

In Equity. No. — 1979 — 1

In the District Court of the United States,
Western District of Michigan.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, PLAINTIFF,

v.

MARLE FLOORING MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION
ET AL., DEFENDANTS.

PETITION.

EDWARD J. BOWMAN,
United States Attorney.

H. M. DAUGHERTY,
Attorney General.

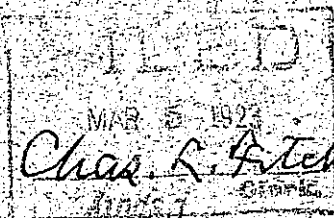
A. T. SEYMOUR,
Assistant to the Attorney General.

~~GUY D. COFF~~

C. STANLEY THOMPSON,
Special Assistant to the Attorney General.

MARCH, 1923.

WASHINGTON: GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1922.



**In the District Court of the United States,
Western District of Michigan.**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, Plain-	} Equity No. —.
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v.	
MAPLE FLOORING MANUFACTURERS	
Association et al., Defendants.	

PETITION.

I.

THE PARTIES.

The United States of America, by its Attorney for the Western District of Michigan, acting under the direction of The Attorney General, brings this petition in equity against the Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association, an unincorporated organization, having its office at Room 1038, Stock Exchange Building, Chicago, Illinois, and against the following members, representatives of members, and employees thereof.

DEFENDANTS, MEMBERS OF DEFENDANT ASSOCIATION.

Name.	State of incorporation or other description.	Location of factory and principal office.
W. D. Young & Company.....	Estate of W. D. Young.	Bay City, Mich.
Mitchell Brothers Company...	Michigan.....	Cadillac, Mich.
Wisconsin Land & Lumber Co.	Wisconsin.....	Hermansville, Mich.
Cobbs & Mitchell, Inc.....	Michigan.....	Cadillac, Mich.
I. Stephenson Co., Trustees...	Trusteeship.....	Wells, Mich.
Cummer-Diggins Co.....	Michigan.....	Cadillac, Mich.
Osgood & Blodgett Mfg. Co.....	Minnesota.....	St. Paul, Minn.
Holt Hardwood Company.....	Wisconsin.....	Oconto, Wis.
Kerry & Hanson Flooring Company.	Michigan.....	Grayling, Mich.
East Jordan Lumber Co.....	Michigan.....	East Jordan, Mich.
Nichols & Cox Lumber Co.....	Michigan.....	Grand Rapids, Mich.
Strable Lumber & Salt Co.....	Michigan.....	Saginaw, Mich.
Foster-Latimer Lumber Co.....	Wisconsin.....	Mellen, Wis.
West Michigan Flooring Co.....	Copartnership.....	Manistee, Mich.
J. W. Wells Lumber Co.....	Michigan.....	Menominee, Mich.
Northwestern Cooperage & Lumber Co.	Michigan.....	Gladstone, Mich.
Flanner-Steger Land & Lumber Co.	Wisconsin.....	Blackwell, Forest Co., Mich.
Grand Rapids Trust Company, as Receiver for William Horner.	Michigan.....	Newberry & Reed City, Mich.
North Branch Flooring Company.	Illinois.....	Chicago, Ill.
The Bigelow Copper Co.....	Michigan.....	Bay City, Mich.
Kneeland-McClurg Lumber Co.	Wisconsin.....	Phillips, Wis.
Oval Wood Dish Corporation..	Delaware.....	Tupper Lake, N. Y.

INDIVIDUAL DEFENDANTS.

Name.	Affiliation.	Address.
George R. Keehn....	Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association.	Stock Exchange Bld., Chicago, Ill.
B. P. Whedon.....	W. D. Young & Company....	Bay City, Mich.
M. E. Thomas.....	Mitchell Bros. Co.....	Cadillac, Mich.
G. W. Earle.....	Wisconsin Land & Lumber Co.	Hermansville, Mich.
H. H. Shepeck.....	I. Stephenson Co., Trustees..	Wells, Mich.
J. L. Colby.....	Cummer-Diggins Co.....	Cadillac, Mich.
F. S. Blodgett.....	Osgood & Blodgett Mfg. Co...	St. Paul, Minn.
W. L. DeWit.....	Holt Hardwood Company....	Oconto, Wis.
F. R. Walsh.....	Kerry & Hanson Flooring Company.	Grayling, Mich.
J. A. Porter.....	East Jordan Lumber Company	East Jordan, Mich.
F. E. Holland.....	Nichols & Cox Lumber Co....	Grand Rapids, Mich.
George Strable.....	Strable Lumber & Salt Co.....	Saginaw, Mich.
H. I. Latimer.....	Foster-Latimer Lumber Co....	Mellen, Wis.

