

STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE  
HARTFORD, CONN.

5

TO Comr. E. J. Hickey  
FROM Capt. Paul Lavin & Capt. Paul Beckwith  
SUBJECT: Case H-25-Z Ringling Brothers Circus Fire

June 5, 1950

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Commissioner:

In compliance with orders received, left the City of Hartford at 3:30 P.M. on May 30, 1950, in company with Captain Paul Beckwith of the Hartford Police Department. We proceeded to Dover, New Hampshire, arriving there at 8:00 P.M. and reported in at the police station and made an appointment to meet Chief Andrew H. MacDaniel, Chief of Police, at 8:30 A.M. on May 31st.

On May 31, Captain Beckwith and I went to the police station and interviewed Chief MacDaniel, who gave us the following information relative to one Robert Dale Segee and his immediate family.

Chief MacDaniel stated that the Louis Segee, Jr. family (Robert's father) have left town for Portland, Maine - dates unknown; however, the family was known to them when they were residents in Dover and they lived at an address on Middle Road. While living in Dover, Louis Segee was in the house wrecking business with his brother. To the best of the Chief's knowledge, Robert's grandfather and two uncles are still residents of the town and are considered to be seniles and mentally unbalanced at this time.

Louis Segee was arrested on 9-5-31, when he was 37 years of age, and while living at 4 Whittier Court, in Dover. He was arrested upon the request of the Clinton, Mass. Police Department and turned over to them as a Fugitive from Justice to answer charges of Forgery of Checks. Their records do not indicate however that he was prosecuted in Clinton or what sentence or fine was imposed. The record does show that he was born in Stafford Springs, Connecticut.

Francis Segee, brother of Robert, has a record for Breaking, Entering and Theft. He was 15 years of age at the time of his arrest in 1933 but there is no record of disposition.

To the best of Chief MacDaniel's knowledge, Robert Segee has no police record in Dover.

From information received from Chief MacDaniel and his staff, they are all of the same opinion - that the entire Segee family, while in Dover, New Hampshire, were considered to be mental defectives - this included the whole family from the grandfather down to the family of Louis Segee, Jr., the father of Robert Segee.

We were unable to get any further information from the Chief or his



June 5, 1950

staff at this time relative to the Segree family.

5-1

We did secure from the City Clerk's Office at Dover, New Hampshire, birth certificate of Robert Dale Segree, showing he was born Sept. 17, 1929 - same is attached and part of this record.

We went to the office of Chief Edward Knott, Headquarters Fire Department, Dover, New Hampshire, located on Broadway. From him we secured the following information relative to fires in or around the vicinity of the Segree home.

Their records show that there was a fire at the James K. Horan warehouse, located on 63 Fourth Street, on July 16, 1944, with a still alarm at 3:00 A.M., which developed into a box alarm at 3:08 A.M. This location is within a short distance of the former Segree home. The fire originated in the rear of the building on the outside in a pile of debris. There was no loss of life in this fire - damage estimated at \$3,000. This was a storage warehouse containing heating equipment and fixtures. It is recorded as an incendiary fire.

Chief Knott further advised that their records show there was a fire in the Segree home in 1937 when a barn was ignited and a total loss. Records do not indicate any cause as to origin.

The only other fire in Dover that seemed pertinent was on Sept. 12, 1946 at 4:20 P.M. at 38 Third Street, involving a furniture store and bowling alley owned by Joseph Michaels of Rochester, New Hampshire. The building was occupied by the L. E. Rossi Furniture Company (Ross Peyeau - Prop) and the bowling alleys operated under the name of Peabody Bowling Alleys. Fire records show that the cause of the fire was definitely established to be in the bowling alleys - while they were cleaning the bowling alleys with gasoline and steel wool, the gasoline ran into a lower electric light socket and ignited. Besides the fact that the origin was very definitely established in this fire, the subject was not a resident in the town on that date. To quote the Chief's description of the family - "The whole family -- not good -- off a little -- half wits right down through." He also confirmed the fact that Louis Segree and his brother were in the house wrecking business and folded up. To the best of his knowledge, the family left Dover sometime before the war for Portland, Maine.

