

A Legacy of Persecution:

The Bell Family of Amite County



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I. INTRODUCTION

“He was the largest landholder and beat supervisor in one county and Justice of the Peace in the next and hence the fountainhead if not of law at least of advice and suggestion...He was a farmer, a usurer, and veterinarian...He owned the store and the cotton gin and the combined grist mill and blacksmith shop in the village proper and it was considered, to put it mildly, bad luck for a man of the neighbourhood to do his trading or gin his cotton or grind his meal or shoe his stock anywhere else”.

William Faulker, *The Hamlet*¹

During the Mississippi summer of 1945, an African-American sharecropper by the name of Eugene Bell was approached by a white farmer, Russ MacDowell. During the previous year Bell had worked on MacDowell’s farm, as well as that of a subsequent employer, until he joined the United States Army. Bell was discharged after three months due to a heart condition. He would return home to work on the farm of his father-in-law, Herbert Lea. Unhappy with this turn of events, MacDowell prophesised to Bell:

“You didn’t stay with me and you didn’t stay with...[another man] and you didn’t stay in the Army, which means you’re no good...you will never die with your shoes off. You’re going to die like your old grandfather”.²

Was MacDowell’s reference to Eugene Bell’s grandfather, who was whipped and murdered in 1893, a prophesy or a threat? As it turned out, both Bow Bell and his grandson Eugene were lynched and neither crime was ever punished.

This paper examines the social and political context for both murders. The death of Bow Bell can be seen as a response to agricultural depression, reactionary violence and the return of Reconstruction-era Klan ideology in the 1890’s perpetuated by “White Cap” racial terrorists. The murder of Eugene Bell in 1945 during World War II reflects similar themes: racial violence and terrorism were used to keep a black man in his proper place, “working under the watchful eye of a white man.” Officials in both cases took no action against the perpetrators of the two murders so that justice was absent in both cases.

¹ William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (1940).

² ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* June 29th 1946

II. THE LIFE AND DEATH OF BOW BELL

On July 10, 1893, Bow Bell was ambushed and murdered by two unidentified parties while ploughing on a farm in Franklin County.³ This event occurred soon after Bell moved across the adjoining boundary line of his home county, Amite. The previous fall, less than a year before his murder, Bell had testified in Amite Circuit Court that he had been severely whipped by Whitecaps.⁴

The 1880 United States Federal Census indicates that Bow Bell was born in Mississippi around 1850.⁵ The names of Bell's mother and father are presently unknown. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the Freedman's Bureau, established by Congress, oversaw the conclusion of labour contracts between plantation owners and their former slaves.⁶ Out of an estimated 436, 631 slaves held in Mississippi in 1860, only around 36,000 are named on the contracts that were drawn up.⁷ No such contracts exist from Amite County.⁸ The first known recording of Bell identifies him as thirty years of age, a farm labourer and married head-of-house with five young children, residing in Beat 4, Amite County, Mississippi.⁹

A. White Cap Terror

The emergence of the Whitecap movement in the early 1890s occurred nineteen years after the official disbanding of the Klu Klux Klan by its founder, Nathan Bedford Forrest.¹⁰ "Whitecapism" was born out of agricultural depression.¹¹ In 1891 when the Mississippi movement was first formed in Amite and Franklin County and other locales, it fashioned itself as a "protectionist club."¹² W. Holmes outlines the downward spiral towards tenancy facing Southern white farmers: the lien and assignation of ungrown crops to merchants in order to obtain credit; the merchants in turn insisting on the perennial cultivation of cotton as the chief "money crop" of the South.¹³ A decline in cotton prices

³ 'A Brutal Assassination. A Negro, Bow Beall, Foully Murdered While Ploughing in a Field', *The Summit Sentinel* July 13th 1893.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ 1880 United States Federal Census, Beat 4, Amite, Mississippi.

⁶ Mississippi State Department of Archives & History: Freedmen's Bureau Search Help Page, accessible online at <http://opac2.mdah.state.ms.us/freedmanblurb.php>

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ 1880 United States Federal Census, Beat 4, Amite, Mississippi.

