ROSEWOOD

Story by GARY MOORE

"I was in it to start with. Me and a fella named Dorsett . . . I said, 'Ed, I ain't goin' to do it. I don't believe in killin' innocent people . . . They were burnin' houses and killin' innocent people — women and children. . . . People comin' from as far away as Jacksonville takin' wrappers off brand new guns."

Rosewood.

"They went to killin' everything — babies and all. Dogs, cats — everything . . ."

Rosewood.

"He showed that ear to many a person . . . He kept it in a little old pouch . . . It was kind of brown . . . He had two ears . . . He just walked up with a knife and clipped 'em off."

"I happened to be one of those children those crackers shot at . . . Like we were rabbits, out in that swamp! And us little children! Hunted us like we were rabbits!"

Rosewood.

"The deads was a secret."
"Stacked 'em like railroad ties."
"Let a sleeping dog lie."
"They don't want it told."
"For the next six years, every now and then, somebody would find a skull or something — nigger head or something — all out in the swamp."

Rosewood.

History has reserved no special monstrosity for the name. For 59 years, the terrible secret of a vanished town named Rosewood, Florida, has stayed buried.

For 59 years a number of grieving, frightened or bitter people scattered across the state have known the secret. But they have kept silent.

They lived in Rosewood.

They watched a whole town get wiped from the map.

Their names are Bradley, Blocker, Carter and Carrier. King, Coleman, Goins, Mulberry, McCoy, Gordon. And many other names. Many still refuse to talk.

They have dispersed to Jacksonville, Chicago, Orlando, New York, St. Augustine, Miami, Pensacola, Deland, Chiefland, Daytona, Gainesville, Tampa, St. Petersburg.

Once, they were hunted like animals. Since, they hardly dared wonder which of the disappeared from among them may have been tortured or killed. What they suffered, what they saw — all made it clear to them: They must never tell the tale.

Rosewood.

It was a special town.

Almost all its inhabitants were black.

A world unto itself, it was a village deep in the Suwannee River swamps and wilderness of Levy County, 46 miles southeast of Gainesville, nine miles from the Gulf of Mexico at Cedar Key.

Then came New Year's week, 1923.

The black settlement of Rosewood was utterly destroyed.

Sudden and savage, the destruction briefly made a splash in newspapers, not only in Florida but in New York and Chicago. However, published counts of the dead and descriptions of what took place concealed the real extent and nature of the violence. The newspaper accounts were "doctored," as one participant in the violence now says.

After a week of sensation, the events of January, 1923, seem to have dropped completely from Florida's consciousness, like some unmentionable skeleton in the family closet.

To blacks, the hidden story of Rosewood may seem like only the tip of an iceberg of cultural violence.

To whites, it must remind that upon the Good Old Days there often lay a savage sheen.

Rosewood stands as a symbol of the countless secret deaths and tortures that took place in an era that has slipped from view.

Rosewood.

The people who remember often disagree in their recollections. They agree on this:

Rosewood, Florida, was a village beside the Seaboard Air Line Railroad, at a spot on Section 29 of the map of Levy County. In Rosewood lived between 150 and 200 souls, in 20 to 40 houses. A few of the houses were large, two-story buildings, with fruit groves and shady grape arbors. There were several churches, two of which were fitted out with organs and steeple bells. There was a school, a store, a sugar mill, a turpentine still, and an all-black fraternal lodge hall. All tucked away deep in the swamps.

Today, the spot is marked by vine-covered chimney brick.

MASSACRE

Art by JOE TONELLI

Tales of what happened there are not often told to outsiders, but they still whisper through sparsely-settled Levy County. Varying with the teller's outlook, the event has different names: the Rosewood Riot, the Rosewood Massacre. Or just "Rosewood."

Estimates of the dead range from seven, in the sanitized newspaper accounts of 1923; to 17 or 18 reported by reliable witnesses as having been interred in a single mass grave; to "30 or 40" recalled by a still-living participant in the violence; to "150, maximum," that other witnesses, perhaps exaggerating, tend to agree upon.

For a week, in January, 1923, as witnesses recall and old clippings verify, white men came into Levy County in droves — by train, horseback, in Model-T cars — bent on destroying a town.

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New Year's Day opened cold and hard on Monday, Jan. 1, 1923, in a once-thriving but now-deserted deep woods milltown named Sumner, in North Florida. Sumner was three miles down the Seaboard Air Line Railroad from the smaller village of Rosewood.

In Sumner, the icy, swamp-wet morning was shattered by a scream.

Fannie Taylor, a young white woman, sobbed to her indignant neighbors that her small company-owned house in Sumner had suddenly been invaded by an unidentified man. He had knocked her to the floor, she said, had stolen her money and fled out the back door.

She said he was black.

That day a number of white men gathered with Fannie Taylor's husband James, and followed a tracking dog out the Taylors' back door. The dog led them to a nearby railroad track, and thence three miles down the track to the town — black world unto itself — of Rosewood.

And then . . .

The story of what happened next is a maze of conflicting tales, twisting downward into rooms which our prevailing culture endeavors to keep tightly shut.

Rosewood.

Who attacked Fannie Taylor?

Even around this beginning of the violence mysteries swirl.

At least two people are still alive who say they were present at the time. Both say they stood near the house where Fannie Taylor lived, at the moment she said she was attacked.

Both witnesses, having lived through mob violence, are afraid it could happen again, that it could reach out from the past to strike them if they talk about it. Both insist on anonymity. One is white. One is black.

Call them Ellen Baker and Eugenia Day.

Ellen Baker, the white woman, was an adult in 1923. She has remained a close friend of many of the whites involved. She skirts around the edges of some parts of the story. Her account essentially backs up most of the legends told among whites in Levy County about what happened that morning, though her story seems more accurate about time and place, and is more convincingly detailed than the legends. She says she would prefer not to go into it all. She says many things would be better off forgotten.

Ellen Baker tells it thus:

Fannie Taylor was "very peculiar, kind of," though Ellen Baker liked her. They were neighbors. Fannie was young, had married very young, when she was about 14. She was from a poor but proud family far out in the country. Her husband James was from a venerable, well-respected family of carpenters and shipbuilders at Cedar Key.

With their two small children, James and Fannie Taylor lived in Sumner, in the double row of weathered, four-room houses that were the sawmill "quarters" — rent-free housing for white employees of the Cummer & Sons Cypress Company. Beyond the mill stood a separate quarters for blacks.

The white quarters ran along a street paved in true sawmill fashion, with the saw-stripped, discarded bark of the cypress tree. Edged with plank boardwalks to foil the summer rains, hemmed by stout picket fences against wayward cows and pigs, shaded by laurel and cedar, the street ran from the howling mill to the brooding woods. Several doors

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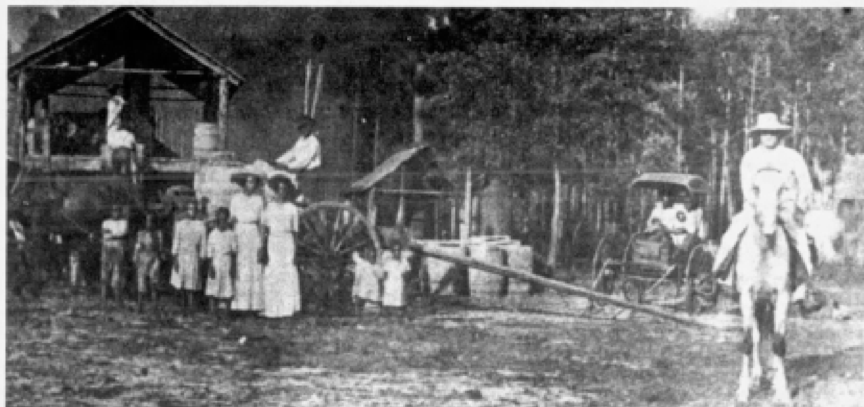
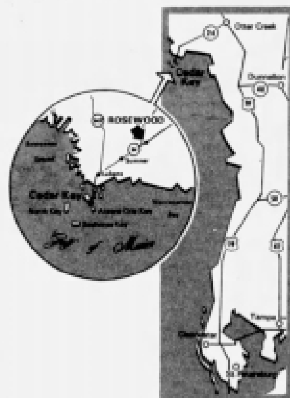


Pioneer Florida: *Turpentine still in the 1920s.*



down from Ellen Baker's house, shoved right up against a deep, dark cypress grove, stood the Taylor house, the last house in line.

