A DOCUMENTED HISTORY OF THE INCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED AT ROSEWOOD, FLORIDA, IN JANUARY 1923

SUBMITTED TO THE
FLORIDA BOARD OF REGENTS
22 DECEMBER 1993

Principal Investigator:
Associate Professor Maxine D. Jones
The Florida State University

Co-Project Director:
Professor Larry E. Rivers
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

Investigators:
Professor David R. Colburn
The University of Florida

R. Tom Dye
The Florida State University

Professor William R. Rogers
The Florida State University

[redacted]

"There is but one way to know the truth, and that is not a golden one. It is fraught with toil and sacrifice and perhaps ridicule. The seeker of the truth must be fearless, he must not be afraid to enter the innermost holies of holies, and to tear down the veils of superstition that hang about any human and so-called divine institution. It is the truth that makes men free. If the truth tears down every church and government under the sun, let the truth be known and this truth only will be known when men cease to swallow the capsules of ancient doctors of divinities and politics; and when men begin to seek the truth in the records of history, politics, religion, and science."

Charles Austin Beard, 1898

[redacted]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Chronology of Events

Date:	
08/05/20	Four black men in McClenny are removed from the local jail and lynched for the alleged rape of a white woman.
11/02/20	Two whites and at least five blacks are killed in Ocoee in a dispute over voting rights. The black community of Ocoee is destroyed, 25 homes, 2 churches, and a Masonic Lodge.
2/12/21	A black man in Wauchula is lynched for an alleged attack on a white woman.
12/09/22	A black man in Perry is burned at the stake, accused of the murder of a white school teacher. A black church, school, Masonic Lodge, and meeting hall are burned.
12/31/22	On New Year's Eve a large Ku Klux Klan Parade is held in Gainesville.
01/01/23	Early morning: Fannie Taylor reports an attack by an unidentified black man.
	Monday afternoon: Aaron Carrier is apprehended by a posse and is spirited out of the area by Sheriff Walker.
	Late afternoon: A posse of white vigilantes apprehend and kill a black man named Sam Carter.
01/02/23	Armed whites begin gathering in Sumner.
01/04/23	Late evening: White vigilantes attack the Carrier house. Two white men are killed, and several others wounded. A black woman, Sarah Carrier is killed and others inside the Carrier house are either killed or wounded.
	Rosewood's black residents flee into the swamps. One black church is burned, and several unprotected homes.
	Lexie Gordon is murdered.

01/05/23	Approximately 200-300 whites from surrounding areas begin to converge on Rosewood.
	Mingo Williams is murdered.
	Governor Cary Hardee is notified, and Sheriff Walker reports that he fears "no further disorder."
	The Sheriff of Alachua County arrives in Rosewood to assist Sheriff Walker.
	James Carrier is murdered.
01/06/23	A train evacuates refugees to Gainesville.
01/07/23	A mob of 100-150 whites return to Rosewood and burn the remaining structures.
01/17/23	A black man in Newberry is convicted of stealing cattle. He is removed from his cell and lynched by local whites.
02/11/23	A Grand Jury convenes in Bronson to investigate the Rosewood riot.
02/15/23	The Grand Jury finds "insufficient evidence" to prosecute.

INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

Racial unrest and violence against African Americans permeated domestic developments in the United States during the post-World War I era. From individual lynchings to massive violence against entire black communities, whites in both the North and the South lashed out against black Americans with a rage that knew few bounds. From Chicago to Tulsa, to Omaha, East St. Louis, and many communities in between, and finally to Rosewood, white mobs pursued what can only be described as a reign of terror against African Americans during the period from 1917 to 1923. In Chicago, Illinois, for example, law and order was suspended for 13 days in July 1919 as white mobs made foray after foray into black neighborhoods, killings and wounding 365 black residents and leaving another 1,000 homeless. In June 1921, the black section of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was almost burned out and thousands were left homeless following racial violence by whites residents.[1]

What had happened to the public's commitment to make the "World Safe for Democracy" that had become the national by-words during World War I? And why had white citizens turned against black Americans with such fury, after

---

[1] Allan H. Spear, Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967); Scott Ellsworth, Death in the Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); also see Elliott Rudwick, Race Riot in East St. Louis, July 2, 1917 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) and William M. Tuttle, Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919 (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

many had participated directly in the war effort and others had patriotically supported it? And finally how did Rosewood and Florida fit into these racial developments?

During the second decade of the twentieth century, African American began to leave the South in record numbers to escape the oppression of segregation and the economic havoc created by the boll weevil's devastation of the cotton crop. They were also drawn to the North by the promise of economic opportunity and greater freedom. Over 40,000 black Floridians joined 283,000 African Americans from other southern states in the migration to Chicago and other midwestern and northeastern cities where a shortage of labor had created great demand for black workers. Labor agents from northern industries and railroads descended on the South in search of black workers. The Pennsylvania Railroad, for example, brought 12,000 to work in its yards and on its tracks, all but 2,000 of whom came from Florida and Georgia.[7]

In a recent study, two historians argue that, while all these issues were important, African Americans went north principally because of the mounting racial violence in the South. With the number of lynchings averaging over 40 per year, the threat of lynching and mob violence had become a serious threat to the average black citizen. As one older study of the black migration noted,

---

[7] John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 4th edition, 1974), 350.

both whites and blacks believed that lynching were "one of the most important causes" and that the fear of the mob had greatly accelerated the exodus.[3]

Recruiting efforts by northern business and especially the notion that someone would actually want their services and be willing to pay a decent salary for it, was a new and welcomed experience for black southerners. Not only was there work in these midwestern and northeastern cities, but the pay was dramatically higher than what a black American could make in Florida and in other southern states, and they could also vote and move about freely. Many African Americans thought they had found the promised land and they wrote to their relatives and friends encouraging them to follow in their footsteps.

In Florida and the South, the response of whites to the massive departure of black residents was mixed. Initially, white southerners ignored or expressed satisfaction with the exodus. For many years, up to the turn of the twentieth century, white Floridians had seriously discussed sending local blacks to a foreign country or to a western region of the United States. For example, Napoleon Broward, while serving as governor from 1905-1909, proposed that Congress purchased territory, either foreign or domestic, and transport blacks to this territory where they could live separate lives and govern themselves.[4]

---

[3] See William Tuttle, Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919 (New York: Atheneum, 1970) and Ellsworth, Death in the Promised Land; also Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 349-350, 369-370.

[4] David R. Colburn and Richard Scher, Florida's Gubernatorial Politics in the Twentieth Century (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1980), 221.

The massive migration, racial stereotypes, the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, and the gradual build-up in preparation for World War I combined to increase racial tensions in ways the nation had not seen since Reconstruction. African Americans viewed the migration as an opportunity for freedom and opportunity outside the South. Whites worried that information sent by northern blacks to friends and family in the South would create unrest in the region. Adding to white concerns was the rapid expansion in the membership of the National Association for the Advanced People (NAACP) during the years from 1914 to 1920. The NAACP was increasingly condemned by southern whites for raising black expectations and for promoting racial unrest in the region.[5]

Underscoring much of the racial hostility were stereotypes and misconceptions that pervaded white America. In his study of the race riot in Chicago in 1919, William Tuttle noted that whites believed that blacks "were mentally inferior, immoral, emotional, and criminal. Some secondary beliefs were that they were innately lazy, shiftless, boisterous, bumptious, and lacking in civic consciousness."[6] Many whites accepted these racial rationalizations because they wanted to, and the newspapers reinforced their attitudes by publishing stories that highlighted black crimes and immoral behavior and by seldom reporting positively about the daily lives of black citizens. Many whites

---

[5] Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 348-353; also see George B. Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), especially 143-218.

[6] Tuttle, Race Riot, 104.

had such a low opinion of blacks that they were prepared to treat blacks in the most inhumane fashion whenever they felt themselves threatened by blacks.

The revival of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia in 1915 reflected the racial concerns of whites both in the North and the South. In that year, the motion picture The Birth of a Nation, based on Thomas Dixon's book The Clansman, sparked great interest in the activities of the first Klan among whites and spurred its revival. The movie ran for 47 weeks in New York alone and portrayed the Klan in heroic and romantic terms, particularly in its conclusions when the Klan rode to save southern civilization from the cowardly black militia. Even President Woodrow Wilson endorsed the film, claiming that "It is like writing history with lightning and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true." Although the movie grossly distorted the reality of Reconstruction, it coincided with white concerns about the black migration and their growing hostility toward racial and ethnic difference in American society. Wherever the movie was shown, race relations deteriorated and racial violence frequently occurred.[7]

The second Klan spread rapidly throughout the South and into many northern communities as well following the showing of The Birth of a Nation. Often allied with local police and sheriff's departments--indeed many police and sheriff's deputies moonlighted as Klansmen--the Klan sought to intimidate blacks into quietly accepting segregation. Throughout this period, the Klan

---

[7] See David Chalmers, Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan (Durham: Duke University Press, 3rd edition, 1987), 26-27.

[redacted]

enjoyed a legitimacy in many areas of the country that it has not experienced since. Political and economic leaders in these communities belonged to the Klan, and the organizations often conducted publicly advertised parades through the center of southern communities, much like veterans on July 4th, with large crowds of whites cheering Klan members. In an editorial in the Gainesville Daily Sun in 1922, the editor noted that he had belonged to the Klan and praised many of its noble qualities.

The spatial and social dislocation that occurred with the mobilization effort for World War I enhanced contact between whites and blacks. This seemingly new arrangement made whites, especially those in the South, uncomfortable. In particular, the arming and training of black soldiers in the South heightened fears among white natives. Although the Army was committed to mobilizing an African American division, it worried about where to train the troops in light of southern concerns. The 92nd division was eventually trained at two places in the North, but many other black troops received their training or were stationed in the South. Skirmishes between whites and blacks often occurred in southern communities when black soldiers came to town, and the threat of more serious violence seemed ever present. German propaganda added considerably to white anguish, especially when this propaganda called on African Americans to lay down their arms or turn them against their real enemies--southern whites. In August 1917, white fears materialized when

armed black soldiers killed seventeen white residents of Houston, Texas, following a prolonged period of racial insults and harassment.[8]

Escalating racial confrontations and rumors during the war years portended ill for race relations during the postwar period. Clashes occurred in many southern communities between black soldiers and local whites, although none as severe as the incident in Houston. At East St. Louis, Illinois, black competition for white jobs ignited a fierce race riot on July 2, 1917, in which nine whites and thirty-nine blacks lost their lives, and black homes were indiscriminately torched. Over 300 buildings valued above $500,000 were destroyed in the black section of town. Shouts of "Burn 'em out" were heard throughout the violence and would become the battle cry of the white mob during the postwar period.[9]

Rumors also circulated in the States in 1918 that black soldiers had been warmly received in Europe and had had their way with white women in France. Back home, white militants warned that black veterans would no longer be content with black women when they returned from Europe.

As the massive exodus of African Americans continued from the northern counties of Florida during the war years, Governors Park Trammell (1913-1917) and his successor Sidney Catts (1917-1921) essentially ignored it. Trammell, who had been the state's Attorney General prior to becoming governor, was no

---

[8] Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 336-340.

[9] Rudwick, Race Riot in East St. Louis, 41057.

friend of black Floridians and during his Attorney Generalship, he had disregarded the lynching of 29 blacks and did the same when another 21 were lynched during his governorship. Catts had been elected on a platform that was anti-Catholic and anti-black. Once in office, he publicly labeled black residents as part of "an inferior race," and he refused to criticize two lynchings in 1919. When the NAACP complained about these lynchings, Catts wrote denouncing the organization and blacks generally, declaring that "Your Race is always harping on the disgrace it brings to the state by a concourse of white people taking revenge for the dishonoring of a white woman, when if you would . . . [teach] your people not to kill our white officers and disgrace our white women, you would keep down a thousand times greater disgrace."[10]

Catts reversed himself, however, when white business leaders, especially those in the lumber and turpentine business, began to complain that the continued out migration of blacks was having a devastating effect on labor availability and labor costs in Florida. Suddenly Catts urged blacks to stay in Florida, and called for unity and harmony among the races. Officials in Jacksonville charged labor agents a $1,000 licensing fee for recruiting black citizens and on occasion threatened their lives to discourage them from persuading more blacks to leave. Few black citizens listened to Catts or were

---

[10] Colburn and Scher, Florida's Gubernatorial Politics, 222.

intimidated by threats.[11] The migration continued to escalate as a quiet protest against racial conditions in the South.

With the end of World War I, racial concerns about the black migration and returning black veterans coincided with the resurgence of nativism. Native Americans worried that their society was being overrun by people who had very different values and political beliefs than they did. Madison Grant captured their concerns in a book entitled The Passing of the Great Race, which was reissued in 1921 and 1922 and in which Grant warned that the great Nordic race was being endangered by the increasing numbers of inferior peoples, especially blacks. The massive wave of immigration prior to World War I and the growing presence of African Americans in the nation's cities spurred nativist opposition. The second Ku Klux Klan, in particular played upon American concerns about difference by attacking both blacks and immigrants indiscriminately.[12]

Social unrest created havoc with the nation's adjustment to post-World War I conditions. Urban workers complained bitterly about low hourly wages and working conditions, and many went on strike. The involvement of recent immigrants in the labor unrest and in the socialist movement in 1919 and 1920 led some to believe that American institutions were threatened by ethnic and racial militants. Fear became so widespread that many alleged that communist

---

[11] Ibid.

[12] John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925 (New York: Atheneum, 1965), 149-157.

labor groups, in particular, with allies in the NAACP, were plotting to overthrow the United States.

Racial hostilities in the North were further heightened by continued immigration of black southerners and the expansion of black neighborhoods into white residential areas. In Chicago, a peaceful beach scene on July 27, 1919, turned violent when whites stoned a teenaged black swimmer who allegedly crossed over into the white area. Racial encounters occurred throughout the city on the following day with both groups arming themselves and attacking one another. By the second day, two armed camps had formed and whites assaulted the black residential area on the south side of the city. For thirteen days, Chicago was literally without law and order as the violence went back and forth. Over 38 people were killed, another 520 wounded, and 1,000 people lost their homes in the nation's worst race riot.[13] The violence in Chicago, East St. Louis, Omaha, and several other northern communities left the dreams and aspirations of black citizens shattered.

As events in Chicago and East St. Louis made clear, black citizens had changed their attitude about white violence and intimidation. No longer content to sit quietly by while mobs stormed their communities and destroyed their property, blacks began to defend themselves against the mounting violence. Claude McKay paid tribute to this militant "New Negro" in a poem, *If We Must*

---

[13] Spear, Black Chicago, vii, 201-222; also Tuttle, Race Riot.

