

# The Gazette

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# A Chronology of Crimes

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**PINPOINTING THE TIME** of death is a routine part of any murder investigation, yet for chroniclers of the Nero Wolfe stories, it is often easier to identify the hour of death than the year. Careful readers will note a number of discrepancies, for example, when they compare the dates given by William S. Baring-Gould in *Nero Wolfe of West Thirty-fifth Street* with accounts of events by fictional characters or by actual newspapers.

The circumstances involving Hickory Caesar Grindon [CAES], for instance, must have occurred in September 1937, not September 1938 as Baring-Gould says. When Wolfe solved the case in [LEAG], which could not have taken place any later than November 1934 since it saw magazine publication in June-July 1935, Archie had been working for him and living in the old brownstone for seven years. At the time of the affair of [BAND] (October 1935), Archie had been with Wolfe for eight years. In other words, their association must have begun in 1927. Thus when Archie remarks in [CAES] that he has been studying Wolfe's face for ten years, there is consistent evidence for dating the case no later than 1937.

Once we have the correct date for [CAES], we can properly place both [bult] and [inst] in October 1944. In [bult] Archie says of Lily Rowan, whom he meets for the first time in [CAES] that he "had only known her seven years." Archie is undoubtedly a civilian in [bult]. If he had been discharged from the Army in October 1945, as Baring-Gould assumes when dating [inst], he would still have been in the service in [bult]. Thus [inst] must have occurred the previous October.

Baring-Gould was under a natural misunderstanding when he set [inst] in October 1945. Wolfe himself is the source of the confusion when he says: "This is October. As my nineteen forty-five income now stands, I'll keep about

ten per cent of any additional receipts after paying taxes." Most people, of course, would have figured their tax on income earned during the 1945 calendar year. But Wolfe ran his finances as a business; he must have used the fiscal year, from July 1944 through June 1945, as the basis for his tax calculations. (In later years he switched to the calendar year, since Archie makes numerous references to his ill temper when the March 15 deadline draws near.)

Another misleading statement in [inst] comes from Archie. "I had been a civilian again for only a week," he remarks. Germany surrendered in May 1945 and Japan in August of the same year. Archie's discharge could have been granted in October, after the end of hostilities, though it would have been mighty quick work. The actual facts are different. While still a major in Army Intelligence, Archie moved back into the house on West 35th Street and had been functioning almost in his old capacity as Wolfe's assistant ever since March 1942 [notq]. By October 1944, with the war drawing to a close and the "undercover enemy activities in this country" pretty well cleared up, Wolfe was undoubtedly impatient to have Archie available for civilian cases again. Because Archie was on semi-detached duty anyway, because the work assigned to him and Wolfe for Army G-2 had been completed, and because an impatient Nero Wolfe is a rather irresistible force, Major Goodwin was discharged in October 1944.

Another error of chronology crops up in [july]. Philip Holt had been "pestering" Fritz Brenner, "insisting that he had to join URWA," because "for three years Fritz had been visiting the kitchen at Rusterman's off and on as a consultant . . . after the death of Marko Vukcic." Marko died in March 1954, so the picnic which Wolfe and Archie attended must have been in 1957, not 1956.

In three of the stories, the case of the mistaken Monday is a mystery all its own. As William J. Clark points out in the *Mystery Reader's Newsletter*, April 1970, the "Christmas Party" could not have occurred in 1957, as Baring-Gould dates it, since January 1 was not "a week from Monday" that year. The closest possible date prior to the publication of Archie's account was December 1950.

Another Monday—Jan. 5—marks the beginning of [eeny] in a year which had to have been 1959, not 1958. In 1958 the first Monday fell on Jan. 6. The only year in which Jan. 5 fell on Monday in the sixteen years from 1954 to 1969 was 1959. The murder in [rode] also occurs on a Monday, one week before the rodeo closed at Madison Square Garden in New York. That was October 5, 1959. There was no rodeo in New York in 1960. Archie made a minor slip, natural for such an avid baseball fan, when he called it the World Series Rodeo instead of the World Championship Rodeo. The 1959 rodeo world series was held in Texas.