James Taylor was a millwright — charged with keeping the sawmill running smoothly. A well-liked man, he neither chewed tobacco nor cursed, a rarity in Sumner.

Because he was a millwright, the old legends say, he had to depart from home early in the morning to oil up the mill, thus leaving his wife at home alone. But in fact, says Ellen Baker, *all* the men from that stalwart little row of company houses had to go to work very early. In the short days of winter, they were gone before first light. New Year's Day, they were all working. Such was the place and time. Dawn to dusk, no holiday all year but Christmas week, low pay. They were furnished a house, firewood, well water.

The exact way in which Fannie Taylor was "very peculiar" is difficult for Ellen Baker to define; it would not be polite. Fannie Taylor was "a nice, sweet woman and all," adds Ellen Baker hastily. But Fannie was, well, extraordinarily neat. She kept to herself. "She just didn't have anything to do with anybody." Neighbor kids would come and walk along her picket fence, pull leaves off her shrubs, just to torment her. They did it because they knew that Fannie Taylor, unlike other neighbor women, would fuss and scold. The mothers of the children also tended to avoid her. She stayed aloof.

Fannie Taylor had a special treatment for her floors. "She kept her floor as white as bleach." In fact, it was bleach she used. With scrubbing after scrubbing of acrid bleach, she burned the color from her cypress floors. Until they gleamed white as bone.

The North Florida morning of January 1 was bitterly cold. Frost lay white as a sheet. Few flames yet woke the pot-bellied stoves. The men were gone to the mill. The women were left in the dark, in the stark little row of houses. It was dawn. Ellen Baker was dressing.

She heard a scream.

She threw on her clothes, grabbed up a big revolver she kept in the house, and dashed into the darkened street. "It was dark when it happened." Other wives were out there, standing distraught and immobilized.

Fannie Taylor was standing in the street, screaming. "Go get my baby! Go get my baby!"

She said a man was in her house, where her baby son still lay in his crib in the side bedroom. She said the man had burst in through the back door, knocked her down and beaten her.

Ellen Baker, carrying the gun, ran in through the Taylors' front door and scooped up the sleeping child. She saw no man, but on those pristine white floors, as daylight soon crept in, she and the curiosity seekers would see scuff marks — big, ugly scuff marks on the floor, as if from struggling shoes. "Old footprints all over the living room floor." Big, black scuff marks on bleached white.

Hysterical, Fannie Taylor was taken to another house and put to bed. Her face was battered and bruised. She said the man who attacked her was black.

And, says Ellen Baker, there was this:

Aunt Sarah had been due to come to wash that morning, before dawn, just when the attacker appeared. But mysteriously, Aunt Sarah had not appeared. This, says Ellen Baker, would be crucial.

"Aunt Sarah" was an industrious, jovial black woman who came from a nearby town and did washing for both the Taylors and the Bakers at 50 cents a week. "Always nice and trusty." She washed outside in the yard, amid tubs and scrub-boards, under the shade trees. In a big iron pot she heated water over a fire. She sometimes brought her grandchildren.

On the morning of January 1, when Fannie Taylor screamed, says Ellen Baker, Sarah Carrier was due to come and wash, but she didn't. Ellen Baker says Fannie Taylor heard something, the breaking of sticks, and thought it was Aunt Sarah breaking wood for the fire, out in the cold and dark. But it was the man — breaking the palings off the back picket fence, so he could creep in.

Ellen Baker says she herself saw the broken fence palings.

Yet the fence could easily have been leapt across. The palings were stout pine boards, and the procedure of breaking them would seem laborious and risky.

Men who were in the mob that started tracking the attacker from the Taylors' house say that the backyard fence was so solid and intact that the tracking dog could not squeeze through it. None mention a hole in the fence. They say that when they began the manhunt, in a growing frenzy behind the Taylors' house, they presumed the attacker had jumped across the fence. The dog struck scent, they say, but had to be carried around the solid fence, to again pick up the trail.

The back yard was sand, its straggling grass clipped neatly by Fannie Taylor's hoe. They say they found tracks there that would later be crucial evidence. Some remember a neighbor woman named Murphy who shrewdly placed a washtub over one of the tracks, to preserve it from the shufflings of the growing crowd.

It was considered very strange that Aunt Sarah Carrier didn't come to wash that day, says Ellen Baker. "The washerwoman didn't come, no." She says that's why the mob, four nights later and already blooded, then went down to the place where Aunt Sarah lived, down to Rosewood, and went after her son Sylvester.

Fire lingers in the black eyes of Eugenia Day. She learned her lessons hard, and she learned them fast, and she learned them at an age and in a way that makes forgiveness hard.

"I happened to be one of those children those crackers shot at," she snaps. "Like we were rabbits! And us just children out in that swamp! They hunted us like we were rabbits!"

It is not an easy memory for Eugenia Day. Nor did it end for her with Rosewood. In later years, in another Florida milltown farther south, she knew a young black man who was tied to a railroad track and sacrificed screaming to the guillotine wheels of an oncoming freight, because he had wolf-whistled at a white woman.

To Eugenia Day, it is all of a piece. To single out Rosewood, to probe it as something special, is somehow vile. It suggests to her the opinion that Rosewood was a fluke. That the world is not still just one big Rosewood. She is a large, glowering woman, formidable even in old age. The strategy she has learned over the years is one of deep, almost automatic distrust toward whites. Her family is large, has prospered. She defends her own.

When asked about Rosewood, she did not want to talk about it. Perhaps most importantly, it hurts. But also, as she said, the inquirer was white. Why all these questions? Explanations dealing with journalism had to be lies — coming from a white. This questioner, she said, must be some crafty, sneaking relative of the mob, looking for her, tracking her down after all these years, tracking down all the Rosewood people to do them harm. Yes, certainly, after all these years. It is all of a piece. Evil surrounds her life. Its face, as she will tell you in a flash, is white.

She, like Ellen Baker, says she was present that bleak, cold morning in January, at Fannie Taylor's house. Her story tends to support another undercurrent of Levy County legends about the Rosewood events. These are the legends, told at hearths, on hunting trips, not among Levy County whites, but among Levy County blacks.

They are very different from the white legends.

Eugenia Day tells it thus:

It was Christmas. If it hadn't been for Christmas, if her mama would have just kept her home, where she should have been, if it wouldn't have been for Aaron . . .

But it was Christmas. And so her childhood's innocence was lost.

