

February 1st 1922

Memo of interview with Gilbert Stephenson-6598

35 years old, single, father is living at Duquette, Minnesota, mother is dead, has four brothers and five sisters living. Was born and raised in Iowa until ten years old, then at Walnut Grove for a number of years but for the past ten years has lived in Duluth. Mother died when he was nine years old, father kept the family together and appearances would indicate that he had good home training. Was raised a Presbyterian, 8th grade in public school.

This offense is Riot and was in connection with the lynching of three negroes charged with raping a white girl in Duluth. The negroes in this case were connected with a circus showing in Duluth and it was alleged that several of them took a girl and the young man who escorted her, at the point of a gun from the circus grounds to an out of the way place and there ravished her one after the other. The matter was reported, some of the negroes were placed under arrest while in Duluth and others were arrested the following day at Virginia. This caused much excitement in Duluth and on the night following the crime against the girl three of the negroes were taken by force from the city jail and hanged. The testimony in this case indicated that Stephenson was one of the leaders who actually took part in breaking the jail doors and taking these negroes therefrom. Twenty-one were arrested in this riot case but only three convicted. Stephenson absolutely denies that he had any part in taking these men from the jail. He says that on the night in question he was at his boarding place, which was about five blocks from the city jail, that he was dressing intending to go to the theater. The man with whom he boarded was down town, called his wife by telephone telling her of the excitement and asking her to come down with Stephenson which she did. They were together on the street and were across the street from the jail when the police undertook to control the crowd by the use of fire hose, the crowd overpowering the police and turning the hose upon them. Says he saw this but had no part in it. Claims that the nearest he was to the cells where the man were confined was on the sidewalk in front of the building. Did not see them taken out nor did he see them hanged but saw them afterwards. Claims his conviction was brought about by police officers identifying him as the man who swung the hammer on the cell doors which he absolutely denies and says that one officer, Ira Ricketts, who was on duty there as turnkey and who knew him well, was ready to testify that he was not the man there but that his attorney refused to call him. The story he tells and the testimony given at the trial seem to be about alike. The jury evidently felt he was guilty.

My impression is that he is really telling the truth and I have some doubt about his being an active participant in this unfortunate affair. No doubt a large number of people of Duluth that night simply reverted to the primitive and lost all control of themselves. Stephenson has undoubtedly been a good citizen in the past with absolutely no criminal record, has been a trusty all the time that he has been here at the prison and in my judgment is perfectly safe to parole at any time and do not believe anything would be gained by keeping him in confinement. He has many friends in Duluth who are anxious to see him return and he is as anxious to do this.



State Parole Agent.

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