

# Newark Offices of Italian Rights League Burned Out in 'Suspicious' Fire

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NEWARK, July 15 — The week-old offices of the Newark chapter of the Italian-American Civil Rights League was destroyed by fire early today.

Capt. James Dalton of the Fire Department's arson squad called the fire "definitely suspicious," adding, that it was "arson . . . an incendiary fire, indicative of an inflammable liquid."

Captain Dalton discounted early reports that the league headquarters, in a newly refurbished storefront at 535 Bloomfield Avenue, had been bombed. He said no fragments had been found in the ashes inside the store, which is in the city's predominantly Italian North Ward. Instead, he said, chemical analyses are being made by department technicians.

Captain Dalton declined to speculate on who might have set the fire, saying it was "still under investigation."

### Extent of Damage

The fire left the paneled walls burnt out, the windows reduced to shards of glass and the aluminum frames bent by the heat. Damage was estimated at \$1,500, the cost of refurbishing the store.

Gus Ferrara, president of the league's Newark chapter, and Caesar Capria, vice president, both said they thought the blaze was the work of an arsonist who was either a "nut" or "someone who hated to see the words 'Civil Rights' up here for Italians." Mr. Ferrara is an Essex County correctional officer and Mr. Capria is head of one of Newark's locals of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association.

Another theory points to the continual friction here between the Italian community, led by former Councilman Anthony Imperiale, and the black community, led by LeRoi Jones. Mr. Ferrara said he thought that was "nonsense, because we're against discrimination against everybody — Italian, Irish, black, white, everybody."

### Enrolling Members

Yet another theory has the arson connected with the near-fatal shooting of Joseph A. Colombo Sr., a founder of the Civil Rights League, in Columbus Circle on June 28.

Mr. Ferrara disputed this, saying: "This has nothing to do with Colombo. What the hell has Colombo got to do with the state of New Jersey?"

Noting that the fire would not stop his organizing efforts, Mr. Ferrara said he set up a registration table in front of the ruined store. Late today, he said, 61 new members paid \$10 each to become league members. The Newark chapter, Chapter 35, has about 5,000 members, he said.

Until the office was opened on July 7, Mr. Ferrara had been organizing the league chapter out of his home. "I got into it," he said, "When my kid came home from school one day and asked me if we had relatives in the Mafia. That's why I'm involved."

The chapter's president said the league members included great numbers of Newark policemen, corrections officers, men on the District Attorney's staff, a judge and an ex-sheff. Nobody with a criminal record belongs, he said, "but that doesn't stop us from demanding that Italians who are arrested be treated equally with other people."

Asked if he planned to look for headquarters elsewhere, Mr. Ferrara said: "We'll fix this place up and be right back."



Gus Ferrara, president of Newark chapter of the Italian-American Civil Rights League, talking with a member outside burned-out storefront office on Bloomfield Avenue.

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