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MOUND BAYOU, MISS.

1910		JANUARY					1910
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JANUARY—FIRST MONTH

“Jewel of the Delta,” – Mound Bayou, Mississippi

Charles C. Stringer, Jr.

May 2002

“Jewel of the Delta” – Mound Bayou, Mississippi

By

CHARLES C. STRINGER, JR.

**A CAPSTONE SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

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In

HUMAN COMMUNICATION

SENIOR CAPSTONE

HCOM 475

Professor Paul Mason Fotsch Capstone Instructor

Professor Debra Busman Capstone Advisor

California State University Monterey Bay

May 2002

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to **GOD, THE FATHER, SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

To our forefathers and foremothers, the founders of the "*Jewel of the Delta,*"

Mound Bayou, Mississippi, my sisters and brothers-Red,

Brown, White, Yellow, Black, Gay & Lesbian,

(All of you are my sisters and brothers-believe it or not) and to my

Father and Mother

This work is also dedicated to SDR, ASAP, to Alcoholics

Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Al-Anon,

all of my Brothers and Sisters in Recovery and to all Co-dependents, the readers of

Diary of a Dixie Cop and all people

who have been discriminated against for any reason, the VA

(VAMC) Palo Alto Health Care System, the Monterey VA Clinic, my doctors and

therapists, and to my fellow sufferers who

attend our group meetings and who are battling PTSD

(post-traumatic stress disorder), depression, anxiety, sleep

apnea and other illnesses as I do each day. We know

we are just one *drink* or one *hit* away from *relapse* and we take life and our problems one day at a time and God, the Magnificent Creator of all Humankind the Heaven and the Earth is ever present in our group meetings and in our lives for those who have reached that place in our lives, and to the Lecturers/Instructors, Staff and Students at California State University Monterey Bay who reached out to me, I thank you.

