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The 'WHITE CAPPING' OF W. C. Crum

By LELAND M. HAWES, JR



PRESIDENT MCKINLEY
... He appointed Crum

Today, the name William C. Crum means little in the lore of Tampa history, and the name of the nearby community of Peck has drifted into obscurity. But in August and September of 1899, both Crum and Peck dominated the news.

For Crum was the victim of a "whitecapping" incident that injured him seriously, and 12 rural residents were charged in Federal Court in the aftermath.

Even the term "whitecapping" has lost its currency. At first, I thought it might relate to the white feathers in a tar and-feathering, but I've learned it was more likely tied in with the white hoods of the Ku Klux Klan.

If the Klan was involved in the incident at Peck, no mention was made in press accounts of that period. The accused perpetrators were masked, but one man purportedly showed up in blackface.

So it appears "whitecapping" had become a general description for extra-legal activities, probably involving various degrees of violence, by Klan-like groups following the Civil War.

SETTLES IN IDLEWILD

Who was W.C. Crum, and what did he do to arouse the ire of some northeast Hillsborough County citizens?

Well, few facts are known about Crum, the central figure in the furor. A native of New York, he evidently moved to the Tampa area in the late 1880s or early 1890s and acquired a grove and a house in a region northeast of Tampa then known as Idlewild, several miles southeast of today's Temple Terrace.

His correspondence on area activities appeared in a weekly newspaper during the 1890s, the Tampa Journal, formerly the Tampa Guardian. He wrote in a rather flamboyant style of the comings

and goings of people, the weather and the state of the crops.

Although "bylines" seldom appeared in newspapers then, the initials "W.C.C." provide the clue, as did the location - Idlewild.

His political affiliation also was pertinent. For W.C. Crum was publisher of the Florida State Republican in 1899, a period when Florida was overwhelmingly Democratic and still associated Republicans with Reconstruction and the North.

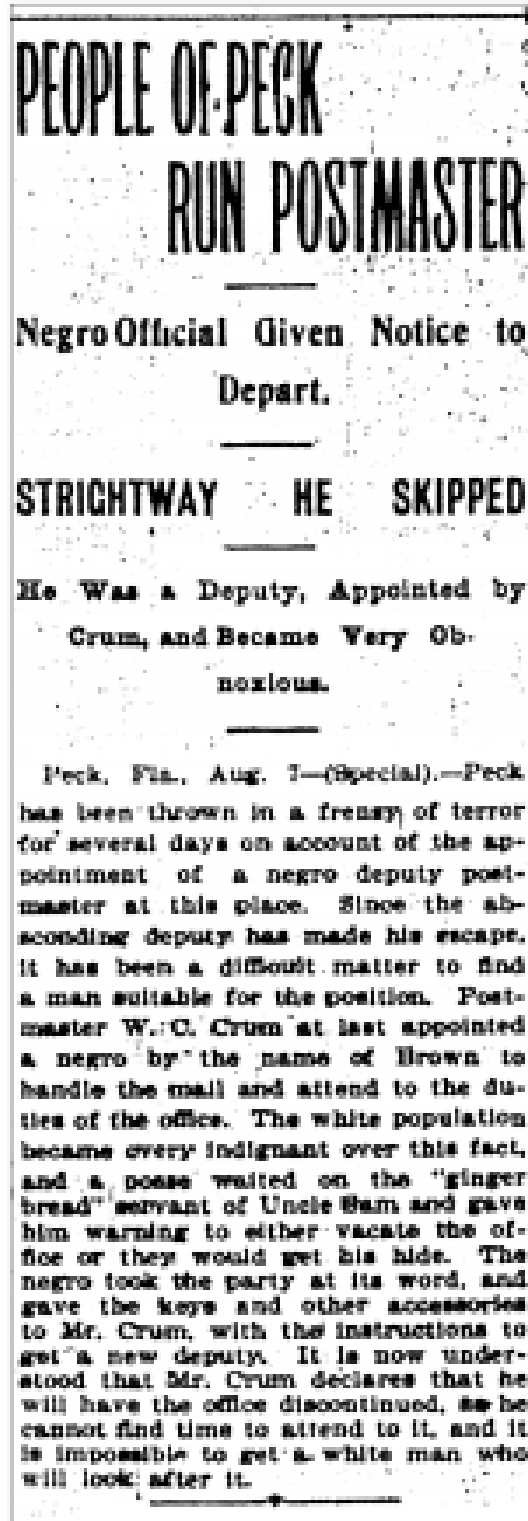
Crum was postmaster for a community known as Peck, in the Idlewild area, at a time when such positions were political plums. The Republican administration of William McKinley undoubtedly had rewarded him.

