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Family Tree Leads St. Louis Researcher to 19th Century Gang Leader

New Biography Explores American Mafia's Birth in New Orleans

St. Louis, Feb. 15, 2007 — A St. Louis woman's lifelong obsession to discover the secret of her family history led her to the person many consider the first "godfather" of the American Mafia.

"I heard a lot about family history while growing up," recalled Martha Machecca Sheldon.

"When I learned there was a missing piece of the story, I was determined to find it. My father and other relatives wouldn't talk about it. Over the years, I was able to pick up bits of information from various sources, until the skeleton was finally out of the closet."

Ms. Sheldon traced family roots to 19th Century New Orleans. In that time and place, her Machecca ancestors were generally well-to-do, law-abiding entrepreneurs and pioneers of the produce trade. However, Martha's great-uncle Joseph P. Machecca happened to be the leading suspect in the 1890 Mafia assassination of New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessy and one of the victims in the worst lynching in American history.

Confronted with generations-old lies and denials, Ms. Sheldon decided to set the historical record straight. More than a decade of her research has been channeled into a recently released biography she co-authored with crime historian Thomas Hunt of Connecticut. *Deep Water: Joseph*

(MORE)

P. Macheca and the Birth of the American Mafia dispels many of the myths of the mob's earliest days and establishes the facts of the Hennessy assassination, the Crescent City lynchings and the underworld's kinship with corrupt political machines of the period. Ms. Sheldon and Mr. Hunt stitch together the details of Macheca's life and the betrayals that resulted in his death.

"This book... will force a reassessment of a famous event in the history of American organized crime," explained Peter Dale Scott, PhD., a noted author and crime historian.

Ms. Sheldon, widow of artist Stephen B. Sheldon, is the daughter of Arthur Michel Macheca Jr. and Marie Lucks Macheca. She is descended from Joseph P. Macheca's half-brother John, a principal owner of the New Orleans-Belize Royal Mail and Central American Steamship Company. She is a graduate of Villa Duchesne Sacred Heart and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Washington University. Ms. Sheldon worked in interior design and, for a time in Los Angeles, CA, in the production of television commercials with her husband. She has served as a volunteer for SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, Malcolm Bliss Mental Health Center and the Barnes Jewish/Christian (BJC) Hospital. On the Auxiliary Board of Directors at BJC, she has served as a member of the Risk Management Board, as Patient Representative Director and as Public Relations Director.

Deep Water has been published by iUniverse, an affiliate of Barnes & Noble. It is available for sale through iUniverse.com and other major booksellers. For information, visit the book's website: www.jpmacheca.com.

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