

American Legal History – Russell

W[illiam] S[tewart] Simkins, Professor of Law in the University of Texas, "WHY THE KU KLUX," 4 *The Alcalde* (June 1916): 735-748.

[William Stewart Simkins (1842-1929) was a faculty member at The University of Texas School of Law from 1899 to 1929. He invented the mythical animal known as the "Peregrinus," which is currently the name of the law school yearbook, and he and his brother Eldred James Simkins organized the Ku Klux Klan in Florida. This article appeared in The Alcalde, which is the alumni magazine for The University of Texas at Austin; this issue was the 1916 Commencement Issue. Simkins delivered this address as the centerpiece of the campus's Thanksgiving Day observance in 1914.]

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In the light of the fact that politically and materially the South has come into her own and that her policies are dominating the administration of our national government, I feel a hesitancy in recalling the bitter memories of the past and in speaking of that period in her history when the door of hope seemed to have been shut, and the South, weighted with a common woe of poverty and desolation, had not among the nations of the earth one sympathetic hand stretched out to her while she was seeking to rehabilitate her ruined homes and shattered fortunes. And I come now not to arouse your prejudices but simply to relate an experience which may point a moral though it may not adorn a tale.

Again, I would protect from the withering influence of ignorance the character of those secret organizations of the South that sprang out of a great necessity for readjusting social conditions and resisting oppression and hate. Again, I think you will see that the men of that day had the spirit of the martyrs of old who passed through the fires of persecution for their faith.

And as I write these lines I lift my heart in gratitude to God that he has preserved me to see faith lost in sight, and hope in the full flower of fruition.

I think that when the future unprejudiced historian shall write the history of this Nation during the nineteenth century, it will be noted that from the Nullification Act in 1832 to the Civil War in 1861 the relation of the North and South was only an armistice; in a word, both sides were resting on their arms, while events each succeeding year during this period were fanning the flames of prejudice and hate, widening the breaches and making the conflict inevitable. But I think back of it all may be found the old, old story of the antagonisms of the Cavalier and Puritan that demanded the head of Charles I as its first great sacrifice and the blood and treasure of the South as its last, I hope.

It is not, however, my purpose to speak of that war and its sacrifices. I will only say that young, enthusiastic and hopeful, I stood by the first gun fired in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, and I heard the last at Bentonville, North Carolina; and the proudest heritage I leave my children is this fact, coupled with the consciousness that from first to last I tried to do my duty as a soldier of the South. The God of Battle was against us, we furled the old flag and hung up the faded jacket of gray, soiled with the [736] dust of battle, every button of which reflected the heroism and glory of our fathers.

I surrendered with the Western Army in North Carolina and received from the Confederate Government for my service one Mexican dollar and a mule, the dollar for grub, and the mule for locomotion to reach my home. But it was all right--I had no home, as the plantations of my family were on the coast country of South Carolina from which my family had fled early in the war. Unfortunately, these plantations were within the territory set apart by General Sherman in his celebrated order Number 15, issued from Savannah [sic], Georgia, for the occupation of the negroes following his army as he swept through the South, and forbidding any white man from entering the thirty mile square so set apart, on any pretext whatever; in a word, my home had been confiscated.

However, having some possessions in Florida, I started on my mule for that state. I had never before ridden a mule and its tango motion was unbearable; so I very soon traded the mule for something that looked like a horse and pursued my journey to Florida, arriving in May, 1865. Unfortunately for the South, Mr. Lincoln was assassinated about this time; the effect upon the country has been so frequently described that I will not dwell upon it. Mr.

Johnson succeeded him with the unquestioned purpose in view of carrying out the policies of Mr. Lincoln as indicated by him in previous proclamations.

Upon reaching Florida I found the negroes on the plantations, and while there was some suppressed excitement, there was no indication that they were going to assert their freedom by abandoning the plantations; there was no particular evidence of unrest. They had not grasped their situation as freemen and the influence of the former owners had not been shaken, as the carpetbagger had not made his appearance, or the scallawag risen to the surface.