Die, written during the epidemic of race riots that were sweeping the country in 1919:

> If we must die, let it not be like hogs
> Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
> While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
> Making their mock at our accursed lot.
> If we must die, O let us nobly die,
> So that our precious blood may not be shed
> In vain; then even the monsters we defy
> Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
>
> O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
> Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
> And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
> What though before us lies the open grave?
> Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
> Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Encouraged by McKay's poem and by the urging of the NAACP and other black leaders, blacks now appeared in public with rifles at their sides. They also volunteered to protect black prisoners whose lives were threatened by a white mob. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, a band of armed blacks arrived at the jail to offer their assistance to police officers who were outmanned and outgunned in trying to protect black prisoners from a hostile white crowd. In other southern communities, black residents increasingly carried weapons to protect themselves against the rising tide of lynching in the postwar period. The notion of an armed black population in their midst sent shivers through the white community and contributed to a paranoia that fed racial fears and hostility.[14]

---

[14] Rudwick, Race Riot at East St. Louis; Ellsworth, Death in the Promised Land; and Tuttle, Race Riot.

Newspapers added to white fears by publishing a daily litany of alleged racial attacks and alleged rapes against white women. A day seldom went by during the period from 1917 to 1923 in which an incident of this kind was not reported on the front page. Violent retribution was the accepted manner of response in the South, in particular, but also in the North for crimes against white women. Lynchings steadily escalated from 38 in 1917 to 58 in 1918. During the period from 1918 to 1927, lynch mobs took the lives of 454 persons, of whom 416 were African American. In Florida, 47 black citizens were lynched during the same period. It was open season on African Americans, with any violation of southern racial codes often sufficient to warrant execution. So violent did the communities become that public notices were placed in newspapers inviting people to come and watch the burning of a live Negro.[15]

Florida was part and parcel of this frenzied violence. In addition to the 47 blacks who died by lynching during this period, the Klan attacked the black community of Ocoee, Florida, in the western part of Orange County, in November 1920 and destroyed several homes when two local black citizens--Mose Norman and July Perry attempted to vote. Approximately six black residents and two whites were killed in the violence, and 25 black homes, two churches, and a lodge were destroyed[16] In Perry, Florida, in December 1922,

---

[15] Tindall, <u>The Emergence of the New South</u>, 172.

[16] Lynching-Ocoee, Florida. Papers of the NAACP. Part 7. The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955. Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, (continued...)

one month before the Rosewood incident, a white school teacher was murdered by an escaped convict. The man and an alleged accomplice were quickly captured by sheriff and placed in the Perry jail. Local whites, joined by men from as far away as Georgia and South Carolina, took the two black men from the Sheriff and his deputies and badly beat Charlie Wright, the escaped convict, in order to extract a confession and to determine if others was involved. Wright, however, refused to indict any one else in the crime. He was subsequently burned at the stake, and two other black men, who were suspected of being involved in the teacher's murder, were shot and hung, although they were never implicated in the crime. Following the murders, the white mob turned against the entire black community and burned their church, masonic lodge, amusement hall, and black school. Several homes were also torched.[17]

The Perry story, recounted on the front page of the Gainesville Sun from December 4 to the 13th, left white and black citizens in the area in a state of high tension. The day after events in Perry concluded, the Sun reported that two blacks killed a white farmer at Jacobs, Florida, near Marianna. Whites lived in great fear, apparently persuaded that blacks were bent on randomly killing

---

[16](...continued)
1912-1953. Reel 9, Group 1, Series C, Administrative Files, Box C-353, Microfilm, 1987. University Publications of America. Also see Lester Dabbs, Jr., "A Report of the Circumstances and Events of the Race Riot on November 2, 1920 in Ocoee, Florida," M.A. Thesis, Stetson University, July 1969.

[17] The Gainesville Sun, especially the issues from December 8-9, 1922.

whites. Black residents of the area seemed to understand that they were sitting on a tinder box that might well explode again at any moment. In less than a month the black community of Rosewood felt the iron hand of the white mob.

ROSEWOOD AND THE RACIAL VIOLENCE OF JANUARY 1923

Lynching had become so common in the United States, especially in the South, that in 1921 Representative L. C. Dyer of Missouri introduced a bill in the House of Representatives to make lynching a federal crime. Dyer acted out of conscience but also at the strong behest of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The bill passed the House, but Southerners in the Senate organized a filibuster that prevented a vote, resulting in the measure's failure and leaving the states to deal with the lynching problem. Although the number of lynchings had declined from sixty-four in 1921 to fifty-seven in 1922, the record was not a source of pride. In the year just ended, fifty-one of the victims were blacks and six were whites. Texas led the nation with eighteen. It was followed by Georgia, eleven; Mississippi, nine; Florida, five; Arkansas, five; Louisiana, three; Alabama, two; Tennessee, two; Oklahoma, one; and South Carolina, one.[18]

---

[18] By 1923 students of race relations in the United States relied on statistics issued annually by Tuskegee Institute in Alabama as a major source of information. Of particular interest were the results of research into mob violence and lynching. The staff at Tuskegee issued its reports at the end of each year. These statistics and other data were reported in depth by black newspapers and in less detail by their white counterparts. See Gainesville Daily Sun, January 2, 1923, a white journal, and the Baltimore [Maryland] Afro-American, January 6, 1923. Throughout this study, unless a newspaper has the state where it was published placed in brackets, or the state is in the name itself, or unless the state where it was published is obvious, as in Chicago Defender, it is a Florida journal.

It is doubtful that the handful of residents in Rosewood, Florida, ever read the Tuskegee report. Yet its citizens would be victims of racial violence in 1923 and several would be murdered. In the first week of January, Rosewood was the center of what became known variously as a riot, a massacre, and a race war. A small hamlet of twenty-five or thirty families in Levy County, Rosewood was largely populated by blacks. Elsie Collins Campbell, a white woman of Cedar Key, once lived at Rosewood, and was about three years old at the time of the disturbance. She remembered the village as one of green forests.[19] This view is shared universally by blacks and whites when they describe the community's dominant features. Population estimates of the settlement nestled along the Seaboard Air Line Railroad vary, but none of them place it as being large.[20] Rosewood and nearby Sumner constituted a precinct of 307 people in 1910 (158 whites, 128 blacks, and 21 mulattoes); by 1920 the population had more than doubled to 638, except now blacks were a majority with 344 people, while white residents numbered 294. The Rosewood voting precinct in 1920 had 355 African Americans.

Rosewood is located nine miles east of Cedar Key in western Levy County and was established on March 10, 1845. What became the village of Rosewood--section 29, township 14 south: range 24 east--was first surveyed in

---

[19] Tom Dye and William W. Rogers interview with Elsie Collins October 18, 1993, at Cedar Key, Florida.

[20] See St. Petersburg Evening Independent, January 5, 1923.

1847. By 1855 seven homesteads were strung out along a dirt trail leading to Cedar Key and the Gulf of Mexico. The Florida Railroad connecting Cedar Key with Fernandina opened in 1861. Rosewood took its name from the abundant red cedar that grew in the area. By 1870 the abundant red cedar that grew in the area and the commercial production of oranges, as well as vegetable farming and limited cotton cultivation, justified a railroad station and small depot at Rosewood. The cedar was cut in the Rosewood vicinity, shipped by rail to Cedar Key on the Seaboard Airline Railway, which had replaced the Florida Railroad, and processed there at two large international pencil mills. The processed timber was then sent by boats to New York factories and fashioned into lead pencils.

Prosperity meant the establishment of a post office and a voting precinct in 1870. Black and white families moved in, and although the hamlet became a small village, Rosewood was never incorporated. The county opened a school for whites, and soon a privately owned hotel for whites began registering guests. Whites established a Methodist church in 1878, and blacks followed in 1883 with their own African Methodist Episcopal church. Pleasant Hill, a second AME church, was founded in 1886.

By 1890 the red cedar had been cut out, forcing the closing of the pencil mills at Cedar Key. The community had a black majority by 1900, as white families moved out, leasing or selling their land to blacks. The post office and

school closed, relocating to the site of a new cypress mill that opened in Sumner, a village three miles west of Rosewood.

But Rosewood survived. Some of its male residents obtained work at the large saw mill in Sumner; a number of Rosewood's black women worked at Sumner as part-time domestics for white families. Some men worked at a turpentine still located at Wylly, a small settlement one mile to the east. Other Rosewood blacks worked for the black-owned M. Goins & Brothers' Naval stores company in Rosewood. The company prospered by distilling turpentine and rosin obtained from the large tracts of pine trees growing nearby. Housing for some laborers was in Rosewood's "Goins Quarters," and at its peak the Goins brothers' operation owned or leased several thousand acres of land. Other African Americans made their living by small scale farming and by trapping in the vast Gulf Hammock that surrounded the area. Gulf Hammock was also the name of a village six miles south of Rosewood. Although some whites moved away, others remained so that Rosewood was never exclusively a black settlement. The village's largest total population was seven hundred in 1915; in 1923 blacks made up the majority.

Facing a number of law suits from competing white firms over land rights, the Goins family terminated their operations, and by 1916 had removed to Gainesville in adjoining Alachua County. Even so, Rosewood maintained its sense of community. A number of black owned businesses continued to operate. There was a general store operated by a white family and another by

a black family. One black operated a sugar mill. Blacks organized a private school and hired Mrs. Mullah Brown as the teacher. The community baseball team, the Rosewood Stars, had their own playing field (near the depot) and played home and home games against teams in Levy and surrounding counties.

In 1920 Rosewood had three churches, a train station, a large one-room black masonic hall, and a black school. There were several unpainted plank wood two-story homes and perhaps a dozen two-room homes that often included a lean-to or a half-roofed room. There were also a number of small one-room shanties, some of them unoccupied.[21]

The events that culminated in the Rosewood affair began on the morning of January 1, 1923, at Sumner, the neighboring saw mill village three miles away. Residents would remember the winter as one of the coldest on record. Frances ("Fannie") Taylor, a twenty-two-year-old married woman, whose husband James Taylor (thirty) had gone to work at Cummer and Sons saw mill at Sumner, was home alone. Fred Kirkland and Elmer Johnson, two whites who were young men in 1923, remembered seventy years later that Taylor's job

---

[21] This condensation of Rosewood's history is based on research by Tom Dye who utilized minutes of the Levy County Board of Commissioners, state and federal manuscript census reports, Florida Railroad Commissioner reports, Levy County deed record books, other primary sources, official and unofficial, and a large number of secondary sources. He is also the author of the useful "Race, Ethnicity and the Politics of Economic Development: A Case Study of Cedar Key, Florida," Unpublished Master's thesis, Florida State University, 1992.

at the mill required him to oil the equipment before the other workers arrived. It was his habit, once he got the mill started, to return home for breakfast.[22]

Deed records do not indicate that the Taylors owned property in Sumner. Their residence, said to have been surrounded by a picket fence, was probably owned by the Cummer Lumber Company. The company was headquartered in Jacksonville. Large operations were begun in Levy County in 1910 when the company purchased land for a railroad right of way. Several hundred men, whites and blacks, were employed at the mill whose main wood product was cypress lumber. The company's "quarters" were segregated by race. Another large labor force worked in the surrounding woods and swamps cutting timber and transporting it to the mill. From 1910 through the 1920s (it burned in 1927 and was never replaced), the company was engaged in a large number of real estate transactions.

James Taylor had married Fannie Coleman on April 25, 1917, a day when they went to the courthouse at Bronson and had County Judge John R. Willis perform the ceremony. Some accounts claim that by 1923 the Taylors had two small sons. The census for 1920 noted that the Taylors had a one-year-old daughter named Bernice.[23]

---

[22] Tom Dye and William W. Rogers interview with Fred Kirkland, December 2, 1993, at Chiefland, Florida; David Colburn interview with Elmer Johnson, November 10, 1993, at Sanford, Florida.

[23] Levy County Deed Book 5, 121-124. Hereinafter cited as LCDB with appropriate book and page numbers; Levy County Marriage Book 3, 1916-1927,
(continued...)

According to Fannie Taylor's version of events, a black male came on foot to her house that morning and knocked. When she opened the door the man proceeded to "assault" her. From most accounts the intruder did not consummate the act of rape, although he beat her about the head and face. Some versions of the event claimed that she was both raped and robbed. Fannie Taylor's cries for help attracted the attention of neighbors, and her assailant fled, supposedly headed south for Gulf Hammock, a dense expanse of swamps covered with jungle-growth vines, palmettoes, and forests. Although Fannie Taylor was not seriously injured and was able to describe what happened, the shock of the assault rendered her unconscious for several hours. Because no one ever disputed that some kind of physical attack took place, the incident was never referred to as an "alleged attack."[24]

The white community was practically unanimous in its belief that the man who assaulted Fannie Taylor was black. That view was not challenged in

---

[23](...continued)
123-124. Both on file at the Levy County Courthouse, Bronson, Florida; Manuscript Census Returns 1920, Levy County, Florida, Sheet 6B, on file at the Florida State Archives, Tallahassee. Various people have described the saw mill operations at Sumner. Of particular value is the Elmer Johnson interview. Six years old in 1923, Johnson lived at Sumner where his father was the mill foreman for the Cummer company.

[24] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 3, 1923; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 2, 1923. Another description of Sumner was provided in Tom Dye and William W. Rogers interview with Oliver Miller, December 2, 1993, at Cedar Key, Florida.

contemporary accounts, but a number of blacks whose families were involved in the trouble disagree with the white version of events.

Lee Ruth Bradley Davis, who was a month away from her ninth birthday when the attack occurred, lived in Rosewood with her father John Wesley Bradley and her brothers and sisters in 1923. She was the seventh of nine children: Hoyt, Kellie, Bradley, Donarie, Marion, Sylvester, Ivory Lee (herself), Wesley James, and Clift. Virginia Bradley, her mother, was dead. Davis based her account on stories told to her by her father (who was involved in the week's events), by her grandmother Sarah Carrier, her cousin Philomena Carrier, by other principals, and by her own memory.

