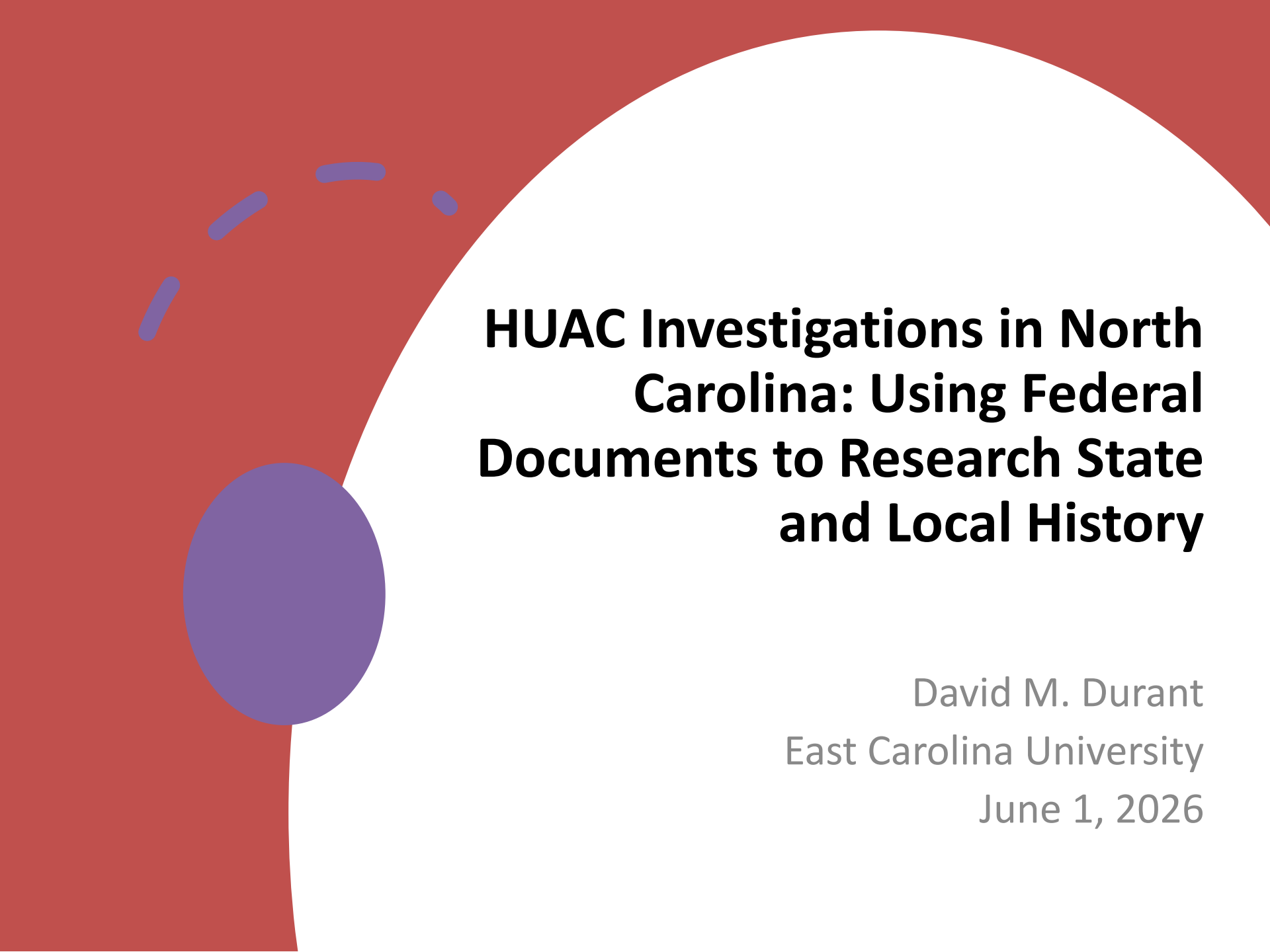




HUAC Investigations in North Carolina: Using Federal Documents to Research State and Local History

