

THE ENTERPRISE

Ragland Defense Based On Report Made To Officer

Limited Confession Read In Open Court Tuesday Afternoon

Apparently recognizing the hopelessness of his case, Otis Ragland, tried and convicted in the Martin County Superior Court of criminally assaulting Mrs. Floyd Moore on November 8, based his defense at the bar of justice on a "limited" confession made to officers while he was held in State's Prison on November 21.

When the state had rested in the case Tuesday afternoon, defense counsel talked with the 29-year-old Negro and the defendant chose not to go on the stand in his own behalf but to rest his fate on the signed statement in which he admitted attacking his victim without criminally assaulting her. The defense, battling against one of the strongest prosecutions imaginable, could do little more than follow a routine line in its cross examination. However, there was an attempt to disprove the prosecution's evidence by introducing an element of nervousness and excitement. Repeatedly the defense asked witnesses if it couldn't have been that the victim was so excited and nervous that she did not know exactly what happened. Little progress was made from this approach, and when the case went to the jury the defense was floundering around, its bars down and its shell cracked wide open.

Ragland Appeals To Supreme Court From His Death Sentence

SPEAKER

Dr. Maynard Fletcher of Washington recently named Regional Chairman of the North Carolina Good Health Association, Inc., for North-eastern North Carolina, will speak at the Court House in Williamston, Tuesday night, December 17, at 7:30 p. m.

Dr. Fletcher, manager of the Taylor Hospital in Washington, will devote full time to the Good Health Program and he will speak on the need and plan of the Program here Tuesday evening.

All people interested in good health are extended a cordial invitation to attend this meeting and it is hoped that a large representation from every section of the county will be on hand to hear Dr. Fletcher.

Jury Selected In Little Over Hour For Ragland Case

Few of Special Venire Are Called Before Jury Box Was Filled

Contrary to predictions and actual plans, very little trouble was experienced in getting a jury to hear in superior court Tuesday the capital case in which Otis Ragland, young colored man, is charged with criminally assaulting Mrs. Floyd Moore, Williams Township white woman, at her home on November 8. Six were chosen from the regular jury. Only thirty-six of the regular and special venire were examined before the box was filled, the procedure requiring only one hour and twenty minutes.

The names of the men chosen are: J. L. Edmondson of Robertsonville, Bill Everett of Robertsonville, Robert A. Edmondson, Sr., of Hamilton, Mack Leggett of Bear Grass, Raymond Cherry of Williamston, L. R. Beach of Hamilton, A. P. Hyman of Hamilton, A. S. Perkins of Robertsonville, Arthur Johnson of Gold Point, Theodore P. Mendenhall of Bear Grass, Roy Clark of Cross Roads and C. W. Forbes of Spring Green.

Of the 100 men called to report as veniremen in the case, ninety-five were found and all of them were present when the court was opened at 9:30 Tuesday morning. Five of the 100 were either out of the county or had moved to other sections of the state, the sheriff explained.

After four men had been examined and all of them declared they had formed an opinion in the case, Judge Henry Stevens, presiding, meaningfully warned that they had taken an oath to tell the truth, the jurist intimating that some were using that as an excuse to escape service. The next man called stuck. Another was excused and the seventh called was acceptable. Then the court skipped one after another until

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Skewarkey Lodge Names Its Officers

George Harrison, Jr., was elected master of Skewarkey Lodge here last Tuesday evening for the year 1947. Approximately 125 Masons attended the meeting and participated in the election. The new master succeeds Ben Courtney who has faithfully served the lodge for the past year.

Henry Griffin was elevated to the chair of senior warden, and Roy L. Ward was elected to the position of junior warden. J. D. Woodard was re-elected treasurer and Julian Anderson, secretary, positions the two men have held for several years.

The lodge is in the middle of an attendance contest, reports stating that all attendance records are being broken, and that substantial support has been extended the Oxford Orphanage.

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Choose Triple A Committeemen for The Coming Year

J. F. Crisp Retires After Serving On Committee For Eleven Years

Approximately one out of every three farmers or 932, to be exact, went to the polls in this county last Saturday to elect men to handle their farm program under Triple A during the coming year. Quite a few changes were made in the personnel in several districts and the county committee.

