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A History of the Colfax Riot

Facts Gathered from Eye Witnesses; Correcting the Misstatement that it Was a Massacre of Innocent Negroes by Whites Without Cause or Any Reasonable Grounds of Justification.

[From The Colfax (La.) Chronicle, June 3, 1882.]

The following account of the Colfax riot contains such a glaring misstatement of some of the occurrences on that memorable Easter Sunday of April 13, 1878, and does such injustice to a majority of the whites who took part in that unfortunate conflict, that, for the purpose of correction, we publish the article entire. It is from the N. O. Mascot of May 27, 1882:

During the summer of 1873, in the town of Colfax, parish of Grant, the nation was thrilled by one of the most frightful massacres ever recorded in the annals of this State.

According to the published statements of the time, a negro ring leader, named Ward, undertook to take forcible possession of the parish offices of Grant, and install negro incumbents, claiming to be elected in opposition to Judge Rutland, and other white parish officers, who held commissions from W. P. Kellogg, then Governor of Louisiana.

The testimony elicited at the trial of the case, before the U. S. District Court in this city, was to the effect, that Ward and a gang of negroes claimed to be legally elected officers of Grant parish, after taking forcible possession in several instances, were finally driven by the infuriated whites, into a building, formerly a sugar house in the town of Colfax, which was then used as a court house. This edifice was surrounded and fired by the whites, and the negroes who attempted to escape were at once seized and stood in a long line, each being securely pinioned. After remaining in a standing position several hours the signal was at last given, and the massacre commenced. The row of negroes were shot to pieces where they stood, and the slaughter becoming general, negroes throughout the parish were shot on sight. If the writer be not mistaken in the summary, one hundred and twenty dusky corpses in one heap told the dismal story, and for days together the birds of prey in the parish feasted upon negro carrion. The individual directly responsible for this horrible butchery, whose fiendish brain conceived the murder, and who, with deliberate devilry, carried it into execution, is a person named to the Mascot by a prominent Republican, who makes not the slightest objection to the use of his name, and expressed to the Mascot his entire willingness to testify under oath to the exact truth of the revelation he is about to make. To quote substantially the gentleman's very words, he said:

"One day in the spring of 1873, I was sitting in the office of W. P. Kellogg, Governor of Louisiana, when Ward, a colored member of the Legislature, and a colored political leader in Grant parish, entered the Governor's office, with the commissions of the newly elected Republican parish officers, which had just been received from the office of the Secretary of State. I heard W. P. Kellogg direct Ward to deliver those commissions to the parties designated, in person, and say to each of them that he, Kellogg, expected them to take possession of their offices and exercise their fullest functions, even if in exerting their authority it were necessary to resort to violence. I heard Ward ask Kellogg if he were authorized to tell these men that they would be sustained by the Executive of the State, and Kellogg replied, 'If necessary I will sustain them with the entire militia force under my command.' Ward had scarcely left, when Judge Rutland, parish judge, and the Democratic leader in Grant, made his appearance in the Governor's office. He also had an entire set of commissions issued to white Democratic officers of Grant parish. Kellogg intimated, in unmistakable language, to Judge Rutland, that the Democratic party claimed a majority of the votes cast in Grant, and that he had commissioned them, but that their ability to retain the offices would depend upon their exhibition of pluck. Feeling satisfied that a fearful conflict of races was about to be precipitated, I called at the office of the Secretary of State, and discovered that two sets of commissions, one Dem-

ocratic and the other Republican, had been issued for the parish of Grant. When W. P. Kellogg was expostulated with upon this exhibition of treachery, he remarked sententially: 'We must burn a little powder, and spill a little blood. The blood of the martyr is the seed of the church,' and my government has not been recognized at Washington."

The statement of the Mascot, in relation to Kellogg commissioning two sets of officers for Grant parish at one and the same time, with the view of precipitating a conflict between the races, is correct in the main, being well known to hundreds of living witnesses, and can be abundantly substantiated.