I interviewed one Dr. Emmett Ogara, physician and surgeon, at 528 Central Avenue, Dover, New Hampshire. He knew the Segree family professionally and knew they were, in his estimation, morons of the lowest type and he didn't consider their word worth much. He also knew Louis Segree was in business with a brother wrecking houses in and around Dover, New Hampshire but had failed in business and had left Dover for some unknown address in Portland, Maine about 1941.

After giving this information, he further advised that if we wanted further information relative to the Segree family, he referred us to one Mrs. Mary E. Cosgrove, of Back River Road, Dover, New Hampshire.



June 5, 1950

5-2

We went to the home of Mrs. Cosgrove and talked with her. It developed that Mrs. Cosgrove is 74 years of age and we found she is apparently senile. Her recollection of this family was that they lived on the corner near their home for a number of years but left for parts unknown, possibly Portsmouth, New Hampshire - and that an uncle was still a resident of the community, residing immediately across the street from her home. Because of her apparent condition, we did not see fit to question her further about the Segee matter and we did not give her any information about the matter so that any leak could be caused at this point. We terminated our interview and returned to the police station where we made our investigation known to the Chief.

We discontinued our investigation in Dover at 1:30 P.M., having obtained all possible information, and left for Scarborough, Maine, arriving at the Scarborough State Police Barracks, Route #1, Scarborough, at 2:45 P.M. There we made an appointment through Sergeant Gorman, the Officer in Command, to interview the Chief of Detectives, one Captain Edward M. Kochian, of the Portland, Maine Police Department.

Arriving at the Portland Police Station, 132 Federal Street at about 3:30 P.M., we immediately went into conference with Captain Kochian, who immediately told us that one R. Russell Smith, of the Fire Marshal's Office, State Fire Marshal's Bureau, Columbus, Ohio, had arrived there at approximately noon of date and had requested the services of his division to assist him in the investigation of fires located in the immediate vicinity of the waterfront in the City of Portland - also in the close vicinity of the Segee home, located at 20 Brockett Street. He had informed Captain Kochian that he had already interviewed Chief Oliver Sanborn, of the Portland Fire Department and had secured from him a partial list on the fires in the areas in which he was interested but that he desired to view the areas in question and if possible interview former neighbors of the Segee family.

We informed Captain Kochian of the facts pertaining to our mission in Portland and suggested to him that we would at the moment rather interview several persons whom we had reason to believe were with the subject, Segee, in Hartford, and whom we presumed were still residents of his city.

The first such person was Francis Domenick Ramangno, of 45 Hancock St., Portland, Maine and Captain Kochian's men succeeded in locating this person and brought him to Headquarters where we interviewed him. Francis appeared to us to be of sub-normal mentality and we were informed by the Portland officers that this was also their opinion; however, we reduced the results of the interview to a statement which Francis signed and same is attached.

The second such person we desired to interview was one Morris Earl Hackett of 20 Lancaster Street, Portland, Maine. Captain Kochian's men were also successful in locating this boy and brought him to Headquarters where we interviewed him. While this boy appeared of a higher mentality than the Ramangno boy, the interview revealed that he was not to any great degree of better mentality.



June 5, 1950

5-3

The results of this interview were likewise reduced to statement form, signed by Hackett and same is attached.

The third such person was one George R. LaVangie. The Portland officers were unable to locate him and after several hours of search it developed that he had moved to R.F.D.#1, East Nassau, New York. He is presumably presently at that address as mail has been received from him there within the past ten days.

Because of the usual delays in locating subjects and bringing them to Headquarters for interview, we did not discontinue until 1:00 A.M. on May 31st; however, during the interval between interviews, Captain Douglas Steel informed us that a friend of his, Richard S. Chapman, attorney-at-law, former County Attorney, had spoken to him shortly after the Hartford, Connecticut circus fire and it was the Captain's recollection that Mr. Chapman stated he had observed a fire at the circus when it played in Portland about a week previous to the Hartford fire.