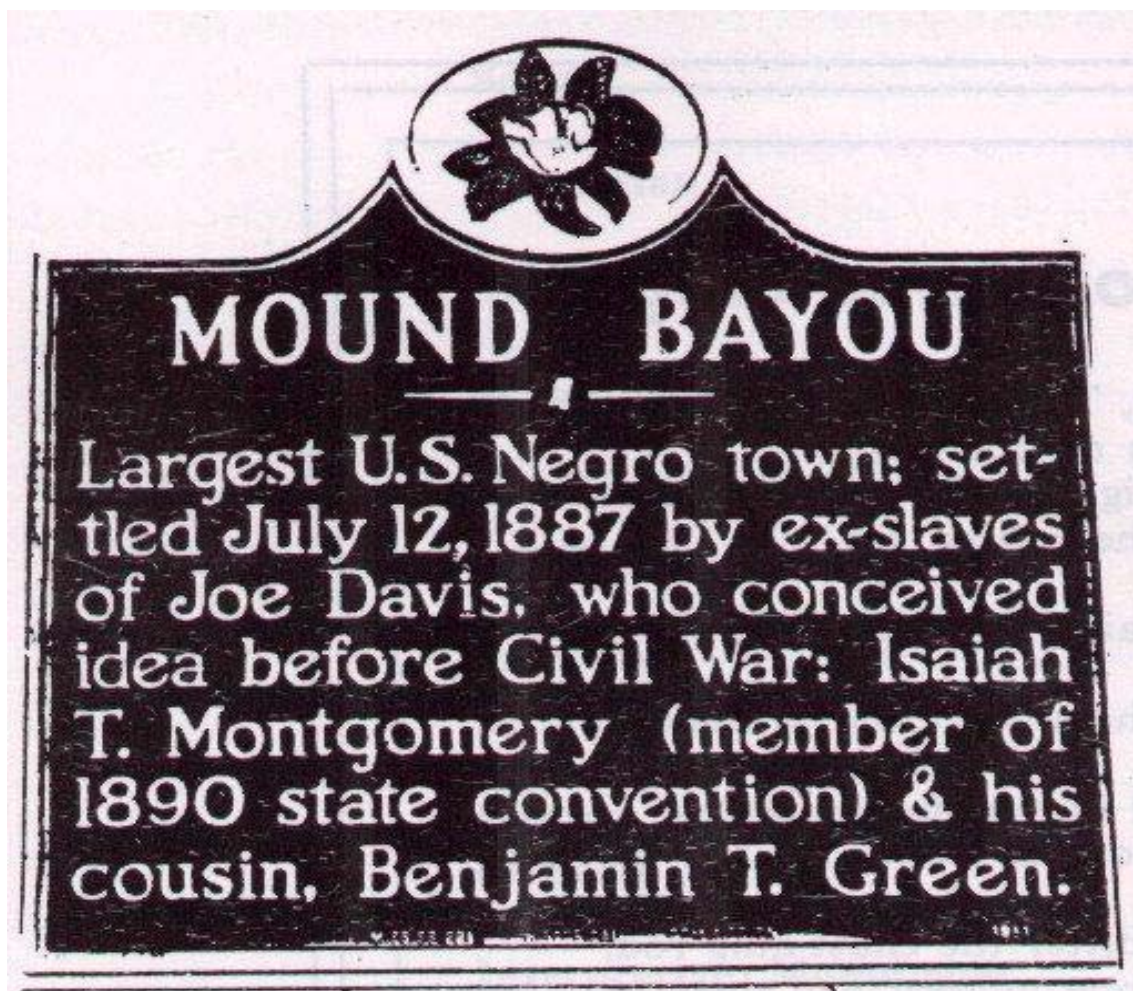


Table of Contents

1. Introduction

2. “*Jewel of the Delta*” – Mound Bayou, Mississippi

Chapter One **Page 9**

“*The Beginning of a Black Colony*” **Founder’s and Supporter’s**

Chapter Two **Page 15**

“*Booker T. Washington*” **Educator and Strong Supporter of Mound Bayou**

Chapter Three **Page 29**

“*Charles Banks*” **Bank of Mound Bayou**

Chapter Four **Page 43**

“*Milburn J. Crowe*” **Resident Historian/Civic Leader**

3. Bibliography

4. Prospectus

PREFACE

(Acknowledgements Included)

This is a book of knowledge, history, research (with complete proof), about the “*Jewel of the Delta*,” Mound Bayou, Mississippi. It is designed to help you really understand the “*Jewel of the Delta*” from its formation, the people and their struggles, Mound Bayou, Mississippi today and why I love Mound Bayou so much.

It is a book that should help African Americans especially, as well as other Americans and other people both nationally and internationally feel good about themselves/ourselves (only in America). It shows just what people can do when really motivated, dedicated, when it is necessary to band together and stick together and to complete the task that was started.

I will touch on racism, and its impact on people, all people. Some of the materials used will come from courses I have studied and have written about while attending California State University Monterey Bay. I am definitely, without a doubt deeply indebted to my *lecturers/instructors*, the *Human Communication Institute*, the *Student Disability Resource Department*, *ASAP*, the *University Police Department*, *CSUMB Library* and many of the students I studied with at the university. Thanks to *California State University Monterey Bay*. This is where I was taught to learn again, with a clear head, not under the influence of alcohol or drugs

and I have been clean and sober since October 27, 1997, thank God. Before that time I was under the influence of alcohol or some type drug since the age of fourteen (14) years.

A very special thanks to VA (veteran affairs), VAMC Palo Alto Health Care System, and to the Monterey Clinic where I serve as a Volunteer with Chaplain Service. Thanks to all of my doctors and therapists, the nurses, my group members (veterans), Chaplain Service-Palo Alto Health Care System. VA has really been good to me and I thank God for that, and for all VA is continuing to do for me. It was at VA that attending the university was first suggested and I registered and was accepted (conditional registration). I was really messed up and I didn't want to be around people, etc. but as time passed attending the university proved to be good therapy for me, as was the reason it was suggested that I attend.

As stated, I am a very non-traditional person and this shows up in my writings. I do not have an *index* at the end of this work and I just might use a few *footnotes*, I don't know. I do have *primary* and *secondary sources* to include interviews, government tapes and serials, newspapers and articles, funeral home and cemetery records. I also have photographs, works cited and a list of inclusions. I really hope you read the entire work word by word, and so many times an index causes one to go to certain pages without reading the before and after.

Some of the information will be scanned directly from the internet and from my school papers as stated, from information provided by Mr. Milburn J. Crowe of Mound Bayou, Mississippi and a few surprises. My interviews are great and full of information from people who were born in and around Mound Bayou and who live there today. Some of the information comes from people who were not born in Mound Bayou but who lived and worked in and around the *“Jewel of the Delta.”* I have my own personal knowledge regarding the *“Jewel of the Delta,”* having been in and around Mound Bayou visiting relatives during my younger years, and having been in and around the town during my younger years just to have fun, real fun.

Even after leaving the Delta, I always enjoy returning to visit Mound Bayou, Mississippi *“Jewel of the Delta.”* It’s a place that is very special to me. To this very day I am acquainted with many people who live in and around Mound Bayou, Mississippi.

I must recognize my very good friend who recently passed from this life here on the Monterey Peninsula to another life, Deacon Carson L. Huntley, Sr. Deacon Huntley was a Brother, Father, Teacher and Friend and we were and still are *“Spiritually Connected.”* I definitely miss him. We often talked about Mound Bayou, the *“Jewel of the Delta.”* Deacon Huntley had stopped in Mound Bayou many times while driving to Cleveland, Mississippi. He was from Memphis, Tennessee and resided in Seaside, California at the time of his demise. Deacon Huntley was 85 years old but you would never believe it. Thanks everybody!

“Jewel of the Delta”

Mound Bayou, Mississippi

(1)

"The Beginning of a Black Colony"

Founders and Supporters

of

Mound Bayou, Mississippi

"Jewel of the Delta"

In 1885, *Isaiah T. Montgomery* approached his *cousin, Benjamin T. Green*, about the idea of **forming a black colony**.^A Montgomery, working through George McGinnis, land agent of the Louisville, New Orleans and Texas Railway, developed and submitted a plan for establishing an all-Black colony along the railroad. After several months of making trips through the lands with a civil engineer during the fall of 1886, searching for a site for the settlement, Montgomery finally selected the present site of Mound Bayou in July 1887. Thick woods of cottonwood and cypress trees, cane stalks, and briar-patches, with streams, bayous, and pools of stagnant water, made the land almost impenetrable. Many of the trees stood over 130 feet tall, while cane stalks grew to over 25 feet.

moccasins,
endangered
brave enough
there.