The first misstatement of the Mascot is in speaking of Judge Rutland as the parish judge, and designating him as a Democratic leader in this parish. Judge Rutland was a Republican, not a Democrat, and at that time was simply a lawyer practicing his profession, and held and laid claim to no office whatever. The contestants for the Judgeship at the time of the riot were Judge A. Cazabat, Democrat, and Shep. Williams, Republican. In the controversy, Judge Rutland, who sympathized with the whites, made a visit to New Orleans in their behalf, as stated by the Mascot. After the riot Rutland abandoned the Republican party and became a Democrat.

The second, most glaring and unjust statement, is as to the manner in which the negroes were killed. In order to put our account of this affair in a connected shape, we will rehearse all the important occurrences of the day and of a few days previous. To begin with, the condition of affairs were about as stated by the Mascot, namely, two sets of officers, one Democrat, the other Republican, held Kellogg's commissions, and had been instructed by him to hold their places by force if necessary. The whites secured possession first, and were soon driven off by a mob of negroes, who installed their officers. A meeting of the whites (Democrats) was called for the first day of April, to assemble at Colfax, to consider the propriety, and the best measures to pursue, in order to gain possession of the parish government. The negroes, to the number of two hundred or more, assembled at Colfax early on the morning of the first. They were nearly all armed, and exhibited their weapons with such freedom and made such open threats of violence in case the whites attempted to hold their meeting, that, although a large number of whites came to town to attend the meeting, it was deemed best not to assemble. This action of the whites seemed to give the negroes greater confidence and they began to boast and make direful threats that they would kill all the white men and take the women and raise up a new people. In the next four or five days several hundred negro men, women and children gathered at Colfax, all making the most terrible threats and conducting themselves in such an insolent and violent manner that the whites became terrorized and fled from their homes under cover of

night. The negroes finding the houses vacated broke them open and took possession, rifling the stores and residences of everything in them. Their acts of vandalism during these days of terror almost beggar description. In the house of Judge Rutland they found a coffin containing the remains of a child, awaiting transportation, which was ruthlessly thrown into the yard, face downward, and the lid broken nearly off. Among the catalogue of crimes committed by them was robbery, rape, and murder. The whites were terror stricken and the alarm spread into adjoining parishes like wild fire. The call of the citizens of Grant parish for help was responded to by the adjoining parishes, who sent about two hundred men to their assistance. These men encamped within two miles of Colfax on the 5th of April, and a demand was made on the negroes to disband and give up the offices and records of the parish then in their possession. This they refused to do, and set to work throwing up breastworks, saying they proposed to fight it out. Capt. C. C. Nash, who is at this time a resident merchant at Colfax, was the acknowledged leader of the whites, being the sheriff elected by them, and he made repeated demands for the negroes to disband or he would attack them and drive them away by force. Day after day the same demand was made and refused. Thus things went on until the morning of Easter Sunday, April 13, 1878, when the negroes were notified to disperse, or else to remove their women and children, as an attack would be made by the whites on the breastworks. The negroes sent off their women and children and manned their fortifications. The two opposing forces were somewhat reduced in numbers, owing to the fact that the attack had been delayed so long they thought there would be no fight, and a large number of men had left and gone home. At the time the fight commenced, a little after 10 o'clock a. m., there were about 150 white men, some 25 of whom were kept detailed to hold the horses, and about 250 negroes behind the intrenchments. A kind of skirmish was kept up all day until about 3 o'clock in the evening, when it was decided to send a sort of "forlorn hope" of thirty men along the river bank, who were to creep up until they got behind the breast works, then to raise up and open fire on the negroes in the rear. This was to be the signal for those in front to charge to their rescue. These thirty men were led by Mr. James Daniels, a resident of this parish until two years ago, when he removed to Rapides parish, where he now resides. The most of the men who accompanied Mr. Daniels were Grant parish men, and a large proportion of them were of the citizens living in the Rigoulet neighborhood. While they made their way along the river bank those in front kept up a constant fire to divert their attention away from them. So successful was this storming party that the negroes had no idea of their approach until they opened fire on them in the rear at a distance of about one hundred yards. At the first volley they were seized with a panic and broke to run, the most of them taking the road down the river and making good their escape. About one hundred negroes took refuge in the court house, a stout two story brick building, formerly used on the