Microfilmed editions of the daily and weekly Tribune are the only surviving sources of what happened to W.C. Crum in August 1899. Its coverage and editorial comments swung from sympathetic outrage to downright derision.

The Tribune reflected the solidly Southern, ardently segregationist, keep-the-black-in-his-place sentiments of most of its readers in that period.

The first story, dated August 7, tells of the start of the trouble.

PEOPLE OF PECK RUN POSTMASTER was the main headline, followed by "Negro Official Given Notice To Depart/Straightway He Skipped/He Was a Deputy, Appointed by Crum, and Became Very Obnoxious."



The article proceeded: "Peck has been thrown in a frenzy of terror for several days on account of the appointment of a

PECK POSTOFFICE PECK OF TROUBLE

Editor Crum Seems in Disfavor
With People.

RUMORS OF WHITECAPPING

Everybody Mysteriously Mum on the
Subject But Smoke Means
Fire.

From Wednesday's Daily.

There seems to be no end of trouble anent the much-vaunted postmastership of Peck. It is very evident that the people of that immediate section are not disposed to rest easily under the absence of the facilities of the United States mail.

The story of how Morrison, the colored legatee of the office, was persuaded to resign, is still fresh in the minds of the public. Morrison was the appointee of Col. W. C. Crum, who held the commission from the present administration. Colonel Crum was also engaged in holding down an editorial chair and an orange grove, and any man who has tackled one job or the other can testify to the fact that he had about all he could attend to, without reaching out for an important and engrossing position like the postmastership of Peck.

So, Morrison came on the scene, making a speedy and more or less graceful exit. Colonel Crum, then, in his

turn, resigned, because he couldn't spare the time to attend to it, and further, because vox populi, as represented at Peck, didn't seem to entertain a very endearing affection for his substitutes.

The office was left to look out for itself, and some one spread the report that Col. Crum had recommended that it be abolished.

This seems to be the main cause of the present uprising among the people of Peck. It is hard to get at the facts, because everybody who knows anything, assumes the silence of an oyster when inquiries are made, but it is certain that, some time in the last twenty-four hours something has happened to Colonel Crum.

Since the absconding deputy has made his escape, it has been difficult to find a man suitable for the position

The writer referred to the naming of a black assistant by W.C. Crum to "handle the mail and attend to the duties of the office." He continued: "The white population became very indignant over this fact, and a posse waited on the I ginger bread' servant of Uncle Sam and gave him warning to either vacate the office or they would get his hide."

15 CENTS A DAY SALARY

The item concluded with a reference to the black man's departure and Crum's reported decision to have the post office closed.

A follow up paragraph appeared Aug. 20, 1899. The Tribune quoted the black deputy postmaster, Daniel H. Morrison, as saying: "There was no honor in the office, and the salary amounted to about 15 cents a day. I did not take the position

Negro deputy postmaster at this place.

THE MORNING TRIBUNE

The Tribune is the Only Morning Paper Published in Tampa. Its Telegraphic Service is Superb and

VOLUME 6.

TAMPA, FLORIDA, SUNDAY, AUGUST 27, 1899

SEVEN ARRESTS FOR CRUM OUTRAGE

Large Force of Government Officials Now at Peck.

