

MICKIE, THE PRINTER'S DEVIL



Facts of the Colfax Riot

Written by the late Editor of the Chronicle to Refute Misstatements

[From The Colfax (La.) Chronicle, June 3, 1892.]

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, 1873, 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 instill 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 man 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 carion. The individual directly responsible for this horrible butchery, whose fiendish brain conceived the murder, and who, with deliberate deviltry, 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 office 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 Democratic 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, be-

Day after day the same demand was made and refused.

Thus things went on until the morning of Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873, 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 entrenchments. A kind of skirmish was kept up all day until about 5 o'clock in the evening, when it was decided to send a set of "forlorn hope" of thirty men along the river bank, who were to creep up until they got behind the breastworks, 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 Riglett 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 stirring 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 50 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 that 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 disembowelment 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. James 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 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 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 carcases before they were buried.

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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 aggr on the terrible contest between the races. They all took good care of 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.

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