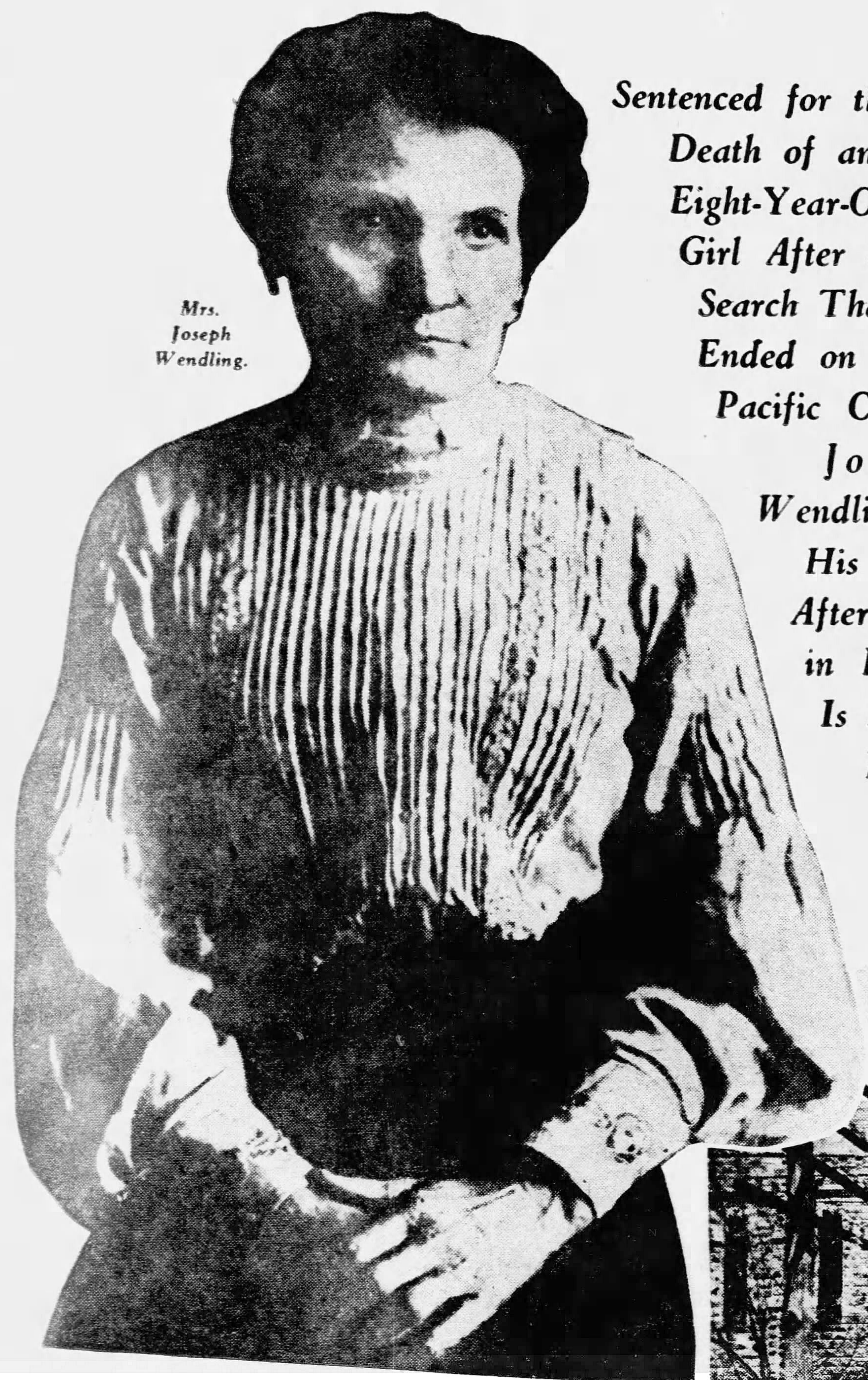
