Commonwealth of Virginia

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
RICHMOND

September 27, 1937.

Mr. Turner McDowell,
Clerk of the Circuit Court,
Botetourt County,
Fincastle, Virginia.

Dear Mr. McDowell:

A citizen of Rockbridge County sent us a newspaper clipping reading as follows, "Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Mohler announce the marriage of their daughter, Grace Vernon, to Samuel Christian Branham, of Buchanan, Saturday, September 18, at the Fincastle Methodist parsonage by the Rev. Sites."

Our informant writes as follows:

"This family of Mohlers, living in Lexington Va., belongs to the class of respectable white people, making about ninety percent of the rural population of the state. These Branhams moved into Rockbridge from Amherst about two years ago. They are unquestionably mixed bloods, negroid in every appearance, speech and behavior.

"This man moved just over the line into Botetourt Co., recently for the purpose, I am sure, of obtaining a license at Fincastle, the family history being well known in Lexington, this County. Unless I am mistaken, this is clearly an unlawful marriage in Virginia."

This is a favorite trick of these mixed breeds. They go around to other counties where they are not known and in their applications swear that they are white. These people are usually well known in their own counties and their clerks will not issue licenses for them to marry white people. Did this woman give Lexington, Virginia, as her place of residence? If so, Section 5072 specifies that the license shall be issued by the clerk of the Circuit Court of the county or city in which the female usually resides. If this feature of the law were strictly adhered to, many of the mixed marriages would be prevented, as the clerks at the place of residence usually know the facts, while those of the adjoining counties do not.

Mr. Turner McDowell, #2.

According to the law of Virginia, this couple cannot be married. This marriage is null and void. Do you know where they are living now? We have made a thorough study of the racial origin of this Branham family. All of the Amherst County Branhams are classed as "free issue", descendants of the antebellum freed negroes. We are sending a copy of this letter to the Commonwealth's Attorney.

In your reply, please give us the names of all of the parents as they show on the application.

Very truly yours,

W. A. Plecker, M. D.
State Registrar.

WAP:W