As a result of this, Mr. Chapman was called on the phone at his home, Pond Cove Park, Cape Elizabeth, Maine - telephone 4-2338. Mr. Chapman informed us that he attended the circus when it played Portland in 1944, about a week previous to the Hartford fire; that he occupied a seat in the reserved section on the right of the main entrance (as you enter) and somewhat nearer the main entrance than the midway part of the tent; and that just before the performance started, he noticed a rope hanging from the top of the tent and believed it had a loop at the bottom of it - apparently used by performers. He noticed the bottom of the rope, in the section where the loop was, was smoldering and he told the usher. He observed the usher go down and get the attendants, the rope was lowered and the fire stamped out. Mr. Chapman stated he thought it was close enough to the tent top to set it afire. However, after the fire was extinguished, he thought no more of it until the Hartford fire and recalled that he then remarked about it to Captain Steel. Mr. Chapman's office address is 85 Exchange, Portland, Maine - telephone 2-5431.

We spent the remainder of the night at the Scarborough State Police Barracks and picked up the investigation again on June 1, at 8:30 A.M. in Portland, Maine, at Captain Kochian's office. We were assigned Inspectors Donald M. Macdougall and John C. Keanery, these being the two officers who had been assigned to Russell Smith on the day previous. They retraced the route that had been taken with Inspector Smith for our benefit, taking us to the waterfront area and to the area of Segee's former home, pausing en route to view some eight or ten fire sites. They also took us to see Chief Sanborn of the Portland Fire Department.

Chief Sanborn informed us that he had furnished Mr. Smith with a list of fires of unexplained origin, in the vicinities in which he was interested, on the day previous, and that he would have a copy of same made up and forwarded to us. Further, that he expected



June 5, 1950

5-4

Mr. Smith to call on him again and he would be glad to furnish any information given Mr. Smith and same, if any, will be forwarded to us.

We spent some time in the area of the former Segree home on Brackett Street and while there we interviewed one H.M. Brown, who operates an antique store at 21 Brackett Street, corner of York, across the street from the former Segree home. Mr. Brown owns the former Segree home and purchased it while the Segrees were living in it. He informed us that the family was a very untidy one and in his opinion were a little off. He recalled the subject, Robert Segree but only as a neighborhood kid and really knew little of him. It was his thought that any adults we might interview would not know any more about Robert than he did and suggested we see a boy of Robert's age, who knew him. He furnished us with the name of one Norman Driscoll, currently of 212 York Street, formerly, and at the time of the Segree tenancy, of 245 York Street - very close to the Segree home.

With the assistance of the Portland officers, a search was made for the Driscoll boy and when it developed that he was out of town, arrangements were made for him to report to Captain Lavin at the Scarboro Barracks upon his return. He so reported about 4:20 A.M. on June 2nd, when he was interviewed. The results of the interview were reduced to statement form and was signed by Driscoll and same is attached.

While in conversation with Norman Driscoll, he furnished the names of David Redman, age 17, of Ting Street and Edward Ridge, age 17, of 28 Summer Street, Portland, both seniors at the Portland High School, Cumberland Avenue, in that city.

With this information, proceeded to the Portland Police Station and in company with Inspector MacDougall, at 9:30 A.M. interviewed Sub-Master C. Johnson of the Portland High School and secured his permission to interview these two boys separately.

First interviewed was David Redman, of Ting Street, who gave me the following information: That while he was in the sixth or seventh grade he was a class mate of Robert Segree - that he knew Robert Segree and played with him daily in the vicinity of 20 Brackett Street, the Segree home. To the best of his knowledge, Segree at that time was somewhat of a foolish individual and all the boys were of the same opinion. He knew Segree left Portland sometime in 1944 - the date not known - and ran away with Ringling Brothers Circus. He remembered when he came back to Portland he heard Segree say he had been with the circus at the time of a big fire. He also has a vivid recollection that when Segree returned, he had a burned right hand. He could give no further information about Segree or his family.

