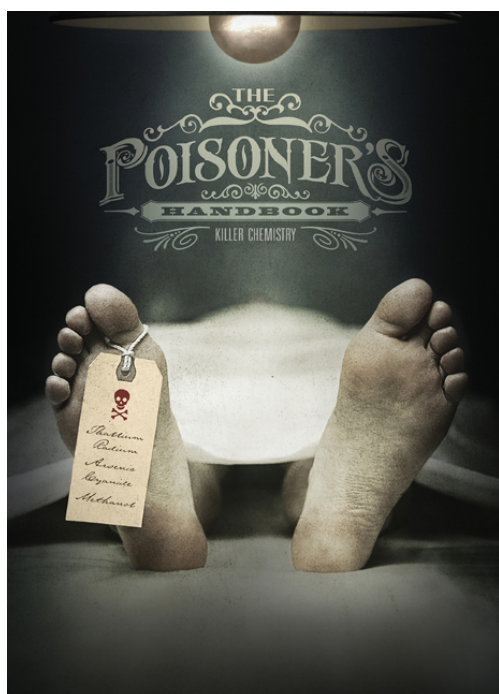


25 YEARS

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Presents *The Poisoner's Handbook*

The Story of How New York City's Pioneering Medical Examiner and His Chief Toxicologist Transformed Crime-Solving by Using Science

Premieres Tuesday, January 7, 2014
8:00 - 10:00 p.m. ET on PBS



In 1918, on the brink of becoming the largest metropolis in the world, New York City hired Charles Norris as its first scientifically trained medical examiner. Over the course of a decade and a half, Norris and his extraordinarily driven and talented chief toxicologist, Alexander Gettler, turned forensic chemistry into a formidable science, sending impatient heirs, jilted lovers, and desperate debtors to the electric chair. Written and directed by Rob Rapley and based on Deborah Blum's bestselling book of the same title, *The Poisoner's Handbook* premieres on AMERICAN EXPERIENCE on Tuesday, January 7, 2014 at 8:00 p.m. ET ([check local listings](#)).

In the early 1900s, the average American medicine cabinet was a would-be poisoner's treasure chest. Deadly chemicals such as radioactive radium, thallium, potassium cyanide, and morphine lurked in health tonics, depilatory creams, teething medicine and cleaning supplies. While the tools of the murderer's trade multiplied as the pace of industrial innovation increased, the scientific knowledge and political will to detect and prevent crime lagged behind. Unnatural deaths were handled by the coroner, a position

handed out to the corrupt and unqualified as political payback. New York's coroners were particularly notorious for taking kickbacks from funeral homes and changing death certificates for a price.

All this changed when Norris, the scion of one of Philadelphia's wealthiest families, and Gettler, the son of poor immigrants, were hired. Against the opposition of corrupt politicians and powerful industrialists, Norris and Gettler reinvented criminal investigation and led the first campaigns against the dangers of a new chemical age. Determined to fight corruption and use science to explain the causes of violent or suspicious deaths, Norris and Gettler pioneered a justice system based on forensic science instead of cronyism. They also forced corporations and governments to regulate the chemicals used in workplaces and consumer products.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL INSURANCE. MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS. AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.

Featuring interviews with renowned medical examiners Marcella Fierro and Michael Baden, historians, and science writers, ***The Poisoner's Handbook*** looks back at Norris and Gettler's most notorious cases, including the mysterious poisoning of the Jacksons who died in their New York apartment; the cold-hearted serial killer Fanny Creighton; the death and dismemberment of Anna Fredericksen; the fatal radium poisoning of the dial painter girls at a New Jersey watch factory; and the battle with Standard Oil over leaded gasoline. While Norris passed away in 1935, Alexander Gettler remained New York's chief toxicologist until his retirement in 1959. Together, one autopsy and one case at a time, Norris and Gettler elevated forensic science into a highly respected discipline that has revolutionized the justice system in America.

In conjunction with the broadcast, the AMERICAN EXPERIENCE website (pbs.org/americanexperience) will launch "Tales from the Poisoner's Handbook," an interactive online graphic novel for viewers, students and teachers. Using four actual case studies of lethal poisons, players find the visual evidence, chemical trails, and supporting evidence to uncover the truth and are introduced to the basics of biochemistry, including the impact of poisons on the human body.

The Poisoner's Handbook will be available on DVD on January 8, 2014, or for online viewing on pbs.org.

