

MORE HORSE THIEVERY IN NEW YORK THAN THE FAR WEST

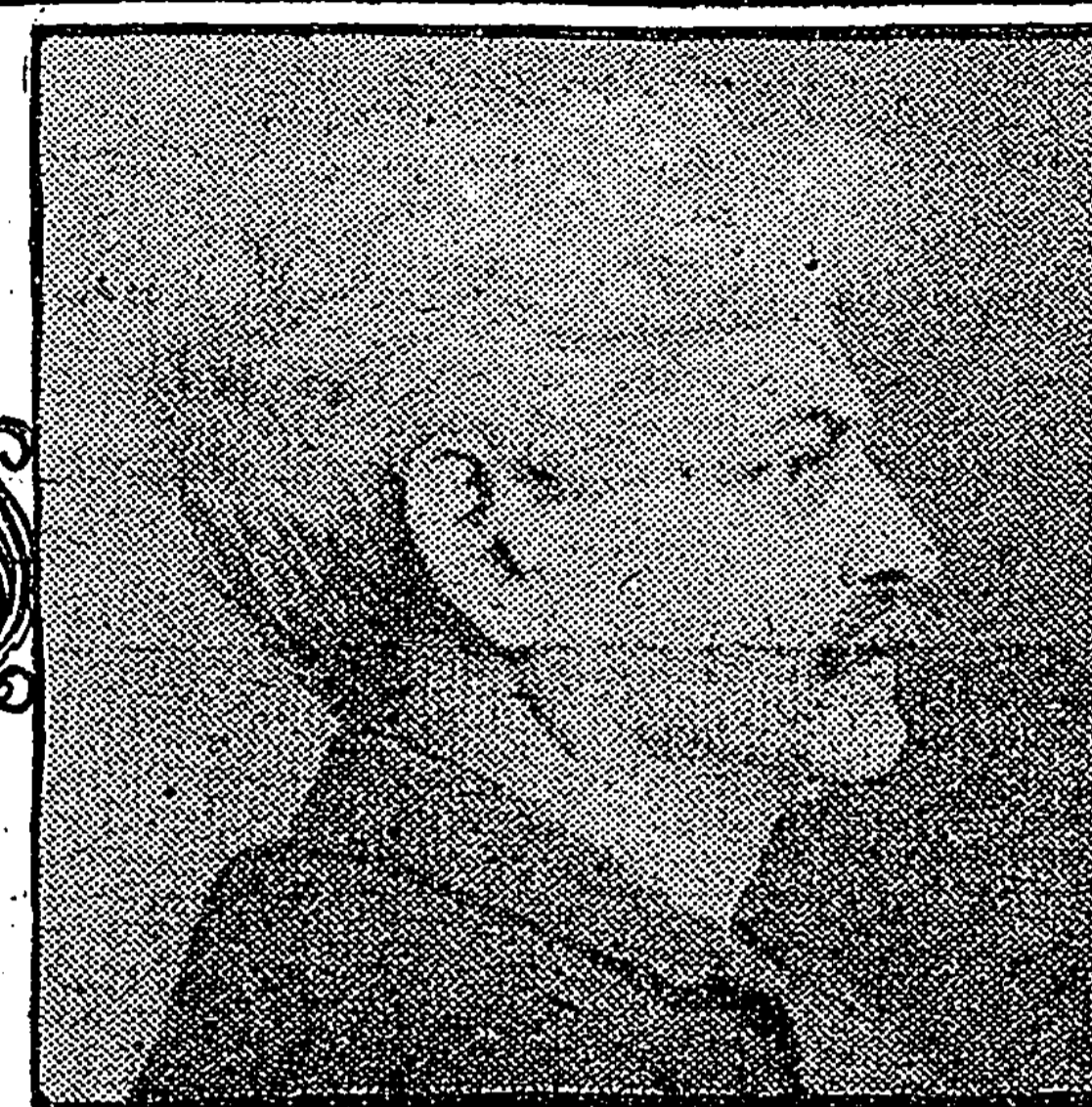
So Easy to Do and Hard to Detect That Detectives Are
Puzzled What to Do--Looks Like an
Organized Industry.



