

# Woman Escaped From Florida Mob But Rest of Family Died

## Aroused at Midnight by Shots, Find Escape Barred by Mob of Whites—In Bushes Four Days, Naked and Hungry

(Special to THE NEW YORK AGE)

Savannah, Ga.—A gruesome and blood-curdling experience was that of Mrs. Hattie Smith of Youngstown, Ohio, who reached this city from Jacksonville, Florida, to which place she escaped by the aid of a friendly white woman and her husband from the mob-infested region around Ocoee, Fla., where Mrs. Smith had been for two weeks visiting her sister-in-law.

The sister-in-law, her child and husband are dead—burned to death in their home from which escape was barred by the murderous mob and Mrs. Smith is alive only because she managed to slip out undetected and lay in the heavy underbrush for four days, without food and clad only in a thin night shirt, her sleeping apparel.

On the fourth day a hunter's dog, running back and forth in the bushes, discovered her and began barking. The hunter, a white man, approached to see what game his dog had found and spied the colored woman. Seeing the white face, panic again enveloped the woman and she attempted to run, but four days without food had weakened her too much.

The white man was a Good Samaritan—he took off his coat and covered her with it, went home and sent his wife with food and decent clothing. The white couple, fearing the mob, did not dare attempt rescuing the woman during the day, but that night they brought their horse and wagon, put Mrs. Smith in and drove ten miles to another railroad station. They gave her enough money to pay her railroad fare to Jacksonville and put her on the train.

### Savannah People Aid.

Reaching this point in safety she was aided in reaching Savannah. As soon as her story became known to Savannah people, every possible aid was rendered her. Medical attention was provided, and funds were quickly raised to furnish her an outfit of clothing and pay for transportation to her home in Youngstown.

Mrs. Smith told the following story of her experiences:

"I went down to Ocoee from Youngstown to visit my sister-in-law, my husband's sister, and had been there just two weeks on the night before the Presidential election. My

sister-in-law's husband came in that night and told of trouble in a nearby town, but we were not apprehensive and after a short while everybody went to bed. About midnight we were roused by shots and screaming of women and children. Jumping out of bed, we found the house next door on fire. Starting out the front door, we were met with a fusillade of revolver shots fired by a band of white men. With shots and curses they drove us back into the house.

"Then we discovered that our house was on fire. But another attempt to leave by the front door was stopped in the same way, my sister-in-law's husband being shot in the hand. We ran into the back of the house. The

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flames began eating into the house all around us, and I finally determined that if death was to be my portion I'd meet it on the outside and not be burned to death like a trapped rat. The family tried to dissuade me, saying surely help of some sort would come.

## Escaped to Bushes.

"But I was desperate and clad only in my thin night shirt rushed out and succeeded in making my way into the bushes, about a city block away from the house, undetected. Lying there in the heavy underbrush I could hear the wails of the women and children and by the fire's bright glare could see the mob shooting at those who tried to escape. When morning came the mob had disappeared, but the houses were all burned and not a soul was in sight.

"My poor sister-in-law, her husband and child had perished in the flames along with probably twenty others, who were either burned or shot to death by the mob. Those Negroes who had escaped, as I had, dared not return to the scene to look for either family, friends or property. I lay in the underbrush for four days, naked and hungry, until the dog discovered me and the hunter and his wife rescued me and put me on the train for Jacksonville."

Mrs. Smith, a woman about forty-five years of age, is intelligent and of good bearing. Her physical appearance bore out her statement as to the sufferings she had experienced. She declared there was no apparent reason for the attacks made by the mob and that there was no preliminary warning of the lyncher's intentions.

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