

A Negro Town in Illinois

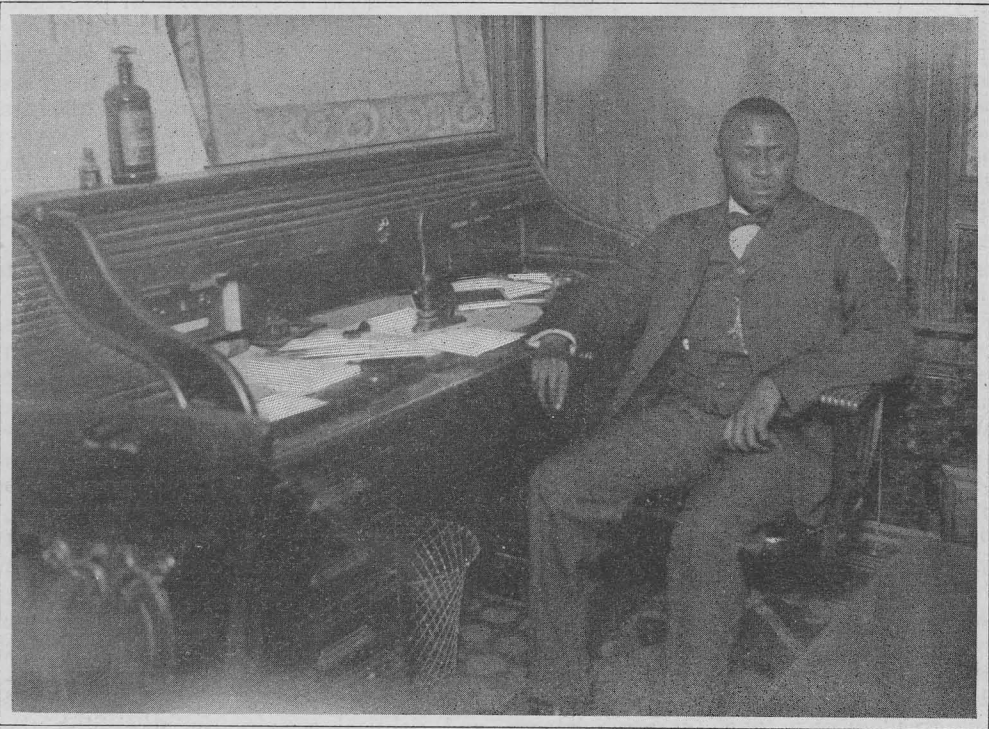
BY IVERSON B. SUMMERS

[There is one town in Illinois which is safe from a race riot. The author of the following article describing it is at the head of a college of commerce in East St. Louis.—EDITOR.]

SITUATED in the northwest corner of St. Clair County, Ill., within a half hour's trolley ride of St. Louis, Mo., is a prosperous, growing town, governed solely by negroes and populated almost exclusively by members of that race, who believe that a higher degree of civilization is attainable for them thru isolation from the whites. It bears the pretentious name of Brooklyn, and is just a span from the great national stock yards, that hive of human industry, where the inhabitants find profitable em-

refutation of the oft-repeated claim that negroes are born to follow and never lead—for it seems to have progrest to a degree of unusual prosperity, and its possibilities are yet only to be estimated. The executive heads boast, and county officials have been heard to say, that there is less crime, even fewer violations of the "city code," within the confines of this little corporation than in many of the larger towns of mixt population of contiguous territory.

In these days of race-question agitation,



BURTON F. WASHINGTON, MAYOR OF BROOKLYN, ILL., AT HIS DESK.

ployment while building up their community to greater proportions.

This municipal colonization of Afro-Americans apparently affords a striking

when clash and clamor come from the colored clans, and speculation is rife as to what the eventual outcome will be, Brooklyn must prove a source of interest-

ing study to advocates of the colonization scheme as the final means of satisfactory adjustment.

Whites, as well as blacks, who have

Railroad Association, two giant corporations, which have roundhouses, plants and stations in the town.

The mere handful of whites—probably



MADISON STREET, LOOKING EAST, BROOKLYN, ILL.

watched the place grow to its present population of 1,900, agree that a spirit of perfect harmony prevails there in every business walk; that the negroes are law-abiding to an extreme, self-supporting, honest, and proud of their achievements—characteristics which Booker T. Washington and other stellar lights of the race have tried to implant and impress ever since slavery was abolished.

