

INVESTIGATION IN NEWCASTLE

"If you wish a thing to be done right,  
You must do it yourself; you must not leave it to others!"

If you asked me if I thot Degler was worth it, the answer would be No; but the pleasure I had playing private investigator was worth it.

Easter Afternoon.

No Degler, Stein, Domnick, or Matley in the Newcastle fonebook.

214 North 20th was a small white house in good condition. After photographing it, I knocked, just as Claude's mother came out a side door, going somewhere. No, Claude wasn't in town—had gone off to somewhere in Ohio. She recognized my name, but not any of those of the Indiana cosmen, and of course she didn't know where they lived. But then, she was busy all day at the factory and didn't see much of Claude and his activities. This wasn't his house; it was his grandfather's. I asked if he had a mimeo at this address; reply was vaguely negative. Degler's mother was a sharp-looking woman, but courteous enuf, in a coarse sort of way, toward me. She became suspicious, however, when I followed up her statement that Claude "has worked around some at various things" with further questioning about whether he had a regular job. I assured her that I merely wanted to know if there was something that would make him have to return from Ohio Monday, so that I mite still see him. There wasn't. Claude had been sick the past week, trouble with stomach ulcers. She would ask his younger brother if he knew where Claude was, so that I mite call him up. Was the younger brother Vergie Degler\*?, I asked. She said No, not volunteering who Vergie Degler was. Robert would fone me at the hotel if he knew where Claude was, but he was too busy with a job to take part in Claude's activities.

214 N 20 being the only address I had, I caught a ride with a hiway patrolman to the police station, where I had them look up several names in the city and county directory. A line on Dominick\*\* ran out, but within a block of the end of this trail was the home address of Claude Degler and Vergie Dogler—Vergie apparently is his mother—as given in the directory. It is a mixed negro and white neighborhood, but doesn't look like a red lite district. I photographed the house, which is small and shabby but not dilapidated.

Rather extensive inquiries in the suburb of Oak Grove turned up no trace of Matleys, Tylors, or Tilbys\*\*\*.

Rain ended further search. Fone calls to a Walters, a Jenkins, and an Allan in the fone book failed to locate the persons of

\* Named as treasurer of the Cosmic Circle, to whom money orders should be made out.

\*\* Said by Marlow to be the real name of Helen Bradleigh.

\*\*\* Persons mentioned in connection with the OGFS gang war.

those surnames mentioned in CC publications.

Monday.

stated at the County Welfare Board that I was member of an organization which was considering expelling Degler; explained that considerable visiting goes on among the members with hospitality taken for granted and mentioned Degler's complaints over exclusion from the gathering at the president's home. Also, when asked, told what I had heard via the Marlows about the Degler-Dominick love affair. The worker who handled the case in 1942 was no longer there, but another woman read the file and told me about it. Mr and Mrs Degler were divorced. Joan Dominick's name was Jo Anne (Sp?) Andes, Dominick being her stepfather. She was of lower mentality than Claude, who was also classed as subnormal, tho there were no figures on his mentality in the report, and Mrs Scotten, the school principal, had said that he made fairly good grades. Claude had been twice committed to the East Haven Hospital for the Insane, at Richmond Ind; once after beating up a little boy, who was the County Prosecutor's son, and again after beating Mrs Degler. After the Dominick offense in 1942, they advised sending Claude to the Maskatuck (sp?) school for the feeble-minded, but his mother didn't want to sign the papers, so it was agreed that Claude would leave town, and he had done so.

In the County Clerk's office I got the following information from the commitment records on Claude Degler: He was born 19 May 1920 in Poplar Bluff Mo, and came to Newcastle in 1925 from Wolf Bayou Arkansas. Mr Degler had deserted the family, and he had had a mania for stealing. The Degler grandfather had been confined in a hospital for the insane. The first signs of insanity in Claude were observed in December 1935: extreme nervousness, depressed spells, violent destructive spells. The commitment application was dated March 1936. The attack at that time had been gradual in onset. He had had nervous and depressed spells several times in the preceding year. It was necessary to remove him from school in 1934 because of his extreme nervousness. He was a diligent student and on the honor roll. From January to March of 1936, his mother had to keep him away from other people. He had lately become homicidal. The doctor's examination said that Claude had fits of temper, was unable to tell the difference between right and wrong, and otherwise confirmed the description in the application. He was emaciated, sallow, and anemic, alternately depressed and excited. Homicidal and destructive tendencies. Had attempted to burn buildings. Another physician's statement said he was insomniac, had poor appetite, and cried frequently. Among the papers was a certification that he was the probable potential parent of mentally incompetent or socially inadequate offspring, and calling for his sterilization. In November 1937 he was discharged as having been restored to sanity. There was no record of any other commitment. I was told that his brother had also been sent to the asylum, which mite have been confused by the Welfare Board.

