

0. THE ELECTRIC CHAIR - Story Preface

1. WHO WAS ALBERT FISH?

2. YOUTHFUL TRAUMA

3. THE SETUP

4. KIDNAP OF GRACE BUDD

5. FISH TAKES THE BAIT

6. THE ARREST

7. THE UNSPEAKABLE

8. THE TRIAL

9. THE ELECTRIC CHAIR

The "death house" was the place where death-penalty prisoners met their end in Sing Sing's electric chair. Death in the chair (invented in 1887 by an employee of Thomas Edison) was particularly gruesome. Although he was in charge of at least 300 Sing Sing executions, Warden Lewis Lawes did not support the death penalty. Legend has it that Albert Fish looked forward to this "supreme thrill." Other reports, however, depict a man who did not want to die.

It didn't take long for the Court of Appeals to turn down Dempsey's request to spare his client's life. The Governor of New York, Herbert Lehman, went through the motions of listening to a plea for clemency. It, too, was denied.

Less than a year after his trial, Hamilton Albert Fish was at the end of his life. Shortly after 11 p.m. - on January 16, 1936 - Fish was strapped into the chair.

Harold Schechter, in Deranged, describes the end:

At the sight of the electric chair, Fish did not quail, as even the hardest men often did, though he did not seem like someone who was looking forward to the "supreme thrill" of his life, either. Hands clasped in prayer, he lowered himself into the chair and allowed the straps to be adjusted around his arms, legs and torso.

His face looked very pale in the instant before Robert Elliott, the gaunt, gray-haired executioner, slipped the black death mask over it. The leather cap with its electrode was fitted to the old man's close-shaven head. After fastening the chin-strap, Elliott stooped to secure the second electrode to Fish's right leg beneath the trouser slit. Then he stepped to the control panel.

Part of the legend surrounding the demise of the real-life model for Hannibal Lecter happened at the moment of his death. The needles that were part of his body were claimed to have short-circuited the first effort to end his life. Schechter, however, disputes that:

Afterward, stories circulated that the needles in the old man's body had produced a burst of blue sparks when the electricity was activated. But this was simply part of the folklore that grew up around Fish in the following years. There were no pyrotechnics. Fish died like other men.

By 11:09 p.m. Fish was dead. Nothing Hannibal Lecter could ever do on screen would be as bad as Hamilton Albert Fish did in real life.

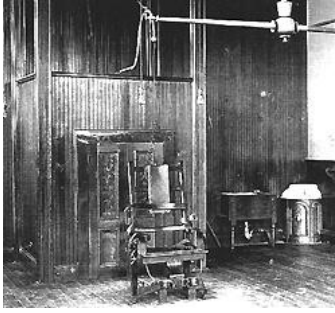
NOTE: If you would like more details about the life of Hamilton Albert Fish, you can visit the Crime Library's story about him. Keep in mind this **WARNING:** That site contains explicit details about his crimes.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-ELECTRIC-CHAIR-Hannibal-Lecter-and-Albert-Fish)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-ELECTRIC-CHAIR-Hannibal-Lecter-and-Albert-Fish)

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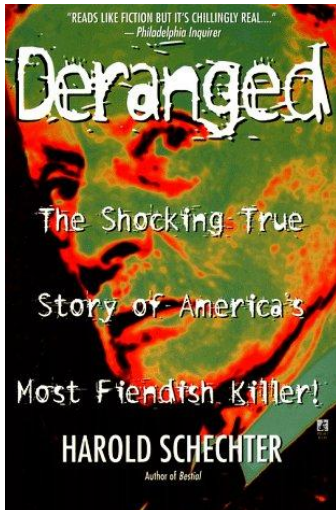


Death House at Sing Sing

Image of Sing Sing's electric chair, online courtesy Sites at Google.

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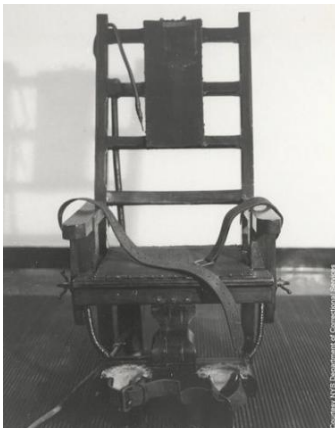
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Deranged - by Herold Schechter

Image online, courtesy Amazon.

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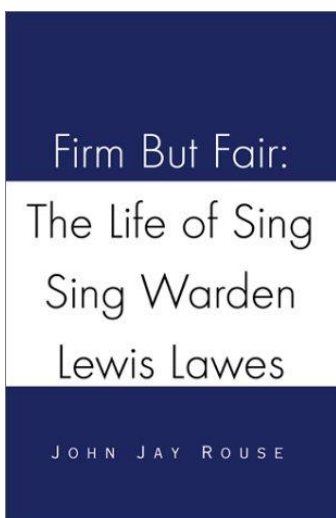


Electric Chair at Sing Sing Prison

Image, described above, online courtesy New York State Dept. of Correctional Services.

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Firm But Fair: The Life of Sing Sing Warden, Lewis Lawes

Book-cover image online, courtesy Amazon.

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Straps on Sing Sing's Electric Chair

Image of Sing Sing's electric chair, online courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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