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East Carolina University
June 1, 2026

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

- House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations related to North Carolina offer an example of how federal docs might be relevant to state/local history
- Three case studies as examples



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

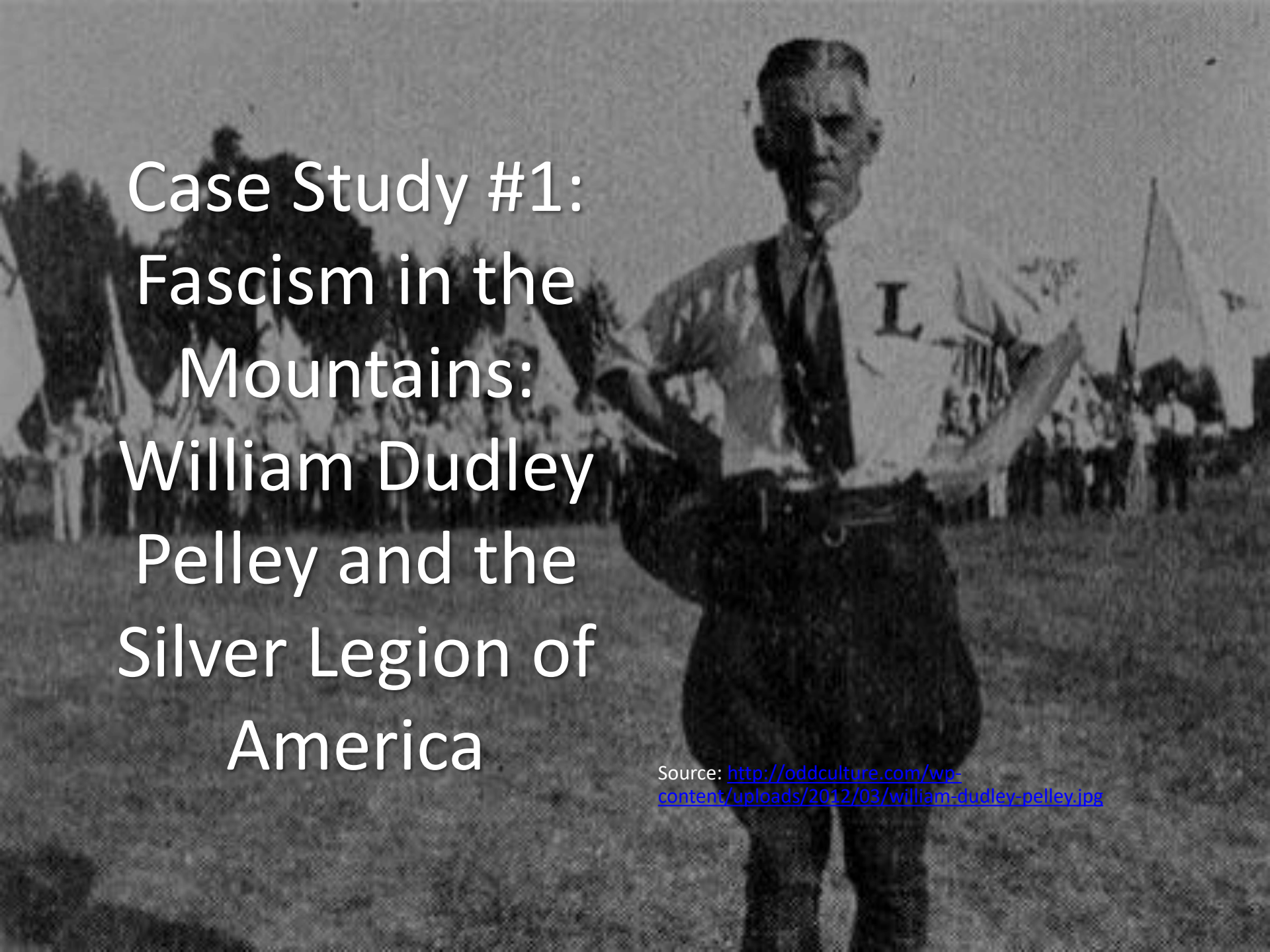
Source:

