

Biggest Sensation in Years

16 Men Held For Murder

C.G. SIMS, ARDMORE POLICEMAN, AND TWO WILSON

MEN KILLED AT WILSON - SIXTEEN MEN ARRESTED

AND HELD "INCOMMUNICADO" IN ARDMORE JAIL

TREMENDOUS EXCITEMENT AND SHERIFF AND COUNTY

ATTORNEY SEVERELY CENSURED

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Ardmore, Oklahoma

Thursday, December 22, 1921

For the last five or six days Ardmore has been stirred up to a degree that the city has never before experienced. More of its people were excited and wrought up, and were worse wrought up, than the oldest inhabitant can recall, in even this city of exciting experiences.

The condition was set in motion by news coming in last Friday morning that two men had been killed at Wilson, Thursday night, in a fight between bootleggers and a posse of masked men, and that five persons had been brought to Ardmore during the night and placed in jail. About 11:30 Friday morning the town suffered an added chill, when the news came that the dead body of C.G. Sims, city policeman of Ardmore, had been found lying in the pasture near Wilson. These facts, with attendant rumors created an unusual amount of excitement, which continued and grew during the day Saturday. On Sunday morning the news spread all over the city that seven well known residents- men of prominence in the business world- had been arrested and were being held in jail charged with murder; Monday morning brought the information that one or two other similar arrests had been made and additional warrants were out.

Friends of the arrested parties by the score called at the jail to see them and offer sympathy and aid, but were told by the officers in charge that the parties were held under the charge of murder, and could not be seen or interviewed, and that bond could not be furnished for their release until after a preliminary hearing had been held. The public did not know, and a whole lot of them do not now believe that, that is the law in the state. It has always been very laxly observed in this county in the past, and the public believed (and with pretty good reason for their belief) that it was being enforced in this case unwarrantedly. This made the feeling run still higher, that "something crooked was going on in the court house and at the jail". The effect was electrical. There was open talk and spoken threat of going to the jail in force and liberating the business men held there. Fortunately more conservative counsel prevailed and the attempt was not made,

but the feeling in the community against the sheriff and law department grew continually more intense, and "anything was likely to happen at any time," all thru Monday and Tuesday.

The funeral of C. G. Sims was held at the Presbyterian church Sunday afternoon, being conducted by the Masons, of which order he was a popular member. In the course of this remarks at the funeral services at the church the pastor asked the assembled Masons "had their brother died in vain?" It is possible his reference was to the fact that the brother had died in an effort to repress the lawless sale of liquor; but it was interpreted by many to refer to the fight that had been going on for some time in the county to have the sheriff removed because of the common belief that he is not in sympathy with the movement for enforcement of the moral and prohibition laws. The funeral was said to have been the largest ever held in the city, the attendance being so large that the big church building would not near hold the congregation, which over flowed the church lawn and street.

The feeling of indignation grew rapidly throughout Monday, culminating in a mass meeting at Masonic hall at 2:00 Monday afternoon, which was attended by as many people as the room would hold, which is approximately 400. Probably all present were members of the Masonic lodge, and any reputedly citizen residing in Ardmore or Carter county was welcomed.

The question of asking the governor to put the city under martial law was advocated, but more conservative counsels prevailed, and instead a resolution was adopted that a committee be appointed by the chairman of the meeting (A.H. Palmer, president of the City State Bank), which committee should be composed of 10 to 50 persons, and that this committee take the night train to Oklahoma City and lay the whole matter before the governor, at the same time urging the attorney general's office to make its report regarding recent investigation of conditions in Carter county. Such committee was appointed, and 28 of them went to the capitol Monday night and saw the governor on Tuesday, who promised his immediate aid, and that the report of the attorney general's office would be forthcoming without delay. Also that the attorney general's office would take charge of the prosecutions for the Wilson killings. The meeting also appointed a committee composed of Mayor R.A. Hefner, Fred E. Tucker, and Roy M. Johnson, to go at once to the jail and find out the facts regarding the recently arrested business men being held "incommunicado," and whether they were being subjected to the "third degree" confinement in the dungeon, and other indignities that rumor reported they were being subjected to. Attorney J.B. Champion, who was in the meeting, was requested to accompany the committee, which he did. The committee returned in a half hour or so, reported that they had been admitted to see the prisoners, talked to them, found them in good spirits, and learned that they had been allowed to communicate with counsel, and with their families. This report relieved the tension to a very decided degree. While the committee was absent there had been a number of talks made by persons residing in the city and persons from Wilson, Healdton, and elsewhere in the county. After the announcement of the names of the committee to go to Oklahoma City was made, the meeting adjourned.

