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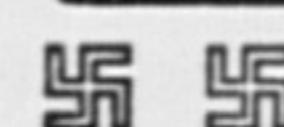
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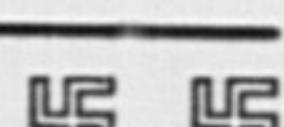
* Resigned January 3, 1916.

THE CHEROKEE FIRES

An N. A. A. C. P. Investigation



By Royal Freeman Nash



CHEROKEE COUNTY, Georgia, suffered four incendiary fires during the twenty-four hours commencing at one-thirty on the morning of Sunday, December 5, 1915. At that hour two barns belonging to Gus Coggins, on the outskirts of Canton, the county seat, were set on fire. Mr. Coggins is one of the largest stock dealers in the South. In one barn 159 mules and two horses perished; in the other 16,000 bushels of corn, many tons of hay, seven car-loads of cottonseed hulls, and a car and a half of cottonseed meal, together with farming implements of every description, were consumed. Out of the largest corn crop ever produced in north Georgia and the greatest number of stock gathered under one roof, nothing was saved but Coggins' celebrated racer, Sledmer.

At almost the same hour, a tenant house belonging to W. F. Bell, five miles east of Canton, which had been vacated by a Negro tenant named Parks Bates the Wednesday previous, was burned. Bates had for some reason departed too suddenly to take with him his household goods, which were burned with the building. In a split board placed in a wire fence nearby were three matches covered with a printed card bearing the inscription "move rapidly."

About one o'clock Monday morning the residence and barn of Otto Sherman, one-half mile east of Hickory Flat, were set on fire and totally consumed. Housed in the barn were eight fine mules. Mr. Sherman was in south Georgia at the time. When neighbors reached the fire and liberated the animals it was discovered that "plugs" had been substituted for the Sherman mules and the good stock run off.

Within a few minutes after the Sherman fire, the torch was applied to the residence and barn of Guy Stringer who lives only a short distance from Sherman. Besides his crops and household effects, seven head of live stock perished in the Stringer blaze. Two old plugs were rescued from the burning barn which did not belong to Stringer.

The Governor of Georgia immediately issued a proclamation offering \$250 reward.

The insurance companies sent in detectives to work on the theory that the owners of the barns near Hickory Flat set them afire to get the insurance. The finding of six of the mules by the sheriff, abandoned in a pasture up in Pickens County, led some to believe that the fires were but a blind to cover plain horse stealing. The belief held by the average man one talks to, however, carries directly back to the anti-Negro "pogrom" of 1912 in Forsyth County.

Forsyth County is a sparsely settled Piedmont section wherein scattered hardwoods alternate with fields of cotton and corn. At the time of the Terror the population was 12,000, of whom 2,000 were colored. No railroad touches the county, nor the counties to the north. The region is in all respects backward, but decidedly the most backward thing in the county was the cracker who came into direct competition with the Negro. These two classes were alike either tenants of the larger landholders, day laborers, or one-mule farmers of their own land. White and colored were paid alike from \$.75 to \$1 a day, but no one would hire a cracker for farm labor or teaming when he could get a Negro. The colored people, too, had a monopoly of the household positions, and the independent Negro farmers had established credit with the bank and the stores to a much larger degree than the crackers. This third class of small capitalists unanimously testifies that Forsyth County for the most part had an industrious, law-abiding, reliable lot of "niggers."

Three of them, however, in the neighborhood of Brown's bridge in eastern Forsyth, raped a white girl named Crow on a Sunday in October, 1912. They had her during one night and a part of the next day. At the end of the orgy they beat her on the head with a rock and left her for dead in the woods covered with boughs, al-