

## The Lindbergh Baby Kidnapping Case and the Sheepshead Bay Connection

On March 1, 1932, the 20-month old baby of famed aviator Charles Lindbergh was kidnapped from the family home near Hopewell, New Jersey. The crime occurred sometime between 8 and 10pm, when the nanny discovered that the child was missing. A ladder was discovered by the house. A ransom note was also found, in the child's room.

Other ransom notes were communicated to Lindbergh, and eventually in April a ransom of \$50,000 in gold notes was paid to a shadowy figure in a Bronx cemetery. The extortionist told the go-between who delivered the ransom that the child was safe on a boat at Martha's Vineyard. There was no child found there; there wasn't even a boat there. In May, the child's body was discovered in the woods a few miles from the Lindbergh home.

Despite the best efforts of law enforcement, led by the FBI (J. Edgar Hoover), and the New Jersey Police (led by Herbert Norman Schwarzkopf), the crime went unsolved for quite awhile. By the way, if this last name sounds familiar, you probably remember that a certain H. Norman Schwarzkopf was the Commander-in-Chief of the coalition forces in the 1990-1991 Gulf war. Yep, that's father and son!

Then in 1934 a break came. A gold note had been used to pay for gas at a gas station. The station manager had written down the license number of the guy who had given it to him. Everything was traced to a German immigrant named Bruno Richard Hauptmann, who resided in the Bronx. Hauptmann was arrested.

Hauptmann was arraigned in Bronx court for extortion, but was tried in New Jersey for the crime of murder. He pleaded not guilty and vehemently denied any wrongdoing. The trial was named "Trial of the Century". And it lived up to its reputation. There was very strong anti-German sentiment in the country at that time due to the rise of Hitler to power. Though there was strong circumstantial evidence against Hauptmann, there were also witnesses who lied, and witnesses who were pressured into giving incriminating testimony. Evidence may have been manufactured. However, when Hauptmann took the stand he himself gave testimony that was less than truthful, shall we say.

Hauptmann was convicted and sentenced to be executed. By now you must be wondering: if the extortion occurred in the Bronx, Hauptmann lived in the Bronx, and the kidnapping occurred in New Jersey, **then what can Sheepshead Bay possibly have to do with the case ??** Well, here's where things get interesting, or more interesting. You see, there were many who believed Hauptmann might have been innocent, despite the jury verdict. Either that, or perhaps he had accomplices. One of those who questioned the official version was New Jersey Governor Harold Hoffman. Hoffman even personally visited Hauptmann in his cell, offering a life sentence (instead of execution) if Hauptmann would confess and/or name names. This led to the famous exchange, when Hoffman stared at Hauptmann's eyes, Hauptmann said to him "You won't find anything there, Governor".

Another person who didn't believe the official story was famous detective Ellis Parker (and his son Ellis Parker Jr.). Parker had solved many, many cases thought unsolvable, and he thought he had a lead. A weird, disbarred attorney named Paul Wendel, had offered to help Parker solve the crime, and the more he spoke, the more Ellis Parker believed Paul Wendel had committed the kidnapping himself. Parker believed Wendel was giving information that only the kidnapper could know.

Here's the Sheepshead Bay connection: Parker had a few guys impersonate Mafia men and "coax" Wendel to their Sheepshead Bay house at **3041 Voorhies Avenue**, just off of Coyle Street: Why they dragged him all

the way here, I don't remember. But here is the house as it looks today:



So, Wendel wrote out a confession in this very house in Sheepshead Bay, and Ellis Parker had his man. Another case solved by the brilliant detective from New Jersey. Except things went wrong, it didn't happen like it does in Perry Mason episodes! Wendel recanted his confession. He claimed he was kidnapped and coerced into the confession. A grand jury didn't believe Wendel's confession. Another grand jury was convened and indicted the Parkers and their co-conspirators. They went to jail, ironically, under the new Lindbergh kidnapping law. Most people now don't believe Wendel's confession, but many people do, and are coming up with some weird evidence and connections to this day. For example, evidence has emerged that Wendel knew Hauptmann's business partner, Fisch, who is blamed by many for the extortion, if not the kidnapping. Nobody can say for sure.

Hauptmann's execution had been held up due to the Wendel “confession”, but on April 3, 1936, he was executed. He never confessed – he maintained his innocence until the end. His wife, Anna Hauptmann would spend the next SIXTY years trying unsuccessfully to clear her husband's name, until her death in 1996. Mrs. Hauptmann insisted that her husband picked her up from her job at the bakery that evening, and they went home, as they always did. She never veered from that story. They have a son, who does not discuss the case. He wants no part of the discussion.

And there you have it – the Sheepshead Bay connection to one of the most famous (and possibly unsolved) crimes in U.S. history. Was Hauptmann guilty of the kidnapping and extortion? One and not the other? Neither? Who knows. I asked my dad what he thought. My dad grew up in the Bronx at that time (born 1928) and was thus very familiar with the geography and the history. Despite his anti-German sentiment (caused by WWII), he surprised me and said “Hauptmann didn't do it. They just grabbed the first German they could pin it on”. And that is and was the viewpoint of many people.

I'll tell you if I form a conclusion after I read a relatively recent book I just bought on Kindle, appropriately named, **The Case That Never Dies**.