

Police raid Arizona polygamist enclave

An historical account of a radio address given by Arizona Governor Howard Pyle shortly after the Short Creek raid in 1953. (Source: <http://savethechildbrides.com>).

Before dawn today the State of Arizona began and now has substantially concluded a momentous police action against insurrection within her own borders.

Arizona has mobilized and used its total police power to protect the lives and future of 263 children. They are the product and the victims of the foulest conspiracy you could possibly imagine.



More than 120 peace officers moved into Short Creek, in Mohave County, at 4 o'clock this morning. They have arrested almost the entire population of a community dedicated to the production of white slaves who are without hope of escaping this degrading slavery from the moment of their birth.

Arizona police send residents of Short Creek packing. (Utah Historical Society)

Highly competent investigators have been unable to find a single instance in the last decade of a girl child reaching the age of 15 without having been forced into a shameful mockery of marriage.

THE STATE OF ARIZONA IS FULFILLING TODAY ONE OF EVERY STATE'S DEEPEST OBLIGATIONS. . . TO PROTECT AND DEFEND THE HELPLESS.

The State is moving at once to seek through the courts the custody of these 263 children, all under the age of 18. They are the innocent chattels of a lawless commercial undertaking of wicked design and ruthlessly exercised power. This in turn is the co-operative enterprise of five or six coldly calculating men who direct all of the operations and reap all of the profits, and are the evil heart of the insurrection itself.

It is no surprise that some of these vicious conspirators are former convicts.

Warrants were carried into Short Creek this morning for 35 men, many of them related, who include not only a hard core of plotters but a wider circle of fawning beneficiaries of this conspiracy that the State of Arizona is determined to end right now and completely.

As the highest authority in Arizona, on whom is laid the Constitutional injunction to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed," I have taken the ultimate responsibility for setting into motion the actions that will end this insurrection.

It should be clearly understood at the same time that so complicated an operation has required and has received the co-operation of many elements of our government . . . and has been undertaken only as a last desperate resort.

In many situations of the last few years I have reminded the people of Arizona that law enforcement is primarily a county problem--UNTIL SUCH TIME AS COUNTIES THEMSELVES DECLARE OR BY THEIR ACTIONS PROVE THAT THEY ARE ABLE NO LONGER TO FULFILL THEIR FUNCTIONS.

MOHAVE COUNTY APPEALED FOR STATE INTERVENTION TO END THIS INSURRECTION. The county's plea came to your governor from the Honorable J.W. Faulkner, Mohave County's highest legal authority as judge of the superior court there, in March of 1951, when I had been on duty only two months.

Judge Faulkner recited the almost incredible details of this conspiracy . . . details almost revoltingly incomprehensible at this mid-point of the 20th century. The sheer magnitude of the situation demanded immediate action, but even more urgently required proof beyond any possible doubt.

Hence it is that 26 months have passed since Judge Faulkner's first letter came to me. The investigation has been most thorough. Two attorneys general have participated. Appalled successive Legislatures have approved funds for every phase of the investigation . . . and it has been from the very beginning a disturbing undertaking.

It has been, frankly, the one and only real sorrow of my administration, intruding as it has on a hundred other problems of state, and occupying the time and energy of scores of men and women. There had to be absolute certainty that in the end the innocent should be as securely protected as the guilty were severely punished.

Before a single complaint was drawn, or a single warrant prepared, or the first preliminary order for today's action issued, we had to be certain beyond the last shadow of doubt.

All doubt is erased when it is realized that in the evidence the State has accumulated there are multiple instances of statutory rape, adultery, bigamy, open and notorious cohabitation, contributing to the delinquency of minors, marrying the spouse of another, and an all-embracing conspiracy to commit all of these crimes, along with various instances of income tax evasion, failure to comply with Arizona's corporation laws, misappropriation of school funds, improper use of school facilities and falsification of public records.

The leaders of this mass violation of so many of our laws have boasted directly to Mohave County officers that their operations have grown so great that the State of Arizona was powerless to interfere.

They have been shielded, as you know, by the geographic circumstances of Arizona's northernmost territory . . . the region beyond the Grand Canyon that is best known as "The Strip."

This is a land of high plateaus, dense forests, great breaks and gorges, rolling arid lands, and intense color . . . a land squeezed between the even higher plateaus of Utah and the Grand Canyon of Arizona.

