

Golney Seymour after the murder

The prison years of Golney Seymour, and those he spent outside, take us a long way from the death of Henrietta, and thus were not reported in the book. But the documents in his parole file offer much of relevance to the murder, and present an interesting story in themselves.

Golney began serving his life sentence at McNeil Island Penitentiary in Washington State on May 1, 1932. The records show, however, that he would first be eligible for parole in May, 1947. In those early years, he was classified as a “mental defective,” with a recorded IQ of 40. This categorization is open to serious doubt, however—not just because of the quality of his later writing and the amount of his reading, but because he seemed not to have gone beyond third grade in his previous schooling and never seemed to finish the tests he was asked to take.

Most of the formal progress reports describe him as having made a “fairly good”—or “satisfactory”—adjustment to prison life, describe his work ethic as “reasonable,” and suggest that he got along with other prisoners. There seem, however, to have been numerous lapses reported.

During his first year at McNeil, he had his first misconduct citation—for fighting. By 1933, his child (born prior to Henrietta’s trial) had died, and his wife had divorced him. (By 1935, she was remarried.)

His pattern of self-reporting to the prison’s health service was noted. He spent 26 (!) days in the hospital for the removal of an in-grown toenail. One report in 1938 said “he is seen rather frequently on sick call for treatment of minor conditions.” In 1939, he “refused to quit talking in sick line and when told a second time to be quiet, he became very surly and argumentative.” This led to another misconduct sentence: “8 days in isolation behind the screen.”

Generally, he did not attend religious services, or only “occasionally.” Most of the reports described him as Lutheran (and, of course, he had the backing of the Lutheran missionary, Rev. Guenther), but one mentioned that he was Congregational. I may be reading more into the reports than intended, but it seemed that his religious observance increased during the years of his being considered for parole.

By 1945 he had accumulated 9 misconduct reports and this was noted in his record: “He is not industrious and will not work without close job supervision.”

This issue of his industriousness became more important over the next two years, when parole was originally considered. He could count on Rev. Edgar Guenther to offer to serve as his parole advisor, but the reservation superintendent (now R.D. Holtz) could promise no specific work, only that “we will do our best to assist him in obtaining employment.” Parole was denied at a May 1, 1947 hearing of the U.S. Board of Parole.

By 1949 his report indicated that Seymour, who “a couple of years ago...was not a good worker... has shown a decided improvement.” In 1952, as Golney approached the 20-year mark of his incarceration, parole talk heated up once again. His conduct violations now totaled 12, but he had made a good impression with his electrical work and, according to prison officials, now seemed ready to rejoin society. The Rev. Guenther would finally get to serve as his parole advisor, and the reservation superintendent would be aided by the probation officer in finding—and helping maintain—employment. And besides, said the Special Progress Report prepared to recommend parole, “the file contains letters which reveal that there were mitigating circumstances involved in this case. *It is quite certain that the girl was in part responsible for her destruction.*” [my italics]

On August 19, 1952, Golney was given his Certificate of Parole. His return to White River was not as smooth as had been anticipated. “He met with a very unhappy home-coming,” according to his probation officer. His brother turned out to be in jail for intoxication and there was nowhere for him to sleep but on a cot in the jail. Golney declined and went to spend the night with a friend. The offers of employment did not come through, or did not satisfy Golney. The probation officer reported on October 9 that “he has now left the reservation and is now probably working as a cotton picker near Safford, Arizona. The sad part is that he has with him female companionship who, unfortunately, happens to be a married woman.”

There was a brief moment of good news when Golney appeared to have secured in 1953 employment as a lineman and electrician for the Fort Apache Tribe and the U.S. Indian Service, and the parole supervisor said he was “very much relieved and pleased to find he is making a satisfactory adjustment down there.” But that did not last long.

Later that year the probation officer reported that Golney had been arrested for arguing with a policeman, “and he had been drinking, of course.” Even Rev. Guenther, who always had good things to say about Golney, now said he could “well understand that the patience of the U.S. Board of Parole is running low.” The

pastor remained an unapologetic supporter, however, and noted in one parole report that “Golney’s conduct has been far better than other parolees I have known. I think that a commendatory letter from the supervisor of parole would bolster his morale even more.”