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

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, the activities of HUAC and related committees impacted political developments in NC





Case Study #1: Fascism in the Mountains: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America

Source: <http://oddculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/william-dudley-pelley.jpg>

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



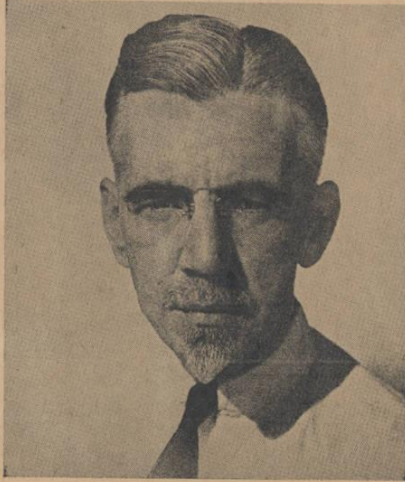
The Special Committee Comes to Asheville

“He seemed quite certain that some great event was going to take place on January 30, 1933, and when the papers announced the rise of Hitler to power in Germany, Mr. Pelley announced that that was “the pyramid date” event unquestionably: and from that point on he seemed to lose all interest in everything which had gone before in the way of his publications, and appeared to become possessed with the idea that something was going to happen in America similar to what was happening in Germany, and at one time he wanted me to have printed and sent out to all newspapers a page-sized sheet headed “Is he the American Hitler?”

-Former Pelley employee George S. Anderson

(Investigation of Nazi Propaganda Activities and Investigation of Certain Other Propaganda Activities, 1940, p.68)

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.

- 1935: Conviction for financial fraud
- 1939: Buncombe County issues arrest warrant for Pelley

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 (sic.) 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. Executive Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-Third Congress, Second Session. May 2-3, 1934.*
 - George S. Anderson testimony on pgs. 60-76
- *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)*
 - Anderson's public testimony is in v. 1, pgs. 246-261.

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.



Case Study #2: The Spy Who Ran for Governor

- By The Greensboro News and Record -
Original publication: Greensboro, North
Carolina Immediate source:
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/938130224/?terms=Mary%20Price&match=1>, Fair
use,
<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73758674>

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

“Senator HOEY. Do you recall meeting anybody from North Carolina in that connection?

....

Miss BENTLEY. Yes, I do, Senator.

Senator FERGUSON. Senator, do you want to put the name in the record?

Senator HOEY. Yes.

Miss BENTLEY. Mary Watkins Price.

...

Senator HOEY. When was that?

Miss BENTLEY. I should say, roughly, February 1941.

Senator HOEY. At that time was she a member of the Communist Party?

Miss BENTLEY. I was introduced to her as such, yes.”

(Export Policy and Loyalty, 1948. P. 25)

President Renews His Demand For Action to Curb Inflation

Witness Labels Mary Price As Communist Party Agent

But Head of Henry Wallace
Party in State Declares
Charge 'Fantastic'

The 38-year-old brunette chairman of North Carolina's Progressive Party was described yesterday by a confessed spy as a Communist agent, and immediately she labeled the charge "fantastic."

Testifying before a Senate committee investigating Communist influences in the government, Elizabeth T. Bentley, who admitted she had been a member of a Communist spy ring, said that Mary Price of Greensboro, chairman of the Henry Wallace party in this State, was an agent for the Communist Party during the war.

She said that Miss Price, while a secretary to columnist Walter Lippmann, in Washington, took information from office conferees on United States relations with Great Britain and passed it along to Earl Browder, then head of the Communist Party in this country.

