

PRESS SERVICE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

MOORFIELD STOREY
President

69 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON
Secretary

TELEPHONE STUYVESANT 6548

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Baltimore	Bishop John Hurst	Los Angeles	Chairman: MARY WHITE O'WINGTON, New York
Boston	Joseph Prince Loud	Memphis	E. Burton Gerstl
	Moorfield Storey	New Haven	E. B. Clegg
Catell	Ella Rush Murray	New York	George W. Crawford
Chicago	Jane Addams		Lillian A. Alexander
	Dr. C. E. Collier		Rev. Hutchens C. Bishop
Cleveland	Harry E. Davis		Dr. W. E. Dubois
Detroit	How Ira W. Jayna		Rev. Dr. H. H. Holmes
Indianapolis	F. B. Ransom		Florence Kelley

Baltimore	Richmond	Morris L. Walker
Boston	Springfield	Rev. G. H. Waller
	Topeka	Hon. Arthur Capper
Catell	Washington	Nannie H. Burroughs
Chicago		Jesse A. Clegg
		Prov. Gov. William Cook
Cleveland		Charles Edward Russell
Detroit		Nevel H. Thomas

Immediate Release

October 29, 1926.

WALTER WHITE GETS NAMES
OF AIKEN, S. C. LYNCHERS

N.A.A.C.P. ASS'T. SECRETARY ON SCENE, UNCOVERS REIGN OF LAWLESS TERROR

FULL EVIDENCE TURNED OVER TO GOVERNOR MCLEOD OF SOUTH CAROLINA

New York, Oct. 29 - Names of lynchers and full details of the lynching of one colored woman, Bertha Lowman, and her brother and cousin, at Aiken, South Carolina, in the early morning of October 8, have been obtained in an investigation on the spot by Walter White, Assistant Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and all the facts submitted in a letter to Governor McLeod of South Carolina.

A lawless reign of terror in the State of South Carolina in the vicinity of the lynching city of Aiken is disclosed by the daring investigation just completed by the N.A.A.C.P. Assistant Secretary, which brings to light the following startling facts:

1. The lynching was planned and executed by members of the Ku Klux Klan.
2. Officers of the law took part in the lynching and a number of them acted as "official executioners" of the mob victims.
3. The prisoners were turned over to the mob by the Sheriff and his assistants, who were parties to the crime.
4. Reputable white citizens living in that vicinity are in terror of their lives from the lawless Ku Klux Klan ring and go heavily armed, bar their doors at night, and have been "praying to God" for some person from outside the State to come in and bare the facts.

Walter White, who has just returned to New York, made the following statement:

"I went to Aiken for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and as Special Correspondent of the New York World. I found a situation in South Carolina which beggars description. Among the persons with whom I talked were some of the best known and most respectable white citizens of South Carolina, including lawyers, newspaper editors, farmers and business men. I found them heavily armed and terrified because of the activities of the Klan and allied criminals. The predicament of colored people can easily be imagined.

"Early in 1924, Sam Lowman, his wife, Annie and their children moved from Saluda County where they had lived all their lives to the farm of a white man named Hartley, 13 miles from Aiken. As a result of a quarrel between this man and another white man, the latter sought to embarrass Hartley by notifying the Sheriff that the Lowmans were selling whiskey. I talked with a number of white people and without exception they declared that the Lowmans were an entirely industrious, law-abiding and respected family. As a result of the anonymous letter to the Sheriff, Sheriff H. H. Howard and Deputy Sheriffs Nellie Robinson, R. L. McElhaney, and A. D. Sheppard went to the Lowman home on April 25, 1925. Two weeks earlier, on a Sunday night, a crowd of Klansmen robed and hooded had called Demon Lowman, 22-year old son, from his home and whipped him.

SHERIFFS SHOWED NO BADGES

"When the four white Sheriffs in plain clothes, and with no badges, approached the Lowman home, Mrs. Annie Lowman, the mother, 55 years old, was making soap in the backyard and her daughter

(Continued Page 2)

-8-

Bertha, 27, was sweeping the yard. Sam Lowman, the father, had gone to the mill to have meal ground, while Damon Lowman and Clarence Lowman, 14 years of age and his cousin, who had been raised by Sam Lowman and his wife, were plowing in a field 100 yards away.

