

LAZZARI

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born.

The murders in the sculptor's studio sent shock waves through Boca, a rather sleepy town at the time, said Sue Gillis, curator of the Boca Raton Historical Society & Museum.

"At that time, this was still a very small town — 700 ... 800 people," Gillis said. "So it was very dramatic and very impactful. It was horrible."

Arlene Owens was only 4 years old when the news hit. Though the longtime Boca Raton resident had no involvement in the case, Owens recalls how people talked about it for years during her childhood.

"We didn't like anything that wasn't solved," said Owens, 70. "It was a small town and that left you with the possibility of a murderer walking among us."

Well-known artist

Leno Lazzari was something of a celebrity.

The Duke of Windsor had commissioned him to produce a piece called, "The Rainbow Fountain." His creations adorned landmarks like the Surfcomber Hotel in South Beach and Rollins College in Winter Park. He also donated a work to Boca's parks that has since disappeared.

Before opening a studio in tony Palm Beach on Worth Avenue, Lazzari had been a race car driver, an anti-fascist foot soldier, and a boxer. As a portrait artist, though, he counted First Lady Grace Coolidge, H.L.



BOCA RATON HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM/COURTESY

A Lazzari monument stood at a pavilion at the east end of Palmetto Park Road. The Lazzaris are to the left of the anchor.

home from a dinner gathering in West Palm Beach. They were apparently surprised by their killer, who left the scene in their Jeep, according to police records.

Crime-scene photos show the couple sprawled on the floor next to their bed. A package of vermicelli appears to have tumbled from Louise Lazzari's grasp. Leno Lazzari's body was curled up in the fetal position and one of the gunshots was in his groin.

No one was ever arrested. Franco Lazzari, Danilo Lazzari's grandfather and Leno Lazzari's son by his first marriage, was briefly taken into police custody soon after the murders were discovered. They tested his hands for gunpowder and checked his alibis before he was released the next day.

The Lazzari family's yearning to find out more connected them with someone else intrigued by the case.



MARK RANDALL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Author Sally J. Ling and Danilo Lazzari, of Germany, try to find the site of Leno Lazzari's art studio on Federal Highway.

active juices flowing, she said, especially after she discovered the family had only one piece of the sculptor's art in their possession.

Ling got the idea that writing another book, a novel

record has some unanswered questions.

An interview with Leno Lazzari's first wife, Julia Lazzari, revealed that perhaps the sculptor was too well loved, according to the investigation report.

Tracing a life

1927: Leno Lazzari and his wife, Julia, arrive in the United States.

1929: Leno and Julia Lazzari separate; they have one son, Franco.

1933: Officially divorced, Leno Lazzari marries his second wife, Emily Woods of Jacksonville. They divorce in 1939.

1940: Leno and Louise Lazzari marry.

1942: Leno Lazzari shows his art at the prestigious West Palm Beach Society of the Four Arts.

Nov. 14, 1948: Leno and Louise Lazzari are slain.

1:05 p.m. Nov. 14, 1948:

The bodies of Leno and Louise Lazzari are discovered by a family friend and intended dinner guest for that evening. She flags down a passing policeman in a state of excitement, according to the investigations report.

Later Nov. 14, 1948: Leno Lazzari's son, Franco Lazzari, is booked by the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office and briefly held until the next morning (Nov. 15) as police verify his whereabouts and test his hands for gunpowder.

7:35 a.m. Nov. 15, 1948:

The Lazzari Jeep is found nearly 30 miles from the scene of the crime, near the Florida East Coast Railway, at the corner of Dixie Highway and Third Street in West Palm Beach.

Nov. 17, 1948: Franco Lazzari complains to a probate judge that the man appointed curator of the Lazzari estate, identified in the investigations report as

Leno Lazzari did of his grandmother and the story behind it.

After Hertz's grandmother had stopped at Lazzari's Palm Beach studio, before he moved to Boca, to admire the displayed portraits, Lazzari had begged the then-42-year-old to sit for a portrait, Hertz said.

But his grandmother didn't have the money for the extravagance. Still, he had her sit in front of him for 30 minutes anyway and told her to come back in a week, Hertz said.

"At that time, he presented her with a wonderful portrait, refusing payment, asking instead for a kiss," Hertz said. "My lovely grandma obliged and about 60 years later, she laughed when she related the story."

Danilo said making the trip to Boca has given him a profound feeling of connection with his great-grandfather in ways he never expected. He said he is following in his great-grand-