

Lead Industries Association

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DIRECTOR OF HEALTH AND SAFETY

August 8, 1956

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.
Director
Kettering Laboratory of Applied Physiology
University of Cincinnati
Eden Avenue
Cincinnati 19, Ohio

Dear Bob:

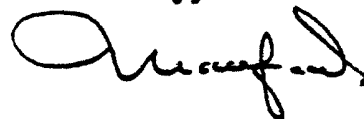
A few more words on "Arsenic and Old Luce".

What led to my allegedly left-handed remarks of July 19th was not your comment on the case, which I thought you handled very well, but my childish pleasure in the references to "Dr. Kehoe."

I am not yet at liberty to reveal the sources of my information, but I have it on what I regard as just about incontrovertible authority that, eteologically, the ceiling paint at Villa Taverna had about as much to do with Mrs. Luce's recent illness as does the moon with the common run of psychoses. I am furthermore told that the true story will ultimately be released, and I can only regard the hokum published in the June 23rd issue of her husband's magazine as a highly questionable effort to distort and dissemble.

Herewith are copies of a letter and enclosure sent to Dr. Rosenbluth, Mrs. Luce's physician, as well as of an item from the New York Post of July 19th. Compare, please, what the Washington paper of July 18th says he said, with what the New York paper of the day following says he said. Something is obviously screwy somewhere.

Sincerely,



Encls.

MB/J



LEAD INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

420 Lexington Avenue

New York 17, N. Y.

MANFRED BOWDITCH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH AND SAFETY

July 20, 1956

Milton B. Rosenbluth, M. D.
75 East 55th Street
New York 22, New York

Dear Dr. Rosenbluth:

As has no doubt yours also, this office has been beset with inquiries and clippings as a result of the publicity accorded to the case of your famed patient, Mrs. Luce.

Such references as I had seen to your comments on the case had impressed me most favorably, but yesterday came the clipping from the Washington Post and Times Herald of which a marginally marked photostatic copy is herewith. Though I am of course aware that misquotations are by no means uncommon in the daily press, and this may well be one of them, it seems worth while to point out that the following are, to the best of my knowledge, facts:

1. Lead is a common ingredient of paints.
2. Arsenic has been used, in the past and to a limited extent, as a pigment in certain paints.
3. Arsenic occurs today in paints only as an ingredient of anti-fouling paints for ship bottoms, and in these as copper arsenate.
4. Other statements to the contrary, lead arsenate has never been known by us to be used in paints of any description.

Please do not interpret this letter as in any sense an unfriendly criticism. As I said, it is not unlikely that you were misquoted, and in any case, my sole purpose is to seek to correct one of the many misconceptions relative to the etiology of metal poisonings with which I am obliged to deal in the course of my daily activities.

Since this is a free country and we are all entitled to our own opinions, mine is that whatever arsenic may have been found in the specimens sent to Bethesda came from a source other than the paint of the bedroom ceiling.

I would welcome any comment on the above that you may deem appropriate.

Sincerely yours,

MBB

MB:GW
Enclosure

ICE 02918

N22325.01

Mrs. Luce Planning Return to Rome; Experts Doubt Paint as Poison Source

Clare Boothe Luce soon will return to her Ambassador's post in Rome and the 17th Century Italian villa where falling specks of paint are blamed for her recent siege of lead arsenate poisoning.

The lady diplomat will return from medical treatment in the United States around Aug. 15 to find the white roses on her ornate bedroom ceiling covered up with heavy tarpaper redone in non-lead paint.

Lincoln White, press officer for the State Department, officially confirmed yesterday that Mrs. Luce has been a victim of arsenic poisoning.

"The fact that the paint had arsenic in it is purely an accident," he emphasized with diplomatic firmness, "and there is absolutely no indication that it was otherwise."

The secret of Mrs. Luce's illness turned into the case of poisoned diplomat and read at first like cloak-and-dagger fiction with overtones of a Borgia poison plot. Central Intelligence Agency officials finally traced the culprit to the white-painted roses on the ornate ceiling in Mrs. Luce's bedroom. A deadly fallout of lead arsenate slowly poisoned the Ambassador as she worked and slept, they reasoned.

