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Caspar Holstein --1

1300

From rags to riches an old and time worn theme that can do nothing but describe Caspar Holstein most adequately. A black Horatio Algers who was born in Christiansted, largest town on the Island of St. Croix, in what was then the Danish West Indies, ^{AND} who arrived ^{IN AMERICA} with his mother in 1894. He attended Brooklyn public ~~high~~ school and graduated from Boy's High School. And the death of his mother prevented further progress.

Numbers were destined to play a most important part in the life this modern midas. His mother sent him with a message to a servant in one of the leading families of Brooklyn--- the Roes and Chrysties--- Mrs. Chrysties in turn sent him to 124 Putnam Street. After reaching his destination, Holstein realized that he had been given a wrong number. Not to be outdone he rang all the doorbells along the street that had the figure four. He finally found the right number which was 114. He was commended for his ^{resourcefulness} ~~perseverance~~ by the Chrysties, and as a reward was offered a job.

The grandmother in the family---Mrs. Roe--- was blind, and Holstein's new job was to read every afternoon to her. Coming this close to the family he made them his friends--- a friendship that lasted until the last Chrysties died.

Many persons have inquired how and where Holstein got

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his start in the financial world. G. James Fleming in his articles on Caspar Holstein intimated that the Chyrties were the basis for his amazing rise financially. This family was counted among New York's ~~finest~~ leading citizens, and had Chrysties street named after them. John A. Chrysties a member of the famil was a partner of the Wall street firm of Chrysties and Janney.(1)

The years passed by and the family fell into dire financial reverses. Caspar Holstein supplied their every need from 1921 to 1933. He placed them in a West 93rd street apartment, in keeping with their former standards. At the death of Mrs. Chrysties he was the only mourner in the family pew, except another relative.

There were two other men in the life os Holstein that were given credit for teaching him the art of making two pennies from one. Their paths crossed his while he was a bell-hop in one of New Yorkk's hotels. They owned a stable of horses, including "Agitator", a successful racer of the period. Asked about these men, Holstein thought their names might have been "Smith". They placed bets for the bekl-hop, and he Holstein was able to lay by quite a sum.

Holstein joined the United States Navy, served four years and eight months, saved his money, quit, and then returned to bell-hopping. He then went to Chicago and studied embalming and still considers himself, "a fairly good one in a pinch", although he did not complete the course and has never practised it.

Around 1929 the royal raiment of policy king was draped

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around the shoulders of Caspar. He wore this mantle for a number of years, indeed a very rich mantle that is said to have covered a person capable of taking in many thousands of dollars a day.

J. Saunders Redding's "playing the Numbers", in the North American Review, described Holstein as having the prosaic traits of a financier, with the dizzy, imaginative flights of a fingerless Midas. The article continues to say that Holstein came in after the old policy game had been wiped out. The numbers genius supposedly studied the totals of the Clearing House for several months. From these studies he devised the simple scheme of selecting three digits, two from the first total, and one from the second total, by an unvarying rule.(2)

In a year it was reported that he owned three of the finest apartment houses in Harlem, a fleet of expensive motor cars, a home on Long Island, and several thousand acres of land in Virginia.

Although the play was loaded 999 to 1 against the player, (six dollars for a penny hit) Negroes hopped aboard the bandwagon in droves. Any get-rich-Washington scheme was all right to them. Discriminated against in every way, they asked what could they lose. Jobs were like finding a needle in a haystack, and rents were double in the black ghetto. Living off the lean of the land was no cinch.... so they took a chance.

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Installments on the furniture, and to keep the wolves of the butcher, baker and candlestick maker from their heels, went numberward. Hadn't they bought lots that were later found under water, had they not invested in oil wells that never yielded anything, had they not supported schemes for a black Utopia, take a chance, one hit and you're made.

Guessing evidently was not so good, for the players. The police maintained that Holstein milked at least \$5000 a day from poor harlemites.

As long as the game was confined largely to colored persons, municipal authorities did little or nothing about it, but after the whites hopped aboard this great guessing game, it took on a national menace.