According to Davis, it was a white man who visited Fannie Taylor that New Year's morning. Never identified by name, he supposedly worked for the Sea Board Air Line railroad. He got off the train and was seen entering the Taylor house by Sarah Carrier and her granddaughter Philomena. Sarah Carrier was employed by Fannie Taylor on a weekly basis to do her washing and ironing. On occasion but not that day Sarah took her youngest son and her grandson, Arnett Turner Goins, with her to stack wood for the Taylor household. She worked for other white employers as well. That morning the woman and the young girl had, as usual, walked from Rosewood and arrived at the same time that the white man entered the Taylor house. (Present day family members, including Arnett Turner Goins, declare that Sarah Carrier remembered having seen the same man visit Fannie Taylor on several previous

occasions). The white visitor remained a while, reemerged, and left sometime before twelve o'clock. It is not known if James Taylor came home for breakfast, but about noon he returned home (perhaps for lunch) and his wife told him that a black man had assaulted her.[25]

Some African Americans in the area contended privately at the time, even as black descendants contend publicly today, that the man who visited Fannie Taylor was her white lover. For some reason they quarreled, and after physically abusing her, the man left. Then the white woman protected herself by fabricating the story of being attacked by a black man.

Fannie Taylor's version of the assault was the one accepted by the white community of Sumner, and the news spread rapidly. Soon a posse under the direction of Levy County's Sheriff Robert Elias Walker, popularly known as Bob, was formed to search for the unidentified felon. Walker was a longtime Levy County resident. According to the Tampa Morning Tribune, "The entire county is aroused, and virtually every able bodied man has joined in the search."[26]

---

[25] Deposition of Lee Ruth Davis, May 4, 1992, 12-16. The deposition was conducted by Stephen F. Hanlon at the law offices of Holland & Knight, Miami, Florida. See also the deposition taken by Hanlon of Arnett Turner Goins, February 27, 1993, at Orlando, Florida. Goins's version of the assault was based on what his sister Philomena told him. See 15-17. Goins was also interviewed by Larry Rivers, September 24, 1993, at Tallahassee Florida. The two interviews differ in detail but are basically similar. See Larry Rivers interview with Dr. Arnett Shakir, September 25, 1993, at Tallahassee, Florida. Dr. Shakir is the daughter of Arnett Turner Goins. Dr. Shakir placed in perspective much of her father's testimony.

[26] Tampa Morning Tribune, January 2, 1923. For the marriage see Levy County Marriage Book B, 1905-1906.

Sheriff Walker obtained a pack of bloodhounds from Captain H. H. Henderson at Convict Camp Number 17, Fort White, near High Springs in neighboring Alachua County.[27] There is some evidence that the manhunt was begun before the dogs arrived, and that the posse used a single dog initially.

Although the lawman headed a deputized posse, the search was soon joined by numerous other men who converged from several locales. By Tuesday night a crowd estimated at between four hundred and five hundred people combed the woods. It was logistically difficult, if not impossible, for all of them to be sworn in as deputies. Many of the men were, in fact, independent agents who formed their own search parties and pursued their own extra-legal objectives.[28]

Jason McElveen, a white resident of Sumner, would remember Sheriff Walker's concern. He told McElveen, "I don't know what to do." The lawman added, "this crowd wants blood, and they [are] going to have blood." McElveen told the sheriff, "Bob, keep them [the posses] out of the colored quarters in the mill [at Sumner]....We knew if we could keep them niggers in the mill we could

---

[27] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 3, 1923. The Gainesville Daily Sun, January 2, 1923, reported that the bloodhounds were obtained from Columbia County. If that was so, the convict camp could have been at White Springs. In fact, the bloodhounds came from Fort White. See Levy County Commissioners' Minutes, Book K, 314. On file at the Levy County Courthouse, Bronson.

[28] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 3, 1923; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 3, 1923.

keep them straight, but we knew if we let them out of there the farmers [white posse members] would get them.[29]

The assault on Fannie Taylor and the search for the black man whom she accused of committing the crime were the initial incidents in the story of the Rosewood tragedy. What happened in the week of January 1-8, was reported across the state and nation by the Associated Press.[30] The AP correspondent or correspondents who supplied the Rosewood stories to black and white newspapers were never identified with by-lines. Because AP reports were often filed the same day from different locales, it is probable that there were several "stringers" (part-time reporters who were paid by the story). The accounts went out by telegram and telephone to various towns and cities where they were picked up and edited further to fit space and local interest needs. Most newspapers--from the New York Times to the Gainesville Daily Sun in Florida--credited the AP as their source. A few journals gave no source, even though their accounts were obviously supplied by the AP. Some newspapers printed their own stories when there was a local angle germane to the event. Beyond the AP dispatches, a number of newspapers reacted editorially. This was more true of the black journals than of their white counterparts. Besides the AP's coverage, the black newspaper, the Chicago Defender, ran an account

---

[29] Jason McElveen tape, no date, on file at the Cedar Key Historical Society Museum, Cedar Key, Florida.

[30] Formed in New York as early as 1848 as a news gathering service, the modern AP, as the syndicate was popularly known, was reorganized in 1900.

authored by Eugene Brown, and another unsigned story was used by a black newspaper, the St. Louis Argus. Presumably both reporters were black. Their versions of events were at odds with those of the AP.

In Levy County suspicion soon fell on Jesse Hunter, a black man serving time on a convict road gang for having carried concealed weapons. Hunter had just escaped from a crew working on what is now State Road 24 (other reports had it that he was laboring in a turpentine camp, under Florida's notorious convict lease system).[illegible] Hunter was reported as having been in the vicinity of Rosewood. Sometime before the assault, he was allegedly seen in the company of Sam Carter, a forty-five-year-old black man who resided mid-way between Rosewood and Sumner. Carter, a blacksmith, had previously had a brush with the law in 1920. He was accused of attempting a felony by assaulting a Levy County deputy sheriff with a shotgun. The grand jury declined to find a true bill against him, and Carter was set free.[illegible]

Apparently that same day (Monday, January 1) Sheriff Walker arrested two blacks who were suspects and put them in jail at Bronson, the county seat. The AP story did not identify the two men, but, as will be seen, one of them was Aaron Carrier, member of the close knit Carrier family in Rosewood, a

---

[illegible] For an informed study see Noel Gordon Carper, "The Convict Lease System in Florida, 1866-1923," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1964.

[illegible] Box C, 1920-1923, Office of the Clerk, Levy County Courthouse; Kirkland interview.

community bonded by families related to each other by marriage and by long time associations. Walker's real suspect was Jesse Hunter, and the search now included Carter, wanted for whatever information he might have and to determine the extent of his implication.

As reported in the newspapers, that same New Year's day the bloodhounds led a posse to Sam Carter's home. The occupant of the house admitted that he hid one of the men wanted (newspaper accounts never said that the man hidden at Carter's house was Hunter). Carter further admitted to hitching up his horse and wagon and driving the fugitive away (presumably back toward Rosewood). Carter then led the posse to a spot where he and the fugitive parted ways. The bloodhounds were unable to pick up a scent. Angry and thinking they had been duped, the group abandoned whatever pretext they possessed as a legal posse and became little more than a lynch mob. When Carter did not answer all questions satisfactorily, he was tortured and his body was riddled with bullets and then hanged from a tree. According to the Associated Press, his corpse was left lying in the road where it was discovered the next morning (Tuesday, January 2).

Fred Kirkland, a seventeen-year-old white boy, and his father happened to be in Sumner on the day of the assault. In 1993 Fred recalled that his father and uncle, O. B. and Garret Kirkland, were members of the posse that captured Carter. Kirkland's memory of the assault and its aftermath conforms basically with the

accounts of contemporary newspapers. The murder of Sam Carter marked the initial death in the unfolding drama. With so many men scouring the area, Sheriff Walker must have considered the tracking dogs of no further value, and, in any event, he returned the bloodhounds to the Fort White convict camp the next day (Tuesday, January 2). The county commissioners later voted a payment of $50 for their use. It should be noted that while many posse members were outsiders, a number of them were whites who worked at the sawmill in Sumner. They continued working at their regular daytime shifts and early in the week, some of them joined the search at night. No contemporary accounts mentioned that black mill laborers were members of the posse. Their absence was deliberate.[34]

The contemporary newspaper reports are at variance with accounts given later by black survivors and their descendants. According to Lee Ruth Davis, who got the story from her father, John Bradley, the white lover of Fannie Taylor, realized that he was in trouble and went to the home of Sam Carter. He told Carter that he was a mason and needed help. Carter, a tall man with Indian features, was a member of the black Masonic Lodge # 148 in Rosewood. The masonic ties of fraternity and brotherhood reached beyond the barrier of race, and Carter agreed to help him. Carter hitched his horse to a wagon or cart and carried the fugitive to the house of Aaron Carrier, twenty-six,

---

[34] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 3, 1923; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 2, 3, 1923; Gainesville Daily Sun, January 4, 1923. See also Baltimore Afro-American, January 6, 1923.

also a mason, who lived in Rosewood. Carrier agreed to help, and gave the white man a meal. Then the three men left in Carter's wagon and took a road into Gulf Hammock, proceeding until they reached water (probably the Waccasassa River). There the fugitive escaped in a boat, and Carter and Carrier returned to their homes.[34]

Arnett Doctor, the son of Philomena Carrier, the young girl who witnessed with her grandmother the white man enter and later leave Fannie Taylor's house, recounted in 1993 a slightly different account from that of Lee Ruth Davis. Doctor is the leader in the Carrier and related families' current efforts to research and make public the events at Rosewood. Doctor's version was based, in part, on conversations that he later had with family members, including Aaron Carrier.[35] Supposedly, the white fugitive, aware that no train would be running soon, sought to leave the area. As an employee of the Seaboard Air Line railroad he knew Aaron Carrier, a World War I veteran, and many other people in Rosewood and Sumner. Aware that Carrier was a mason, he went first to Carrier's house seeking aid. The two men went in Carrier's wagon to the home of fellow mason Sam Carter, and from there the three men carried out the successful escape described by Lee Ruth Davis.

---

[34] Davis deposition, 21-22.

[35] Maxine Jones, Larry Rivers, and William W. Rogers interview with Arnett Doctor, September 24, 1993, at Tallahassee, Florida.

Arnett Turner Goins, eight-years-old in 1923, gave a deposition seventy years later that paralleled Arnett Doctor's version.[36]

Another part of the story surrounding the death of Carter that was not described in the newspapers comes from the deposition of Minnie Lee Mitchell Langley given on June 2, 1992. Ten at the time of the Rosewood affair, she and her brother, Reuben, were the children of Theodore and Daisy Mitchell. Minnie Lee Langley's mother died when she was a baby, and she and her brother were raised by her grandparents James and Emma Carrier. According to her, the grandparents, like many other blacks in Rosewood, owned their land. Emma Carrier also raised her own children: Lorna, Carol, Rita Carrier Williams (her married name), Beulah, Wade, Eddie, J. C. and perhaps more. Aaron was also her son. James Carrier had suffered two strokes. Incapacitated for mill work, he earned his living trapping and selling hides. Emma Carrier milked cows and performed other chores for whites and occasionally sold eggs and vegetables at the Rosewood railroad station. The family owned its own cow and had a garden that was planted in, among other vegetables, sweet potatoes and peas.[37] The young girl and her brother

---

[36] Ibid. See also Goins deposition, 18-20. Goins relied on his memory and stories related to him and Sarah Carrier and others.
For Aaron Carrier's service record see Roll 3, Record Group 197, Series 1204, Florida World War I Card Roster, Blacks, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

[37] Deposition of Minnie Lee Langley, June 2, 1992, 1-10. The depositions was conducted by Stephen F. Hanlon at Jacksonville, Florida.

referred to James and Emma Carrier as mama and papa and to their uncles and aunts as their brothers and sisters.

Minnie Lee Langley went to school in a large one-room frame building located next to the masonic lodge. The all black student body was taught by the previously mentioned Mullah Brown. On New Year's Day 1923, Minnie Lee Langley remembered that at dark "Mama and we all was standing out in the yard and...here come a gang of crackers, coming down the railroad." A black man leading a dog was with them. How many men were there? As Minnie Lee Langley put it, "There's so many...all kinds, horseback, some...riding them little buggy cars down the dirt roads, some of them was in the railroad, just as far as you can see them." She estimated there were between 100-150 in the crowd. Some of the men wore "them big ole' tall hats," and neither she nor her grandmother had ever seen or knew any of the people. When asked if she had witnessed anybody pass, Emma Carrier replied negatively, and the posse went down the road to Aaron Carrier's house. The man with the dog went into the black man's house and came out by the back door.

One member of the posse came back to Emma Carrier's house, where Aaron was, and she identified him as her son. According to the story, Aaron was sick in bed. The probable reason was that Aaron Carrier needed an alibi if he was accused of helping Fannie Taylor's attacker escape. At any event, the posse dragged Carrier from his bed and took him to a stand of pine trees, and there was much talk about getting a rope and hanging him. At that point, a

man named Edward Pillsbury, the son of W. H. Pillsbury, who ran the Cummer saw mill and for whom Sarah Carrier worked from time to time, got Carrier away from his captors. Some stories also credit Sheriff Walker with helping Carrier escape. Carrier was placed in the back seat of Pillsbury's car, laid down, and taken to the safety of the jail in Bronson [Minnie Lee Langley said he was driven to Gainesville, but more likely it was Bronson].

The posse also confronted a man named Sylvester Carrier, thirty-two, and ordered him out of town. Carrier told them that he lived in Rosewood and planned to remain there. With the death of Sam Carter, the near lynching of Aaron Carrier, and threats against Sylvester Carrier, the tension mounted. Sylvester Carrier took the lead in suggesting that various family members go to the home of his mother, Sarah Carrier, where he could protect them better. Sarah Carrier had a comfortable two-story home in Rosewood. Besides washing and ironing for Fannie Taylor, she worked sometimes for D. P. "Poly" Wilkerson, an official at the mill in Sumner. Sarah was well known and highly respected in the area.[38] She was married to Hayward J. Carrier. While it is unknown when the couple moved to the Rosewood area, they bought an acre of land there on February 23, 1901. The Carriers paid S. C. and J. J. Cason $60 for the property that was located close to the railroad right of way.[39]

---

[38] Ibid., 17-23.

[39] LC Marriage book, LCDB S, 212. The deed book is not quite clear on whether it was an acre of half an acre.