She did not live in Rosewood. She was a Goins. That was her maiden name. She is very proud of the name, with good reason. The Goinses were an enterprising family. They ran turpentine stills. Now gone, replaced by other technologies, turpentine stills were a mainstay of the Old South, since back in colonial days. From the bleeding sap of the longleaf pine, men distilled not only turpentine, for thinning paint, but also pitch, crucial for sealing wooden ships. The industry was called "naval stores." Another time-vanquished term.

The Goinses came south from the Carolinas around 1895, and they settled at the southwest edge of Rosewood. There they built their thriving still, employed many workers, as records and many oldtimers agree. And they were black, were the Goins brothers, of Goins Bros. Turpentine, by the iron-

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She heard a scream. She threw on her clothes, grabbed up a big revolver she kept in the house, and dashed into the darkened street.

clad dictum of the day — though, as Eugenia Day says with a defiant pride she sees as not in the least contradictory: "They were just as white as you."

When the light-skinned old Goins Brothers had sons, and those sons grew up, many did not stay at Rosewood. Their turpentine operation was declining as 1910 became 1920, and the Goinses, though most of them married local girls from Rosewood or around there, were seekers of opportunity. Only one of the Goins sons stayed in Rosewood, she says.

As for her own father, George Goins, married as a matter of record in Levy County in 1915, he left for better-paying work. If only he had kept her at that new town where they lived, she says, where she was supposed to be. But he did not — at least, not for a single, festive stretch.

It was Christmas. She went to her grandmother's house. In Rosewood.

It was her grandmother on her mother's side. The ardently church-going grandmother, who played the organ in the Rosewood Methodist Church. That grandmother, as many remember, lived in a big two-story house in Rosewood. She was known by whites as Aunt Sarah — Sarah Carrier. Among the neatly-dressed grandchildren noticed by whites accompanying Aunt Sarah Carrier to wash clothes in Sumner was one who came just on Christmas.

Eugenia Day remembers, on those Christmas washday trips into Sumner, tending the babies of the white women for whom her grandmother worked. One she remembers with pain and indignation. "I played with her *baby!*" she says of the woman in whose house the Rosewood violence started. She says she remembers very vividly Fannie Taylor.

She says that her grandmother Sarah Carrier most certainly *did* go to wash in Sumner that day, January 1, when it all started, and that she went with her, and that when the two of them went, as they had on other days, it was not in the gloomy darkness before dawn. She says they went in the light of early morning, and when they got to the Taylors' house, everything was peaceful.

The wash fire, the scrub-boards, the tubs full of clothes — all the accustomed ceremonies were the same. But as they stood outside the house, they watched something: A man came out the back door of the Taylor house. Aunt Sarah had seen him there before.

He was white.

Only well up in the day, after he was long gone, she says, did a bruised Fannie Taylor emerge from the house and claim attack, and the cry of vengeance rang out. She says the white men began to gather at the Taylor house not at mid-morning, as whites generally recall, but "after Mr. Taylor came home for lunch."

"He was *white!*" she exclaims. All the old legends, passed among the black households in Levy County, also say that the man who began the Rosewood cataclysm was white. Interviews with surviving blacks from Rosewood suggest that Sarah Carrier talked to her relatives in Rosewood about the man at the house. By the time the full fury of the violence broke, many adult blacks in Rosewood seem to have heard from Sarah, or from another Carrier, named Aaron, once a pillar of the community and now hidden by mystery, that the phantom who had doomed Rosewood was white.

In a rage, whites reflected not upon the deep risk a black man, indeed any stranger, would have taken by breaking into a house in a close-knit white mill quarters. Even Ellen Baker says, "You never heard of anything like that, back then. Everybody kept their doors unlocked." The blacks from Rosewood, by legend, trauma or solid evidence, were universally convinced that Fannie Taylor was attacked by her secret white boyfriend, who then fled — to Rosewood.

"To *Rosewood!*" Eugenia Day explodes.

There is much more to her story. There is the part about the car, and the man who was dragged behind the car, and the secret Masons, and Aaron, and the shootout. But that must all wait for its proper place.

Eugenia Day and Ellen Baker are not fabrications, fictionalizations or composites. They are real individuals. Black and white. Their truths clash. So did their worlds.

Boiling down the railroad, the men behind the dog, they burst upon the town. The tracking dog turned off the railroad. It made for a single house.

"Kill him! Kill him!"

These, says Marshall Cannon, were among the words shouted by the men who followed the tracking dog from the Taylor house on the morning of January 1.

Anger boiled as the men hurried down the tracks behind the dog. The crowd grew. Marshall Cannon was the Sumner barber.

Sumner, dependent in its entirety upon the five-story Cummer & Sons cypress sawmill, had all amenities. Its hotel sold hot baths, and its barbershop, with poolroom annexed to its rear, sold hot shaves.

Sumner also had a board-floor skating rink. It had been a dance hall, but the mill boss changed that, hoping the skates would tear up the floor, end the dancing, cool Sumner down. It was a hot little town — a sawmill boomtown. Hip-pockets hid guns. One black man's job was driving a wagon full of kerosene, spreading it on mosquito-filled ditches. Malaria was rampant.

Marshall Cannon says he and 10 or 12 other men of Sumner gathered at the Taylor house at mid-morning. Soon, somebody brought the tracking dog.

Country people were accustomed to trusting the nose of a good hound; it was a part of their existence. The dog struck trail in the Taylors' back yard. It whimpered at the fence until somebody carried it around. Then the chase was on.

The dog led them in a tight, expectant loop along a cypress pond near the Taylors' house. The thick trees were an ideal hiding place; the Taylor house, at the end of the house-row, was uniquely vulnerable. South, the dog passed Ed Dorsett's store.

Dorsett was Marshall Cannon's good friend. They were in the crowd together. Later, they would watch the first killing. Then they would leave the mob in disgust. But for now, everyone was behind the dog. The dog reached the railroad, turned northeast along it.

Now the crowd had grown, the men were shouting:

"Kill him! Kill him!"

They knew it was a black man. He had done the unspeakable. Back then, mobs hanged black men for looking at a white woman. For a glance and a wink, black men in North Florida were shot. Some were literally burned at the stake. Some raw nerve went very, very deep. The Sumner white men rarely if ever used the polite term of the age — "colored." They used just one term. For them, it was precise — it defined a gloomy matter of species, a biologic mystery. It defined beings unfathomable, mystically incomplete. But the beings thus defined were equipped physically like men. There, the monstrous danger. Your women.

"Kill him!"

East the crowd ran. One mile, two miles up the railroad. They passed houses. Three miles. Rosewood.

Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? . . . Thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth . . .

Boiling down the railroad, the men behind the dog, they burst upon the town. On what comes next no one seems to disagree. Black residents of Rosewood, white members of the mob, all say:

Once fully among the houses — which were painted white or weathered gray, waiting in the cold — the tracking dog turned off the railroad. It made for a single house. Nose down, the dog sped up the steps of the house. The door was opened. The dog went straight in.

And . . . said unto Aaron, what did this people

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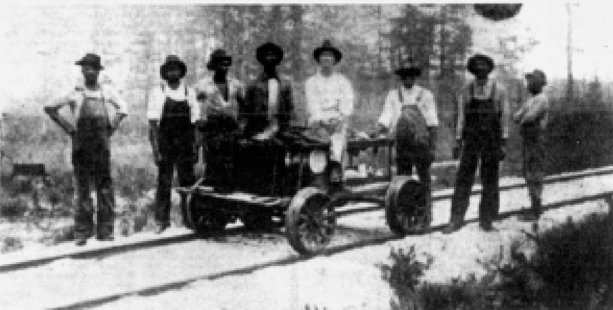

Working: *Railroad section crew near Rosewood.*

unto thee, that thou has brought so great a sin upon them?