Mound
Indian Mound
converged.
Southeast of the



Isaiah T. Montgomery
Founder

Poisonous snakes especially water
wolves, panthers, and bears
adventurers

to travel through the Delta or settle

Bayou was named after a large
located where two drainage bayous

This mound is located just to the
present city. The railroad records

^A Isaiah T. Montgomery, Founder, Page 2. Benjamin T. Green Co-Founder, Page 3. Notes and photographs provided by Dr. E. J. Stringer, October 1990.

show at least 27 Black family names that purchased land in the community within a few months after the arrival of the first settlers. It has been reported that at the end of 1888 there were more than one hundred settlers.

Some men were posted to watch for the many wild animals while others cleared away the thick growth. The men boarded a Memphis bound train for sleeping at night and would transfer to the Vicksburg bound train the following morning. In the latter part of December 1887 Montgomery and Green purchased 840 acres of land from the railroad at \$7.00 per acre. They paid 50 cents per acre down with the balance due in five annual payments at an interest rate of 8 % per year. Montgomery acted as land agent for the railroad, selling 40- acre tracts at \$8 and \$9 per acre, and he reportedly required a \$40 entrance fee for each 40- acre tract. He also acquired more land himself.

Ben Green set up a “groundhog sawmill” and by October 1887, the first cabin had been built. There were many obstacles including a flood late in the year that caused a lot of damage, but by the end of the year about 80 or 90 acres had been cleared. In February of 1888, the first women and children arrived and the settlers planted their fist crops of corn and cotton that spring. In March of 1888 Mrs. Montgomery and Ben Green set up a small supply store and later erected the first cotton gin.

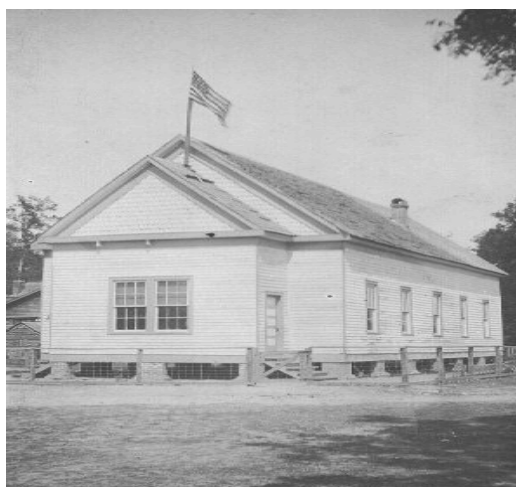


Benjamin T. Green

Cousin and Co-Founder

I.T. Montgomery and the early settlers recognized the value of education in building a

community. Montgomery helped to found Campbell College in 1887, the same year of the birth of Mound Bayou. Affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the College began holding classes in both Friar's Point and Vicksburg in 1890. Montgomery became the second president of Campbell College in 1892 and worked for and hoped to have the college located at Mound Bayou. He was successful in getting the railroad through its president, C. P. Huntington to donate more than 1000 educational purposes.



Mound Bayou's First School Building

Montgomery told a local A.M.E. conference of his hopes to have the land partially used for an agricultural science school.¹

Campbell College moved completely to Jackson in 1898 and a new President took over. However, the land near Mound Bayou was kept and in more recent years an attempt to locate the college at Mound Bayou is evidenced by the abandoned structure that was started.

Early in 1888, Isaiah T. Montgomery and his sister, Virginia Montgomery began classes for the children in his home. The first church, Greengrove Baptist Church, was

¹ Taken from Slide Show provided by Mr. Milburn J. Crowe on Friday, February 4, 2000. **Milburn J. Crowe-City of Mound Bayou-CLG Coordinator-404 Renee Street-Mound Bayou, Mississippi 38762.**

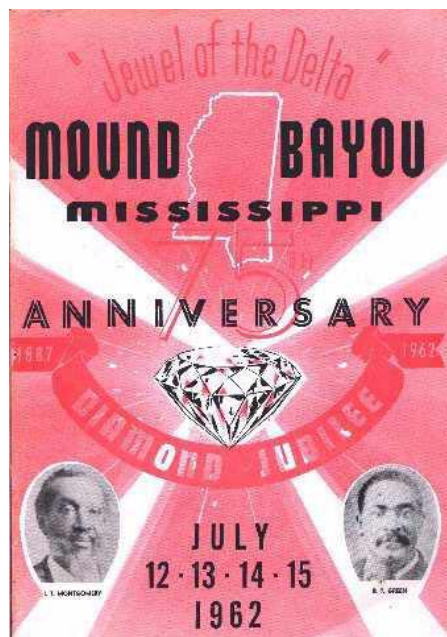
founded in one of the early settler's home. The school Montgomery and his sister Virginia started began inside her home. According to recorded information, Virginia Montgomery became the first principal and served until 1896. During the early years this school was held in the Greengrove Baptist Church (now First Baptist). Rev. J. I Brandfort succeeded Virginia Montgomery. Later, under the joint principal ship of Professor James Wilson and Professor R.J. Jarrett, a portion of the school continued to be held in the Greengrove Baptist Church under Professor Jarrett and the other portion under Professor Wilson was held in the Bethel A.M.E. Church. Mrs. Gertude Jones Bryant as principal succeeded these men in 1904 and served until 1915.