The town has an annual income, from all sources, amounting to more than \$10,000, and may levy additional assessments for needed improvements. The present policy is not to incur needless expense. Cash is paid or warrants issued for every investment of public necessity, and the municipal debt is not of sufficient proportions to depreciate the value of property. The heaviest taxpayers are the Wiggins Ferry Company and Terminal

fifty in number—who have habitation in the place live in evident peace with their colored brothers. There is never any race riot or even discord, but they have no voice in the municipal government other than to walk up to the polls each succeeding year and cast their ballots for chosen leaders. Only once in the history of Brooklyn, 'tis said, was a white man ever chosen to town office. That was several years ago, when an unpopular negro was nominated to represent his ward. The citizens banded together and elected his opponent by an overwhelming majority. Prior to and since that time the dusky denizens have held a tight clutch upon the governmental reins. The council meets in regular sessions and drafts ordinances in proper form to suit existing conditions. Civic improvement ideas have recently been taken up with a great deal

of enthusiasm and will probably be incorporated into town laws to insure more systematic consummation.

Two principal business streets, lined with well-kept shops owned by prosperous negroes, mark the merchandising avenues of the place. The town, covering an area nearly two miles square, is laid off in blocks that are filled with little houses, many of them tidy homes provided with lawns and gardens. It is said that a majority of the citizens own their property, and they apparently vie with one another in adding to its value. The streets are graded and the sidewalks before every building are maintained at public expense, a system differing from that observed in most municipalities.

The chief public structure, costing \$5,000, is the City Hall, a somewhat pretentious two-story frame building that serves for many purposes. It occupies a conspicuous corner and is surmounted by a 1,000-pound fire gong which calls out the citizens when their services are needed to assist the volunteer fire department. The lower floor of the building is divided into a handsomely appointed council chamber, office of the mayor and headquarters of the chief of police, where the latter resides with his family and transacts official business. The second story is a large public hall, where dramatic and social functions are held, features which are by no means of minor importance in the community. Back of the hall building are the two fire stations, in which are kept ready for immediate use three hose reels and other modern equipment of like character that cost the town \$1,500. A system of fire alarm boxes connects with the stations and arouses Chief Daniel Lucas and his twelve volunteers to speedy action when needed. The water supply is adequate, the service being obtained from East St. Louis, three miles distant. Hydrants are plentiful, and there has never been a serious loss of property by fire within the recent history of the town. The department chief draws a stipulated salary and his men are allowed \$1.50 each for every fire.

Strange conditions exist here. The relative proportions of school buildings as regards the races, invariably characteristic in other towns, are exactly reversed. The educational abode of the Brooklyn

negro is an imposing brick building, two stories in height, surmounted by cupola and flagstaff, and attended daily by 150 to 200 children. It was built in the fall of 1878 at a cost of \$5,000 and christened in memory of Elijah Lovejoy, a martyr for the race. Three teachers are required and the work in all departments is considered thorough.

Time was, in the early history of Brooklyn, when the half dozen white families then living there sent their children to the negro school, but there arose objections to the commingling of the colors, it is said, not from the whites, as is usually the case under such conditions, but from the negroes themselves. The Board of Education was appealed to, and it erected a separate building, a small frame structure, which it permitted the occupants to name "The Sherman School," where the "invaders" might find instruction at the hands of one of their own race for their offspring. It now has an average daily attendance of twenty. Tho the two buildings are in close proximity, there is never any trouble among the pupils. Both races mingle at play during the recess hour, and all meet upon that common plane of comradeship known only to childhood. Prof. C. B. Jones, the negro principal of Lovejoy School, is also local superintendent of instruction and has complete control over the white teacher. There are no truant officers in Brooklyn, for the children attend school punctually and are in bed at nine.

Brooklyn has three negro churches, two of the Baptist faith and one of the Methodist, but there are no religious advantages for the whites unless they choose to affiliate with the colored brethren. Most of the whites who are devout enough after a week's hard toil to travel the distance on Sundays, go either to East St. Louis or one of the tri-cities—Madison, Granite City or Venice—a few miles away, where they may find sanctuaries of their choice.

Notwithstanding that there are eight saloons in the place, each of which pays an annual revenue of \$500 into the treasury, the morals of the town do not appear to be seriously affected by their presence, so perfect is the police control. There are no restrictions as to the opening or closing hours, but they are held under

complete subjection and summarily deprived of license at the first justifiable charge of disorderly conduct.

Justice is meted out swiftly in Brooklyn. There is no tardy delay incident to the absence of a police magistrate or other presiding official. One can spend an entire day on the streets of the town without hearing a profane word or seeing a drunken man. The conduct is not tolerated under the existing administration. The populace seems to realize that the eyes of the world are upon its demeanor and recognizes the grave responsibility of its self-colonized government. When an offender is arrested for some petty offense

that not more than ten arrests on an average are made each month, and the majority of these are said to be transient offenders. The big steel cell where the unruly are incarcerated is often unoccupied for weeks at a time. You can always see a Brooklyn policeman, because he is proud of his "harness." His trappings of gilt and blue are in conformity with the metropolitan style and there is quick response to every call for protection.