In a few months provisional governments for the Southern States had been formulated and by July, 1865, had been fully organized under men appointed by President Johnson as Governors of the various States, and in pursuance of a plan to readmit them to their former status as States of the Union. Governor Marvin, who had been sent to Florida, whom I personally knew, was a Christian gentleman of broad sympathies and did what he could to reconcile our people to the conditions existing. As said, these provisional governments were intended to pave the way to constitutional state governments, and immediately elections were ordered and held for state officers and members of the Legislature and Congress; and thus launched as constitutionally organized, they sought representation in Congress as members of the Union.

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Our political peace lasted until the meeting of Congress in December, 1865, which was dominated by such men as Stephens, Sumner and Wilson, all apostles of hate and one of whom at least had declared the Constitution of the United States "a league with hell."

Their theory was that the States, by secession, had been reduced to territories and Congress could deal with them as such; and their theory practically prevailed, as the South was denied representation in Congress and thus lay prostrated at the feet of this irresponsible body of fanatics. It was only by reducing us to a territorial existence that their Congressional fulminations could reach us, and their envenomed prejudices could be satisfied; and the suffering of the South was sweet incense to their passionate hate.

With the enforcement of their theory our troubles began. The Freedman's Bureau, organized shortly after Congress, met under the guise of protecting

the negroes from their former masters; it was in fact a method of organizing the negroes as pliant tools of the Republican party. It was also armed with powers that were intended to humiliate the South, and enforce the anticipated Civil Rights laws, the germ of which was social equality. The severest penal laws were enacted against those who interfered in any way with the free exercise of any whim of these ignorant masses, and the federal courts, then presided over by party tools, were given jurisdiction in enforcing these penalties. To make it more effective the Bureau was made an annex of the War Department and the soldiers of that victorious army were to obey the orders of that villainous Bureau and assist in crushing the pride of the South by the elevation of the negro to political control. The pillar of cloud by day and fire by night that marked the trail of Sherman 's army were not more blighting in its effect upon the people of the South.

In most of the states of the South, and especially in Florida, the heads of these Bureaus were the most corrupt set of scoundrels that could be found in the land; they seemed to have been selected from the criminal class following in the wake of the army who looted homes while the army fought. Qualification had nothing to do with preferment; only hate of the South and the absence of conscience were required to fill the positions.

The state head of the Bureau in Florida was an admitted swindler; his second in command a proved thief; and the third added to the above qualifications the responsibility for murders committed. These men appointed the sub-agents of the Bureau in all the towns and villages of the state.

Thus organized let us look at its powers. They exercised jurisdiction over all contracts between negroes and white employers, [738] their former masters, charging, without any authority of law, the employer fifty cents and the negro twenty-five cents for each contract they approved, and reserving the right to set aside the contract if the negro was dissatisfied; for these agents sat in judgment over all disputes between the white people and the negro whether the contract was for domestic or plantation service. They could hear any other character of complaint of any negro who had some supposed or fancied grievance, and impose the severest penalties of the law. They could take a case from any civil court of the state in which a negro was interested or involved and could set aside the decree or judgments of these courts under similar conditions whether criminal or civil; with these despotic powers it was superior to the constitution and laws of the land. No jury was allowed, no

indictment or information save the presence and oath of an ignorant negro; and to enforce the orders of this irresponsible Bureau the army was at its back to arrest white men and women, and to enforce the penalties adjudged. Every barrier of the constitution was set aside, and in the name of law they defied the law and in the name of justice they strangled it. This is no exaggeration of these powers, for I am prepared to give concrete examples of their exercise.

The carpetbag members of the Bureau, by their unlawful assessments on the contracts between the white and blacks, and the free exercise of other predatory schemes, were getting rich. The news spread rapidly and these Union patriots (as they called themselves), whom plunder incited to action, swept down upon us like vultures to a carcass. These scoundrels had neither heads to think nor hearts to feel; they moved among us in wrath and paused in ruin, but if they stopped for a moment in their flight it was to whet their beaks for keener rapine or replume their wings for a bolder flight of oppression.

It was under these conditions that 1867 dawned upon us.