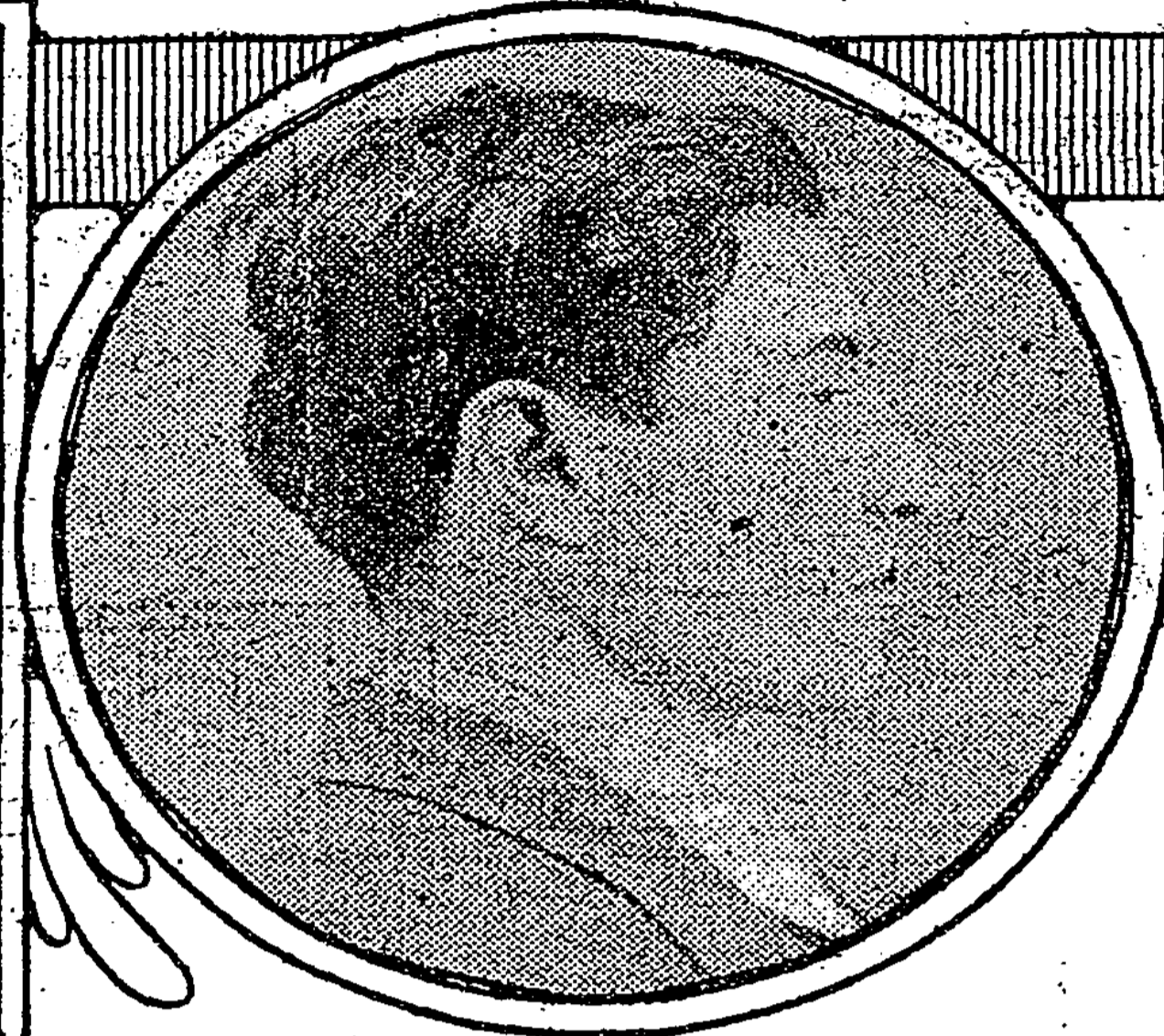
GIOVANNI ZITO



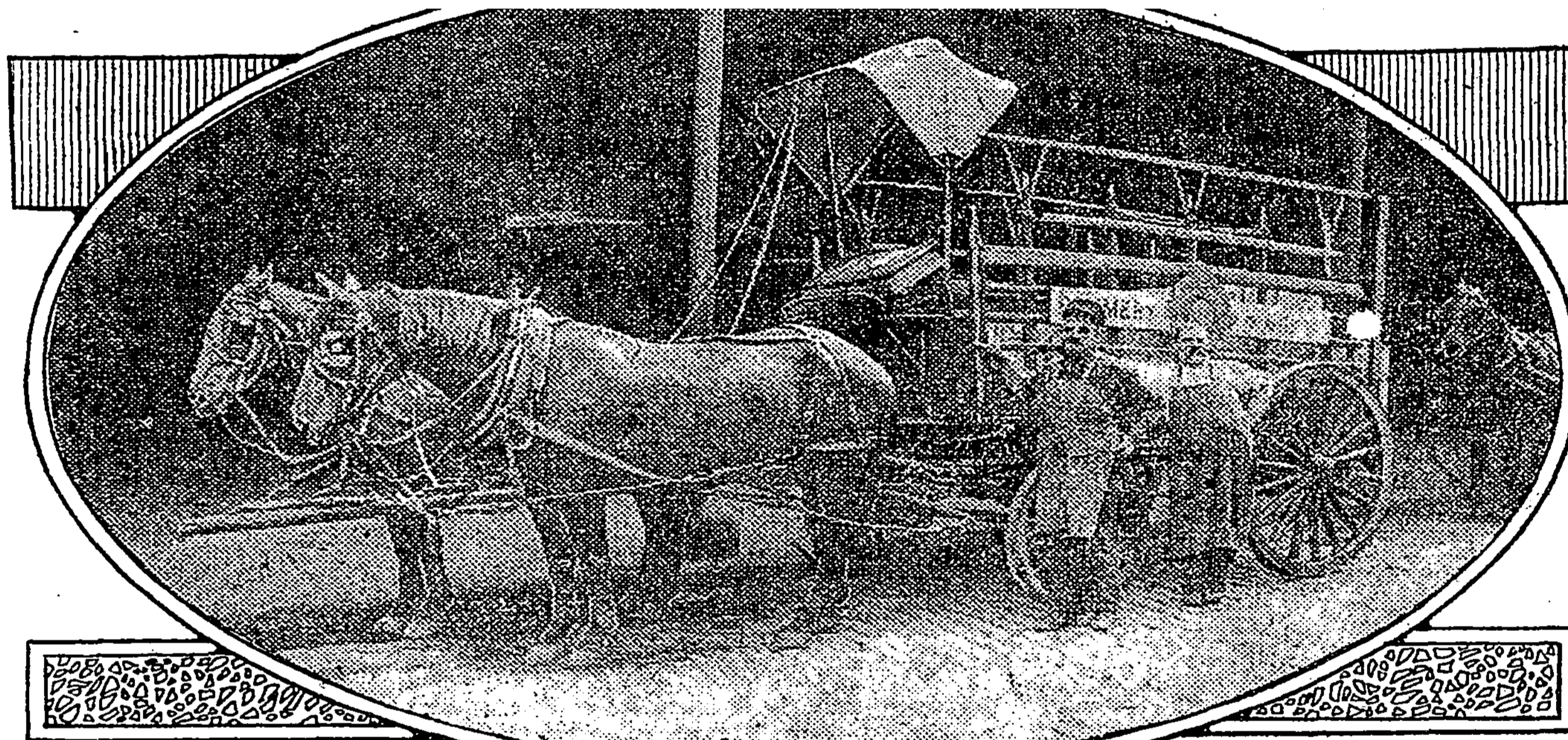
LOUIS FRIEDMAN



CHAS HARRINGTON



ABRAHAM LASKOWITZ



THIS WAGON FILLED WITH CHAMPAGNE WAS STOLEN WHILE
STANDING IN FRONT OF A WELL KNOWN RESTAURANT

ONE of the things called to the attention last week of the special Grand Jury that is inquiring into the so-called crime wave was the prevalence of horse stealing in New York. Chas. Haslop of the Grocers' Association gave a report that makes the wild West seem foolish. One Harlem grocer, for instance, lost five horses with their wagons within a few weeks and another concern six. All of which may surprise the average New Yorker who associates the horse thief with the country, especially the ranches of the West. But this city has more thieves than any other in the land. As a matter of fact the amount of property stolen by horse thieves in this city in one year probably exceeds that stolen in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and Texas, in ten. This crime is so easy of execution and so hard of detection in New York that the detectives detailed have been able to make but little headway in checking it and recovering any of the stolen property. It is a puzzling situation that confronts the police.

To place the amount lost each year very accurately is impossible. But on the best figures obtainable it is estimated that property worth from one million to one million five hundred thousand dollars is stolen. Ordinarily the theft of a horse and wagon from the streets of the city attracts little attention. But the writer's attention was attracted to this class of crime by the theft of a team and truck loaded with champagne from in front of Delmonico's on Nov. 21 last, and he started an investigation.

