Alger Hiss Defense Collection



Section 1

Hiss Defense Files I

Folder Title

Witnesses-- defense
(Geoffry May)

Dates

October 23, 1948-October 25, 1949, undated

Box Number	*Folder Number*
20	18

Copy for Mr. Davis

Memorandum of conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey May
at Erwinna, Pennsylvania, Saturday, October 23, 1948.
Mrs. Hiss was also present.

Mr. and Mrs. May have recently returned from a year's service with the United States Mission in Greece. Mr. May was at the Harvard Law School at about the same time Bill Marbury was, graduating in the class of 1924. He has written on domestic relations problems and has had a notable career in social service activities. Before going to Greece he had an important position with the Social Security Board. Mrs. May is a former economics professor at Goucher College and was with the Budget Bureau just before going to Greece. Priscilla and I had known them very well since becoming their next door neighbors in the early summer of 1936.

Mr. and Mrs. May recall that they moved into 1243 30th Street shortly after we had moved in. The two houses were part of a renovation development handled by Gilliatt and Company. Originally it had been expected that the entire project (comprising eight or nine small frame houses) would be ready for occupancy by June 1. Delays on the part of the contractors made this impossible for some of the houses, including 1243, 1245 and 1247. (We had made arrangements to leave 2905 P Street on June 1 and because of the delay in completion of 1245 30th Street spent two or three weeks at the Hotel Martinique. Mr. Davis is checking the records of our registration there to get the exact dates. It would appear from the utility records that we moved into 1245 30th Street on the first of July.) Mr. and Mrs. May think that our house was completed before theirs was and that they moved in sometime between July 1 and July 15. (Mr. Gilliatt's records may help settle the date of our moving in and the date that the Mays moved in.)

Both the Mays and we are confident that we became acquainted and friendly from the moment they moved in. The two houses were identical in size and construction and the walls were so thin that it was almost like living in the same house. As they pointed out, the yards were like extensions on the small houses and the two families and the third couple (the James Robbs were in 1247) were constantly in and out of each other's houses and yards, talking over the fences and through the windows. All the houses had large windows fronting on the yards so that there was a goldfish bowl aspect about life in the three houses which made the congeniality of the three sets of tenants a most fortunate circumstance. We had many things and friends in common with the Mays and got to know them well very rapidly.

Both Mr. and Mrs. May are confident on the basis of their separate and uncoached recollections that we had only one car at 30th Street, that a sedan which Geoff remembers as a Plymouth. Neither of them ever saw the Ford or knew that we ever had it. All cars were parked continuously on the streets in Georgetown in those days, and there was unlimited parking on 30th Street. (Incidentally neither Priscilla nor I have any recollection of being burdened with two cars when we moved from 2905 P Street to the Martinique, which is on 16th Street and would raise parking problems.)

Again without any coaching the Mays were independently convinced that we were not teetotalers during the time that they knew us because it has always been their custom to serve drinks to those who come in their house and to expect that their friends would do likewise. Consequently they do notice friends who are either teetotalers or tipplers.

They remember our musical interests well because the thinness of the walls made Priscilla's playing and Timmy's practising and our playing on the recorders very familiar to them.

Neither of them ever heard Priscilla or me speak in any derogatory way of Thayer Hobson. Their recollection on this point is perhaps of some significance as we learned for the first time in talking to them on Saturday that Geoff had advised Thayer with respect to his divorce problems at the time he was getting his divorce from Priscilla. (Thayer's firm, Morrow and Company, published one or more of Geoff's books on domestic relations, which led to Thayer's asking for legal advice on his own divorce problems.) They both remembered well Tim's accident and his being incarcerated in the house and receiving his homework via the school bus. On the subject of Tim's physique Geoff remembered him as chubby but Elizabeth remembered him as small and would in retrospect think of him as thin rather than chubby. (This is not a matter of significance as the school records on Tim's being overweight are available.)

Neither of them saw anyone that could possibly have been Crosley/Chambers coming to or leaving our house, although they met or knew about our guests and would have been impressed with our ability to put anybody up overnight in that tiny house.