Individual defendants—Continued.

Name.	Affiliation.	Address.
Edwin Bolmer, W. H. Green, Mary Bolmer.	West Michigan Flooring Company.	Manistee, Mich.
A. C. Wells, H. C. Law.	J. W. Wells Lumber Company.	Menominee, Mich.
J. D. Staple.....	Northwestern Cooperage & Lumber Co.	Gladstone, Mich.
P. D. Flanner.....	Flanner-Steger Land & Lumber Co.	Blackwell, Forest Co., Mich.
T. M. Ralston.....	Grand Rapids Trust Company, Receiver for William Horner.	Newberry & Reed City, Mich.
C. A. Brand.....	North Branch Flooring Company.	Chicago, Ill.
J. E. Dewey.....	The Bigelow-Cooper Co.....	Bay City, Mich.
P. S. McClurg.....	Kneeland-McClurg Lumber Company.	Phillips, Wis.
F. M. Hedges.....	Oval Wood Dish Corporation.	Tupper Lake, N. Y.

Defendants B. P. Whedon, George R. Keehn, M. E. Thomas, and A. C. Wells are respectively the President, Secretary, Vice President, and Treasurer of the defendant Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association. Said association will be hereinafter referred to as the defendant association, the members as the defendant corporations, the officers and representatives of the members and of the defendant association as the individual defendants, and all collectively as the defendants.

II.

JURISDICTION AND OBJECT.

Many of the defendant corporations maintain their principal offices and have their mills for the manufacturing of flooring within this district and they there manufacture large quantities of maple, beech, and birch flooring. The defendants make

sales of the flooring manufactured by them from their said offices in this district, and they thereupon ship said flooring in interstate trade and commerce from this district into other States, to the wholesale and retail lumber dealers who have contracted for its purchase. Said sales and shipments are made pursuant to and in conformity with the restrictive practices and agreements which are hereinafter described, and said practices and agreements are enforced from the offices in this district of the individual defendants M. E. Thomas and A. C. Wells, as respectively the Vice President and the Treasurer of the defendant association.

This petition is brought under the provisions of section 4 of the Act of Congress of July 2, 1890, entitled "An Act to protect trade and commerce against unlawful restraints and monopolies" (26 Stat. 209), known as the Sherman Antitrust Act, to prevent and restrain the aforesaid defendants from further engaging, in this district and elsewhere in the United States, in violation of the said Act of Congress, in a combination and conspiracy to restrain the manufacture of maple, beech, and birch flooring, its transportation in interstate trade and commerce, and its sale in the course of said trade and commerce in all of the States of the United States and in the District of Columbia.

III.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INDUSTRY.

The defendant corporations are engaged in the business of manufacturing maple, beech, and birch flooring, which is extensively used throughout the country in the construction of residences and other buildings. Approximately half of the defendant corporations own timber lands and saw mills as well as flooring mills, and they conduct logging operations and saw the rough lumber which they use for the manufacture of flooring. The other defendant corporations purchase rough flooring lumber in the open market and manufacture the same into finished flooring. The membership of defendant association comprises practically all of the manufacturers of maple, beech, and birch flooring within the States of Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota and it represents approximately seventy per cent of the total manufacturing capacity of such flooring in the United States.

IV.

THE COMBINATION AND CONSPIRACY AND RELATION OF DEFENDANTS THERETO.