The community of Short Creek is 400 miles by the shortest road from the Mohave County seat of Kingman. Short Creek is unique among Arizona communities in that some of its dwellings actually are in another state.

ALL OF THE RESIDENTS OF SHORT CREEK WHO LIVE IN UTAH HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH THE CRIMES THEY HAVE COMMITTED IN ARIZONA. We have neither enlisted nor encouraged the State of Utah to take action simultaneously with or parallel to our own, for it are a mass insurrection against the State of Arizona that we seek to suppress.

To the best of our knowledge and information, there are only five residents of Short Creek who are in NO way involved in this situation. They are Mr. and Mrs. Jonreed Lauritzen, Mr. and Mrs. Alfonso Nyborg, and Don Covington. They are old residents of a colorful part of Arizona who have found themselves surrounded by this conspiracy, and have given invaluable help in the elimination we have now undertaken.

Massive cliffs rearing north of Short Creek's little central street provide a natural rock barrier to the north. To the east and west are the sweeping expanses of dry and almost barren plateaus before the forests begin. To the south there is the Grand Canyon.

It is in this most isolated of all Arizona communities that the foulest of conspiracies has flourished and expanded in a terrifying geometric progression. HERE HAS BEEN A COMMUNITY ENTIRELY DEDICATED TO THE WARPED PHILOSOPHY THAT A SMALL HANDFUL OF GREEDY AND LICENTIOUS MEN AND SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT AND THE POWER TO CONTROL THE DESTINY OF EVERY HUMAN SOUL IN THE COMMUNITY.

HERE IS A COMMUNITY--MANY OF THE WOMEN, SADLY, RIGHT ALONG WITH THE MEN--UNALTERABLY DEDICATED TO THE WICKED THEORY THAT EVERY MATURING GIRL CHILD SHOULD BE FORCED INTO THE BONDAGE OF MULTIPLE WIFEHOOD WITH MEN OF ALL AGES FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF PRODUCING MORE CHILDREN TO BE REARED TO BECOME MORE CHATTELS OF THIS TOTALLY LAWLESS ENTERPRISE.

Some of the boys have escaped this dreadful and dreary life. But the girls . . . no.

The very institutions such as the schools, upon which we all depend for the cultivation of the ideals that have made the nation great and Arizona great, have been perverted to the inculcation in our young of a devotion to this RANK AND FETID DISTORTION OF ALL OF OUR BASIC RIGHTS AND IDEALS.

The very operation of this insurrectional conspiracy, with its complete disregard of all decency and of

all law, have served to expand the population of Short Creek until it is probably the second largest community in Mohave County.

Sixteen years ago it was nothing. You may recall at that time two individuals, who were almost all of the male population of Short Creek, were sent to the Arizona State Prison to serve terms for flagrant violations of the state's moral laws.

They had half a dozen wives.

But their prison terms ended . . . they returned to Short Creek . . . and now the two have expanded to the 35 men named in warrants today . . . and their wives have increased from half a dozen to 85.

The criminally deadly part is that their children under legal age now number the 263 we mentioned earlier.

It is easy to see from this rapid expansion that in another 10 years the population of Short Creek would be in the thousands, and an army would not be sufficient to end the greatest insurrection and defiance of all that is right.

Of the 120 persons named in warrants as being involved in this ever growing conspiracy, 83 have their principal homes in Arizona. The rest base their operations in Utah, although a number of these have additional homes in Arizona.

Not all of the men for whom warrants have been issued have been arrested, but it is fully anticipated that they will be. Those who have crossed or subsequently cross the state line into Arizona during the course of the police operations will be jailed on the Arizona warrants. **THOSE WHO ELECT TO REMAIN IN UTAH WILL BE SOUGHT ON WARRANTS OF EXTRADITION.**

This may take days or weeks, but it **WILL** be done. It is regrettable that this action had to be undertaken on a Sunday, but there were a number of vital considerations. There has been a community entertainment the last day or two in Short Creek that has attracted the maximum number of those named in warrants. Today the maximum numbers of police officers have been free from other duties. And the situation they have moved against has been as godless as anything we have ever known.

It should be emphasized here that we have gone to almost unbelievable lengths to insure that the rights of no one are violated or even jeopardized in this action.