But an aura of mystery still remained yesterday, although nothing of plots and foreign intrigue was suggested.

Mrs. Luce's personal physician, Dr. Milton B. Rosenbluth, told the International News Service in New York City there was "nothing sinister" in the lead arsenate poisoning.

"It was just a case of old paint," he said. "Lead arsenate is in all old paints."

But a spokesman for the United States paint industry came to the defense of the white-painted roses.

Joseph F. Battley, president of the National Paint, Varnish, and Lacquer Association, advised the investigators to seek "other sources of arsenic than paint." He questioned whether paint dust could contain enough arsenic to poison Mrs. Luce's cup of coffee and food for over 20 months.

Earlier, a technical adviser for the Association said he had never heard of a case of arsenic poisoning from paint. American paint manufacturers, Battley said, do not use any arsenic compounds in the manufacture of paints. Paint poisonings, a

spokesman added, usually involve lead poisoning, not arsenic.

Exterior white paint, he explained, often contains lead dioxide. If someone used this by mistake to paint furniture, a child might chew on the paint and be poisoned.

Battley pointed an accusing finger at arsenic trioxide agricultural sprays which he said might have been used against house insects or rodents at the Villa Taverna, the American Ambassador's official residence on the outskirts of Rome.

A National Institutes of Health paint toxicologist did not absolve the white-painted roses on the ceiling as the culprit. Old paint from the previous century, he said, could have flecked off with the new coats and dropped down on Mrs. Luce's food. Lead arsenate, he said, once was used in a type of whitewash paint.

He also had another solution for the mystery:

Arsenic might have been added to a casein paint, made from a milk derivative, to ward off insects attracted by the sweet mixture.

Mrs. Luce was reported to

have done a great deal of work at her desk in the bedroom in addition to using it as a sleeping chamber.

A previous occupant, Ellsworth Bunker, Ambassador to Italy in 1952 and 1953, apparently used the same room but did not suffer any ill effects.

"My wife does recall the paint did fleck off some," Bunker said last night just after a return from five weeks in Europe as president of the American Red Cross. "But it didn't seem to bother me. Of course, I was only there for a year."

After consulting with his wife, Bunker said the ceiling was probably green and white when they occupied the bedroom. The suspect ceiling in Mrs. Luce's chamber has been described as green with white rosettes.

Mrs. Luce returned suddenly to the United States last May with an explanation that she was tired and suffering from overwork. Time Magazine, which her husband heads as editor-in-chief, broke the story of the paint poisoning which it called "one of the best kept secrets of U. S. diplomacy."

KE 02919

N22325.02

NEW YORK, N. Y., POST
Circ. D. 311,466 - S. 270,024

1954

Clare Luce's Doctor Sees No Poison Link to Illness

Washington, July 19 (AP)—Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce's physician said today her latest illness might have had no connection whatever with poison paint specks which allegedly dropped from her bedroom ceiling.

Dr. Millon Rosenbluth said the ailments for which he treated Mrs. Luce in New York two months ago were enteritis and iron deficiency anemia.

Their relation—if any—to traces of arsenate of lead detected in a specimen is "very unclear," he said, because the suspected ceiling of her Rome embassy bedroom had been covered and repainted 13 months earlier.

Dr. Rosenbluth was interviewed

by telephone in New York.

Time Magazine reported Tuesday "a deadly fallout" of the poison caused the long series of illnesses that have beset Mrs. Luce since she became Ambassador to Italy more than three years ago.

The Ambassador's husband, Henry R. Luce, is editor in chief of the publication.

The magazine said a second investigation uncovered "a high content" of arsenate of lead from painted roses in the ceiling of her 17th century embassy residence

in Rome.

"For 20 months," it said, "Ambassador Luce had been breathing arsenated fumes, had been eating food and drinking coffee powdered day after day with the deadly white dust."

Dr. Rosenbluth said it was far from certain her latest illnesses were "arsenic induced infection," as the magazine reported.

"Whatever she had in 1954 I would regard as cured," he said. "Her latest illness seemed to be related to some liver infection

she had in Italy.

"Specifically, what she had now was not poisoning."

Time magazine had no immediate comment on Dr. Rosenbluth's remarks.

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