On March 4, 1867, Stevens, Sumner, Wilson and their ilk swept away the provisional governments, and divided the South into military districts with a military commander, or rather satrap, at the head of each district, leaving us no government but the unrestrained will of the commander, and the tyranny of the Freedman's Bureau whose powers were increased by successive amendments and made a more efficient curse to the South. This division into military districts was known as the first of the reconstruction acts. In substance it abolished all civil courts and set up "Courts Martial," in which constitutional guarantees were unrecognized. The commander had power to remove any civil officer of the state and replace him with a pliant tool, and to more effectually carry [739] out this mission of hate, Congress amended the law twice, taking away all powers of the President of the United States to interfere and depriving the Supreme Court of the United States of jurisdiction to pass upon these tyrannous and iniquitous laws.

The so-called States were to reorganize under the direction of these military satraps. To more fully prepare for this reorganization Congress passed a law disfranchising the intelligence of the South by declaring that all who had voted for secession or held any office before the war could not vote. Voters were all to be registered by September, 1867, and the carpetbaggers were to compose the Board of Registration, and to pass upon the qualifications of those who presented themselves for registration. In Florida about 11,000 whites of the

scallawag and carpetbag element, with 15,000 negroes, registered. Such was the class of men who were called upon to elect the members of so-called constitutional conventions to frame constitutions for the Southern States, and under the domination of military fanatics who did not pause in the free use of vicious ignorance to carry out the congressional scheme. There may have been exceptions in some of the military districts, both as to the character of the commanders and the methods of carrying out the will of Congress, but the writer is speaking from a vivid recollection of the character and methods of one, General Pope, and his subordinate, Colonel Sprague, in the third military district composed of Georgia, Florida and Alabama.

But with or without a constitution the state could not be admitted into the Union without first adopting the 14th amendment to the Constitution of the United States. It was the first great step in consummating the scheme of Congress to make the negro a factor in the government, so that the slave of yesterday, who knew no law but the will of his master, was to be invested with the control of the government to control his master's will. In the latter part of this year another factor entered to render more acute our Crown of Sorrows: I refer to the LOYAL LEAGUE.

It was somewhat of a caricature of the "Union League" of the Northern States. This particular secret organization was a whelp of the "Freedman's Bureau"-conceived in sin and born in iniquity. The purpose ostensibly [sic] was to bind the negroes to vote the Republican ticket; its ritual was directed at the superstitions and fears of the negroes, and its final purpose was to break every remnant of loyalty and affection that had hitherto bound the negroes to their old masters. The reward held out for loyalty to the Republican party and obedience to the orders of its leaders was "forty acres and a mule"; the punishment for disloyalty was a return to slavery. But this was not the disturbing element in its organization [740] it was the military feature and the oath taken to obey orders that aroused our fears.

The negroes soon began to appear in companies of infantry and cavalry. All night their drums were beating, telling of a preparation for some deviltry or disturbance when the carpetbagger who controlled them should give the order. The hands of irresponsible ignorance led by ruffians and thieves were at our throats.

Thus, 1868 opened upon us; under the influence of the League the negroes became bolder, incendiary harangues were heard everywhere, white women

could not appear on the streets without escort, and domestic duties were performed with a ready pistol at hand. The Freedman's Bureau aggravated the conditions by pandering into the rising prejudice of the negro, arresting white men and women on trivial complaints by servants in the household, or negroes from the plantations. Equal rights began to assume the form of insistence on social equality and we find the Legislature of Florida passing a force bill to accomplish it by law. On every hand wrong was raised on arrogance and power stamped as law.

Were we simply to sit quiet and cry out "take thy beak from out of our hearts, thy form from off our door"? Were we to lie down in quiet, hugging to our breasts the delusive phantom of hope that God in his infinite mercy would help us? No; God only helps those who help themselves.

So to meet this saturnalia of crime and insolence; to suppress this volcano on which our women and children were nightly sleeping; to meet the military feature of this Loyal League, arose the "Invisible Empire." It was demanded for our safety and essential to our peace. In its organization and operation each state acted independently, and I can only speak of its organization and operation in Florida with which I was connected. Florida was more fortunately situated than other states to facilitate the operation of the Klan. The railroad from Tallahassee to Gainesville passed through the center of the black belt where we were most needed, and the conductors, engineers, and telegraph operators, being mostly Southern young men in hearty sympathy with us, never hesitated to carry out our orders when such services were needed, either for the dispatch of orders or the transportation of men. Our particular organization policed the counties of Jefferson, Madison, Taylor, and as far east as Columbia county, which comprise the heart of the black belt in Florida. Most of our service was performed at night and on horseback and not by rail. Our plan was never to work men in the county of their residence; the masked flitters of the night were always brought from other counties that the ready alibi might always be in evidence. The dawn of day [741] was the hour to disperse and no two must be seen together after daylight. We worked, of course, upon the fears and superstitions of the negroes, performing before their cabins at night apparently supernatural stunts. The immediate effect upon the negro was wonderful, the flitting to and fro of masked horses and faces struck terror to the race, and any belated negro on the road at night who saw us coming never stood on the order of his going. The spirit of "dem Ku