The local tendency is to educate the young, inculcate the spirit of industry, and to improve every opportunity for advancement that is offered. Secret societies abound here in profusion, the princi-



LOVEJOY SCHOOL FOR NEGROES.

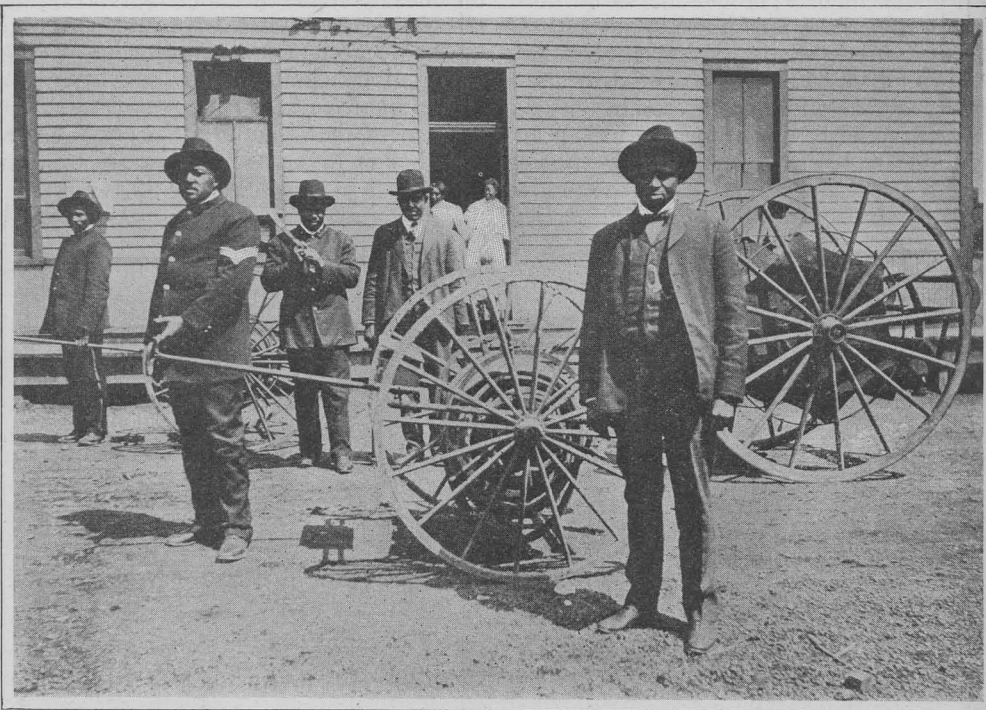
he is given quick trial before a magistrate, is sentenced and assigned to the rock-pile, which is termed "workhouse," where he is compelled to pound out macadam at the allowance of fifty cents per day and his board. The result of this practical method of keeping up the town's thoro-fares has a salutary effect upon those of evil tendencies who are acquainted with Brooklyn justice. The jail records show

pal ones being the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Ladies' Court, Ladies' Chapter, Tabernacle Society; debating organization, which meets weekly to discuss current national topics; several church auxiliaries, and last, but not least, the True Reformers, whose object is to establish in negro communities co-operative banking, industrial and merchandising institutions. The future work of this

society is watched with great anticipation by the inhabitants of Brooklyn, as it is expected to produce many solid business enterprises for the town. At various times a local dramatic and minstrel company, composed of the younger set, gives entertainments in the town hall, which as a rule net handsome returns, with which costumes and scenic acces-

\$1.50 to \$2 a day, and, as the larger proportion own their homes, where they raise vegetables and poultry, their lot is far from a hard one.

At the head of the administration is Burton Franklin Washington, who, altho confessing to the age of thirty-six, looks scarcely more than a youth. He is a well-groomed, polished negro and assistant



THE FIRE DEPARTMENT.

sories are purchased for subsequent events.

Business is conducted by the negro merchants in Brooklyn much the same as in any other place of like population, where the inhabitants depend upon their weekly or monthly wage to provide for their families. Accounts are run at the different stores and payments met with remarkable promptness. The majority of all other current personal transactions is conducted upon a credit basis, and there is not a "bad debt" collection agent in the town. Most of the inhabitants are married, and there is only one instance of miscegenation, the negro husband being worth \$12,000.

