

****News Release****
10/2/63

Racial tension continues in Fayette County Tennessee as a white dairy owner and his son beat and pasture whip a Negro employee. William Todd Jr. returned to work this Monday to find his employer pulling a pistol on him after a verbal argument regarding time off. While Todd was struggling to keep his employer, Sterling Dunn, from shooting him and or whipping him, Mr. Dunn's son, Thomas Dunn joined in the struggle. A shotgun barrel was broken over Mr. Todd's head. Stitches were taken in Todd's head at a Memphis hospital and he was treated for cuts and bruises on his head and face. Local authorities were not available when his wife made an attempt to contact them, however they had a warrant for Todd's arrest by Monday evening.

BACKGROUND:

SOMERVILLE, Tenn.(Fayette County) first came into the news when mass evictions of Negroes followed their registering to vote in 1959. Negroes found themselves turned away from the polls on election day 1959 when they were advised that the election was an all white primary. "Negro voting was illegal," they were told. By this time many of them were living in the nationally known "TENT CITY," made popular by PETE SEEGER'S ballad by the same name. The last family didn't find shelter until the spring of this year, 1963.

To add to their miseries, the county officials made lists of those negroes that registered and sent them around to local bankers and merchants. To these negroes, stores and banks were closed. Mortgages were called due. Negro merchants who had taken part in the voter registration drive were cut off from their suppliers. Major oil companies pulled their tanks and refused to deliver to the local "ADJITATORS" as they were called.

John McFerren was one of the Negro merchants who continued on with the struggle for the right to vote. He with others formed the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League, now known as THE ORIGINAL FAYETTE COUNTY CIVIC AND WELFARE LEAGUE, "to promote civil and political and economic welfare for the community of Fayette County"

Somerville erupted this summer when registration efforts were renewed, teenagers from some of the local churches organized on their own to get better schooling and open up public facilities to Negroes. Demonstrators were arrested while whites chased integration and voter registration leaders and other Negroes down the road at gun point. A minister and three attorneys were shot at as they traveled home from a visit to the Fayette County Jail. Licences were noted and victims turned them in, but the occupants of the cars that were involved in these harassing tactics were always unknown. One Negro has announced his intention to run for county tax-assessor and a sympathetic white, L. T. Redfearn, has announced that he will also run in the next presidential election.

Rev. June Dowdy, the Negro candidate for tax-assessor was one of the leaders who was active in the summer's registration drive and was one of the people who were evicted in the early days of the local movement.