Calhoun plantation for a stable (and never used as a sugar house as stated by the Mascot). From this building they kept up a constant fire, wounding three white men in the meanwhile. The only approach to the building was at one end in which there were no openings. The whites made a torch of oil and other combustible material, and, putting it in the hands of a negro prisoner (alive at this writing) compelled him to set the corner eaves on fire. The wind being from that direction the flames commenced to spread immediately. The negroes attempted to punch off the burning shingles, but by keeping up a regular fusillade on the burning spot they were forced to desist. In a few minutes flags of truce were run out at various windows. The firing ceased the minute it became known the negroes desired to surrender.

Right here the negroes committed one of the most dastardly acts of treachery ever perpetrated by fiends in human shape. Mr. James Hadnot, a gray-headed, venerable and respected citizen of this parish, desirous of allowing the negroes to escape from the burning building, rushed up to the door in company with five or six other white men, in order to make terms of capitulation as quickly as possible. When they got within a few feet of the door, a volley was fired at them from the inside of the building, mortally wounding Mr. Hadnot, Frank Moses and Sidney Harris, and slightly wounding two others of the party. After this act of treachery the negroes attempted to escape in the confusion that ensued. The whites were enraged at the perfidy of the negroes, and, as they rushed out of the building, shot them down like dogs, and those that escaped the first fire were ridden down in the open fields by men on horseback and shot without mercy. Notwithstanding this fearful carnage, some 40 prisoners were taken by those disposed to be more humane. At 4 o'clock all firing had ceased and the whites were masters of the situation. The prisoners were marched into the back yard of a residence, so they would be convenient to a cistern of water. They were not bound, nor was even a guard set over them longer than one hour, after which they might have gone without let or hindrance, had it not been for fear of incurring the displeasure of their captors. The wounded whites were taken into the house, so as to be convenient to the same cistern to which the negroes had access. There was a general disbandment of the whites, many of whom went home thinking all was over. About dark the steamboat Southwestern came down the river and landed at Colfax, taking Mr. Hadnot, who was then in a dying state, and other seriously wounded whites, on board. While this boat was at the landing a number of the whites drank pretty freely and became intoxicated. Among them were the sons, relatives and warm sympathizers of Mr. Jas. Hadnot. After the boat was gone, and nearly all of the sober and influential men had lain down to sleep, these parties, all of whom were young, reckless and irresponsible men, determined to go to the yard where the negroes were, and kill the last one of them in revenge for the dastardly murder of Mr. Hadnot and those with him who were shot down under the flag of truce. About 10 o'clock at night, and before any one was aware of their intention, they opened fire

Ransdell Opposes President

Is Fighting His Proposal to Repeal Sec. 5 of the Panama Canal Act, Which Exempts American Vessels Engaged in Coastwise Commerce from Paying Tolls to Pass Through Canal.

A tremendous effort is now being made to secure the repeal of that provision of the Panama Canal Act which exempts American vessels engaged in coastwise commerce from the payment of tolls, and this effort is likely to succeed unless those who are opposed to legislation by the Congress of the United States which is in the interest of Great Britain and the transcontinental railroads, rather than of the American people, shall enter a prompt and energetic protest.

The National Rivers and Harbors Congress at its convention in 1912 unanimously passed a resolution commending the 62nd Congress for its exemption of coastwise commerce from the payment of tolls, and this action was unanimously reaffirmed at the convention of 1913. The executive officers of the Congress, therefore, consider themselves in duty bound to use all legitimate means to prevent the repeal of this portion of the law.