¹⁰ M. Newton, *The Klu Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History* (North Carolina, 2010), 56.

¹¹ W. Holmes. 'Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era', 63 *Jewish Historical Quarterly* 244 (1974), 245.

¹² Newton, *The Klu Klux Klan in Mississippi*, 56.

¹³ Holmes. 'Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era', 246

coupled with high interest rates led to prevailing debt and frequent surrender of land to creditors through foreclosure.¹⁴ Where racism entered the fold was the direct leasing of mercantile farms to African-American tenants by absentee owners.¹⁵ This arrangement fostered resentment on the part of some local white residents who believed that “for a Negro to be in his proper place, he should work under the watchful eye of a white.”¹⁶

A manifesto published in the *Magnolia Gazette* decried the concentration of farmland into business syndicates. Supporters of the manifesto sought to combat the demoralization of the white farmer and laborer through control of “negro labor,” claiming that such control “is by right ours” so that “we may tend the soil under white supremacy.”¹⁷ Their goal would be achieved through agrarian violence in the form of “nocturnal terrorism,” directed through paramilitary-styled Whitecap societies.¹⁸

After dismissing complaints of Whitecap activity in 1892, Governor John Marshall Stone condemned the movement in January the following year, offering \$100 per conviction.¹⁹ In April the arrival of Governor Stone in Lincoln County coincided with the conviction of six defendants for arson and attempted murder. Just four days earlier, a mob of seventy-five armed men had disrupted the trial over which Judge Chrisman presided.²⁰

A targeted campaign against a wealthy Jewish merchant, H. Hiller of Summit, Pike County, encompassed the burning of twenty-seven farm houses across Amite, Pike and Franklin Counties, resulting in an estimated loss of \$50,000.²¹ Hiller sold his mercantile firm to Eugene L. Scott in February 1893. Bell worked on the Scott property before his murder in the same year.²²

In November 1892 fifty whites at Zion Hill, Amite County, condemned an order issued against two African-Americans, Henry and Cicero McGehee, requiring them to cease their cotton gin operation.²³ Cicero McGehee is likely the same man who was a co-witness alongside Bell in Amite Circuit Court. A county-wide gathering followed the condemnation,

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *Magnolia Gazette*, August 19, 1893.

¹⁸ Holmes. ‘Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era’, 247.

¹⁹ Newton, *The Klu Klux Klan in Mississippi*, 57.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 58.

²¹ Holmes. ‘Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era’, 249.

²² ‘A Brutal Assassination...’ *The Summit Sentinel* July 13th 1893.

²³ Holmes. ‘Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era’, 250.

when around four hundred African-Americans united in support of the McGehees at Liberty on November 7, 1892.²⁴ The group adopted resolutions proclaiming that Whitecap actions were harming black tenants, and if not halted, they would leave the county.²⁵ The resolutions met with sympathy from whites and were presented before the court house.

B. Bell's Testimony and Murder

During the March term of Amite Circuit Court, Bow Bell, alongside two men, named as Cicero McGhee and Bell's son, appeared before the Court to delivery testimony that Bell had been whipped at night²⁶ by a group of men in Amite County the previous Fall.²⁷ Consistent with the Whitecap cause, the attacks upon Bell are believed to have been initiated because he was in direct possession of land which he worked independently.²⁸ An individual named as D.W. Fenn, among others, was indicted in the attack under section 968 Code 1890 for Assault and Battery.²⁹

Soon thereafter Bell moved across the boundary line between Amite and Franklin County, to reside on the property of a Mr. Cage McGehee.³⁰ It is not known whether any other member of Bell's family relocated with him.

It was reported that at approximately 8 o'clock on the morning of Monday July 10, 1893 Bell was leading a mule-driven plough on the land of Mr. Eugene Scott.³¹ The specific topography of the land--*bottom land*--was surrounded by a dense growth of cane. Two different parties approached Bell, armed with shotguns; one was loaded with buckshot and the other turkey shot.³²

Bell was fired upon when turning his mule at the end of the field row, with the shot "passing entirely through his body".³³ He was knocked to the ground, and crawled for several feet, when the attackers fired two more shots, which struck him at the hip. The attackers

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ See the testimony of Cicero McGhee as stated by Frank Alexander McLain in his letter to Governor John M. Stone, dated October 21st 1893, Official Correspondence of Governor John M. Stone, Mississippi Department of Archives & History.