Mr. Jesse F. Crisp who has faithfully served as a member of or chairman of the county committee for eleven years, resigned and he is being succeeded by Mr. George C. Griffin, former vice chairman. The county committee now includes, George C. Griffin, chairman; Elmer N. Modlin, vice chairman; J. T. Moore, regular member; and H. H. Worsley and W. M. Hardison, first and second alternates, respectively.

The community committees follow with the chairman, vice chairman, regular member and first and second alternates listed in order, by districts:

Bear Grass: H. G. Harrison, T. L. Roberson, E. C. Harrison, Wheeler Rogerson, and H. U. Peel; 176 voted.

Cross Roads: H. L. Roebuck, G. H. Forbes, J. F. Bailey, W. L. Aushorn, and J. Marion Griffin; 90

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Carry Condemned Man To Raleigh

Otis Ragland, sentenced to die in the gas chamber for a criminal assault, was delivered to State's Prison, Raleigh, by Martin County officers Thursday following his conviction in the court here last Tuesday evening.

Ragland, son of Addie Ragland of Oak Hill, Granville County, never knew his father. Talking in his cell in the local jail at the close of his trial last Tuesday night, Ragland who was born on April 17, 1916, had what may be called a poor show in his early life. And as he grew older he did little to improve his position. After completing the third grade in school, he was hired out to a farmer, the meager income going to help support his widowed mother. As he grew older he started running around with bad companions, Ragland declaring that his bad companions helped put him where he is today—facing death by asphyxiation. "We started drinking. Then we turned to gambling. Debts piled up and I cashed a forged check in the sum of \$95. I stole a pistol, then an automobile. On November 16 of last year I started serving a 5-to-7-year sentence," the condemned man admitting that was the beginning of the end.

Transferred from State's Prison to the camp near here, Ragland escaped while working the roads near Parmele. He was captured in New Jersey and returned.

Ragland said he had received a fair trial, that he had been treated "square" by Sheriff Roebuck, and that Jailor Roy Peel was a fine gentleman.

Although no trouble was anticipated, Sheriff Roebuck asked for a patrol detail, and Sgt. C. R. Williams and Patrolman Titus Martin of Washington, Cpl. John Lawes of Greenville, Patrolman Wayne Cunningham of Tarboro, Patrolman Charles Payne of Hertford, Patrolman Clyde Fenness of Edenton and Cpl. W. T. Simpson and Patrolman W. E. Saunders along with special agents and other officers maintained guard during the day-long trial here Tuesday.

PEANUTS

With the market still holding to the bearish side, peanut prices Thursday afternoon were ranging from about \$1.2 to \$1.2 cents per pound. A few sales were made for as much as 10 cents, but such cases were hardly more than one out of forty.

It is estimated that 85 percent or more of the crop has been harvested and that possibly 70 percent has already moved to market in this section.

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Judge Henry L. Stevens Orders Repair Buses Or Close Schools

Doomed Man Hears Fate Calmly Tuesday Evening

Sitting almost motionless and with a far-away gaze in his eyes, Otis Ragland, convicted rapist, heard death sentence pronounced upon him without quivering in superior court here last Tuesday evening.

Following a detailed charge lasting an hour and fifteen minutes, Judge Henry Stevens turned the case over to the jury which returned a verdict of guilty of rape against Ragland in twenty-one minutes. The victim of the attack wept, but the condemned man remained expressionless. Clerk L. B. Wynne polled the jury, and Solicitor George Fountain prayed judgment.

Only after Clerk Wynne warned the spectators against any demonstration and asked the prisoner if he had anything to say for himself did Ragland snap out of a state like unto that of an hypnotic, and then only his lips quivered as if he tried to speak and could not. He wavered a bit. A falling pin could have been heard as 'the

spectators, crowding the seats and aisles maintained a death-like silence.