'Nose down, the dog went once to an old rifle or shotgun leaning in the corner, once to a pair of shoes that lay beside a bed, once to a bucket of drinking water that sat on a cooling shelf out the back door. And finally — the dog went back outside the house, to a pair of wagon tracks.

Standing in the road before the mob, says a black woman who was a girl in Rosewood at the time, and was told the story by her father, "The dog just looked up."

And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my Lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief.

That the dog looked up meant the fugitive had risen from the ground, stepped into some vehicle, which had taken him away, they said. And there were the wagon tracks. Inside the house, the shoes by the bed were examined. The men said the shoes matched tracks in Fannie Taylor's back yard.

And . . . saw that the people were naked; for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies.

The old tales told by whites leave out a crucial point. They do not tell the name of the owner of the house. He was not Sam Carter, the man the mob would soon fall upon, nor was he Sylvester Carrier, the man the mob would soon hunt. These two names have crept into the old legends. They are repeated, distorted, magnified. "Ole Sylvester . . ." and the eyes of old whites go far away in time. "Sam Carey," they say, confusing the names. But the name of the man who owned the house, so central to the tale, has been spared almost utterly by the whispering white legends. He was not spared by the white mob.

The people of Rosewood knew him well.

Eugenia Day speaks for many, angry at him even after all these years, for what he helped to bring upon them: "It was Aaron!"

And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made . . .

Aaron Carrier, nephew of Sarah, cousin of Sylvester. Yes, say the people from Rosewood, those still alive, there really was a fugitive. Someone, they say, really did flee Fannie Taylor's house that day, and come to Rosewood. And the house he came to was Aaron's. And Aaron hid him.

Aaron hid him for a special reason, they say — even though the fugitive was white.

The mob would find Aaron. They would make him pay. But they would not know his secret. He had a hidden life. Here deep in the swamps, there flourished an ancient, ritualistic Brotherhood. Aaron was bound to it. That was why he did it, they say. The whites would never understand.

Who was in your house, they demanded.

He said nobody.

He had taken the oath, the old black stories say.

The secret was in a single building. The building faced the tracks — not a house, but a meeting place. Here, each month, some Rosewood men would gather by night. Special men. If someone died, they would go, and bathe the corpse, dress it, lay it on the cooling board, build the casket. No undertakers lived out in the woods. What was this furtive African sect? These men, Aaron Carrier and others, were Masons.

Aaron thy brother . . .

The loyal order of freemasonry — Masonic Rites, Masonic Temples, Most Worshipful Grand Lodges — was a special, widespread part of pioneer Florida. Where violence abounded, new settlers must know quickly whom to trust. You could count on Masons. Otter Creek, Cedar Key — lodges were everywhere — much more influential and awesome than today. Weathered, bearded men wore Masonic aprons and held mysterious swords in old pioneer photos. They stressed integrity, deep loyalty. Of course they were white.

When in the late 1700s, the king of England had granted rights of Masonic charter to a staunch Caribbean black minister named Prince Hall, white culture felt no ripple. Across new America, in Florida since 1870, there arose Masonic Temples with unobtrusive script appended: Masonic Temple, P.H.A. It means, "Prince Hall Affiliation." Code words for "all black." They were segregated Masonic lodges. Like old frontier Masons everywhere, they were dead serious.

Masons first — loyal to the death. Thus came doom to Rosewood, via Aaron, the old folks say. Aaron was prominent in the local lodge. He was bright, serious — veteran of World War I, husband of a schoolteacher. "Aaron helped that white man because he was a Mason." In Rosewood they say that the terrified white fugitive knocked on Aaron's door, gave the secret Mason distress sign. And Aaron was bound. Torn fiercely between loyalties — too much believing — destroyed.

To this day, the Florida headquarters of Masons, P.H.A., in Jacksonville, says, "If you are a true Mason, you get recognition whether you are black, white, whatever . . . (Especially) if you're being accused of a wrong situation."

And to this day, the Florida headquarters of *white* Masons, in Jacksonville, says white Masons feel no tie or obligations whatsoever to black Masons, ever, at all. Aaron Carrier took his oath dead serious, they say. He hid the man. Unto death true. The whites would never know.

brother . . .

Parents were snapping tensely at children: Stay in the yard. Nobody goes out today. Nobody breathes. Everything is different. Even from the dusty yards, the wide-eyed children saw:

What they did to Aaron.

The children watched the white men come in a Model-T car, down the dirt track by the houses, and tie Aaron to the back of the car, and drag Aaron speeding through clouds of dust, three miles back to Sumner.

Many of the white men who did what they did to Rosewood were Masons. Now they were turning quickly on another man.

"Father forgive them." She sadly quotes scripture. She says she must not be bitter.

"They know not what they do."

She is Lee Ruth Davis, a retired teacher in Miami. She was a child in Rosewood.

Her maiden name was Bradley. She lived in a two-story house owned by her father John Wesley Bradley, set way back from the railroad track. John Bradley was a log sawyer and professional hunter. The woods were rich, and yielded well. One front bedroom of the Bradley house stayed vacant, reserved for the visiting African Methodist Episcopal minister. Once, some of the Bradley children had to give up their room, too, for the black A.M.E. bishop of the whole state of Florida came to Rosewood. It was the scene of the district convention. A staunch little town. Sundays, the Bradleys did not work, or even play. The big churchbell rang. They worshiped. Sunday at sunset, children were hustled off to bed.

Not far from the Bradley house, in a grove of great oaks, stood a smaller house. Here lived a teamster. Teamsters were special men in the turpentine industry they served. They were bookkeepers of the field. As workers filled barrels with pine sap, teamsters crisscrossed the woods, gathering the barrels, noting in paper tablets each man's harvest. Mornings, some teamsters would wake earlier than the other men, then drive through a turpentine outfit's "quarters," singing to wake the workmen. They held responsibility. One such man was Sam Carter. He owned his wagon. He had raised a family, had a grown son. He lived in the house in the grove of oaks.

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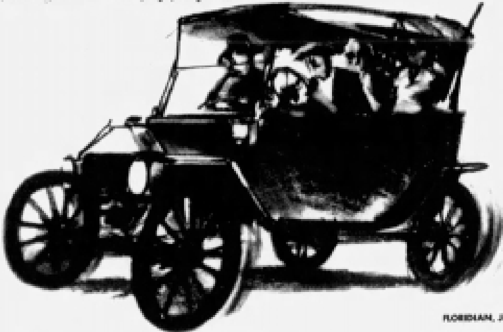

The white mob burst upon him.

They demanded to know whom he had carried in his wagon that day, and where the man had been let off.

They put a rope around Sam Carter's neck and led him to one of the oaks by his house. A big black-jack oak. They pulled him up. But they did not drop him. You must drop a man, breaking his neck, to kill him by hanging. They did not drop Sam Carter, just choked him, high in the air, to make him talk.

"He'd squall and holler," says Jason McElveen, a white man, now 86, who was in the mob. "And say, I'll tell you! I'll tell you!"

Other things were done to Sam Carter. Several men say he was tied to a stump, and the stump was set on fire. At some point, the mob applied knives. His ears were cut off. His hand was cut off. Many say it was done after he was dead. Some say not. It went on two days.