"Fantastic Thing."
"Why, this is the most fantastic thing I've ever heard," Miss Price exclaimed when first informed of the charge. "I'll have to see what I can find out about this."

Later, she issued a formal statement in which she described the charges as "an obvious effort to discredit the great new Progressive Party." Her full statement will be found later in this story.

The United Press said Miss Price admitted that she had met Miss Bentley and had worked for Lippmann, but aside from her preparatory statement she had "no other comment."

Miss Price would say neither "yes" nor "no" with regard to Miss Bentley's charge, saying she had no comment pending further advice from her attorney.

Before the committee, Miss Bentley named the woman she was talking about as "Mary Watkins Price" and Miss Price said she is Greensboro's middle name is Watkins.

When Senator Hoey, a member of the committee, informed Miss Bentley that Miss Price is now the State

See PRICE, Page Three.

CHICAGO DAIRIES
TO FACE CHARGES

Federal Grand Jury Indicts



MARY PRICE.



ELIZABETH T. BENTLEY.

'Grave Danger'

Washington, July 30.—(AP)—If the vote is split three or four ways this November, then there's "grave danger" that Gov. Thomas E. Dewey will carry North Carolina, Senator Clyde Hoey said today.

"Otherwise," he added, "I think President Truman will

Elizabeth Bentley Tells of
Collecting Military Secrets
from WPB Man

Washington, July 30.—(AP)—Elizabeth T. Bentley, who said she fell in love with a Communist and became a Russian spy, today calmly unspooled a story of collecting wartime military information from William W. Remington in the War Production Board.

She appeared before the Senate investigating committee inquiring into reports of subversive persons holding responsible government jobs.

Remington tonight said flatly that Miss Bentley's allegations are untrue.

He told reporters that he will prove this tomorrow when he appears before the committee which heard Miss Bentley's testimony.

Remington still is on the government payroll, but was placed on "indefinite leave" from his Commerce Department post more than a month ago.

Miss Bentley identified Remington as a man who paid dues to the Communist Party. Commerce Department officials said he has been working most recently with an inter-agency committee that has the say-so on what goods may be shipped to Russia.

Trained in Russia.

They also said he was trained in Russia by the Navy and did wartime work as a naval intelligence officer in London, after his WPB work. He did postwar work for the President's Council of Economic Advisors, they said, before coming to the Commerce Department early this year.

Miss Bentley, 36, who said she was a 1930 graduate of Vassar College, said she decided to quit her Communist work — conferring in New York and Washington—in 1944, and a year later went to the Federal Bureau of Investigation office in New Haven, Conn., with her information.

She said she went to New Haven rather than Washington because "after you have been doing work

See BENTLEY, Page Three.

AIR SHOW DRAWS
TWO CANDIDATES

President Truman and Governor

Accuses Congress of
Showing 'Blind Disregard'
of Dangers That
Face Nation's Economy;
Sends Bristling Letter
to Capitol Hill Along
with Report by His Economic
Advisers; Senate
Filibuster Continues;
Taft Says Republicans
May Be Willing to Approve
Some of Anti-Inflation
Measures

Washington, July 30.—(AP)—The fight over inflation surged to a new height of bitterness today, with President Truman accusing Congress of "blind disregard of the dangers that beset our path."

Senator Taft (R-Ohio), spokesman for Republicans in the Senate, shouted back that Mr. Truman actually "doesn't want to stop inflation."

Instead, Taft told the Senate, he is "making political speeches to Congress."

Senator Barkley (D-Ky), Vice Presidential running mate of the President, got into the quarrel by saying that Taft himself was making a political speech. Taft talked of winding up the special session a week from tomorrow.

Committee Dues.

While all this was going on, Congress committees heard:

1. From Secretary of the Treasury Snyder that he doesn't like price controls any more than he does cost-of-living, but that in an emergency resort must be had to distasteful remedies.

