

## DA Investigators Jemison &amp; Morgan



*Lt. Frank Jemison*

ONE OF THE FEW MEN IN THE BLACK DAHLIA INVESTIGATION who it can be said was actually wearing a white hat was Lt. Frank B. Jemison of the Los Angeles District Attorney's Bureau of Investigation.

From everything that I've seen, he did his job, solved the case, and was just about to make the arrest when the powers that be pulled his plug. We can speculate all day about why. The reasons are many and varied.

However, what is not in dispute is The Order. Lt. Jemison, in his final closing report, made it crystal clear that he had been removed from the case [later independently confirmed in a 2004 television interview of DA investigator Walter Morgan] and ordered to hand over his investigation, interviews, and all his evidence, which included the wire recordings and transcripts, directly to LAPD Chief Thad Brown.

As I said in an earlier chapter, Lt. Jemison's saving grace was to copy his original investigation, complete with the Hodel-Black Dahlia File, and secure it in the DA's vault, where it would remain hidden for the next fifty-three years until finally being opened and revealed.



*Los Angeles Hall of Justice  
210 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles*

The above photo taken by the author in 2008 shows the downtown Los Angeles Hall of Justice at the corner of Temple and Broadway Streets. The HoJ built in 1925, has a long, colorful, and macabre history. Most of L.A.'s famous trials were held in this courthouse. The building served as a jail detention facility for prisoners awaiting trial, as well as housing the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, Coroner and District Attorney, including Lt. Jemison's office in the Bureau of Investigation.

The HoJ was within easy walking distance of all three of Dr. George Hodel's medical facilities: Health Department in Chinatown, First Street VD Clinic at First and Central, and his private medical office at Seventh and Flower Street.

The building has direct connections to our investigation.

1) In the early 1940s, Dr. George Hill Hodel's Health Department office was inside this building [1938-1942];

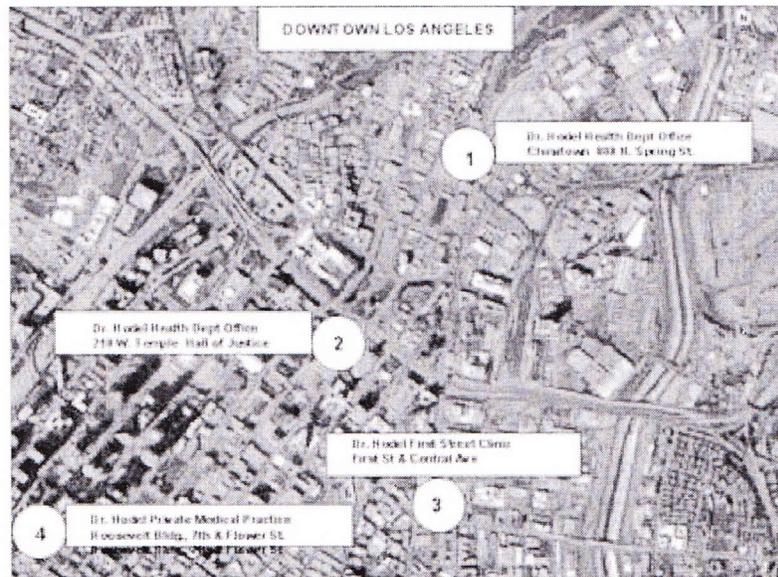
2) In 1947, the autopsy on Elizabeth "Black Dahlia" Short was performed in the Coroner's morgue in the basement of the HoJ, and the inquest into her death was held in a courtroom of the building; and

3) In 1949, Dr. George Hodel was arrested and booked into the jail facility here and was later tried in Superior Court on the lower floors of the premise. On February 15, 1950, George Hodel was detained and questioned by Lt. Jemison here, while at the same time, LAPD and DA sound technicians and detectives broke into the Franklin house to install the microphones.

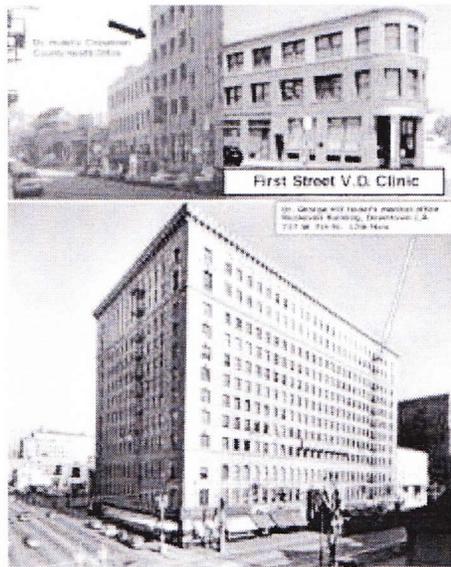
Dr. Hodel was free to go only after Lt. Jemison got the "all clear" call from detectives as they exited the Franklin house, having "wired it for sound."

Charles Manson and the rest of his "Family" were tried and convicted here. So were RFK assassin Sirhan Sirhan, mobsters Bugsy Siegel and Mickey Cohen, actor Robert Mitchum, as well as most of L.A.'s historic bad boys and *femme fatales*. In addition to Elizabeth Short, this was also the morgue where the autopsies on Marilyn Monroe and Robert Kennedy were performed.

The building was deemed "unsafe" after the 1994 Northridge earthquake and has been vacant for nearly two decades. With such a distinguished history, hopefully, it will be saved from the wrecking ball, updated to current codes and preserved.



