

Merola Says Berkowitz's Diaries May Link Slayer to 2,000 Fires

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David R. Berkowitz, a onetime volunteer fireman in the Bronx, may have set 2,000 blazes—most in that borough—in the four years before he was arrested in August 1977 for six murders, the Bronx District Attorney said yesterday.

District Attorney Mario Merola stunned spectators in Supreme Court in Brooklyn when he interrupted proceedings in the .44-caliber killer case to announce that the man who yesterday admitted to being the "Son of Sam" slayer might also have been the "Phantom of the Bronx" who set fires in brush, abandoned cars and buildings.

Mr. Merola offered as evidence diaries kept by Mr. Berkowitz and found in his apartment. They are a record of blazes that note times, locations, weather conditions and fire-box numbers. Some are near the spots where the .44-caliber killer later killed one of his victims.

No Firm Proof Offered

"There's no question in my mind that he's a firebug," Mr. Merola said at one point. But later he added that of his own knowledge, "I don't know whether he's just a fire buff who called in fires or he set them."

He said that while there had not been time to check all the diary entries—

which list 1,411 fires, with the looseleaf book for 1976 missing—spot checks revealed that many of the blazes had indeed occurred. But whether Mr. Berkowitz set them himself or merely picked them up on the fire scanner radio receiver that he apparently had in his car, is still open to question.

So, too, is the question of why Mr. Merola's 11-hour disclosure was necessary. Mr. Berkowitz's possessions, among them the diary, have been with the Police Property Clerk's office since his arrest.

Entries Note Many Fires

Mr. Merola said that only in recent weeks had he been informed of the diary by Ira Jultak, one of Mr. Berkowitz's lawyers. The district attorney added that there had not yet been time to determine whether any of the fires had been fatal ones, or whether anyone else had been charged with them.

One log sheet in Mr. Berkowitz's notebook shows 11 entries in a single day for fires in different parts of the Bronx. Another shows a fire in the Bronx at 10:30 P.M. on April 16. Five hours later, Mr. Berkowitz said at his pleading yesterday, he murdered Valentina Suriani and

DATE	Box	Location	W/58	WORK	Time	Weather
4/2/77	6699	82 Ave. + 217 St.		Q	18-24	0025 COOL CLEAR
4/2/77	6452	61 Ave. + 262 St.		Q	92	0115 COOL CLEAR
4/2/77		MARATHON PKWY. + THEIBES AVE		Q	19-21	0125 COOL CLEAR
4/16/77	4373 (TA)	Adee + Edson		Bx	1+2	2230 WARM CLEAR
5/24/77	4361 (TAS)	E. CUNNINGHAM RD. + MACE		Bx	19-22	1200 HOT CLEAR
5/26/77	3595	Webster bet. CUNNINGHAM + E. 233		Bx	18-23	0600 WARM CLEAR
5/26/77	2245 (ERS)	RIVER + E. 151 ST.		Bx	19-23	2120 WARM CLEAR
6/2/77	4373 (TA)	Adee + Edson		Bx	1+2	0645 WARM CLEAR
6/16/77	4027 (TAS)	Ferry Point Park		Bx	19-22	1100 HOT CLEAR
7/2/77	7139	40th Ave. + 11 ST.		Q	92	0600 WARM CLEAR
7/3/77	2830	BAY SHORE PKWY. + BAY 13 ST.		K	18-23	0340 WARM CLEAR
7/3/77	3848	13th Ave + 78 ST		K	18-23	0400 WARM CLEAR
7/3/77	2830	BAY SHORE PKWY. + BAY 13 ST.		K	18-23	0410 WARM CLEAR
7/4/77	2248 (ERS)	Park + E. 151 ST		Bx	18-22	2235 HOT CLEAR
7/5/77	4426	BAYCHESTER + DARROW		Bx	1+2	0210 HOT

Page from a notebook reportedly found in David R. Berkowitz's apartment

Alexander Esau in another part of the borough.

And on July 3, Mr. Berkowitz's diary shows two fires only a half hour apart on the corner of Bay Shore Parkway and Bay 13 Street in Bensonhurst. Nearby is the spot where Stacy Moskowitz, the .44-caliber killer's last victim died.

If Mr. Berkowitz was indeed the "Phantom of the Bronx," he followed much the same pattern as he did when he left letters for the police after the "Son of

Sam" shootings. The "phantom" frequently phoned the Fire Department about arson fires and identified himself by that name.

Mr. Merola said he had not revealed the possible fire connection before yesterday because he was concerned about destroying the careful mechanism that had been worked out to accommodate Mr. Berkowitz's guilty pleas.

"We did not want to upset the possibility of taking those pleas," he said.