According to Minnie Lee Langley, the posse took Carter in a wagon to a place near the railroad station in Rosewood. The depot was close to a baseball field and near the home of the previously mentioned Sylvester Carrier--a black hunter, marksman, and music teacher--who would become a central figure over the next few days. Sylvester Carrier, proud and independent, had married Mattie Mitilda Smith, a strikingly attractive woman with long hair, in November 1912. Highly regarded in the community, Sylvester was active in Rosewood's AME church, even though he and his father had served prison time in 1910 for changing brands on livestock. Minnie Lee Langley said that the white men took Carter into some woods behind Sylvester Carrier's house where they hanged and shot him. No blacks witnessed the lynching of Carter, but news spread rapidly, and the black community expected more trouble to follow.[40]

Gary Moore, a free lance journalist who has studied the Rosewood events for twelve years, wrote in the Miami Herald's Tropic magazine March 7, 1993, that the men who captured Carter overpowered Sheriff Walker and took his weapon. Moore, who has contributed to this report with a synopsis of his research, has concluded that a World War I veteran named Bryant Kirkland, shot Carter first. It is certain that during the episode several men fired shots into Carter's body. Young Ernest Parham, a white boy, followed the tracking

---

[40] Langley deposition, 23; Levy County Marriage Book 2, 1905-1916, 392; State of Florida Prison Record Book, 3, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

party, saw the capture of Carter, and witnessed his death by shooting. According to Parham a non-resident of the area shot Carter first.[41]

If, as the newspapers reported, Carter's body was found on the road or if he was hanged and shot in Rosewood, as the black families contend, a coroner's jury was called on Tuesday to review his death. The six-man jury issued its report the same day: "We the Jury after the examination of the said Sam Carter who being found lying dead, find that the said Sam Carter came to his death by being shot by unknown party [or parties] so say we all." The report was signed by L. L. Johnson, a justice of the peace, in the absence of a coroner.[42]

Tuesday (January 2) and Wednesday (January 3) were uneventful and were spent in a fruitless search for Hunter and another black said to have been implicated. Then on Thursday, January 4, violence broke out on a large scale. Early that evening reports were received in Sumner that a group of blacks had taken refuge in Rosewood. No one believed that Jesse Hunter was among them, but the situation led to an investigation by a "party of citizens" who went to Rosewood to investigate. They were particularly interested in locating Sylvester Carrier. Ernest Parham, the white youth, explained in his interview that Carrier "was a little bit different than the rest of the people." He considered

---

[41] David Colburn interview with Ernest Parham, November 10, 1993, at Orlando, Florida.

[42] Box C, Office of the Clerk, Levy County Courthouse.

himself the protector of his family and kin. Carrier, already unpopular with certain whites because of his spirit and manner, had supposedly remarked that the assault on Fannie Taylor was "an example of what [Negroes] could do without interference." The whites planned to warn Carrier against further incendiary talk and to discover what he or the others knew about Hunter.[43] Jason McElveen, a white participant, recalled that the news of Sylvester Carrier's alleged statement "was just about like throwing gasoline on a fire when you tell a bunch of white people that." He added, "a bunch of [whites] gathered up and went up there to see them. I didn't have anything but a twelve-gauge shotgun--a pumpgun--with plenty of buckshot."[44]

There were white men who declined to participate in the manhunt. One was the town barber of Cedar Key. Another resident of the town refused even to loan his gun to anyone. He did not want to "have his hands wet with blood," which seemed to be the clear intention of these white residents.[45]

On arriving at Rosewood the posse found a group of African Americans, estimates would vary later but the usual figures ranged between fifteen and twenty-five, barricaded in Sarah Carrier's house. The white posse apparently

---

[43] Parham interview; for the quote attributed to Carrier, see Jacksonville Times-Union, January 6, 1923. The statement that the whites did not expect to find Hunter is from Gainesville Daily Sun, January 13, 1923, quoting Bronson Levy Times Democrat.

[44] McElveen tape.

[45] George De Cergueira Leite Zarur, "Seafood Gatherers in Mullet Springs: Economic Rationality and the Social System," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1975, 51.

had six men initially, a figure which, if accurate, was quickly swelled to many times that number. The whites deliberated about how to accomplish their mission, and particularly how to discover Hunter's whereabouts.

Finally, two men, Henry Andrews, forty-two, Superintendent of the Cummer Lumber Company's saw mill, and C. P. "Poly" Wilkerson, forty-five, a Sumner merchant and mill official, boldly approached the house. Wilkerson, a large man who weighed well over two hundred pounds, and Andrews, short but stocky and powerful, mounted the porch steps and attempted to enter. According to newspaper descriptions, the blacks inside opened fire (those who were armed had shotguns mainly), and the two white men fell dead. Some accounts had the whites firing the first shots. Andrews and Wilkerson were the second and third persons to be killed since Monday. The whites rapidly cordoned off the house and surrounded the building. As described by the Jacksonville Times-Union, they began "to pour a hail of lead into it." From inside their fire was returned. It remains unknown whether any blacks other than Sylvester Carrier answered the whites' fire. Four more white men were wounded, including M. T. (Cecil?) "Sephis" Studstill of Sumner, shot in the arm; Bryan Kirkland of Sumner (also reported as Warner Kirkland of Rosewood); Mannie Hudson of Sumner, scalp wound; and Henry Odum of Jacksonville who worked at Otter Creek, a settlement on the railroad a few

miles north of Rosewood, shot through the neck. Other unnamed whites were also wounded. The fusillade continued.[illegible]

Even by modern standards, the news story was swiftly reported. As buckshot impacted and rifle bullets whined and the outcome remained undecided, an AP reporter telephoned the details from Cedar Key to the Gainesville Daily Sun. Acting on requests from unnamed people (most likely Sheriff Walker and town officials), the reporter asked the Sun to contact Alachua County's Sheriff P. G. Ramsey and have him start immediately for Rosewood with as many men as he could assemble. That was done, and by one o'clock on Friday morning Sheriff Ramsey, Chief Deputy Dunning, and several car loads of deputies and armed citizens were preparing to leave for Levy County.[illegible] In Florida, sheriffs and deputies of one county rarely entered another county on an official mission unless requested by the local sheriff. Such an appeal to Alachua County officials was a statement of how grave the situation was perceived by Levy County whites.

It appears that among those coming from Gainesville were several members of the Ku Klux Klan, who had held a major rally in Gainesville on January 1, that was announced in the Gainesville Sun. A large crowd,

---

[illegible] Jacksonville Times Union, January 5, 1923; see also Tampa Morning Tribune, January 5-6, 1923; Gainesville Daily Sun, January 5, 1923; Jacksonville Journal, January 5, 1923. The physical descriptions of Wilkerson and Andrews are from Kirkland interview.

[illegible] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 5, 1923.

including some Northern tourists, watched as an estimated one hundred Klansmen in full regalia paraded through downtown Gainesville. The white-clad figures carried banners proclaiming their opposition to bootleggers, gamblers, and cheating lawyers. One placard declared, "First And Always--Protect Womanhood." The KKK motorcade disappeared into Gainesville's black section only to emerge at the square an hour later. Then the hooded principals dispersed into the night.[48]

It is possible, even probable, that Klansmen did in fact come to Rosewood, but they did not wear their regalia. The Klan, as an organization, was never specifically accused of participating in the riot. Beyond that, neither Ruth Lee Davis, Minnie Lee Langley, nor their various family members and kin claimed that any of the posse members wore hoods.

At Rosewood the battle was still in progress at 2:30 in the morning of Friday, January 5. One newspaper reported white authorities as believing that unless the blacks surrendered "they will be smoked out."[49] At some point one of the attackers, armed with a flashlight, worked his way across the open space between the crowd and the house. He climbed through a darkened window, switched on his flashlight, cast its beam on the crouching blacks, and shouted to his white comrades to fire. One of the blacks quickly shot him. The bullet

---

[48] Gainesville Daily Sun, January 1-2, 1923; Jacksonville Times-Union, January 3, 1923.

[49] St. Petersburg Evening Independent, January 5, 1923.

struck the intruder's head, inflicting a serious wound. The injured man fell through the window to the ground and was rescued.[60] The next day an unnamed official of the Cummer Lumber Company stated that an unidentified white man had been shot in the head and was dying. This may have been the person who managed to get into the Carrier house, but he remained unidentified and was never listed among the dead or wounded.[61]

There were no other attempts to enter the house. The blacks seemed well supplied with arms and ammunition, and the bright moonlight made the attackers such easy targets that they contented themselves with a siege. Desultory firing from a safe distance ceased around 4 a. m. when the whites' ammunition ran low. More shells and bullets were ordered from Gainesville, as they waited for daylight before making another move.

Blacks were able to use the cease fire to make good their escape. They fled into the nearby woods and swamps and were joined by the other blacks in Rosewood who feared that they would also be attacked. Early on Friday morning the whites approached the house. They retrieved the bodies of Andrews and Wilkerson and took them to their homes where preparations were made for their burials. Both men were well known in Levy County. On entering the house whites discovered the bodies of Sylvester Carrier and his mother

---

[60] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 8, 1923; Miami Herald, January 8, 1923.

[61] St. Petersburg Evening Independent, January 5, 1923.

Sarah Carrier, who had been shot to death. The death toll had now risen to five. Bloodstains were seen, and it was apparent that a number of blacks had been wounded. Thwarted by the escape and angered by the deaths of two whites and the wounding of several others, the "infuriated" whites quickly "tore down pictures, smashed furniture, and completely ransacked the black dwelling."[illegible] Descendants of the Carriers and of other black families of Rosewood do not believe that Sylvester Carrier was killed. They contend that he escaped and died several years later in Texas.

The white mob now acted without restraint. It is unknown what attempts Sheriff Walker made to stop the angry whites or what assistance Sheriff Ramsey was able to render. In any case, the mob burned the Carrier home so that "nothing but ashes was [sic] left to tell the tale of the gun fight."[illegible] They next burned five more houses and a church in the black section. Lexie Gordon, about fifty, a black woman with a light complexion who had hidden under her house, fled when it was set on fire. She sought escape by running toward a

---

[illegible] Andrews had a wife and three children; Wilkerson, had been married to Mattie M. Miller Wilkerson for eighteen years, and the couple had five children. Jacksonville Times-Union, January 6, 1923; St. Petersburg Evening Independent, January 6, 1923; Gainesville Daily Sun, January 5, 1923; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 6, 1923. For the Andrews's marriage see Levy County Marriage Book 1905-1916, 2, 21; on file at the Levy County Courthouse. They were married by the Reverend M. G. Lynn. Andrews left no will, and his wife became administratrix of his real and personal estate. See Letters Administration And Letters Testamontary, Book 3, Office of the Clerk, Levy County, 11-15.

[illegible] Tampa Morning Tribune, January 6, 1923.

clump of bushes in the rear of the blazing building, but was shot to death. Lexie Gordon became the sixth victim.[84]

Rosewood was depopulated as the terrorized African Americans left. Margie Hall, fifteen at the time, remembered later that her family's reaction was typical. Yet her parents, Charles B. and Mary Hall, who had four daughters and five sons, were not a typical black Rosewood family. Hall owned several farms, was a Baptist preacher, and was the village's only black store owner. The family lived in a two-story building, and, as Margie remembered the night of January 4, "all of us children were in bed and my mother was gone to bed. She came into our room and woke us up and said, 'Y'all getup, they're shooting.'" Once awake, Margie continued, "we didn't have time to put any clothes on. We just jumped up and ran out of the house and took off into the woods going toward Wylly."[85]

Years after the incident, Mae McDonald's mother, Ruth Bradley, told her she fled with her parents George and Mary Bradley and other family members. They did not have time to dress properly for the cold weather before entering the nearby protective woods and swamps. The frightened young Ruth believed the white men were searching for any blacks they could find. According to Mae

---

[84] The burning was widely reported, but see Gainesville Daily Sun, January 5, 1923; Jacksonville Journal, January 5-6, 1923; Miami Daily Metropolis, January 5, 1923; Miami Herald, January 5-6, 1923. A good account by a contemporary is Parham interview.

[85] Larry Rivers interview with Margie Hall Johnson, September 24, 1993, at Tallahassee, Florida.

McDonald, her mother "said anything that was black or looked black was killed."[56]

At Sumner a group of armed men surrounded the black district, and no one was permitted to go on the streets. As the forceful stocky, dark complexioned W. H. Pillsbury explained, "I want to keep everything quiet here at Sumner. The important thing for us is to keep our own negroes busy at work, and prevent any spreading of the trouble. We all hope that the negro sought will be captured at once and put an end to this rioting. Every effort is being made to prevent any spread of the race trouble to Sumner."[57] After the first reaction to the assault on Fannie Taylor, Pillsbury persuaded his white workers to remain in Sumner and not join the posses. He also got the whites to keep order in Sumner. Pillsbury was aided by another white man named Johnson who was the mill foreman.[58] A similar precaution was taken at Bronson. That same Friday morning three hundred blacks went to work as usual in Sumner at the Cummer Lumber Company. Several blacks who attempted to leave town were turned back by Sheriff Walker. Guards were stationed around the village to keep blacks who had fled into the woods from returning.[59]

---

[56] Larry Rivers interview with Mae McDonald, September 24, 1993.

[57] For Pillsbury quote see Jacksonville Journal, January 5, 1923.

[58] Parham interview; Johnson interview.

[59] Tampa Morning Tribune, January 6, 1923.

[redacted]

State newspapers reported the events at Rosewood in bold headlines and some took large liberties in describing what was happening. According to the Miami Daily Metropolis, which headlined its story, MANY DIE IN FLORIDA RACE WAR, "Deputized posses and citizens said to be numbering in the thousands were pouring into this village early this morning [Thursday]. Automobile after automobile heavily laden with armed men have arrived, some coming from a distance of about 75 miles."[60] A few out-of-state journals were equally guilty of distorting the news. The Chicago Defender, a black newspaper, ran a story by Eugene Brown, who filed his account from Tallahassee. Brown based his exaggerated report on what he was told from an on-the-scene informant. Supposedly, Ted Cole, an ex-soldier from Chicago had just come to Rosewood, and it was he who rallied the blacks to resist the attack on the Carrier house. According to Brown, the veteran used combat skills acquired in World War I to good effect, managing the stand-off exchange between blacks and whites. The reporter also claimed that nineteen people were killed. The Defender's account seems to have been largely fictional.[61]

On Friday afternoon a seventh death occurred. Mingo Williams, a black turpentine worker about fifty, whose nickname was Lord God, was killed when he was shot through the jaw (or through the head). His body was found on the road near Bronson, some twenty miles from Rosewood. Williams had no

---

[60] Miami Daily Metropolis, January 5, 1923. See ibid., January 6, 1923.

[61] Chicago Defender January 13, 1923, January 13, 1923.