Kluxers," as they called us, guarded the roads at night; in a word, the night prowlers now were satisfied to remain at home.

The Klan was composed of the best young men of the land, soldiers of the Southern army, many of them heroes in battle, and now as fearless in their duty as they had been in war. Our organization was compact, and we could assemble several hundred men at almost any point of the black belt on short notice and in time to quell any disturbance of a serious nature. Our mission was the protection of our women and children from the disorders of the time, and to suppress crime as far as it could be done without disclosing our identity, and in doing so I come with no blood-curdling stories as the result of our operations. We controlled by mystery; there was our power. When anyone, whether white or black, was obnoxious to the community by reason of specific crimes such as theft, arson, or swindling; or inflammatory in word or conduct, all we had to do was to visit his abode at midnight and tack our sign upon his door and his voice would no longer be heard in the land. The change in the conduct of the negro as well as the carpetbagger, and even in the operations of the Freedman's Bureau in 1869 and 1870 was marvelous. It was the force, not of numbers, but of mystery.

Pardon me now for relating certain personal incidents during the time I was operating the Klan; in a measure these incidents illustrate the unseen power of the K. K. K. The negroes and carpetbaggers in the town in Florida in which I lived, while not susceptible of proof, were morally certain that I was a member of the Klan. This was shown on many instances where I was brought in personal contact with them.

I was staying at the hotel in my town when one morning a lady came in apparently quite frightened and in tears. I asked her what troubled her. She said she had been insulted by a negro. Ascertaining the name of the negro I seized a barrel stave lying near the hotel door and whipped that darkey down the street and into the Freedman's Bureau. While an information was filed against me they sent the negro out of town and dismissed the information without any effort on my part to interfere with the prosecution. [742]

On another occasion a young man by the name of Garwood had come out of the war with only a hand printing press as his sole remaining possession. He suggested to my brother and myself that if we would write his editorials he thought he could make a living at least, if not a little more; we willingly consented and proceeded to expose the villainies of the carpetbag

government of the state, not hesitating to mention names and the crimes of which they were guilty. Now in the same town there was a negro by the name of Robert Meacham who was a prototype of the negro Lynch whose influence is portrayed in the "Birth of a Nation." Robert had been brought up as a domestic servant in a refined Southern family and absorbed much of the courteous manner of the old regime. He had been highly honored by the Republican party; in fact, had been made temporary chairman of the so-called Constitutional Convention heretofore referred to. He was at the time of which I am now speaking State Senator and Postmaster in the town. I could hardly exaggerate his influence among the negroes; glib of tongue, he swayed them to his purpose whether for good or evil; in a word, he was their idol. On one occasion he was delivering a very radical speech in which he referred to the paper which we were editing as that "dirty little sheet." He was correct as to the word "little," for it was not much larger than a good size pocket handkerchief; but it was exceedingly warm, a fact which had excited his ire. The next day, being informed by a friend who was present of Meacham's remark, I called upon him at the post-office and asked an interview. With his usual courtesy he bowed and said he would come over to my office as soon as he had distributed the mail. I cut a stick, carried it up to the office and hid it under my desk. Within an hour he appeared. I told him to take a seat, but I could see that he suspected something unusual as he began to back towards the door. I saw that I was going to lose the opportunity of an interview, so I grabbed the stick and made for him. Now, my office was the upper story of a merchandise building approached on the side by wooden stairs. I hardly think that he touched one of those steps going down; it was a case of aerial navigation to the ground. This gave him the start of me. He was pursued up to the postoffice door and through a street filled with negroes and yet not a hand was raised or word said in his defense, nor was the incident ever noticed by the authorities. The unseen power was behind me. Had I attempted anything of the kind a year before I would have been mobbed or suffered the penalties of the law.

