and foremost, well done to all our attendees for running the Hyatt's maze and finding the room! The ongoing construction adds excitement and an element of chance to every event, but we're all looking forward to when it's finished and we can use the hotel's front door again.

For those who enjoy collecting and wearing scion lapel pins, Tom Fahres unveiled the attractive new Red Circle pin. Check the website for information on scoring a pin for yourself. Thanks for all your hard work, Tom.

Shades of J. Edgar Hoover's ghost! In addition to many of our regulars, we welcomed a contingent of G-men and women to this quarter's meeting. Our speaker's colleagues at the FBI turned out in force, bringing fresh new faces and interesting perspectives to the evening's topic.

Peter Blau started the meeting with a brief history of the Red Circle, reminding everyone that he is not the president, because (wise words that many politicians should heed) "if you don't hold office, you can't be impeached." After greeting the first-time attendees from the FBI, he explained that J. Edgar Hoover certainly knew about the existence of our Red Circle, because he was invited to attend the Red Circle's annual dinners, although he never accepted. (His loss.) Peter also discussed how, in our namesake story, the name Camorra was changed to Carbonari, probably to avoid annoying members of the crime syndicate in London and bringing down their wrath on *The Strand Magazine*.



He then introduced our speaker, Charles Rooney, a 35-year veteran of the FBI's organized crime division, who led or was involved with a series of investigations into the Mafia from the 1980s into the current century.

Charlie, a pleasant, soft-spoken man, took the podium and joked that he doesn't like speaking into a mic, for obvious reasons. He explained that the Camorra is in Naples the equivalent of the Sicilian

Mafia, or La Cosa Nostra (LCN), whose roots were established well before the turn of the 20th century. Police departments in the US and Italy had long been interested in the organization. In 1909, a division of the New York City Police Department called the Italian Squad started investigating crimes committed by the Black Hand. A New York City policeman who was visiting Palermo, Italy as a part of his investigation was assassinated, and his murder was only solved in 2014. Indeed, the FBI is still interested in receiving reports of the Camorra's activities. For more general information on the Camorra, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camorra>

In 1980, Charlie first began looking into the Camorra's presence in New York City. He was assigned to investigate Salvatore Catalano, a capo of the Bonanno crime family who was establishing a drug pipeline in the neighborhood. Catalano had been resident in the US for ten years, and rose quickly through the ranks of the Bonanno family organization.

"The Pizza Connection," as this investigation was called https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pizza_Connection_Trial, was the culmination of several related investigations, the most famous of which was the undercover work of Joe Pistone, better known as Donnie Brasco.



The Italian police joined the FBI's investigations of the drug trade, and prominent anti-Mafia investigative magistrate Giovanni Falcone assisted in identifying and prosecuting Camorra and Sicilian Mafia members. In October 1985, these investigations led to 22 defendants being put on trial in the US, and by March 1987, 18 were convicted. In Italy, Falcone indicted 474 Camorra and Sicilian Mafia members, and 360 were convicted. Falcone, who famously said, "He who doesn't fear death dies only once," himself was assassinated in May 1992, but his killers were quickly discovered and convicted.

Charlie pointed out that the FBI could not have achieved these results working alone, and that the law enforcement agencies of the US, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, and Brazil cooperated and contributed to the prosecutions.

A fascinating story told by a man on the inside of the investigations!