The net results of this gathering were to clearly demonstrate that the sentiment all over Carter county most pronouncedly is that law violations must stop; car stealing and whisky peddling must come to an end; and that the law department of the county has been and still is inefficient in

bringing about this result, and ouster proceedings should be instituted without delay against them.

The culminating event in the series of exciting happenings of the preceding days occurred on Tuesday night, when both daily newspapers put on the streets early in the evening, an "extra" containing what they head-lined as a "confession" of J.A. Gilliam. It was in fact, a statement signed by Gilliam detailing what he knew of the affair at Wilson on last Thursday night. (It will be found in full in another column of this issue of the Statesman.) Following the issuing of this statement all of the persons arrested, except John Smith and Jeff Smith, both of Healdton, were permitted to give bond, either Tuesday night or Wednesday morning, and were released from custody. Thus the storm center seems to have passed, for the time at any rate.

### Tragedy at Wilson

The facts surrounding the killing of Joe Carroll and John Smith, as well as the manner of the death of C.G. Sims, are very hard to obtain. As well as the Statesman could assemble them from the published accounts in the daily newspapers and from conversations with those who had taken part in the investigations of the mysterious affair, they appear to be about as follows:

Police Detective C.G. Sims of Ardmore, probably aided by an unknown out of town enforcement officer or detective, had got in touch with John Smith of Wilson, a former bootlegger (later killed in the fight), who was an intimate friend of Joe Carroll, who was looked upon as the directing spirit of the car thief gang that has been operating for some time in Carter county, particularly in the oil fields and adjacent towns. By some means these officers had prevailed on John Smith to guide them to Carroll's home and entice him outside, where he could be captured. The facts and circumstances would further indicate that a meeting similar to the Ku Klux methods had been arranged, about a mile and a half southwest of Joiner City which is about two and a half miles west of Wilson.

At any rate, it appears from the Gilliam statement, published below, and other facts that have cropped out, that a number of cars, loaded with masked men had assembled in that pasture in the early part of Thursday night. Some of these cars had come from Ardmore, other from Healdton, and possible some from Wilson.

Reading between the lines of the Gilliam statement it could be gathered that Sims and others left the pasture in cars and went to Wilson to get Carroll and bring him to the pasture. It does not seem likely that there was any plan to kill him, but all the facts and circumstances would indicate an intention to bring him to the pasture, and endeavor to wring from him information that would aid in breaking up the gang with which he was suspected of being associated.

The store of how he happened to be killed can only be unravelled from the fragmentary testimony obtained from Carroll's neighbors, the members of his family, and from the statements said to have been made by John Smith after he was taken to the hospital at Wilson. The story, as well as the Statesman could patch it together, is about as follows:

### Story of the Killing

At about 12:30 o'clock last Thursday night two cars loaded with men wearing masks drove up in front of the shack on a side street in Wilson, where Joe Carroll, a suspected bootlegger lived. The men dismounted from the cars and gathered around the front door of the shack. John Smith of Wilson, who was known to be a friend of Carroll, had been picked up in Wilson and induced to go with the masked party as a guide. Reaching the door of the shack Smith called to Carroll, asking him to come outside. Carroll responded and came to the door and as he opened it, it is presumed he was ordered to "stick up his hands." His reply was to reach for his pistol, which his wife says he carried stuck in the top of his overalls.

What followed, and the sequence in which it happened, is a confused maze from the information now available. The only sure thing is that some 30 to 40 shots were fired in quick succession, and the masked party returned hastily to their cars, leaving Joe Carroll lying dead at his door step, where his wife found him as quickly as she could come from the back room of the shack.

All of the attacking party except John Smith, made their escape in the cars, later events showing that two of them were wounded.

John Smith who did not enter the cars but staggered up the street toward the business district of the city of Wilson, and was met by an acquaintance, Mr. Hill, who on being told that Smith was wounded assisted him in getting to the Wilson hospital where he died from the effect of wounds he had received in the melee.

