

The Crescent Farm Rock Barn

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The following paper was prepared under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Dickey at Kennesaw State University for an Introduction to Public History course.

The Crescent Farm Rock Barn is located just off of Marietta Highway next to Cherokee High School in Cherokee County. Today, the Rock Barn is separated from the rest of Crescent Farm Edgewater Hall by the Highway. The Rock Barn was built in 1906 by Augustus Coggins to house his race horses.¹ The Crescent Farm, of which the Rock Barn and Edgewater Hall are its last two surviving structures, was a massive farm owned by Coggins. He was known for raising race horses, but he was more largely involved in the mule-trading business and in farming. The fact that the Rock Barn is built out of stone and is designed to be resistant to fire is a symbol of what Coggins had to face in the 1910s, during the Jim Crow era, as an employer of African Americans.²

During the early parts of the 20th century there was a movement to create what are called “sundown towns.” In these towns, African Americans were only welcome as visitors and had to leave by sundown. The Ku Klux Klan was a major force in establishing these towns and did so by going on what are called “night rides,” during which they would burn down businesses and farms owned by African American or anyone who hired them.³

In the 1910s there was an effort to create sundown towns in north Georgia. Such towns had been successfully established in Forsyth County, Ball Ground City, and other surrounding areas. Segregation spread throughout north Georgia and signs posted in many towns warned African Americans to leave or face repercussions, and in towns such as Ball Ground, repercussions involved fire and dynamite.⁴

In 1910 many farmers who employed African-American workers received notes warning them to get rid of their African-American employees and to do so quickly.⁵ Most ignored such demands, including Coggins. He continued to employ African Americans and had 75 working for him.⁶ However, the warnings that Coggins and others received were not idle threats. On the night of December 6, 1915, Coggins' farm, as well as others, was set ablaze. Coggins was hit the hardest, losing two barns, one full of crops and the other full of mules and horses, of which only one horse was able to be saved. The *Cherokee Advance* described the burning of Coggins' crops as "the destruction of the largest corn crop ever produced in Georgia." This loss paired with the loss of all of Coggins' mules and horses was calamitous.⁷ Coggins estimated the value of the lost property at between \$75,000 and \$80,000.⁸ For comparison, the *Atlanta Constitution* had an advertisement for the same time with flour for 30 cents a pound, eggs for 29 cents a dozen, and bacon only 31 cents a pound.⁹ The *Atlanta Constitution* also pointed to the "Night Riders" as the culprit. "Night Riders" is an alternative name for the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁰ Several other fires were set over the next week. Farmers who employed African Americans were targeted, but the farms burned were not as large as the one at Crescent Farm.¹¹ These fires show that Canton was far from immune to the social conflict happening in north Georgia and the rest of the South. The efforts to turn Canton into a sundown town were in full force with night-ride campaigns to set fire to any business that resisted.¹²

It is because of the Rock Barn's unique stone construction that it was able to survive the fires at the Crescent Farm. The Rock Barn now serves as a symbol to educate those of North Georgia of the social conflict that went on during the Jim Crow era in the region and how that conflict still marks the area today.

 Notes

¹ "Crescent Farm." Cherokee County Historical Society. Accessed September 09, 2018. <http://www.rockbarn.org/national-register-of-historic-places/crescent-farm/>.

² Kenneth H Wheeler, and Jennifer Lee Cowart, "Who Was the Real Gus Coggins?: Social Struggle and Criminal Mystery in Cherokee County, 1912–1927," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (2013): 411-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24636328>.

³ James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: New Press, 2018).

⁴ Kenneth H Wheeler, and Jennifer Lee Cowart, "Who Was the Real Gus Coggins?: Social Struggle and Criminal Mystery in Cherokee County, 1912–1927," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (2013): 411-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24636328>.

⁵ "Big Fire Losses after Warning to Fire Negros," *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1910

⁶ Kenneth H Wheeler, and Jennifer Lee Cowart, "Who Was the Real Gus Coggins?: Social Struggle and Criminal Mystery in Cherokee County, 1912–1927," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (2013): 411-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24636328>.

⁷ "Coggins Burn Out," *Cherokee Advance*, December 10, 1910.

⁸ "Big Fire Losses after Warning to Fire Negros," *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1910.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ "Two More Blazes in Cherokee Add to Reign of Fear," *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 9, 1910

¹² Ibid

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<https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AssetDetail?assetID=cb8267d3-8a5e-4431-aeca-0050a9a625ee>.
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https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/crescent-farm-rock-barn/

MrGeode13. "Crescent Farm Stone Barn." September 29, 2013. Wikimedia Commons. Accessed October 15, 2018.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crescent_Farm_Stone_Barn.jpg

"Big Fire Losses after Warning to Fire Negros." *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1910.

"Two More Blazes in Cherokee Add to Reign of Fear." *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 9, 1910.

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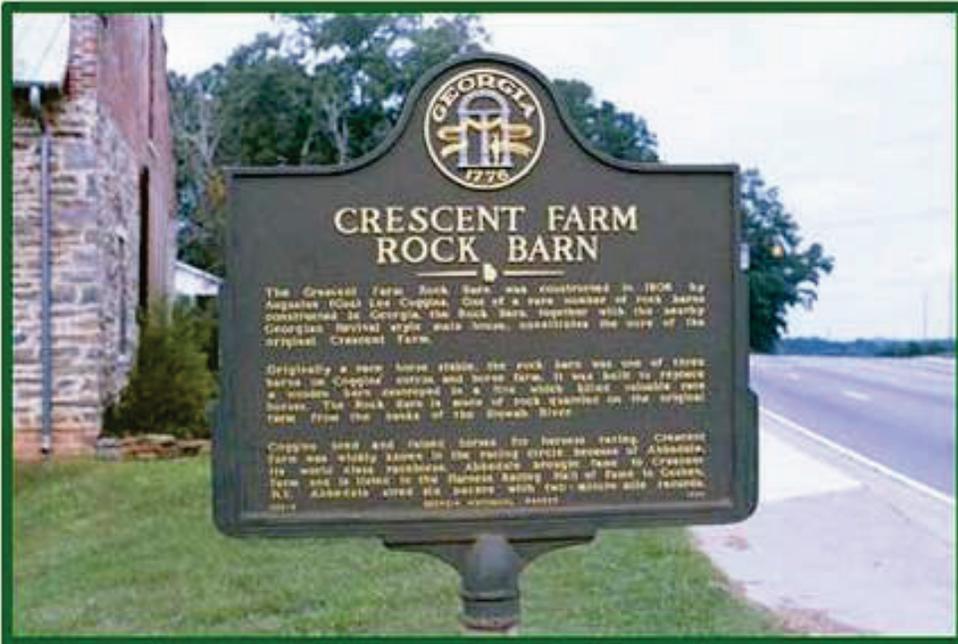


Photo: Ed Jackson

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1 Carl Vinson, "*Crescent Farm Historical Marker*", Historical Markers, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Accessed October 15, 2018.

https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/crescent-farm-rock-barn/

2 Judson W Roberts, "*Historic Property Information Form - Crescent Farm*," National Register of Historic Places, November 27, 1989, October 15, 2018.

<https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AssetDetail?assetID=cb8267d3-8a5e-4431-aeca-0050a9a625ee>.

3 MrGeode13, "*Crescent Farm Stone Barn*," September 29, 2013, Wikimedia Commons, Accessed October 15, 2018.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crescent_Farm_Stone_Barn.jpg

4 Judson W Roberts, "*Historic Property Information Form - Crescent Farm*," National Register of Historic Places, November 27, 1989, October 15, 2018.