On Tuesday, January 2, he led them to a spot in the dense, swampy forest called Gulf Hammock, at the south edge of Rosewood. With the rope still around his neck, what was left of Sam Carter said, here, this is where I put him out.

But the men's dogs could get no scent. He must be lying, they said. One man in the crowd, says Marshall Cannon the barber, had been talking loudly about killing. The man had a shotgun. He was drunk. The mob was becoming a holiday for the dregs of white society. The drunks, losers, loafers, moonshiners, rowdies, roustabouts, town bullies, brawlers, it was their time.

Jason McElveen also succinctly remembers the same man:

"A man said, 'You black son of a bitch, you didn't do that!' And 'bout that time, somethin' went BLAM! And Sam Carter didn't have no face."

Even dead, it was not over for Sam Carter. They took souvenirs. Moonshine-flamed, there was a mood among them. Pocketknives on ears, fingers. They carried him away, seeping blood in their pockets, to pull out in barbershops, and nonchalantly brag. One man, it is said, got Sam Carter's watch. "Let's see what time it is by old Sam Carter," he would say months later, pulling out the watch before the startled eyes of a child. The child would later become a Florida legislator, a power in the state, named Randolph Hodges.

Near the killing, the white men saw a big field. They never stopped to think. It was a baseball diamond. This town had a locally famous team — among blacks. Their uniforms were sewn meticulously by Eliza Bradley, sister-in-law of John Bradley. She lived with her family in another two-story house. Way across the baseball diamond, says Lee Ruth Davis, a man was looking out his window, very silently, as they killed Sam Carter. He was sometimes the baseball team's umpire. And this man *knew*. He knew what was coming.

He was Sylvester Carrier, she says, watching quietly from afar.

Something else about Sam Carter . . .

A black man still living today recalls Sam Carter looked striking — not just his light skin, but the cast of his face, "like an Indian."

Some whites harrumph that he was "yaller."

He was indeed pale of skin, like many of the people at Rosewood — deep in the swamps, where you might go to get far away from something.

"He was a get-away artist. Pimp kinda," scoffs Jason McElveen.

It's true Sam Carter was something special. He was something you had to go all the way to Washington to become. Something cloaked in secrets. It

bound him to Aaron, say the old black stories, and to the phantom white man who brought the doom.

The white mob never knew. Or cared. He was a 32nd degree Mason.

Loggers who braved the swamps and felled giant trees for Cummer & Sons Cypress Company were quartered not in Sumner, where the big mill was, but in Otter Creek — 12 miles up the railroad from Rosewood.

The two Cummer mill towns, Sumner and Otter

Continued

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Creek, famed for their payday violence, held Rosewood between them.

On Monday, Jan. 1, 1923 — as a white logger named John White, now 81, recalls — logging boss Henry Andrews called his men together in Otter Creek and told them to take the day off. Andrews told them to spend the day keeping their eyes peeled for the black man who was said to have attacked Fannie Taylor that day, over in Sumner: "And if you happen to see him, kill him."

Blacks called Andrews "Cap'n Boots."

"He would chastise you with his feet," says former logger Pompey Glover, a black man. "Not only black, but everybody was scared of him."

One witness says he saw Andrews grab a black man on the street in Otter Creek and strike him with a pistol butt.

Loggers — at times knee-deep in swamp, at times smothered in mosquitoes — worked such long hours that they did not see their homes by daylight except on Sunday. The man who drove them had to be special.

On Thursday night, January 4, the moon was full — almost supernaturally bright. It shone on white frost. Many people remember it. The week had gone shuddering by. Sam Carter was dead. Houses had been searched. White men were beginning to pour in from other counties. Headlines in Tampa, Gainesville, Jacksonville and elsewhere were drawing them: SEARCH FOR NEGRO ASSAULTER. "Virtually every able-bodied man has joined the search." "Mob Searches For Fiend." But still no fugitive.

That night in Otter Creek, a railroad "motorcar" roared. Motorcars were small work-vehicles that ran on train tracks. Cummer cypress had several. On this one, Thursday night, was logging boss Henry Andrews. Shortly, in the brilliant moonlight, armed men from Otter Creek met armed men from Sumner. They met between the two towns — in Rosewood. Whether Andrews, a powerful man, had decreed the expedition, as some say; or whether Andrews was talked into it by friends, as his family would hear, the fact remains — he became a main actor in what followed.

Also soon famous for deeds done that night was Poly Wilkinson. A very heavy, round-girthed man, Poly Wilkinson was a Cummer Cypress Company "quarters boss." He kept order among the company houses — the "quarters" — especially in the black quarters, where he oversaw the Saturday night "jook." Every milltown, they say, had to have a church and a jook. Sumner, unlike severe little Rosewood, barely had a church at all. A single building — the general meeting hall — served both Baptists and Methodists. But Sumner, unlike severe little Rosewood, did have a roaring jook. Its moonshine, music and loose women kept black millhands forgetful of the rigors of the week.

Besides his enforcement duties, Poly Wilkinson also ran a small dry goods store. Prim newspaper accounts of the day would call him simply "a merchant of Sumner."

The white men — Andrews, Wilkinson and a number of others — went to Rosewood seeking Sylvester Carrier. Whites say Carrier had challenged them, had sent word that the fugitive was in his house. Blacks say they had challenged Carrier, sent word that they were coming.

"Ole Sylvester," some whites would call him.

The newspapers would say he was 22.

He remains to th': day an enigma.

Those who were children or young adults in Rosewood remember him walking down to the train depot at night to socialize, wearing black coat, black tie, severe black Stetson hat. He had a nickname. They called him "Man."

He was dark, well-built, was Man. When he worked he wore overalls. To socialize, he dressed. He was a hunter. Wild turkey, quail, duck, squirrel, opossum, raccoon, deer — the woods were a cathedraled jungle, before its huge trees were felled, and hunting was once a lucrative profession. Men sold the game to passing train conductors, who then resold it in faraway Gainesville. He was quiet, they say, aloof.

One side of him, the whites would never see.

Here speaks the Com-fort-er,
Ten-der-ly say-ing,
Earth has no sorr-ows,
That heav-en can-not heal.

He played the organ in Rosewood's Methodist Church.

Come Ye, Disconsolate. Brighten The Corner Where You Are. It Is Well With My Soul.

His mother, Sarah Carrier, had a piano in her two-story home. Sylvester had married, and lived in his mother and father's house with his wife. He and his sisters — Sweety, Beauty — nicknames for Annie and Lillian — they all sang in church. "Oh, Man had such a beautiful voice," sighs a woman who now lives in Pasco County, but who grew up in Rosewood.

From home, he went hunting. At home, he kept his guns. One was special — a 12-gauge pump shotgun whose beneath-the-barrel handle could slam five successive shells into the chamber without reloading. It was like a cannon.

For days, hungry, in icy cold, wearing only nightgowns, children huddled in the swamp. Way out in the swamp. They clutched each other. Frost stiffened their gowns at night.

Moonlight bright as day. Bitter cold. The white men were so cold when they got to Rosewood, one of their number said, they built a fire, right in the middle of the railroad tracks. Dogs ran out from the Carrier house. By the blazing fire, the white men killed the dogs, shot them, the white man said. Others said they killed just one dog. Sylvester Carrier's house stared at them blankly.