2. From Presidential Assistant Paul A. Porter, former OPA chief, that petroleum and petroleum products would be among the items to get "first consideration" if Mr. Truman should induce Congress to approve price controls. Porter previously had included in this group meats, dairy products, clothing, building materials, steel and some other metals.

Meanwhile, the quiet Southern filibuster against the anti-poll tax bill droned on in the Senate.

Bristling Letter.

Today's fireworks over inflation were set off by a bristling letter Mr. Truman sent to Capitol Hill along with the midyear report of his Council of Economic Advisors.

The report told of peacetime or all-time records piled up in employment, wages, production and trade. It recorded, too, the dizzy climb of prices.

Mr. Truman said that heavy spending for defense and foreign aid, third round postwar wage boosts and the probable wiping out of the government's money surplus within the next year are contributing strongly to inflation.

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 later repeated the allegations before HUAC

• Raleigh News and Observer,
July 31, 1948. Source: ProQuest
Historical Newspapers

The Spy Who Ran for Governor

- 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 (sic.) 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: 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

VENONA Revelations

“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 Sources

- 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>

A black and white photograph showing a group of men in suits and ties, likely members of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), gathered around a table. They are looking down at documents or papers, appearing to be in the middle of an investigation. The man in the center foreground is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. A microphone is visible on the table in front of him. The background is dark and out of focus.

HUAC Investigates the Klan

Source: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/klansville-gallery/>

HUAC Investigates the Klan

- House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) unlikely venue for investigating klan
- Opened klan investigation in October 1965
- 37 days of hearings; nearly 200 witnesses
- Ended in February 1966
- Final report in December 1967
- Investigation revealed that NC had more UKA chapters (“Klaverns”) than any other state (112)
 - Majority in eastern NC

HUAC Investigates the Klan

- Pitt County had seven klaverns:
 - Benevolent Association No. 53 (Greenville)
 - Ogden Christian Fellowship Club No. 53 (Greenville)
 - The Benevolent Association (Winterville)
 - Pitt County Improvement Association No. 37 (Farmville)
 - Ayden Christian Fellowship Club (Ayden)
 - Grifton Christian Society (Grifton)
 - Fountain Klavern (cover name not given)
- Every county bordering Pitt had at least one klavern
- Lenoir County had five

