

P.O. Box 794
Trenton, New Jersey

Miss Marion Wynn Perry
N A A C P
20 West 40th Street
New York 18, New York.

18740 JUN 3 '48

Dear Miss Perry:

This is the report of a peonage investigation which the Legal Committee of the New Jersey State Conference, N A A C P, is conducting.

Mr. Robert Queen, Chairman of the Committee, received a report from Mr. Squire Newsome, 131 Spring Street, Trenton, and Mr. J. Hugh Stewart, 46 West End Avenue, Trenton, that a girl was being held in bondage somewhere in the vicinity of Cream Ridge, New Jersey.

In questioning Mr. Stewart, I obtained the following. Mr. Stewart was visited by a William R. Mears, a white farmer, living in the vicinity of Cream Ridge, New Jersey, sometime in April of this year in reference to a catering job on May 15. Some twenty years before, Mr. Stewart and his brother had served as caterers for Mears. This was the first time that Stewart had seen him since that occasion. Stewart saw a colored woman at the wedding reception held at Mears' home but did not talk to her. He knew of the situation only from the conversation of his employees. He did not want to be involved. He served many wealthy families and he just did not want to harm his business.

Mrs. Carrie Jacobs, 43 West End Avenue, Trenton, lives at the home of William Fizer, a janitor at the Post Office in Trenton. She states as follows. On May 15, 1948, Mr. Stewart served a wedding reception for W.R. Mears, Cream Ridge, New Jersey. There were 100 guests. Mrs. Laura Vessles, 46 West End Avenue, Trenton, worked as kitchen assistant. Luther Redman, 255 Lincoln Avenue, Trenton, Danny Billups, 169 Lincoln Homes, Trenton, and William Fizer, 43 West End Avenue, Trenton, were the waiters. She did not work on that job. She knew of the incident from the report of the waiters and Mrs. Vessles. She reported the information to Mr. Newsome and Dr. Charles Broaddus, 34 Spring Street, Trenton, President of the Trenton Branch, N.A.A.C.P., and Mr. William Dinkins, 110 Spring Street, Trenton, N A A C P Membership Committee Co-Chairman.

Mrs. Laura Vessles, 46 West End Avenue, Trenton, states as follows. In addition to being the housekeeper for Mr. Stewart, she serves on catering jobs as the dish washer and kitchen assistant. On May 15, 1948 they served a wedding reception of a daughter of W.R. Mears, Cream Ridge, New Jersey. While

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washing dishes a colored woman began to talk with her. The woman was named Mary Wright, was 5'6", dark complexioned, and plump built. The woman said that she would have to run away if she wanted to get married. The statement seemed so peculiar to Mrs. Vessles that she began to question the woman. When asked if she worked for the Mears she answered yes. When asked what she was paid she stated nothing, that the banks were full and they would not take any more money. Further questioning the woman, Mrs. Vessles found that she was afraid of some one. Mrs. Vessles asked her where her home was. She stated that she came from Delaware when she was 14 years old and that she came before the girl who was married was born, that the girl was 26 years old, and that she was 40. She had not heard from her people and she did not go home because the trains had stopped running. She had a brother Willie who lived nearby and worked for Cousins of the Mears and he had been with the Cousins 24 years. She said her brother was afraid and would not take her any place because he did not have time. A West Indian had worked at the farm a short time and he later wrote her a letter but she could not read it and she gave it to Mr. Mears to read but he kept the letter. She could not read or write nor could her brother. Mrs. Vessles stated the woman did not appear to be insane, spoke clearly but seemed to be afraid and whispered most of the time. Mrs. Vessles saw the brother Willie.

William Fizer, 43 West End Avenue, Trenton, states that the Mears home was a large white farm house filled with antiques. He was a waiter at the wedding reception on May 15, 1948 and saw Mary and Willie Wright. He had no opportunity to speak to Mary because Mears seemed to hang around and he did not wish to cause trouble. He talked with the brother Willie. Willie appeared to be somewhat frightened and claimed to be trying to get his sister to leave but she was afraid. Willie worked on a farm of a Mears relative.

Luther Redman, 255 Lincoln Homes, Trenton, states as follows. He served as a waiter at the Mears farm on May 15. He saw both Mary and Willie Wright. He had no opportunity to speak to Mary since he was busy serving the reception and did not wish to cause a disturbance. Both seemed to be somewhat frightened in appearance. He talked with Willie. Willie said he was trying to get his sister to leave but she was afraid. Willie said he worked for a Cousin of Mears.

On Sunday, May 30, 1948, Dr. and Mrs. James R. Granger, 235 Spring Street, Trenton, Mrs. Carolyn D. Moore, 237 Spring Street, Trenton, Capt. Ford Perkins and Capt. Darby Irvine, 365th Infantry, Fort Dix, and Mrs. Willis Polk, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and myself drove to Cream Ridge, New Jersey.

Cream Ridge is a small village in an area of rather extensive and well kept farms. To reach William R. Mears farm, after turning into Cream Ridge from the Allentown Road continue on the main road, across the railroad spur, pass the Post Office

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to the blacksmith shop on the left side of the road. Turn left on the intersecting road and turn right on the first lane.

The Mears farm was well kept and gave the appearance of being carefully cultivated. The house was a large, three story frame building of approximately 16 to 20 rooms. The yard was extremely well kept, there was a formal lawn inclosed by hedge on the southside.

