Master Chronology

The Sammie Lee Williams Case

November 20, 1949 – January 1950

PUBLIC READING NOTE

This chronology separates established facts from reported, disputed, incomplete, and missing information. It does not resolve conflicts that the surviving record cannot resolve. A grand-jury no-bill means that no indictment was returned; it is not a trial verdict.

Prepared for public presentation from surviving police, hospital, coroner, death-certificate, newspaper, witness-statement, and disposition records.

How to Read This Chronology

Dates and times are reproduced as precisely as the surviving file permits. Where records conflict or are missing, the uncertainty is stated rather than silently resolved.

Confirmed — Supported by an official record or multiple consistent sources.

Reported — Appears in a witness statement or contemporary news account but lacks complete independent confirmation.

Disputed — Material accounts conflict about the sequence, time, location, or conduct described.

Incomplete — Some relevant documentation survives, but important details are absent.

Not located — The surviving file does not contain the record needed to establish the point.

Scope

The sequence begins with the streetcar incident and the records of police and medical response, then follows witness interviews, charging activity, forensic milestones, prosecutorial preparation, and the grand-jury disposition. It does not infer later events that are not documented in the case file.

1. November 20, 1949: Shooting and Initial Response

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Before approx. 7:25 p.m.	Pratt-Ensley Streetcar No. 306 travels west toward Pratt City. Mody Andrew Weeks is the conductor; H. D. O'Donald is the operator. Segregated seating is in effect.	Operating or dispatch log not located.	**Reported**
Approx. 7:10–7:25 p.m.	Witnesses are aboard or board at different points. Their exact seats and sight lines have not been fully mapped.	Statements identify several passengers but do not establish a complete passenger list.	**Incomplete**
Shortly before 7:25 p.m.	Sammie Lee Williams boards. Weeks placed the boarding near Seventh Avenue and Seventeenth Street; other accounts are uncertain.	The exact boarding point remains unresolved.	**Disputed**
Shortly after boarding	Williams enters or sits in the white section. Weeks directs him to move to the Black section.	This basic sequence appears across the surviving accounts.	**Reported**
Shortly afterward	Williams moves into the Black section. His precise location and how long he remains there are unclear.	Witness positions and movements require reconstruction.	**Disputed**
Before the confrontation	Words are exchanged. Accounts differ about profanity, volume, and whether Weeks approached Williams again.	Statements were taken on different dates and contain differing descriptions.	**Disputed**
Immediately before shooting	Weeks moves toward Williams or toward the rear. Williams is described as seated, rising, or moving, depending on the witness.	No single movement sequence is established by all accounts.	**Disputed**
Final seconds before gunfire	Weeks said Williams grabbed his right hand and followed as Weeks backed away. Some witnesses described a struggle; others indicated the firearm appeared before Williams tried to restrain or disarm Weeks.	Central self-defense issue; witness accounts conflict.	**Disputed**
Approx. 7:25 p.m.	Weeks draws a Colt .38 Special and fires multiple times. A police wound diagram records three wounds or bullet paths involving Williams.	Weapon held as evidence; complete ballistics documentation not located.	**Confirmed**
During gunfire	Passengers duck, move, exit, or jump through windows. Amos Crosby and John Garlington are also wounded.	Their complete medical records are not in the file.	**Reported**
Immediately after	Weeks said he broke free and Williams later returned to a seat. Other witnesses described the ending differently.	Post-shooting positions remain uncertain.	**Disputed**
Immediately after	O'Donald stops the streetcar and exits through the front. He later said he saw Williams seated and Weeks returning the firearm to his pocket.	O'Donald's statement was taken December 12 and documented December 19.	**Reported**

2. Dispatch, Police Response, and Medical Transport

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
After approx. 7:25 p.m.	The shooting is reported to authorities.	No dispatch log, call sheet, radio traffic, caller identity, or exact notification time was located.	**Not located**
Time unknown	Police and emergency personnel respond to the streetcar near 1520 Eighth Avenue North.	Arrival times, responding units, and the first officer's report are not in the surviving file.	**Incomplete**
Time unknown	Williams is removed from the streetcar and transported by Smith & Gaston to Hillman Hospital.	Transport documentation is incomplete.	**Reported**
Time unknown	Crosby and Garlington receive attention for gunshot wounds.	Treatment locations and medical details are incomplete.	**Incomplete**
Approx. 7:40 p.m.	Williams is admitted to Hillman Hospital.	Time appears in the Hillman admitting record.	**Confirmed**
Evening	Williams receives emergency treatment for multiple gunshot wounds.	The complete hospital chart and operative sequence were not located.	**Incomplete**
Evening	Weeks remains at the scene or is taken into custody; the exact sequence and location are unclear.	Police offense report records an arrest of M. A. Weeks.	**Reported**
Evening	Police take possession of the Colt .38 Special and hold it as evidence.	Evidence receipt, cylinder count, and full chain of custody were not located.	**Confirmed**
Evening	Detectives R. A. MacMurdo and W. J. Haley begin identifying witnesses and documenting the event and injuries.	Initial response and scene notes are incomplete.	**Reported**
Evening and after	Williams remains hospitalized. Surviving reports indicate both Weeks and Williams were treated as possible defendants in cross allegations of assault with intent to murder.	Primary charging instruments for Williams were not located.	**Reported**

