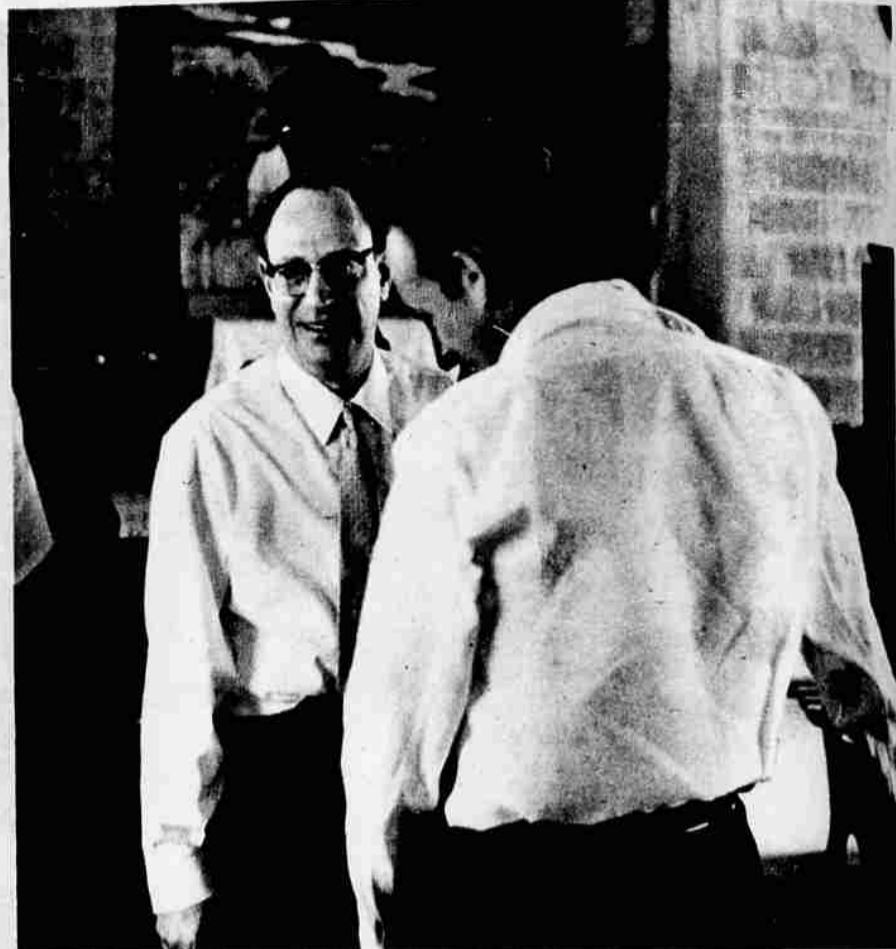


What's Happened to Leopold in Puerto Rico?

35 years ago, he was sentenced, with Loeb, for his vicious crime; today he is in an isolated, back-country hospital still seeking to atone



Leopold began his austere life as lab technician aware of the world's scrutiny.



He's "free" within the confines of the missionary hospital, where he works for mankind, but Leopold remains a prisoner of his elusive search for inner peace.

By Arthur Massolo

ON THE VERANDA of a weather-beaten building in the desolate Puerto Rican hills, natives are accustomed to seeing a short, balding, middle-aged man staring at the distant mountains. On his face is a reflective expression of deep suffering. Here is a man haunted by the memory of a monstrous act of violence he committed as a teenager.

His name is Nathan Leopold.

It was 35 years ago on July 21 when Leopold and Richard Loeb, scions of wealthy Chicago families, went on trial for the brutal thrill-slaying of 14-year-old Bobby Franks, a crime that aroused the wrath of the nation.

Defense attorney Clarence Darrow, the legendary champion of lost causes, could hardly question his youthful clients' guilt in the face of the appalling facts. Instead, in a classic courtroom maneuver, he put the society which had produced them on trial.

So effectively did he pursue his case that Judge John R. Caverly ignored the prosecution's demand that the boys hang, and doomed them to life imprisonment plus 99 years. He admonished prison authorities "never to admit these defendants to parole."

Loeb, who masterminded and executed the "perfect" murder, was killed by a fellow prisoner in 1936. Leopold became a legend in the world of shadows and steel. A model prisoner, he mastered a score of languages, became an authority in ornithology, developed the prison library and, served as a human guinea pig in malaria research.

He found time, too, to repent his deed.

On Feb. 20, 1958, after more than a third of a century behind the walls of Joliet prison, a prediction that Darrow had made to Leopold was realized. "The day will come when society will accept the idea that somehow every debt must be considered paid," the attorney had written to him when the future seemed bleakest.

Despite outraged protests, Leopold was paroled to serve out five years as a laboratory technician in the Church of the Brethren missionary hospital in Castañer, Puerto Rico.

There, deep in the island's rugged, isolated coffee country, he is seeking his redemption in service to mankind.

As yet, redemption has eluded him.

Ramon Perez, the director of the Puerto Rican parole system, claims that Leopold is "one of my best parole cases," but admits: "No, Leopold's rehabilitation is not complete. He still presses too hard. He is too anxious to impress the parole board with the completeness of his moral redemption to have found inner peace."

Leopold's existence as a \$10-a-month x-ray and lab technician is ascetic. One visitor to the hospital commented, "I don't see how he's much better off here than in prison. His living conditions were probably better there."

To Nathan Leopold, however, there is a difference: the air he breathes is free.

The Church of the Brethren hospital is poor. Luxuries for personnel are nonexistent. Leopold's almost bare room in a ramshackle CCC barracks is divided by a curtain. On the side nearest the door is a desk with two chairs. On the battered desk is a typewriter. The cramped space on the other side of the curtain is his sleeping quarters. You get an overwhelming impression of monastic drabness.

Yet Leopold expresses satisfaction with his Spartan life of today. His only complaint—he hasn't voiced it, but you sense it—is that the rigid terms of his parole curtail the intellectual pursuits of a man with an inquisitive mind and a genius IQ.

Although he is painfully retiring, Leopold has made many friends on the island. "Nobody ever called me Nathan but my mother," he recalls. At prison it was always "Nate" or "Babe." But now everybody at the hospital calls him Nathan.

The female employees—all much younger than he—use his name in a special way. They seem protective and motherly toward him. In the hospital's main building, the *casa grande*, where single girls on the administrative staff live, there's a snack bar where they relax at night. Sometimes Leopold visits with them.

"We always look forward to Nathan's visits," one girl says. "He doesn't talk much and he seems embarrassed when we ask him about himself, but he's such a gentle man! We all feel he's paid for his horrible crime, and we want to help him repent if he feels he must do more."

AFTER 35 YEARS in prison, Leopold is acutely aware of the wonders of nature he had known only through his books. "Isn't that a nightingale?" he asked excitedly one day, seeing a graceful bird soar in the sky. "I've never seen one before. They're more beautiful than all the pictures

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