They both remembered that we had two Cocker spaniels at 1245, a fact much in evidence in a house of that size.

Our house, like theirs, was open to constant coming and going of friends, and they never had any feeling of needing to stand on formality in coming to see us and frequently found other friends they knew had dropped in.

Geoffrey thought that Chambers should be asked the color of the houses (they were then but are no longer a bright and almost offensive yellow with disconcertingly blue shutters. Anyone who saw even a little of the houses during that period should remember them. They also pointed out that in the yard of the Todd-Lincoln house, which is directly across 30th Street,

there was then a coach house which has now been made into a dwelling house.)

In their many conversations with us on matters of common interest in our respective Government jobs both during the time that we were near neighbors (a year and a half) and subsequently they never noticed anything in our opinions or manner which indicated any possible sympathy with Communism.

22 East Eighth Street
New York, New York

March 30, 1949

Mr. Goeffrey May
Erwinna
Pennsylvania

Dear Jeff:

You will remember that when Priscilla and I came out to see you and Elizabeth last fall, one of the points on which our recollections all agreed was that at some time while we were living at 1243 and 1245 30th Street, respectively, all the houses in that development (including the five houses that ran around the corner on N Street), were painted a bright yellow with violet blue shutters. During the Baltimore depositions, we asked Chambers what the color of our house was and he replied that it was white frame with green shutters. We then got Mr. Gilliat to check his records and those of the contractor who, according to Gilliat's records, has done all the exterior painting of 1245 30th Street from 1936 to date.

We have just, after considerable delay due to the contractor's absence from Washington, received a copy of a letter from the contractor, Teunis F. Collier. Mr. Collier says that at the time he remodeled the houses in 1936, he painted them a light gray with green blinds, the steps and platforms gray and splashed with black, the wood railings being black. He also says that in 1942, the houses were repainted by him, this time a darker gray with the steps and platform a dark gray and the blinds and railings a dark green. Finally, his letter states that in May 1947, he again repainted the houses, this time the walls being painted yellow and the steps, platforms and shutters being a dark green.

It is, of course, possible that Gilliat had some other painter in between 1936 and 1942, but has no record of it. I suppose that it is also possible that Collier has not kept full records or that his 1936 records are in error. My own indistinct recollection now is that the houses were, as Collier says, initially gray with green shutters, but I

may be wrong about this - Priscilla thinks the yellow and blue combination was on when we moved in. In any event, I do particularly remember our dislike, shared by the other tenants in the development, for the "artistic" splashing of black paint over gray on the platforms and steps, which, after many protests, we got corrected. I also know that at some time well before we moved in December 1937, and perhaps right from the beginning of our tenancy, I was also annoyed with the landlord's color tastes in the form of the bright orangish-yellow and violet-blue combination. This annoyance was not corrected.

The distinction between Collier's gray and Chambers' white is not particularly striking or significant and, unfortunately, Gilliat's and Collier's records don't help on the more striking contrast of yellow and white. In view of the state of the records and the relative insignificance of the point anyway - even if the records were accurate - it is not a matter of importance to get this straightened out and we probably would not use it in the case even if the records coincided with our memories. However, I am personally piqued on the poi t and would appreciate it if you would let me have Elizabeth's and your best recollection about when the houses received the yellow and blue paint job.

We hope the two of you have a pleasant and useful year in the country. How has the writing gone? We are both well and things are shaping up most satisfactorily. Please let us know if you are going to be in town any time in the next couple of months. Also let us know how things are going with you both.

Ever sincerely,

AH

AH:A

TWO HUNDRED FORTY SOUTH MOUNTAIN AVENUE
MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

April 4, 1949.

Dear Alger:

It was indeed good to hear from you again and to have the assurance that things are hopeful with you. We trust that they will proceed rapidly as well, since the strain itself is one of the least happy features.

According to our excellent memories, Priscilla is 3/8ths correct and you are all wrong. The five houses on N St. were gray from the beginning, mid-1936. Our three houses on 30th St. were yellow with blue shutters when we moved in and were repainted about two years later. It was when they were repainted gray that the steps were so artistically dappled (a euphemism for daubed).

