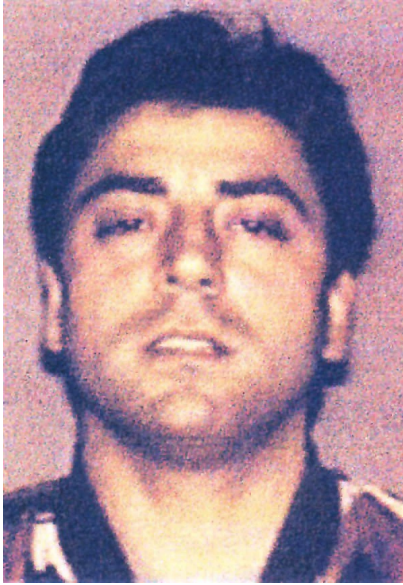


Reputed Gambino Mob Boss Is Shot and Killed on Staten Island



Francesco Cali was fatally shot outside his home on Staten Island on Wednesday night.

By Ali Winston, Nate Schweber, Jacey Fortin and Liam Stack

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[Update: The slain Gambino boss shunned the limelight. Here's the latest.]

Francesco Cali, the reputed boss of the Gambino crime family, was fatally shot outside his home on Staten Island on Wednesday night, a senior police official said.

Mr. Cali, 53, was shot six times, the official said. The police said they received a report about the shooting outside 25 Hilltop Terrace in the Todt Hill section of Staten Island around 9:20 p.m. There was also a report of a blue pickup truck leaving the scene around the time of shooting.

Mr. Cali was pronounced dead at Staten Island University Hospital.

A 58-year-old neighbor who gave only his first name, Salvatore, said that he heard a burst of about seven gunshots shortly after 9 p.m.

“I just heard the pow-pow-pow-pow-pow,” he said.

He said he rushed to his window but could not see anything. He said the shots were all the same volume, as if fired from the same gun.

Two other neighbors who declined to give their names corroborated Salvatore’s descriptions.

The Gambino family was once the nation’s largest and most influential organized crime group, but several of its leaders were convicted in the 1990s of crimes that included murder and racketeering.

The family was led at the time by the showy crime boss John J. Gotti, who frequented expensive restaurants and nightclubs with a crew of bodyguards. He took power in the family by arranging for the murder of his predecessor, Paul Castellano, in 1985, in front of Sparks Steak House in Manhattan.



The scene outside Mr. Cali's home on Staten Island on Thursday morning.
Jefferson Siegel for The New York Times

Mr. Gotti was convicted of racketeering and murder in 1992 and died of cancer in prison in 2002, at the age of 61. In 2013 his son, the former Gambino boss John A. Gotti, was stabbed in the stomach in Syosset, N.Y. He survived.

[Read more about the Gambino crime family from The New York Times's files.]

The assassination of Mr. Cali came on the same day that Joseph Cammarano Jr., the reputed acting boss of the Bonanno crime family, was acquitted at trial, and about a week after Carmine J. Persico, a longtime boss of the Colombo crime family, died in prison at age 85.

While it has been decades since a Mafia boss was killed in New York, lower level members have been attacked or killed in recent years.

In October, Sylvester Zottola, 71, a reputed associate of the Bonanno crime family was shot and killed as he waited in his S.U.V. to pick up an order at the drive-through window of a McDonald's in the Bronx.

Just three months earlier, Mr. Zottola's son, Salvatore Zottola, was ambushed by a gunman and left for dead on a leafy street outside his family's Throgs Neck compound. He survived.

On Staten Island, Todt Hill is known for its Mafia history. Castellano, who was the last Gambino boss to be assassinated, owned a home on Benedict Road. A home on nearby Longfellow Avenue served as the filming location of the Corleone compound in "The Godfather."

Paul Castellano on a stretcher outside Sparks Steak House in Manhattan on Dec. 16, 1985.

Mario Suriani/Associated Press

[Todt Hill, a getaway from the bustling city, offers privacy that has appealed to mob bosses.]

Since the 1990s, the fortunes of the city's five traditional Mafia clans have been on the decline. Federal and state authorities increased their focus on the mob's control of certain industries and unions beginning in the 1980s and improved their use of racketeering laws to loosen the mafia's control. And since eight mob leaders were convicted in 1986 in a federal racketeering trial of operating a commission that ruled the Mafia in the United States, Mafia leaders have avoided the spotlight in fear of coming to the attention of federal and state prosecutors.

By early Thursday morning on Staten Island, the police had strung yellow tape across the street leading to Mr. Cali's home, a large red-brick, two-story colonial style house whose front door stood open.

Prashant Ranyal, 39, who lives in the neighborhood, said he was shaken by the killing. "Whenever you see nice areas you feel like it's peaceful," he added. "When something like this happens you definitely have a second thought about it."

Salvatore, the other neighbor, said he had lived in his house for 12 years and did not know any of his neighbors, which struck him as unusual. "Nobody talks to nobody around here; it's crazy," he said. "People kind of keep to themselves. They like their privacy."

He described the street where the shooting happened as quiet and full of old homes. "Dead street," he said. "Dead quiet all the time."

Correction: March 15, 2019

An earlier version of this article misstated the name of a street used as a location in the film "The Godfather." It was Longfellow Avenue, not Road.

Lew Serviss contributed reporting.

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