

TERMS OF COURT

Pensacola—First Mondays in May and November.
Marianna—First Monday in April.
Tallahassee—Second Monday in February and the Tuesday after the first Monday in September.
Gainesville—Second Mondays in June and December.
Panama City—First Monday in October.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

NORTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

Pensacola
July 14, 1942

RECEIVED
JUL 18 1942
CRIMINAL DIVISION

158260-70
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
JUL 18 1942 A.M.
DIVISION OF RECORDS
CRIM. DIV. - ROTNEM

The Attorney General,
Washington, D. C.

ATTENTION: Mr. Rotnem,

Re: Department of Justice File No. WB-FGF-158260,
Lynch murder of A. C. Williams, near Quincy,
Florida, May 12, 1941.

Sir:

During the past month of April, 1942, the above matter was the subject of some discussion between the writer and Mr. Rotnem in his office in the Department at Washington. In response to the Department's letter of May 21, 1942 and its wire of June 27, 1942, I advised the Department under date of June 30, 1942 that I had completed my investigation for preliminary report and same would go forward in a few days, after necessary copy work could be performed.

This young negro on May 11, 1941, was arrested and detained on a technical charge of breaking and entering and placed in the county jail of Gadsden County at Quincy, Florida, from which he was taken by a band of four masked men as delineated in a report of the investigation made by special officer, Maurice H. Tripp, in his report of May 25, 1941 to Honorable Spessard L. Holland, Governor of Florida at Tallahassee, Florida. Immediately upon the happening of this event, Governor Holland assigned Special Investigator Tripp to the case. I had an opportunity to discuss this matter with Governor Holland at Tallahassee, Florida on June 26, 1942. It appears that during the investigation, Governor Holland received a letter of complaint, dated May 17, 1941 from the "Harlem People's Club", signed by Peter Landon, 1 West 125th Street, New York City. It is also noted that under date of May 14, 1941, a letter was addressed to the President at Washington, D. C., signed "Harlem People's Progressive Club", signed by Peter Landon. It is to be noted that the addresses given in the letters of complaint are identical. Although the same person signed the letters, name of the organization is varied by omitting the word "Progressive" in the first instance.

Governor Holland, immediately upon hearing of this

FOR DEFENSE



lynch murder, directed special officer Maurice H. Tripp to conduct an investigation and report to him. This was done with promptness and efficiency.

The Governor advises me that the sheriff was also before him for an interview on the subject shortly after it happened and the sheriff's report to the Governor was reduced to letter form, a copy of which is enclosed.

Testimony was taken at the coroner's inquest held May 13, 1941 at Quincy, Florida, at which time the witnesses were interrogated by Orion C. Parker, Jr., State Attorney for the second Judicial Circuit of Florida. Prior to that date, the State Attorney conducted a preliminary investigation on May 12, 1941 and the testimony taken in that investigation was also reported. The identity of the guilty persons involved were not established. Governor Holland stated to me that he did not regard the file in this case as closed and he was hopeful that a break might come somewhere in the case so that evidence would become available to establish the identity of the guilty parties. It has been the subject of attention from time to time up to the present and there has been no evidence pointing to the guilty parties.

The Civil Liberties Unit in the Department would probably get a better picture of the situation in this case by reference to (1) copy of the report made by special investigator, Maurice H. Tripp, (2) copy of the transcript of testimony at the preliminary investigation on May 12, 1941, made before Orion C. Parker, State Attorney for the Second Judicial Circuit of Florida, (3) copy of the testimony taken under the supervision of Orion C. Parker, State Attorney at Quincy, Florida at the Coroner's inquest, May 13, 1941, and (4) copy of the sheriff's letter of report to the Governor.

Governor Holland has loaned me his file in the matter and I have selected some of it to make copies, and I therefore, am privileged by his courtesy to enclose to the Department two copies of each of these four items. I am sending two copies of each, because in the typing work done in the office, it was easy enough to make an additional carbon copy. If the Department desires to use one copy in any letter to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for reference, the extra copies would be handy.

The Governor had a considerable amount of correspondence with persons whose attention was attracted by the publicity in this case and as a sample of the correspondence, I am enclosing copies of communications passing between Mrs. Henry Havens, 2845 Corinthian Avenue, Jacksonville, Florida, Chairman of the Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, and Governor Holland, which correspondence passed during the month of October, 1941. The formal letter of report of Orion C. Parker, State Attorney, dated May 19, 1941 is also included in the Governor's file in which it is noted that Mr. Parker stated that no evidence had been secured showing any particular persons being involved in the lynching and that it was his full intention to continue this investigation for the purpose of apprehending the guilty parties. With the Governor's permission, I have prepared copies of the correspondence, together with copies of the letter of complaint from the "Harlem Peoples Club", signed by Peter Landon of New York City and duplicate copies of each are enclosed herewith.

