Tallahassee, Florida
May 29, 1941

Hon. Spessard L. Holland
Governor of Florida
State Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida

SUBJECT: Re: Death of A. C. Williams
(Negro) by violence in
Gadsen County Florida
on May 13, 1941

Dear Governor:

I beg to report the following facts on the above subject.

On May 11, 1941 at about 2:30 A. M. Police Officer Dan Davis
who is Assistant Chief of Police for the City of Quincy, Florida
while cruising in the Southern Section of Quincy, known as the
Seaboard Section heard two gun shot reports and he immediately
went in the direction from which these reports came. Going there
he saw a negro running. He gave chase and the negro ran behind
a chicken house and then into a negro house very close by. Officer
Davis knocked on the door and they admitted him. There he found
three negro men in the room and one he recognized as A. C. Williams;
the negro he was chasing. He arrested him on suspicion, thinking
he had fired the two shots heard. As he was coming out of the
house with Williams, Officer J. J. Rowan (Constable) and E. M.
Potter, City Police Officer drove up in their car as they were cut
searching for a negro. Officer Davis turned Williams over to
Officers Potter and Rowan and asked them to put Williams in jail
as he was going to search for the gun, that he thought Williams
had fired. While he was searching, Officers Rowan and Potter
returned to where he was searching. They had with them a Mr. Bell.
Mr. Bell stated that someone had broken into his house and had stolen two watches and one dollar and fifty cents. The money being a one dollar bill and a fifty cent piece and had tried to rape his twelve-year-old daughter, Thelma Bell. Officer Davis then searched behind the chicken house where Williams ran and found there two watches, identified by Mr. Bell as being his watches that were stolen from his house a short while before.

When Officer Davis searched Williams before turning him over to Officers Rowan and Potter he took off Williams' person a one dollar bill and a fifty cent piece, two five cent pieces, and black handle case knife or kitchen knife. The Officers Davis, Rowan and Potter went to the home of Mr. Bell and talked to the family. The child, Thelma Bell looked to be a child about twelve years old and showed scratches and bruises on her face and neck and told Officers Davis, Rowan and Potter "he woke me up in the bed, he was in the bed with me and feeling of me, I said who is this. When I said that he put one hand over my mouth and started choking me."

In this room there were two beds, Thelma Bell's smaller sister was asleep in the other bed and was awakened by the sounds of her sister screaming and struggling. The smaller girl screamed and awakened the father Mr. Bell. Both girls recognized the man as being a negro as he ran out of the room. The father Mr. Bell came into the room and the negro was gone. Mr. Bell did not see the negro but he rushed to the door and shot his gun twice. More to summon help than anything else because he did not see the negro. This was about 2:30 A.M. Sunday Morning May 11, 1941.

Sunday Morning May 11th at about eight o'clock, Officer Davis (who being a night Police Officer for the City of Quincy) reported the
incident to his superior office Chief of Police Ed. Wynn.

At one o'clock Sunday P.M. May 11, 1941 Mrs. Bell, the mother of Thelma Bell telephoned to Dr. S. E. Wilhoit (Dr. Wilhoit a very prominent physician of Quincy, Florida) saying that she wanted to see him. He asked what he could do for her. She said she could not tell him over the telephone. Dr. Wilhoit told her to come to his office. She did so and brought Thelma Bell with her. Dr. Wilhoit examined Thelma Bell and his examination disclosed that she (Thelma Bell) had been raped and that she was scratched and bruised about the face and neck.

About 2:30 A.M. Monday morning May 12, 1941 while Officer Davis was proceeding diagonally across the street from Lovetts Store to the Quincy State Bank directly under the street light a car, a Ford sedan with four doors drove very close to Officer Davis and stopped. Two men jumped out of the car, one from the back seat and one from the front seat. Both were wearing a mask and armed each with a pistol. Each man seized Officer Davis by an arm, disarming him and each placing a pistol in Officer Davis' side, told him to get into the car and not make any trouble. There were two other men in the car. Officer Davis asked the four men "what is this all about". They said "we want A. C. Williams and no trouble ". At this point Officer Davis says that when he got into the car that the smell of whiskey was very strong. They proceeded to drive to the county jail in a round about way, traveling six blocks, when the jail was only two and one-half blocks by direct course. They drove directly to the front door of the jail, over the walk and lawn. There was no guard or night man on duty at the jail. Upon arriving at the jail, the four men demanded that Officer Davis unlock the jail and upon opening the front door Officer Davis reached in and switched on a light, whereupon one of the masked men stuck his gun
in Officer Davis' side roughly, saying "turn off that dam light, we will furnish all the lights for this party". Then one of the masked men remained at the front door of the jail, one in the car, and two men each with a pistol in Officer Davis' side demanded that Officer Davis unlock the cell doors. He did so and the two masked men handcuffed A. C. Williams hands behind him and shoved Davis into the cell and took A. C. Williams with them, slamming the door to the cell block. This left Officer Davis free to come out of the cell and into the corridor, but he was locked in the cell block. Officer Davis immediately began to call for help. Sheriff Luten who lives in a cottage near the jail heard Officer Davis's cries, but thought it was a drunk in jail that some of the City Police Officers had put in jail, as the City used the County Jail for City prisoners. After a short while of hearing the cries decided to investigate. Whereupon he found that it was not a drunk but Officer Dan Davis. He immediately went into the jail and turned Officer Davis out. When Sheriff Luten let Davis out, Davis said "they have got that negro out and gone with him". At this point Sheriff Luten says that he thought Officer Davis was talking about a negro whom he was holding in jail for safe keeping for the Sheriff of Jackson County Florida.