Edward Ridge was then interviewed and he gave the following information: That he and Driscoll had been friendly for some time



June 5, 1950

5-5

and both he and Driscoll knew the Segees when they lived on Brackett Street. That they played in the lot adjacent to the Segee home. He was also of the opinion that Robert Segee was a moron. He further stated that on one occasion, while the children in the neighborhood - including himself, Driscoll, and three Segee boys - Clifton, Earl and Robert - were staging an air rifle battle - Norman Driscoll shot at and hit Earl Segee in the eye, knocking his eye out. He also states that he remembers Robert Segee leaving Portland, Maine at the time the circus came in town sometime in June 1944 and he was away from the neighborhood possibly two weeks when he returned and was quite talkative about the fire. He is sure that Robert Segee's right hand was burned and that it had a bandage on it at the time he returned. He further stated that Robert Segee boasted about the fact that he had had an affair with one of the Ringling Brothers official's daughters, while en route from Portland to Hartford, Connecticut and while in Hartford, and talked about this every chance he got. He said that in his opinion Segee was an oversized moron and it was generally known in the entire neighborhood that the entire family was the same.

I questioned this boy relative to the sister, Dorothy, who is now in Columbus, Ohio and he stated that while they lived at 20 Brackett Street, Portland, she, on numerous occasions put on a strip-tease act for the kids in the neighborhood. All that he could give me relative to the Segee family was that they were off mentally, from the father down.

I obtained only a verbal statement from these two boys as Mr. Johnson didn't know whether he should give me permission to obtain written statements and under the circumstances I didn't force the issue.

After completing this interview in the City of Portland, I left and went to Dover, New Hampshire, where I interviewed Chief Andrew MacDaniel at 2:00 P.M. and he gave me the following information:

That R. Russell Smith, of the Columbus, Ohio Fire Marshal's Office, George Morse, Assistant Fire Marshal of Portland, Maine, and Louis Pendleton, an agent of the Fire Underwriters from Concord, New Hampshire, were at his office on the afternoon of the first and made inquiry as to the birth of Robert Segee and also as to any record he might have at the Dover Police Department. He also stated that Smith was very much interested in a sex murder that happened in Portsmouth on an eight-year-old girl of that city, who was found under a railroad platform in that city. Smith was of the opinion that Segee might be in on this job but the Chief knew that an itinerant barber had been arrested and brought to trial for the crime - that a plea of guilty had been entered - and that the court had seen fit to discharge him.

He also secured some knowledge from Smith that both he and Morse were trying to develop a case against Segee for the fire at the University of Maine where several students were killed some time



June 5, 1950

5-6

ago - day and dates not known.

He also secured information while they were there that there had been two fires at the Segee home on Middle Road, Dover, in 1937 or thereabouts - these fires being discovered in a closet and extinguished by the sister, Dorothy, and not reported to the Dover Fire Department. This information, according to Smith, was given to him by the sister, Dorothy.

The Chief further advised that Smith, in company with Morse and Pendleton, were proceeding to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to call upon Police Chief Lynche relative to the above reported sex murder.

From the Police Department they went to the office of Chief Knott at Fire Headquarters and made inquiry relative to the warehouse fire at Horan's place (previously reported) and left here in a very few minutes.

I concluded my business in the City of Dover, New Hampshire and left immediately for Hartford.

Attached are pictures of Robert Dale Segee, forwarded by Col. Chas. Mingle, through Sergt. Jos. Seryak, of the Ohio State Highway Patrol, 1117 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio.

Respectfully submitted,

*Capt. Paul Lavin*

Capt. Paul Lavin  
Western Division

*Capt. Paul Beckwith*

Capt. Paul Beckwith  
Detective Division  
Hartford Police Department