Speaking again of the little paper, it was a custom when the negroes met to celebrate some occasion or hear a speech that they [743] would march in front of that paper office jeering and hooting; but that was all,- the invisible empire protected it. Many a time I have seen the negroes force white persons from the sidewalk, but the right of way was never denied to those young men whom they suspected of being members of the Ku Klux. These and a thousand

other similar incidents from the latter part of 1868 to the end of the year 1870 could be stated, showing the influence of this organization.

So much for the social conditions. I come now to speak of certain political incidents which demanded effective action by our organization. In the election of November, 1870, a Democrat was running for Lieutenant Governor of Florida, against a carpetbagger. Just before the election great unrest was apparent among the negroes, which excited some anxiety among our people. The negroes had begun to assemble at night in companies and the everlasting beat of the drum was again heard in the land. Our organization began to prepare for the anticipated trouble in each county, so that we could obtain assistance if necessary from other counties. In Jefferson county where I lived we had only about fifty of the Klan in the town where the election was to be held; for by the law all polling places of the county were required to be concentrated at the county seat where the negro vote would be under the immediate supervision of the officers of the Freedman's Bureau and the carpetbag officers of the county, and thus to keep away from any latent influence of the former owners. The vote of the county was about six negro votes to one white vote. Anticipating trouble, we began our preparation as follows: We first agreed with the officers of the Bureau and county that the negroes should have six of the polling places at which no white man should vote, and the whites should have their polling place at the courthouse at which no negro should vote. After notifying the white carpetbag officials that in the event of any trouble, which we knew they could control, we would kill them first, but feeling that in the event of trouble, with only fifty of our organization as against several thousand negroes who would come into the town to vote, we could not enforce our threat or adequately protect the women and children, we sent up to Georgia for several hundred men to appear in the morning of the election to aid us in preserving order. The courthouse at which the whites were to vote stood, as usual, in the middle of the square, surrounded by brick stores on three sides and a large hotel on the other. In all of these general merchandise stores were stacks of guns for sale, which, out of abundant caution, some days before the elections; we loaded with buckshot, capped them, [744] and replaced them in the stacks with strict orders not to sell any of them until after election. The morning of the election arrived and with it our Georgia boys fully armed and equipped. The moral effect was splendid, the election proceeded quietly, and about five P.M., the Georgia boys, having a long way to go, were dismissed with thanks. They had been gone about a half hour when I heard from our voting place at the courthouse the

words, "If you attempt to vote here I will kill you." I rushed over to the courthouse to find Colonel Capers Bird with a pistol pointing at a negro who was hesitating, while Meacham, the leader, was urging him to vote at the white polling place. Meacham turned to the negro after I arrived, saying, "Go and bring my pistol." I saw the trouble had come; so I rushed Colonel Bird into one of the stores, distributed the fifty men among the stores and upper gallery of the hotel and waited events. The negro whom Meacham had sent for his pistol ran to the six polling places of the negroes announcing the fact that we had killed Meacham. In fifteen minutes they came like a black cloud down all the streets leading to the courthouse square in companies of cavalry and infantry, and to my surprise all were armed with some character of weapon, and crying, "Kill the rebels, cut their throats," and other imprecations that can not be written. My brother, Wm. Pasco, afterwards United States Senator from Florida, and myself went out in the vain effort to stem the tide of the onrush. In the event we could not stop it I was to give the signal to the stores to begin firing. I suppose between six and seven hundred negroes were in the mob that rushed into the square, it being late, and most of them having voted and left for the plantations. Fortunately one over-enthusiastic darkey on horseback, seeing no white people, thought we had fled, and began twirling his gun over his head in exultation, but suddenly bringing it down struck the hammer of his gun on the pommel of his saddle and an explosion followed. Immediately every negro fired off his weapon in the air, so I knew we had them, for not one in fifty had another load of ammunition for his weapon. The result, however, was more disconcerting than the original attack, for here came the white women and children screaming and yelling from their homes thinking that we were being massacred by the infuriated blacks. It was not long after the negroes had fired off their guns that we were enabled to pacify them by forcing Meacham to show himself as still alive.