Our literary retirement ended abruptly at Christmas time when Elizabeth's parents both became ill. She has been here in Montclair almost consecutively since that time. To prevent myself from becoming a long-haired romantic, I have taken two consulting jobs since that time, one for the Governor of New Jersey, which allowed me to continue at Erwinna, and one for the ECA, which revived my contacts with Greece.

Erwinna is now no longer. You can always reach us at this address. (Telephone: Montclair 2-2816.) Actually I am going up to Brewster, Massachusetts to pursue the literary will o'the wisp down the Cape. We still expect to be in a quiet New England (female) college town next autumn: Elizabeth has one bird in hand and is pursuing one or two others with brighter plumage.

We do want to be helpful. We do want to see you. We shall leave the suggestions of time and method to you.

As ever,

Leo

Mr. Alger Hiss
22 East 8th St.

whale inn
Goshen
Mass.
will be back 5/25
leaving for west
6/4

22 East Eighth Street
New York, N. Y.

April 13, 1949

Mr. John H. B. Gilliat
Gilliat & Co.
2827 Dumbarton Avenue, N.W.
Washington 7, D. C.

Dear Mr. Gilliat:

On March 16 you were good enough to write to Mr. John F. Davis and send him a copy of a letter of March 15 to you from Mr. Teunis F. Collier about the exterior painting of 1245 30th Street. I am sorry to trouble you about this subject again, but the fact is, whatever Mr. Collier's records show, that while Mrs. Hiss and I were living at 1245 30th Street, the exterior of the house was a bright orangish yellow and the shutters were a violet-blue. As Mr. and Mrs. Goeffrey May had independently last fall emphasized their clear recollection of this garish color scheme, I wrote to them after receiving the copy of Mr. Collier's letter. Mr. May has now replied with a recollection which perhaps may explain why Mr. Collier's records show that at the time the houses were done over, in the spring of 1936, he painted them light gray with green blinds. Mr. May replies as follows:

> "The five houses on N Street were gray from the beginning, mid-1936. Our three houses on 30th Street were yellow with blue shutters when we moved in and were repainted about two years later. It was when they were repainted gray that the steps were so artistically dappled (a euphemism for daubed)."

It may be that Mr. Collier's records show merely the colors put on the five houses on N Street which, you will recall, were remodeled about the same time, and as part of the same development project, as the three houses on 30th Street. Incidentally, I am sure that Mr. Collier is wrong with respect to the gray, splashed with black, steps and platforms. That color was not on the steps when we moved in, and I recall definitely, as did the Mays, that this was added to our color scheme at a later date.

It is possible that because of the garishness of the yellow-blue combination, the three houses on 30th Street were repainted gray to match the five houses on N Street before the latter houses were repainted and that Mr. Collier has simply not listed this painting job. I note that his records indicate that the first repainting occurred in September 1942 which is not consistent with the Mays' recollection nor with my own recollection about the steps.

This may turn out to be a matter of no great significance in any event, but I would nonetheless appreciate it if you would make inquiry once more of Mr. Collier on the basis of the Mays' and Mrs. Hiss's and my recollection. You may, yourself, independently have some recollection of when the three houses on 30th Street had the yellow and blue combination, although I realize, of course, the hundreds of houses you have handled since 1936.

With best personal wishes to you and Mrs. Gilliat,

Yours sincerely,

AH:A
Hiss Personal 2395

Alger Hiss - Personal 2395

October 25, 1949

Memorandum re Conference with
Geoffrey May and Summary of
his Previous Testimony

The conference was held at the offices of Debevoise, Plimpton & McLean, October 17, 1949.

Present in the room, though not participating in the conference were:

Messrs. Alger Hiss
von Mehren
Rosenwald
Cross
Mrs. Hiss

Present address: Norton, Mass. - Telephone Norton 145.

Mrs. May is at present the Dean of Women at Wheaton College, Norton, Mass. The Mays resided from about July 1, 1936 until February 1942 at 1243 - 30th Street, N.W., Washington, being the south house in the Hisses 30th Street residence.

