

SNCC REPORT OF ROLLERBOWL INCIDENT

From Mary McCollum, SNCC Field Secretary

40 demonstrators arrived at T-Wood's RollerBowl, Cario, Illinois, at about 8:35 pm Friday, August 17, 1962. Some 30 white people were clustered in and about the entrance of the roller rink.

The demonstrators, in a single line, walked to the far end of the sidewalk (in front of the rink) and lined up along the walk. The jeers and threats from the white mob were somewhat louder than usual. The threats were directed especially at the 3 white students in the line.

A group of about 10 boys walked to the middle of the line where 2 white demonstrators were standing and made a few threats. A second group including several women, stood at a distance and made threats directed especially at Mary McCollum.

Charles Koen and Willy Bingham, who were in the front of the line, engaged several whites in conversation. After hearing the many threats directed at white demonstrators Willy Bingham went down the line twice warning the demonstrators. After the second trip, he returned to the head of the line just as several boys and an older man advanced from around the side of the RollerBowl and from out of the door of the rink to the head of the line.

Charles Koen turned his head and the older man came down on Koen's head with a blackjack. The rest of the mob rushed out swinging chains, blackjacks, and sticks. The first few people in the line were struck. Linda Perlstein put her face down on the hood of a car and was hit on the back of the head. The front section of demonstrators ran backwards over each other in an attempt to escape the mob.

Frances "illians was hit on the arm and fell against a car. Ronnie Hale saw her and ran forward to help her to her feet. As Frances struggled to her feet a goodlum ran at Ronnie and hit him in the stomach with a piece of pipe. The demonstrators ran out to the highway and toward our cars. About 10 boys were cut off from the remainder of the demonstrators; these boys were chased north down the highway.

Many students were hit with chains, sticks and blackjacks. As the group tried to reunite a car drove accross the drive-in theatre driveway and the adjacent field toward them, again seperating them from the cars and the rest of the demonstrators.

As the boys ran down the highway they saw a merchant policeman standing at the ticket booth of the drive-in theatre. When they headed toward him he shouted "I'm not a policeman, get away from me!" He told them they could not cut

threatened to "blow a boy's legs off".

Mary McCollum walked through half of the 15 white attackers, reached Linda Perlstein and took her to the cars. John O'Neal and John Lewis found Charles Koen who had a gash on his forehead and took him to the cars. Almost all of the demonstrators (except the ten who had been chased down the highway) were loaded into the cars.

Sheriff Clutts then drove into the parking lot along with several other police cars. Mary McCollum immediately went to the sheriff and said "some of the demonstrators have been chased down the highway down there. won't you please help us find them?!!" The sheriff muttered something. McCollum repeated, "Please, I beg you, won't you help us find them? Someone may be beating those boys right now!"

The sheriff replied, "I object to a woman being in charge of this thing. I'm going to talk with someone about this. Go and get in your car."

Mary answered, "I'll go and get in the car as soon as those boys are safe. Won't you do anything?"

The Sheriff wandered around muttering and doing nothing. He finally said "How do I know anyone was hurt?" (He was standing just at the fringe of the white mob)

Mayr said, "Look I have blood all over my hands--can you still say you don't know anyone was hurt? Call the hospital--two students have been badly hurt!"

A white woman said, "Oh you probably fell down. I've been here the whole time and I didn't see a thing."

Mary McCollum and John Lewis then went to the State Police for help. Explaining the situation, and they were told "We can't do anything until the sargeant gets here. You'll have to talk to him."

Finally the Sheriff instructed two policemen to go with a group of about six demonstrators who were leaving to look for the lost boys. The policemen went as far as the edge of the driveway and turned back.

The searchers continued down the highway. Several shots were fired in their direction, apparently from a .22 rifle. They found one of the missing boys who had been hiding behind houses. He related that the group was together and headed north down the highway when he had last seen them.

The searchers returned to the rink and again Mary McCollum asked the Sheriff "won't you please help us?! How can you just stand there when they may be killing our boys?"

The sheriff said, "I'm not going to walk. I'll send a car down the road." Mary replied, "But you can't find them that way---they're back in the dark somewhere." Again the Sheriff muttered and walked away.

The searchers then saw 6 of the lost demonstrators walking on the highway.

toward the roller bowl parking lot. The searchers, again without police assistance, went to the group and directed them to the cars.

Monnie Hale was vomiting and doubled over with a stomach injury. Mary went to the sheriff and asked them to take Monnie Hale to the hospital. The Sheriff replied, "There are cars over there to take him." Later he said he would call an ambulance but he never did.

The state police were asked to help in getting some of the others to the hospital because no other cars were available that were not blocked in by spectators cars. Their reply was "You got them here you get them back." They did offer to call an ambulance. This has been explained as policy.

Later the Sargent came over to the group and said, "We're here to preserve the peace," and then returned to his previous task of leaning against his car watching, but doing nothing. Many of the attackers went into the RollerBowl. The Sheriff was asked to get the attackers out and arrest them. He asked for descriptions and went in without witnesses to aid in the identification. There were several bitter complaints against the Sheriff's behavior. He came back out, asked a question, and went back in. Mr. Thistlewood would not admit anyone capable of identifying attackers. The State Police were asked to help get witnesses in and to prevent the escape of attackers through a rear door. They refused, saying that the Sheriff had things well in hand. After some discussion, they did move toward the rear exit.

Meanwhile, one of the cars that the demonstrators had arrived in left with one boy who had returned. This boy led them to a house about three-quarters of a mile away ~~from~~ where they found four more boys hiding.

NAACP Attorney Raymond Harth, James Moore of Cairo, and Charles Dunlap, SNCC field worker from Nashville, have been charged with assaulting a pregnant white woman, Mrs. Lang, during the attack. Several witnesses have declared the charge is absurd.

Thistlewood, who threatened two Negro youths (15 and 17 years old) with death during the attack, was considered an objective source of information on the attack by the sheriff. Thistlewood later posted \$500 bond per person for four whites arrested. Three of the four are charged with aggravated assault. A fourth is charged with "assult with a deadly weapon." Later at the police station, a Mrs. Gurrin, who was not involved in the rink incident, went into the station to get a soda, came out, and was talking to a man in a car. A Policeman's wife made a snide accusation. Police Cpl. Charles Williams and Sgt. Hastings, the latter in civilian clothes,

twisted Mrs. Gurrin's arm behind her back and forcibly jerked her toward the police station. Mrs. Gurrin is pregnant. She was told that she was under arrest but no charges were placed against her. After she was released, she was taken to the hospital for treatment of strained muscles in her back.

Those who were taken to the hospital were: Charles Koen 17

Linda Perlstein 22

Charlene Williams 15

Ronnie Hale 17

Debbie Flowers 13

Frances Williams 15

Linda Perlstein was not released from the hospital until Sunday August 19.