Dr. George Hill Hodel's four downtown L.A. medical office locations:  
 (1) Health Dept. Chinatown; (2) Health Dept., Hall of Justice [1938-1940  
 (3) His privately owned, First Street VD Clinic; and (4) His private practice at Roosevelt Bldg.



Upper Left: GHH Chinatown office; Upper Right: First Street Clinic  
 Bottom: Dr. Hodel's private practice on 12<sup>th</sup> floor at Seventh and Flower

## A FAMILY SECRET

“The Dahlia murder suspect was a doctor and we know who did it, but we couldn’t put him away.” —Lt. Frank Jemison Hall of Justice Summer, 1951

In mid-October 2006, I was contacted by a close surviving relative of District Attorney investigator, Lt. Frank B. Jemison. For privacy’s sake, I will simply use his initials, “J.F.” He advised me that he was Jemison’s nephew [Jemison’s sister’s son], a medical doctor, and a retired Air Force colonel. Here in his own words is his description of his Uncle Frank, and one very important meeting he remembers from 1951:

### Family background:

Frank was my mother’s brother, the only son of a Methodist minister. He seemed a little eccentric to me. Every two years, he and his wife would fly to Detroit, pick up a new Cadillac, and drive through Ohio unannounced to visit his three sisters. If they weren’t home—too bad, until two years later. He had not followed his father Dave’s advice and entered the ministry and after graduation from Ohio Wesleyan College, he took off for the west coast. I thought he had a Law degree. Family rumor has it that he earned a good bit of money in real estate and as a financial advisor prior to his career as a DA investigator.

I know he was proud of his fortune, which was, at least in 1951, over one million dollars. While there was some family friction with Uncle Frank, he was always described as a person of impeccable personal integrity. I surmise that this integrity plus the fact that he had already made his fortune made him an excellent choice as investigator in the midst of apparent corruption. At his wife’s death, the estate was left to Ohio Wesleyan.

### The Black Dahlia Murder Case:

When I was 12 years old in the summer of 1951, I accompanied my family to a medical convention in San Francisco and we stopped in L.A. for three days, my only extended contact with Uncle Frank. At dinner, he asked if my father, a family physician, and I would like to see where he worked. At that time, the Hall of Justice was one of the, if not the, tallest buildings in LA. My father and Uncle Frank sat in the front seat and I sat in back. As they drove, Dad turned and said, “You know your Uncle Frank was the

investigator for the Black Dahlia case." I liked the name but it didn't mean much to me. They explained that it was a famous murder case. I didn't listen too hard to the conversation until they said the body was cut up. Then I was all ears. Uncle Frank described the cuts, etc., and asked Dad what he thought. My father said he thought it had to be the work of a surgeon. Uncle Frank agreed and said that "We know who did it but we didn't have enough to put him away." For some reason, my twelve year old mind couldn't understand that. I wondered why, if they knew who did it they couldn't arrest him. I never thought of that case from that time, but the name "Black Dahlia" remained stuck in my mind. Just thought this might be interesting to you as background information. Really have enjoyed your book!

Sincerely Yours,  
J.F. M.D. COL USAF (ret)

Dr. J.F.'s "background information" is much more than interesting. With what we already know, his family reflections are extremely illuminating, especially because of his certainty as to when Uncle Frank met with him and made these statements. It was the summer of 1951!

Let's briefly review Lt. Jemison's investigative chronology:

1) **October 1949**—Grand Jury appointed Lt. Frank Jemison to take over the Black Dahlia and other L.A. Lone Woman murder investigations. George Hill Hodel became DA Lt. Jemison's prime Dahlia suspect.

2) **February 15-March 27, 1950**—Jemison established an eighteen-man task force assigned to twenty-four-hour electronic-surveillance of Dr. Hodel's Franklin house.

3) **March 28, 1950**—George Hodel was tipped about surveillance. Realizing he was about to be arrested, he fled the residence. DA Lt. Jemison forced to remove surveillance equipment and shut down operation. After that, Lt. Jemison and police never again have contact with prime suspect, Dr. George Hill Hodel.

4) **February 1951**—Lt. Jemison ordered to close Dahlia case and turn all investigation and evidence and Hodel surveillance recordings and interviews over to LAPD. He complies, but locks away a "second set of investigative files" in the DA vault, where they remain untouched and unexamined until 2003.

5) **July 1951**—Lt. Jemison brought his vacationing brother-in-law, a medical doctor, and his twelve-year-old nephew, "J.F." to his office at the downtown Los Angeles Hall of Justice and informed them that "the Dahlia murder suspect was a doctor and we know who did it, but we couldn't put him away."

On August 15, 1967, some seventeen years after solving the Black Dahlia murder and locking his secret away in the DA vault, Frank Jemison died in Beverly Hills, California. He was sixty-eight.

He died a rich man. His will gave some of it to his alma mater, Wesleyan College in Ohio. The rest of his assets, after his wife Jane's death, were placed as a trust fund for the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office.

In 1979, the Frank Jemison Award was established from his bequest for the purpose of selecting and acknowledging "excellence in public service."

Every year since then, the award has been given to two outstanding employees selected from the DA's Office. One of the recipients is a DA investigator, and the other from the DA's support staff. Each Jemison Award Winner receives \$5,000 cash.