²⁷ Letter from Frank Alexander McLain to Governor John M. Stone, October 21st 1893, Official Correspondence of Governor John M. Stone, Mississippi Department of Archives & History

²⁸ Interview with Mrs. Ida Mae Williams, 07/23/2014, CRRJP File 04-022.

²⁹ Letter from Frank Alexander McLain to Governor John M. Stone, October 21st 1893.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ 'A Brutal Assassination...' *The Summit Sentinel* July 13th 1893.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

moved to stand over Bell, still alive, and place the muzzle of a gun on the left side of his head. With the following shot Bell was decapitated.³⁴

As the sound of the shots echoed into the air, nearby field hands did not suspect anything was amiss, as shooting for game frequently occurred in the area.³⁵ The tracks of the attackers led from the scene back into Amite County.³⁶

The month of October witnessed further reports of Whitecap activity across Mississippi, with a telegram appearing in the Natchez *Daily Democrat* on October 15 stating that the gin house of R. K. Marders of Yalobusha County had been posted at night with a threat that “the house and contents would be burned if any more cotton was ginned until it reached the price of ten cents.”³⁷ The *Democrat* had earlier reported that on July 31 Governor Stone would travel to Marion County to deliver a lecture “on the subject of Whitecapping.” with the news article also commented that “a rigid enforcement of the law in a few cases would accomplish more than a hundred lectures from the Governor.”³⁸ The Vicksburg *Daily Commercial Herald* reported that a public meeting on Whitecapping was held in Franklin County on October 9, and had resolved that “vigorous measures were taken to suppress this mean crime, so prevalent that it had to be treated in this way.”³⁹

On October 18 Governor Stone wrote to Captain W. A. Montgomery, stationed at Edwards, Hinds County, questioning reports about the whipping of African Americans in that locale which had appeared in the *Memphis Commercial*.⁴⁰ The Governor’s solution was that, “there is nothing to do, except for the aggrieved party, if there is any truth in the whipping, to go before the grand jury and have the parties indicted.”⁴¹ Captain Montgomery’s reply was definitive:

“After investigating the above, I find that the notices as stated were posted, but there has been no whippings no threats, no cessations in the sale of cotton seed or other products

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Natchez *Daily Democrat* October 15th 1893.

³⁸ Natchez *Daily Democrat* July 19th 1893.

³⁹ Vicksburg *Daily Commercial Herald* October 18th 1893.

⁴⁰ Letter from Governor John M. Stone to Captain M.A. Montgomery, October 18th 1893, Official Correspondence of Governor John M. Stone, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

and it is but reasonable to supposed some fellow posted the notice as a joke. We have no whitecaps in this neighbourhood.”⁴²

With regards Bell’s native county, it was reported that since the winter of 1892 “with the exception of several cases of personal violence – this is whipping – inflicted upon some colored people by lawless men at night, the county of Amite has been quiet and peaceful.”⁴³

C. The Law Enforcement Response

At the late October term of Amite Circuit Court, the case of *the State v. D.W. Fenn et al.* was called. District Attorney F.A. McLain announced to the Court that Bell had been assassinated.⁴⁴ The state’s first witness, Cicero McGhee, stated to McLain that he knew nothing of the case, except “that he saw on the night of the whipping a band of men ride by his house.”⁴⁵ Bell’s son also claimed that he knew nothing of the case. He said that he was out “coon and opossum huntin’” and heard about the incident several days later. Faced with the prospect of going to trial without testimony, which the defendants urged, McLain opted to declare *nolle prosequi*.⁴⁶