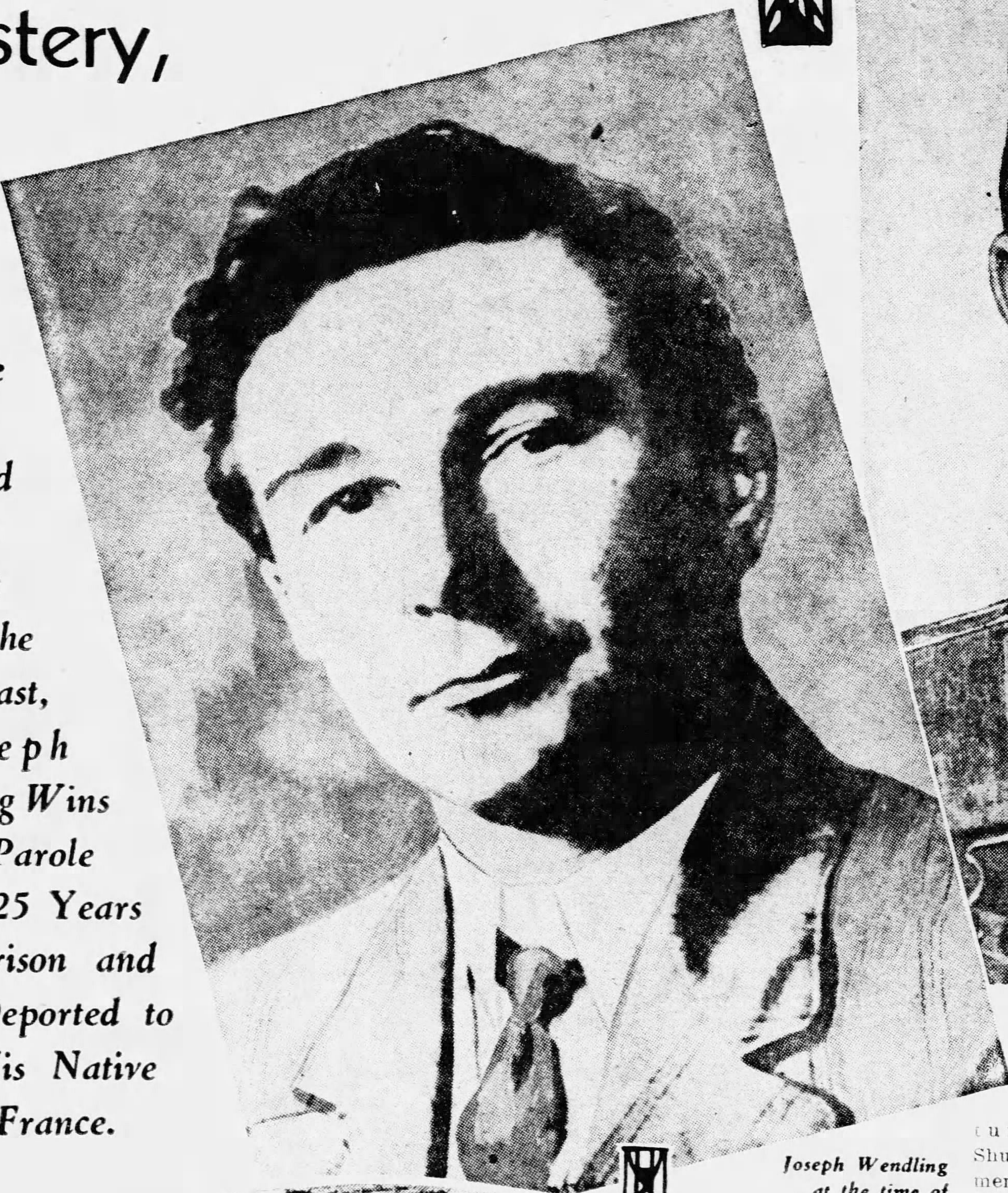


