

HUAC Investigates North Carolina: How Federal Documents Can Help Uncover State and Local History

David M. Durant

East Carolina University

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Federal Documents in State/Local History

- Often overlooked as a potential source
- Perceived lack of relevance
- Lack of familiarity/esoteric quality
- Intimidation factor

Federal Documents in State/Local History (cont.)

- House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations related to North Carolina offer a case study in how federal docs might be relevant to state/local history

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)



Source: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/hec.25582/>

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

- Created as a special committee to investigate Nazi propaganda in 1934-5
- Re-established in 1938; continued through 1944
- Became a permanent standing committee from 1945-1968
- Name changed to House Internal Security Committee in 1969
- Disbanded in 1975

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

- The committee actually met twice in NC
 - Asheville, May 1934
 - Charlotte, March 1956
- A number of other HUAC investigations touched on North Carolina
- On several occasions, HUAC's activities impacted political developments in NC

Fascism in the Mountains: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America



W.D. Pelley and the Silver Legion of America

- Founded in Asheville in January, 1933 by Pelley
- Known as the “Silver Shirts”
- Radical paramilitary organization
- Reached peak strength of 15,000 in 1934-35
- Anti-Semitic and Anti-Black
- One of the largest and most radical of the 1930s domestic fascist groups

The Special Committee Comes to Asheville

- Rise of the Silver Shirts helped spawn the “Brown Scare”
- Led to creation of Special Committee (1934)
- A subcommittee of HUAC came to Asheville in May, 1934 and held two days of hearings
- 1935: Conviction for financial fraud
- 1939: Buncombe County issues arrest warrant for Pelley

WANTED



William Dudley Pelley

DESCRIPTION

Age, approximately fifty years; height, five feet, seven inches; weight, 130 pounds; has black hair mixed with gray; heavy eyebrows; wears mustache and a vandyke; has dark gray eyes, very penetrating; has straight Roman nose; wears nose glasses; dresses neatly; distinguished looking; good talker; highly educated; interested in physic research.

Capias has been issued by the Judge of the Superior Court of Buncombe County for the arrest of the above-named party for sentence on conviction of felony, making fraudulent representation, and also for violating the terms of a suspended sentence on another charge by failing to remain of good behavior, and by engaging in, among other things, UN-AMERICAN activities.

Arrest and notify

LAURENCE E. BROWN, Sheriff

Asheville, N. C.

1939 wanted poster for W.D. Pelley. Source: This Day in North Carolina History blog

(<https://nchistorytoday.wordpress.com/2013/07/30/asheville-fascist-and-presidential-candidate-william-dudley-pelley/>)

End of the Silver Shirts

- February 7, 1940: Pelley testified before HUAC:

“Mr. Voorhis, I have here a book with 82 attestments by leading spokesmen of the Jewish people in the United States that say they are out to subvert our American Government through what I call the predatory priestcraft.”

- *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, v. 12, 1940, p.7218*

End of the Silver Shirts

- Pelley leaves Asheville and disbands Silver Shirts soon after
- Imprisoned from 1942-1950 for sedition
- Refrained from political activism until his death in 1965

Silver Shirt Sources

- *Investigation of Nazi Propaganda Activities and Investigation of Certain Other Propaganda Activities. Public Hearings Before the Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-Third Congress, Second Session. 1934-35, 8. v. (Y 4: Un 1: N 23)*
 - Los Angeles hearings contain testimony on Silver Shirts in So. Cal.

Silver Shirt Sources

- *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States. Hearings Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives. 1938-44, 17. v. (Y 4: Un 1/2: Un1/)*
 - Pelley's testimony is in v. 12, pgs. 7201-7333.
 - The Silver Legion is also discussed extensively in V. 6.

Communism in North Carolina: 1929-1960



Source: NCPedia (<http://ncpedia.org/scales-trial>)

Communism in North Carolina: 1929-1960

- Always a small faction
- Centered in Triad and Triangle
- Focus on union organizing (tobacco and textile)
- Also strong at UNC-Chapel Hill
- Peak of popularity in late 1940s (250 members in 1947)

Communism in North Carolina: 1929-1960 (cont.)