The defendant corporations, from the date each became a party to any or all of the hereinafter described contracts or Articles of Association or Minimum Price Plans of the defendant association, and during all of the time that each has been a party thereto, and the individual defendants, from the date each became a representative to the defendant asso-

ciation of a member thereof, or became an officer or an employee thereof, and during all of the time that each has been such representative, officer, or employee, have contracted, combined, and conspired with each other to eliminate all competition between the members of the defendant association in manufacturing, transporting, and selling in interstate trade and commerce the maple, beech, and birch flooring manufactured by them in the States of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, and New York, transported therefrom, and sold in the course of interstate trade and commerce in all of the States of the United States and in the District of Columbia, in violation of Section 1 of the Act of Congress of July 2, 1890, entitled "An Act to protect trade and commerce against unlawful restraints and monopolies" (26 Stat. 209), known as the Sherman Antitrust Act.

V.

THE MEANS.

Said combination and conspiracy was brought about and accomplished and is now being maintained in the manner and by the means now stated, viz:

(1) Association organization and early activities.

The defendant association has been in existence since 1895, and it was reorganized by a mutual agreement or Articles of Association entered into by the defendant corporations and by other manufacturers of flooring under date of January 1, 1913, and it has been continued in existence by other mutual agree-

ments or Articles of Association entered into by them at various dates thereafter. It is now being maintained under and in accordance with the provisions of Articles of Association dated January 1, 1922, which will be in effect until January 1, 1925. All of the defendant corporations are now parties to said Articles of Association, and through the individual defendants as their representatives they take an active part in all of the activities of the defendant association. All of the aforesaid Articles of Association have provided for the formal organization of the defendant association with headquarters at Chicago, Illinois; for the usual officers and a board of trustees to supervise and manage its activities; for a special fund or membership fee fund as a guaranty for the fulfilment of the obligations assumed by its members, and for an expense fund created and maintained by assessments levied on its members. Said Articles of Association prior to those of January 1, 1922, also established a pooling arrangement between the members of the defendant association by allotting to each member a certain percentage of the total business, by creating a general fund through payments from all members on shipments over their prescribed allotted percentages, and by providing for payments from said general fund to members shipping less than their prescribed allotments. The defendant corporations operated under this arrangement for the pooling of their businesses continuously from January 1, 1913, until on or about March 31, 1920.

(2) Minimum price agreements.

Under dates respectively of July 1, 1916, July 1, 1919, and January 6, 1921, the defendant corporations and the other manufacturers of flooring who were members of the defendant association on said dates, entered into mutual agreements termed "Minimum Price Bases" or "Minimum Price Plans," each of which constituted an amendment to the Articles of Association under which the defendant association was being maintained. By said minimum price plans the defendant corporations agreed to establish minimum prices for the sale of maple, beech, and birch flooring, and not to sell any such flooring below said minimum prices. Said plans specified certain elements which should be used as the basis for determining an average cost of manufacturing and selling flooring, and the average percentage of net profit which should be added to said average cost in order to establish said minimum prices. Said plans also provided that said minimum prices should be the delivered prices in the "Table of Values" in the "Association Rate Book and Index of Towns," which is hereinafter described, and specified the concessions and commissions which could be allowed and the terms of sale that should be enforced.

(3) The present method of establishing minimum prices.

In and by the aforesaid Articles of Association of January 1, 1922, the defendants substituted for the aforesaid Minimum Price Plans a statement of policy to the effect that a careful consideration of the question of cost is recognized as the only scientific method of conducting the business of manufacturing and marketing maple, beech, and birch flooring, and provisions that the defendant association furnish to its members information regarding the average cost of such flooring when manufactured, sold, and delivered F. O. B. cars at the flooring plants, as determined from time to time by surveys of costs. Said agreement specifies that certain enumerated fundamental elements are to be considered as entering into and determining such *average costs*, and said elements are identical with those employed in accordance with the aforesaid minimum price plans for the determination of *minimum prices*. The elements specified as entering into costs, both by the aforesaid Minimum Price Plans and by said Articles of Association, themselves contain many items of profit. With the addition to said so-called "costs" of a percentage thereof to allow profit under said Minimum Price Plans, or to constitute "a reasonable allowance to provide for contingencies or unforeseen hazards incident to manufacturing operations," which was substituted for the item of profit by said Articles of Association, said so-called "average costs," as well as said minimum

prices, in fact have represented and now represent all possible elements of actual cost and also large profits to the defendant corporations.