Henry Andrews and Poly Wilkinson, at the head of the crowd, approached the house. One or both of the men gained the porch. Jason McElveen and others who were there say Poly Wilkinson kicked open or knocked down the door. The moonlight roared. From somewhere within the doorway, shotgun blasts exploded. Rapid, automatic shotgun

blasts. Poly Wilkinson's face was gone. Both Poly Wilkinson and Henry Andrews lay dead.

Whites say the house was full of black men, all "armed to the teeth." Eugenia Day, who now lives in St. Petersburg, says the house was indeed full — of children who were visiting their grandmother Sarah Carrier for Christmas. Christmas had just passed. Eugenia Day herself was in the house. "There were children runnin' and hollerin' everywhere. There were bullets everywhere . . . I got between two mattresses."

The surviving white men surrounded the house. A battle blazed. Buckshot riddled thin walls. Inside the house a grandchild named Ruben was blood-soaked, shot in the eye, half-blinded, still alive. *Come Ye Disconsolate.* The house was roaring like a cannon. *Here Speaks The Comforter.* Shotgun pump-handle furiously jumping shells. *Tenderly Saying.* White men were at the windows, shooting in. They were falling back.

Blacks say that more whites were killed that night than were ever made public. With at least four wounded, after hours of siege, the whites ran away. Those among the blacks in the house who were left alive then escaped out the back door, past the hogpens, and into the swamp.

Whites came back the next morning. Says Jason McElveen, "There were 250 people there . . . From every place . . . with every conceivable kind of armament." A white man who lived 70 miles away across the state says he remembers seeing relatives grab guns and leave for Rosewood, in the wake of Andrews' and Wilkinson's deaths. The man says they went for "vengeance."

"They had blood in their eyes, and ammunition in their guns, and drink in their bottles," says Jason McElveen. "They said nigger was nigger to them. Didn't make any difference if it was a little one or a big one, long one or a short one."

In the light of day, the Carrier house was quiet. Inside, the white men found Sarah Carrier, Syl-

ster's mother, dead. Her relatives say she was killed by one of the first shots. The white men found a bed. On it lay a man, dead. The people in the house had laid him there, then lit a lamp beside him. Then they had fled. They could take no dead. They could take nothing. The newspapers would say that this man was Sylvester Carrier.

The white men were enraged. They smashed everything in the house to pieces. They came to Sarah Carrier's piano. It brought a special satisfaction. A piano proved what kind of devil's nest this was. It had a piano: Why, it was a jook.

They smashed it to bits. Then they brought kerosene.

"Listen," said little Lee Ruth Davis, at home in another part of Rosewood. "They're tonin' the bells. Somebody must be dead." But it was just the white men. They were in the church, ringing the big steeple bell. They were burning houses. They were burning the church. A white storekeeper rushed to Rosewood. He had grown up there, knew all the people. He was horrified. The mob was like a tidal wave. The storekeeper saved the Bible off the church altar as the church burned. He went home, he tried not to think. All the churches were burned. In Rosewood there was one white church. They burned that too.

It was only the beginning.

The men would encircle the houses, set them afire from in front, then try to shoot whoever ran out the back. Reportedly only certain men or certain groups of men did most of the killing. The whole countryside reeled. Newspapers across the state which had first egged-on the search for the "black brute" now back-pedaled in shock, saying there was no reason to go to Rosewood, everything was quiet, there was very little violence.

One Rosewood family was named Gordon. Lexie Gordon, middle-aged, was sick. She told her children to leave, she would stay. When the men came, she, too, tried to run. They killed her. Whether she was shot as she ran, or was caught and thrown screaming back into the burning house is variously reported. Rosewood, hidden sanctuary: "She was a light-skinned nigger," says a white man. "They killed that poor white woman," says a black woman. Lexie Gordon, caught in the middle, trapped in genetic exile, Rosewood. She had long, red hair.

Continued

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◆ Rosewood

The killing spread all around. It was like a giant hunt. Men came from as far away as Georgia. Some came in cars from Gainesville. Many were drunk. Near Bronson, one car came upon an old black man collecting turpentine sap from pine trees, beside the road. The old man had a strange nickname. He was called "God Knows." The white men in the car had bought new guns. They could not wait for Rosewood. "What's your name, Boy?" They blew God Knows to bits. They came to Bronson and bragged about it — a restaurant owner and a mechanic. Many in Bronson still remember it. That was his only name, says a white man: God Knows. The white man is cultured, expresses regret. "A lot of niggers back then," he says, "They didn't have names."

The dead man's given name was Mingo Williams.

"They didn't have names."

God Knows.

How many others were killed along the way to the cataclysm that was Rosewood has gone unrecorded. Rumors said there were deaths as far away as Jacksonville. In Jacksonville, black people heard of Rosewood. Vague rumors: "A time of fire."

One man lived in Rosewood who was fully certified by his culture as white. John Wright was a successful white merchant. In Rosewood he had a store, a big house, a fruit grove. He was well-liked by both blacks and whites. His wife taught Sunday school. "Bradley," he said in distress to Ruth Davis' father, who lived next door, as the bells tolled, guns chattered, houses burned, the war raged. "You've got to get out of here. Leave the children with me." John Wright began hiding black women and children at his house. The black men and older boys were the mob's main targets. They hid in the swamps. Some took guns and fought back. The first day, some women and children tried to stop passing trains, pleading for sanctuary. But the engineers did not stop. The mob was all along the rails. They might burn the train. In that same era, when a white mayor in Omaha, Nebraska, had told a white mob that a black prisoner must not be lynched, the mob had killed the mayor, lynched the prisoner, and then burned down their own courthouse. In Rosewood, the first day, trains rushed past.

For days, hungry, in icy cold, wearing only nightgowns, children huddled in the swamp. One of them was Eugenia Day. It never leaves her. "Way out in the swamp. Way out in the swamp. Way out in the swamp." Her voice turns liturgy. They clutched each other. Frost stiffened their gowns at night.

The tales of torture and horror that float through Levy County about that time are legion. Some or all may be false. But it is in the nature of that time that nothing can be disbelieved. It was all impossible. Yet it came.

The tales say that one black woman was skinned alive. That one black woman was killed with a baby in her arms, and her dead breast inserted in the live baby's mouth. That a small boy was shot in the back, running, by a deputy sheriff whose friends begged him not to do it. That a man was flayed. That one white member of the mob was shot in the back by another. That there were rapes and worse. That one black woman killed two white men with a long fish-roasting fork.

Some things are not just rumors:

Young James W. Turner sat beside his father on a motorcar, speeding down the Seaboard Air Line Railroad. It was midday, cold. A blanket covered their legs. His father was the railroad's company doctor, bound for Sumner.

Later, James Turner would be prominent in local politics. He is now 73. He may be the single most objective surviving witness of the extent of the violence at Rosewood.

Living 20 miles up the track, he had heard what was going on that week. He wanted to see.

The motorcar slowed. He saw the rows of weathered buildings alongside the tracks. There were white men everywhere, carrying guns. There was smoke. He got out. His father continued on to Sumner.

He told the men, some of whom he knew, that he wanted to *see*. They took him in a Model-T car along a dirt track to a spot perhaps a mile away, in a stand of pines.

"It was a hole . . . looked like it was dug with shovels." The hole was open. It was filled with corpses. They told him there were 18 of them — corpses of blacks. "I couldn't count 'em . . . the way they was thrown in there."

They would appear on no one's record. He remembers nothing special about the way the corpses were dressed. The women wore dresses. Some wore coats. It was cold.