I read Mr. Mays' testimony at the first trial to him and he said that there was no correction to be made.

Mr. May at the time he lived at the 30th Street residence was employed by the Government as an executive in the Social Security Board.

Mr. May knew the Hisses who lived 1245 - 30th St. He described the outside of the houses. He stated that from the window in his house he could easily see people in the garden of the house next door. He saw the Hisses regularly

while they were living there, beginning July 1, 1936 up until they moved in December 1937. He visited them on frequent occasions and they similarly visited the May home. Occasionally they called by invitation, but usually the visits were informal and casual. They particularly dropped in over weekends and also called in the evenings. He saw people coming and going to and from the Hiss house. He returned home at 5:30 to 5:45 afternoons and he thinks Mr. Hiss returned a little later. He saw him at his home about 6 o'clock or shortly thereafter. He saw other people going into the Hiss home from time to time. He saw people in their garden.

Mays' window looked over entrance to Hiss home.

To the best of his recollection Mr. May never saw Chambers at the Hiss home, nor around the 30th Street residence.

FBI saw May in Jan.-Feb., 1949 in Trenton - showed him 2 pictures of Chambers as of '38 - told them he did not recognize pictures.

The outside color of the houses ~~is~~ was bright or vivid yellow, the shutters bright blue. Color was changed after Hisses moved in autumn of 1938 to gray with gray-green shutters. He describes the vestibule as extending across the front of the house behind which is the living room occupying the remainder of the first floor. He remembers built in bookcases along the right hand wall of the living room at 1245, which are exactly opposite to those at 1243. He thought the color of the walls and woodwork was some flat color but could not tell what the color was, nor the color of the draperies, nor about the pictures.

The Mays visited the Hisses at 3415 Volta Place for a period of some five years. He describes the entrance to 3415 Volta Place. He says there was some shrubbery

shutting the steps and the entrance from the street. The steps went directly up to the door. They were either shrubs or trees or vines. There was no iron railing in front of the door in 1938. There was no porch. Show him picture. The outside brick wall was painted white.

Mr. May testified that he remembered the foliage. He was not sure about the tree.

The direct testimony of Mr. May has been summarized above. It appears on pages 1489 to 1495.

In cross examination, pages 1496 to 1500, he testified with reference to Exhibit 30C that the brick wall was there in 1938; that you entered the garden through a gate; that there was a stone stairway. Thinks stairway was set back. He says that he does not remember the house as it appears in the photograph (Exhibit 30C); that there had been changes; that he thought there was some shrubbery or trees cutting off the direct view of the doorway from the street.

Mr. May said he was first Director of the Division of Plans and Grants, next Assistant Executive Director of the Social Security Board, and then by Presidential appointment was Associate Director. He was in the Volta Place and the 30th Street Hiss houses quite frequently as a neighbor and friend. He was asked to mention some of the people whom he met there, and he gave the name of Mr. Hiss' mother, Mrs. Hiss' brother, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Horton and Donald Hiss, Christopher Roberts. He said he could not recall the names of other people he met.

Held responsible positions at Dept. of Commerce. Vice-president of Welldon-Roberts Rubber Company. Taught at Harvard & Duke.

Mr. May testified that the railings on the steps when they moved in were always there; that all three houses were yellow on the outside; that in all the houses he went down a step or two to get into the kitchen and the dining room. The dining room was behind the kitchen facing the garden. This is the way you got into the dining room, unless you went through the living room and down the stairs. He stated that the hill sloped away from the street slightly; in the back of the house it was higher than the ground in front.

Service Entrance to Robbs' was from alley on north side.

Mr. May remembers distinctly that he saw a Plymouth standing in front of the 30th Street residence, but never a Ford. The Plymouth was left on the street.

Mr. May was a Naval officer during World War II. Bring this out and the rank he held when discharged. Bring out also the fact that he served at least on one occasion as a member of the Naval Board of Investigation.

C.B.C.