In accordance with the aforesaid minimum price plans and with said 1922 Articles of Association, the defendants from time to time from 1913 until the present date have made surveys of costs, have determined therefrom minimum prices or so-called "average costs," and have recommended that the defendant corporations should not sell flooring at prices below said minimum prices or below said so-called "average costs." The defendant corporations have at all times during said period accepted and acted upon said recommendations, and have concertedly established and maintained as the basis of their individual selling prices, the minimum prices or so-called average costs determined as heretofore described, and by concertedly maintaining the same, and also the uniform terms of sale, the uniform rules with regard to allowing cash discounts, the uniform commissions, and the uniform rules regarding the allowance of commissions and concessions, which were established by and in accordance with said Minimum Price Plans, they have always maintained during said period, and they still maintain, a practical uniformity between themselves of net f. o. b. selling prices.

(4) Freight rate books.

In connection with the aforesaid determinations of minimum prices or of so-called average costs, the defendant association has from time to time prepared

and distributed to the defendant corporations so-called freight rate books. Said books contain tables of the freight rates from Cadillac, Michigan, to many cities and towns in all of the States of the United States. They also contain an average cost chart showing the average costs f. o. b. cars of the principal items of maple flooring in the three established grades; tables of differentials for the determination of average costs of all other kinds of maple, beech, and birch flooring by additions to or subtractions from said average cost chart; statements of the extra charges for special grades, for special sizes, and for special lengths; statements of the terms of sale and of the rules for allowing cash discounts; and delivered cost charts showing the average so-called cost of any item of flooring, including the freight from Cadillac, Michigan, when delivered at any destination. By means of said freight rate books, the defendants from 1913 continuously until the present date have been enabled to determine the delivered "minimum price" for any item of maple, beech, or birch flooring at any destination in the United States, in accordance with the aforesaid Minimum Price Plans, or the so-called "average cost" thereof in accordance with the 1922 Articles of Association. The defendants agreed to adopt and have concertedly adopted Cadillac, Michigan, as an arbitrary freight basing point from which they compute and charge freight, regardless of the point from which each may actually ship flooring. They also agreed to adopt, and have concertedly adopted

and used, and they still continue to use, the minimum prices or so-called average costs stated in said Freight Rate Books, as the basis of their individual selling prices, and by concertedly maintaining the same and also the uniform charges and practices heretofore described, they have always maintained, and they still maintain, a practical uniformity between themselves of net delivered prices.

(5) Open price reporting plan.

The defendants adopted and for many years have operated under a so-called open price reporting plan, or open competition plan, and said plan is included in the aforesaid Articles of Association of January 1, 1922. In accordance therewith the defendant corporations render the following reports to defendant George R. Keehn, as Secretary of the defendant association:

(a) Monthly report of stocks on hand of Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring at the end of the previous month.

(b) Monthly report of unfilled orders on hand for Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring at the end of the previous month.

(c) Monthly report of the amount in feet of shipments made during the previous month of all kinds of Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring for use within the United States, except Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring purchased from other members of the defendant association.

(d) Monthly report of production of Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring during the previous month.

(e) Report of new orders booked for Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring during the previous month.

(f) Monthly report of average prices realized F. O. B. flooring plant, after deducting freight, for 13/16" x 3½" face clear No. 1 and factory Maple flooring, standard grades and lengths, sold during the previous month.

(g) Weekly report of all sales of flooring, stating for each individual sale the quantity and grade of flooring sold, the delivered price sold at, the average freight rate to destination of shipment, and the commissions paid, if any.

(h) Quarterly report of manufacturing and marketing costs per thousand feet of flooring.

Said defendant George R. Keehn, as secretary of the defendant association, receives and compiles the aforesaid reports and prepares therefrom and distributes to the defendant corporations the following statistical reports:

(a) Monthly stock conditions and barometer report, containing statistics and graphical representations comparing the combined figures of the same reporting members for the preceding month and for the same month of the preceding year as to: stocks on hand, unfilled orders, shipments, production, new business booked, and average values; and also as to each of these a statement of the percentage of increase or decrease for the preceding month in comparison with the comparable figures for the preceding year.

(b) Monthly report of Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring statistics for the preceding

month compared with the same month of the preceding year, showing for each member individually the stock on hand and unfilled orders as of the last of the preceding month and of the same month of the preceding year; the shipments, production, new orders, and stock changes of each member for the preceding month in comparison with the same month of the preceding year, and the total of these statistics for all of the members and the percentages of increase or decrease in comparison with similar statistics for the same month of the preceding year.