"When Mrs. Lowman and her daughter saw the white men approaching the house they thought it wisest to go inside until they had passed. The Sheriffs drew guns and started running towards the house to surround it. Bertha Lowman screamed. Damon and Clarence ran to the house as the Sheriffs rushed into it. Sheriff Howard and Bertha Lowman reached the back steps at the same time. The Sheriff knocked Bertha out of the way with his left fist, his pistol clutched in his right hand, shouting to her to stand back. In the melee Deputy Sheriff Robinson fired and killed Mrs. Annie Lowman. Bertha Lowman was shot twice in the left breast just above the heart and once through the abdomen. Clarence Lowman was also severely injured while Damon Lowman was shot but not wounded seriously. Sheriff Howard was killed by gunshot wounds and, in the first trial three state's witnesses testified that a pistol bullet went through his head. The Sheriffs had pistols. Clarence Lowman had a shotgun while Damon Lowman had a pistol but at no time was anywhere near Sheriff Howard or at a point where he could have shot the Sheriff. In the trial it was brought out that the white men did not in any manner indicate they were officers of the law.

HASTY TRIAL AMID HIGH TENSION

"Five of the Lowmans were arrested and moved hastily to the penitentiary at Columbia to avoid a lynching. According to the record of the South Carolina State Supreme Court, the shooting took place on April 25, Howard's funeral on the 26th (at which were present more than 200 Klansmen in full regalia), inquest was held on the 27th, the court convened on May 4, the indictment of the Lowmans was had the same day, the defendants were arraigned on the 9th and placed on trial May 12. Feeling was so high in Aiken, according to the defense brief in the Supreme Court, it was published to the world that it would be difficult to obtain lawyers for the Lowmans in Aiken. Attorneys were appointed by the court, who merely went through the gestures of defending them. In his charge to the jury, Judge H. F. Rice, knowing of the danger to the lawyers, even though appointed by the court, apologized for the formal defense made by them and impressed upon the jury the fact that 'none of them wanted to do it.'

"Bertha, Damon and Clarence were found guilty of murder with a recommendation of mercy in the case of Bertha. Damon and Clarence were sentenced to die on June 18, 1925 and Bertha to life imprisonment. It is worthy of note that Bertha and Clarence Lowman's lives were hanging in the balance from their wounds at the time they were placed on trial and they were taken from the hospital to the court room.

"The case was so outrageous that N. J. Frederick, a colored attorney of Columbia, on his own initiative, entered the case and filed an excellent appeal to the State Supreme Court for a review of the cases, resulting in a reversal of the convictions and the remanding of the defendants for a new trial.

"The three defendants were again placed on trial Oct. 5 at Aiken, Judge Lanham presiding. Mr. Frederick retained L. G. Southard, a white attorney of Spartanburg, paying him \$125 out of his own pocket. Messrs. Frederick and Southard put up a magnificent defense and completely demolished the State's case. On Oct. 7, a motion was made for a directed verdict of not guilty in the case of Damon Lowman. It was generally conceded in Aiken that Clarence and Bertha would be freed by the jury the next day. At 5 in the afternoon Judge Lanham granted the motion for the dismissal of the case against Damon. He was however immediately re-arrested on a charge of assault and battery and recommitted to jail.

THE LYNCHING PLANNED BY KU KLUX KLAN

"Within one hour after the Judge's decision, news had been sent to as distant a point as Columbia that the 3 Lowmans were to be lynched that night. Within the same hour the Ku Klux Klan held a meeting in the office of a prominent white attorney of Aiken who had been recently elected to the State Legislature. At this meeting plans were perfected for the lynching and also plans were discussed, but abandoned, to tar and feather Mr. Frederick and to castrate Mr. Southard, the white attorney. A prominent and respectable white lawyer of Spartanburg warned Judge Lanham and Solicitor

(Continued on page 3)

-3-

Bert Carter that a lynching was in the air. Despite this the Lowmans were committed to jail with only one guard whereas plans had been made to remove the defendants hastily should they be convicted.

"Shortly after midnight a police officer of Aiken forced automobileists to remove cars from around the jail so that the lynchers would have a place to park their cars. According to reliable informants Sheriff Robinson, Deputy Sheriff McElhany and A. D. Sheppard, and Traffic Policeman Salley dragged Bertha Lowman from her cell, got the other 2 defendants and handed them over to the mob. After the mob had secured the prisoners 2 shots were fired inside the jail and not, as Sheriff Robinson claimed, when he was trying 'to prevent entry' of the mob into the jail.