The specific case mentioned was the theft of a team and truck owned by Francis Draz, an importer. The truck, loaded with \$2,000 worth of champagne, had stopped in front of Delmonico's while the driver, George Holmes, was delivering an order; when he returned to the street the team and truck with forty-five cases of champagne had disappeared. Five hours later the team and truck was found abandoned at Tenth Avenue and Thirteenth Street, by a policeman attached to the Charles Street Station. The wine had disappeared. Two days later the wine was found in the cellar of a building at Eighth Avenue and Twenty-eighth Street, concealed under a pile of coal. The police were unable to find who put it there, but they were so close on the track of the thieves that a man named John Koerner, who at the time was under indictment, and about to be tried on another charge of truck robbery, committed suicide. Friends who were with him at the time said he feared arrest for the champagne "job," and was sure that the man to whom he had sold the wine would "give him up."

Norman R. Moray, manager of the Great Eastern Casualty Company, which insures against this sort of theft, makes the following statement:

"In 1904 brokers began to put up propositions to me, regarding the insuring of horses and delivery wagons on the streets of New York, against theft. After consideration I came to the conclusion that we could insure the horses, harnesses and wagons, but not the contents of the wagons. A policy was drawn up, and a rate of \$25 per thousand was decided upon, and a minimum premium of \$10 maintained; that is, even though the insurance required was less than \$400 we still charged \$10. The first year or so the business was fairly profitable as we were fortunate in recovering horses and wagons which were stolen.

However, about 1907, our losses began to increase tremendously, and our recoveries dropped tremendously, and after trying to ascertain the cause of the change I came to the conclusion that stealing of horses had become an organized institution rather than a private industry. I did not at the time realize how strong an organization it was, but as an easy solution to the matter the rates for the insurance were doubled, making it \$50 for one thousand. The reason I say solution is that I did not think anybody would pay such a rate as this in New York City for this kind of insurance.

In addition to this increase of rates, I also began to select with great care, the risks; that is, we would only insure merchants in the better neighborhoods of New York; but even this did not decrease the loss ratio, as a grocer's or butcher's delivery boy would drive up to one of the high-class apartment houses in the best neighborhoods of the city, go in for three or four minutes to deliver a parcel, and come out and find that his wagon had

completely disappeared and so far as my investigators could ascertain, the ground might just as well have opened and swallowed the rig. However, we recovered a few horses in 1909, which convinced me that a very thoroughly organized band of horse thieves existed, and that they had headquarters in Connecticut and New Jersey as nearly as we could ascertain. We could not do much on account of the fact that the New York Police Department has no jurisdiction in either of these States, when the case originates in this State. The New York Police Department would follow the clues as far as their jurisdiction extended; on the other hand, the robbery, having been committed in New York State and it being only a supposition that the thieves had gone into another State, it was difficult to get any action by the authorities of the other States. Finally, I came to the conclusion, personally, that life was too short to bother any further about this class of insurance, and that there was not enough money in it to warrant employing a large detective force to work exclusively on it; and I have now discontinued writing this class of business at any rate.

"You can make up your mind that when merchants will pay \$50 a thousand for insurance they need that insurance too badly for the good of the company."

"This did not include the contents of wagon, and another company undertook to insure the contents of the wagons whether the stuff was stolen from same or whether the horses and wagons and contents were stolen in their entirety, and their loss ratio was about three times what the business would stand, and they discontinued this class of business.

"No man's horse is safe. The horse of the big department store is as likely to disappear as the horse and wagon of the small grocer or butcher. Detectives say that the theft is easily covered up. Within six hours after the horse and wagon disappears, a transformation is made, which is so complete that few owners can identify their property. The horse is shorn of his mane and tail, white legs are dyed a color corresponding with the body of the horses, and cases have been known where a stolen horse was described as having a bobbed tail, where the horse when finally recovered was found to have had a very beautiful tail, attached to the former stub.

"The same with the wagon. A gayly painted wagon is soon transformed into a dilapidated peddler's wagon. The top is removed, dash board knocked off, and a dirty drab or brown coat of paint reduces the wagon that cost from \$150 to \$200 to one that when the thief sells it, will bring not more than \$50.

"On an average, five horses and wagons are stolen in New York every business day. The horses are worth on an average \$300 each, the wagons and harness, \$200

each. The contents can safely be placed at \$300, which amounts to about \$4,000 a day, a total for 300 business days, of about \$1,200,000. The amount recovered will not amount to 5 per cent., but allow for 10 per cent., or \$120,000, and there would still be a loss of \$1,080,000."