#### Sheriff Finds Sims Body

Shortly after the tragedy at Carroll's home, Sheriff Garrett was notified by telephone. He and several of his deputies went hurriedly to Wilson and began in investigation. Assistant County Attorney John L. Hodge was taken with the party and assisted in the investigation, which was prolonged into Friday. During Friday afternoon they obtained information concerning the meeting in the Davis pasture, and went there in cars. Close beside the road and within the pasture, they found the dead body of officer C.G. Sims lying on the ground. He had received several gunshot wounds, all of which, it is said, entered his breast from the front. One statement recited that his features were likewise bruised. He was dressed in overalls of dark brown color, and a handkerchief which might have been used as a mask, was around his neck. It was apparent that he had been dead several hours when the body was discovered. Undertakers were telephoned for at Ardmore, and the body was brought to his home in this city.

#### How was Sims Killed?

As to how Sims was killed there appears as yet no positive testimony. The most reasonable deduction seems to be that he as one of the part which went to bring Carroll to the pasture meeting and that when John Smith and called Carroll to the door, Sims who was known to be a fearless officer, grappled with Carroll seeking to disarm him, and was shot in the ensuing tussle. This theory was circumstantially supported by the statement of Mrs Carroll, who stated that she heard a scuffle at the door before there were any shots fired.

It is true that there is no direct testimony that brings Sims into the fight at the Carroll house, but the foregoing theory seems the most logical explanation of his fatal injuries.

### Other Investigations

The sheriff and assistant county attorney, aided by the sheriff's deputies, continued investigations, but have given out little information as to what they found. At any rate they secured information that caused the county attorney to obtain warrants and arrests were made of some 16 different people who were brought to or were found here in Ardmore.

### List of Those Arrested

The early arrests were those of John Smith, butcher; and Jeff Smith; meat cutter of Healdton; J.A. Gilliam, who has been engaged in oil leasing and oil scout work in this territory recently, and who made the race before the democratic primaries against Buck Garrett and Homes Akers in 1920, his home is at Ardmore; Rev. Leon Julius, the Baptist minister at Healdton was also arrested. Walter Carroll, brother of Joe, and who lived with him at Wilson, and H.A. Hensley, a friend of the Carroll's and who staying in the Carroll house Thursday night, was another arrested. Two oil field operators, John Murray and W.M. Ratliff were included in the bag.

Then came the sensation. On Sunday evening and Monday morning the following well known businessmen of Ardmore were placed under arrest, charged with murder, Dr. E.O. Harlow, optician; Dan Ridpath Jr., building contractor; Tom Hailes, well known oil scout formerly with Carter company; Frank Cardwell of the firm of Bridgeman & Cardwell, insurance men; Ray Beede, owner of the Dodge Bros. automobile agency; Clinton G. Whitechurch, proprietor of the Whitechurch Auto Supply Company; and W. L. T. Hilton, retired merchant.

### Up in Arms

It was the arrest of these seven men and the Healdton minister, and the fact that they were held "incommunicado" and no statement was given out by officials as to what facts or circumstances the arrests were based on and the further fact that no bond for their release would be considered, that set the town and county wild. There was talk of a "jail delivery" and it is said, the sheriff was notified by letter that the release of the men as least on bond would be demanded and if refused they would be taken out by force. A concurrent rumor was that the sheriff had sworn in a large number of special deputies to defend the jail and his prisoners. Then the fact was published in the daily papers that one pawn broker had sold his entire stock of pistols and the other dealers in firearms were making large sales. Rumor covered the street that Dr. Weith Otis Smith, and other well known men had been arrested and added to the colony in jail.

In fact, it would be difficult to conceive of a rumor effecting the rights of the prisoners that did not get into circulation during Monday and Tuesday. The meeting at Masonic hall and the report made by the committee sent by it to investigate the facts, as has been mentioned above, served to quiet things very much, and the announcement on Tuesday of the assurances received by the committee that when to Oklahoma City to confer with the governor and attorney general that the

condition here would receive immediate and effective attention, served further to allay apprehension.

Then came the publication of the Gilliam statement on Tuesday night, and the announcement early Wednesday forenoon, that all of the parties arrested and held in jail in the case, except John Smith and Jeff Smith of Healdton, had been permitted to make bond, and were at liberty, restored things to a condition of normalcy for the first time since last Friday forenoon.