[redacted]

known connection with the trouble at Rosewood and apparently encountered part of the white mob, many of whom had been drinking and were indiscriminately seeking black victims. The posse still fluctuated between two hundred and three hundred men and continued its macabre mission. By nightfall Sheriff Walker told the AP that more trouble was imminent because relatives of the slain blacks were believed to be armed and were expected to cause trouble, although most were hiding in the woods fearful of their lives.[82] Sheriff Ramsey and his deputies returned to Gainesville on Friday afternoon because they believed local officers had matters under "fairly good control."[83]

Sheriff Walker's statement that "more trouble was imminent" was inconsistent with his communication to Governor Cary Hardee in Tallahassee. Learning about the turbulent conditions at Rosewood from the AP dispatches, the governor sent a telegram early Friday morning to Sheriff Walker. He asked for a situation report. As commander-in-chief of the Florida National Guard, Governor Hardee wanted advice on whether to call out the troops. There were various national guard units in several Florida cities (Jacksonville had seven), including Company E 154th Infantry at Live Oak, and Company H at Lake City. Throughout the day the governor waited for a reply. He and his staff closely

---

[82] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 6, 1923; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 6, 1923; Miami Daily Metropolis, January 5-6, 1923.

[83] Tampa Morning Tribune, January 6, 1923.

followed all press bulletins, but Hardee refused to commit himself to action based on unofficial reports.[64]

That afternoon the governor felt comfortable enough to go hunting despite the many verified deaths in Rosewood. Standing by was his secretary, Professor L. B. Edwards. Late in the afternoon a telegram arrived from Sheriff Walker. No copy of the telegram exists in the governor's papers, but various newspaper stories noted that the message did not go into details. The sheriff briefly told Hardee that local authorities had the situation under control. There was no need to activate the national guard according to Walker.[65] As events turned out, the situation was not under control, but the governor accepted the opinion of the Levy County sheriff and never sent in the national guard.

The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch described developments in Tallahassee differently. The journal reported on the riot in close detail but was dependent upon AP stories. It reported: "Although Governor Hardee, when informed on the outbreak, announced that he would send troops to dispel the mob, it was still intact Friday night, numbering between two and three hundred armed men, and was scouring the surrounding country in search for Jesse

---

[64] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 6, 1923; Tampa Morning Tribune, January 6, 1923. Get NG info, including various units from Annual reports of Fla NG.

[65] Ibid.

Hunter...."[66] A respected and influential national publication, the Nation, was critical of the governor: "There has been no indication that the authorities of Levy County or of the State of Florida were even interested in the fate of the Negroes."[67]

That same day (Friday, January 5) a black man answering the physical description of Hunter was arrested in Lakeland, about 130 miles south of Rosewood. Two deputies and two citizens of Rosewood who knew Hunter went to Lakeland. They arrived and concluded that, although the prisoner closely resembled the fugitive, he was not Hunter. The chief of police at Lakeland, noting that the Rosewood people "didn't look as if they would stand much foolishness," held the man over on other charges.[68] The search continued.

James Carrier, brother of Sylvester and son of Sarah who were killed in the Thursday night ambuscade, was one of the besieged occupants who escaped. On Saturday morning he left his hideout in a nearby swamp and returned to Rosewood. There he asked W. H. Pillsbury, the white superintendent of the Cummer mill, for protection. Pillsbury obliged and locked Carrier in one of the remaining houses in Rosewood's black section. Later in

---

[66] Oklahoma City Black Dispatch, January 9, 1923. The newspaper also held that it was the whites who began the firing on Thursday night at the Carrier home.

[67] Nation, January 17, 1923.

[68] Tampa Morning Tribune, January 1, 7, 1923; see also Jacksonville Times-Union, January 7, 1923; Gainesville Daily Sun, January 7, 1923.

the day, as the Jacksonville Times-Union put it, "when a new clash became imminent, the negro was turned over to...twenty-five or thirty men."[69]

Carrier was taken to the black graveyard. There beside the fresh graves of his mother and brother (and perhaps other black victims who may have been buried there), Carrier was interrogated. He probably was questioned and tortured before being taken to the graves, and it is certain that the grilling continued there. His inquisitors demanded the names of the people in the house who had participated in the shooting. They especially wanted to know if Jesse Hunter was one of them. Carrier admitted that he had been in the house and escaped. Yet he refused to name the other blacks. His captors then shot him several times and left his body stretched across one of the graves. The body count now numbered eight.

Later in the day Sheriff Walker oversaw Carrier's burial beside his family members. Walker and other officers reported on Saturday night that the entire vicinity was quiet.[70] Whether the story was true or not, it was reported that several of the blacks who were in the Carrier house had been arrested and spirited away for safekeeping. The captured men allegedly reported that there had been eighteen people in the house.[71]

---

[69] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 7, 1923; see also Tampa Morning Tribune, January 7, 1923; Oklahoma City Black Dispatch, January 9, 1923.

[70] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 7, 1923; Gainesville Daily Sun, January 7, 1923.

[71] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 8, 1923.

[redacted]

The Baltimore Afro-American, like other black papers, picked up the AP stories and was incensed by events in Levy County. The black paper, particularly angered by the killing of James Carrier, published a blistering editorial. It noted that Carrier had spurned offers of immunity if he revealed the names of his compatriots and had ignored threats to "shoot him to hell" if he did not. The admiring Afro-American declared, "The 'Uncle Toms,' the South loved are gone forever, and in their place have grown up heroes like Uncle Jim Carrier who died true to his friends and true to his home."[72]

Yet another black Maryland newspaper, the Baltimore Herald, made a similar argument. "Negroes throughout the country," the Herald declared, "are in the fullest sympathy and cherish the highest admiration for the men of the race in Florida who fired into the mob and killed two of their number. We regard the twenty, or whatever the number killed as martyrs. They died defending their own lives and in defence of law and order. Every shot fired into a mob and every member of a mob killed is in defence of law and order."[73]

In the meantime, the African Americans residents of Rosewood remained in hiding and blacks in Sumner and other villages did not venture from their quarters. At Lenin [probably Lucans], another hamlet located between Rosewood and Cedar Key, nine-year-old Lillie Burns and various family members watched the proceedings. "We could see the white people in their

---

[72] Baltimore Afro-American, January 6, 1923.

[73] Baltimore Herald, January 10, 1923.

trucks with their guns sticking up on the trucks and cars right behind them. This went on all day and all night," Lillie said. "We could see where they were burning the houses....We could see the balls of black smoke." The Burns, who were kin to the Carriers, gave temporary refuge to five or six Rosewood refugees.[74]

At Sumner all blacks who were not at work in the lumber mill were kept in the quarters, and a "dead line" was established between the black and white sections.

W. H. Pillsbury, the mill superintendent at Sumner, was given credit and praise by whites for keeping his black employees working, for restricting them to certain sections, and for making the curfew effective--all measures that helped prevent additional difficulties.[75] No further trouble was expected, but some came on Sunday, January 7.

Following the burning on Friday morning, only twelve black houses were left in Rosewood. On Sunday afternoon a crowd of whites, estimated at 100-150, gathered and watched as the remaining houses were torched, one by one. The AP report declared, "The burning of the houses was carried out deliberately, and, although the crowd was present all the time, no one could be found who would say he saw the houses fired."[76] As a result of the burning on

---

[74] McDonald interview.

[75] See Gainesville <u>Daily Sun</u>, January 8, 1923.

[76] AP release quoted in Jacksonville <u>Times-Union</u>, January 8, 1923; see also Tampa <u>Morning Tribune</u>, January 8, 1923.

Friday and again on Sunday, "Masses of twisted steel were all that remained of furniture formerly in the negro homes, [and] several charred bodies of dogs, and firearms left in the hasty retreat, bore evidence to the mob's fury which set fire to the negro section of [Rosewood]...."[77] In Virginia a black newspaper, the Norfolk Journal and Guide, sardonically appraised events since Friday when Sheriff Walker informed Governor Hardee that no troops were needed: "[Walker] told the truth. He proved he could handle the situation without outside assistance."[78]

Although Hunter remained at large, officers believed they finally had the situation under control. Even so, the Jacksonville Times-Union commented ominously, "The section however, is still much aroused by the disturbances."[79] That newspaper, like others, published little follow up information. On Monday, January 9, the Times-Union had relegated the story to page seven, giving it a few lines under the heading "Rosewood Is Quiet After Disturbance."[80]

The black Norfolk Journal and Guide reported the week's volatile events but not in much detail. The reason, the paper explained, was that "news from the seat of the trouble, after the second day, was suddenly suppressed, so nothing has leaked out as to how the trouble terminated." Reporting was not

---

[77] Gainesville Daily Sun, January 8, 1923.

[78] Norfolk [Virginia] Journal and Guide, January 27, 1923.

[79] Jacksonville Times-Union, January 9, 1923; see also Tampa Morning Tribune, January 9, 1923; Miami Daily Metropolis, January 8, 1923.

[80] Ibid.

[redacted]

that bad, but the journal had a point. It had a stronger point in stating that the nation's "undercurrent of hate and lawlessness" could only be dealt with effectively by court action and due process of law.[81] Except for a few homes owned by whites, there was little left to disturb. Most blacks were still hiding in the woods and swamps. No documented record has been found that Jesse Hunter was ever captured. The Rosewood community as African American residents knew it had been obliterated from the map of Florida.

The Baltimore Afro American of January 12, 1923, ran what appeared to be two pictures supplied by an "International News Reel." One photograph was of a burning black residence in Rosewood and the other portrayed a group of white men, women, and children standing by three graves of blacks who had been killed. The picture of the burning house was run in the New York Literary Digest on January 20, 1923, as well as an uncredited picture of whites inspecting the charred remains of black houses in Rosewood. The latter picture was also published by the Chicago Defender, January 20, 1923, which further included a photograph of M. L. Studstill, one of the white men who was wounded at the Thursday night battle. Still another photograph was of a burning house with three whites wielding shotguns and crouched in the bushes a few feet away. The Literary Digest was the only white publication to run any pictures.

---

[81] Norfolk [Virginia] Journal and Guide, January 20, 1923. See ibid., January 23, 1923, for a summary of the week's events.

Today there is a small green highway marker with white lettering that reads Rosewood. What once was the village is now overgrown with trees and vines, and scattered about are a few bricks and parts of buildings. Little other physical evidence remains.

The question of how many people died remains, however, and it may never be solved. Nor is it certain how many people were in Hayward and Sarah Carrier's house on the night of January 4, although most of them were apparently children. Arnett Turner Goins's deposition states that Sylvester's wife left Rosewood before Thursday night. Based on contemporary evidence and accounts, there were eight deaths, six blacks and two whites. The blacks included were Sam Carter, Sylvester Carrier, Sarah Carrier, Lexie Gordon, Mingo Williams, and James Carrier. The white men were Henry Andrews and C. P. "Poly" Wilkerson. A story that ran in the Baltimore Afro American of January 12, 1923, was supplied by a news agency called "Crusader Service." The article was datelined Rosewood, January 9, and stated, "Eighteen white and colored men and women are known to be dead." The account did not supply the names and seems to be inaccurate. It is possible that some of the whites and blacks who were wounded died later as a result of their injuries, but there is no documentation to support this thesis.

Jason McElveen, the white man who participated in the affair, had a memory extremely at variance with contemporary reports. He claimed that after the Thursday battle, "they went up there and buried seventeen niggers out of

the house. And I don't know how many more that they picked out of the woods and the fields about the area." McElveen's version had it that "they just took 'em and laid out in the road [and] plowed the furrows, with a big field-plow, extra big field-plow, fire plow. [They] plowed two big furrows there and put them niggers in there in the trench and plowed it over." As for identification, "there is no markings or anything; don't know who they was, why they was, and they said there was twenty-six of them there." As a final grisly note, McElveen remembered, "and after that for the next four or five years they picked up skulls and things all over Gulf Hammock--all around Gulf Hammock."[62]

Moore's article in Tropic quotes the statement of James Turner, a white man who served later as sheriff of Levy County. A fourteen-year-old boy at the time, Turner witnessed the aftermath of the burning and said that he saw an open mass grave in a pine grove. Unable to count the bodies he saw there, Turner was told there were seventeen of them. Some of the black descendants, among them Arnett Turner Goins, deny that there was an open grave, and to date no such site has been found. The descendants vary in their estimates of how many people were killed. As of now, eight deaths can be documented.

The black residents of Rosewood left the area, never to return. Those who owned homes and land lost them. In his "Synopsis of Research: The Destruction of Rosewood, Florida," (28-29), the journalist Gary Moore puts the

---

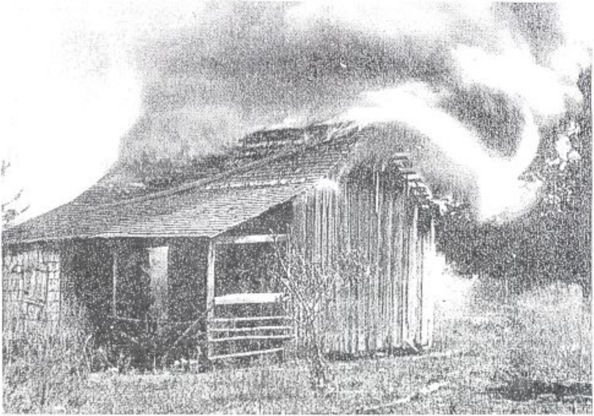
[62] McElveen tape.

number of destroyed homes at eighteen. They belonged to John Wesley Bradley, George Bradley, Mary Ann Hall, Laura Jones, James Carrier, Sarah Carrier, Aaron Carrier, Hardee Davis, John Coleman, Virginia Smith, James Hall, Lizzie Screen, Sam Carter, Cornelia Carter, Ransom Edwards, May Ann Hayward, John McCoy, Ed Bradley, Perry Goins, Sam king, and Lexie Gordon. Moore's evidence indicates that the homes were substantial dwellings and well furnished for the time and place.

RECOLLECTIONS OF ROSEWOOD SURVIVORS

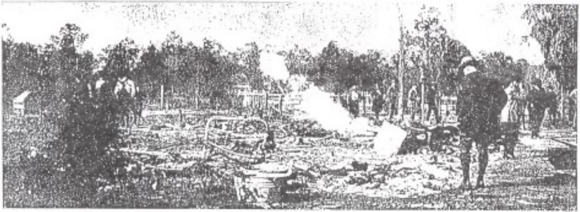
Adding to the information supplied by newspapers and other contemporary accounts are the recollections of Minnie Lee Langley, Ruth Davis, and Arnett Turner Goins, who were children living at Rosewood in 1923. Their depositions have been cited several times previously. Before examining the reaction to the affair and suggesting some conclusions and interpretations, the authors of this report believe it is useful and informative to see the week of strife through the eyes of Langley and Davis.