Under the name of Charles Harrington, John Mahaney, alias Jack Sheppard, was sentenced to two years in Sing Sing Nov. 20, 1910, by Judge Crain. He had, in company with Charles Ackron, former proprietor of a notorious Tenderloin resort, been found guilty of having robbed the store of a merchant named Lavarosa, at 118 John Street, of 35,000 cigars. Sheppard first came to the notice of the New York police as a truck thief when he was arrested on May 5, 1875, charged with having stolen a team and truck loaded with \$3,000 worth of merchandise, the property of Overton & Co., 341 and 342 Pine Street. The police then learned that he had just served five years in the Massachusetts State Prison for having stolen a team and truck with a load of broadcloth valued at \$5,000 in Boston. The jury was unable to agree, and when he was discharged he was rearrested for the Philadelphia authorities. He was sentenced to three years in the penitentiary. He was arrested again in New York on Dec. 26, 1878, under the name of John H. Mathews, for the larceny of a truck from James Lynch, 35 City Hall Place.

On this date Jack engaged Lynch to carry off three bales of wool from the corner of Reade Street and West Broadway. A number of bales of wool had been left outside of the establishment there and Jack, on the arrival of the truck, superintended the work of removing them with quite an assumption of ownership; then he took a seat on the truck beside Lynch, who drove off. He induced Lynch to leave the truck for a minute and go on a message to the top floor of a house they were passing. Jack lashed the horses, and was soon out of sight. The wool was unloaded and the truck turned adrift. Jack then hailed another truckman, who was returning to New Jersey, and the wool was taken to Jersey, where it was afterward found. Jack was finally discharged on Dec. 28, 1878, as the authorities could not get the Jersey truckman to come to New York and identify him.

What seems to have had a salutary effect in checking the thieves recently was the "settling" of the notorious Italian horse thief, Giovanni Vito, alias Bonnaventura, the leader of the notorious Elizabeth Street gang, who has just been sentenced to four years in Sing Sing by Judge Crain; the Herman Weber gang at Garden City, L. I., the leader of whom got twelve years, and the Freedman gang, two of whom got ten years each.

It was known for a long time that there was a band of Italian horse thieves much

after the manner of the "Black Hand" gang; that is, a merchant who owned a nice horse and wagon and had no children would be selected as the victim. He would be sent the usual letter demanding a certain amount of money; he would be informed that unless the money was paid the horse and wagon would be taken. For a time not much attention was paid to this class of blackmailers, but the regularity with which horses and wagons disappeared after the demand for money had been refused had an effect.

Louis J. Campomenosi, a first grade detective attached to the Central Office of Manhattan, is the man responsible for breaking up the Zito game. Campomenosi, who was regularly detailed to the work of hunting horse thieves was in the Detective Bureau one night several months ago, when a terrific bomb explosion occurred in Elizabeth Street. The block on Elizabeth Street, between Prince and Houston Streets, has had more bomb explosions than any other Italian settlement in the city. Campomenosi was hurriedly sent to the scene of explosion. In his search through the block for some clue he came upon a stable in which were several freshly painted wagons. The following morning at daylight Campomenosi returned to the stable and began an examination of the wagons. The day before a horse and wagon, the property of Charles Weisbecker of 125 West One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, had been

stolen. He noticed that a top had just been removed from one of the wagons and smeared with paint of a dirty brown color. The wagon from which it had been removed had been painted a dull brown color. After rubbing the fresh paint off in several places, he came upon the missing figures—123 and 125. Further inspection proved that it was Weisbecker's wagon. Weisbecker was notified, and positively identified it. The horse had been so altered by cutting off his mane and tail that the description given of the horse stolen did not in any way correspond to that found in the stable, but Weisbecker remembered a peculiar scar on the horse's tongue; then he recognized it as his own.