(c) Monthly report of average prices realized for the preceding month in comparison with the same month of the preceding year, showing the average prices after deducting freight and commissions on new orders booked for three representative items of maple flooring; the average prices realized being given for all of the members, for each member individually, and for seven geographical groups of members.

(d) Monthly report showing for each kind, grade, and size of flooring the amount on hand the first of the preceding month, the unfilled orders on hand on the same day, and the surplus stocks.

(e) Weekly report of sales made during the preceding week, showing in consecutive columns from left to right: the date of the sale, the quantity of lumber sold, the description of the lumber sold (dimension and grade), the delivered price, the average freight rate, the commissions paid, if any, and the index number of the mill making the sale.

(f) Quarterly "Survey of Costs," showing the average manufacturing and marketing cost per thousand feet of flooring.

(g) Quarterly report of average costs, showing the approximate relative average costs of flooring products of the standard sizes and grades F. O. B. cars at the flooring mills, based on the average cost of rough flooring lumber F. O. B. cars at flooring mills, the average manufacturing and marketing costs, and test runs indicating the proportions of the grades and faces of flooring produced from the lumber used.

(h) "Trend of Average Sales," recently inaugurated and not heretofore issued at regular intervals, showing for the weeks ending August 5, 1922, and thereafter until October 14, 1922, the averages of delivered prices, the averages of average freight rates, the average cost of freight, and the averages of prices realized F. O. B. Michigan and Wisconsin mills, of one item of Maple flooring in standard grades and lengths.

(i) Semiannual report containing statistics similar to those described heretofore in subparagraphs (a), (b), (c), and (d) of this paragraph, but covering the preceding half of the calendar year and contrasted with comparable statistics for the same half of the preceding year.

(j) Annual report, containing statistics similar to those described heretofore in subparagraphs (a), (b), (c) and (d) of this para-

graph, but covering the preceding calendar year and contrasted with comparable statistics for the next preceding year,

Each defendant knows the index number of each of the defendant corporations, and is therefore fully advised as to every detail, excepting the name of the purchaser and the destination of the shipment, of every sale of flooring made by every member of the defendant association. The aforesaid monthly statistical reports are published in certain trade papers, but at such times that the defendants have the information contained therein considerably earlier than does the general public. The distribution of the weekly detailed information as to sales and prices is strictly confined to the defendant corporations.

(6) Association meetings.

Prior to 1922, defendant George R. Keehn, as secretary of the defendant association, generally transmitted the aforesaid statistical reports of the open competition plan to the defendant corporations accompanied with his comments interpreting the same, and with statements and comments regarding general conditions in the industry. Since 1921, the defendants have substituted for said written comments and statements the system of holding frequent meetings, and they now assemble monthly at association meetings and discuss the prices and the supplies of rough flooring lumber, the costs of manufacturing and selling flooring, the conditions of supply and

demand in the flooring industry, and trade conditions and the flooring situation in general, and especially as reflected by the statistical reports of the defendant association. In short, they exchange with each other at said meetings, all the information which they have, and all the experiences which they have had in their several businesses, which can be of general interest to them as manufacturers of maple, beech, or birch flooring.

For use at the aforesaid monthly meetings defendant George R. Keehn secures from the defendant corporations, on blank forms distributed by him, information as to orders, production, and shipments for the portion of each month preceding its monthly meeting. These data are compiled and are discussed at said meetings, and the defendants forecast therefrom the probable amounts of orders, of shipments, and of production for the entire month, and then compare the same with similar data for preceding months. The Committee on Coast Surveys of the defendant association also frequently reports at said meetings respecting the supplies of rough flooring lumber and gives its opinion as to the actual market value of such lumber and as to the average cost of manufacturing and marketing flooring.

(7) Uniform trade-mark and grading rules.