A local board of trustees ran the school, but these trustees were responsible to a county board that was not so willing to appropriate money for the school even though this school had an enrollment of 200 by 1910. A.P. Hood remarked in that year that it had been only recently that the public school had received \$400 for improvements.

In 1892, Montgomery and Green donated a tract of land for educational purposes, "designed to supplement the inadequate curriculum of the public schools." On this tract of land, the Mound Bayou Normal and Industrial Institute was built with financial assistance from the American Missionary Association. The school was largely supported by tuition but continued to receive some financial assistance from A.M.A, which was responsible for providing the first principal (teacher), Mrs. Annie Randolph from New England. Miss Mary E. Crump of Memphis, Tennessee succeeded her. Later Miss Minnie S. Washington -Jordan, a graduate of Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama, headed the school. The Mound Bayou Normal and Industrial Institute continued to grow under the able principal ship of Professor B. F. Ousley. A complete

high school course was added. Vocational instruction in domestic arts and science, and music was offered. Professor Ousley served for a period of sixteen years. Upon his resignation, Professor F. M succeeded him. Roberts, a graduate of Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado, who was assisted by a former student of the same school and graduate of Hampton Institute, Professor Robert Ross.²

Baptist College (Mound Bayou Industrial College) was established between 1900 and 1904, founded through the efforts of Mrs. A. A. Harris by orders of the General Baptist State Convention. An annual tuition and regular fund drive supported the school and was sponsored by the Baptist Women Workers' Union. Among those responsible for the early success of the school were Mrs. A.A. Harris, Mrs. V. L. Alexander, Mrs. M.C. Collins and Mrs. M.D. Crawford. The first principal was Professor John Capshaw; second, Professor R. C. McCorkel; third, Professor P. M. Smith; and the last Professor A. A. Thompson. The school was discontinued in 1936.



² The Founding of Mound Bayou Normal and Industrial Institute. The Founding of Baptist College (Mound Bayou Industrial College). Received this History from Dr. E. J. Stringer, October 1990.

(2)

"Booker T. Washington"

Mound Bayou's Friend and Supporter

Booker T. Washington, who had close dealings with Isaiah T. Montgomery, mostly through the Negro Business League and Charles Banks, in 1912, got Julius Rosenwald to donate \$1000 for a school. He had also convinced Andrew Carnegie to donate \$4000 for the construction of a library. Booker Washington said that Mound Bayou was "...not merely a town, but at the same time and in a very real sense of the word, a school. It is not only a place where a Negro may get inspiration...but a place, also, where he has the opportunity to learn some of the fundamental duties and responsibilities of social and



Booker T. Washington

T.

civic life.³

Montgomery, in a letter to Mrs. Jefferson Davis in 1900, said the churches and schools were:

“...Well represented, though we are not doing as well in this line for the younger generation as I would like; special care and preparation is needed to train and educate the youth in order that they may be well qualified to take up our farm work and bring it to a higher development instead of being drawn away by the peculiar attractions of town and city life...”

Montgomery told Washington in 1907 that Mound Bayou needed an “agricultural school.”

“But more than that we need here a system of education that will teach our young men and women the underlying meaning of the work that is being done here. The problem of education is at present the most important which the town and colony have to solve.”

A visitor to Mound Bayou in 1915 wrote that though the schools were better than most he had seen for Blacks, he still cited the public schools as being inadequately equipped, running for only five months per year and the private schools for operating on a very slim budget. The Board of Trustees floated bonds in the amount of \$115,000 and in the Mound Bayou Normal and Industrial Institute consolidated to form the “Mound Bayou Consolidated Public School and County Training School.” A local group administered the school board of trustees responsible to the County Superintendent of Education. The first board of trustees consisted of Isaiah T. Montgomery, chairman, B. W. Byran, and John W. Francis. The second board of trustees of B.C.T.S. was B. A. Green chairman, W. D. Hill, T. S. Morris, John Tharpe, Sr., Rev. Jim Jones and P. M.

Smith. The three-story brick structure was completed and the first classes started in 1921.⁴

The first principal was Professor J. H. Moseley who was succeeded by Professor J. H. Powell in 1926. Both men were graduates of Alcorn A. & M. College. Along with Professor A. R. Taylor the principals have been Professor C. M. Green, Ms. Olivia Holmes-Ryles, Professor Richard Williams, Mrs. Richard Williams, Rev. Hardin, and Professor B. T. Johnson. Mrs. Holmes-Ryles carried out the term of Professor C. M. Green and Mrs. D. Williams carried out the term of her husband, Professor Richard Williams who was the victim of an accidental drowning, tragic because it perhaps may be attributed to the lack of community recreational facilities available at the time.

