

69 Fifth Avenue,
New York City,
October 28, 1926.

Hon. Thomas G. McLeod,
State Capitol,
Columbia, S. C.

My dear Gov. McLeod:

I have just left Aiken which I visited along with other cities in South Carolina as a representative of The New York World. My purpose in going there was to cover the recent lynching at Aiken of Clarence, Demon and Bertha Lowman. May I preface what I shall say to you with certain data?

I have seen a letter which you wrote to one of the prominent white citizens of South Carolina who wrote you urging that you do all in your power to apprehend and punish the lynchers and in your reply you said, "I will do everything in my power to get at the truth in this matter and to fix the guilt upon the proper parties."

I have before me copy of The Columbia State of October 9th in which you are quoted as saying, "Investigation will be made to the fullest extent, but the difficulties are apparent. Denunciation will accomplish nothing. Only thoughtful consideration with due regard to the horrible effects of that lynching will prevent a recurrence of this kind of tragedy." I further notice a copy of the State of October 21st telling of the report to Judge Marvin M. Mann of the Aiken County Grand Jury investigating the lynching in which regret is expressed on its inability to secure sufficient evidence against any person or persons on which to bring indictments.

May I at this point state to you that Col. Claude E. Sawyer of Aiken who is practicing law in the state of South Carolina and who has practiced for more than forty two years in the state, who was a member of the Staff of Gov. Wade Hampton, was formerly Solicitor at Aiken and who is one of the most distinguished attorneys and citizens of South Carolina, asked me to say to you that you have been entirely misled regarding the situation at Aiken through the confidence you have placed in Sheriff Nellie Robinson. The reason for his statement will be apparent later.

During the time I was in the state of South Carolina my contacts with and sources of information were some of the most responsible citizens of the state. Some of them were former members and officers of the Ku Klux Klan. All of them are men whose work I have every reason to believe is entirely reliable and there is documentary evidence to back up the statements which I shall make to you. I am placing this information before you in this fashion so that you and the state of South Carolina may have the opportunity of apprehending those responsible for the cold-blooded, carefully planned and premeditated murder of the three Lowmans. I am now enroute for New York and I shall place all of this material in the hands of my paper upon arrival there. This will allow some forty-eight hours for action before any of the material I have gathered will be published.

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Here are the facts which I have secured. The lynching was very carefully planned in advance. When Judge Lanham delivered his decision for a directed verdict in the case of Demon Lowman at five o'clock on the afternoon of October 7th, plans were immediately made for the lynching that night. I am reliably informed that the representatives of the Ku Klux Klan met in the office of John Edwin Stansfield, an Attorney of Aiken, who was appointed by the Court to defend Bertha Lowman in the first trial. Mr. Stansfield was, as you know, elected democratic candidate for the state legislature at the election of August 31, 1926; that of the seven candidates, three of whom were to be chosen, Mr. Stansfield received about one thousand more votes than his nearest competitor. During the same afternoon there was considerable discussion of the performance of a criminal operation on L. G. Southard of Spartanburg and the tarring and feathering of N. J. Frederick, a col red Attorney of Columbia. These two men, as you know, defended the Lowmans at the second trial. This latter step, however, was for some reason abandoned.

I am further reliably informed that early in the morning of October 8th around three o'clock, Sheriff Nellie Robinson, Deputy Sheriff R. L. McElheny, Deputy Sheriff A. D. Sheppard and Traffic Officer John B. Salley of Aiken went to Bertha Lowman's cell. Sheriff Robinson unlocking the door. Bertha Lowman asked them, "What do you want now?" They told her to put on her clothes as she was wanted downstairs. When she was reluctant to leave her cell, suspecting something amiss, I am informed that she was dragged from her cell by Robinson and Salley. She was taken down stairs and with Clarence and Demon Lowman delivered to the mob. Two shots were fired after the mob had gotten possession of the prisoners, so I am informed, and not as Sheriff Robinson claims, when he was resisting entrance of the mob into the jail.

May I at this point call attention in corroboration of these facts that the jail at Aiken is only four years old and well constructed. It shows little if any signs of the struggle which Robinson claims he made in trying to defend the prisoners. Besides the barrier two outer doors of steel, the keys to the cells are kept in a steel vault some twenty-four inches square and the door to this vault is some two inches thick and is of steel also. This vault, I am informed, shows no signs whatever of the use of dynamite or nitroglycerine on it and can not be opened in any other way except through connivance. May I also call your attention to the Columbia Record of October 10th which describes the jail's condition after the lynching.

I also want to mention at this point that plans had been made to remove the prisoners hastily from Aiken to Columbia should they be convicted. But when Demon Lowman was freed of a murder charge, a circumstance certain to inflame lynchers if there was fear of a lynching following a conviction, they were placed in the jail and only one man put there to guard them. This action, I feel safe in asserting, is concrete evidence of extreme carelessness if not of nonfeasance on the part of Sheriff Robinsons and his Deputies.

