



Inspector Oldfield and the Black Hand Society: America's Original Gangsters and the U.S. Postal Detective who Brought Them to Justice

William Oldfield , Victoria Bruce

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The incredible true story of the US Post Office Inspector who took down the deadly Black Hand, a turn-of-the-century Italian-American secret society that preyed on immigrants across America's industrial heartland—featuring fascinating and never-before-seen documents and photos from the Oldfield family's private collection.

Before the emergence of prohibition-era gangsters like Al Capone and Lucky Luciano, there was the Black Hand: an early twentieth-century Sicilian-American crime ring that preyed on immigrants from the old country. In those days, the FBI was in its infancy, and local law enforcement were clueless against the dangers—most refused to believe that organized crime existed. Terrorized victims rarely spoke out, and the criminals ruled with terror—until Inspector Frank Oldfield came along.

In 1899, Oldfield became America's 156th Post Office Inspector—joining the ranks of the most powerful federal law enforcement agents in the country. Based in Columbus, Ohio, the unconventional Oldfield brilliantly took down train robbers, murderers, and embezzlers from Ohio to New York to Maryland. Oldfield was finally able to penetrate the dreaded Black Hand when a tip-off put him onto the most epic investigation of his career, culminating in the 1909 capture of sixteen mafiosos in a case that spanned four states, two continents—and ended in the first international organized crime conviction in the country.

Hidden away by the Oldfield family for one hundred years and covered-up by rival factions in the early 20th century Post Office Department, this incredible true story out of America's turn-of-the-century heartland will captivate all lovers of history and true crime.

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Kristine says

Inspector Oldfield and the Black Hand Society by William Oldfield & Victoria Bruce is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in early August.

Oldfield is the titled Frank Oldfield's great-great-grandson, who presents his grand-dad as a US post office inspector who brought down the Sicilian mob at the start of the 20th century with talents being required when a murder victim is found to be carrying letters written to him in Italian. While reading this, I experienced a sudden flashback to watching Saturday morning tv and coming across the USPS inspector show, The Inspectors. This book, however, is written in a dense, journalism-style storytelling from so many perspectives with the factors surrounding the main plot (the postal service, Pinkerton police, mafia, confiscating letters, making arrests, and court proceedings) that it's easy to lose track.

Kelsey (Kelseylovesbooks) says

Historical non-fiction is a genre I greatly enjoy. I tend towards the civil war era when picking historical non-fiction, but I really enjoyed this caper set in the early 1900s. I had no idea how much investigative power the Post Office Inspector has. Oldfield is quite the character and I found myself really rooting for him to bring the Black Hand Society to justice.

Something I liked about this book is that it's set in a time just long enough ago to feel like some aspects of life were different, but still recent enough that it was only a few generations ago. The mafia storyline is also fascinating and kept me on my toes. Inspector Oldfield and the Black Hand Society comes out August 21! I received an ARC of this book via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Steve says

Before the beginning of prohibition era gangsters such as Al Capone, There was the Black Hand-the prelude to the Mafia, a secret Sicilian criminal organization. The Black Hand began its reign of terror and their victims kept quite. Before the FBI, there was the U.S. Post Office who had a group of inspectors led by Frank Oldfield. In 1899, Oldfield became America's 156th Post Office Inspector and joined the ranking of the most powerful law enforcement agencies in the United States. Oldfield was responsible for bringing down the Black Hand, capturing sixteen from the group in a case that spanned four states and two continents- and put an end in the first international organized crime ring.

Stephen A. Tornio says

I got a little over halfway through, really skipping a lot of the detail. Would have been better as a long magazine article rather than a novel. The writing just got tedious for me. I am glad they caught the bad guys, kudos to the Postal Inspectors. On to the next book.

Valerity (Val) says

This was a good true crime book set in the early 20th century dealing with a group of Sicilians who sent out letters to other Italians threatening them with harm if they didn't pay protection money. The letters were called Black Hand letters and if ignored for very long, usually led to the death of the recipient or their family members. This eventually led to an investigation by a postal inspector, since the crime involved the US mail. Luckily, it drew the attention of Inspector Oldfield who happened to be a very good and creative detective, and he stuck with the case until managed to make headway, where others had failed for years. My thanks for the advance electronic copy provided by Netgalley, authors William Oldfield & Victoria Bruce, and the publisher for my fair review.

Touchstone

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My Bookzone blog: <https://bookblog200.wordpress.com/201...>

Cristie Underwood says

This was a fascinating read about a postal inspector who took down a criminal organization that was a prelude to the mafia. Before the FBI, the Postal Inspectors handled investigations. This is a part of America's history that I knew nothing about prior to reading this book. The author did a great job researching his ancestor and this time period.

Donna Davis says

A decidedly mixed bag. Full review will be up before the pub date.

Sandra Berryman says

I haven't read a true crime book in ages but the synopsis of this book just piqued my curiosity. First of all, my grandfather and his twin came to Ellis Island at the age of 14 from Sicily in 1901. Second, my father was a postal worker in Cleveland, Ohio, and third, The Godfather is my all-time favorite movie. With all that, I eagerly dug into this book. This is a font of information here and is one of the most informative books I have read. Meticulously researched about a period of history that I had no clue about, I heartily recommend this book (no my father wasn't a Post Office Inspector or in the mafia). If you love history, true crime and/or mafia stories, please pick up this book. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. I received an e-book from NetGalley in return for an unbiased review

Kyle Robertson says

This is the fascinating story of Frank Oldfield, a postal inspector who was all but forgotten until his family uncovered the archives that remained from Frank's illustrious career. The book starts off with a detailed history of the birth of the United States Postal Service in July 1775 and, in turn, the creation of the Post Office Inspection Services, which would soon become the most robust law enforcement service of the United States government.

When Frank Oldfield was 21 years old, his father was appointed as the local postmaster. This paved the way for Frank to land a good job in the post office. From there he went on to dabble in politics, and at age 29 he was appointed county sheriff.

In 1899, at the age of 32, Frank Oldfield became a U.S. Post Office Inspector. He was known as one of the most aggressive and successful Post Office Inspectors in the service. In 1908 Oldfield was hunting members of the Black Hand Society. He believed that they were responsible for an international organized crime ring spanning across America and all the way to Palermo, Sicily. The Black Hand carried out acts of extortion and coercion through the postal service, often ending in bloodshed. The members were cunning and the operation was quite simple yet sophisticated. Using the power and authority of his badge to exhaust all resources, Frank would lead the investigation that ultimately brought the Black Hands to justice.

One thing I learned from this book was just how powerful and revered Postal Inspectors we're back in this time. U.S. Post Office Inspectors were the country's most powerful federal law enforcers at the turn of the century. Long before the FBI came into being, U.S. Post Office Inspectors had jurisdiction of the world. The FBI wouldn't be founded until July 1908. The presidentially appointed position gave a Post Office Inspector authority to take over an investigation from any law enforcement agency in the country if the United States mails were used in any fashion.

I would recommend this book to fans of true crime, history, and anyone with an interest in the United States Postal Service. I received this as a free ARC from Touchstone on NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Whitney says

Who knew the history of the USPS could be so interesting? While I've come across some historical nonfiction that gets bogged down with extraneous detail, this book had just enough historical backstory to set the story in perspective.