Professor Calvin J. Jones was the first District 6 Superintendent following a county reorganization after the 1954 Supreme Court decisions overruling the practice of segregation in the public schools of our nation.

Principal since Professor B. T. Johnson, the last under the name B.C.T.S., have included, Ruth Scott, O. W. Howard, Samuel McGee, Arthur Jackson, and Arthur Holmes, all for the elementary schools, G. G. Young, A. L. Moore, Willie Gates, and Principal L. T. Lambert. This is up to 1980.

Isaiah Montgomery played a crucial role in the history of black entrepreneurship in the United States as well as in the history of Mound Bayou, Mississippi. He guided and shaped the establishment and early growth of Mound Bayou and continued to influence its development throughout his life. His business interests and activities, together with those of his family, continued significantly to the town's evolution. Moreover, his personality and personal background present a fascinating study of the ambitions,

⁴ Bolivar County Training School (BCTS). From information provided by Mr. Milburn J. Crowe-Historian

failures, and success of black entrepreneurs going from slavery into the business world of late nineteen-and twentieth-century America. Within the context of this study, a brief review of Montgomery's pre-Mound Bayou life and achievements is merited.⁵

Isaiah Montgomery was born on May 21, 1847, to the Hurricane Plantation slaves Ben and Mary Montgomery, Isaiah, even as a bondsman, enjoyed a more comfortable and privileged life than did most free blacks. He became intimately familiar with the world view of the southern aristocracy, and, after emancipation, he and other members of the Montgomery family would manifest values and behavior very similar to those displayed by the white landed gentry in Mississippi. Isaiah's father served as one of Joe Davis's favorite slaves, and his position allowed him to acquire highly valued skills, including the ability to read and write. Through independent trading with local blacks and whites and working as Davis's business agent, Ben Montgomery became proficient in farm management, applied mechanics, and general merchandising. He paid his master an unknown sum of money to free his semiliterate wife from her slave duties, so that being a wife and mother became Mary Montgomery's primary responsibility. Ben Montgomery built a combined house and store along the riverfront of the Davis plantation, which sheltered and helped support his wife and four children, William, Isaiah, Mary Virginia, and Rebecca. Like most slave parents, the Montgomery's highly valued education for their children.

Isaiah learned to read well and write very legibly at Hurricane Plantation. He could do basic arithmetic and taught himself some history, often using his father's small library. Joe Davis selected Isaiah, when he was about ten years old, to work as his office

⁵ A brief review of the life of Mr. Isaiah T. Montgomery Founder of Mound, Bayou, Mississippi. Taken from (BCTS) Bolivar County Training School Reunion Book/Program provided by Mr. Milburn J. Crowe.

boy and body servant. When Isaiah was older, he became Davis's private secretary, while continuing to serve as his body attendant. By the age of twelve, Isaiah had learned to keep books and read with such proficiency that some whites in the Davis Bend area would ask him about current events rather than read periodicals themselves.

Isaiah continued to serve as Davis's personal servant and secretary until 1862, the year Davis fled into Mississippi's hinterland before the advance of the Union army. Throughout most of 1863, the black youth served as a cabin boy to David D. Porter commander of the victorious Union navy fleet on the Mississippi River.⁶ Porter persuaded Ben Montgomery to move his family to Cairo, Illinois, and then to Cincinnati, where Isaiah rejoined his parents following his discharge in late 1863. While living in exile, the Montgomery's accumulated a small amount of venture capital. After the war, they returned to Davis Bend, where the Freedman's Bureau sponsored a colony of newly freed blacks, and they invested in a general merchandise business, Montgomery and Sons General Store. Isaiah served as bookkeeper and secretary and continued his education through tutelage from a missionary teacher and independent study of books on business record keeping.

On November 19, 1868, the family purchased both Brierfield and Hurricane plantations from Joe Davis for a \$300,000 principal payment due at the end of nine years and yearly interest payments of \$18,000. This venture severely taxed the managerial skill of the black entrepreneurs, and they lost the land through a foreclosure sale on September 12, 1881, three years after Ben Montgomery's death. The forfeiture was mostly the result of natural disasters and declining cotton prices.

⁶ Joe Davis, brother of Jefferson Davis owned Isaiah T. Montgomery as a slave, fled his plantation after the Union Army continued to advance toward his location. Information provided by Milburn J. Crowe.

Extravagance and inappropriate business decisions aggravated the Montgomery's tenuous finances. Their life-style would have been envied by all but the most successful antebellum planters. They frequently staged lavish meals and social gatherings featuring such expensive delicacies as squid. They subscribed to numerous periodicals, including *Demorest's*, an upper-class-oriented fashion journal, *Well's Phrenological journal*, a Pseudoscientific serial and *Harper's weekly*. Their hiring of several servants to tend a floral garden that spelled out family member's names is a particularly glaring example of the Montgomery's lavish spending habits. Instead of using their profits to retire their considerable debt, the Montgomery engaged in new speculative investments. In 1871, they arranged to purchase the 1,557-acre Ursino Plantation adjacent to their lands, and in 1874 they established another merchandising business in Vicksburg, which failed three years later. These financial setbacks and commitments, along with Ben's untimely death, brought on the forfeiture of the Brierfield and Hurricane plantations.