It is claimed by Great Britain that the "free tolls" provision is a violation of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, but the members of the Senate who voted to ratify that treaty held a different view. Senator Lodge, who was in London while the negotiations were going on and afterwards was in charge of the treaty in the Senate, Senators Clapp and Perkins, former Senator Bard, the late Senator Davis, who was chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and an acknowledged authority on international law, and Theodore Roosevelt, who was then President, all believed that under that treaty we

had the right to treat our own shipping as we pleased; otherwise, the treaty would never have been ratified.

So far as it relates to domestic commerce the Panama Canal is purely an American waterway and should be treated in the same manner as other American waterways. Placing tolls on interstate commerce through the Panama Canal would overturn the custom which has been followed from the foundation of the government. It is claimed that free tolls would constitute a subsidy to coastwise shipping and that the benefits would be absorbed by a monopolistic combination, instead of going to the shipper. A ship with a net registered tonnage of 10,000 tons would pay \$12,000 in tolls each time it passed through the canal. If our coastwise shipping constitutes a monopoly so strong that the remission of tolls would result in no benefit to shippers, the proper remedy is, not the repeal of the law, but the destruction of the monopoly. * * * * *

The cooperation of every citizen, every newspaper and every commercial organization to which this memorandum or a knowledge of its contents may come is earnestly requested, so that a flood of letters, telegrams, editorials, petitions and resolutions may be sent to the Senators and Representatives in the Congress of the United States urging them to maintain American rights and refuse to repeal the free tolls clause.

JOSEPH E. RANDELL,
S. A. THOMPSON, Prest.
Secretary.

on the defenseless negroes, who broke and ran in all directions. Of the forty negroes in the yard about twenty were killed, the balance escaping under cover of the darkness.

In all there were some ninety-five negroes killed. All the negro bodies that had not been removed by their friends or relatives were buried on Tuesday, being placed in the ditch which they had dug in making their fortifications, and covered with dirt taken from the embankment. No birds of prey feasted on their carcasses before they were buried.

One remarkable feature of the fight was that there was not a solitary white Republican with the negroes when the fight came off, while only the day before they had with them Harvey, Payne, Shaw, Terry and one or two other white wretches who helped to agitate the terrible contest between the races. They all took good care to save their own bacon.

The foregoing is a condensed account of the "Colfax riot," which we have gathered from eyewitnesses. We hope the Mascot and other papers will do our people the justice to give publicity to this account, which we vouch for as being truthful in every particular.

Best Family Laxative.
Beware of constipation. Use Dr. King's New Life Pills and keep well. Mrs. Charles E. Smith, of West Franklin, Me., calls them, our family laxative. Nothing better for adults or aged. Get them to-day, 25c. All druggists or by mail. H. E. Bucklen & Co. St. Louis.—Adv.

Program of Big Creek Association.
The following is the program of the district meeting of the Big Creek Association, to be held at Colfax Baptist church on Saturday before the fifth Sunday in March, 1914:

Introductory sermon Friday night at 7:30 by Elder B. C. Smith.

SATURDAY.
9:30 a. m.—Devotion, Rev. L. M. Tyler.

10:00 a. m.—"The Place of Christian Education in the Kingdom," Prof. Weathersby.

11:00 a. m.—"The Importance of Missions," Dr. G. H. Crutcher. Special song.

Adjournment for dinner.
1:30 p. m.—"How Enlist the Attendance and Support of Disinterested Members? The Attitude of the Church Toward Them," Elder I. M. Brian and Robt. Hale.

2:30 p. m.—(a) "The Pastor's Duty to the Church," Elder B. F. Wallace. (b) "The Church's Duty to the Pastor," Dr. R. L. Baker.

3:30 p. m.—"Why Baptists Should Support their Denominational Paper," Elders J. O. Fogleman and E. O. Ware.

Preaching Saturday night by Prof. J. L. Railey; Sunday night by Dr. Crutcher.

General discussion after each subject.

Churches, see that you are represented. Come whether elected or not. The good people of Colfax will entertain all who come.

H. B. MERCER,
Pastor.