He remembers the diapers.

"There were little chillun . . . suckin' babies . . . six months old . . . shot."

The motorcar came back, James W. Turner got in beside his father.

In time, his father would become state senator. James Turner himself would grow up to become Levy County sheriff. He would never forget. Part of him would remain a shocked boy, gazing down into that hole.

One white man who was in the killing would come home to his wife, and bring a present. Over and over, people in Levy County would tell the tale. The wife was pregnant. The husband dropped the present into her pregnant lap. "Here's a pretty for you," he said laughing, according to a man who says he was there. The present on her lap was two severed fingers — a black woman's fingers, middle and index. The wife lept up in horror, nearly fainted. The fingers fell on the porch. They lay there. When the wife's baby was born, it lacked one hand.

Over and over, the tale has been told.

The baby lived, tenaciously, grew to a man who could hit a baseball harder with one hand, they say, than most men with two. But there was always the reminder. Something monstrous in the swamps. Smoke against the sky. Buried deep in a county's subconscious. It kept rising. It is a very small county. Lives intertwine. The doctor who delivered the baby was James Turner's father.

shallow furrow in the earth, to hide the de[ad]. "Didn't put any marker to show who they were, [or] why they were."

And there was "Big Baby."

He lived in Rosewood with his parents. Bi[g] Baby was different. It was his mind. He would si[t] and stare for hours. Just sit and stare. The whit[e] men came, where Big Baby was. Big Baby saw th[e] smoke and fire. He heard the screams. The whit[e] men did not know about Big Baby. Once, some loc[al] boys had been teasing Big Baby. Rosewood was n[o] more perfect than any other town. Some of the me[n] had rough card games Saturday nights; some of th[e] boys teased Big Baby. Once, they had teased hi[m] and teased him. He could not stand it. He wen[t]

wild. One of the boys lay dead. Big Baby just sat back down then, as if he had done nothing at all. Just stared and stared. The white men came for Big Baby. They did not know. Something went wild. One of Sylvester Carrier's surviving cousins, who was there, and now lives in New Smyrna Beach, remembers cryptically:

"Big Baby done a lot of shootin'."

On Saturday, they caught James Carrier, Sylvester Carrier's uncle. "REFUSES TO DIVULGE NAMES AND PAYS PENALTY," a Jacksonville newspaper headline gloated. Some say that James

◆

To whites, the violence was a race war. They gathered their children in central houses. Whole white families put to sea in boats.

It was on the wires: headlines in New York, Chicago, Baltimore. FLORIDA, BURN NEGRO HOUSES. As in Florida accounts, names of towns and participants were confused, garbled, misspelled. The newspapers depended almost entirely on a single brief series of Associated Press reports on Rosewood, which reports were apparently based largely on hearsay and discreet official versions of the events. These reports said that in all, only seven people died in the "Rosewood Race Riot." Survivors say the dead were many more.

The numbers — 18 dead, 17 dead — keep popping up in reminiscences. Some bodies may have disappeared in fire. Some are said to have died wounded in the swamps. Jason McElveen says that Cummer & Sons Cypress Co., afraid that the violence would spread, hurriedly sent a two-mule plow, used for making fire lanes, to gouge a wide,

Carrier was ordered to dig his own grave. The newspapers said he was brought to a graveyard, ordered to stand on the fresh grave of relatives, and shot. One thing the newspapers did not say: James Carrier was a stroke victim. He walked with great difficulty. He was paralyzed on one side.

He, also, was a hunter. His son Lonnie survives, remembers James Carrier coming home with a deer strapped to his back, three raccoons in his shotsack. Once, James Carrier had looked out his front window and seen a deer tangled in a fence. He had killed the deer for meat, but a white man came on a horse and claimed to have wounded the deer down the railroad tracks. The white man said the deer was his. "You're not gettin' it," said big James Carrier fiercely, holding his gun. The white man never returned. It was a world apart. "My daddy was a mighty man," says the son, his eyes glistening. "My daddy was a mighty man." But then he was paralyzed, and they caught him.

The white men burned and looted — hams from the smokehouses, potatoes from the cellars, chickens, watches, guns. Some of the whites were from the trackless swamps across the Suwannee, wearing long beards.

The big Bradley house with the room for the preacher, the other big Bradley house with the organ in it, the Hall house with the sugar mill out back, the Gordon house, the McCoy house, the Coleman house, the Monroe house, the King house, the three Carrier houses, the Carter house, the Davis house, the Goins house. How many other houses? All were burned. It was a world apart.

It was gone.

"Gal Baby, I see a train comin.'"

"Hush, chile, there ain't no train."

They were way out in the swamp. The white men were everywhere, guns, smoke. Little Ruth Davis was always kind of "psychey." She predicted things. She was staring at the dense leaves. "There's a train comin' for us, Gal Baby." They had wandered off from John Wright's house, where the terrified women and children were. The Wrights were searching for them frantically. Scared children wandered all over, in shock. "This chile may be right. Let's go back to Johnny Wright's house."

Mrs. Wright was crying. Her face was all red. She came running to them. "Oh, Daddy," she called to Johnny Wright. "Here they are!" He was a short man with a big moustache. He had given ammunition to his black neighbors when the mob came, and then he had told the mob that the blacks had cornered him and stolen the ammunition from him. The mob left his house alone. He had gotten word to the railroad: Someone must save the women and children. The governor, Cary Hardee, had contacted the mill manager in Sumner: Shall I send troops? No troops, the mill manager is said to have replied, it is under control. He was afraid the thing would grow, erupt, destroy his mill. That same manager, W. H. Pillsbury, is said by a white woman who worked for him to have hidden black women and children in his cook house. "If they'd a'known that we were keepin' them negroes there at that house," the woman says, "they'd a'killed us." "You keep those chillun quiet!" Pillsbury hissed to the frightened mothers he hid. "Don't let 'em cry!" The mob was out there. The white woman who helped him is afraid to this day of other whites discovering her role. For her, the mob still lives. Many whites in Levy County are still afraid to say they may have sympathized with or helped the people from Rosewood.

Lee Ruth Davis is sure she saw soldiers come. Others also say so. The Florida National Guard has no record of it. Everyone agrees, though, about the train conductors.

The train conductors were John and William Crighton "K." Bryce. Two brothers. They were rich men — old family fortunes — owned big farms, turpentine stills, fine houses at Cedar Key. But they loved trains. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack. "K." Bryce's daughter would ride the train, imagining the wheels to gently chat: Goodmorningtoyou, goodmorningtoyou. Loved trains. The whole family. So the rich brothers wore big gold watchchains and hobnobbed with the world as train conductors.

Independently wealthy, "K." Bryce was curiously forgetful, sometimes, of distinctions of race. Eccentric. As a boy, he had had a young black friend. One day, a white man killed the black friend, left him lying in a ditch. No prosecution of course. "K." Bryce said it clouded his whole life. He and John knew the people at Rosewood, bought game from them.

The town was on fire. The train was due. This time, the Bryce brothers said, go very slow. Blow the whistle. Call the children from the swamp. They took on a stream of refugees, women crying, handing babies aboard. Many got on from the

Wright house. Smoke everywhere. Some special service, now veiled by years, is apparent in the fondness shown in the old black legends for the Bryce brothers.