Isaiah tried to reverse his family's collapsing fortunes. After losing the old Davis Plantations in 1881, Isaiah moved his immediate family, his wife Martha, whom he had married in 1872, his mother, and his sisters to the Ursino Plantation, formerly William's residence. During the early 1880s, Isaiah experienced a long and severe illness that hampered his efforts to make his mortgage payments and to meet other financial obligations. In 1885, the family suffered the loss of Ursino and the death of Mary, the Montgomery matriarch. Afterward, the debt-ridden Montgomery family could no longer afford to live at Davis Bend, their home as slaves, and they lost the land they had hoped would make them rich. Without his strong-willed and ambitious father and his

supportive mother and brother, Isaiah attempted to start anew in Vicksburg, Mississippi.⁷ There he owned and operated a small mercantile business near the national cemetery.

Although neither his monetary resources nor his position matched what he had enjoyed while he and his family possessed the Davis Bend land Plantation, Isaiah consistently showed his desire to recapture the glory he and his family once knew. When James Hill and George W. McGinnis approached Montgomery about selling L., N.O., and T. Railroad lands to blacks on a contract basis, the former planter quickly agreed. A few months after McGinnis first wrote Montgomery about working for the railroad, the black man selected a site for the company to reserve exclusively for black buyers.

Using the promotional skills he learned during his many years as a merchant, Montgomery first attempted to sell parcels of land to his natural constituency, family members and friends from the Davis Bend area. During the summer of 1887, he persuaded several men to inspect the proposed town-site. They dislike the wilderness location, but Montgomery, “a very good orator,” made an impromptu speech appealing to their racial pride and belief in self-help: “Why stagger at the difficulties confronting you?” Have you not for centuries burned the miasma and hewn down forest like these at the behest of a master? Can you not do it for yourselves and your children unto successive generations, that they may worship and develop under their own vine and fig tree? So effective was his peroration that he convinced them to stay and investigate further the many opportunities offered by this locale. Eventually, he sold Mound Bayou property to fourteen members of the inspection party.

Two of the purchasers, Joshua P. T. Montgomery and Benjamin Green, Isaiah’s

⁷ The Montgomery Family owned the Davis Bend Plantation, their home as slaves along with other properties, but following the deaths of their father and mother, all was lost. [M. J. Crowe-Historian](#).

cousins, possessed skills and experience that would aid substantially in the development of Mound Bayou. Joshua, born a slave in 1854, had learned to read and write from his master's children. During his teens, he had moved to Davis Bend and later became a Confederate Army Captain.

Joshua practiced law, mechanical and civil engineering, and land surveying. Green, Isaiah's maternal cousin, also had lived his early years as a slave. After his father's death, when Green was thirteen, he lived and worked with Isaiah's family until he reached the age of twenty-six. During those years, he acquired promotional and managerial skills and held several positions, including manager, with Montgomery and Sons General Store. In 1880, with the family's fortunes declining, Green and his wife, Eva, moved to Newtown, Mississippi, where he became a prosperous merchant.

Joshua, Benjamin, Isaiah, and twelve other members of the original inspection party left their families behind in the fall of 1887 and returned to the proposed site of Mount Bayou. Under Joshua and Isaiah's guidance, they surveyed the colony's land, designating a forty-acre town-site and forty-acre plots, the minimum amount Isaiah intended to sell as farmland to Mound Bayou settlers. The pioneers prepared for the arrival of their families by selecting farm-sites or, in a few cases, town lots, clearing small areas for gardens, and crafting small log cabins. Isaiah's wife, Martha and his cousin, Benjamin Green, jointly bought two town lots and 840 acres of land that adjoined three sides of the town site. One woman, Delta Wilbert, joined her husband at the colony

in 1887, but most of the families did not arrive until February 8, 1888. At least fifteen more blacks bought land in the colony later that winter.⁸

Some of the settler's experiences during the first years of Mound Bayou's existence typified those of most of the all-black colonies that were started. Colonies such as [Nicodemus, Kansas](#), [Allensworth, California](#), [Renova, Mississippi](#), [Boley, Oklahoma](#), [Langston City, Oklahoma](#), [Falcon, Mississippi](#), just to name a few. The difficult conditions and poverty forced some of the settlers to leave their new homes in Mound Bayou. During the cotton harvest, some of the settlers, women and children, picked cotton for \$.50 per hundredweight for whites who owned farms or plantations along navigable waterways several miles away. The families supplemented their diet by fishing and hunting, but when they could not kill game, such as "cottontail rabbits and possums," they went without meat, sometimes for two and three months at a time. According to records, some claimed, "Many times they had bread only to eat and water alone to drink with it."