The labor element find employment at

teacher in the Lovejoy School. Washington is single, living with his aged mother in a comfortable cottage near the town hall. He bears his honors modestly, but predicts a bright future for his town. It is the one ambition of his life to see it grow to a population of many thousands, and he believes that it will yet become the Mecca of the negro race, when once its existence has become generally known. Mr. Washington believes in colonization of a municipal character, where negroes can be brought together, thrown upon their own resources under equal and fair conditions, and left to work out the race problem themselves. He is sanguine that negro colonies in the form of incorporated towns and villages will be

common settlements within the next twenty-five years, and hopes to make Brooklyn the metropolis of them all. While, in his opinion, it would be better to have complete isolation from the white race, he realizes that there will always be an element to invade the towns, and says there should never be any prejudice of the blacks against the minority. "There is none here," he said, "and there never will be. As an instance of the perfect harmony which has always existed in Brooklyn, a white man here shot and seriously wounded a respectable colored citizen without apparent cause. The assailant was locked up in our town jail, and, altho the injured man hovered between life and death for many days, there was no attempt at violence upon the prisoner. We give the few whites that are here the same show that we have ourselves, if they are determined to stay with us. We pay their school teacher \$80 a month, furnish them adequate police protection, and look after their interests as well as it can be done with our means."

Mr. Washington was elected mayor two years ago by the largest majority ever given a candidate for the office, it is claimed—nearly all the whites voting for him. His views upon civic improvement matters, coupled with his personal popularity, was the reason assigned. He is a prominent factor in Republican politics and mixes with men high up in the party. He arises early every morning and goes to his office, where he transacts city business before entering upon his day's duties as teacher. His salary as mayor is \$250 per year, together, as he puts it, "with expenses, which often foot up as much more." His "cabinet" consists of a town clerk and treasurer, who receive respectively \$200 and \$100 per annum, and two aldermen from each of the three wards, whose compensation is fixt at \$1.50 a meeting. These have never been known to demur at called sessions. The police department, under command of Chief C. S. Dorman and Sergeant Hicks, would do credit to places of greater pretensions. The chief is paid \$60 and the patrolmen \$50 per month. The town is lighted by electricity from the plants at Madison and Granite City. There is no sewerage system, but it is the chief improvement planned for the town at an

early date, when the revenue shall admit.

Brooklyn within the last two years, it is claimed, has increased 25 per cent. in population, and the ratio is growing as the colonization idea expands. There are not enough houses to accommodate the increasing influx, and efforts are being made to have a syndicate build others.

The busiest man in the place is Dr. W. R. Arthur, negro physician and surgeon, the only local practitioner, who attends white families as well as those of his own color. He is also postmaster and justice of the peace. His wife conducts a drug store that is noted for its neatness and completeness, and a negro prescription clerk compounds for the entire town.

Among the business establishments noted along the leading thoroughfares are five groceries, three barber shops, one dry goods store, two shoe shops, one furniture store, fish and meat market, poultry stall, two restaurants, drug store, and other establishments to meet the public needs. The biggest negro merchant in the place is James A. Beasley, whose stock is valued at \$4,000, and which is looked after by two octoroon clerks. A negro lawyer attends to the local litigation and a negro undertaker buries the dead in a cemetery where only negroes lie.

The picture is simply a case of the bottom rail being on the top, where fate, fortune or whatever it may be termed has brought Afro-Americans together in complete civic organization, and placed the whites under their control in a peaceable, satisfactory manner of living.

Why do the whites reside in Brooklyn? you ask. Simply because of its accessibility to their places of employment—the big steel mills at Granite City and Madison, a stone's throw away; the stock yards in the northern part of East St. Louis, the Wiggins plant or the Terminal shops. It is presumably not a matter of choice that directed their footsteps here. The negroes, too, find paying work in these great industries; their wives look after the housework and raise chickens; while the boys and girls earn wages in the packing houses.

There is much wealth among the negroes of the place. Principal C. B. Jones, of Lovejoy School, is accredited with being worth \$25,000; James Rollins, a retired merchant, is figured at \$15,000, with

an income of \$200 a month; James A. Beasley is believed to have at least \$12,000 and George B. Ray \$18,000. A bank, real estate firm and newspaper are among the enterprises most needed by the population, according to their opinion.

Stites Township, in which Brooklyn is located, is governed almost exclusively by negroes, and the organization works in harmony with the town.

The records of the founding of Brooklyn have been destroyed, but it is believed

to have first seen the light of existence in 1858, when a band of fugitive slaves from Missouri crossed the Mississippi River and built huts on the present site of the town. Later they were joined by fleeing freedmen. For years the settlement was one of direst poverty and squalidness, but destined to become the modern Mecca of colonizing negroes. The place was incorporated in the year 1867 and ever since has been under complete dominance of the race.

EAST ST. LOUIS, Mo.

