

**Underworld assassins murder Grove owner** by Curt Norris  
For *The Patriot Ledger* (4<sup>th</sup> in a "N.E. Mysteries" series) – ran Oct. 30, 1993:

[The story to date: Wealthy underworld figure King Solomon, owner of the Coconut Grove nightclub, finds himself in trouble with both other members of the underworld and with the Internal Revenue Service. In January 1933, bored with early morning partying at the Grove, he and some cohorts, go to the nearby Cotton Club.]

King Solomon and his party were shown to a table. When word spread of his identity, smiles of welcome flashed across the room, except from one darkened corner table. A group of five silent men sat at this spot, noting Solomon's every move.

Mildred Burrill handed menus around the table. Solomon glanced at his and excused himself, heading for the men's room. The men at the corner table immediately arose and fell in behind him.

Something hard was pressed against the gangster's neck.

"Keep walking," a voice ordered.

The door to the men's room closed on all but one man, who remained on guard.

The shots, covered by the sounds of the orchestra, went unnoticed, and the first sign of something amiss was when five men, guns drawn, burst from the men's room, grabbed some garments from behind a surprised hatcheck girl, and vanished into the night. Couples continued to dance cheek to cheek until the blood-splattered figure of Solomon staggered onto the dance floor. He groped forward, tripped over a chair, and sank to his knees, knocking over a table, scattering dishes and silverware.

Blood spread over his stiffly starched shirt and formed a widening pool on the floor. Harris helped him to his feet and then outside into a taxicab. Solomon died an hour later at Boston City Hospital from shock and loss of blood. He didn't reveal the names of his assailants.

Eventually, an ex-con, James "Skeets" Cogne, alias James Connally, of Sidney Street in Boston's Dorchester section, was fingered for the shooting.

The day after the funeral, which attracted a few hundred who braved a driving rain, lawyer Barnett Welansky, a confidante of the King for years, made application to the Norfolk Probate Court that Solomon's wife be made administrator for the heirs-at-large. These included the dead man's brothers, Henry, Isadore and David, and his sisters, Anna Tamder and Pauline Chahane. Judge Joseph R. McCooles granted the petition Jan. 30.

Then came a big surprise. The huge fortune Solomon was known to have accumulated from the proceeds of prostitution, drugs, bootlegging, fencing and real estate had mysteriously disappeared. After all probate payments and charges were deducted, his estate was worth \$458,222.

If Welansky knew anything, he didn't confide it to the district attorney. A lawyer is not bound to reveal the confidences of his client, and Welansky stood by his rights.

Authorities believe that the people under whose names vast sums were deposited eventually appropriated the money for their own use.

Welansky became the owner of Coconut Grove on Feb. 10, 1933, although his name was not used on the club's annual statement until Jan. 27, 1941. He did away with much of the flamboyance at the club that had so delighted King Solomon. This tended to discourage patronage by the criminal and sporty elements, and made it more of a family place. Still, the Grove continued to garner choice tidbits of publicity.

Brass Monkey, a race horse prominent in 1938 and 1939, was once a special guest of the club. His dinner was served personally by the maitre d'hotel, Angelo Lippi, and racing personality ``Babe" Rubinstein broadcast the event over the radio.

By 1941 it looked as though lush days lay ahead for the Coconut Grove. The nation was emerging from the Great Depression as millions of people began going into defense work.

But the Coconut Grove was in its middle years as nightclub life expectancy goes, and Welansky now spent a lot of money to give it a facelift. A cocktail lounge, with an entrance on Broadway, was built behind the bandstand. A Caricature Bar appeared, and the new Melody Lounge downstairs attracted thousands who ignored a prophetic skull and crossbones above its entrance. The gaudy blood-red leather lining the walls of the foyer yielded to a cover of coco matting.

Not a cent, however, was spent to widen the narrow Piedmont Street entrance to the club. As the war years arrived, the crooks who had once frequented the Grove gave way to servicemen out with their girls, some visiting a nightclub for the first time. But not all the faces were new. Mickey Alpert was still the sharp-tongued master of ceremonies. He had now been with the club 15 years, years marked by faithful service and square dealings. Through his efforts, the Coconut Grove had now gone to war, providing entertainment at military camps and outposts throughout the area. Alpert, a patriotic man, always took charge of these ventures, which took a lot of time and money.

On July 30, 1942, a few lines in the Boston Post reporting a coconut tree fire at the Rio Casino nightclub in Boston foreshadowed the tragic end to the history of the Coconut Grove. That came four months later, on Nov. 28, a Saturday that started out as a gala day in Boston.

The city was filled with servicemen on weekend leave, among them a number of battle-scarred veterans from Africa, and with defense workers seeking relaxation from wartime production lines. And on this Saturday they were joined by hundreds of students who had watched Holy Cross defeat Boston College 55-12 that afternoon in one of the greatest upsets in college football history. It was a victory that called for a celebration.

Boston's streets, theaters, hotels, movies and night clubs were packed, and the Coconut Grove lured more than 1,000 customers through its narrow revolving doors. These people were, as one writer noted, ``a fair cross section of (those) who work on Main Street and live on Elm Street."

Mr. and Mrs. John O'Neil of Cambridge, Mass., laughed self-consciously as a photographer took their picture. They had been married three hours.

Charles ``Buck" Jones, a veteran star of some 90 western movies, sat at another table signing autographs. He was on a national personal appearance tour and had stayed over in Boston to entertain thousands of children that afternoon at a Junior Commando rally in Boston Garden sponsored by the Boston Traveler newspaper. A party at the Grove had been arranged in his honor by New England film exhibitors.

At another table, William J. Young of Medford was being entertained at a farewell party. He was to go into the Navy in less than 12 hours. And so it went . . .

Barnett Welansky was not present at his club that night; he was a pneumonia patient at Massachusetts General Hospital. His brother, James, took over greeting the customers in his stead.

Maitre d' Lippi, a bed-ridden invalid for the past eight months, was also absent. But Mickey Alpert was there, the only key man in the Grove's history to be present at both its opening and closing.

The genial Alpert circulated through the crowded club, greeting old friends and making new ones. Once he stopped to be photographed with three soldiers who wanted a souvenir of their big evening.

A spirit of fun and good times permeated the club, and the grimness of those World War II days faded. Now, although Mickey didn't know it, Capt. Joseph A. Buccigress, of Police Station 4, stopped in on his usual tour of inspection.

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