As mentioned previously, the young Minnie Lee Langley remembered that her Cousin Sylvester Carrier had asked her grandparents, Emma and James Carrier, to bring the children to the home of Sarah Carrier, his mother. "It would be a place," he said, "where I can protect yall if anything should happen." The plan was carried out. On Thursday evening, January 4, shortly



Deliberate burning of cabins and a church wiped out the Black community of Rosewood, Florida.

The Literary Digest Magazine Jan. 20, 1923



Ruins of a house in Rosewood

The Literary Digest Magazine
January 20, 1993

after Sarah returned from one of her jobs the night of gunfire (described on pp. 17-20) began.[83]

Asked in her deposition who was shooting, Minnie Lee answered, "Crackers, them white people. They was shooting all in the house and the first one they killed was my aunt [Sarah]."[84] The shot came through a window and went through Sarah Carrier's head. Minnie and Lee and the children were upstairs under a mattress when Bernadina, Sarah's daughter, came up and told them what had happened. The frightened children huddled closer together, and shortly, Minnie Lee ran downstairs seeking some adult protection. Sylvester was seated in a wood bin under the stairway facing the front door. He grabbed Minnie Lee, and she squatted between his legs.[85]

According to Minnie Lee, Sylvester had a repeating Winchester rifle [or a shotgun] that he held over her shoulder and fired at the assailants as they approached. Minnie Lee said, "he was popping everyone he [saw], if they come in that door, he killed them." Arnett T. Goins, who was in the house, declared in 1993 that Sylvester Carrier was the only black in the house who did any firing. Minnie Lee was asked if many whites rushed the door. "Yeah, they done knocked that door down." Answering the question if the black man shot the whites, she replied, "Yeah, killing them, pile them up on the porch." Then

---

[83] Sarah Carrier worked for Poly Wilkerson in Sumner. Langley deposition, 23.

[84] Ibid., 25-26.

[85] Ibid., 26.

"one of the men say let's us go, they done kill almost all us. And I heard the car crank, the truck they had, they crank it up, and they left."[86]

After the whites withdrew, Minnie Lee and the children, who had undressed for bed and were lightly clothed, slipped out the back door, "hit that swamp and went through the swamp." Her Aunt Beulah "Scrappie" Carrier (daughter of James and Emma) heard about the trouble and came to get the children. Beulah hid them in the woods for the next three or four days. How many children hid out? "Pile of us....She had all of us and Sarah['s] crew."[87]

Conditions in the woods were extremely harsh. Minnie Lee recalled that "it was cold, man it was cold. Jesus, I never will forget that day. It was so cold [that Beulah] had to build a little bitty fire. And them people was running backwards and forwards on the hard road like that."[88] Beulah sent the children to a safer place on the other side of the main road. She directed them across one at a time, and, once on the other side, they followed instructions to lie down under the concealment of bushes.

Minnie Lee noted that "All our houses [were destroyed] they burned every house in that town." That included "Churches and everything, they left nothing....Took all our chickens and cows and everything from us....We see the

---

[86] Ibid., 27.

[87] Ibid., 28; see also, 30; Goins deposition, 14; Goins interview.

[88] Langley deposition, 30.

fire burning, when sister came up there to get us, that fire just leaping over the railroad....Yeah, bloodhounds, we seen them. They had bloodhounds...."[89]

The ordeal ended due to the efforts of two white brothers, William and John Bryce, who were conductors on the Sea Board Air Line railroad. The Bryces often bought eggs and vegetables from Emma Carrier when the train stopped at the Rosewood depot. Concerned about Emma and her family's well-being, one or both Bryces contacted a black man who worked at the depot and told him to have Beulah bring the children to the station. The arrangements were made, and with no fanfare the train eased into the depot, took the children on board, and carried them on a four-hour ride to safety. At Gainesville friends and relatives took them in.[90]

At the time Minnie Lee and the others did not know the fate of James and Emma. As previously related, James Carrier was killed by a mob on Saturday (January 6) when he refused to name the people who were in Sarah Carrier's home. According to Minnie Lee, her Aunt Rita Carrier (later Rita Williams) saw a group of white men capture James. He was on his way to Sumner where one of his daughters lived. Emma was much more fortunate. Like the children, she boarded a train and was taken to Gainesville where she was placed in jail for safe keeping. Later, Emma and the children were reunited. The family lived in Gainesville until 1924 when Emma died. Family

---

[89] Ibid., 47-49.

[90] Ibid., 30-32, 52-53.

members count her as a victim. After that Minnie Lee moved to Jacksonville which became her permanent home. She remembered that other survivors went to Tampa, to Miami, and in general scattered about.[91]

Lee Ruth Bradley (later Lee Ruth Bradley Davis), Minnie Lee's cousin, has also provided a valuable deposition. She was the daughter of John Wesley and Virginia Bradley. John M. Wright, a white merchant of Rosewood, and Mary Joe Jacobs Wright, his wife, played a major role in rescuing Lee Ruth and others. Wright had begun buying land in the Rosewood area in 1907 and continued to purchase and sell property throughout the 1920s. A longtime Levy County resident, he married Mary Joe Jacobs on April 30, 1898. The merchant enjoyed the patronage of many blacks, and, as Arnett T. Goins remarked, often gave black children free candy and cookies. The Wrights, who had no children, occupied a two-story home located on the northeast end of Rosewood about a quarter of a mile from their store. The house was between the dirt highway and the railroad track. To facilitate loading, the merchant had constructed a wooden boardwalk from his store to the depot. Wright befriended many blacks, and as Oliver Miller, a white native of Sumner who was five-years-old in 1923, remarked in 1993 that, "John Wright was the backbone of Rosewood."[92]

---

[91] Ibid., 39-53.

[92] Levy County Marriage Book 1, 1887-1905, 304; Goins deposition, 4; Goins interview; Miller interview.

On the fateful Thursday (January 4), Wright had Sylvester Carrier get John Bradley to bring his four youngest children to Wright's house. Bradley instructed the older children to hide in the woods and took Lee Ruth, her sister, and two younger brothers (the threesome was probably Marion, Wesley James, and Cliff) to the Wright's place. Bradley did so (family members would not see him again for two or three months), and the children were taken upstairs and put to bed. The Wrights cautioned the Bradley children to stay put and not leave the place.[93]

Lee Ruth, the acknowledged leader of the children, had other plans. She persuaded the others to go with her to their brother's place at Wylly, a small community one mile east of Rosewood. Amidst all of the area's turmoil, the children made the journey safely. At Wylly they found the older Bradley and his wife, as well as Mary Ann Hall and members of her family including four or five children. The daughter told her mother and the children that it was dangerous for them to remain there. She said that if the white men found anybody from Rosewood in Wylly they would kill them.[94]

The adults left with all the children and entered a hammock (a heavily wooded area). Lee Ruth remembered, "We walked through water. We sat on

---

[93] Mary Jo Wright was like a mother to her young displaced guests and fed them breakfast the next morning, Friday. At some time that day the Wrights left for Shiloh Cemetery at Sumner to attend the funeral of Poly Wilkerson, slain Thursday night at the Carrier home. Henry Andrews's body had been shipped by rail to Starke for Masonic funeral services; Davis deposition, 26-29.

[94] Ibid., 29-30.

a log on the trail....We sat there all day long." She recalled the log "was laying...deep in water....We sat there until...sundown that evening, and I begged to go home. We left out of the hammock and come back to my sister-in-law's house." By then Hoyt Bradley, her oldest brother, had arrived, and he told Lee Ruth to take the children back to the Wright place. The Hall family also left, walking through muck and water the twenty miles to the Levy County town of Chiefland.[95]

Lee Ruth led her siblings back to the Wright house without mishap. They crawled part of the way, and the young girl "for the first time in my life...[saw] people with guns. They were all on the railroad looking for anything...." The children found their hosts much relieved and the yard full of black women and children waiting for a train to pick them up. As related by Lee Ruth, Sheriff Walker had notified Wright to have the blacks meet at his house. Early the next morning (either Friday or Saturday) the train stopped near the depot. The women and children walked to the station over the boardwalk. At that point in her deposition, Lee Ruth added a puzzling story about marching past men wearing uniforms of green and armed with rifles. She thought they must have been Marines, and believed that Sheriff Walker had requested support from the military. No record of any such unit being in

---

[95] Ibid., 31.

Rosewood has been discovered, and the national guard had not been activated.[96]

Women and children got on the train and found it "jam packed," Lee Ruth remembered. "You know, everybody was hollering and crying and praying [?], and they put us all on the train." The passengers were met at Gainesville and given refuge. After a short stay there, the reunited Bradley family moved to Palatka, Florida, where Lee Ruth grew into her teens. Later the family moved to South Miami.[97]

In 1992 Lee Ruth remembered many of the events that occurred in the first week of January 1923. Not the least was her impression that "They killed everything in Rosewood. They didn't want anything living in there. They killed everything."[98]

Also taking refuge at the Carriers' home were Arnett T. Goins and other children of George Washington and Willa Retha Goins. Willa Retha was Sarah Carrier's daughter and George W. was the son of Ed Goins, the turpentine businessman. Arnett's father was working for the Cummer Lumber Company in Otter Creek and was not permitted to come to Rosewood. It is not known if his mother was in Sarah's home. Arnett was among the children who sought safety upstairs. In 1993 he remembered that long ago night. After the firing

---

[96] Ibid., 31-33, 52.

[97] Ibid., 36.

[98] Ibid., 44.

subsided, Arnett and some others were led to safety by two of the older boys, Rubin and Lonnie. They went through the fields and trees toward Wylly. Goins recalled that they "stayed out in the woods about two or three days." Other African Americans who knew where they went brought them food. Next, they were contacted by some blacks and made their way to the railroad tracks at Wylly where they caught the rescue train and were taken to Gainesville. Goins was reunited with his family, lived various places, and after 1932 made his home in St. Petersburg.[99] The Hall family that had fled on Thursday night hid out near Wylly. Young Margie Hall recalled that later "this white man that owned Wylly...went out and stopped the train and then he hollered and called into the woods. We all came out of the woods and got on that train and went to Gainesville...."[100]

Although most whites sided with the mob, there were several examples of whites who aided the black residents. In Sumner Ernest Parham's mother and stepfather (a man named Markham) ran the saw mill's hotel. During the first week of January, the Parhams smuggled their cook, Liza Bradley (who also worked for the Pillsburys and the Johnsons), out of town. She was hidden under laundry in the back seat of a car and driven past a roadblock to Bronson. White women in Sumner (including Mrs. Pillsbury and Mrs. Johnson) hid black

---

[99] Goins deposition, 27-35; the quote is on 28; Goins interview, 18.

[100] Hall interview.

women and children in the community at Sumner and later helped them escape by train to Gainesville.[101]

NEWS COVERAGE AND EDITORIAL RESPONSES OF FLORIDA AND SOUTHERN, NORTHERN, AND BLACK NEWSPAPERS:

Although newspapers had their biases in reporting the Rosewood events, the editorial responses of white and black state, regional, and national newspapers and other publications are important in evaluating the Rosewood affair. Most major Florida and Southern white newspapers ran the AP stories but did not editorialize. They expressed alarm at the extent of racial violence, but generally said it resulted from the attack on Fannie Taylor and blamed the subsequent deaths on the action of black residents. These papers also denounced criticism of Florida by Northern newspapers. Of those that did editorialize, some justified and defended the violence, but others tempered their opinions with calls for law and order. Usually, white journals in the North also limited themselves to AP releases. Yet, several were highly critical of the mob action. Without exception, the African American press condemned the entire episode.[102]

---

[101] Parham interview; Johnson interview.

[102] Located in extreme Northern Florida, Tallahassee was isolated from happenings in much of the peninsula. Yet the city was the capital of the state, and given the availability of print coverage, the Tallahassee Daily Democrat did not follow the rapidly breaking events adequately. The paper ran only one brief (continued...)

White Florida newspapers often denounced the lawlessness at Rosewood, but not the action itself. The Tampa Times, while decrying outside distortions and exaggerations, was an exception. "We have visited the crime of one on the members of a race," the paper editorialized. "Now that the senseless passion has been gratified, and an awful revenge has been taken, we are content to settle down to a period of quiet. But we will not admit that we are anything but a Christian and civilized people."[103]

The Tampa Morning Tribune was another exception. Events at Rosewood "almost make the blood curdle in one's veins," a Tribune editorial declared. Qualifying its statement, the paper added that the "provocation, assault of a young pure white woman by one or more negroes, was great. It is a provocation which, more than any other, stirs the anger, and whets the determination to punish, in every white man who reads of it." Having defended one of the region's oldest and most deeply held shibboleths--the sanctity of Southern womanhood--the Tribune settled into its argument. "There is no reason in Florida," the editorial continued, "why justice should not be meted out by the courts in such cases, instead of by mobs defiantly assuming to be

---

[102](...continued)
story, a combination of two AP reports. Like most other Florida newspapers, the Democrat did not publish any editorials on the affair. Even if they did not editorialize, other Florida papers such as the Bradenton Evening Herald followed the story for several days. Tallahassee Daily Democrat, January 5, 1923; Bradenton Evening Journal, January 3, 5-6, 1923.

[103] Tampa Times, January 9, 1923.

arresting officer, court, witnesses, trial judge, jury, and executioner, all at the same time." The Tribune did not temper its conviction that "Lawlessness is anarchy. This state is law abiding. The American people are law abiding. What then is the source of this maddening virus in our veins when reason gives way to riot and judgement is lost in clamor?"

The paper pointed out that the South had defeated passage of an anti-lynching law by Congress in part by arguing that the individual states themselves could and would handle crime, including extra-legal mob action. Not to do so, as in the Rosewood turbulence, would be to ignite again "the flames of hatred and scorn fanned toward the South by those in other states who think nothing good can come out of us." Still, and emphasizing again the ancient taboo, as much as the affair was to be regretted, it offered "another proof to the lawless negro that he cannot with impunity, or even with hope of escape, lay his hands on a white woman, for white men will shed their blood to get him." The Tampa newspaper demanded that "county and state officials must take immediate steps to punish every man, black and white, who is guilty of violating the laws of the land, be they state or national laws....The 'riot' is a warning to [Florida] enforcement officials, from the veriest constable to the sheriffs, and the judges, that unless there be speed in the punishment of crime, through the regular channels of the law, there will be more and more an increase of such horrible things as this."[104]

---

[104] Tampa Morning Tribune, January 8, 1923.