Pronouncement of judgment by Judge Stevens was delayed almost 15 minutes as an over-worked court stenographer typed the jury verdict and prepared the judgment which the jurist read, as follows:

"Ordered, decreed and adjudged that the defendant, Otis Ragland, shall suffer the penalty of death by asphyxiation, and to that end it is ordered and adjudged that the sheriff of Martin County, in whose custody the prisoner now is, forthwith convey to State's Prison at Raleigh, said prisoner, Otis Ragland, and deliver said prisoner to the warden of State's Prison, who, the said warden, on Friday, the 3 day of January, 1947, shall cause him, the said Otis Ragland, to inhale lethal gas of sufficient quantity to cause death, which administration of such lethal gas shall continue until said prisoner, Otis Ragland, is dead."

Six Business Houses Robbed This Week

Over Six Hundred Dollars Taken In One Local Plant

SBI and Local Officers Are Working On Cases, But No Developments

Striking fast and furiously, robbers broke into and robbed six business houses and offices between midnight Monday and daybreak Tuesday morning. Probably starting at the Branch Bank and working out to the Blue Star Cleaners, the robbers took building after building, the six-house raid netting approximately \$650, two packages of chewing gum and a few other items.

State Bureau of Investigation agents, working with local police, got several sets of good fingerprints at two or more of the places robbed, but no other developments have been reported. Several angles to the robberies have been investigated, including a check on a foreign car seen parked on a side street here about 2:30 o'clock Tuesday morning. Chief Chas. R. Mobley said yesterday that they hoped to establish a lead in the series of robberies within a short time.

The offices of the Martin County Building and Loan Association in the Branch Banking and Trust Company Building were ransacked, but only 45 cents in cash was missed. The robbery there is surrounded by a bit of mysterious activity since the officers could find no place where the robbers are supposed to have entered.

Breaking through a back window, the robbers ransacked John E. Pope's insurance office on Washington Street. The safe was unlocked, but no cash was in it. Mr. Pope gained 10 cents which the robbers apparently lost while searching the safe.

The next stop was at H. B. Jennings' filling station next to the Roanoke-Dixie Warehouse. Forcing an entrance through the back door, the robbers took between \$20 and \$30 from the money drawer.

Going across the street the robbers broke a back window of Ophus Price's filling station and took \$29.26 from the cash register. A crow bar was missed by the station operator.

The next stop was at the Greene Oil Company station next to the Carolina warehouse. The robbers went through a back window and left with two packages of chewing gum and possibly a few other items of merchandise.

The big haul was made at the

Achievement Day Held By County's Club Federation

Mary Ola Lilley and Edith Rogerson Are Three-Time Winners

The 4-H and Home Demonstration Clubs of the county held their annual Achievement Day Saturday in the High School Auditorium in Williamston. Mrs. R. L. Leggett, president of the County Council of the Home Demonstrating Clubs presided over the morning program.

The meeting was called to order by singing Hail Club-Women Crovoked through Service. The invocation was offered by Dr. Ira Knight, pastor of the Williamston Baptist Church. Mr. Robert L. Perry welcomed the group on behalf of the county extension service. Mrs. Leggett responded to the welcome.

The roll was called and each club gave a report of the achievements during the year. After the roll call the county dress revue winners in 4-H modeled their garments. Those taking part were Mary Ola Lilley, Farm Life 4-H club; Mary Lou Coltrane, Williamston Senior 4-H club and Elizabeth Holliday, Jamesville 4-H club.

Miss Garnette Crocker, assistant Home Agent, introduced the guest speaker of the morning, Mr. John Goff, pastor of the Christian Church in Williamston. Mr. Goff had for his topic, "The Home. The question was arroused: Are We So Busy With Our Household Duties that we are neglecting the morals of our family? It was an inspiring message.

The home agent awarded a pressure cooker to the Bear Grass Home Demonstration Club for

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PRESENT

Electric customers of the Virginia Electric and Power Company were assured a Christmas present this week when the company officials announced that a fifty percent rebate will be made on the December electric bills. The action will mean a saving of approximately \$650,000 from the company's more than 300,000 customers. The reduction will apply only to residential users, it was explained.

The rebate is being made voluntarily by the company.

Local OPA Office Closes Its Doors

The local office of the Office of Price Administration, opened in early 1942 during trying times and under hurried conditions, suspended all activities and closed its doors on Thursday of this week.

