

CHAPTER TWENTY

KILLINGS AND RIOTING IN GREENE

In 1870 Eutaw, the seat of government of the rich county of Greene, contained a population of 1,800 or 2,000, and prospered greatly in trade farmers in the surrounding country. It was a typical Southern court-house town,—busy in fall and winter, almost dormant in late spring and summer. Its men were among the earliest to volunteer for service in the Confederate armies and latest to retire from that service; they were also amongst the earliest to organize resistance to carpet bag rule and to throw off the yoke.

On the morning of April 1, 1870, the people of Eutaw were shocked when informed of a tragedy which had been enacted during the night—Alexander Boyd, county solicitor and register in chancery, had been shot to death by Ku Klux! At first most persons discredited the gruesome story as an "April fool" hoax, but incredulity gave place to amazement when the scene of the awful tragedy was visited.

Of all the acts attributed to the klan, perhaps none was bolder than the slaying of Boyd. A bachelor, he had for a long time occupied sleeping quarters in a detached office building situated in a corner of the court-house yard; but having received a warning note, he became alarmed and abandoned these quarters and obtained an apartment on the second floor of the Cleveland Hotel only a few nights previous to his death. This hotel was situated on a corner diagonally opposite the court-house, and was the principal rendezvous of townsmen with a taste for gossip.

Witnesses at the investigation into the circumstances testified that at half-past eleven o'clock forty or fifty horsemen, in the regulation garb and armed with revolvers, their horses robed and hooded, approached to within a short distance of the hotel, where all except the customary horse-holders dismounted and quickly and unhesitatingly entered the hotel office, posted guards at all entrances, and then commanded the clerk to take up a candle and show them to Mr. Boyd's apartment. Obediently the clerk led the way until he reached the corridor upon which opened the room they sought. Pausing here, in his speechlessness he indicated the door by pointing, and then fled the scene. Within a brief space an agonized scream, heard blocks away, issued from the room of the doomed man, and was almost in-instantly succeeded by a heavy volley of pistol shot. The panic-stricken clerk had hardly resumed his seat upon the office stool, with hands to ears and head bowed upon his ledger, when the dread invaders reappeared in the office. Signaling with whistles the recall of sentinels, they quietly withdrew, remounted and rode around the square, in military order, and then departed in the direction from which they first appeared. (They were traced to the Mississippi border line.)

After their departure, officials and others repaired to the corridor and discovered the dead body, robed in night dress, perforated with many bullets and almost completely drained of blood. Not a shot had missed the mark. Inside the room a table bearing a lighted lamp, his revolver and watch, stood close to the head of the bed. He had not attempted to use the weapon. Evidently the purpose of his slayers was to remove him

from the building, for one of them carried a suggestive coil of rope, but his outcry and struggles settled his fate.

Boyd was a nephew of William Miller, probate judge. Some years before the war he was convicted of killing a young man named Charnel Brown, and sentenced to a term in the penitentiary. A petition in his behalf was presented to Governor Wanton, and in response thereto the sentence was commuted to one year's imprisonment in the county jail. Having served the sentence, Boyd departed for another state. At the close of the war he reappeared, and, following the example of his uncle, sought office in 1868 at the hands of the negroes and was made county solicitor and register in chancery. He was not distinguished as a prosecutor, but regarded as indifferent.

December 9, 1869, Dr. Samuel Snoddy left the village of Union, in the northern part of Greene county, to return to his farm. Night overtook him en route, and he became confused. Reaching the cabin of some negroes with whom he was acquainted, he engaged one of them to pilot him. Early next morning Dr. Snoddy's badly mutilated remains were discovered on the roadside. The unfortunate man had been murdered and robbed of a considerable sum which he had on his person. Sam Caldwell, Henry Miller and Sam Colvin, negroes, were arrested, accused of the crime, and lodged in jail at Eutaw. The scene of the murder had become notorious on account of being a centre of league Activities and disorders, and the murder of Snoddy aggravated the sense of wrong under which the whites had long been restive; and when, a few days later, the prisoners were released, one of them on bond, they were seized and executed summarily. Solicitor Boyd, it was alleged, manifested no zeal in the investigation of the Snoddy murder, but became exceedingly active in the inquisition in connection with the subsequent and consequent affair, and exultantly declared that he had ascertained the names of all the men engaged in it, would send for soldiers to effect their arrest, and vigorously prosecute them, and if necessary hold the jury for six months.

All of these facts were related in explanation of popular displeasure with Boyd, which revealed itself first in the note of warning and finally in the taking of his life. Mr. Boyd's tombstone in the Mesopotamia cemetery, Eutaw, erected by Judge Miller, is inscribed: "Murdered by Ku Klux."

From: "When the Ku Klux Rode" by Eyre Damer, The Neale Publishing Company, New York, 1912. p 132-136.