The 'Lifer,' Convicted in Louisville's Most Sensational Murder Mystery, Finally Goes Free



Mrs. Joseph Wendling.

Sentenced for the Death of an Eight-Year-Old Girl After a Search That Ended on the Pacific Coast, Joseph Wendling Wins His Parole After 25 Years in Prison and Is Deported to His Native France.



Joseph Wendling at the time of his conviction, and (right) as he appears today.



By a Special Correspondent of the Post-Dispatch Sunday Magazine



LOUISVILLE. HERE isn't a prisoner in Kentucky who has been confined as long as Joseph Wendling. Fourteen years at the State prison in Eddyville; never a look beyond the walls. Before that, almost a year in Jefferson County Jail. Altogether, Wendling, convicted in Louisville's most sensational murder mystery, has served 24 years of a life term, enough to break a man's spirit and mortify all instincts of kindness—but it hasn't had that effect. Almost throughout his term Joseph Wendling has served with exemplary resignation, bolstering his indomitable optimism with the often-expressed conviction that some day "they" would know him for innocent and let him go.

For 16 years of that term one man in Louisville who had testified against Wendling at his trial has managed to prevent his being paroled. Others have exhausted every means to secure an executive pardon, some of them being friends who never knew him until long after the sentence was imposed. But Frank Fehr, the Louisville brewer who has played the part of an implacable Nemesis to Wendling ever since the murder of Alma Kellner, Fehr's 8-year-old cousin, was discovered, is now the man responsible for the prisoner's parole and deportation to France. He says that he has never had the remotest doubt of Wendling's guilt, though (like the jury that nearly had him hanged) he founded this opinion entirely on circumstantial evidence.

At any rate, and whatever its essential merits, the idea has been so strong in Fehr that he has brought heavy pressure to bear on boards of parole and governors; he says that this has forced Wendling to remain a prisoner 10 or 12 years longer than would otherwise have been necessary, and that he is responsible for a special investigation by one of the members of the present Board of Parole. Now that the man has been released, it is only because he agreed to certain secret

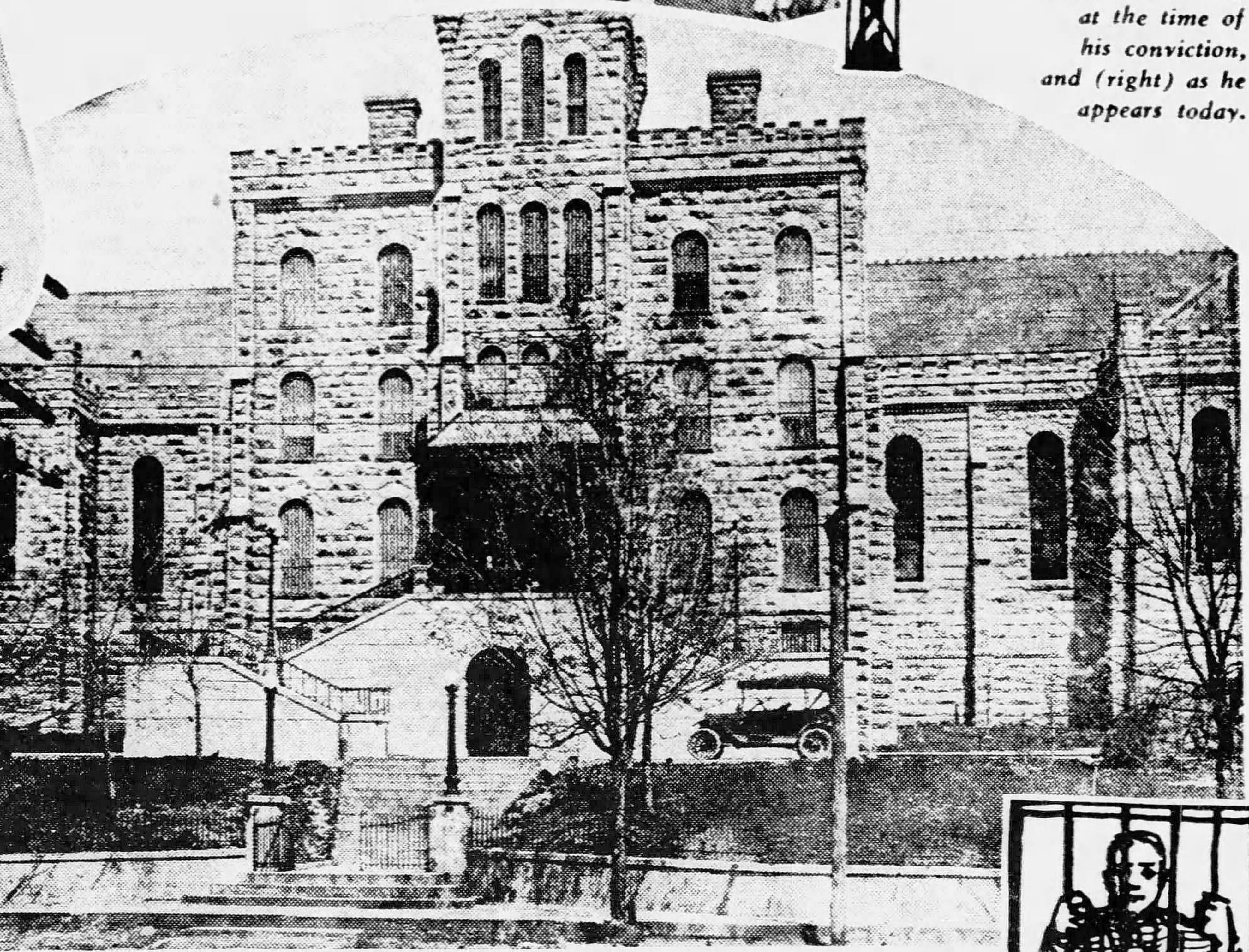
conditions laid down by Fehr, who assumed full responsibility for the parole, with the proviso that the prisoner must be immediately deported.