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About the Participants, in Order of Appearance

Dr. Marcella Fierro is the former chief medical examiner for the Commonwealth of Virginia. She co-directs the Virginia Institute of Forensic Science and Medicine, offering weeklong courses on topics such as advanced death investigation to medical examiners, crime scene investigators, judges, law enforcement investigators, prosecutors, forensic scientists, nurses and others working in forensic science. Dr. Fierro's skill and dedication inspired mystery writer Patricia Cornwell to write a series of crime novels in which the protagonist, Kay Scarpetta, was modeled after Dr. Fierro.

Colin Evans is the author of 17 books dealing with forensics and true crime including *The Father of Forensics*, *The Casebook of Forensic Detection*, *Blood on the Table: The Greatest Cases of New York City's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner* and others.

Deborah Blum is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author whose books include *The Poisoner's Handbook: Murder and the Birth of Forensic Medicine in Jazz Age New York* and *Angel Killer: A True Story of Cannibalism, Crime Fighting, and Insanity in New York City*.

David J. Krajicek has been telling crime stories for more than 30 years, as an author and a newspaperman. Since 1999, he has been writing *The Justice Story*, a weekly true crime feature that has been running in the *New York Daily News* for nearly a century. He was also a special correspondent for Court TV's *Crime Library* and has appeared frequently on television as a crime expert including on *The Today Show* and Dominick Dunne's *Power, Privilege and Justice* on Court TV.

Dr. Michael M. Baden is a board certified forensic pathologist and the former Chief Medical Examiner of New York City. In addition to maintaining a private practice, Dr. Baden is the co-Director of the New York State Police Medico-Legal Investigation Unit. He was the Chairman of the Forensic Pathology Panel of the U.S. Congress Select Committee on Assassinations that investigated the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. Baden has been involved as an expert in forensic pathology in many cases of international interest, including the examination of the remains of Tsar Nicholas of Russia and his family, the death of John Belushi, the re-autopsy of Medgar Evers, the re-examination of the Lindbergh kidnapping and murder, and autopsies of the victims of TWA Flight 800. He has also published factual accounts of several of his cases in the books *Unnatural Death*, *Confessions of a Medical Examiner* and *Dead Reckoning: The New Science of Catching Killers*.

Michael Lerner is the principal of Bard High School Early College in New York City and the author of *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City*.

About the Filmmakers

Produced and Directed By	Rob Rapley
Edited By	Don Kleszy
Cinematography By	Tim Cragg
Story By	Michelle Ferrari
Telescript By	Rob Rapley
Co-Produced By	Kathryn Lord
Music By	Nathan Halpern
Narrated By	Oliver Platt

The Poisoner's Handbook is an Apograph Productions film for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**.

Rob Rapley (Producer/Director) has worked with **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** on a number of projects, including the recent miniseries *The Abolitionists*, which played to over ten million viewers and received an Emmy nomination for Best Documentary Series. Rapley's other **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** programs include *The Greely Expedition*, *Buffalo Bill*, *Trail of Tears*, and *Wyatt Earp*, which won a Writers' Guild Award. He previously produced two episodes of the acclaimed PBS series on the Supreme Court, which *The Boston Globe* called "as good as it gets when it comes to history on public television." He has also been nominated for Primetime Emmy Awards for his work on Bill Moyers's *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* and Bobby McFerrin's *Loosely Mozart: The New Innovators of Classical Music*.

Mark Samels (Executive Producer) was named executive producer of **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**, PBS's flagship history series, in 2003. Under Samels' leadership, the series has been honored with nearly every industry award, including the Peabody, Primetime Emmys, the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award, Writers Guild Awards, Oscar nominations, and Sundance Film Festival Audience and Grand Jury Awards. Samels recently served on the Board of Governors at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Prior to joining WGBH, Samels worked as an independent documentary filmmaker, an executive producer for several U.S. public television stations, and as a producer for the first co-production between Japanese and American television. A native of Wisconsin, he is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

About AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Television's most-watched history series, **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2013. The series has been hailed as "peerless" (*The Wall Street Journal*), "the most consistently enriching program on television" (*Chicago Tribune*), and "a beacon of intelligence and purpose" (*Houston Chronicle*). On air and online, the series brings to life the incredible characters and epic stories that have shaped America's past and present. Acclaimed by viewers and critics alike, **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** documentaries have been honored with every major broadcast award, including 30 Emmy Awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, and 16 George Foster Peabody Awards, one most recently for the series represented by *Freedom Riders*, *Triangle Fire*, and *Stonewall Uprising*.

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