The next day, however, there marched into my office a committee of about twenty prominent negroes who had discovered their peril and with a most profuse apology for their conduct, they thanked us for not firing upon them. We substantially replied that we [745] hoped it would be a lesson for the future, and that they would see the tragic result of following the foolish advice of their leaders, and to keep in mind that we were always prepared for any criminal or hostile movement on their part. The incident had a sobering influence upon the negroes in that county and from that day I think the influence of the local carpetbagger began to wane, for they gave but little trouble afterwards.

I think from this year the negroes generally in the black belt of Florida began to discover that the apparent disinterested friendship of the carpetbagger was a hollow mockery. There was no question of the common belief among them that each was to receive "forty acres and a mule," and upon this belief the carpetbagger had devised every kind of scheme to swindle them. Many of them went through the country selling painted sticks from \$2.50 to \$5.00, and they were told to drive these stakes at the four corners of the land selected by them and the government would protect them in their possession. Hundreds bought these stakes and drove them down upon their selected patch in perfect faith that they had acquired the land selected. Other carpetbaggers sold exemption certificates, printed at small cost, executed in the form of a deed with a cheap tinsel seal attached, and I give you as a sample the form of this instrument that they sold for not less than \$2.50 and as much more as they could get:

"Know all men by these presents that naught is naught, and a figure is a figure; all for the white man, and none for the nigger and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so have I lifted dollars from this darned old nigger.

(Signed) Nix CUM A Rous."

The United States Land Registrar at Tallahassee sold thousands of bogus certificates to these poor, ignorant creatures for from \$5.00 up.

These are but a few examples of the forms of deception practiced upon these poor, ignorant, poverty-stricken people. Their former masters and members of our organization tried to undeceive them, but they were joined to their idols and could not be persuaded. The United States Government found it necessary to send down provisions for the indigent negroes, but the higher officers of the Freedman's Bureau stole them and manipulated them as a source of revenue for themselves.

By 1871 many of the active leaders had disappeared for crimes committed and other causes; the scales began to fall from the eyes of the negroes and the troubles rapidly ceased. I will close with one more incident which I think may be of interest. I allude to the capture by our organization, of a train bearing rifles and [746] ammunition with which to arm the negroes. At the time of which I write the Republican party was fiercely divided over the control of the loot which they were extracting from the state by exorbitant taxation, and the

issue of bonds, the proceeds of which were never devoted to the purpose of the issue.

Reed, the carpetbag governor of the state, was at the head of one of these party divisions, and evidently thought that if he could organize the negroes and arm them as a state militia it would give him a decided advantage over the other side who were seeking to impeach and remove him. He consequently applied to the legislature for an issue of bonds to enable him to purchase the arms and ammunition, which request was granted and the bonds issued. He purchased, in Connecticut, about two thousand Enfield rifles with a large quantity of ammunition and shipped them to Tallahassee, Florida. Our organization knew it would be disastrous to the state to permit the arming of the negroes, so watched with considerable anxiety the whole movement, and seriously considered the means of preventing it. Our control over the telegraph operators, already spoken of, kept us in touch with the movement of the arms from the time they left the armories of Connecticut until they reached the Florida line. At this time the Florida Road only ran mixed trains, and usually behind the freight was one passenger coach. We gathered one hundred and twenty men, determined to destroy those arms. So our plan was to place forty men at Station 57, now known as Greenville on that road; forty men at Station 4; and forty at Station 3, which was about thirty miles from Tallahassee, the point of destination; so that if one squad failed from any cause the other perhaps would succeed.