The mob, says Jason McElveen, was killing all up and down the tracks, for miles, "running 'em like rabbits." *Eenie, meeny, miney* . . . In Cedar Key a woman saw white men pulling a string, dragging a black man's severed toe. *If he hollers* . . . Whites in Cedar Key were terrified — not of the white mob, but of the 500 blacks who lived in Cedar Key. Rumors said each black had bought a gallon of kerosene. To whites, the violence was "an uprising," "a race war." They gathered their children in central houses. Whole white families put to sea in boats.

Seven days. Came Sunday. No bells. Ashes. It was finished. The last of Rosewood, except for the property of white John Wright, was burned to the ground.

"It just blew over," shrugged a white man in Levy County. No arrests. How to arrest a whole culture? Something huge had reared its head. They wanted it to sleep, sleep. And the people of Rosewood? Whites shrugged. They just disappeared. Went somewhere, one supposes. But don't *tell* about it. Why, these whites that did that thing, they have *families*.

Rosewood.

Emma Carrier, widow of James Carrier, paralyzed hunter forced to dig his own grave. She arrived in shock, a bullet wound in one hand, on the train in Gainesville. Her children, those she could find, huddled around her. She wore wire-rimmed glasses and a hair bun. A severe, hollow-eyed woman. Aaron was her son. She lasted a year. "Just lay down and died," says her son Lonnie Carrier, his eyes glistening. The house, life, everything gone.

ROSEWOOD RACE RIOT RESULTED IN KILLING 2 WHITE AND 4 BLACK

22 KILLED IN FLORIDA RACE WAR

Florida Mob Destroys an Entire Negro Community

. . . Whites Killed and Several Wounded While Mob of 300 Kill 5 Negroes and Burn Houses and Churches at Rosewood

"She grieved over my daddy so. Just lay down and died."

Rosewood.

Haywood Carrier, widower of Sarah Carrier, had been away in a county to the north working a lumber job. He was Sylvester's father. The daughters at the big piano, the son with the severe black suit. The big two-story house. Everything gone. He lasted several years. "They say his mind just went bad. He just grieved, just grieved. He'd pull off his clothes and walk around. He'd be talkin' to his wife and children." Everything gone.

Rosewood.

George Bradley, who had owned the big two-story house behind the depot, was said by whites to have disappeared, until a powerful white man from Cedar Key was riding on the streets of Gainesville one day, and was hailed by someone in a work crew digging a sewer ditch. And the powerful man looked down, and there was the ragged figure of George Bradley.

Aaron Carrier, son of James and Emma, Masonic officer, was dragged three miles behind a car to the Sumner jail, but was still alive. That night a white sheriff came and secretly removed him to Bronson, then to Gainesville, saving him from the mob. He was jailed for at least several months. He moved to a small town near the Atlantic. "He'd talk about bein' a preacher . . . He kept to himself." *Aaron thy brother.* He died of a stroke in 1965.

Wade Carrier, son of James and Emma, changed his name, years later became a deputy sheriff in St. Augustine. Myrna Borden (name changed by her request), niece of Ed and Julia Bradley, painfully worked her way through night school in Tampa, had a daughter who became a Headstart teacher, and an in-law who helped integrate the University of Florida. Lee Ruth Bradley, daughter of John Wesley and Virginia, became a teacher and church worker in Miami. Eugenia Day raised a large and prosperous family, and like an echo of grandmother Sarah Carrier's piano, she still sings in church. Pasco Goins, grandson of Haywood and Sarah Carrier, returned from Pinellas County to Levy County for a tense showdown at the courthouse one day in the 1950s. He said he wanted to see the old land deeds. He was told to come back a little later. When he did, a group of white men was waiting. They made it clear he should not come back. Much of the land was sold for taxes. One woman, Ellen King, who fled to Deland, held on to her land in Rosewood until 1962, when a white man finally persuaded her to sell it to him for a nominal sum. Whites, including a former state representative, own all of it now.

Rosewood.

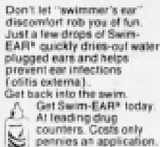
One white man who, with relatives, was heavily involved in the violence ran off a Levy County highway in a car while drunk during World War II and killed himself. A large white man said to have shot a black child in the back died early and unmarried. A white man who claimed to have killed Sylvester Carrier during the shoot-out died later without a friend, perhaps four relatives at his grave. A black gravedigger was his pallbearer.

The shocked white storekeeper who saved the Bible from the Rosewood church would pass the blackjack oak where they hung Sam Carter, and he would tell his children somberly, "See, the old oak tree died."

The mill at Sumner was touched, four years later, by a tiny spark. Cummer & Sons Cypress Company blazed up in a fire so huge that the heat could be felt at a distance of a quarter mile. Acres and

Continued

Swim -EAR



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acres of stacked lumber, burning, burning. A time of fire. The town of Sumner was utterly destroyed.

Fannie Taylor was "very nervous" in later years, was the subject of bitter rumors in the black community at another mill town, and eventually died of cancer.

"K." Bryce, the wealthy train conductor credited by both black and white with having saved many women and children at Rosewood, was riding on his large farm a year after Rosewood when his horse spooked. Something was in a ditch. Some frightening animal. They never knew what. He was thrown against a tree and soon died.

Several of the small boys, teen-agers and young men who saw shriveled fingers and ears in Levy County barbershops, or heard the savage boasts in stores, became state representatives, powerful men throughout Florida.

John Wright, white store owner, lived in the ruins of Rosewood till he died, served as undercover emissary to his dispossessed black neighbors who lived in secrecy in distant places, and for a while kept "a pistol on every table."

Many, many changed their names. They must never tell. They were from that town. Don't say the word. It was a crime. The victims must pay. To this day, it rends them. They do not like to talk about it. "Justice?" scoffs the daughter of one. "There is no justice." They live everywhere among us, these people from a crushed world apart.

"When I was young . . ." Ronald Reagan, who was young in 1923, would say, "America didn't even know it had a racial problem."

They knew.

In seeking them, other things emerged. In asking from town to town for them, other things came out. Near Orlando, 30 black people are said to have been killed in 1920. In Newbury they said, "Oh, do you mean the people who were hung here in 1909?" There were six of them, four men and two women. In Perry, a man was burned at the stake. In Taylor County and in Chiefland, they say, there were "uprisings" and several had to die. It was violence, violence, everywhere violence. It enclosed their lives. Something could not move. Wrong steps everywhere. Not a black soul lived but did not know personally of someone who died a horrible death. And the happy and the powerful were delighted to see how much they smiled.

A young black man who called himself Andrew Mulberry turned up in Gainesville in 1923, and worked his way up to mail carrier. He would amuse whites telling about how he had escaped Rosewood, ran for two days, hiding in the woods. "There ain't no dogs fast enough to catch me!" And he would laugh. And they would laugh. "It didn't sound very serious to me," says the white postmaster Andrew Mulberry worked for. Thus thought all the whites in distant towns. Easy to forget. It was serious enough for terrified Andrew Mulberry to have changed his name, as many did. The victims must pay. Probably, his real name was Andrew Monroe. His parents' house was burned to the ground.

"Also dead . . . Sylvester Carrier, negro."

They say he was in Kentucky, in California, even in Alachua County, hiding, under an assumed name. "Uncle Syl." The hunter, the organist in church, the singer, the man in the severe black Stetson hat, the umpire. "Man." It is reasonably likely, despite the garbled newspaper reports, despite boasting in the mob, that Sylvester Carrier was not killed at Rosewood. Somewhere, many, many years later: an old, old man. Something burning in his eyes.

"He was a man." ◉

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