



State vs. William Powell Collection, 1969

Collection Summary:

Title: State vs. William Powell Collection

Summary: Court transcripts and photographs from the case of the State of Tennessee vs. William Powell, occurring in 1969.

Physical Description: 1.67 linear feet

Stack Location: Section 11.21

Language: English

Repository: Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville & Davidson County, 615 Church Street, Nashville, TN 37219

Biographical/Historical Note:

One of the most well-known and controversial criminal cases in Nashville, the trial of the State of Tennessee vs. William Powell centers on the 1968 murder of 72-year-old W. Haynie Gourley, founder of Capitol Chevrolet. Gourley was shot to death with a .38 caliber pistol while he and Powell took a fifteen-minute drive down Elm Hill Pike on the morning of May 24. According to Powell, the two men slowed at an intersection when a third man entered the car, carrying a gun and demanding their money. The man then began shooting, killing Gourley with three shots and injuring Powell in the leg before jumping out of the car. Powell described the assailant as a tall, thin, African-American man, approximately 30 years old.

The murder itself took place three days after Bill Powell agreed to leave Capitol Chevrolet in order to allow the Gourleys' son, William Haynie "Billy" Gourley, Jr., to take over the business. When no viable suspects were found, Powell came under suspicion. In March of 1969, he was indicted by the Grand Jury for first degree murder.

The trial took place over the summer of 1969, with Judge Allen Cornelius presiding. Attorney General Thomas Shriver represented the State, with John J. Hooker, Sr. as a special prosecutor; Cecil Branstetter and Jack Norman, Sr.

represented Powell. After around three weeks of witness examinations and nearly five hours of deliberations, the Jury gave a verdict of Not Guilty.

Scope and Content:

The Gourley-Powell Trial Collection contains approximately 2400 pages of documents and approximately 65 photographs from the trial of the State of Tennessee vs. William E. Powell. The documents comprise the court transcripts from the trial, spanning from July 21 to August 2, 1969. Included in the transcripts are witness testimonies, Attorney General Thomas Shriver's closing arguments, Judge Allen Cornelius's charge of the Jury, and the final verdict. The transcript is arranged chronologically and divided into individual witness testimonies.

The photographs in this collection are *Nashville Tennessean* staff photos taken in the courthouse while the trial was in progress. Subjects include attorneys John J. Hooker, Sr., Cecil Branstetter, Jack Norman, Sr., and Thomas Shriver. Other subjects include Josephine and Billy Gourley, William Powell, Officers Sherman Nickens, Charles Hunter, and Detective William Larkin. Some subjects are still unidentified.

This collection also includes a guide to the trial, which provides bullet-point summaries of each witness testimony, General Shriver's closing argument, and other courtroom proceedings.

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Folder 11: Who's Who in the Case – a guide to the trial, including bullet-point summaries of witness testimonies and courtroom proceedings

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Administrative Information:

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Accruals: None expected.