I went to the rear side entrance which turned out to be the kitchen. There was a dark complexioned colored woman about 5'4" in height dressed in a light blue maid's costume working in the kitchen. She identified herself as Mary Wright when I asked for that name. Upon questioning she stated that she came to the Mears farm when she was about 14 years of age and that she had been there since 1922. She came from Delaware. She identified the town as Lewistown. Her father was David A. Wright and he was dead before she came to New Jersey. Her mother was Alice A. Wright, she had not seen her since coming to New Jersey and she heard that she had died a short time before. She had never left the farm. She had a brother William who lived on a nearby farm of Mears' cousin. She had a brother George and two or three sisters. She had not heard from them. She did not receive any mail. She could not read or write. I asked could she get away from the farm. All her answers had been in whispers. She answered no. I asked did she want to get away. She said yes. She must have heard a sound for she walked away from me. At that moment a white woman, blond haired, wearing glasses, about 5'7", slim built, and about 22 years of age came into the kitchen.

I identified myself as an insurance investigator searching for next of kin of a deceased policy-holder. I asked if she knew anything about a mythical family of "Japer Miles". She left the room to get her mother. Mary would not come near me. A white woman about 50 years of age, white hair, about 5'7" entered the room. She identified herself as a Mrs. William R. Mears.

Mrs. Mears stated that Mary had been with her since 1922, she was 14 when she came to New Jersey, she came from Delaware. Mary's parents were David A. Wright, dead 27 years, and Alice Wright, maiden name Miller, who died about two years previously. Mary came from Lewes, Delaware. Mary's parents had been raised since they were ten years old by Mrs. Mears' parents. Mary had a brother named George who was either in Lewes or Georgetown, Delaware. A sister Mabel could be reached through R.I. Richardson, Georgetown, Delaware. A brother Horace had died recently. William worked on the farm of William H. Mears. He had been in New Jersey 24 years. Mrs. Mears appeared to be extremely interested in the amount of money was involved. A man about 25 years of age, 5'10", medium build, black haired

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was in the room the entire time of the conversation with Mrs. Mears. Mary flitted about and took no part in the conversation.

Mary gave no appearance of insanity or feeble-mindedness. She answered questions in a fearful whispering manner. She was not shy but gave the impression of hesitancy due to some fear. On one or two occasions, she was directed to do some task and did so quickly and alertly.

To reach the William H. Mears' farm, turn right on the lane just before reaching the blacksmith shop. It was a large well kept farm with numerous buildings, all painted red except for the farmhouse which was white. The farmhouse was three stories, frame, and seemed larger than the W.R. Mears' farm house. I spoke to a Mrs. William H. Mears. She stated that Mrs. W. R. Mears telephoned that I was on my way and that she could give no more information as to William Wright's relatives. She stated that he had been there since July or August of 1925, it might be earlier. He had come either from Lewes or Georgetown, Delaware. He did not receive any mail.

William was operating an electrical milker when Dr. Granger and I questioned him. He was about 5'6" in height, dark brown skin, and slim built. He was bellicose at first when we questioned him. Almost his first words were "Hell, I can get away any time I want". He said he was thirty-nine years old, could sign his name but otherwise could not read or write. He had heard little from his relatives, he was getting along fine. He said that Mary was paid no money but got her food and clothes. He got a little money but did not know how much. He went into Allentown once in a while and into Freehold. He did not have any way of getting around and could not take Mary with him. He was treated all right where he was, nobody bothered him there.

He finally stated that Mary could not get away. He was afraid of getting into trouble if he helped her. She would be brought back if she tried to go away. He received no mail, and he had not heard from his relatives. Under Dr. Granger's questions he stated again that Mary wanted to get away. He further stated that "they" would get Mary if she tried to go away. Willie gave no impression of insanity or feeble mindedness. At first his attitude was one of belligerence. He seemed to sense that Mary and his situation was peculiar but did not know why. He did not leave his present place because he wanted to be near Mary.

Both Mary and Willie seemed to be under some form of

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duress. Mary was very furtive in her actions but answered freely all my questions while it was possible to question her. Willie was very free in his answers yet he seemed to be laboring under some form of fear.

Just as we completed questioning Willie, a white man who identified himself as a Mr. Wygans sauntered up. He had been in one of the barns. He stated that he was the Postmaster of Cream Ridge and that he did not recall Willie or Mary receiving any mail in the last ten years.

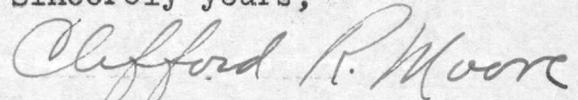
On June 1, 1948 I discussed the matter with agents of the F B I. As soon as we have completed our preliminary investigation they will act. A recent bulletin from the Department of Justice requires them to report all peonage incidents to Washington for investigation. John A. Waldron, Esq., Assistant United States Attorney, in charge of the Trenton Office, will cooperate with what ever plans we have. He will initiate the necessary steps upon request from us.

I would recommend that the National Office have some one investigate the Delaware angle. Try and locate Mabel Wright, c/o R.I. Richardson, Georgetown, Delaware.

Meanwhile, we sent the inclosed letter by registered mail. If Mary appears at Mr. Queen's Office unaccompanied, that should close the matter. If she is accompanied by anyone, I believe we can employ a stratagem to question her alone.

We would appreciate comments and suggestions from you. I can be reached by telephone, Trenton 6675, during the day.

Sincerely yours,



Clifford R. Moore

CRM/