The publication dates of several magazine stories also help clarify the chronology of crimes within Wolfe's universe. An example is [sqr] which appeared in the August 1951 issue of the *American Magazine*. The events in the story could therefore not have occurred, as Baring-Gould has it, "in the Winter of 1951-1952." Winter 1950 seems most likely. Similarly, [meth] takes place in September, and was first published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in

January-February 1960. It must have happened during the previous year, in September 1959.

"This Won't Kill You" [this] could not have taken place in October 1952 because Archie's account was published in the *American Magazine* in September 1952. It is therefore obvious that the crime occurred on Wednesday, October 10, 1951, the day of the sixth (Archie made a slight mistake in calling it the seventh) and final game of the World Series.

The big-name gamblers who fixed the game made an earlier attempt to fix the Series. The *New York Times* reported that Leo Durocher, manager of the New York Giants, received a typewritten letter postmarked October 6 which said, "There's \$15,000 for you and your team if you manage to lose the next three games. If you are interested call RI-9-8749. If you want to keep Laraine [Durocher's wife] better keep your mouth shut." Durocher indignantly gave the letter to baseball commissioner Ford Frick, who turned it over to the police. The Giants played hard but did indeed lose the next three games, including the unforgettable ninth inning on October 10 which cost them the Series. Archie



didn't mention any of this because it had little to do with the drugging of the Giants players on October 10 in [this]. He also changed the facts slightly to make his account seem fictitious and thus spare the feelings of the sabotaged team. The New York Yankees won the Series, not the Boston Red Sox. The only time the Red Sox ever played the Giants in a World Series they did win, and in a seventh game too, but the year was 1912.

The weather provides a final set of clues for accurately dating Nero Wolfe's cases. The affair of [SLNT] undoubtedly occurred in March 1945, not in March-April 1946. The case opens on "a Wednesday toward the end of the warmest March in the history of New York." March 1946 in New York was unusually warm, with temperatures in the 70's, but it was not as warm as March 1945 which had temperatures in the 80's.

The date of [copk], which Baring Gould sets in "Summer 1951," is off by almost two years. The weather was certainly not that of a New York summer or Tina Vardas would not have worn a coat. Archie's description of the day as "sunny and sparkling" also makes it sound more like fall. Since both spring

and fall 1950 were pretty well occupied by the final encounter with Arnold Zeck and Archie's subsequent vacation in Norway with Lily Rowan, the fall of 1949 seems more probable.

Finally, [east] was published in the April 16, 1957 issue of *Look*. Easter fell on April 21 in 1957, so the murder must have occurred on Easter 1956. A look at the weather report confirms this. According to the *New York Times*, the weather in New York on Easter 1956 was as Archie describes it, and very different from Easter 1957.



## Chronology

By Stephen F. Schultheis

Date events took place	Book titles Novelette titles which are not book titles	Date of first book publication
June 1933	Fer-de-Lance	1934
November 1934	The League of Frightened Men	1935
October 1935	The Rubber Band (Alternate title: To Kill Again)	1936
March-April 1936	The Red Box	1937
* September 1936	The Hand in the Glove (Crime on Her Hands)	1937
April 1937	Too Many Cooks	1938
* July 1937	Red Threads (in: The Mystery Book)	1939
September 1937	Some Buried Caesar (The Red Bull)	1939
* June 1938	Mountain Cat (The Mountain Cat Murders)	1939
November 1938	Over My Dead Body	1940
* July 1939	Where There's a Will	1940
Summer 1939	Double for Death	1939
* November 1939	Bad for Business (in: The Second Mystery Book)	1940
* March 1940	The Broken Vase	1941
* September 1940	Alphabet Hicks (The Sound of Murder)	1941
March 1941	Black Orchids	1942
August 1941	Cordially Invited to Meet Death (in: Black Orchids)	1942
March 1942	Not Quite Dead Enough	1944
August 1943	Booby Trap (in: Not Quite Dead Enough)	1944
May 1944	Help Wanted: Male (in: Trouble in Triplicate)	1949

