

Relevant interviews of Sheriff's et al re criticisms of raid and petition against FBI/Government. Rumors, exaggerations, jurisdiction, liabilities, pay questions, using "deer hunters" and more. Red arrows are mine showing relevant statement wording etc. submitted: L. Wack, FBI - Ret. ("Faded Glory...")

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Manitowish, Wisconsin,
April 30, 1934.

Inspector H.H. Clegg,
Division of Investigation,
U.S. Department of Justice,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

Re: JOHN DILLINGER, with aliases,
I.O. #1217, FUGITIVE, et al,
N.M.V.T.A. - CONSPIRACY TO HARBOR,
St. Paul File No. 26-2434.

This letter covers investigation surrounding the circularization of petitions by persons in the vicinity where the Dillinger mob was raided, which petitions criticized the manner of the raid.

On the 25th instant I interviewed Mr. and Mrs. R.T. Collins, Mercer, Wisconsin, proprietors of a Phillip's Gasoline Service Station at Mercer. This is the place at which persons identified as Albert W. Reilly, alias Pat Reilly, and Pat Cherrington stopped in their car on the night of the raid, and purchased a new tire. They stated that they had heard that a petition was being circulated by Louis A. Gehr, Postmaster at Mercer, Wisconsin, criticizing the government and asking for an investigation. They could furnish no further information.

Postmaster Louis A. Gehr was interviewed at his home at 2:30 P.M. on the 25th instant, and was informed by me that I was conducting a thorough investigation covering the entire case in this vicinity. I asked if he could assist me in any way, and whether he had any information in the matter. He stated that he had no information, but volunteered the statement that if the government had notified the people of Mercer and vicinity, that they could have gotten together for good rifle shots and deer hunters and captured the Dillinger mob. He stated that there are many rifle marksmen in the vicinity of Mercer, and that the government should have used them as guides in conducting the raid, particularly since the government agents were not familiar with this territory. He mentioned that peaceable citizens cannot now drive down the highways without being fired on and killed by government agents, but when questioned he stated that he had only hearsay information concerning what occurred at "Little Bohemia" lodge. He was asked if Mercer is in the same county as "Little Bohemia" lodge, and stated that it is not. Mercer is in Iron County, whereas "Little Bohemia" lodge is at Spider Lake, in Vilas County.

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-2-

He was asked if he were circulating a petition in criticism of the government, and in an obviously evasive manner stated that he was not. He was asked if he knew anything concerning such a petition, and replied that he believed one was around town somewhere, and finally admitted that he had seen it in a store, but he stated that he did not know where it was then located. He was asked if he knew who originated the petition, and replied that it originated by unanimous vote of the Mercer Lake Lands Association, which is a civic club of Iron County, Wisconsin; that the meeting was held on the night of the 24th instant, and was a regular bi-monthly meeting. He was then asked whether the petition were instigated by any newspaperman, and stated that it was not. He further stated that he did not know who initiated the matter at the meeting. I requested Mr. Gehr to accompany me to the store of M.E. Brandt wherein is located the Post Office, in order that Gehr could assist me in locating the petition. He accompanied me to Brandt's store, and as we entered, he pointed to the petition lying on the counter. While I was reading it, M.E. Brandt, the proprietor, came up to me, and I asked him if he could advise me who prepared the petition.

Brandt immediately turned to Gehr and asked him if he knew the names of the two news reporters who prepared the petition. Gehr appeared embarrassed and said that he did not know. Brandt later advised me that these reporters were connected with the Wisconsin News at Milwaukee, and that Herbert Peter, a young man of Mercer would know their names, as he had driven them around the previous two days. At the time I observed this petition it had only seven names on it, but I was later informed that perhaps 25 or 30 names had probably been placed on another sheet. No one seemed to know where this other list of names was located.