Upon hearing of the declaration of *nolle prosequi* in the Vicksburg *Daily Commercial Herald*,⁴⁷ Governor Stone wrote to McLain requesting him to “write me full what trust there is” in the report in the *Herald* that “the District Attorney entered a Nolle Pros. in a case of Whitecapping in Amite Co. because one of his witnesses had been murdered and the other was so terrified that he could not be induced to testify.”⁴⁸ McLain sought to refute the statement, declaring it “incorrect...in that he did not refuse to testify, but absolutely denied knowing anything about the case.” McLain further elaborated: “Whether he was prompted to say, “I know nothing of the case,” from free and honest motives, or from the “terrifying” recollection of the cruel and foul death of his father, let the facts surrounding the case, speak.”⁴⁹

⁴² Letter from Captain M. A. Montgomery to Governor John M. Stone, October 23rd 1893, Official Correspondence of Governor John M. Stone, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

⁴³ Letter from Frank Alexander McLain to Governor John M. Stone, October 21st 1893.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Vicksburg *Daily Commercial Herald*, October 18th 1893.

⁴⁸ Letter from Governor John M. Stone to Frank Alexander McLain, October 19th 1893.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

District Attorney McLain would later observe that: “I think I can safely say that very little Whitecapism, exists in Franklin county – as an organisation. It has its sympathisers here and there in the country...On one of her borders, she has had some Whitecap outrages. In her interior, some notices have been posted around; commanding owners not the gin & etc from what I could learn; the people were pretty well satisfied that this was the act of one certain individual.”⁵⁰

D.W. Fenn may be identified as Daniel Willoughby Fenn of Amite County (February 3, 1833 to January 9, 1917).⁵¹ He is said to have served in the 4th Confederate Mississippi Cavalry, also known as Stockdale’s Battalion, and fought at the siege of Port Hudson.⁵² Indeed, some descendants highlight his service alongside Forrest himself.⁵³ Fenn held considerable vested interests in the cotton industry. In his lifetime he was the proprietor of a cotton gin, a saw mill, and a grist mill, as well as a large plantation.⁵⁴ If Daniel Willoughby Fenn is indeed the individual named on the indictment, it defies the common stereotype that violent acts were carried out solely by poor white farmers.⁵⁵

In the *Summit Sentinel* of July 13th 1893, the adjoining column to that describing Bell’s murder reads that in the evening following the attack, a D.W. Fenn enjoyed festivities as a newly appointed officer of the Summit Branch of the Odd Fellows Lodge. The newly installed officers “invited the Brothers present out to a delicious lunch, where good cheers, jollity and wit reigned unconfined.”⁵⁶

On July 13, 1893, the *Summit Sentinel*, July 13 1893, reporting the murder of Bow Bell, endorsed the principle of justice:

“Midnight murders, cold-blooded assassinations and ruthlessly shooting down men, as well as burning houses has become of late almost a weekly occurrence in the Southern tier of counties. It is entirely too frequent, open

⁵⁰Letter from F.A McLain to Governor John M. Stone, October 21st 1893.

⁵¹ United States, Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current, Daniel Willoughby Fenn, accessible online at <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=95899153&ref=acom> last viewed 07/23/2014

⁵² The Mississippi in the Civil War Message Board. Re: Dan Willoughby Fenn, accessible online at http://history-sites.com/cgi-bin/bbs62x/mscwmb/webbbs_config.pl?md=read;id=20489 last viewed 07/23/2014

⁵³ The Mississippi in the Civil War Message Board. Re: Dan Willoughby Fenn, accessible online at http://history-sites.com/cgi-bin/bbs62x/mscwmb/webbbs_config.pl?md=read;id=20489 last viewed 07/23/2014

⁵⁴ ‘History of Dan Willoughby Fenn, Mary Letha Ann Dickey, Otis L. Fenn and Tempie Cain Gammill’ *Ralph and Tempe Crosby Collection*, Box 8, Folder 2, Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies, Historical Collections.

⁵⁵ Correspondence with Professor William Holmes, CRRJP File 04-033

⁵⁶ ‘Odd Fellows Installation’ *The Summit Sentinel* July 13th 1893.

and bold, and if allowed to continue much longer a reign of terror will set in, where justice before peace and quiet prevailed.