What the secret conditions are no one else knows, and Fehr has just repeated his determination that no one ever shall. Wendling has gone forth to face the new post-war world, about which he has read so much, with undisguised joy illuminating his habitually sober face. Tom Logan, the warden at Eddyville, has taken him to New York for his deportation to France, the country of his origin. Although Joseph Wendling is 60 or 62 years old now, he admits to only 51 and looks less. His hair has become slightly sparse and there is a wrinkle, as of unhurried puzzlement, over his brow. His face is the face of a quiet, French artisan, passive, or suffused with naive inner good humor. After 27 years in America, he speaks with unmistakable French intonations and simple phrases. He is a big, healthy, peaceful man.

THE crime for which Wendling has suffered so long an imprisonment took place on December 8, 1909. At that time Wendling was a vivacious, carefree young man, with luxuriant black hair and a mouth that puckered everlastingly in a cheerful half-smile. After about eight years of schooling in his native village, Dijon, he had served for a short time as a marine and as a soldier in the French African service. He had come to America and Louisville, and had found a wife here, a girl named Madeline Arnold, whose parents came from Alsace. She was 13 years his senior and soon became impatient of his carefree ways and his injudicious consumption of cigars and white wine.

At the time of little Alma Kellner's disappearance, Wendling lived on the grounds of St. John's Catholic Church, on the corner of Clay and Walnut streets; he was caretaker and janitor of the church, and Father Shuhman, the parish priest, lived in an adjacent house, frequently disturbed by the high-voiced wrangling of the Wendlings.

The little girl came to St. John's



Eddyville Penitentiary.

Church for vesper services one winter afternoon. The last persons to see her were two women, who watched her playing about the altar after the services were over. She never got home. But later the same day Father Shuhman returned to the church and found it singularly cold and permeated with a curious odor. On investigation it was found that the fire in the furnace had gone out and that the odor was especially strong in the cellar, but nothing about the furnace explained anything further.

It was about this time that Wendling was dismissed from the church for

the brawling that went on between him and his wife. And more than a month after the child's disappearance, on January 14, the French janitor left Louisville. He had no money, he said later, or he would have left long before to escape from his wife's nagging. But he has insisted that the disappearance of Alma Kellner had nothing whatever to do with his departure. Wendling wandered all over the Southwest. He worked in New Orleans, in Houston, Texas; in Los Angeles, always going by the name of

Henri Jacquemin, the surname being that of his mother's family. His reason for the incognito, he afterwards explained, was that he didn't want his wife to trace him. He finally landed in San Francisco and lived in a rooming house over a restaurant and a barber shop on South Third street. Meanwhile an event had taken place in Louisville which was to be a turning point in his life.

On May 30, 1910, the city was stirred by the discovery of a charred and mutilated child's body in a reservoir under the music room in St. John's Church. The reservoir was in a cellar which could only have been entered through a trap door in the music room in the church. No one was known to

have had great difficulty in perpetrating the crime without attracting attention as he went from the music room to the cellar.

Wendling was suspected immediately. And the police were made extraordinarily active in the case by the fact that two newspapers were then attacking the Democratic administration in the city and were concentrating their fire on the Commonwealth Attorney's office. The mysterious details of Alma Kellner's disappearance resulted in charges that the police were dilatory and inefficient.