Herbert M. Peter, age 29 years, was interviewed. He works odd times as mail messenger, and stated that on the day following the raid on the Dillinger gang, that he was employed by two news men to drive them around interviewing persons and taking photographs. He stated that these men were Al. Wahlberg, cameraman, and A.S. Aslekson, reporter, both employed by the Wisconsin News, Milwaukee. He stated that they covered the story in the usual manner, and that when the government agents were departing in the confiscated Buick Coupe, that the newsmen attempted to photograph the car, but were requested by the agents not to do so. He stated that after covering the story on the 24th instant, the aforementioned two newsmen and himself were at the railway station at Mercer arranging for the departure of the two newsmen for Eagle River, Wisconsin; that three or four young boys were present, and reporter, A.S. Aslekson suggested that in view of the death of one of their citizens that they get up a petition and get some government agents fired. Peter stated that someone present replied that Mr. Gehr was going to write a story for the Milwaukee Journal, whereupon Aslekson said, "Who is Gehr?"

After learning that he is the Postmaster, the two newsmen immediately went to see Gehr, and were in conference alone with him for some time. At first Peter stated that he believed the language of the petition to be that of Gehr but later said perhaps it had been drafted roughly by reporter Aslekson and after their departure typed by Gehr or someone of Gehr's friends. Peter stated that after the newsmen conferred with Gehr, they left by train for Eagle River, Wis., but returned late the same day by train, merely passing through Mercer enroute to Milwaukee; that Gehr met them at the train and conferred with them; that during that afternoon Gehr had unsuccessfully endeavored to get a reasonable number of names on the petition so he could give them to the reporter when he came through on the train. Peter stated that at the regular meeting of the Mercer Lakeland Association on the night of April 24, 1934, that Gehr and several others spoke in criticism of the Division Agents; that the aforementioned petition was presented to the Association and by vote it was agreed that the petition should be circulated for signatures and presented to the Director of this Division. Peter claimed that he was never in sympathy with the petition and personally dislikes Gehr and stated that he signed it reluctantly.

I again interviewed Mr. Gehr in his home in company with Agent Falkner. This interview lasted an hour and at its termination Gehr and his wife appeared to have become very friendly and admitted that they had heard many conflicting stories as to what actually occurred at the raid. However, Gehr was of the opinion that the petition would serve a useful purpose in bringing the true facts to light.

He stated that the newspapers had carried a story headlined and dated at Washington purporting to have been made by either the Attorney General or the Director in which it had been stated that Eugene Boiesoneau had been shot and killed by members of the Dillinger mob when caught in cross fire. Gehr stated that such a statement was obviously false. I informed him that he undoubtedly misinterpreted the news article for in my opinion Washington would reserve such an opinion until a thorough investigation was made, including ballistic examinations. I, however, did explain to him that the car in which Boiesoneau was killed was in the line of fire between one or more members of the Dillinger mob and Division Agents.

I discreetly called his attention to the fact that while the seige was in effect that a car containing Pat Reilly and Pat Cherrington, associates and members of the Dillinger mob, had driven into the Bohemia Lodge grounds and that the Agents had merely shot one tire and the car and occupants

had escaped; that had the Agents been intent upon shooting unknown occupants of cars at the time of the seige that they would obviously have shot these persons; that these two persons before escaping had fled in their car to Mercer, where they remained at a filling station for approximately forty-five minutes to purchase and put on a new tire. I further informed him that John Hoffman, driver of the car in which Boiesneau was killed, had informed me about one hour after the shooting that he was highly excited when we yelled to him to stop; that he had been held up a year ago by bandits and believed the Agents were bandits and in his nervousness jumped from the car and ran.

Gehr admitted at this interview that the two newsmen from the Milwaukee News had drafted the petition and had furnished the name of Agent in Charge Purvis. Mrs. Gehr volunteered the statement that the Little Bohemia Lodge was only a low type barroom and hangout for the rowdys of the neighborhood and that Boiesneau and the other occupants had no business in going to it.

Herbert Peter had advised me that Constable Ed Sergeant of Mercer was actively sponsoring the petition as a result of not having been asked by the government agents to assist in the raid. Sergeant was interviewed but appeared to lack enough force to speak his convictions and state merely that he had signed the petition but had no part in initiating it.