To the contrary, there began a long string of arrests for disorderly conduct and/or assault—most of which produced convictions and jail time—culminating in a more serious offense in November of 1956: Golney struck a policeman in the face with his fist, when that officer was attempting to break up a fight, and then ran off. Parole officials were now beginning to consider the viability of Golney’s parole status, but did not see immediate cause for revocation.

Golney provided that cause on September 14, 1957, when he was accused of attempting to solicit sex from a 10-year-old girl. The complaint came from the girl’s mother, who reported not only the proposition to her daughter (and the twisting of the girl’s arm to force compliance), but of Golney’s having threatened her own life (the mother’s) and leaving a large bruise on her arm. Golney’s only defense before the tribal court was that he had been drinking and does not remember, but he could not have done such a thing. (He later claimed he was framed by the girl’s mother, who was angry at him because he had asked her to move out of “my room,” where she had been living.) Although Rev. Guenther later expressed his personal doubts about the young plaintiff (she “appeared so composed and told her story so glibly that I could not help feeling that she was plowing some furrows with her mother’s heifer”), the tribal court had no such hesitation, found Golney guilty, and sentenced him to 260 days in jail.

The parole board had had enough. On October 26, 1957, Golney was returned to McNeil Island Penitentiary.

His second stay at McNeil was seemingly quieter than his first. He spent three years in electrical work—apparently his forte—and then was transferred to the shoe factory, where he worked as an Edge Trimmer and a Bottom Scraper and his work reports rated him as average and above average. He was reported to have received no visits in prison, but had been in correspondence with his two sisters, his new wife Sarah, and, of course, Rev. Guenther. His conduct record was “clear,” he did not pursue any further education (although he continued to read), and he now attended religious services periodically. His adjustment was described in one report as “outstanding.”

He was denied parole in a January, 1962 hearing, primarily because of the seriousness of his earlier parole violations. But by mid-1963 he was again recommended for parole, based on his “good adjustment in the institution” and his “clear conduct record.” The parole supervisor who interviewed him noted Golney’s “realization that he must refrain from alcoholic beverages if he wishes to remain in the community.”

An August 26, 1963 parole date was granted—almost six years after Golney had been returned to McNeil—but release was delayed until his sisters and wife could be reached to verify he would have a home when he returned to the reservation, and while guaranteed employment was being sought. When, in early November, his probation officer concluded that “the release plan you outlined... is perhaps the best that can be worked out at the present time,” Golney was finally released from prison. He was 54 years old.

Once again, his homecoming was less than smooth. An early parole progress report noted that “he had been having some difficulty with relatives over his inability to keep steadily employed but this has since been resolved although he still doesn’t get along too well with them and he is being encouraged to make other living arrangements.” Later, he was reported to be “working in a remote area of the reservation and therefore not living with his relatives.” The probation officer concluded that “he seems to do better when he lives alone as he has never gotten along too well with his relatives.”

There were more arrests for drunk and disorderly conduct, beginning about a year after he returned to the reservation and totaling five by 1973. On the other hand, reservation officials reported that “he usually keeps to himself.” By 1969, a parole official had recommended that Golney be released from active supervision—but his supervisor was willing only to reduce the number of required reports from monthly to quarterly.

By 1971 Golney was listing himself as “retired,” although he continued to take odd jobs. A probation officer noted that he lived on “welfare benefits and old age pensions” (Social Security), and “does a little gardening, occupied with day-to-day survival.” Another report in 1976 noted that Golney used to make his living as a cowboy but was now “too old to be riding horses.” The same officer reported that “the trading post manager knows Mr. Seymour the best and he feels Mr. Seymour, primarily because of age, will not get into serious problems in the future.” He recommended “complete discharge.” Another officer noted in 1977 that Golney

“should be considered for termination as he has not caused any trouble on the Reservation in many years.”

On March 30, 1978, Golney Seymour was granted a Certificate of Early Termination, with the message, “You are hereby discharged from parole.”

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[*Author's note:* When Evelyn and I first visited the White Mountain Apache Reservation in late 1986, we did not know whether or not we would encounter Golney Seymour. In Evelyn's previous phone contacts with reservation officials, she could get no information on Golney's status. During that first visit, we were told—somewhat vaguely—that he had died, but were not told when or how or where. It took a friend who worked for the *New York Times* to find out, soon after our return home, that he had died in 1980, still on the reservation.]