

## Franklin Pierce Rainwater murder case, 1925, South Carolina

by Susan Chance-Rainwater

Franklin Pierce Rainwater, 1892-1925, son of William Harrison Rainwater & Sophronia Elizabeth Jamison

### A MYSTERIOUS MURDER

On 19 August 1925, Franklin P. Rainwater was found dead by passers-by in an auto on the side of the road. He was believed to have been returning to his home in Cheraw from a business trip to Society Hill. He had been shot four times and the gun thrown some distance from the car. [2395]

The first theory published in newspaper articles covering the death was that Rainwater had run afoul of “rum runners.” This line of inquiry came to nothing.

The August 28th article in The Spartanburg Herald suggests that Rainwater was drinking and fooling around with a mixed race girl, Micklin Chapman Douglas, described as a quadroon indistinguishable from white (these articles are obsessed with race). A red-faced white man named Jack Mitchell was described as having quarreled with Rainwater over the girl. [2397, 2398, 2399, 2401] Douglas and Mitchell were arrested, but the charges dropped for lack of evidence. [2801]

After the police had given up on solving the murder, John Howard Rainwater, the victim’s brother, hired a private detective agency. After two years’ investigation, charges were brought against three men – Dol Chapman, Elmer McKay, and John Spencer. They are listed as “safekeepers,” meaning they were begin held for safety in the federal penitentiary in Columbia, SC, because their presence in Chesterfield might insight violence. [2511, 2523, 2801] The motive for the murder and whether the three men were convicted is unknown (by me).

F. P. Rainwater’s business was carried on by a number of his nephews (Claud H. Rainwater, Jr., Troy Ernest Rainwater, Robert Charles Rainwater, Eli Folsom Rainwater, and Norris M. Rainwater of Georgia, all the sons of his brother Claud Harrison Rainwater, Sr.), in Rock Hill, SC, and two Georgia communities. Four of his brothers were also in the furniture business.

### SOURCES

2395: “Officers baffled by mystery around killing of Cheraw citizen found dead in auto; F. P. Rainwater is found by passing tourists,” page 1, The Spartanburg Herald, Spartanburg, SC, 21 Aug 1925.

2396: "Arrest of White in Rainwater Case is Expected to Come Soon," page 1, The Spartanburg Herald, Spartanburg, SC, 23 Aug 1925

2397: "No rift is seen in veil around Cheraw mystery," section one, The Spartanburg Herald, Spartanburg, SC, 30 Aug 1925

2398: "Mitchell will get preliminary heading today," The Spartanburg Herald, Spartanburg, SC, 10 Sep 1925

2399: "New clues found in investigation of Cheraw Case," page 1, The Spartanburg Herald, Spartanburg, SC, 28 Aug 1925

2401: "Veil of deep secrecy around murder of merchant in Cheraw: prominent man is implicated," page 1, The Spartanburg Herald, Spartanburg, SC, 29 Aug 1925, scan of original.

2511: "Pen is crowded with prisoners held for trial," page 6, The Evening Herald, Rock Hill, SC, 9 Nov 1927

2523: "Many surprises in Cheraw case predicted soon," The Evening Herald, Rock Hill, SC, 1 Nov 1927

2545: "May Implicate Man in Rainwater Killing," pg 7, The Observer, Newberry, SC, 1 Sep 1925

2801: "Arrested for Old Murder," pg 1, The Camden Chronicle, Vol XXXIX, No 32, 4 Nov 1927, Camden, SC

2858: "Found dead by side of road," pg 1, The Camden Chronicle, Camden, SC, Vol. XXXVII, No. 22, 28 Aug 1925

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