To return to the lynching. I am informed that the following persons were members of the mob which actually did the killing. I am giving you their names, occupations and addresses in full so there can be no difficulty in locating them.

Gary Seigler, Bonded Constable for A. B. Raborn, Magistrate at Aiken, whose office is in the Courthouse.

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Pink Gaddy (or G. V.), Aiken.

Robert L. McElheny, Deputy Sheriff at Aiken.

Marion Bell, Captain of the Chain gang.

J. Pierce Howard, Blacksmith at Aiken, brother of the late Sheriff H. H. Howard.

Walter Sheppard, Magistrate's Constable for D. H. Turner and industrial Constable for the Graniteville Manufacturing Company.

Arthur Sheppard, Deputy Sheriff at Aiken.

Chester Anderson who works for the Carolina Light and Power Company.

Ben Tyler, Superintendent of Streets of Aiken.

Joe M. Holley (called "Little Joe"), automobile salesman at Aiken.

Hart from Edgefield who is Special State Constable for Your Honor, the Governor of South Carolina.

Ed Anderson, Special Constable for the Governor.

Jim Woodward, Aiken Policeman who wore his uniform to the lynching.

Ussery, Policeman at Aiken.

John Edwin Stansfield, Attorney at law whose office is in the Farmers' and Merchants' bank Building in Aiken.

Eugene R. Buckingham, Ellenton. Mr. Buckingham, I am informed was Master of Ceremonies at the lynching. He served three terms in the South Carolina Legislature, is a farmer at Ellenton 23 miles from Aiken, is a graduate of Citadel and is a loyal supporter and adherent of United States Senator Cole Blease.

J. Crosslens Bush, farmer and merchant at Ellenton, member of the Grand Jury which investigated the lynchings.

Nellie Robinson, Sheriff at Aiken.

John B. Salley, Traffic Policeman, Aiken.

Rupert W. Taylor, Jailer at the Aiken Jail.

Otto Sommers, butcher, Aiken. Mr. Sommer's father was, I am informed, the first mayor of Aiken and took office in or about 1892.

John Widener, Constable at Bath, S. C.

Artis Kennedy, Aiken.

James E. Ferr, newspaper correspondent, was "close around."

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I am informed that J. F. Hart, J. E. Anderson and Policeman Ussery acted as sentinels while A. D. Sheppard and Chester Anderson cut the electric wire (furnishing light to the jail) at a point 8 miles west of Aiken and 3 miles west of Graniteville. I am informed that John Calhoun Parker, R.F.D. Mail Carrier from the Warrenville Post Office told Postmaster Theodore Craig that he had been told on his route that the car containing the wire cutters had been traced to Deputy Sheriff Arthur Sheppard's yard. I am further informed as result of threats against his life, Parker has become terrified and how will not discuss the case.

In addition to the above list, I am informed that the following persons were spectators at the lynchings:

Branson, President of the Graniteville Manufacturing Company.

George H. Leightner, Vice President of the Graniteville Manufacturing Company.

Woodhead, Superintendent of the Grege Dye Plant, Graniteville.

J. B. Williams, Superintendent of the Textile Mills, Graniteville.

C. S. Timmerman, Superintendent of the Warrenville Mill of the Graniteville Manufacturing Company.

Whitehead, Overseer of the Carding Department of the two mills at Graniteville. Mr. Whitehead is also Master of the Masonic Lodge At Graniteville. He did not get home until 5 A. M., October 8th.

Edgar L. Couch, undertaker and funeral director at Graniteville.

Charles Kenney, Second Cousin of Your Honor, the Governor. Mr. Kenney is, as you know, a merchandise storekeeper whose store is opposite the railway station at Warrenville. I am informed also that two other cousins of Your Honor, brothers of Charles Kenney, were present.

To return for a minute to the time when the prisoners were taken from the jail. There is incarcerated at the present time in the Aiken jail a white man by the name of E. A. Worley who was convicted of manslaughter or murder and whose case is now on appeal to the South Carolina Supreme Court. I am informed that Mr. Worley was stabbed by the son of his wife and that on the following day we went to Worley's house after having made the threat that he would kill Worley. A number of eminent citizens in and near Aiken expressed the unqualified conviction that the severity of the prosecution of Worley is due to the feeling that Worley opposed the illicit distilling and sale of whiskey and that the whiskey ring wanted to get him out of the way so he could not interfere. Worley, I am informed, saw Robinson, McElheny, Sheppard and Salley take Bertha Lowman from her cell on the morning of October 8th. An effort was made on either October 14th or 15th to organize a mob to go to the Aiken Jail and lynch Worley to keep him from telling these facts. May I respectfully urge that Your Honor, the Governor, have Mr. Worley moved from the Aiken Jail to the penitentiary at Columbia for it is felt that he will be either lynched, poisoned, or done away with in some manner if he is allowed to remain in

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the Aiken Jail.