Calls at the local newspaper offices discovered nothing about the Oak Grove fitting. Found nothing about it in the daily paper around the date given.

At the Post Office, they knew of no one named Stein. Box 365\* had long

\* Frank N Stein's return address.

been in Vergie Degler's name.

The County Prosecutor was at the police station. After I identified myself, he told me about the 1936-37 occurrences. Claude was chasing some children who were teasing him, when they passed another group of kids among whom was the Prosecutor's son (he did not mention the relationship till later). The boy was beaten severely, bruised all over. A WPA workman a block away heard his screams and came to stop Degler, but he got away. That evening Claude set fire to the Prosecutor's coal shed, and slipping away again from police and firemen, returned later that nite to burn the garage (containing car) of the next-door neighbor. He then knocked on the neighbor's door. The lady of the house recognized him and screamed. He threatened that he would blow up the whole block. After Claude had been in the asylum a few months, his mother pulled political strings and got him furloughed. She kept him locked up at home till one nite he beat her unconscious, knocked over the kerosene stove, and left the house afire with her in it. He was returned to East Haven, and after staying there a year, was furloughed again, but not declared cured. The Prosecutor knew less about the Dominick case. He said she and Claude had met for statutory rape, but due to inability to prove that it had been accomplished, the agreement for Claude to get out of town was made, and he had gone, tho he'd been around some since then. The Prosecutor, like the others, failed to recognize the name of Helen Bradleigh.

Further search in the city directory found no Tilby, Tylor, Kinney, Fagsmyer, Math, Matley, nor Bradleigh.

Returning to Degler's neighborhood, I made further inquiries and soon found Joan Dominick. She appeared to be 15 or 16. Denied being Helen Bradleigh or knowing anything about her. Said she had not been a member of the Cosmic Club or helped on Degler's publications in any way. I knocked on the door at Degler's, but nobody was home. A note from Vergie Degler pinned to the screen said neighbors had told her somebody had been around several times trying to get in touch with her, and asked whoever it was to leave a note or drop a card to Box 365.

Attempted to fone Mrs Scotten, but since it was a school holiday she was out of town.

#### Richmond.

At the East Haven asylum, the woman at the desk said, "... Degler? Robert-- Oh, Claude Degler." The Superintendent had the folder brot to him. "What's he doing now-- something in the religious line?" I mentioned the Cosmic Concept. The Superintendent said he came in 1936 and was furloughed twice, both times against their advice, last leaving in 1937. They hadn't made any tests of his intelligence, since with that type it wouldn't have been a fair guide to his performance under other conditions. He pointed out, however, that the boy had never gone beyond the seventh grade in school. He had not caused them any trouble while in East Haven. The sterilization called for had not been done at East Haven. At the time of his admission there it was recorded that he'd had nothing to do with the opposite sex. He had been discharged from the asylum as "restored", but it was up to the court to decide whether to judge him sane again. They in the hospital didn't care whether people were sent there or not. Often the relatives would object, and they were

usually harder to deal with than the patient. He mentioned that Claude had claimed to suffer from various imaginary illnesses, had said that people teased him, and had burned down a garage to get revenge on somebody. I asked the Superintendent if he could tell me the name of Claude's type of insanity, but he said it was "a privileged communication, for the family only. I can tell you almost anything else you want to know about him, tho." He did say it was a recurrent type, and asked about Claude's recent activities. I spoke of the Cosmic Circle and his publications in our amateur press association. The Superintendent said, "I guess he's having a recurrence of it now. They'll probably catch up with him again before long. But he stayed out six or seven years, didn't he? I see here he joined the Buck Rogers Club and had a lot of trouble with that because people made fun of him. They go in for things like that. He was interested in electricity, too; used to fool around with it. Anything like that - and religion - anything you just can't put your finger on, they go in for."

On my honor as a steffnist, this article is true and complete.

*Jack Spier*