"The mob numbering between 30 and 40 started out York Street on the Dixie highway to a tourist camp about 2 miles from Aiken. On the way Clarence Lowman jumped from the car in which he was held. He was shot down and recaptured. In order to prevent telltale blood marks, a rope was tied to the back of the car and the other end of it around Clarence's body. In this manner he was dragged about a mile to the place of execution. The members of the mob stated that Bertha was the hardest one to kill. She was shot but not killed instantly. She dragged herself over the ground and, as one member of the mob put it, 'bleated like a goat.' Another member of the mob, slightly more decent, said that she begged so pitifully for her life and squirmed about so that a number of shots had to be fired before one found a vital spot and ended her agony.

FACTS GIVEN TO SOUTH CAROLINA'S GOVERNOR

"I have furnished Thomas G. McLeod, Governor of South Carolina, in a 6-page letter, every detail regarding the lynching. I have given him the name of the member of the mob who was accorded 'the honor' of being executioner but whose nerve failed him. I have furnished him with the names of the 3 men who did act as executioners and of their 2 assistants. I have furnished him with the names and addresses and occupations of 22 members of the mob telling the Governor in detail of the part played by each one of them at the lynching. I have furnished him with the names of 11 other persons who were very close to the lynching as spectators but who did not actively participate in it.

"This list includes besides the Sheriff and his deputies other so-called law-enforcement officers, prominent business men and 3 men related to the Governor and the name of at least one member of the Grand Jury investigating the lynching. I also furnished the Governor with the names of 4 white men and one colored man incarcerated in the Aiken jail on the night of the lynching, and who saw the Sheriff and his deputies drag Bertha Lowman from her cell and turn her over to the mob. I have also stated to the Governor that I can furnish him with the names and addresses of most influential and respectable white citizens of the community who will testify to the correctness of the facts set forth, if the Governor will guarantee them protection from the vengeance of the Klan and the lynchers.

ATTEMPT TO STAGE RACE RIOT

"Following the lynching an attempt was made to stage a race riot to cover the guilt of the murders. Agents of the Klan went around Aiken saying the Negroes were armed and were going to 'rise in the night and kill all the white people.' The same tactics were used as in the famous Phillips County, Arkansas, riots of 1919, which the N.A.A.C.P. exposed. Fortunately this dastardly attempt did not succeed.

"I learned that the inevitable aftermath of Klan activities is now being seen in South Carolina. The element of membership which acted as a restraining influence in the Klan and which entered the movement believing it to be a law-enforcement body as it claimed, has largely resigned. The local Klans are now in the hands of murderers, bootleggers, operators of stills and other criminals. As I have said the law-abiding element of whites are living in a state of constant terror and indeed are more afraid of the Klan and of the lower order of whites than are Negroes.

WHITE MEN ARMED FOR DEFENSE AGAINST KLAN

"In the home of one white man, formerly a high officer in the Klan, and who resigned when he found out the nature of the movement, he showed me an automatic pistol which he carried in his trousers pocket and a .38 calibre revolver in a holster. He told me that if he went only across the road in front of his house after nightfall, a distance of some 75 feet, he strapped on his person, in addition, a cartridge belt and two .45 calibre army revolvers.

"This man showed me a collection of 30 guns including rifles,
(Continued page 4)

A.1600-65012

-4-

shotguns and revolvers which he had in his home for self-protection. For 4 years the members of the Klan from which he has resigned have been attempting to kill him. The late Sheriff Howard, the present Sheriff Robinson and the present deputy sheriffs were all expelled from the Klan some years ago for 'conduct unbecoming a Klansman.' But they were later readmitted. On the anniversary of Sheriff Howard's death, the Klan held a celebration at his grave in the Graniteville Cemetery at which, according to the Columbia State, more than 1,500 persons, many of them clad in Klan robes, were furnished with free lunches and lemonade and listened to eulogies of the late Sheriff. This celebration took place while the State Supreme Court was deliberating on the appeal for a new trial for the Lowmans.

"This makes the 41st lynching I have investigated, besides 8 race riots. In none of them have I seen the depravity, barbarity, and terrorism which exists in and near Aiken. One of the white men with whom I talked and who gave me much valuable information, put his hand on my shoulder as I was leaving and said: 'Mr. White, work into your story the fact that you were sent by God. For 7 weeks a group of white people has met here in my house every night and prayed that some man from out of the State be sent to open up this mass of corruption and to publish to the world the terrible state of affairs prevailing here. You are the answer to that prayer.'"

A.600-1650.13