Jeff Smith, it should have been stated above was wounded in the leg or heel in the fight at the Carroll house on Thursday night.

J.A. Pruitt of the Ward Motor Co., was arrested on Wednesday morning, but was permitted to make bond and was released.

Preliminary Today - Freeling Here

The preliminary hearing of the defendants is set for today and Prince Freeling, attorney general of the state, is here to conduct it in person. The hearing is before D.W. Butcher, justice of the peace.

#### GILLIAM'S STATEMENT

Statement of J.A. Gilliam concerning the shooting in the town of Wilson on Thursday night, Dec. 15, 1921.

Announcement was made in the office of the county attorney late Tuesday that a statement had been made by J.A. Gilliam of this city, the first man arrested in Ardmore in connection with the shooting affray at Wilson, Thursday night of last week. The following is the signed statement:

At about 11 a.m. o'clock Thursday, Mr. Sims said he wanted me to go with him to a meeting at Wilson; that he was a committeeman selected by a committee meeting who invited cooperation of Ardmore citizens to meet in a mass meeting for the discussion of better conditions in the oil fields. He also stated he was planning a raid and had taken pains to secure a detective, as he would be out of the city. I told him I could not go on account of other business. So I saw him no more till about 4 or 6 p.m. o'clock, when he came to me in front of the Simpson building and talked again about going. Then we went to see other parties about going - Mr. R.G. Raines, the saddler; Guy Harris and Ray Beede. Then I told him I could not go on account of business and he said that I was no busier than he, as he had called on a whiskey raid with Hathcock to make the trip. He also stated there would be no danger as he had planned the raid which he thought would uncover a wet car dealer as well as the whiskey traffic, and had planned for Mr. John Smith to do the buying of the whiskey as he knew the game, but had quit; that he was planning to have four or six men to be present and nearby so they might take charge without harming anyone.

Then Mr. C.G. Sims, Mr. Ray Beede, Dan Ridpath, Mr. Pitts of the Ward Motor Company and I got into a car about 7 p.m. o'clock and left Ardmore for Wilson. When we got to Hewitt we stopped and Mr. Sims got out, saying he was to meet Mr. John Smith there at Hewitt; and I

remarked that John Smith lived at Healdton. He said not Merchant John Smith at Healdton, but John Smith at Wilson. We stayed at Hewitt about 40 minutes and Mr. Sims said drive on to Wilson. When we got to Wilson, he said "I will look things over," got out of the car and was gone about an hour, when it came back with a bunch in a Ford car, saying he had his man. Then is when he told me of the meeting place southwest of Joiner, and we drove on over there, following his car. When we got there, there were several cars parked and we drove our car in above them on the hillside, when he got out, looked around, came back and took something in a paper out of our car, saying his men were with him and for me to stay there to watch things, that if he was not back by 11:30 o'clock at least, that we might figure that he came to Ardmore by way of Milo, as he figured there was a still about Milo that he wanted to put his detective next to. He came back once and said he had located everything and it was sitting pretty. I again said I had better go with you, and he said "No, we've got plenty men who know the parties, know the ground, and the street." He did not shoe up again; and he heard of the killing. I think it was J.D. Smith who brought the news. I had gotten out of the car. Mr. Pitts was driving our car and the cars began to leave. Pitts then reported that Carroll and John Smith were killed and Sims had returned to Ardmore with some of the parties connected with the shooting. We came back to Orr and the Marietta road; Dan Ridpath and Pitts came back with me.

The object was to get Carroll and make him come clean on wet car deals as well as whiskey.

On the pasture field I saw, besides those named, S.G. Whitechurch, E.C. Harlow, Tom Hailes, J.D. Smith, Frank Cardwell, and W.L.T. Hilton.

As to myself, I did not think of any trouble whatever. I had no gun. I do not think any of the parties expected trouble. The reason we came back by Orr was on account of instructions from Sims to come, that way, as I was known all over that country and he expected to pull some more deals that would still uncover wet car problems. I do not know who the detective was. I know of no organized movement behind this and went only at the suggestion and request of Mr. Sims.

Dated this, the 20th day of December, 1921.

(Signed) J.A. GILLIAM

Witness by Homer Hinkle, F. E. Tucker, Otis H. Smith, O.H. Wolverton, D.M. Ballew, John L. Hodge.