At the start of the colonization process, Isaiah Montgomery and Benjamin Green formed a legal partnership to open a sawmill, a venture, which earned them, profits for several years while also helping provide income for other settlers. As they cleared their lands, farmers used railroad crossties, stove bolts, spoke timer, and other products they could sell to the railroad and other buyers. In many instances, these sales produced money for settlers' required down payments on their lands or helped Montgomery in his efforts to renegotiate contracts with the railroad for colonists who had fallen behind in payments.

⁸ Other all -black colonies mentioned. Information received from Mr. Milburn J. Crowe of Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Permission given to use information in this work.

Montgomery's relationship with the railroad gave the partners a head start in launching other moneymaking ventures. The first three businesses in Mound Bayou belonged to the Montgomery or Green families. In addition to the sawmill, they owned the general store, which Benjamin Green founded in 1888, and the country emporium, which Isaiah and his wife opened the following year. Green located his store and his home on Green's square, the more northerly of two town-site blocks belonging to the families. Montgomery named the other block, where he built his own home, Montgomery's Square. Since there is no record of their buying these properties, Montgomery might have obtained the land from the railroad as a bonus, which he then shared with Green. Both squares had easy access to the railway, for their eastern fronts abutted the tracks. Green's store also served as the ticket outlet for the town's railroad "flag station," an open wood platform where prospective passengers and shippers stood to flag down oncoming trains. Montgomery's home housed the post office, initially a simple "wooden soap box" where mail could be deposited, which prospective passengers and shippers stood to flag down oncoming trains. Montgomery's home housed the post office, initially a simple "wooden soap box" where mail could be deposited, which the railroad secured for the town and colony late in 1888.

In addition to these businesses, the Montgomery and Green families engaged in land speculation and large-scale cotton production. Montgomery seems to have exchanged his sales commission for a discount, because he brought the land for both families for less than \$6.50 per acre. The price totaled \$5,680; Montgomery made a down payment of \$220 and arranged to pay the balance in five yearly installments of \$1,092. This land investment had two attractions for the families: the property's

proximity to the town-site made it ideal for future development, should demand for town lots outstrip the supply at the original town-site; in the meantime, the town-dwelling Montgomery, using family and hiring other settlers, could cultivate large cotton crops. *In 1890, the Montgomery family during its Davis Bend years had produced the third largest cotton harvest in the United States, grossed \$30,000, mostly from the sale of cotton.*⁹

During Mound Bayou's early development, Montgomery traveled throughout Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas selling town lots and farmland around the town for a probable commission of 12 percent, the same rate he took as a discount on his own purchases. At every stop he distributed handbills and made speeches aimed at attracting the "earnest and ambitious class" of African-American, respectable blacks with enough money to purchase farmland or town plots and maintain themselves until they could raise profitable crops or establish business. In keeping with his own economic interests and motivations, Montgomery hoped to find settlers who could contribute to the financial growth of Mound Bayou and to the profits of the businesses he and his family had established in the town.



Government and church leaders joined with concerned citizens to establish stringent codes of behavior for residents. They kept prostitutes from settling in the town by not permitting a place for them to lodge and attempted to eliminate common-law marriages among area blacks. When a committee from the Baptist and Methodist congregations identified forty couples cohabitating out of wedlock, the town government

⁹ The Montgomery family during their Davis Bend years produced the third largest cotton harvest in the United States. City of Mound Bayou "logo" - 1887. Information provided by Charles C. Stringer, Sr.-1986

instructed them either to marry formally or to leave the town and colony.¹⁰ The 183 black residents qualified to vote in county elections also consistently cast their ballots in favor of preserving countrywide prohibition. Through actions such as these, the settlers of Mound Bayou, like those Nicodemus, Kansas explicitly demonstrated their acceptance of the dominant Victorian moral outlook shared by middle-class and upwardly mobile blacks and whites. By guaranteeing that no hint of disrepute would touch their town, blacks aimed to ensure its appeal to new settlers as well as to outside business people and investors.

The founding of a local newspaper, the *Demonstrator*, was of considerable help to the political and promotional aims of the town leaders. Seuborn J. Alford, a physician and Aurelius P. Hood, an educator who served out Montgomery's term as mayor after Montgomery resigned to work for the federal government and William L. Smith, the secretary of a black fraternal organization established the paper in 1900. The *Demonstrator* advertised land for sale, business opportunities, and available credit, and it printed "ambitious race editorials" emphasizing values very similar to those expressed by Booker T. Washington. Although this weekly tabloid underwent several ownership and editorial changes, and no complete copy of it survives, contemporary accounts suggest that it consistently adhered to the statement of mission its three first owners published in early issues: "To make and keep, an authentic record of the growth and development of the town of Mound Bayou, and the dignified representation to the Negro people of the Delta and ...to labor as best it could for the advancement of every interest affecting the welfare of the citizenship of this section."

¹⁰ Marry formally or leave the town and colony. The founding of a local newspaper, the *Demonstrator*. Information from historical documents owned by my father, Charles C. Stringer, Sr. 1986.