It would be of interest to the Department in consideration of this matter to know that a few years ago, under order from the Bureau of Prisons in this district, we have not been using the Gadsden County jail for Federal prisoners, because of the loose and careless way in which the jail was operated. The town of Quincy is the county seat of Gadsden County, Florida. The town does not have a municipal jail. Persons arrested for violation of city ordinances, breaches of the peace and the various municipal offenses were locked up in the county jail under an arrangement between the County of Gadsden and the City of Quincy. They do not have an organized police force with the ordinary police station personnel. An officer making an arrest, would carry his prisoner to the jail and lock him up. In the operation of this jail, it was found that the sheriff carried out this policy, allowed members of the police force to each carry an individual key. It is my understanding that this situation has been remedied and this condition does not exist at this time, however, that was the situation when the four men in an automobile came along side of the city policeman at Quincy and took him over to the county jail where he opened the doors and the masked men took the negro from his cell.

Governor Holland advised me that when the sheriff appeared before him in person to give some explanation about the matter, he suggested that the sheriff place his explanation in

written form and that this letter of explanation, signed by the sheriff, was filed and is part of the Governor's file.

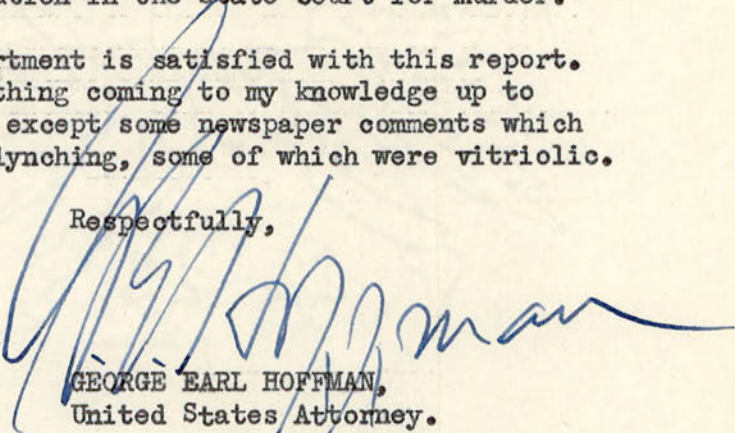
It appears that when the negro first got away from his captors and was dangerously wounded and was able to make his way home, the sheriff was notified by the family and likewise Honorable E. C. Love, Judge of the Second Judicial Circuit who lives in Quincy. Judge Love was United States Attorney for this District in the first Wilson administration and is now on the Circuit bench and highly respected in this state. Judge Love was consulted by the sheriff on the matter with reference to the best procedure for the relief of the wounded negro and it was suggested that the best procedure was to get him as soon as possible to the hospital at Tallahassee, about 23 miles distance from Quincy, where he could receive proper and full medical attention. Accordingly the sheriff made arrangements and had an ambulance company at Quincy call for the negro for the purpose of taking him to Tallahassee to a hospital. A short way out of Quincy, the ambulance was stopped and presumably the same men again took him in charge and completed their felonious work of killing the boy.

In consideration of the matter, Governor Holland also had the benefit and advantage of the advice of Circuit Judge Love. So far as can be learned, the only persons who knew the boy was at his home, and was to be moved from his home to the hospital in the ambulance, were the doctor, Judge Love, the sheriff and the ambulance driver. When the boy was placed in the ambulance for transportation to the hospital at Tallahassee, no armed guard or deputy sheriff was placed over him. The failure of the sheriff to take the necessary precaution to protect this negro from further violence merits criticism and any feeling on his part that the wrath of this small group of men had been spent, would hardly be an excuse. The situation was one that really justified and required an armed guard and protective custody in its best sense. The sheriff's failure to do this is perhaps directly responsible for the second episode in this unfortunate affair. The ease with which this negro was taken in custody by this four man mob from the county jail, was occasioned by the promiscuous distribution of keys to the jail, without the maintenance of a proper guard personnel at the jail.

It might be possible in this case for the Federal Bureau of Investigation to break through the present lack of identification and establish some evidence of the identity of the parties. If evidence could be gained that was sufficient to identify the parties committing the crime, beyond a reasonable doubt, even though the investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation with the object of prosecution under the provisions of Federal law for the protection of civil liberties, the same might be done thoroughly enough to provide sufficient evidence of identification to justify and warrant a criminal prosecution in the State Court for murder.

I hope the Department is satisfied with this report. I have incorporated everything coming to my knowledge up to the date of this writing, except some newspaper comments which occurred right after the lynching, some of which were vitriolic.

Respectfully,



GEORGE EARL HOFFMAN,
United States Attorney.

GEH:JHB
Enclosures.