

8044 Cahalan Avenue,
Detroit, Mich.
July 21, 1933.

Mr. W. Alfred Debo,
Commissioner of Paroles and Pardons,
Lansing, Mich.

Dear Commissioner:

In order to correct what I believe to be a gross miscarriage of justice, I respectfully ask your aid in bringing to the attention of Governor Comstock the case of Meda Hodell, now serving a life sentence in the Detroit House of Correction for the alleged murder of her father-in-law, David Hodell.

The alleged crime was committed near White Cloud, Newaygo County. This is my home county and I was a personal friend of David Hodell. Knowing him as I did, although I was not in the county at the time his death occurred, I have every reason to believe his death came from natural causes:

Briefly the circumstances were these: Romie Hodell, husband of Meda Hodell, was found hanging in a barn vacated by him the day before, this barn being a half mile distant from the home of Meda Hodell's mother, Alice Dudgeon. It had all the ear-marks of a suicide case. But the undertaker discovered something which he thought indicated murder and it was brought to the attention of the local authorities. They questioned the family several times but could get nothing on them. They then brought in three state policemen. These policemen forced confessions by some of the most cruel methods ever known, and

Meda Hodell's mother, her two brothers, and a farm hand were convicted of this crime and sentenced to prison. At the same time, by the same inhuman methods, they forced a similar confession from Meda Hodell that she had poisoned her father-in-law, and she was likewise sentenced for life.

These defendants were very poor and the first trial was held in White Cloud where the neighbors, who had always been antagonistic to the Dudgeons, kept the matter at white heat until they were convicted.

Later a new trial was granted to the farm hand and one brother. This was held at Hart, in Oceana County, and these two were acquitted. Then the other brother, Lee, and the mother were granted a new trial. This was held at White Cloud but Judge Harry J. Dingeman of Detroit presided. I had moved back into Newaygo County and was somewhat prejudiced against the defendants by what neighbors had told me. I was doing newspaper work then and covered the case for the Muskegon Chronicle. I became convinced by the testimony offered that no crime had been committed by any of the family. Judge Dingeman halted the trial when about half through, and took the case of Lee Dudgeon away from the jury, ordering an acquittal. The case of Mrs. Dudgeon resulted in a disagreement, being split, I believe, by ten for acquittal and two for conviction.

A new prosecutor had been elected and he refused to prosecute this re-trial because he was convinced the family were innocent. In fact, he appeared as a witness for the defense. It was agreed in the case of Mrs. Dudgeon that there was no use of another trial as no jury could ever be found who

would convict her again, and she was paroled.

By an error of Meda Hotell's attorneys in not filing a notice for a new trial within the stipulated time required by law, she is prevented by a legal technicality from securing an appeal. While she was convicted on a different charge than the others, the evidence against her was manufactured in exactly the same way as against the others, which Judge Dingeman and a large majority of the jury refused to take any credence in.

In order to finance their defense, the family lost the farm they owned and are without funds. It seems too bad that this young woman should be sacrificed because she is penniless. Firmly convinced of her innocence, although she is practically a stranger to me, I am anxious that the wrong be righted.

I have interviewed Meda twice in the House of Correction and can find no weak spots in her story. I have her biography, written by herself since her incarceration. Although it shows a limited education, it rings true. I have also interviewed several of the matrons at the House of Correction and they all believe in her innocence. The same is true of a former and a present lady member of the Board of Commissioners of the House. I am also certain that Captain Edward Denniston, Superintendent, believes her innocent.

Anything that you can do to bring about the parole or pardon of this unfortunate young woman will be greatly appreciated by me.

Yours very respectfully,

Harry L. Spooner