Moving into Short Creek right behind the officers with their warrants have been the courts. Superior Judge J. Smith Gibbons of Apache County has been acting as committing magistrate and has observed every legal propriety in holding the principal defendants to answer for trial in superior court as he also ordered these principal defendants to jail in Kingman, the county seat.

The defendants are being transported right now to Kingman to await release on bail for those who are

able to provide it or who have it provided for them. These are the men and some of the more ardently involved women.

In the case of the unwilling wives and the children, the action has been parallel but entirely different. Juvenile judges have gone along with the other superior court judges.

Judge Lorna Lockwood of Maricopa County, whose understanding in juvenile matters is widely recognized, and Judge Faulkner himself, have started and for some time will continue a series of juvenile court actions through which the State of Arizona expects to be able to provide protection for the 263 children.

This protection is very inclusive. It is calculated, under Arizona's laws, to give these children every possible garment of secrecy so that in years to come, the action in which they are now involved cannot appear anywhere as a matter of public record.

Right along with the courts have gone trained social workers. A full staff from the state department of public welfare has gone along with the officers and the courts to take immediate custody of those children the courts decide should be brought under the protection of the State of Arizona.

There hasn't been and there won't be any hardship in all of this. Facilities, equipment, and supplies have been sent into the area to be prepared to feed every defendant and every innocent victim, and every officer and participating state official, as long as may be necessary.

There is a medical staff to guard against any health contingency, and facilities are provided to care for everyone. There has been and there will be NO invasion of homes or quarters, for our people have with them a complete miniature tent city which by now has been erected in unused community space, and will house the state's personnel for as long as such housing is necessary.

Representing the state department of law in the filing of complaints, the issuance of warrants, and the general direction of all legal phases of this operation, is the attorney general himself, Ross Jones.

He has with him two of his assistants, Paul LaPrade and Kent Blake. LaPrade and Blake are the men who have conducted the preparation of all the cases designed to shatter for all time this insurrection and the conspiracy that supports it.

To climax their work and beginning the conclusive phase of this operation, I signed an official proclamation on July first, declaring a state of insurrection to exist in Mohave County and in the community of Short Creek.

Secretary of State Wesley Bolin and State Auditor Jewell Jordan have co-operated fully in handling the transfer of funds, especially appropriated to the Governor's office for this purpose, to the office of the attorney general . . . and in the proper and orderly expenditures of sums from that appropriation.

As your governor, I have been at my desk since early this morning, ready to issue any order or authorization to meet changing plans or unforeseen circumstances. I have been in complete and

almost instantaneous contact with the operation from its beginning, through my administrative assistant who is at the scene.

To the eternal credit of the press and radio of Arizona, none of this complex operation has been publicized in advance in any way, ALTHOUGH REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL MEDIA HAVE BEEN FULLY APPRISED OF EVERY DEVELOPMENT DURING THE ENTIRE 26 MONTHS OF PREPARATION. The whole purpose of this operation would have been destroyed had any part of it been known generally in advance.

Now this most necessary cloak of secrecy is removed.

From here on out and no doubt for some time to come you will be hearing directly from press and radio correspondents whose names you know well and in whom you have implicit faith.

They have gone right along with the officers and the courts, to observe and report everything.

While we leave the rest of the details of this fantastic insurrection and its ending in their hands, it must be reiterated that THE STATE OF ARIZONA IS UNALTERABLY PLEDGED AND DETERMINED TO STOP THIS MONSTROUS AND EVIL GROWTH BEFORE IT BECOMES A CANCER OF A SORT THAT IS BEYOND HOPE OF HUMAN REPAIR.

EVEN IF THE LETTER OF THE LAW DIDN'T EXIST AS IT DOES. . .COMMON DECENCY DEMANDS THIS.

THESE CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHTS OF ALL NATIVE-BORN AMERICANS--THE RIGHTS THAT WERE WRITTEN INTO THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. . . .

THE RIGHT TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. . .AND AS HAS SO OFTEN BEEN EMPHASIZED SINCE, HAPPINESS OF THEIR OWN CHOOSING. . . .

THE STATE OF ARIZONA IS DETERMINED TO INSURE THAT THEY HAVE THOSE RIGHTS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THEIR LIVES.

WE COULD DO NO LESS THAN THIS.

Sunday, July 26, 1953

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