SIXTEEN WARRANTS SWORN OUT

United States Authorities Have Taken Charge of the Situation.

PARTIES WILL BE PROSECUTED

District Attorney, Commissioner, and Six Deputy Sheriffs Go to Peck to Execute Their Orders.

Seven men charged with participation in the assault on Postmaster Crum were arrested yesterday at Peck by United States officers, and will be brought to the city this morning.

Warrants for sixteen white residents of that community were sworn out yesterday before United States Commissioner Crane. The warrants were sworn out by United States District Attorney Strippling, who came from Jacksonville to take charge of the case.

Yesterday afternoon, armed with these warrants, District Attorney Strippling, Commissioner Crane, Deputy Marshal Stickney, from Ocala, Deputy Marshal J. R. Williams and special Deputy John Mooney, of this city,

and three additional deputy marshals from Jacksonville, went to Peck to arrest the parties charged with the offense. Two postoffice inspectors were also in the party, one of them being Colonel Tate.

Two separate sets of warrants were sworn out—one charging the men with intimidating the former assistant postmaster, Daniel H. Morrison, colored, and the others charging the assault on Postmaster Crum.

The formidable government retinue reached Peck without incident. District Attorney Strippling and Commissioner Crane entered the town first.

The deputies started out at once to arrest their men, and, by night, had taken seven into custody. The men arrested were as follows:

George Durham.
Gary Smith.
Horace Tupper.
Harry Moore.
Madison Barber.
John Webb.
Bart Smith.

All of these are parties well-known, farmers and woodmen, of the Peck station. None of them showed any resistance to arrest, but all denied any knowledge of the Morrison and Crum affairs, so far as any personal participation in them was concerned.

Commissioner Crane returned to the city at nine o'clock last night. He was driven by Daniel Morrison, the colored assistant postmaster, who was persuaded to resign from office by a visitation of masked men. Morrison says he doesn't think it safe for him to remain in the vicinity of Peck.

All the rest of the party remained. Two of the men arrested yesterday had come to the city in the morning, and were apprehended as soon as they returned home in the afternoon.

through any desire of my own, but merely to oblige Mr. Crum. When the delegation informed me that if I remained in office my hide wouldn't hold shucks, I went to Mr. Crum and tendered my resignation. That's all there was to it. "

But that wasn't all there was to it.

Although Morrison had been threatened, Crum was attacked the night of Aug. 21. In its Aug. 24 edition, the Tribune reported it with this headline:

"PUNISH CRUM OUTRAGE
/Government Informed of the Work. of
White caps/Victim Is Still Suffering/The
Mob Treated Him Severely and Its
Actions Will Be Investigated. "

CARBOLIC ACID POURED ON CRUM

Readers were told that a "masked mob" had pulled Crum from his horse, whipped him and poured carbolitic acid on his lacerated flesh. In addition, "one side of his flowing side whiskers was amputated."

The Tribune said the victim was slightly improved, but still suffering, from his injuries. It added that much talk had passed in the community, "most of its unfavorable to the whitecappers."

And because of the nature of Crum's duties as postmaster, the U.S. government was said to be looking into the matter.

An editorial in the same issue, entitled "INEXCUSABLE," spoke in Crum's behalf and declared, "Such exhibitions

of savagery are not to be tolerated in an intelligent and civilized community

The mere fact that a man differs from the majority of his fellow citizens in his political faith does not warrant the use of forcible, and in this case inhuman, treatment."

The editorial urged prompt prosecution of the perpetrators.

Federal District Attorney Stripling arrived in Tampa to pursue the matter, and deputies soon began serving warrants and arresting suspects. By Tuesday, Aug. 29, seven men were in custody, and eight additional warrants remained to be served.

Some of those sought by deputies were said to be "concealing themselves in the swamps of the neighborhood." And buggies conveying suspects to the county jail encountered "hold-ups" or delays, the Tribune noted.