HUAC Investigates the Klan

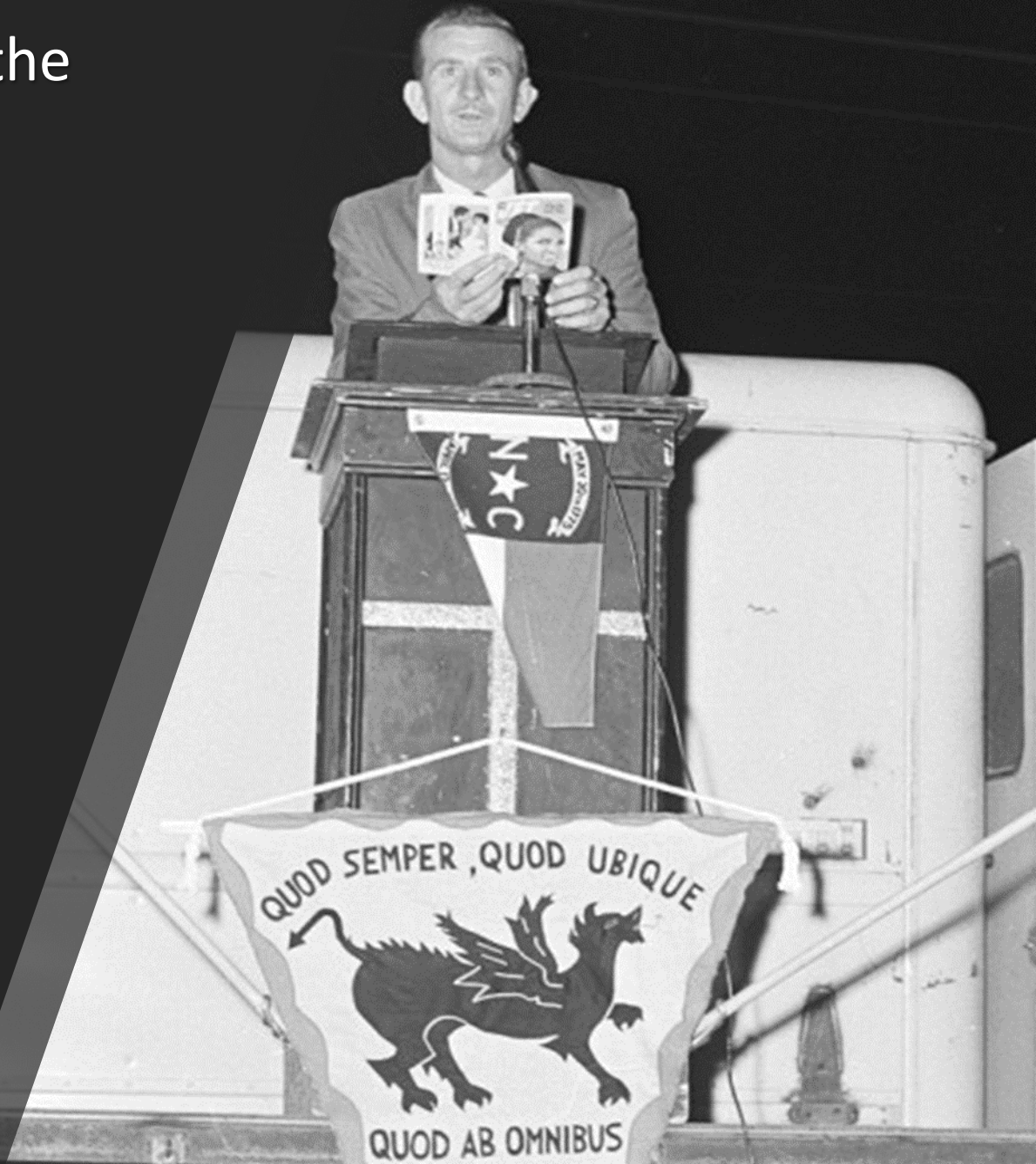
- Several witnesses from in and around Pitt County testified before HUAC regarding the KKK:
 - James Huey “Sonny” Fisher (Farmville)
 - KKK Official
 - George Leonard Williams (Greenville):
 - Former KKK member

HUAC Investigates the Klan

- “I respectfully decline to deliver to the committee any and all documents and records as demanded by the committee in a subpoena(sic) dated October 21, 1965, for the reason that I honestly feel that to do so, the same might tend to incriminate me in violation of my right as guaranteed to me by amendments 5, 1, 4, and 14 of the Constitution of the United States of America.

- (Testimony of James Huey (Sonny) Fisher. October 22, 1965. *Activities of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in the United States, Part 1*, 1965, p. 1870)

- Source: <http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/8603>



HUAC Investigates the Klan

- George Leonard Williams was the most damaging anti-klan witness
- Joined July 28, 1965
- Member of Greenville and Pactolus klaverns
- Shot in Plymouth incident (8/31/65)
- Ordered to beat up Mayor of Vanceboro
- Left klan in November 1965
- Testified 1/28/66

HUAC Investigates the Klan

- “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)

HUAC Investigates the Klan

- The negative publicity generated by Klan hearings provoked NC authorities into cracking down on the organization
- The UKA was a non-factor by the end of the 1960s



Sources

- *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
- *The Present-Day Ku Klux Klan Movement. Report by the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Ninetieth Congress, First Session. December 11, 1967.* (SuDoc no: Y 1.1/7: 90-377; also Joyner NC Stacks: HS2330 .K63 A56)

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: <https://sites.ecu.edu/cwis/>
- LibGuide: <http://libguides.ecu.edu/cwis>



Questions?



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