- 1929: Gastonia textile workers' strike
- 1948: Progressive Party campaign
- FTA Local 22 in Winston-Salem
- Junius Scales: 1947-1956
- Declined in late 1950s

HUAC and NC Communism

- NC did not have its own “Un-American Activities” committee
- Shreve-Regan bill (1949 & 1951)
- Fred Beal testified before Special Committee: 1939
- HUAC came to Charlotte in March, 1956 for three days of hearings
- 1958 Atlanta hearings

HUAC and NC Communism:

Sources

- *Investigation of Communist Activities in the North Carolina Area. Hearing Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fourth Congress, Second Session. 1956. (Y 4. Un 1/2: C 73/63/)*
- *Communist Infiltration and Activities in the South. Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Fifth Congress, Second Session. 1958. (Y 4. Un 1/2: C 73/95)*

Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida. Hearing Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session. 1954, 2 pts. (Y 4. Un 1/2: C 73/54/)

HUAC and NC Communism: Sources (cont.)

- *Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, Volume 10. Hearings Before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-Sixth Congress, First Session. 1939. (Joyner Docs CWIS: Y 4. Un 1/2: Un 1/V. 9-10)*

-Contains the testimony of Fred Beal, a disillusioned former communist who had been involved in the CPUSA's campaign to organize the 1929 Gastonia, NC textile workers' strike. Beal's testimony can be found from pages 6006-6042.

The Spy who Ran for Governor

- In 1948, Mary Wolfe Price (1909-1980), became North Carolina's first female gubernatorial candidate (Progressive Party)
- Worked in Washington, DC for Walter Lippmann from 1939-43
- Returned to NC in 1946
- Organized NC chapter of Southern Conference for Human Welfare
- Led Progressive Party third party effort in NC in 1948

The Spy who Ran for Governor

- On July 30, 1948, Elizabeth Bentley testified before a Senate subcommittee that Price was part of a communist espionage network, and repeated the allegations before HUAC
- Price accepted the PP nomination for governor in late August
- Price denied the charges, but they did hurt her candidacy and that of the Progressive Party
- By the 1970s, the charges were regarded as McCarthyite smears

The Spy who Ran for Governor

“That’s my memory of it and I fell sure that’s right, because I know that my reaction was that this was a putup job to discredit the Progressive party, when the reporters came to see me in the office in Greensboro, my to my surprise, to tell me about this Elizabeth Bentley before the House Un-American Committee in Washington. She had said that she was an agent of the Soviet Union and she had been assisted by me. She got much publicity, you know. “

- (Documenting the American South: [Interview with Mary Price Adamson, April 19, 1976](#), p. 122)

VENONA Revelations

- 2,900 NKVD cables intercepted and decoded by Army SIS during the 1940s, declassified in 1995
- Supplemented by Vassiliev notebooks
- Helped answer lingering questions about Soviet/CPUSA espionage

VENONA Revelations

- Revealed that Bentley was telling the truth, and that Price had been a Soviet spy (code name: “Dir”) from 1941-1944
- Supplied information from Lippmann’s files to NKVD
- Mildred Price also worked for NKVD
- Ran several other agents, notably Duncan Lee (“Koch”)
- Transferred to political work by 1945

From: New York

To: Moscow

No: 868

8 June 1943

To VIKTOR[i].

[1 group unrecovered] [REDACTED] "DIR"[ii]
[1 group unrecovered] from "IMPERIALIST"[iii] and will go for several months to
the "COUNTRYSIDE[DEREVNYa]"[iv] to her brother, who is the representative there
of the ship-building firm KAISER[v], with[b] ^

[28 groups unrecoverable]

she is there

It is intended to use "DIR's" trip for passing on mail to "NORA"[vi]. DIR
Will

[47 groups unrecovered]

No. 478

MAKSIM[vii]

Reference No. 2164[a]

[41 groups unrecovered]

T.N.: [a] Not available.

[b] or "from".

Comments:

[i] VIKTOR: Lt. Gen. P.M. FITIN.

[ii] DIR: Mary Wolfe PRICE, secretary of Walter LIPPMANN at this time.

[iii] IMPERIALIST: Walter LIPPMANN.

[iv] COUNTRYSIDE: MEXICO.

USSR

Ref No: S/NBF/T92

Issued: [REDACTED] 5/5/1954

Copy No: 205

REFERENCES TO THE WORK OF "MAYOR"

Item 2

REISSUE

From: NEW YORK

To: MOSCOW

No.: 1065

28 July 1944

To VIKTOR[i]

[Your no.][a] 3028. Some weeks ago GOOD GIRL [UMNITsA][ii] told MAYOR[MÉR][iii] that HELMSMAN[RULEVOJ][iv] as a result of a conversation with DIR[v] had apparently decided that DIR must be withdrawn completely from our work in order to employ her fully on FELLOW-COUNTRYMANLY [ZEMLYaChESKIJ][iv] work. In HELMSMAN's opinion DIR's nerves have been badly shaken and her health is poor, which renders her unsuitable for our work. In MAYOR's opinion it is possible to get H. [R.][vii] to change his opinion about the advisability of this decision which MAYOR suspects was made under pressure from GOOD GIRL, who for some reason dislikes DIR. MAYOR has informed G.G. [U.][viii] that if DIR is really ill she will need rather to be withdrawn for a rest, but afterwards be used on liaison [with][a] a conspirative apartment etc. She has been working for a long time and has acquired considerable experience. MAYOR proposes that she should not be employed on active FELLOW-COUNTRYMANLY[vi] work. Telegraph your opinion.

