

Mr. Pinelli

*“The United States Department of Justice’s organized crime unit requested a background check of Mafia leader Anthony Pinelli who has a wide acquaintance with the hoodlum element from the Midwest and East...” “...Pinelli was being paged to assume leadership for the jailed Sam Giancana...” “...in addition to Giacana, Pinelli is an associate of Tony Accardo in the Costa Nostra crime syndicate...” “...the hoodlum Anthony Pinelli is a former gambling and vice boss for the Chicago syndicate” “...Pinelli is suspected of being an investor of hoodlum money in legitimate enterprises on the East Coast and Puerto Rico...” “... Chicago police are wondering what the palaver was all about at a northwest suburban hoodlum restaurant when Anthony Pinelli Federal Bureau of Investigation No 9266676, the Chicago and northern Indiana gambling and rackets boss, ended his self-imposed exile in Sierra Madre, California, by flying in to meet top hoodlums such as Sam Giancana, FBI No. 675538; Tony Accardo, FBI No. 908635 ; Jimmy Fratiano, FBI No. 82558; Simone Scozzari, FBI No. 4972308; Joey Aioppa FBI No. 92677; Black Joe Amato FBI No. FBI No. 922282; Frank Caruso FBI No. 921438; Joe Sica, FBI No. 343378; Angelo Polizzi, FBI No. 9210157; Sam Farruggia FBI No. 9268231; Leonard Gianola FBI No. 92735; Joseph Glimco FBI No. 92735; Vincent Inserro FBI No. 921520; Leo Manfredi FBI No. 921294; Frank Orlando FBI No. 921367; Anthony Ricci FBI No. 92407; Frank Desimone, FBI No.7707; Tony Mirabile FBI No. 90227...”*

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People in Sierra Madre barely remember the short and stocky man with gray hair and brown eyes and an inch long scar on the side of his chin who dressed in superior gray suits and snap brim hats, who once remarked “The Mafia? Whatsa that? You tella me if there’s a Mafia and I tella you ifa l’ma in it.” This was Anthony Pinelli whose Justice Department, Internal Revenue, Treasury Department, and Immigration and Naturalization Service aliases were Antonio Pinelli, Joe Ferro, Joe Legno, Tony Melton, and Frank Helsey. Born on October 30, 1899, in the notorious province of Calascibetta, Sicily, he was age twelve when he got aboard the SS Martha Washington to immigrate to the U.S. and made landfall in New York. It was 1911. Twenty years later, in 1931, he was in Chicago where he had his first brush with the law: caught with an illegal distillery, he pleaded guilty; was convicted anyway; and for violating the National Prohibition Act, was fined \$500 and sentenced to six months in DeKalb County penitentiary. By the 1940s the FBI had him down as a Mafia kingpin who was an olive oil importer, grape broker, and restaurateur who ran the football card, juke box, and pinball machine rackets of East Chicago and Gary and Hammond, Indiana.

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In the late 1940s Mr. Pinelli left the Midwest and migrated to California. No body in the FBI knew why he picked Sierra Madre as a place to live, but he was put under surveillance with a tap on his telephone. Mr. Pinelli found out about the tap and when he needed to call long-distance to Chicago, Gary, and Hammond he avoided it by using the pay phone of Al Foxton's Chevron gas station downtown. In 1953, when two very important Sicilian mobsters, Giancana and Accardo, flew into Los Angeles en route to Las Vegas, Mr. Pinelli greeted them at LAX. Greeting them too, as a favor to the FBI, were elements of the Los Angeles police department who made Giancana and Accardo so unwelcome that they flew on to Las Vegas. Mr. Pinelli was interrogated and declared himself to be completely legitimate.

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In 1954, Mr. Pinelli became a land baron, on Sierra Madre's west end, an occupation he held until his death. This activity began on August 14 when Mr. Pinelli appeared before the city planning commission and city council to receive approval to develop a subdivision. Over time, his properties, in the FBI's estimate, spread like an octopus. They included seven lots and five homes. The main house on 500 West Montecito was an impressive edifice with nine rooms including three bedrooms, three bathrooms, rumpus room in the basement and a swimming pool.

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*Wealthy Sierra Madre Man Linked With The Mafia* reported the Los Angeles Mirror on June 10, 1959, the date of Mr. Pinelli's celebrity hearing before the Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor and Management Fields. Mr. Pinelli invoked the Fifth Amendment 41 times and wasn't charged with doing anything wrong...

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The FBI had had its turn with Pinelli and now it was the Internal Revenue Department that wanted him for income tax evasion during 1957, 1958 and 1959. When Mr. Pinelli temporarily disappeared an IRS bulletin went out: *MAY BE ARMED AND SHOULD BE CONSIDERED DANGEROUS*. He was arrested; let go; re-arrested; set free again; and ultimately made to pay \$2000 in fines.

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"The only way America will be safe is to break up the nationwide syndicate and deport Pinelli and other hoodlums," thundered a Republican senator from Kansas. So in 1969 Mr. Pinelli was arrested by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. But instead of being deported back to Calascitetta he posted a \$10,000 bond, was released, and got to remain in Sierra Madre.

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Mr. Pinelli's health had been failing for years and he died in 1974, aged 72, not in Sierra Madre but at Desert Hospital in Palm Springs. The funeral took place at St. Rita's. A future mayor of Sierra Madre rode in the procession's lead Cadillac. (2012)