We hope these assassins will soon be apprehended, and swift justice meted out to them.”

However, following the declaration of *nolle prosequi* by Attorney General F.A. McLain in *the State v. D. W. Fenn et al.*, no one was ever held accountable for either the assault and battery or the murder of Bow Bell.

III. THE LIFE AND DEATH OF EUGENE BELL

On the evening of Saturday 22nd August 1945, Eugene Bell was lynched by a group of white men in Amite County, Mississippi. Despite local law enforcement being made aware of the identification of the perpetrators, no arrests were ever made.

Eugene Bell was born around 1923 to Deacon John Bell and Mrs. Vinie A. Bell.⁵⁷ He was described by relations as “very kind,” “quiet” and “did not start trouble.”⁵⁸ A “hard worker,”⁵⁹ Bell was raised with his family and farmed on a number of properties including that of Wilkerson, the Rowe Plantation and MacDowell.⁶⁰ In 1944 Bell left the MacDowell farm to work for another unknown white farmer.⁶¹ On the December 27, 1944 Bell enlisted in the United States army at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.⁶² After three months Bell was honorably discharged⁶³ due to a heart condition.⁶⁴ He thereafter returned to Amite County to plant a crop on the land of his father-in-law Herbert Lea,⁶⁵ having married his daughter; Verma Lea.⁶⁶

A. Racial Violence in the 1930s and 1940s

The Great Depression of the 1930s would see the resurgence of racist sentiment in the South. Despite a recorded twenty-seven lynchings occurring between 1931 and 1939,

⁵⁷ Interview with Mrs. Ida Mae Williams, 07/23/2014.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mrs. Ida Mae Williams, 04/11/14, CRRJP File 04-022.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mrs. Ida Mae Williams, 07/23/14.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* June 29, 1946.

⁶² U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938 – 1946.

⁶³ ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* June 29, 1946.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mrs. Ida Mae Williams, 07/23/14.

⁶⁵ ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* Jun 29, 1946.

⁶⁶ Interview with Mrs. Ida Mae Williams, 07/23/14.

Mississippi's Senators remained resistant to a federal ban on its practise.⁶⁷ Klan notices posted across Alabama seeking funds for the relocation of blacks to Africa in 1930 were echoed by Senator Theodore Bilbo in his 1939 proposal to create "Greater Liberia," to address high unemployment levels through the relocation of twelve million black citizens to the 400,000 square miles of African territory, which had been ceded to the United States from Britain and France in order to repay First World War debt.⁶⁸

In tandem with President F.D. Roosevelt's New Deal measures, the 1930s witnessed a rise in agricultural and industrial Klan terrorism.⁶⁹ The harassment and murder of black Mississippi railroad workers would thin their ranks to less than 100 state-wide by 1940, with the *New Republic* observing that Klan "practises were being resumed in the certainty that dead men not only tell no tales but create vacancies."⁷⁰ A black organizer of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU), Rev. T.A. Allen, was shot dead, and by 1939 STFU members would be subject to a catalogue of arrests, beatings and at least one castration.⁷¹

Further violence would arise over African-American conscription during the Second World War, based on concerns that the issuance of uniforms to blacks would also carry an undue world wisdom and "biggity" nature.⁷² Even though no lynchings were recorded by Mississippi officials between 1939 and 1945, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People reported six.⁷³ Indeed, in rural areas racial violence was seldom reported and often hushed up by local press.⁷⁴

The threat that MacDowell issued to Eugene Bell would echo the sentiment of the previous half century: African-American farmers should always be subservient to whites, either through supervision or employment.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Newton, *The Klu Klux Klan in Mississippi*, 98.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Newton, *The Klu Klux Klan in Mississippi*, 99.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 100.