PROMINENT MERCHANTS

Community sentiment appeared to rally behind the defendants about the time a posse of 15 regular and special marshals made a midnight ride to Peck in an effort to round up the remaining suspects.

Three prominent merchants - ST Drawdy, W.T. Lesley and Gordon Keller - helped raise bonds for the already incarcerated defendants.

And the top legal firm of Macfarlane and Shackelford was retained to represent those jailed.

Meanwhile, Crum gave his own account of the incident in the Florida State

Republican, which the Tribune reprinted:

"Monday night of Aug. 21, when the editor of this paper, a postmaster at Peck, was going to his farm cottage about 80 rods from the post office, he was held up and assaulted by about a dozen masked men - one being in the guise of a Negro.

"These immediately covered him with their shotguns and revolvers, two men catching the horse by the bits, cutting off the reins of the bridle; four men seizing his hands and legs dragged him from his horse to the ground.

"Others tied his hands behind his back, threatening to kill him if he opened his mouth, while still others pulled a sack over his head and then violently threw him to the ground with his face downward.

"They then tore open his shirt and pants behind, stripped his back naked and, after beating him almost to a jelly, poured carbolic acid on the lacerated wounds.

MORE BRUTALITY

"As if not satisfied with his brutality, one of the party stood off just far enough for a heavy cowboy's whip, with a loaded lash, to reach the wounded back, and proceeded to add lash after lash until he was tired.

"In the meantime, another man cut off with a pair of shears one side of his Burnside whiskers, making at the same time an unsuccessful attempt to put carbolic acid in his eyes."

The Tribune printed an accompanying editorial deriding Crum for other

material in his Republican journal (which it did not reprint). It noted Crum had singled out the daily for "a little distempered fling" despite its earlier expressions of sympathy.

Then the morning newspaper editor took Crum to task for a reviving North-South sectionalism and suggested he haul in the "bloody shirt" figuratively waved in post-Civil War campaigns by Republican politicians.

Evidently, the Tribune felt Crum's comments "reflected upon the people of the South as a whole," and suggested such statements would cost him sympathy and "incur opprobrium."

From then on, the Tribune's tone towards Crum could only be characterized as one of ridicule and hostility.

OTHER DEFENDANTS

Preliminary hearings to determine whether the defendants should be bound over for trial began Monday, Sept. 4, 1899, and the newspaper published extensive details.

By then, eight defendants stood to face charges of intimidating Morrison. They were listed as George Durham, Henry Grantham, Matt Grantham, Lee Strickland, Steve Strickland, John Thomas and George Heath.

Almost the entire population of Peck crowded into Tampa's Courthouse Square for the hearing.

Shortly after the hearing started, defense attorney Hugh Macfarlane announced that five other Peck residents sought by federal marshals were present in the

courtroom, ready "to deliver themselves into the custody of the court."

They were then placed under "verbal bonds" of \$1,000 each.

The Tribune writer described Crum as wearing a "coat of thin, dark material, black trousers and a light limp." He added: "He had trimmed down the off-side of his flowing whiskers to the length of the bristles on a hairbrush, so as to match the other side, which had been rudely clipped by the mob"

The description continued: "He had a tired expression on his features, and he sat down with great care and discretion, as though he feared upturned tacks in the chair."

AIDE NOT PROTECTED

The district attorney led off with his basis for the case: That if the black assistant "was in possession" of the Peck post office with Crum's consent, "he was a defacto officer of the United States." Therefore, a conspiracy against him would be a federal crime.

Early on, Macfarlane demanded to see Crum's commission, to show "highest evidence of Mr. Crum's right to the office of postmaster." (Crum did not have it with him at first.)

He maintained that, if Crum were postmaster, Morrison, the assistant, was not the postmaster - therefore, not a federal official when he was intimidated. And he contended that only postmasters were protected by the law.

