

Santa Barbara Chapter, SCOPR  
Sussex County, Virginia  
Reported by Mickey Bennett

Many Negro's last sentence related you on efforts to organize the Negro population in Newell, Virginia. I'll note a few of the high spots since we shifted our attention to the rural districts of Sussex County.

The first came on July 20—the day I arrived from California, and it went that four of us moved to a Gadsden-type town named Stony Creek on the opposite side of the County from Newell. Whereas the Market districts to organization in Newell had been free of comment, finally, the primary hindrance in the rural areas has been apathy. Many persons simply aren't aware of their rights as American citizens. "We was just ain't supposed to vote, am they?"

Youth activities. As in Newell, the first moves were made through the youth—most of whom are at least vaguely aware that the Southern "way" is not the only way for Negroes to live. After informing the local police of our intentions, we led a group onto the public Stony Creek High School playground. Though Negro youngsters greatly outnumber whites in Stony Creek, there is no play area for them, and never before had they been allowed to use the "white" facilities. The following day four of us SCOPR workers and five Negro youngsters tested the Blue Diamond— a highway restaurant which served Negroes only through a back entrance. The proprietor immediately closed her doors, stated her intention to go out of business (which proved to be the case), and by nightfall had posted a large sign on U.S. Highway 301, "Closed on account of niggers." The sign was up only one day, but that was long enough to scat a good number of adult Negroes from their employments. (Many said he included the Richmond Times-Minute picture-story of the incident in his last report.) The following day, July 22, 125 Negro

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youth again used-in a manner the school's white principal later said was "very orderly"-Stony Creek High's facilities.

Organization at Stony Creek adults. The various actions of the youth-will perfectly legal but described by the Commonwealth Attorney as a "cloudburst" over the white community-provided the stimulus for the adults to organize. The first mass meeting was held July 22, and besides voting to form the Stony Creek Improvement Association, the eighty persons present decided unanimously to boycott a local white grocery who had given a Negro boy for participating in the playground activities. The boycott (without pickets) was called for the next day. It was observed to beautifully, and before closing time the grocer telephoned the boy, invited him back to work, and offered him a raise. (High school grocery boys get about fifty cents an hour in three parts) The Stony Creek Negro community was as delighted as we were. What's more, they were now as ready as we for more united action.

Change in SCOPC policy. On July 23 we got word from Atlanta of a change in SCOPC policy: whereas up to this time demonstrations were taken (there simply wasn't enough funds in the organization's treasury to bail out the jailed), now they were recommended on behalf of the Voting Rights Bill. We decided to use the opportunity to protest our County Registrar's limited office hours—<sup>other</sup>open five hours, one (working) day per month. No county in Virginia has less than three days per month, and one of the days is always a Saturday.

Demonstrations. Our demonstrations took place the evenings of July 26 and July 31, and both on the Sussex Court House lawn. (See articles marked "1" and "2".) And when it was announced at the second demonstration that Martin Luther King had asked President Johnson to sign the Voting Rights Bill in Sussex County, no one expected him to

about the stepped but we all felt good to know Negro interest in our particular efforts. While the demonstrations were billed publicly as protests against the Registrar's unreasonably short office hours, they had additional purposes to get people used to visiting a building traditionally frightening to Negroes and to create interest in Registration Day.

Day, August 2. Both demonstrations received widespread press and TV coverage, and by Registration Day Sussex County was the focal point of the civil rights struggle in Virginia. We are, of course, always glad for publicity, for many ~~fully~~ powerful Virginians are embarrassed by the enormous fraction of Southerns white officials, and they apply pressure to change.

Registration Day, August 2. Though the Registrar's Office was not supposed to open until 9:00 Monday morning, a line had formed by 8:30, and the Registrar accommodated by opening early. The line remained between forty and fifty all day, and by 4:00 PM. (an hour past regular closing time), 283 Negroes had been registered. Over 125 of these also paid ~~the~~ full taxes for the first time. At 4:15 meeting between SCOPE workers and the Registrar it was explained that while we appreciated his cooperation in sitting for all, that appeared, we still felt it unfair that persons should have to miss work and stand in lines for hours in order to register. We would therefore press for registering to be done at least two Saturdays per month. Petitions asking the <sup>Sussex County</sup> Electoral Board to so instruct the Registrar are now ready for mailing to the Chairman of the <sup>said</sup> Board and to the Chairman of the Virginia Board of Elections. The petitions are notarized and contain 230 signatures. If the request of these citizens is not acceded to within two weeks, we will ask the Justice Department for Federal registration under provisions

of the just-passed Voting Rights Bill petitions with signatures sufficient for filing are already in hand.

**Local white attitudes.** The hostility shown toward us by local whites has yet to cause anyone bodily harm. The most serious incident was when Gary Ireland and Mike Wiesenthal were chased by two cars (at 110 mph.) on Highway 301 and threatened with a rifle. (One of the drivers has been identified and will be tried August 9; we're anxious to note the ~~way~~<sup>quality</sup> of Sussex County legal justice.) We are, of course, constantly followed and occasionally cursed, but the whites express themselves mainly in their facial expressions. Seeing us drive up to a hamburger stand with Negro youngsters in their car, some simply stare in disbelief. Other faces show their owners' absolute disgust, as if they'd caught us waiting on some smoke fire hydrant. Still others compute with their eyes that they're morally bludgeoning us on the spot. (We included one sample of the way the local whites express themselves 244 in point. See article from the ~~SUSSEX~~ <sup>WILMINGTON</sup> Journal, August Journalist ④.)

The Southern "way" is dying; the whites know it, and the Negroes are learning fast.

(I'm leaving for Birmingham, Alabama, on August 8  
~~14/15/14/15/16~~ to represent Sussex County SCOPE along with two local Negroes at the S.C.I.C. National Convention. I'll try to get you word on what occurs down there.)

enclosed

(Please send the news clippings. I'd like to get them back.)

Mary Bratt