

# BURNED CHURCHES REBUILT IN TEXAS

## Interracial Drive Restores Bombed Black Edifices

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TEXARKANA, Tex.—On a gusty March night in 1971, arsonists tried to destroy every black Baptist church in this city of 54,000 people. They burned two churches to the ground and their fire bombshy in an elementary school

caused slight damage to three other churches.

The local police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted a fruitless investigation. The arsonists are still at large. No suspect was detained. A \$5,000 reward offered by the Texarkana Chamber of Commerce for information leading to the arrest of the arsonists expired Dec. 31, and the money was given to the congregations of the burned churches.

St. Paul's Church, rebuilt, was reopened on May 28. Singing "We Shall Overcome," the black congregation marched in a light stage of reconstruction. Its pastor, the Rev. S. A. Stuckey,

to the handsome new edifice built of Colorado spruce logs. Almost as many whites as blacks attended the service. In an unusual show of racial harmony, the white community had contributed not only money but also labor to the rebuilding of St. Paul's.

### To Reopen in July

The other burned church, Mount Orange, is in the final stage of reconstruction. Its pastor, the Rev. S. A. Stuckey,

our bodies are blistered and B. C. Green told the mixed assembly. But he added, "We've all no malice or hatred."

He said it would reopen sometime in July. Perhaps for fear of reprisal, leaders of the black community have been reluctant to speculate on the identity of the arsonists. But Mr. Green said in an interview that "no whites came under suspicion." Both he and Mr. Stuckey are apparently convinced that the arsonists were "black radicals," although Mr. Stuckey did not rule out the possibility that some whites had been involved.

in the suspension of 126 blacks and about 30 whites.

At 1 A.M., March 6, 1971, the Mount Olive Baptist Church, a brick building, was set afire. Hampered by high winds, firemen were fighting a losing battle with the flames when, at 2 A.M., the rear of St. Paul's Church, a cinder-block edifice a mile away, was discovered ablaze. Both buildings were quickly reduced to rubble. Attempts to burn three other Baptist churches failed.

The Rev. Dr. L. Eugene Harris, pastor of the First Methodist Church, and another white clergyman, the Rev. Dr. Lory Hildreth, pastor of the First Baptist Church, headed a drive

for funds that netted more than \$24,000 toward the rebuilding of the burned churches.

But more heartening to black pastors than the cash donations—the money fell far short of the goal of \$200,000—was the contribution of muscle by both races. The Red River Army Depot provided men and bulldozers to clear away the rubble of the two churches. White Boy Scouts and white adults worked side-by-side with blacks in the rebuilding of St. Paul's.

Responding to Mr. Green's call for volunteer labor, as many as 40 blacks and whites appeared at the site on week-ends. While men were raising

the log structure, women—food in the school cafeteria.

Leaders of both races agreed that the church burnings had brought an unexpected bene

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