No. 596

[Continued overleaf]

Distribution

The Spy who Ran for Governor

“Dir met K. through her sister, Mildred, in the spring of 1942 and recruited him for secret work, ostensibly for the fellowcountryman organization (CPUSA). At the same time, D. began an intimate relationship with K., which she did not tell us about until very recently...In the fall of 1943, D. refused to work with K. As it later turned out, the reason for this was that K’s wife had found out about K and D’s intimate relationship and had had fits of jealousy in front of the latter. Although D. broke off her connection with K. on our line, she continues to have a personal relationship with him...According to D, she is in love with K. and has not lost hope that she will marry him when the latter divorces his wife.”

- NKVD report from Elizabeth Bentley, November 2, 1944. From [Vassiliev White Notebook #3](#), pgs. 104-5

The Spy who Ran for Governor: Sources

- *Export Policy and Loyalty. Hearings before the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Expenditures, United States Senate, Eightieth Congress, Second Session. Part 1, July 30, 1948. (Y4.Ex7/14:ln89/pt.1)*
- *Hearings Regarding Communist Espionage in United States Government. Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eightieth Congress, Second Session. July 31-Sept. 9, 1948. (Y 4.Un 1/2:C 73/6)*
 - Bentley's main testimony against Price is on pgs. 25-27 of Export Policy and Loyalty.

VENONA

National Security Agency: VENONA

<https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/>

Federal Bureau of Investigation: VENONA

<http://vault.fbi.gov/Venona>

Cold War International History Project: Venona Project and Vassiliev Notebooks Index and Concordance

<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/venona-project>

1965: HUAC vs. the “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”



KKK rally in Greenville, NC, October 1965. Source: Daily Reflector Image Collection (<http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/3690>)

1965: HUAC Investigates the Klan

- In October, 1965, HUAC opened a series of hearings on the Klan
- Investigation revealed that NC had more chapters (“Klaverns”) of the United Klans of America (UKA) than any other state (112)
- Seven in Pitt County alone

The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”



The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

- Cover name for the Greenville Klavern of the UKA
- Also known as the “Benevolent Association”
- Greenville, NC, resident and former Klansman George Leonard Williams testified about the organization
- About 40 active members (340 on the books)
- Leaders included Charlie Edwards (Police chief of Grimesland)

The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

“I don't know for sure why, but I was at a cafe on Friday night, tonight a week ago, and it was brought out that Harry Ferguson was at a Good Neighbor Council, East Carolina College, and the chief of police recognized him, and after the chief made his speech he said, "I see we have one of our Klan leaders here." He said, "Maybe he would like to say a few words.”

And he said, Ferguson said, “He had never been a leader of anything but a mule.”

(Testimony of George Leonard Williams. January 28, 1966. *Activities of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in the United States, Part 3, 1965-66*, p. 2888)

The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

- The negative publicity generated by Klan hearings provoked NC authorities into cracking down on the organization
- The UKA was a non-factor by mid-1967

1965: HUAC Investigates the Klan

- *Activities of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in the United States, 1965-66, 6 v. (SuDoc no: Y 4.Un 1/2: K 95/)*
 - Pts. 1 and 3 contain information on the Klan in NC
 - Williams testimony in pt. 3, pgs. 2867-2900

Conclusions

- Using federal documents gives a broader perspective to state and local history:
 - Impact of external actors on NC developments
 - Impact of NC developments elsewhere
 - Unique local conditions best perceived by comparison
 - Corrective to excessive focus on local sources
 - Opens new avenues for research

CWIS Blog & LibGuide

- Blog: <http://blog.ecu.edu/sites/cwis/>
- LibGuide: <http://libguides.ecu.edu/cwis>
- Slides and bibliography are posted to blog
- *NC Libraries* article

Questions?



Contact info:

David M. Durant
J.Y. Joyner Library
East Carolina University
Greenville, NC 27858
Ph. (252) 328-2258
E-mail: durantd@ecu.edu