Operations were from Portland to Savannah; Towns in New Jersey seethed with the activities of the number barons. In Philadelphia one city official, realizing the perniciousness of the evil, tried to get police ^{back} to wipe it out. Officials of several insurance companies, it is charged, had combined efforts to do away with the Clearing House figures, as they were losing thousands of dollars each year. Their concerted efforts were overridden within a week and the numbers were flourishing ~~with~~ ^{AGAIN} ~~week~~. (3)

Holstein, a spectacular ~~figure~~ ~~figure~~ figure by 1933 was kidnaped during this year. Many whispers said that he had been hit heavy on a certain number and did not want to pay off, and had just disappeared for a short time. There were all kinds of versions, but it seems that a group of white gangsters held him for \$50,000. (4)
(Vincent Coll's gang said to be the perpetrators)

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This writer wonders if more than \$50,000 was the reason for the kidnapping. In reviewing the publicity that has been given to the numbers racket, it seems as if Arthur (Dutch Schultz) Flengenheimer invaded Harlem at that time. "Dutch" is said to have been placed in Harlem by Max Romney, a part owner of the Sunset Beer Garden, at 760 St. Nicholas Avenue. (5)

Chief deputy Inspector David J. McAuliffe, sent detectives Paul Twilley and Elmer Duckett to investigate the Harlem policy complaint. Holstein was arrested December 23, 1935, and held in \$5000 bail. Holstein denied ownership of the policy, but admitted owning the Turf Club, 111 West 136th Street, of which he was ~~xxxxpresidentxxxx~~ and still is the president. At the time of this arrest, Holstein claimed to be a real estate man living at 128 West 135th Street. The New York Times also mentioned that Holstein's fortune had dwindled considerably since "Dutch" had stepped into Harlem.

The Times continued to say that He ~~xxx~~ (Holstein) was a facile orator, a delver in politics, ~~and~~ reputed to have made large sums in real estate, and a plunger on the horses. He was quoted as being open handed with his funds, having fed and clothed hundreds of Harlem Negroes, and provided higher education for many. He is said to have sent \$2000 annually of his own money to the Virgin Islands to help the needy and as president of the New York Virgin Islands Association he raised large sums for relief there. In 1934 he was active in opposing the administration of the Islands. (An appointment made by President Hoover.)

At the time of the arrest, Holstein gave this statement to the press. "All that stuff about me being a millionaire is

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bosh, but the papers have reported it so often many people believe it. He also stated that he had only seen Dutch Schultz once, when he was pointed out to him ~~once~~ at a prize fight in Madison Square Garden."

After white backers took over the "game" with their cut-throat method of competition ~~xxx~~ less and less was heard about Holstein along those lines. In later years he invested successfully in first mortgages, through the firm of Louis Jacobson, 299 Broadway, and he financed the building of several houses in Nepperham, New York, for Negroes.

Sixty-five miles in the interior of the Republic of Liberia is a Baptist School, supported by the Abyssinian Baptist Church and other American Baptists, and on its campus is the Caspar Holstein Hall --- a dormitory for girls, erected from a gift of \$1000 in American money from Holstein.

In Gary Indiana is a home for children whose parents have deserted them, and in that house is a placque honoring Holstein, who gives his checks in four figures which, to a great extent, made the building possible.

There is in Indianapolis a young man doing a successful business, but he would never have finished Columbia University and earned his degree, if Holstein had not paid his expenses the last two years of his course.

He contributed to both Jewish and Catholic Charities. Every Christmas he donated as ~~any~~ as five hundred baskets to the poor of Harlem.

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He gave endlessly to the Garvey Movement, because he ~~believed~~ believed it was worth while for the race. He bought the property at 112-130 West 138th Street the site of the "Old Liberty Hall". When the Vincent Sanitarium was planned Holstein loaned \$20,500 for the project, because he saw the enterprise as an opportunity for Negro physicians. He founded and spent a fortune on the Monarch Lodge NO.45, a branch of the ~~XXXXXX~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ I.B.P.O.E. of W.

Holstein was again in print in 1938. The Authorities that be, wanted information about the almost fatal shooting of Fats Waller in front of his Turf Club. Caspar denied that it had happened in front of His place, but that Waller and his mixed group were several doors down ~~the~~ the block from the club building. (6)

In the early part of the build-up of the Hines Case in this same year the numbers had Holstein called to headquarters again. Mr. Dewey it seems felt that Holstein was no longer in the great game of guessing.

Caspar Holstein in 1939 has again returned to the spirit world of the digits with Madam Stephanie St. Clair, a former number queen, and many others.

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