IT took a Coroner's jury only two days to investigate the circumstances of the discovery and charge the fugitive Joseph Wendling with first-degree murder. The autopsy had indicated that death probably had resulted from a skull fracture, though the condition of the remains gave no clues as to what had actually happened to the child before her death.

The late Captain John P. Carney, then head of the detective force, did an excellent piece of sleuthing; within two months he was able to locate Wendling in San Francisco. The hapless Frenchman was evidently too prone to make friends with chance acquaintances. One of these, a Mrs. Cora Muena of Hume, Missouri, gave the essential clue. She had become well acquainted with "Henri Jacquemin," while visiting an uncle in Houston,

Texas. Wendling had told her he was a cotton buyer from New Orleans.

To Joseph Wendling's somewhat childlike mind the murder charge seemed hilariously funny. He laughed so profusely over it that he was quickly nicknamed "Smiling Joe" and "Laughing Joseph" in newspapers all over the country. When Carney found him he said he would be delighted to go back to Louisville and get the whole thing straightened out. Carney quoted him as saying: "Why should I not want to go back? What I scare of? I no kill the little girl, so I get free soon as I get back there. But I like better to stay in California. I make more money here." Although the Governor of California granted extradition papers immediately they were applied for, Wendling didn't even wait to have them served and validated. He seemed anxious to get back and have it over with and continued to laugh at the absurdity of anyone's taking him for a murderer.

Newspaper men who had met Wendling en route to Louisville arranged to have him taken from the train at Evansville, Indiana, and driven the remaining 65 miles in a car. His arrival thus became a "scoop"—and a redoubled sensation. Crowds assembled to get a glimpse of him. His story was followed minutely.

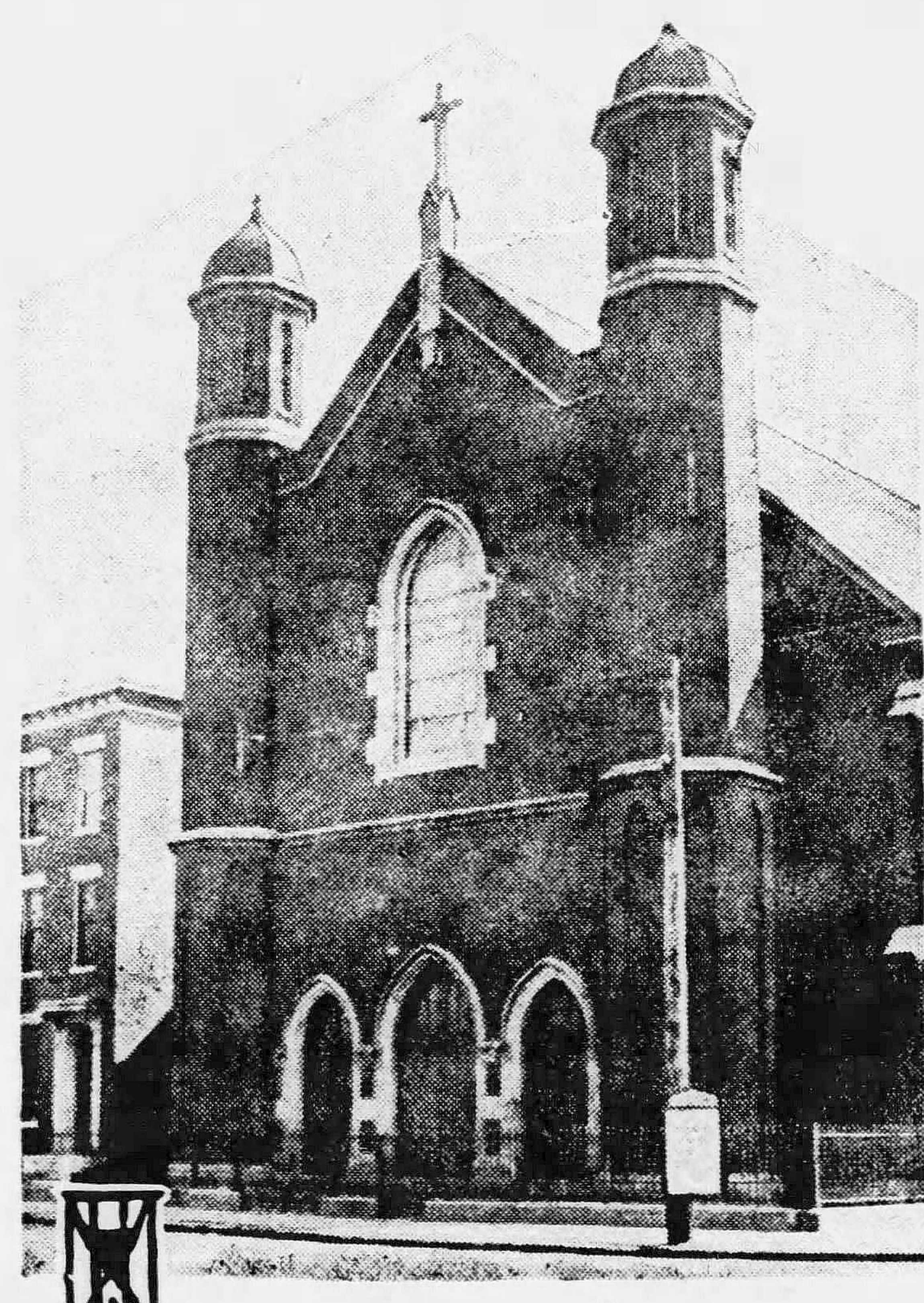
BUT there was a great deal of legal dickering, including an attempt to get the case tried in a Federal court, before Wendling could actually be brought to trial, and the case didn't come up until the beginning of October. Mrs. Wendling was living with her family in Louisville; despite her earlier difference with her husband, she engaged two attorneys, John W. Ray and J. Reginal Clements, to defend him.