No newspaper in Florida reacted more strongly than the Gainesville Daily Sun. The Sun's wrath was so visceral that as late as Saturday, five days after the attack on Fannie Taylor, the editor was unable to comment: "Words cannot express the horror of the tragedy at Sumner and Rosewood in Levy [County]. A brutish negro made a criminal assault on an unprotected white girl. As a result of this, two officers of the law were killed and another wounded. Five or six negroes were killed and many others wounded. Houses were burned, indignation, vengeance and terror ran riot. We do not know how to write about it. We feel too indignant just now to write with calm judgement and we shall wait a little while. One thing, however, we shall say now--in whatever state it may be, law or no law, courts or no courts--as long as criminal assaults on innocent women continue, lynch law will prevail, and bl[ood] will be shed."[108]

Having made clear that sexual crimes against white women led inevitably to violence, the Sun's editor felt able "to write with calm judgment," and editorialized the next day: "Let it be understood," he declared, "at the very beginning of what we shall here write, that the racial trouble at...Rosewood was no 'Southern Lynching Outrage.' It was caused by the shooting down and killing of two officers of the law and the wounding of another. These law officers were shot down by negroes, barricaded in a house where a brutish

---

[108] Gainesville Daily Sun, January 6, 1923. See ibid., January 13, 1923, quoting the Bronson Levy Times-Democrat that neither of the two whites, Wilkerson and Andrews, killed on Thursday night were officers of the law.

beast was supposed to be sheltered and this brute had criminally assaulted a white woman. These officers in Levy [County] were trying to do their duty...."[106]

The editorial cautioned: "Do not let it go abroad, however, that racial troubles are impending in this state. Do not let it be attributed to malice or hatred between the races. We have many good negro citizens who deplore these things as deeply as the white people do. There is no more racial prejudice in the south than [there] is in the north. We are glad to testify to the law abiding character of the large majority of colored people of Florida. Let us speak plainly, however. We do not write in justification of lynch law for offenses like murder or arson or crimes like that. We believe the law should take its course and that patience should prevail even with what [we] are pleased to call 'the law's delays.' Preach and admonish and warn as you may, however, the crime of rape will never be tolerated for one single moment. Congressmen may rave and froth and pass laws as they please but the time will never come when a southern white man will not avenge a crime against innocent womanhood. Nor will the men of the north tolerate it any more than the men of the south."[107]

After conceding that other crimes did not justify mob action, the Sun repeated its sentiments: assault against a woman "creates in the hearts of brave men a determination that vengeance shall speedily follow the brutish deeds of the rape fiend. Call it lawlessness if you will. Legislate against it as

---

[106] Gainesville Daily Sun, January 7, 1923.

[107] Ibid.

you may. Let it be understood now and forever--that he, whether white or black, who brutally assaults an innocent and helpless woman--shall die the death of a dog."[108]

Having taken its stand, the Sun used Sunday's editorial to condemn the murder of James Carrier. The partial recanting to what the Oklahoma City Black Dispatch called a "barbarous act,"[109] was not made until the Sun raised the level of the attack on Fannie Taylor to an actual rape: "In writing yesterday about the horrors of the Rosewood race riot we did not speak of it as justifiable in the sense that the law defines justification. We spoke of it as the inevitable result of the crime of rape. We said that it was no 'Southern Lynching Outrage.' That it was brought about because of the shooting down to death of two white men and the wounding of another by negroes barricaded in a house where a brutish beast, who had ravished a white woman, was supposed to be harbored. We spoke of it as the result of aroused indignation." Then the paper declared, "In no sense do we excuse all that happened. What occurred at the 'Death house' was inevitable. The taking of the old negro man, the next morning, to the cemetery and there shooting him down was an outrage. It was unworthy of our race. We are told that bootleg liquor was the bottom of that. What a

---

[108] Ibid.

[109] Oklahoma City Black Dispatch, January 9, 1923.

shame! What a disgrace to manhood! If that old negro man was accused of any crime, short of the rape itself, he was entitled to a fair trial."[110]

The Gainesville paper, inspired by the Sanford Herald, published at the seat of government of Seminole County in east-central Florida, next arrived at a final explanation. The paper's rationale was a variation on the 'outside agitators' theme that has universally, historically, and without regard to geographical location been used to dismiss controversial issues and to avoid local blame. The episode was the work, both newspapers deduced, of a stranger, a vagabond, and was thus caused by the absence of or lack of enforcement of laws against tramps. The two journals absolved the black race in general of any inherent criminality. Quite the opposite, the papers conceded, most blacks were hard working and law abiding. According to the Sanford Herald, "Again a no-account [N]egro--an escaped convict in fact--has aroused racial feeling and caused mob rule and killings and bad feelings generally in this state. This trouble is always caused by strange negroes and not by the local negroes and goes to show that the vagrants especially of the vicious type should be closely watched and made to leave as soon as possible. The trouble has never been with the local negroes but the negro tramps and vagrant gamblers and vicious negroes generally."[111]

---

[110] Gainesville Daily Sun, January 8, 1923.

[111] Ibid., January 9, 1923, quoting Sanford Herald.

Echoing the Herald's sentiments, the Sun remarked, "The horrible trouble at Rosewood was brought about by a lawless and criminal negro vagabond. He was loafing over the country, shirking work, violating law and was a disgrace to his race. The people of his race in Florida should not be condemned because of the act of this vagabondish convict. The negroes of Florida are conducting themselves well. They are a law abiding people who desire to live in peace." The Sun admitted, "We have vagabonds and criminals in our own race. They have no legitimate employment but go about committing crime and avoiding work. They are burglars and thieves. They are wiretappers and bootleggers. They burn houses and sometimes commit rapes. What we need in this devoted land of ours, in city and town and country is a rigid enforcement of the vagrancy laws without distinction of color or condition. The man who does honest work does not commit crime. The man who lives by devious means is a vagrant and a criminal."[112]

In Tennessee, the Nashville Banner attempted to discriminate between acts of retribution against individual African Americans in the South and wholesale violence against a black community which was more typical of the North. The Banner concluded: "Clashes will probably continue to occur as long as the two races live together on the same soil--and that will be, apparently,

---

[112] Gainesville Daily Sun, January 10, 1923.

forever. We hope to make them less frequent. The best men of both races are earnestly working toward that end."[113]

Reports in Northern newspapers were entirely different in tone and largely condemned Florida and the South generally for its racial violence. The New York Call, a socialist journal, saw the Rosewood incident as demonstrating "how astonishingly little cultural progress has been made in some parts of the world, and...also explain[s] the industrial backwardness and political reaction of the South." In New York state the Utica Press commented: "Certainly this latest calamity in Florida is a serious reflection upon the State and its people."[114]

The New York World used Rosewood and other examples to warn that if the South did not police its own house, the federal government would step in. "At Rosewood in Levy [C]ounty," the World editorialized, "a race war has broken out that threatens to lead to the gravest consequences. It is the usual story of a reported attack on a white woman, followed by the lynching of a negro [Sam Carter], not in the belief that he was the actual criminal but on the charge that he had 'transported in a wagon for several miles a negro suspected of the crime.' From that started fighting between armed white men and negroes, which the county authorities professed to be unable to stop. How

---

[113] Quoted in [New York] Literary Digest, January 20, 1923.

[114] Both Call and Press quoted in [New York] Literary Digest, January 20, 1923.

many have been killed is not known, but the utter breakdown of the law is admitted." As was common with many white Northern newspapers when discussing the South, the editor saw fit to lecture both races with a gratingly sanctimonious tone: "Incidentally there is an awful lesson to the black race in this and in every other state in the Union: when one of his color is sought for a crime of such intense blackness as that which started the Rosewood 'riot,' his duty is to conceal nothing; but like a man, and like a law abiding citizen which his leaders claim--and, which mostly--he is, aid the regular officers of the law in bringing to justice the criminal. And that advice stands for the white men of the state too--those who take vengeance of a summary nature upon aiders and abettors of law and order maintained in a lawful way."[115]

Black newspapers universally denounced the events in Rosewood and blamed southern society for the persistence of racial violence. A black newspaper in St. Louis, Missouri, the Argus, explained why violence against blacks, as in Rosewood, occurred: "When a mob goes out to lynch a victim it knows when it is forming, that unless by accident not one of their number will be hurt physically, and that no mental anguish will come to anyone by being arrested or subjected to a fine or jail sentence." Therefore, the Argus contended, "There will always be mob violence and lynching just so long as mob members can satisfy their blood lust on a certain class of people, knowing

---

[115] Tampa Morning Tribune, January 10, 1923, quoting New York World.

that not one of their number will be punished by the constituted authorities of the law."[116]

The same idea was expressed by the Oklahoma City Black Dispatch. The Oklahoma paper had fought for passage of federal legislation against lynching, and now offered a post-mortem: the nation's record in 1922 was "a severe indictment of the white South which fought to the death the Dyer Bill in the [S]enate of the United States." The more recent events of 1923 made it difficult to refute the Black Dispatch's overall analysis: "we believe that the seed of lawlessness in America is IN HER HYPOCRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE NEGRO."[117]

A despairing Walter F. White, black native of Atlanta, Georgia, activist, authority on lynching, and later Executive Secretary of the NAACP, understood the essence of the problem. In a letter to the New York Call about the deaths of African Americans at Rosewood, he asserted, "Their crime was that their skins were black." White reduced the issue to a single query: "Let us put aside any considerations of humanity or decency--the American conscience is no longer shocked by murders at home. The question to be faced is simply this: How long can America get away with it?"[118]

---

[116] St. Louis [Missouri] Argus, January 26, 1923.

[117] Oklahoma City Black Dispatch, January 4, 1923.

[118] Walter F. White to New York Call, January 13, 1923, in National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Papers, Part 7, Reel 6, #1147.

A spokesman for blacks, the New York Age, compared the racial discord in Chicago in 1919 with that in Rosewood: "In Chicago...the Negro was not afraid to fight back and when the fight was over he felt that he had something pretty near a fair chance before the law. Those are two conditions which the suffocating, damning atmosphere of the South does not permit." The Age mentioned that "the newspapers this week carry the name of a Florida riot, the culmination of a series of lynchings, which included men not even alleged to have committed any crime. In this riot a whole Negro community has been wiped out, their homes and their churches destroyed by fire, and the Negroes themselves are hiding in the woods like hunted animals."[119]

William Pickens, a black native of South Carolina, who served as field secretary for the NAACP from 1920-1942, wrote a letter to the white New York World. In it Pickens compared how the law was applied in New Jersey and in Florida. "Rosewood and Orange," he wrote. "Two beautiful names, but almost as different as Hell and Heaven...." Pickens believed, "If anything is needed to show up the folly of mob action, the contrast between mob action in Rosewood, Fla., and the legal process in Orange, N. Y. [,] supplies that need." According

---

[119] In 1993 Ernest Parham, the young white Sumner man who witnessed the events around Rosewood, was of a similar mind. Working in a store, he had delivered ice from Sumner to Rosewood and had often observed that "the people had nice homes and were law abiding and took care of themselves and had clean and well dressed young people." What happened in Rosewood, said Parham, "was a terrible situation...It was just a good black community. And [the people] had nothing whatever to do with [the assault]." Oklahoma City Black Dispatch, January 19, 1923, quoting New York Age; Parham interview.

to Pickens, "In Florida a Negro is accused of 'attacking' a white woman (whatever may be hidden under that word), and the mob, savage furious and hellish, gets busy. What was the result? Seven people dead (some of them white) and all the homes of all the innocent Negroes burned down. The only fellow [Jesse Hunter] there who has not suffered is the fellow who is charged with the crime. For that fellow escaped. Mobs are not so proficient as the law." In contrast, in Orange "a black committed an attack and murder, and the law got busy & the only person to suffer is the criminal. He'll be hanged & the innocent whites and blacks go about their business. That is law. That is civilization. That is justice--justice to both the criminal and the law-abiding."[120]

Few black newspapers failed to point out that the blacks who died were innocent people. A typical comment was that of the Norfolk Journal and Guide. The journal observed with bitter irony that "none of the persons done to death [were] in any way whatever connected with the alleged assault."[121]

A number of historians have traced Northern racial discord during the time to economic causes. Job competition built up animosities between blacks and whites and often resulted in violence. Such trouble was far less frequent in the rural South, but the episode at Rosewood raises the issue. Both blacks and whites from Rosewood, Sumner, and other nearby communities were

---

[120] New York Amsterdam News (a black newspaper) quoting Pickens's letter to New York World, January 10, 1923.

[121] Norfolk Journal and Guide, January 20, 1923.

employed by the Cummer Lumber Company. Were the two races at odds over employment, specific jobs at the mill, and pay scales? Did whites resent those blacks in Rosewood who owned houses and land? The Kansas City [Kansas] Call reported the Rosewood episode and remarked, "It has been proven time and again that the desire to eliminate Negroes from industrial competition, to acquire Negroes' property without paying a fair price, and other similar mercenary reasons have been the real cause of race riots."[122]

There may have been economic rivalry between the races at Rosewood, but the authors of this report have found nothing to substantiate this. Oliver Miller, a white resident of Cedar Key, declared in 1993 that relations between his fellow whites and blacks were good before and after the Rosewood incident, that there were few if any repercussions in Otter Creek or Cedar Key, and that blacks continued to work at the Cummer saw mill in Sumner. Elmer Johnson, like Miller a resident of Sumner in 1923, remembered that the pay scale at the saw mill was less than fifty cents a day for both races. Evidence that blacks and whites apparently got along in their business relations could be seen in real estate transactions between them.[123]

The affair at Rosewood also brought out larger issues of how blacks perceived themselves and their place in American society. The shootout on

---

[122] Kansas City [Missouri] Call, January 12, 1923.

[123] LCDB 5, 560, reveals that in 1911, John White, the white merchant, leased forty acres to the Ed Goins, black operator of turpentine stills for $90 per thousand boxes. Miller interview; Johnson interview.

Thursday night was seen by some blacks as a manifestation of their refusal to be subservient to the white majority. Arming themselves and fighting back demonstrated that blacks were prepared to defend their homes and their lives to the last extremity. The actions of Sylvester Carrier were portrayed as heroic by black writers. The Pittsburgh American, a black newspaper, declared that what happened at Rosewood should "make Negroes everywhere feel proud and take renewed hope. For our people have fought back again! They have met the mob with its own deadly weapons, they have acquitted themselves like free men and were not content to be burned like bales of hay." The American noted that "Things have come to the place in this country that the only course for the Negro is armed resistance. The states refuse to protect us against the mob and the federal congress has washed its hands of all anti-lynching legislation. Lynchers are free to prowl the earth and butcher any Negro who gets in their path. The only way for the black men then is to keep his powder dry and shoot back." As the paper evaluated the situation, "It was a much needed lesson in race solidarity that these southern Negroes at Rosewood gave to their brothers in the North."[124]

"No man in his right senses expects to run, and run, and run forever," the Kansas City Call declared. The black paper added, "Three hundred years of slavery did not drive all slaves into abject submission, nor will continued oppression kill out our determination to sell life dearly, even down in

---

[124] Pittsburgh American, January 19, 1923.

