

KOBRAK Herbert L.

1943

McCarrens, Cleveland Publisher, Wounded by Caller in His Office

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Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

CLEVELAND, July 22—John S. McCarrens, president and general manager of The Cleveland Plain Dealer and of The Forest City Publishing Company, which also owns and operates The Cleveland News, was shot and seriously wounded today by a caller in his office. The assailant was identified as Herbert L. Kobrak, former general manager of German and Hungarian language newspapers here.

After firing four bullets at Mr. McCarrens, who is 73 years old, Kobrak shot and killed himself with the same pearl-handled revolver.

Mr. McCarrens was rushed to St. Vincent's Charity Hospital in a police ambulance and was operated upon at once. A bullet had penetrated his abdomen and had

gone through both forearms. His condition tonight was reported as serious.

The shooting followed a violent thirty-minute quarrel during which Miss Jane Hammond, a secretary, heard angry words from behind the closed door of the publisher's office.

Paul Bellamy, editor of The Plain Dealer, said Kobrak was ousted in 1939 as an official of The Waechter und Anzeiger and the Szabadsag and had been calling upon Mr. McCarrens for the last four years. It was his belief that Kobrak was seeking assistance in starting a picture paper here.

Kobrak apparently had planned a murder and his own suicide for more than a year. Detective In-

spector Frank Story said Kobrak carried two notes in a brief case indicating that his only mission at The Plain Dealer office was to kill Mr. McCarrens and himself.

Mr. McCarrens' secretary said Kobrak had been in to see him four or five times in recent years, but that today was the first time she had seen him this year. She told police that Kobrak had telephoned for an appointment this morning and was given one at 2:30 P. M.

After the shooting Mr. McCarrens staggered out of his office and collapsed in a chair.

"Somebody call the police," he said. "I've been shot by Kobrak. He's a crazed man."

Kobrak, who was 52, lived thirty-eight minutes after he had shot himself through the head. He was unconscious in a chair in Mr. McCarrens' office when found and died without speaking.

One of the notes he carried was addressed to "Gentlemen of the Press." It said in part:

"Hello, you hyenas of gossip, I mean—forgive my abruptness—Gentlemen of the Press.

"Please, for the sake of a colleague, leave the [at this point the writing was blurred] print the truth. My home will give you documents from birth records up if needed. I smell big news for you. . . ."

[Here the letter said the writer had "found something out that unless corrected may result in tragedy." It spoke of "John," apparently a reference to Mr. McCarrens.]

"* * * this is only a repetition [evidently referring to his plan to kill Mr. McCarrens.] Sixteen months ago I was close to this decision, but my friends talked me into starting all over again.



John S. McCarrens

The New York Times, 1942



"After all, ambition is still noble and selfishness the devil's own. [The letter then stated that Kobrak "started The West Side News and sold The Shopping News idea." It recited that Kobrak, between 1911 and 1917, had worked for The Chicago Tribune, Chicago Herald, St. Louis Globe-Democrat and The Western Watchman.]

The second note, addressed to the police, read:

"Please yield my body to Steinmetz & Gross, funeral directors. They have their instructions."

McCarrens Sorry for Assailant

CLEVELAND, July 22 (P) — As he was being taken to the hospital today John S. McCarrens told associates Herbert L. Kobrak had made an appointment with him to discuss starting a graphic newspaper in Cleveland.

"I feel so sorry for that fellow," Mr. McCarrens was quoted as saying. "And to think he shot himself!"

W. G. Vorpe, Plain Dealer Sunday and feature editor, said Kobrak appeared for the appointment at 2:30 P. M.

"It was at 3:02 that I heard four shots in quick succession and then, a moment later, a fifth shot," said Miss Florence Anthony, a secretary. "Mr. McCarrens opened the door of his office and came out. He said: 'I've been shot. A crazy man just shot me.' Then he walked into the office of Joseph Madigan, circulation manager, and collapsed."

The publisher told associates later that Kobrak had come to him for financial help and that he had helped him previously.

Rushing into Mr. McCarrens' office, C. C. McConkie, controller for

the newspaper, reported finding Kobrak, blood streaming from his temple, sitting in a chair. A .32 caliber pistol lay on the floor near Kobrak's right hand.

From Kobrak's brief case police took a pamphlet titled "Six Nights in Luxemburg," a folded placard with the printed words "Cleveland Daily Graphic Sheet," and the letter addressed to "Gentlemen of the Press." This letter, Inspector Story said, referred to Mr. McCarrens as having "blocked Kobrak's newspaper ventures."

Kobrak came to America from Hungary in 1913 and settled with his parents at Lorain. He worked for a commercial establishment there for a time, and later at Chicago. He started work on a Cleveland-foreign language newspaper as an advertising solicitor twenty years ago and later became general manager of the now defunct Consolidated Press and Printing Company, which published various foreign language papers.

Dr. Ervin H. Bolgar, president of Consolidated until it went bankrupt in 1939, said Kobrak habitually carried a gun.

Twice Head of the A.N.P.A.

Mr. McCarrens, twice president of the American Newspaper Publishers Association and now an A.N.P.A. director, joined The Plain Dealer as advertising manager in 1914. Previously he had handled advertising for various department stores after coming here from Freeport, Pa., in which city he was born.

He was made business manager of the newspaper in 1920 and in 1932 was named general manager of the Plain Dealer Publishing Company. Several years later the Forest City Publishing Company, which operates both The Plain Dealer and The Cleveland News, was formed and Mr. McCarrens was chosen administrative executive. He became president of the company two years ago on the death of B. P. Bole.

Mr. McCarrens lives with his wife in suburban Shaker Heights. They have two daughters and two sons, including Lieut. John J. McCarrens of the Navy, formerly classified advertising manager for The Plain Dealer.