Macfarlane also elicited from Crum the fact that business at the post office

"wouldn't break a bank" - it was less than \$5 a month.

District Attorney Stripling countered that the statute was not limited to full-fledged officers of the United States but applied as well to persons holding "places of trust or confidence."

Macfarlane asked Crum who authorized Morrison to take charge of the office, and the witness said, "I did."

Asked what compensation Morrison received, Crum replied, "The cancellation of the stamps and the free use of the building, which belonged to me."

Asked if Morrison were bonded, Crum said he did not require one.

Crum also conceded that Morrison took no formal oath of office.

When Macfarlane asked Crum how old he was, he said, "I'm pretty old." (He was probably in his 70s.)

WITNESS RECANTS TESTIMONY

Another question brought out Crum's experience as a newspaper editor for 20 or 25 years.

Thus ended the first day's hearing.

On the second day, Daniel Morrison took the stand and said a crowd gathered and told him "not to allow himself to be caught in the post office again."

A man named Lee Lofton, originally arrested in the conspiracy, had told a story implicating other defendants

originally. However, when he took the stand, "Lofton persisted in differing from his previous statements," the Tribune asserted.

Lofton eventually testified he has been part of a group near the post office on the evening of Aug. 3 and that he saw some of the other defendants there.

He said they "talked about the Negro in the post office."

Lofton said he didn't know who did the talking, but "somebody" asked Morrison if he held a bond to act as postmaster. When Morrison said no, "somebody" warned him not be caught there again.

He blamed an "unknown man" for the remarks, saying none of the defendants made them.

NOT "ROLLING DRUNK"

Macfarlane then sought to show Lofton was under the influence of alcohol when he signed his statement for the district attorney.

Lofton testified he'd had a drink of gin but wasn't "rolling drunk."

When the district attorney tried to pin him down to earlier, explicit statements which he had signed, Lofton said, "If I did, they were false."

Stripling announced he would bring perjury charges against Lofton.

Macfarlane objected, saying no witness should be required to make statements incriminating himself. He accused Stripling of seeking to scare other witnesses.

When the audience applauded loudly, the district attorney expressed amazement that such a demonstration was allowed to occur.

"Here we have assembled a crowd of friends and backers of the man on trial, but none for the old man who was the victim of this heinous crime. I am shocked, your honor

Applause to a lesser degree followed Stripling's statement.

"The temperature was now getting close to the boiling point," the Tribune reported.

Another government witness, Bart Smith, who had been in the Peck crowd, gave further testimony.

SHOOTING THREATENED

Smith said the man picked to talk to Morrison was "a stranger, selected for the job because he was unknown."

"He told Morrison not to be caught in the office again, or his hide wouldn't hold shucks," Smith asserted.

He quoted some of the defendants as saying they refused to receive their mail from a black man.

There was talk, too, of shooting into Morrison's house as a further warning.

Smith testified to references to a "talk to old man Crum" after dark at a later time.

A blistering dispute then broke out between prosecuting and defense attorneys as to which man was telling

the truth on how Smith had gotten bond money for his release.

Stripling said "It isn't so," and Macfarlane said, "It is true." And the two men exchanged quick blows in the courtroom. Sheriff Spencer had to separate the pair.

After apologies to the court, the lawyers simmered down. And the second day's hearing concluded.

On the third day, one of the defendants, John Webb, was declared innocent by Judge Crane, the U.S. Commissioner, and released from the charge of threatening and intimidating Morrison. But the other seven were ordered held for trial in U.S. Federal District Court.

In final arguments, District Attorney Stripling said he felt "probable cause" had been established to warrant trying the defendants.

Defense attorney Macfarlane maintained that the men who assembled at the Peck post office were "simply exercising the sacred rights of American citizens" when they objected to receiving their mail from a black man.

"THESE POOR MEN"

He also insisted the defendants should not be blamed for statements made by a stranger to Morrison. And he again attacked the validity of Morrison's role as a government representative when he acted as an unbonded assistant in the post office.