While its work and efforts were the objects of battered criticism, the public, with some few possible exceptions, recognized its value.

The office was opened with Messrs. C. C. Martin of Jamesville as chairman, Herbert L. Roebuck of Cross Roads and J. A. Everett of Goose Nest as members of the rationing board. Mr. Everett succeeded in the spring of 1944 by Mr. Jesse F. Crisp, and Mrs. Irene Blount served the board as secretary or chief clerk. It is only fitting to pause here and now and suggest a glowing tribute to the rationing board personnel and others for the able and unselfish work handled during more than four long years.

Miss Inez Godwin of Columbia, chief clerk for the past several months, Mrs. R. H. Smith of Williamston, Mrs. Myrtle Bunting of Hamilton and Jesse Terry took leave of the office Thursday afternoon. Furniture and fixtures were delivered to State College Wednesday, and all the records except auto transfers were burned a few days earlier. Sugar rationing, automobile transfers and a few other items will be handled by the office in the Capitol Club Building, Raleigh, it was announced.

Killer Draws Five To Seven Years In Manslaughter Case

Trial of Criminal Docket Is Completed In Superior Court Thursday

Frank Belcher, 29-year-old colored man, was sentenced by Judge Henry Stevens in the superior court here Thursday morning to serve not less than five and not more than seven years in State's Prison for involuntary manslaughter, the case marking the close of the completion of the criminal trial docket for the term.

Belcher pleaded guilty and offered only two character witnesses. Mr. Marcellus W. Newsome, one of Hertford County's most highly respected citizens and who was nearly killed when Belcher while under the influence of intoxicating liquors ran his car into the one driven by Mr. Newsome near Sweet Water Creek on Highway 64 last February 17, was the first witness for the state. Mr. Lloyd Cowan, another prominent Hertford County citizen, was fatally injured in the accident.

"We saw Belcher coming on the wrong side of the road, and Mr. Cowan said, 'look out. He's going to hit us!'" Mr. Newsome told the court. "I drove off the hard surface as far as I could or almost into the iron fence near the creek and almost stopped my car when the Belcher car struck us and almost turned out car around or in the direction of Plymouth," he added.

Mr. Newsome, his left leg and hip broken, a rib injured and his jaw bone broken in two places, fell unconscious to the road. After an overnight stay in the local hospital he was removed to Duke where he spent four months and one day. Returning to his home he was confined to his bed for several months, and is now only able to be about on crutches. His car was wrecked and sold for junk. The defense did not cross examine the witness.

Patrolman Saunders, stating the position of the cars when he reached the scene of the accident ten minutes after it happened, told the court that Belcher was under the influence of intoxicants, and said that Belcher claimed a tire on his car blew out. He said on cross examination that he had not known Belcher to be in court before.

Sheriff Roebuck stated that he had received reports, stating that the owner had removed Belcher from his truck because he (Belcher) had been drinking, that one report telling of the man driving while intoxicated had been received only a short time ago.

Mrs. Annie Burroughs and M. L. Peel were offered as character witnesses by the defense.

Belcher's attorney pleaded for mercy, stating that he did not know whether the defendant had paid a cent to the injured parties.

Solicitor Fountain recalled the unfavorable reports made against Belcher, and cited drunken driving as a growing menace on the highways, adding that it is beginning to appear that people fill themselves with liquor or beer, caring little about the life of another.

Attorney Cherry, representing the state, said that one of his county's best citizens had been killed and another almost killed, that the good people of his county and this county want to see everything done possible to stop the needless killing.

"It is another instance where liquor coupled with an automobile cost a man his life." "Some may claim this or that, but I believe drunken driving is responsible for a majority of the accidents and killings on our highways," Judge Stevens said, adding that it has got to stop.

The widow, Mrs. Cowan, wept in court when she was reminded by the evidence of the accident in which her husband lost his life.

Other proceedings in the court follow:

Ben Nichols, charged with breaking and entering and larceny, was reported to be serving a long term either in a Pennsylvania or Maryland prison, and the court ruled that the \$200 bond offered by R. S. Critcher be stricken out, the bondsman having agreed to pay \$50 for Nichols' return. The case has been pending since last March.

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