The defendant association has adopted a trade-mark, which is used by the defendant corporations under and in accordance with the terms of uniform

trade-mark license agreements which have been entered into between each of them and said association. Said agreements grant each of said defendant corporations the right to use the uniform association trade-mark, followed by the index number of the individual corporation, so long as each continues a member in good standing of the defendant association, and provide that each member so licensed shall maintain the standard grades of flooring established by the defendant association and shall be subject to inspection by the association inspectors for the purpose of seeing that said standard grades are properly maintained. Standard grades and also detailed grading rules have been adopted and copyrighted by the defendant association, and they are now being uniformly and concertedly maintained by the defendants.

(8) Association advertising.

The defendant association has for a number of years conducted, and is still conducting, an extensive advertising campaign for the purpose of promoting the use of maple, beech, and birch flooring and of emphasizing that purchasers should secure flooring bearing the aforesaid association trade-mark. Said advertisements carry the name of the defendant association alone, and not the names of its members, and they state that flooring bearing the association trade-mark is standardized and guaranteed by the defendant association. Many of said advertisements contain price propaganda urging purchases of floor-

ing at the time of the publication of said advertisements on the ground of the price being fully adjusted to then existing conditions. Inquiries received in answer to said advertisements are bulletined by the defendant association to the defendant corporations.

VI.

THE RESULTS.

The aforesaid surveys or reports of average costs and the tables of delivered values constitute a uniform basis on which the defendants establish their individual selling prices irrespective of their individual costs; and, together with the weekly report giving detailed information as to every sale made by every defendant, with the uniform use of the freight-basing point, and with the maintenance of the uniform trade practices, they have practically eliminated all price competition between the defendants. The use of the uniform trade-mark and the character of the advertising put out by the defendant association intensify the tendency to establish and maintain uniform prices and also practically eliminate all competition between the defendants based on the quality of their respective products.

The elaborate information furnished the defendants by the reporting system of the defendant association enables them to forecast the trend of conditions in the industry and the course of prices,

gives them an unfair advantage over the general public, and prevents the free operation of the economic law of supply and demand. The discussions at the meetings intensify this condition, and tend to cause, and do cause, the substitution on the part of the defendants of uniform and concerted action for individual action. The reporting plan and the discussions at the monthly meetings also tend to accelerate upward movements of prices, and to retard downward movements, whenever either may be naturally caused by economic conditions.

Summarily stated, the unlawful combination and conspiracy hereinbefore described has resulted in eliminating the competition to which the public is entitled, which the law contemplates, and which, but for said combination and conspiracy, would exist between defendant corporations in the manufacture and sale of maple, beech, and birch flooring, and constitutes an unreasonable and unlawful restraint of interstate trade and commerce within the meaning of the Sherman Antitrust Act.

VII.

PRAYER.

Wherefore petitioner prays:

1. That writs of subpœna issue, directed to each and every of the defendants, commanding them to appear herein and answer, but not under oath (answer under oath being hereby expressly waived),

the allegations contained in this petition, and to abide by and perform such orders and decrees as the court may make in the premises.

2. That the court, upon final hearing of this cause, adjudge and decree the Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association in and of itself to be an unlawful instrumentality organized, operated, and maintained solely for the purpose of carrying into effect the unlawful combination and conspiracy in restraint of interstate trade and commerce in Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring, hereinbefore described, in violation of Section 1 of the Act of Congress of July 2, 1890, entitled "An Act to protect trade and commerce against unlawful restraints and monopolies" (26 Stat. 209).

3. That the court, upon final hearing of this cause, adjudge and decree that the defendants have engaged in a combination and conspiracy in restraint of interstate trade and commerce in Maple, Beech, and Birch flooring in the manner and by the means hereinbefore described, in violation of the act of Congress of July 2, 1890, entitled "An Act to protect trade and commerce against unlawful restraints and monopolies" (26 Stat. 209), and that they and their officers, directors, and agents be perpetually enjoined, individually and collectively, from further engaging in, carrying out, or maintaining the said combination and conspiracy, or any other of like character and effect, and particularly from further employing any or all of the above-described means of carrying out said combination and conspiracy.

4. That plaintiff have such other, further, and general relief as the nature of the case may require and the court may deem proper.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

By

Edward J. Burman
United States Attorney for the
Western District of Michigan.

Harry M. Daugherty
Attorney General.

Augustus J. Sargent
Assistant to the Attorney General.

C. Stanley Thompson

Special Assistant to the Attorney General.

MARCH, 1923.