On the 26th of April, 1934, I interviewed Deputy Sheriff Hank A. Kuhnert, proprietor of the Northern Lights Resort, Manitowish, Vilas County. Manitowish adjoins Spider Lake Township and Kuhnert resides in this township, where the raid occurred, although the Post Office address is Manitowish, Wisconsin. Kuhnert advised that on the 26th of April, 1934, Louis A. Gehr had approached him and also Alvin Koerner to request them to initiate a similar petition in Vilas County. Kuhnert stated that he and Koerner advised Gehr that such a petition was now untimely; that the citizens should await this Division's investigation and then conduct one of their own and only then, if facts warranted, should a petition be drawn. A few days later, Kuhnert advised me that, in his opinion, Gehr will not now send the petition to Washington. Kuhnert advised me that he heard from Gehr that several citizens of Mercer were highly angered over the killing of Boiesneau and the wounding of the other two occupants of the car and some were desirous of coming to Spider Lake with rifles and determine the particular Agent, or Agents, who fired on the Coupe. He stated that this feeling has now died down as indicated by the coroner's jury verdict.

Investigation disclosed that the people and coroner's jury, in its verdict believed that it favored the Government.

Inspector Clegg advised me by telephone from St. Paul that he had received information that petitions similar to the one at Mercer were being circulated at Eagle River, Rhinelander, Wisconsin, and also at Ironwood, Michigan. The one at Ironwood was believed to have been prepared by the Ironwood Globe newspaper.

At Eagle River, Wisconsin, I interviewed Sheriff Thomas MacGregor. He appeared very friendly towards the Division and referred to the newspaper criticism. He stated that he felt that this Division and his office had done everything which could be reasonably expected under the circumstances and that the persons criticising are those who are continually criticising any endeavor in which they, themselves, are not involved. The Sheriff is seventy odd years of age, not very active, and was busily engaged in Court. His son, Dell A. MacGregor, aged about 47, is under-sheriff and is the active head of the Sheriff's office of Vilas County. He was interviewed for more than an hour in his home, which is in the jail building. The Sheriff and under-sheriff advised that no petition is being circulated, nor will any be circulated, in Vilas County.

The under-sheriff stated that at ten fifteen (10:15) P.M., on the night of the 22nd instant, his office received a telephone call from a Division Agent to the effect that Dillinger and his associates were at Bohemia Lodge, where the Lodge was at that time being raided by Division Agents. He stated that he secured some men and started at once for Little Bohemia, leaving word with the Sheriff to immediately telephone the necessary persons to block the roads at Manitowish Bridge, Spider Lake Bridge, the road at Mitchells; and to further notify all persons in the vicinity of Little Bohemia, to disable their cars. He stated that he since learned that the Sheriff did as instructed. The under-sheriff was very cordial and on the same night that I interviewed him, I met him with other Division Agents or two deputy sheriffs, and searched roads all night on a clue that "Baby Face" Nelson was in the vicinity of Fifiield, Wisconsin. Several days later I was told by an employee of the Fisheries Department of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, who resides at the C.C.C. Camp near Mercer, that he heard it said that under-sheriff Dell A. MacGregor has voiced a statement that the trouble with the raid was that the Division Agents did not have the necessary "guts". I did not later question MacGregor on this for the reason that if he made the remark he would undoubtedly deny it to any government employee. On Saturday night, at Bohemia Lodge, undersheriff, MacGregor, came up to me, introduced his wife

and talked in a friendly manner for some time. He was slightly under the influence of liquor.

At Rhinelander, without disclosing my identity, I learned that no petition was being circulated. Openly, I interviewed the Sheriff at Rhinelander, John Farman. He had read the newspaper criticism of the Division and was at first very critical. His basic criticism was aimed at the fact that Agents did not contact him upon arrival at Rhinelander. He stated that he could have furnished us the necessary cars and given us the assistance of deputies. He appeared desirous of having the county prosecuting attorney talk to me and I, accordingly, accompanied the sheriff to the office of John W. Kelly, prosecuting attorney.

It was obvious that Kelly and the Sheriff had discussed the matter at length and were very critical. The district attorney asked why the sheriff at Rhinelander was not contacted; that it appeared we did not trust him; that the Secret Service and Post Office Inspectors always worked with the Sheriff. I informed them of the fact that we had no information as to Dillinger's whereabouts until a few minutes before we enplaned for Rhinelander. It was apparent that these men could not be satisfied by my agreeing with them and, consequently, I disputed their contentions. I informed the Sheriff that I believed that upon the arrival of three air planes at Rhinelander on a Sunday afternoon that he would be at the airport to investigate; that shortly after our arrival we received confidential information that Dillinger was then departing from Little Bohemia Lodge; that it was a fact that the scene of our investigation and raid was beyond his jurisdiction. I asked how many paid deputies he had, that is, salaried deputies, and he said only one.