October 1944	Instead of Evidence (in: Trouble in Triplicate)	1949
October 1944	Bullet for One (in: Curtains for Three)	1950
March-April 1945	The Silent Speaker	1946
October 1946	Before I Die (in: Trouble in Triplicate)	1949
March-April 1947	Too Many Women	1947
June 1947	Man Alive (in: Three Doors to Death)	1950
March-April 1948	And Be a Villain (More Deaths than One)	1948
July 1948	Omit Flowers (in: Three Doors to Death)	1950
December 1948	Door to Death (in: Three Doors to Death)	1950
June 1949	The Second Confession	1949
August 1949	The Gun with Wings (in: Curtains for Three)	1950
Fall 1949	The Cop Killer (in: Triple Jeopardy)	1952
March 1950	Disguise for Murder (in: Curtains for Three)	1950
April-Sept. 1950	In the Best Families (Even in the Best Families)	1950
Winter 1950	The Squirt and the Monkey (in: Triple Jeopardy)	1952
December 1950	Christmas Party (in: And Four to Go)	1958
Jan.-March 1951	Murder by the Book	1951
July-August 1951	Home to Roost (in: Triple Jeopardy)	1952
October 1951	This Won't Kill You (in: Three Men Out)	1954
June 1952	Prisoner's Base (Out Goes She)	1952
Fall 1952	Invitation to Murder (in: Three Men Out)	1954
May 1953	The Golden Spiders	1953
Fall 1953	The Zero Clue (in: Three Men Out)	1954
March-April 1954	The Black Mountain	1954
May 1954	When a Man Murders (in: Three Witnesses)	1956
September 1954	The Next Witness (in: Three Witnesses)	1956
Fall 1954	Die Like a Dog (in: Three Witnesses)	1956
April 1955	Before Midnight	1955
August 1955	A Window for Death (in: Three for the Chair)	1957
Fall 1955	Immune to Murder (in: Three for the Chair)	1957
January 1956	Too Many Detectives (in: Three for the Chair)	1957
March-April 1956	Easter Parade (in: And Four to Go)	1958
April 1956	Might as Well Be Dead	1956
May-June 1957	If Death Ever Slept	1957
July 1957	Fourth of July Picnic (in: And Four to Go)	1958
Summer 1957	Murder Is No Joke (in: And Four to Go)	1958
March 1958	Champagne for One	1958
April 1958	Poison a la Carte (in: Three at Wolfe's Door)	1960

January 1959	Eeny Meeny Murder Mo (in: Homicide Trinity)	1962
May-June 1959	Plot It Yourself	1959
September 1959	Method Three for Murder (in: Three at Wolfe's Door)	1960
October 1959	The Rodeo Murder (in: Three at Wolfe's Door)	1960
January 1960	Death of a Demon (in: Homicide Trinity)	1962
May 1960	Too Many Clients	1960
December 1960	Kill Now-Pay Later (in: Trio for Blunt Instruments)	1964
Winter 1960/1961	Counterfeit for Murder (in: Homicide Trinity)	1962
April-May 1961	The Final Deduction	1961
September 1961	Murder Is Corny (in: Trio for Blunt Instruments)	1964
February 1962	Gambit	1962
✓ June-July 1962	The Mother Hunt	1963
August 1962	Blood Will Tell (in: Trio for Blunt Instruments)	1964
Feb.-March 1964	A Right to Die	1964
January 1965	The Doorbell Rang	1965
Jan.-Feb. 1966	Death of a Doxy	1966
Aug.-Sept. 1967	The Father Hunt	1968
August 1968	Death of a Dude	1969
Summer 1969	Please Pass the Guilt	1973
October 1974	A Family Affair	1975

The following books by Rex Stout are not detective novels and have been omitted from the chronology:

*How Like a God, Seed on the Wind, Golden Remedy, Forest Fire, The President Vanishes, O Careless Love and Mr. Cinderella.*