Besides Weisbecker's rig, five wagons and three horses were recovered. The wagons had all been altered and the horses so changed in appearance, by starvation and usage, as well as being shorn of their manes and tails and dyeing, that it was only after great difficulty that the people from whom they had been stolen were able to recognize them. The trail from the Elizabeth Street centre led to a place in Junior Street, Brooklyn, where the detective found a horse and wagon which had been stolen from R. L. Titus of 29 Harrison Street, valued at \$550. By this time the detective had evidence enough to arrest Zito and two companions, one of whom was found to be an innocent tool, while the other, a man named Maddo turned State's evidence, and Zito was convicted. Five horses and three wagons were found at the Junior Street place. Zito's method was to work with two assistants. He would usually locate a likely looking horse and wagon, and then after watching the route and habits of the driver would find a quiet cross street. He would then have one of his men in the middle of the block, or at the place where the horse usually stopped, and a man at each avenue corner. When the driver left the wagon to deliver his goods the man in the middle of the block would get a signal from the man stationed at the corner that the coast was clear, jump on the wagon, drive it to the corner, where he would be relieved by the man there who would drive the horse rapidly away. The idea of making this change was that in case of an arrest the man found in possession of the rig would have the excuse that he had been hired to take the horse to some certain point if it so happened that the man who had actually stolen the horse from where the driver had left it had been seen by any one, the person who witnessed the theft being unable to identify the man in whose possession the rig was found.

One of the most difficult round-ups made by the detective was that of the Freedman Laskowitz gang, whose operations were traced over three months.

Detective Drum, who was early assigned to a case in which this gang figured, devoted himself exclusively to their operations. He was assisted by Ben L. Fischer, a private detective, and between them they formed a regular system for the ultimate bagging of the thieves. It was found that most of the horses stolen in New York were taken to an obscure place just outside of Elizabethport, N. J. Fischer frequented the horse mart on Twenty-fourth Street for a number of days and posed as a horse thief who had a couple of horses he'd like to dispose of. He was told of the New Jersey rendezvous. He found the camp in which stolen horses were concealed, returned to New York to get aid, and in company with a New York detective returned to New Jersey, but they found the camp empty; the horses had disappeared. The detective returned to New York, but Fischer remained on the trail, and followed them from Monticello and Philadelphia, where they had been shipped to Centreville, Sullivan County, N. Y. He at once notified Detectives Drum and Reynolds, and they at once left for Centreville.

In the meantime Fischer had located another camp where five stolen horses were concealed, and returned to Elizabeth, N. J., and informed the police. Later when he returned with Sergeant Murphy of the Elizabeth police force he found that the five horses had been destroyed and skinned. When Drum reached Centreville he had in his possession a description of the men in charge of the horses when they left Philadelphia, which Fischer had furnished him. He let it be known that he was about to embark in the junk business, and was in search of a couple of cheap horses.

He got information that a carload was expected from Philadelphia in a day or two, and that if he could wait, he would probably be able to pick up a bargain. While waiting for the horses to come he began a rigid inspection of all the horses in that vicinity, having in his possession the description of a number of horses that had been stolen. His attention was attracted to a beautiful team attached to the truck of the Orange County Brewing Company, which tallied with the description of a team which had been stolen from a man named Christian Ellis of Flushing Avenue, North Beach.

Mr. Ellis was notified to come at once to Centreville. He at once identified the team as his and when the brewing company was notified that they had in their possession a team of stolen horses they showed a bill of sale from the firm of McDougall & Wismer, horse dealers in Centreville. This firm, who had bought the horses in good faith, was forced to replace the team at a cost of \$600. About this time the horses from Philadelphia arrived, and Drum found they were in charge of Freedman and Laskowitz. The horses they had in their possession were all subsequently identified, and brought to New York. The detectives learned that they had a 200-acre farm together with a 200-room hotel. Altogether fifty-five horses were recovered.

Mr. George Stadlander, a grocer who has stores at 62 Seventh Avenue and 442 Tenth Avenue, and is the President of the Retail Grocers' Association, said that the theft of horses and wagons from the members of the association was one of the greatest evils they had to contend with.

The association's "General Alarm" plan is as follows: As soon as a grocer's horse and wagon are stolen he at once notifies Mr. Stadlander, an endless chain of telephoning commences at once, and by this means every avenue leaving the city is carefully watched by grocers or their clerks; by this means a number of horses and wagons have been recovered.

A horse and wagon, the property of Theodore Riehl of 56 Sixth Avenue, was stolen from the corner of Fifty-fifth Street and Sixth Avenue by two Italians supposed to be of the Zito gang, and were seen to stop in front of a butcher shop in Washington Market. They were trying to deftly arrange a blanket so as to cover the name, when an observing young clerk, becoming suspicious, took the name and address, telephoned to Mr. Riehl, and asked him if his horse and wagon had been stolen; he was informed it had, and the clerk notified his employer. The wagon in the meantime had been driven away to a saloon several blocks distant; the men had stopped to get a drink. The clerk finally got a policeman, but when they reached the saloon the two thieves, who had become suspicious, rushed out the side door and made their escape.