Typewriter: - Never heard typewriter being used in this house. Later occupant of 1245-30th St. used typewriter - May heard it and was annoyed.

For Mr. McLean

IN RE GEOFFRY MAY

1. Color of 1245 (ours) and 1243 (Mays') 30th Street houses was yellow, not white as Chambers says, with blue, not green, shutters. (See Balt. Dep. pp 375-76)

2. That there was a service alley in rear and garden gate to service alley which Chambers could have opened and had a good look at rear premises.

3. That houses were thin match boxes and each family heard the other's movements. That gardens were gold fish bowls.

4. That there was much visiting back and forth.

5. That there was no tabu on liquor at Hisses' house.

6. That Tim was not a "punny,little" boy.

Very important- 6a. That Mays moved in on or around July 15, 1936 and do not remember 2 Hiss cars.

7. a) That Chambers did not ring bell or rap on knocker at 1 A.M. every two weeks, or

b) Hang around, ditto, at 5:30 P. M.

8. That the inhabitants of the three houses did not stand on ceremony but were accustomed to drop in on each other unannounced.

9. Piano and its use.

9. a) Should be shown Jim Robb's letter.

9. b) That Priscilla Hiss never spoke disparagingly of Thayer Hobson, whom Geoffrey May knew (although the Hisses did not know that).

10. Two dogs.

11. Character witness questions plus fact of frequent constant discussions on current events with no Communist slant by Alger Hiss or Priscilla Hiss.

12. May's background and experience:

Lawyer, author of legal books and articles, long-time civil servant, permanent member of U.S. Mission to Greece from June 1947 to June 1948 (i.e. The Truman Doctrine of containing and preventing Communism).

See also "Who's Who": Harvard, Harvard Law School (1924), Univ. of London; Barrister-at-Law (England), Ass't Prof. Institute of Law, Johns Hopkins Univ., 1930-1933; Assoc. Director, Social Security Board 1941; Deputy Director, Defense Health and Welfare Service 1941-42; mem. various foreign missions incl. Amer. Mission for Aid to Greece, 1947; lt. commander USNR since 1942; Ass't Chief, Bureau of Budget, Executive Office of President, 1944-47. Author of various books and articles on legal and sociological subjects.

IN RE GEOFFRY MAY

1. Color of 1245 (ours) and 1243 (Mays') 30th St. houses was yellow, not white as Chambers says, with blue, not green, shutters. (See Baetz Dep. pp 375-76)

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5. That there was no tabu on liquor at Hisses' house.

6. That Tim was not a "delicate" boy.

Very important

6a. That Mays moved in on or around July 15, 1936, and do not remember 2 Hiss cars.

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see also "Who's Who" for biography

IN RE GEOFFRY MAY

1. Color of 1245 (ours) and 1243 (Mays') 30th St. houses was yellow, not white as Chambers says, with blue, not green, shutters. (See Ballo. Dep. pp 375-76)

2. That there was a service alley in rear and garden gate to service alley which Chambers could have opened and had a good look at rear premises.

3. That houses were thin match boxes and each family heard the other's movements. That gardens were gold fish bowls.

4. That there was much visiting back and forth.

5. That there was no tabu on liquor at Hisses' house.

6. That Tim was not a "~~delicate~~ puny, little" boy.

6a. That Mays moved in around (or before) July 15, 1936 and do not remember 2 Hiss cars. (Very important)

7. a) That Chambers did not ring bell or rap on knocker at 1 A.M. every two weeks, or

b) Hang around, ditto, at 5:30 P.M.

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See also "Who's Who" for biography:

Harvard, Harvard Law School (1924) Univ. of London; Barrister-at-Law (England); asst prof. Inst. of Law, Johns Hopkins, 1930-1933; assoc. director Social Security Board 1941; Deputy Director Defence Health and Welfare Services 1941-1942; mem. various foreign missions incl Amer Mission for Aid to Greece 1947; lt. commander U.S.N.R. since 1942; Asst chief, Bureau of the Budget, Executive Office of President, 1944-47. Author of various books and articles on legal + sociological subjects.