Present in the Aiken Jail also at the time of the lynching were three other men (and doubtless others who could be induced to talk if they were sure of protection from vengeance). The names of these men are: Wade Franklin, a white man arrested October 3rd in a car with Robert Jordan and Berley Deolittle, charged with violation of the Liquor Law. Wade Franklin was convicted during the week of October 18th at Aiken and sentenced to one year on the Aiken Chain gang. Jordan and Deolittle were acquitted the same week. The live in Augusta and work at the Sibley Cotton Mill.

Sam Lowman, father of Demon and Bertha Lowman and uncle of Clarence Lowman, who was recently moved from the Aiken Chain gang to the penitentiary at Columbia was also in the jail that night and says that no mob entered the jail.

Returning again to the lynching - on the way from the jail Clarence Lowman, 14 years of age at the time Sheriff Howard was killed and 15 years old when he was lynched, jumped from the car which was taking him from the jail to the scene of his death. Clarence was shot and recaptured. I am informed that to keep blood from getting in the car, a rope was tied to Clarence and to the car and his body was dragged in this manner to the scene of the execution. The mob went out York Street on the Dixie Highway to a point about 1 1/2 to 2 miles from Aiken near a Tourist Camp. I am informed that Bertha Lowman begged so piteously for her life that members of the mob had a hard time killing her. After being shot she dragged herself over the ground pleading piteously not to be killed moving about as she did so. A number of shots had to be fired before one of the bullets mercifully ended her agony and caused her death.

Pierce Howard, so I am informed, was to have had the honor of being the Executioner but his nerve failed him. I am informed that Deputy Sheriffs McElheny and Walter Sheppard and Marion Bell, Chain gang Captain, were chief executioners assisted by Pink Gaddy (or Gady) and Gary Seigler.

John Stansfield, I am informed stated on the streets of Aiken to at least one man whose name I can furnish you that he (Stansfield) "did not get home until 6 A.M. Friday morning and his wife gave him the devil for staying out so late".

Several men were invited to come to the lynching who were not members of the Klan. This, it is believed in Aiken, was done in an effort to establish the fact subsequent to the lynching that it was not a Klan affair. I am informed that this effort met with no success. The late Sheriff Howard, the present Sheriff Robinson, his deputies and all of the members of the mob were members of the Klan. I can furnish you with documentary proof from South Carolina sources of the correctness of this statement.

A responsible and well known citizen of South Carolina further stated to me that as soon as the news got out about the murders certain people involved in them in an effort to cover up their guilt and to "muddy the waters" tried to precipitate a race riot. These persons, I am informed, went about frightening the white people, telling them that the Negroes were armed and were going to rise at night and kill all of the white people. It is unnecessary for me to state that there was no evidence whatever to substantiate such a charge.

Finally, may I emphasize the fact that there is a very considerable and influential element in Aiken which is bitterly opposed to the lynching and which is very anxious that steps be taken to punish the lynchers. For example, Col. Sawyer, on the afternoon preceding the lynching and subsequent to the adjournment of Court told Judge Lanham that he feared a lynching had been planned. He also told Bert D. Carter of Bamberg the Solicitor who prosecuted the Lowmans, of his fears. Carter walked away from Col. Sawyer saying, "I have not seen any signs of any trouble." The news of the approaching was widely known in Columbia one hour after the directed verdict and nine hours prior to the lynching. The crowd which went to the jail numbered between 30 and 40, so I am informed, but at the scene of the lynching there were upward of 200 automobiles and over 1,000 people. The lynchers came from Graniteville, Warrenville, Columbia and other points. All were ready and had been given ample notice.

This entire trouble at Aiken appears to be an outgrowth of the Klan and its activities. The element of the membership which acted as a restraining influence from the early days of the organization of the Klan has largely regressed leaving it in the hands of an irresponsible, vicious and criminal element. There is in the vicinity of Aiken and in the towns nearby a very extensive business of distilling of liquor and transportation and sale of same as well as other criminal practices. There have been floggings and even murders as result of this reign of lawlessness and barbarity. A number of white men as well as Negroes have been flogged and killed and the more law abiding and respectable element is living in constant terror. In all my experience, I have never before seen such a reign of lawlessness as exists in and near Aiken.

I am placing these facts before you at such great length that you may have the benefit of my investigation and that you and the state of South Carolina may take such steps as you feel disposed to take to apprehend the lynchers of the three Lowmans, to punish them adequately for the murder and to end the state of lawlessness that now exists. I have reasons to believe that as set forth above many of the law enforcement officers who should be apprehending criminals are not only protecting these criminals but engaged in criminal practices themselves. I can, if you desire it and if you will give assurance that they will be protected from the vengeance of those responsible for the present condition, supply you with the names and addresses of reputable citizens of South Carolina who can furnish personal and documentary corroboration of the statements which I have made above.

If you care to do so, you may communicate with me in the care of Herbert Bayard Swepe, Executive Editor of the New York World, Pulitzer Building, New York.

Respectfully submitted,

(Signed) Walter White

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