In locating our men we of course had to select the stations where the train arrived after night had set in. The train reached Station 5 on time, but to our surprise instead of the usual one passenger coach, there were two coaches filled with United States troops, evidently as an escort for the arms. However, this unexpected condition did not create one moment's hesitation among our men. The conductor stepped down from the coach and walked forward some distance, where we gave the sign and demanded the keys of the freight cars. In a very few minutes the doors of the cars containing the arms and ammunition were thrown open and ten men placed in each car. The engineer was ordered to run slowly and to blow his whistle when within a half mile of the next station to give us an opportunity of getting off, which instructions he carried out to the letter. Before his signal was given however, we had every box of arms and ammunition out of the cars on the side of the road awaiting our return. [747]

We at once began the work of demolishing the whole consignment, which we accomplished by running the rifles under the rails and giving them a twist which rendered them useless; the ammunition we threw into the numerous ponds and borrow pits filled with water along this road. Just before daylight we reached Station 5, having destroyed every gun and cartridge intended for Reed's Negro Militia. We took some of the broken guns and boxes and scattered them a quarter of a mile east of the station where we boarded the train.

At day dawn the boys left for their homes. I remained at the station to see results. I was very tired, and asked the privilege of occupying the station agent's bed, which was in a small room partitioned off in the pine shack called the station house. I hardly had laid my head upon the pillow when I heard the prolonged whistle of an engine; in a few minutes it arrived with a battalion of soldiers sent from Tallahassee as soon as the loss was discovered. They all got out and searched the surroundings for some clue. In the meantime I listened to the conversation between the station agent and the commanding officer of the soldiers who were not over fifteen feet from me; the station agent was swearing that no one got on at the station. He was swearing to what he believed to be true for in fact he had not seen one of us. The soldiers remained about thirty minutes when one of them came up to the officer and reported that they had found some broken arms and boxes east of the depot; the officer replied that they must have gotten on the station east of No. 5 which was the town of Madison, the county seat of Madison county. So the bugles were sounded, the soldiers returned to the cars and set out for Madison where they were quartered for several months investigating and seeking for the parties who had caused such bitter disappointment to Reed and his militia.

I am not ashamed to confess my share in this train robbing incident. I believe it was the best night's work ever done for the State of Florida, as it would have been fatal to the peace of the state had this carpetbag governor been permitted to arm the ignorant tools of an infamous government. Of course, covering the territory which we did, comprising the heart of the black belt of the state, our duties were constant and arduous in seeking out the lawbreakers, the negroes and carpetbaggers spreading vicious doctrines, and the offensive scallawag who had disgraced the South by being recreant to his race for selfish purposes, all of which we accomplished satisfactorily without bloodshed.

True there were many homicides during this period, and especially in Western Florida in which there were few towns at that time [748] and no railroad facilities, but was largely a pine barren waste with comparatively few plantations. The Ku Klux did not operate in this territory and the numerous homicides committed there were the result of individual and neighborhood quarrels, as well as the intense demoralization of the times which would naturally arise when Southern men were face to face with negro domination thrust upon them by federal law harshly executed by hated emissaries from other states.

The course followed by the Freedman's Bureau and the interference by its officers of the contracts between the planters and the negroes, thus demoralizing the labor upon which they depended; the frequent arrests of these planters upon the information of negroes, and other insolent methods in the treatment of Southern men and their families in these sparsely settled counties, naturally drew together all the Southern whites for common defense. Being few in number it required greater activity and often more serious action to accomplish their purpose, but it was the combined action of the white Southern population and not the work of a secret organization.

After all, if we take the census of deaths for 1869 and 1870, the most active period of these secret organizations, it will be seen that there were only 106 deaths from gunshot wounds and other causes in a population then approximating 190,000, which was not much greater than deaths from the same causes in normal conditions. A thousand more funerals would not have compensated Florida for the sorrows she endured. By 1875 Florida came to her own and the curtain closed down upon the tragedy of reconstruction in this state.

Well, I am done. I have only weakly portrayed the conditions of that lamentable period. I have told my story imperfectly but I hope I have said enough to shield the memory of those splendid young men who fought so hard to protect the South from the terrors that threatened her in the days of her desolation and sorrow. I lift my heart in gratitude to the Giver of all good, that today, as the center of wealth and population is approaching her borders and her ports filled with the commerce of the nations, she is beginning to feel the throbings of her ancient glory. Out of the fires of her affliction she has been purified and strengthened, and has risen from the dust to win nobler triumphs of peace than she ever dreamed of in her affliction. While I would

have the alumni of the University always loyal to her traditions, not forgetting the old in the grandeur of the new, yet under a common flag, and the inspiration of an indivisible union, I would have them always loyal to that union in which only is progress, prosperity and peace.

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