⁷² *ibid.*, 101.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Holmes. 'Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era', 247

B. August 1945: The Murder of Eugene Bell

On the evening of August 25, 1945, members of the Bell and Lea family were travelling to their home from McComb, Mississippi,⁷⁶ in a truck driven by Hilton “Babe” Lea, brother-in-law of Eugene Bell.⁷⁷ Present in the group was Lea’s wife as well as Verma Bell.⁷⁸ Riding upon the back of the vehicle was Bell himself and Lea’s two younger brothers, Oliver and Melvin.⁷⁹

The family was tailed on the road by a truck with darkened headlights.⁸⁰ Suddenly a loud noise, mistaken for a tire blowout, pierced the air, then an “anguished cry.”⁸¹ Stopping to investigate, Lea found Bell dying from a bullet wound.⁸² Three men--Oball Mundrey, Earl Moore and Little Wiley Banns--approached Lea’s truck.⁸³ Lea’s wife and his younger brothers were forced from the truck at gunpoint and made to flee the scene.⁸⁴

Moore reportedly struck Lea upon the head with his gun.⁸⁵ When Lea grabbed Moore’s weapon in defense, Moore ordered his accomplices to shoot and kill him. Instead, Lea was beaten unconscious by all three men, who believed that he would not survive his injuries.⁸⁶ The remainder of the group witnessed the wounded Bell being driven from the scene to a local swamp, where he was shot through the head with a .22 calibre bullet and his skull thereafter crushed with “some sort of instrument.”⁸⁷ It was reported that the attackers intended to eliminate any witnesses whom they knew could identify them,⁸⁸ supporting their decision to allow Lea and Bell’s wives and younger relatives to live.

C. The Absence of Justice

Lea’s wife informed her father, Herbert Lea, of the attack.⁸⁹ The elder Lea in turn informed Sheriff Wiley Smith.⁹⁰ Described as “never cursing or smoking”, Smith was known

⁷⁶ ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* Jun 29, 1946.

⁷⁷ Interview with Mrs. Ida Mae Williams, 07/23/14.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* Jun 29, 1946.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* Jun 29, 1946.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

within his jurisdiction as a mediator rather than a strict enforcer of the law.⁹¹ As sheriff he was reputed to prefer negotiating suspects into compliance; often policing without a firearm or use of handcuffs.⁹²

Upon hearing of the incident, Smith visited the Lea home early the following morning.⁹³ He reportedly stated to the Lea family:

“I know what you say is true, because white persons have been to me and explained what happened; it’s bad, but I regret that there is nothing I can do, for if I attempt to arrest them, a mob would form and kill all of your family. I am sorry.”⁹⁴

In defiance of his assailants, Hilton “Babe” Lea survived and fled to New Orleans.⁹⁵ Nearly a year would pass before he reported the incident in June 1946 to Daniel E. Byrd; the then Executive Secretary at the New Orleans branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.⁹⁶ There Lea named Earl Moore, Little Wiley Banns and Oball Mundrey as co-perpetrators.⁹⁷ The *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that Mundrey was related to Russ MacDowell by marriage.⁹⁸

Thus far only Moore has been identified by the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Program. At the time of the attack Moore was serving tenure as County Supervisor, a political position of considerable power and influence.⁹⁹

It has been stated to the CRRJP that the perpetrators’ intended target was actually Hilton “Babe” Lea, due to the Lea family’s ownership of land.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, the targeting of African-Americans, whether Bell or Lea, for their land ownership, military service record or transition from a white to black employer typifies the prevailing motivations behind racial violence in the Southern United States at that time.

No form of legal investigation had taken place before the CRRJ Program made contact with the Bell descendants. It has been confirmed to the CRRJ Program that Hilton

⁹¹ Correspondence with Mr. Rhett Anderson. 07/19/2014, CRRJP File 04-022.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* Jun 29, 1946.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ ‘War Veteran Lynched by Mississippi Farmers’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* Jun 29, 1946.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Amite County Records, CRRJP File 04-022.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Mrs. Ida Mae Williams, 07/23/14.

“Babe” Lea passed away some time ago.¹⁰¹ He is survived by his son, who knows little of the incident.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Travel Log, 07/11/2014, CRRJP File 04-022.

¹⁰² Correspondence with Mr. Hilton Lea Jr., 07/17/2014, CRRJP File 04-022.