Florida....Man created in God's image will always chose to die face to the fore--whenever it is sufficiently clear that he may not live in peace....We cannot establish rights by fighting. But how under Heaven can we urge our people to die like sheep....How can we ask them to be cowards? We cry aloud for mercy and the answer is the torch! We call for justice and are answered by the yells of the mob! Maybe it is the will of Providence that we shall be spared the worst working out of hate, but we fear it is not to be!"[125]

A special report to the New York Amsterdam News, unsigned but obviously written by an African American, offered important evidence of how Rosewood was held up as an example of bravery and courage in the face of overwhelming odds. The Amsterdam News's story was decidedly not a truthful or even an objective example of journalism, but because of its emotional and psychological message, parts of the report are included:

"Hearing that the accused man, Jesse Hunter, was hiding in the village of Rosewood whites from the neighboring towns invaded the Negro section and attempted a house to house search. They were met with a hail of bullets at the first house they came to. The inmates, recognizing the belligerency and lawless composition of the howling mob, did not wait to ask for an explanation of their visit. They opened fire and prepared to sell their lives dearly. They might not have committed any crime, but they knew a lawless mob when they saw one.

---

[125] Kansas City [Kansas] Call, January 12, 1923.

"Two whites were killed outright at the first shower of lead. Four others were wounded, one possibly fatally and the whites retreated to await reinforcements from the surrounding lawless elements.

"At this point negroes from other houses came to the aid of their besieged brothers and a rude barricade was thrown up and loopholes made for rifle fire. Negro ex-soldiers put their knowledge and experience gained in France to use in the service of the Race and an effective defense was soon organized.

"The whites, reinforced, came back, 600 strong, and a battle royal developed. In spite of their reinforcements, the whites were persistently beaten back by the little determined band within the rude improvised fort. Robbed of their prey and not anxious to face the lions at bay, the most cowardly part of the white mob set itself to the safer task of destroying the undefended Negro residences and the village church and lodge building.

"In the meantime, within their improvised fort the little colored group put up a defense that will bear comparison with many of the bravest feats of the colored soldiers on Flanders Field and forged another link in the long chain of evidence going to show that the Negro has at last decided he can fight his own battles just as bravely and as effectively as he has ever fought the battles of others.[128]

---

[128] New York Amsterdam News, January 10, 1923.

EFFORTS TO RESTORE THE LEGAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AFTER ROSEWOOD

Although Florida's newspapers were slow to criticize the violence in Rosewood, they recognized that the extent of the destruction in the community had been excessive and they were concerned that additional racial violence would undermine stability in the region. They also worried that the criticism by the northern press threatened the state's unprecedented prosperity that was fueled by tourists and the real estate and development boom. Florida was beginning to shed its image as a poor, backward region. To ignore what happened at Rosewood was to invite northern criticism and injure the state's booming economy. In the aftermath of the Rosewood affair, regional newspapers attempted to persuade local residents to stop the summary executions and to allow for the restoration of legal due process.

Fear about continued racial unrest and northern criticism led Governor Cary Hardee to order a special grand jury and a special prosecuting attorney to investigate conditions there and in Levy County. On January 29, he named A. V. Long, who was the sitting judge of the Eighth Judicial Circuit, and George DeCottes, prosecuting attorney for the Seventh Judicial Circuit, to inquire into "certain high crimes that have been committed by unidentified parties or persons." A native of Jacksonville, DeCottes, replaced A. S. Crews, the regular state attorney for the eighth district, possibly because he had failed to secure a conviction in a recent lynching in Newberry. Decottes was a forty-three-year-old

[redacted]

World War I veteran who lived in Sanford and was active in the state's military affairs. Long, forty-six, who was born in Lake City and lived at Gainesville, had a fondness for bow ties and a reputation for fairness and impartiality. Governor Hardee took the action because "it is necessary that the State should use what may be necessary of its resources to apprehend and punish crime;" and it is "essential that a thorough and rigid investigation be made of mob violence in the two counties." As the Jacksonville Journal put it, "There will be those who condemn him. But Governor Hardee can comfort himself in the fact that his attitude also expressed the attitude of the great thinking class of the South...."[127] Blacks and some whites, who noted that twenty-four Floridians (one of them white) were lynched during Hardee's administration, remained skeptical.

The special grand jury investigating Levy County was empaneled at the courthouse in Bronson on February 12. Before a packed courtroom, Judge Long charged the grand jury to make every effort to fix the blame where it belonged and to see that the "guilty parties are brought to justice." He declared that mob violence had brought disgrace upon Levy County and the entire state. Examination of witnesses was begun the next morning, and a grand jury

---

[127] Minutes Circuit Court, Book J, Levy County, 233, LCCH. For information on DeCottes see Bench and Bar of Florida (Tallahassee, 1935), I, ?, and History of Florida Past and Present...(Chicago and New York, 1923), III, 239; data on Long can be found in F. W. Bucholz, History of Alachua County Florida...(St. Augustine, 1929), 352-355. For the newspaper opinion see Gainesville Daily Sun, February 2, 1923, quoting Jacksonville Journal. See also Gainesville Daily Sun, February 13, 1923.

composed of farmers and merchants was selected.[128] It is not known if any of the grand jurors were blacks, but it is probable that there were none.

On February 13, thirteen witnesses testified. At the end of the day, DeCottes declined to comment on whether sufficient evidence had been obtained to secure indictments. The prosecuting attorney explained that he could not discuss the matter but said that the incident was being thoroughly investigated. Twenty-five white and eight black witnesses were scheduled to testify the next day.[129]

The February 14 examination of witnesses ended shortly before noon so that DeCottes could go to Gainesville and subpoena additional witnesses. Finally, on the sixteenth, the grand jury's foreman, R. C. Philpett, a prominent Levy County farmer, reported that the jurors regretted being unable to find evidence on which to base any indictments. The jurors deplored the mob action and declared that they were also speaking for the best people of Levy County. DeCottes was praised by the grand jurors for his efforts to secure true bills.[130]

---

[128] Jacksonville Times-Union, February 13, 1923; Tampa Morning Tribune, June 13, 1923.

[129] Ibid., February 14, 1923.

[130] Ibid., February 16, 1923; Jacksonville Journal, February 16, 1923; Jacksonville Times-Union, February 16, 1923.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our research of the Rosewood violence, we are prepared to offer several conclusions. First, the affair at Rosewood lasted virtually the entire first week of January 1923 and we can document that eight people were killed during the racial violence--six blacks and two whites. The rest of the black community of Rosewood was driven from the area by white mobs who then burned their homes, a church, masonic hall and a store. The black residents never returned. The tax rolls of Levy County reveal that Ed Bradley, Hayward and Sarah Carrier, and Emma Carrier were all taxpayers in the years prior to the violence. After 1923 much of their property was acquired by John Wright and other whites who paid the delinquent taxes on the property.

We believe that Sheriff Walker failed to control local events and to request proper assistance from Governor Hardee when events moved beyond his control. While Hardee condemned the violence and ordered a special prosecutor to conduct a grand jury investigation, he did so (more than a month had passed) only after black residents were forced to leave Rosewood and their property was destroyed.

The failure of elected white officials to take forceful actions to protect the safety and property of local black residents was part of a pattern in the state and throughout the region. In Ocoee in November 1920 and Perry in December 1922, local and state officials failed to intervene to protect black

citizens, and in each incident several innocent blacks were killed and their property destroyed. The same was true in other southern states where rape and black resistance were not tolerated by white residents and were seen as a legitimate excuse to abandon the law in favor of brute force. Pleas from citizens and their spokesmen fell on deaf ears, and Florida's white leadership to responded to the civil and racial unrest only when it threatened to jeopardize the state's economic advancement.

Like the racial violence in Ocoee, Perry and numerous other communities throughout Florida and the South during this era, Rosewood was a tragedy of American democracy and the American legal system. In all these incidents, alleged assaults against white women were sufficient to warrant the abandonment of the American justice system. The need to protect southern white women was seen as sufficient to justify racial violence and oppression. When black resistance was added to an alleged assault upon a white woman then elements of southern society believed retribution against the entire black community was warranted. Far too many whites believed an example had to be set so that other black communities throughout Florida understood that such resistance to southern racial mores would not be tolerated. By their failure to restrain the mob and to uphold the legal due process, we can only conclude that the white leaders of the state and country were willing to tolerate such behavior by white citizens.

The authors agree with the views express by former white residents Leslie and Ernest Parham who characterized Rosewood as a "good community." Ernest Parham said about Rosewood's black residents that "the people had nice homes and were law abiding and took care of themselves. . . ." Leslie Parham added that "they did not deserve what happened to them." The authors agree with the Parhams.[131]

---

[131] Leslie Parham interview; Parham interview.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Manuscript Collections:

Papers of the NAACP. Part 7. The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955. Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953. Reel 9, Group 1, Series C, Administrative Files, Microfilm, 1987. University Publications of America.

Florida World War I Card Roster, Blacks, Roll 3, Record Group 197, Series 1204, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida.

State of Florida Prison Record Book, 3, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida.

Manuscript Census Returns 1920, Levy County, Florida, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

Lynching Records, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama.

County Records:

Levy County Deed Book 5. Levy County Courthouse, Bronson, Florida.

Levy County Marriage Book. Levy County Courthouse, Bronson, Florida.

Levy County Commissioners' Minutes, Book K, 314. Bronson, Florida.

Office of the Clerk, Box C, Levy County Courthouse, Bronson, Florida.

Levy County Marriage Book 1, 1887-1905.

Levy County Marriage Book 2, 1905-1916.

Letters Administration And Letters Testamontary, Book 3, Office of the Clerk, Levy County.

Minutes Circuit Court, Book J, Levy County, 233, LCCH.

Legal Depositions:

Deposition of Lee Ruth Davis, May 4, 1992.

Deposition of Arnett Turner Goins, February 27, 1993.

Deposition of Minnie Lee Langley, June 2, 1992.

Interviews:

Jason McElveen tape, no date, on file at the Cedar Key Historical Society Museum, Cedar Key, Florida.

Maxine Jones and Tom Dye interview with Mr. Leslie Parham, August 20, 1993, Tallahassee, Florida.

Larry Rivers interview with Arnett Turner Goins September 24, 1993, at Tallahassee, Florida.

Maxine Jones and William W. Rogers interview with Mrs. Rosetta Bradley Jackson, September 25, 1993, at Tallahassee, Florida.

Maxine Jones interview with Mr. Wilson Hall, September 24, 1993, Tallahassee, Florida.

Maxine Jones interview with Mrs. Eva Jenkins, September 24, 1993, Tallahassee, Florida.

Tom Dye Interview with Ms. Minnie Lee Langley, September 24, 1993, Tallahassee, Florida.

William W. Rogers interview with Ms. Janie Bradley Black, September 25, 1993, Tallahassee, Florida.

Maxine Jones, Larry Rivers, and William W. Rogers interview with Arnett Doctor, September 24, 1993, at Tallahassee, Florida.

Larry Rivers interview with Margie Hall Johnson, September 24, 1993, at Tallahassee, Florida.

Larry Rivers interview with Mae McDonald, September 24, 1993,

Larry Rivers interview with Dr. Arnett Shakir, September 25, 1993, at Tallahassee, Florida.

Tom Dye and William W. Rogers interview with Elsie Collins Rogers October 18, 1993, at Cedar Key, Florida.

David Colburn interview with Ernest Parham, November 10, 1993, at Orlando, Florida.

David Colburn interview with Elmer Johnson, November 10, 1993, at Sanford, Florida.

Tom Dye and William W. Rogers interview with Fred Kirkland, December 2, 1993, at Chiefland, Florida.

Tom Dye and William W. Rogers interview with Oliver Miller, December 2, 1993, at Cedar Key, Florida.

Newspapers:

Atlanta Constitution
Baltimore Herald
Baltimore [Maryland] Afro-American
Bradenton Evening Journal
Bronson Levy Times Democrat.

Charleston News and Courier
Chicago Defender
Crisis
Jacksonville Times-Union
Jacksonville Journal
Kansas City [Missouri] Call
Memphis Commercial Appeal
Miami Herald
Miami Daily Metropolis
Montgomery [Alabama] Advertiser
Nation
New York Age
New York Tribune
New York Times
New York World
New York Amsterdam News
New York Call
New York] Literary Digest
Norfolk [Virginia] Journal and Guide
Oklahoma City Black Dispatch
Pittsburgh American
Sanford Herald
St. Louis [Missouri] Argus
St. Petersburg Evening Independent
St. Louis Post-Dispatch
Tallahassee Daily Democrat
Tampa Morning Tribune
Tampa Times
The Gainesville Daily Sun
Washington Post

Videos:

60 Minutes Segment on Rosewood.

Secondary Sources

Books

Bench and Bar of Florida. Tallahassee, 1935.
F. W. Bucholz, History of Alachua County Florida. St. Augustine, 1929.
Chalmers, David. Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan. Durham: Duke University Press, 3rd edition, 1987.

Colburn, David R. and Richard Scher, Florida's Gubernatorial Politics in the Twentieth Century. Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1980.

Ellsworth, Scott. Death in the Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

Franklin, John Hope. From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 4th edition, 1974.

Higham, John. Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925. New York: Atheneum, 1965.

History of Florida Past and Present. Chicago and New York, 1923.

Rudwick, Elliott. Race Riot in East St. Louis, July 2, 1917. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982.

Spear, Allan H. Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Tindall, George B. The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967.

Tuttle, William M. Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919. New York: Atheneum, 1970.

Unpublished Materials

Carper, Noel Gordon. "The Convict Lease System in Florida, 1866-1923," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1964.

Dabbs, Lester, Jr. "A Report of the Circumstances and Events of the Race Riot on November 2, 1920 in Ocoee, Florida," M.A. Thesis, Stetson University, July 1969.

Dye, R. Thomas. "Race, Ethnicity and the Politics of Economic Development: A Case Study of Cedar Key, Florida," Unpublished Master's thesis, Florida State University, 1992.

Zarur, George De Cergueira Leite. "Seafood Gatherers in Mullet Springs: Economic Rationality and the Social System," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1975.