On November 28, almost a year after the murder had been committed, Joseph Wendling was finally brought to trial. It was a thoroughly stirring case, in which Wendling, an interpreter constantly beside him, testified brokenly in his own behalf. His only defense was a statement that he knew nothing about the crime or the child victim, and left Louisville not to escape from justice, but to get away from his wife's tongue.

The State's star witness was Father Shuhman, whose testimony concerning his experiences on the day of the murder gave Wendling his only bad moment. For a few minutes it looked as if the accused would break down completely, but he pulled himself together and continued to insist on his innocence. Frank Fehr was one of the witnesses.

During the course of the trial Commonwealth Attorney Joseph Huffaker had the entire court visit the scene of the crime. Thousands packed the streets as the dismal procession went by, and the prisoner was protected from mob violence by a heavy police guard. When that was all over, the prosecution had succeeded in convincing at least seven of the jurors that it would have been impossible for anyone but Wendling to have committed the crime. Six days after the trial's opening, the jury retired. Their first ballot (seven for death, five for acquittal) resulted in a five-hour deadlock. During that time a compromise was arrived at and the second ballot was a unanimous verdict for life imprisonment. Joseph Wendling spent

(Concluded on Page 7.)



St. John's Catholic Church.

THOMAS MASARYK
CAPT. FRITZ KRUSE


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IT P-E-N-E-T-R-A-T-E-S

That is what prompted him to Collier is dead now, and Wend- contagiously around the prison. He as an electrician when he reaches get himself up in the costume of a ling's confidences (if they exist- on friendly terms with every- France. If that proves impossible, woman and escape. According to ed) have died with him. At any one he met, from the Warden he will return to farming. But all indications he had no intention rate, Collier's friends in the town down, and friends in Kentucky he faces the world joyously, with of avoiding his sentence perma- of Eddyville think the electrician persistently attempted to get him love in his heart for his fellow- nently; what he wanted was a based his friendly interest on a out. His job at the prison was men, including Frank Fehr, who breath of free air before going on profound faith in Wendling's in-one of real responsibility and re- kept him in prison a decade more with his captivity. Two years nocence. At his own expense he quired 24-hour duty, for if a fire than he would have stayed other- after he was brought back he made three trips to Louisville and broke out in the prison or town it wise. "I hold no malice against escaped again, and this second Frankfort to see whether he could was up to him to step up the wa- Mr. Fehr," he said before he time he wasn't captured until they win the convict his freedom. ter pressure so that the fire ap- Mr. released. "And I want to saw him trying to sneak back into After several years Wendling paratus could work effectively. thank him for what he has done the prison undetected. became in turn manager of the The 75-year-old wife who await- for me."