Sheriff Luten together with Officers Davis, Boyd, Chief of Police Wynn began searching for the four masked men and A. C. Williams. Officer Boyd found a plow line tied to a limb of a tree on a cliff near the warehouse of the G. F. & A. Railroad Companies, East Quincy Station. Upon making investigation Sheriff Luten together with the Police Officers discovered blood stains on the ground directly under the plow line dangling from the limb. Further investigation they discovered marks on the ground apparently made by someone crawling and dragging with blood stains here and there. Then to a point under the G. F. & A. Warehouse which was a distance of about forty or fifty feet from the tree from which the plow line dangled
The Sheriff and Police Officers searched under and around the warehouse in
the bushes and weeds in the vicinity of the C. F. & A. warehouse for A. C.
Williams but were unable to find him. Sheriff Luten then went to the home
of the mother of A. C. Williams and inquired of his whereabouts. Whereupon
she insisted that she had not seen him or heard of him since the Saturday
night before and nothing further was heard of A. C. Williams until Monday
night May 12, 1941. A. C. Williams' mother came to the home of Sheriff
Luten and told him that A. C. had come home and was shot and needed a
doctor. Thereupon Sheriff Luten immediately called Circuit Judge E. C.
Love on the telephone and asked for an interview, going to Judge Love's
house. After talking with Judge Love Sheriff Luten decided to call Dr.
S. E. Wilhoit and together with Dr. Wilhoit went to A. C. William's mother's
house and there found that A. C. Williams was not in his mother's house but
in the house next to her house. Examination made by Dr. Wilhoit showed that
A. C. Williams had been shot ten times. Three of these shots pierced him in
the upper chest and lungs. The other seven shots were in the legs and arms.
Dr. Wilhoit advised that A. C. Williams had a fifty fifty chance to recover
if given proper attention. Thereupon the Sheriff made arrangements with
Will Webb a local negro undertaker to take A. C. Williams to the negro
hospital at Tallahassee, Florida at once. This was after midnight May 12,
1941. There were several negroes at the house where A. C. Williams was
laying and Sheriff Luten asked them if they would assist Will Webb, the negro
undertaker with A. C. Williams. Dr. Wilhoit had given A. C. Williams a
hypodermic. Sheriff Luten and Dr. Wilhoit the only two white persons there,
then left and went to their respective homes. Will Webb and the three negro
men put A. C. Williams into the ambulance and started to the hospital at
Tallahassee, Florida. There were no other persons present - no indication of
any mob or any gathering whatever. It was after midnight and no suspicion of
anything as the ambulance proceeded on its way to Tallahassee.
About four miles east of Quincy on Florida State Highway #1 someone waving with a flashlight stopped the ambulance. Only two men were seen by Will Webb. These two men were masked and armed with pistols. They told Webb that they wanted A.C. Williams and no trouble. They took A.C. Williams and placed him in the back of their car. Will Webb drove back to Quincy with the ambulance and met Officer Dan Davis. Both Webb and Officer Davis went to Sheriff Luten's house and reported what had happened. This was way after midnight. No trace could be found of A.C. Williams or the car which took him away. Will Webb says that as he was leaving Quincy en route to Tallahassee with A.C. Williams a car passed him. He does not know whether it was the same car that took A.C. Williams away from him or not. This was about two A.M. Tuesday, May 13, 1941.

About five o'clock A.M. Tuesday morning May 13, 1941 Chaff Chason (a white man) who is in the logging business telephoned to Sheriff Luten that a dead negro was lying face up on the bridge over Withlacoochee Creek, which is on the road from Quincy, Florida to Attapulgus, Georgia five miles north of Quincy, Florida. Sheriff Luten, together with his son, went immediately to this spot where they found the dead body of A.C. Williams. Sheriff Luten returned to Quincy immediately where he got Dr. Wilhoit and again examined the body of A.C. Williams. This examination showed no additional bullet wounds, but did show that he had been shot in the arm and side with bird shot. Sheriff Luten notified State's Attorney Orion Parker of Tallahassee, Florida, who came to Quincy and attended the inquest and examining witnesses and making a personal investigation.

I have discussed this case with many people of prominence in Quincy and I find no mob sentiment. The largest number ever involved was only four persons. There has been no crowd or gathering of any great number of people. The sentiment of the general public is they feel that the officers did their duty.
In talking to Sheriff Luten he said "I had no idea that A.C. Williams would be further molested after placing him in the ambulance; that no one except he and Dr. Wilhoit and the three negroes present knew anything about the transfer of A.C. Williams from Quincy to Tallahassee". It was after midnight, everything was quiet, no one on the streets, and, therefore, he did not think it necessary for him to go or to send a guard with A.C. Williams to the hospital.

There have been several rumors, not originating in that county, that the body of A.C. Williams was taken to the school house with a sheet over it and shown to the colored students there, and was told that the same thing would happen to them if they committed such a crime.

I find no foundation of facts to this rumor.

The body of A.C. Williams, immediately following the inquest, was taken to the home of his mother. She refusing to accept the body, was then taken to the county convict camp where a coffin was made and Will Webb, the colored undertaker, prepared the body for burial and was buried by him in the colored cemetery. (my personal opinion is that the mother was afraid to accept the body).

If you desire further information in the matter please advise me.

Respectfully yours,

[Signature]

MAURICE H. TRIPP