

Solicitor Murdaugh's Status In Doubt Following Indictment

Solicitor Randolph Murdaugh of the 14th judicial circuit, which includes Beaufort, was indicted by a federal grand jury Tuesday for conspiracy to violate internal revenue liquor laws.

The indictment, handed down by a federal grand jury in Columbia, linked the solicitor with Sheriff Haskell G. Thompson of Colleton county and 22 other defendants, including a number of his deputies, who were indicted in January at Charleston for liquor law violations.

The solicitor, like Sheriff Thompson, is a candidate to succeed himself in the Democratic primaries which will be conducted on Tuesday of next week. Unlike Sheriff Thompson, however, the solicitor is unopposed for renomination and, under law, would become the party nominee. The Colleton county sheriff, who came under indictment several months ago, faces three opponents in his bid for reelection.

The Gazette sought yesterday to determine whether or not a law, enacted by the last general assembly and covering the suspension of officeholders under indictment, would affect Solicitor Murdaugh's role in the various courts of his circuit but obtained no definite information.

The governor's office would offer only "no comment" and Attorney General T. C. Callison, who said no action would be taken on his own initiative, indicated that it was left to the governor whether or not any action should be taken. The bill, introduced by Rep. Marshall Saunders of Colleton County, was enacted after the original indictment of Sheriff Thompson in January.

The attorney general yesterday told The Gazette, by telephone, that the "matter has not come directly to my attention. I understand Mr. John Mason, assistant to the governor, came to my office this morning to discuss the matter but I wasn't in at the time. I have given no opinion and can give none until I have had a chance to confer on the matter . . . I hadn't realized just exactly what the law covered. I first understood it applied only to felonies, but now I understand that it covers indictments in general. Local officials should proceed with plans for holding their courts. If the governor were to take any action on this matter, and there is no solicitor available, I then will name some other solicitor . . ."

Pertinent portions of the act in question, which was ratified on March 24 and signed by the governor on March 27, read as follows:

"Any state or county officer who is indicted in any court for any crime may, in the discretion of the governor, be suspended by the governor, who in event of suspension shall appoint another in his stead until he shall be acquitted. "In case of conviction, the office shall be declared vacant by the governor and the vacancy filled as provided by law."

While the law was passed subsequent to the January indictment of Sheriff Thompson, he was indicted again on Monday of this week on a charge of attempting to influence a juror.

Some Columbia observers hazar-

ded the opinion that the governor may defer action in the matter until after the primary elections next Tuesday.

A Colleton county court term, originally scheduled to begin next Monday, has been postponed, it was announced in Walterboro yesterday, the reason given being its conflict with the primary Tuesday. Court is scheduled to convene in Beaufort on June 25 and in Jasper county on July 2.

The attorney general yesterday said that no test of the constitutionality of the new law had yet been made.

The following is from an article by W. D. Workman in Wednesday's papers, telling of the indictment:

Today's grand jury action was a rare occurrence in federal court proceedings. As the grand jury neared completion of its revision of an earlier indictment against Sheriff Thompson and his several co-defendants, Foreman W. G. Moore of Marion requested that the district attorney amend the indictment to include the name of Randolph Murdaugh as a defendant, it was learned.

That was done and the true bill was returned with Murdaugh's name among the others. The revised indictment includes six additional defendants besides Solicitor Murdaugh. The six are George Steve Crosby, Eugene Dewitt, Robert Lee Varnadoe, D. L. Smith, Herbert Bodison and James Paul Robinson. All are from the Colleton-Hampton area.

They are linked by the indictment with the Colleton County liquor conspiracy disclosed some months ago by federal investigators.

Assistant District Attorney Arthur G. Howe of Charleston reported that the conspiracy cases will be tried in Charleston at a special term of federal court beginning Sept. 15. Judge Walter J. Hoffman of the Eastern District of Virginia will preside.

The indictment charges that Murdaugh conspired with a man to move an illegal whisky still from Hampton to Colleton to avoid interference by local officers.

Oliver H. Davis, Jr.

Recently Visited

Relatives In Beaufort

Oliver H. Davis, Jr., son of Mrs. Oliver H. Davis, Sr., was a recent visitor of his mother, his sister, Mrs. Al Wilhelm, and other relatives in Beaufort.

For the past year he has been working as a computer technician on the Missile Test Project (guided missiles) for RCA, sub-contractor for the U.S. Air Force.

He has been working at 14 stations stretching out 5,000 miles from Patrick Air Force Base, Cocoa, Florida, through the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, St. Lucia (nicknamed the "Gibraltar of the West Indies"), and the Dominican Republic, to Ascension Island, which is closer to the west coast of Africa than it is the United States.

Mr. Davis said that plans being made for a more distant station to be located on the tip of southern Africa, and ultimately a station on Australia.