Macfarlane urged the court to consider the hardship and cost a trial would require of "these poor men." (They had

been identified earlier as farmers and woodmen.)

Judge Crane "cleared his throat with a premonitory accent," the Tribune reporter wrote. "There was a hush in the courtroom."

Judge Crane said, "the duty of the court is plain in the premises." He then held the seven defendants for trial in the Morrison intimidation case.

Still remaining was the hearing on whether 12 defendants - several of them charged in both cases should be held for trial in the assault on Crum. That took place the next day.

Those accused of the Crum attack were George Durham, George Heath, Lee Strickland, John Strickland, Stephen Strickland, Matt Grantham, Henry Grantham, John Thomas, John Webb, Mark Ogden, Gary Smith and Horace Tucker.

Crum's story dominated the proceeding. His demeanor was described as follows by the Tribune:

"Mr. Crum was a most peculiar witness. He answered some questions with a torrent of words; to others he gave but monosyllabic notice. At times, he wriggled in his chair, half rose from it, waving his arms like the windmill with which Don Quixote did valiant battle. Again, he subsided into it, or rather collapsed, and seemed to lose all interest in the proceedings."

THREATS OF DEATH

His story paralleled his earlier account in print, but added a few details. He said he

recognized some of the men by voice, form or gesture. And some of the masks dropped.

The blows to his back, he said, "were accompanied by threats of death, curses and epithets."

Tar was poured on him along with the carbolic acid, Crum testified.

"The pain was excruciating," he said.

Under cross-examination from Macfarlane, he sought to describe exactly what each of the defendants did individually.

In the case of two of the Strickland brothers, Macfarlane tricked the witness by having the pair exchange shirts during noon recess. Thus, Crum's identification of them was flawed.

The defense attorney then proceeded to parade a group of witnesses who testified they would not believe Crum "on oath."

Among them were Tampa's Police Chief and the Clerk of Criminal Court.

In his closing remarks, Macfarlane declared that Crum must have brought on the beating he received because he "was a bad citizen and unworthy of respect."

DEFENDANTS BOUND OVER

He also accused Crum of having an inconsistent political record - saying he had been a Democrat, Populist and Republican.

Despite the oratory, Commissioner Crane bound over all of the defendants for trial.

Everything seemed anticlimactic after that. The next term of Federal Court wasn't scheduled until the winter of 1900. And there were rumblings late in 1899 that the trial might be moved to Jacksonville because of local prejudice.

But Federal Judge Locke (not otherwise identified in Tribune accounts) abruptly turned down the district attorney's plea for a change of venue. He called for the trial to start Wednesday, Feb. 14.

The first of the two cases - the intimidation of Morrison, the black assistant - found the key witness, the victim, missing from the scene. The Tribune's headline said, "Fickle Morrison flees."

In a similar vein, the newspaper identified the defendants as "Peck's Bad Boys."

The trial outcome must have been a foregone conclusion. Testimony focused on the "mysterious stranger" who supposedly acted as spokesman for the group that objected to a black man serving at the post office.

The defense sought to show that whatever the stranger said, he was unauthorized to speak for the others - and was drunk, anyway.

The case went to the jury quickly, and the panel came back with a verdict almost instantly - not guilty.

CRUM DIES THE NEXT YEAR

At that point, District Attorney Stripling must have realized it was useless to pursue the charges relating to the Crum beating case.

He announced, "I am firmly of the opinion, as the representative of the United States government, that there is not sufficient evidence here to convict these defendants of any of the acts with which they stand charged."

Stripling asked the court to *nol prosee* the charges, and Judge Locke granted the motion. "The defendants are discharged," he said.

"The Peckites filed out of the courtroom with expressions of great relief and satisfaction Colonel Crum pulled his returning whiskers reflectively," the Tribune said.

William C. Crum died the next year in Tampa, his flurry of fame in the local spotlight already half-forgotten.