Sheriff Farman stated that the first he knew of the raid was at 12:30 A.M., April 23, 1934, when he received a telephone call from the Sheriff's Office of Eagle River, to block the roads; that he inquired as to who would pay the expense of the men whom he would get, and that he was told that the Sheriff's Office at Eagle River did not know; that he asked who would be responsible if any men were killed or injured and the Sheriff of Eagle River said he would not. Sheriff Farman said that if the government had requested him to assist that he would gladly have done it inasmuch as the government would have been responsible. I explained to him that the Division could not deputize any men; that it could not assume any responsibilities for injuries or death and had no authority to request his assistance out of his county, nor to hire any men for pay. He and the District Attorney appeared surprised.

-7-

It was, thus, plainly brought to their attention that, according to their own statements, they could have given no assistance to us had we asked it.

Later, the Sheriff told me that a night officer at Rhinelander had gone out on the road, or to Little Bohemia, at the request of a Division Agent and he wanted to know how this officer could be paid for his services. I explained the matter to him. He appeared to have changed his opinion when I was ready to depart and stated that there were two sides to the matter and he was no longer critical of the Division's action but the District Attorney had little to say.

At Hurley, Wisconsin, the county seat of Iron County, wherein is located Mercer, I interviewed Sheriff Frank J. Erspamer. He had no criticism to offer, was very friendly, and cooperative, and stated that he was not in sympathy with the Mercer petition and that no petition was to be initiated at Hurley, Wisconsin, or Ironwood, Michigan.

At Ironwood, Michigan, the Sheriff was out, but a deputy informed me that the Sheriff's office saw no reason for the newspaper criticism.

At the Ironwood Globe newspaper, I talked at length with Managing Editor W.C. JENSON. He was friendly and stated that the Globe subscribes to the Associated Press service; that the Mercer petition was initiated by the Wisconsin News of Milwaukee, a Hearst owned paper, which he condemned. He stated that he saw no good reason for any criticism but that the Department of Justice should take a definite step in cooperating with newspapers by permitting certain officials in the field to give out immediately news happenings; that if the raid had been explained to the press, as I explained it to him, all papers could have seen our difficulties and understood the result. He stated that never before has he found a Department of Justice employee who would say anything. He appeared to be a highly ethical newspaperman who will not stoop to trivialities or false gossip in his paper.

During recent days, several individuals have informed me that there had been much criticism which had not reached the ears of Agents but that, to a great extent, it had abated.

On Friday night, April 27, 1934, all Agents and I organized a posse and surrounded a swamp region near Powell, Wisconsin, as a result of information that a stranger with a rifle had been seen to be in that vicinity

about dusk. The Sheriffs from Ironwood, Michigan, Hurley, Wisconsin, and the Chief of Police of Lac du Flambeau, were present all night.

Wilmer Hoffman, brother of John Hoffman, driving the coupe in which Boissoneau was killed and Hoffman wounded, was present. All of them talked to me at length and I believe were sincere in condemning the Mercer petition and newspaper criticism.

Postmaster L.A. Gehr was present in this posse for the first half hour, or until dark, when I observed him leaving. On that afternoon, I had personally notified Gehr that Tommy Carroll was probably still in the vicinity of Mercer and if possible I would like for him to organize the deer hunters to which he had referred, into a posse and search the regions where Government Agents were unfamiliar. He took no action, as I expected.

When Gehr started to leave the posse, I asked him if he were willing to stay with us all night and go into the swamp at daybreak and he stated that he didn't feel like staying out there all night; that if it were daylight, he wouldn't mind going into the woods with some deer hunters.

The resort owners appear to bear resentment against Emil Wanatka both because of the fact that a rowdy element meets there and because he apparently is getting much publicity over the affair.

H.A. Kuhnert informed me that after we complete our investigation, the citizens of Spider Lake Township, which consists of 104 votes, intend to investigate Wanatka, both as to whether he knew in advance that Dillinger was coming to his place and, secondly, whether the Little Bohemia Lodge is a menace to the welfare of the township.

Very truly yours,

WAR:TC

W.A. RORER, INSPECTOR.