3. Initial Investigative and Charging Actions

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Nov. 20–21	Weeks is detained and later released under an assault-with-intent-to-murder warrant with reported bond of $300.	Warrant and original bond order not located.	**Reported**
Nov. 20–21	The streetcar interior is photographed.	Photographs survive, but a complete photo log is not present.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 20–21	Police prepare an offense report and body-wound diagrams.	These are among the principal contemporaneous records.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 21, approx. 11:45–11:48 a.m.	Thomas Edgar Glover is interviewed.	Witness statement preserved.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 21, approx. 2:10 p.m.	Lloyd Edgar Murphy gives a statement.	Statement text gives Nov. 21; a later heading gives Nov. 28.	**Date disputed**
Nov. 21	Newspapers report the shooting and early allegations.	Contemporary reporting supplements but does not replace primary records.	**Reported**
Nov. 22, approx. 9:00 a.m.	Weeks is interviewed about the confrontation and shooting.	His formal document is dated Nov. 23.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 22	Johnnie Watts is interviewed.	Witness statement preserved.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 22	Ella Langdon is interviewed.	Statement identifies her as a Black female, 1032 11th Street North.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 23	Lola Blair is interviewed.	Statement identifies her as a Black female, 313 North 13th Avenue.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 23	Eugene Hudgins is interviewed.	The statement heading does not specify race; it should remain unconfirmed.	**Confirmed / limited**
Nov. 20–28	Williams remains hospitalized.	A complete day-by-day medical chronology is unavailable.	**Incomplete**

4. Death, Homicide Investigation, and Forensic Milestones

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Nov. 28, approx. 1:25–1:30 p.m.	Williams dies at Hillman Hospital.	Surviving records differ by about five minutes.	**Time disputed**
Nov. 28, approx. 3:00 p.m.	The coroner is notified or called.	Coroner record supplies the approximate time.	**Reported**
Nov. 28	The matter is reclassified and investigated as a homicide or murder case.	Police felony disposition later lists a murder charge.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 28	Police prepare a death-case wound diagram describing Williams as shot three times.	Diagram documents multiple entry and exit locations.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 28	The coroner directs Dr. Fred W. Smith to perform an autopsy.	The complete autopsy report was not located.	**Confirmed / incomplete**
Nov. 28	The death certificate attributes death to bullet wounds of the chest and abdomen, including perforation of the left lung, left kidney, stomach, and transverse colon, with medical complications.	Official cause-of-death record.	**Confirmed**
Nov. 28	A homicide/grand-jury memorandum places the case on the grand-jury docket.	The full prosecutorial submission is not present.	**Confirmed**
After Nov. 28	Weeks faces a murder allegation; contemporary accounts report bond of $1,500.	Primary murder charging and bond instruments were not located.	**Reported**

5. Supplemental Interviews and Prosecutorial Preparation

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Dec. 12, approx. 3:40 p.m.	H. D. O'Donald is interviewed about operating the streetcar and what he observed after the shooting.	Document is dated Dec. 19.	**Confirmed**
Dec. 12, approx. 3:45 p.m.	Mrs. Robert H. Steading is interviewed.	Document is dated Dec. 19.	**Confirmed**
Dec. 19	The O'Donald and Steading statements are dated or prepared as formal documents.	The difference between interview and document dates should remain visible.	**Confirmed**
Dec. 21, approx. 9:50 p.m.	Mrs. J. R. "Lillian" Praytor is interviewed.	Witness statement preserved.	**Confirmed**
Nov.–Dec. 1949	Investigators collect and compare statements and records for prosecutorial or grand-jury review.	No complete investigative summary, prosecutor intake, or exhibit list was located.	**Incomplete**

6. Grand-Jury Disposition

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Late 1949–early Jan. 1950	The case is submitted to the grand jury.	The witnesses, exhibits, instructions, testimony, and deliberative record are unknown.	**Confirmed / incomplete**
Jan. 6, 1950	The grand jury returns a no-bill in the case against Weeks.	A no-bill means no indictment was returned; it is not a trial verdict.	**Confirmed**
Jan. 7, 1950	A newspaper reports the grand jury's action.	Contemporary public account of the disposition.	**Reported**
Jan. 1950	The Birmingham Police Department felony arrest record is closed with the final disposition "No Bill."	No trial, appeal, or further prosecution appears in the surviving case file.	**Confirmed**

Principal Chronology Gaps

The following records would materially improve the chronology or permit firmer conclusions:

• Original dispatch log, call sheet, and radio traffic	• Identity of the person who first reported the shooting
• Exact police and ambulance arrival times	• Initial responding-officer reports
• Complete scene notes and photographic log	• Evidence receipt and full chain of custody for the firearm
• Cylinder and cartridge count; recovered bullets or cartridge cases	• Firearms examination or ballistics report
• Medical records for Amos Crosby and John Garlington	• Complete Hillman Hospital chart for Sammie Lee Williams
• Completed autopsy report	• Toxicology or blood-alcohol testing records
• Original warrants and charging instruments for Weeks and Williams	• Original bond orders
• Prosecutor intake or evaluation memorandum	• Grand-jury docket, witness list, exhibit list, minutes, or transcript

Editorial status: This document should remain labeled a Working Master Chronology until the missing records and internal date discrepancies are resolved or formally documented as unavailable.