Perhaps the most important factor in Mound Bayou's continued and accelerated growth and development during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century was the promoter's ability to attract and benefit from the interest of outside supporters.¹¹ Booker



T. Washington and his Tuskegee Institute provided especially useful contacts. Respected and accepted by both whites and blacks,

Washington, the "Great Accommodator," had established contact with a wide-ranging network of leaders in education, business, government, and the media. Although his strategies for racial uplift emphasized black self-help and self-sufficiency, he willingly drew on the financial and promotional resources of white supporters, and he utilized his network in behalf of endeavors he deemed worthy.

For his part, Washington saw Montgomery's plan for Mound Bayou as examples of what the black bourgeoisie could accomplish, individually and collectively. Shortly after their correspondence began, the Tuskegeean invited Montgomery to the annual Negro Farmers' Conference at Tuskegee, but business concerns prevented Isaiah from attending. He did accept Washington's invitations to participate in the National Negro Business League's first national meeting held at Boston in August 1900 and in a Tuskegee Institute fund-raising concert held in New York City at Madison Square Garden on March 18, 1901. Both the benefit and the founding meeting of the National Negro Business League provided Montgomery with opportunities to advertise Mound Bayou to large numbers of Washington's audience. In New York, he shared the lecture platform with Washington

¹¹ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Airmont, 1967), p. 136. "There is no deference or security for any of us except in the highest intelligence and development of all."

and other well-known blacks, including poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and, though the biracial audience had gathered to raise money for Tuskegee, Montgomery sought to engage their interest in Mound Bayou as well. As early as 1901, Washington's private secretary, Emmett J. Scott, provided background information on Mound Bayou and Isaiah Montgomery in news releases sent to several major newspapers in connection with the Madison Square Garden Tuskegee Institute Benefit.¹²

Impressed by Montgomery and his program, Washington decided that the Mississippian would be an obvious choice for a federal post. At Washington's urging, the Theodore Roosevelt administration appointed Montgomery receiver of federal land and a federal post. He resigned as Mound Bayou's Mayor and moved to Jackson to take this appointment, succeeding James Hills, his friend and former colleague.



Mrs. M. Booze

Civic Leader

Business Leader

¹² March 18, 1901 Madison Square Garden New York, biracial audience to help Tuskegee also has interest in Mound Bayou. From historical data given by Milburn J. Crowe, Mound Bayou resident and Historian.

(3)

"Charles Banks"

Bank of Mound Bayou

It was the presence of Charles Banks in the community as much as any other factor, that kept Washington interested in Mound Bayou's future. Banks, a "tall, big bodied man of pure African blood," arrived in Mound Bayou in January 1904. He believed strongly in Washington's ideals of racial uplift and viewed Mound Bayou as a potential place to put those ideals into action. The positive impression he gained during a visit to the town in 1903 inspired him to relocate to Mound Bayou, where he quickly became one of the town's most important citizen's as well as Montgomery's sometimes cooperative, sometimes competitive rival as its leading booster. Much later, Washington, wrote to Montgomery, "I have the fullest confidence in Charles Banks, and the highest respect for him...I have not only a respect for him, but a deep affection for him."¹³ These

¹³ Booker T. Washington supports Charles Banks. Charles Banks was a successful merchant-farmer in Clarksdale, Mississippi (my hometown), before relocating to Mound Bayou. BCTS historical document.

sentiments helped ensure Washington's support for Bank's community activities. Before arriving in Mound Bayou, Banks had surmounted humble origins to become a successful merchant-farmer in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Born March 25, 1873, in a log cabin, he attended Rust College from 1887 to 1890. He left school before graduating and worked as a census numerator for a year. Afterward, he established a mercantile business at Clarksdale with his brother. In 1893, Banks married Trena Ophelia Booze, a former Natchez Baptist College student, and took her younger brother, Eugene Parker Booze, a former Natchez Baptist College student, as his apprentice in general merchandising and cotton trading. Eventually, Eugene Booze was to join Banks in Mound Bayou and play an active role in the town's business activities. During 1900, Banks served as census supervisor for Mississippi's third district. Three years later, he wrote to Emmett J. Scott, "I am going out of the merchandise business...to engage in banking business." The bank he founded, the bank of Mound Bayou, became one of the few black-owned -operated, bona fide banking enterprises in the country, and as such, residents considered it a source of pride and prestige for Mound Bayou.

Banks and Scott and other men connected with the National Negro Business League, which he served as third vice-president from 1901 to 1905 and as first vice-president from 1907 through the mid-1920s. He also founded the Mississippi Negro Business League in 1904 and served as its president. Always civically active, Banks had many black organizational affiliations, including the Mississippi Bankers Association, which he helped establish, the Prince Hall Masons, the Odd Fellows, and the Knights of Pythias. In addition, he served as a trustee for two A.M.E. Church schools: Campbell College in Jackson, Mississippi, and Wilberforce University in Ohio. Politically, Banks

was active in the Republican Party, serving as a member of the state executive committee and as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1904 and 1908.¹⁴

Despite some anti-black incidents, including a vicious hanging of two blacks “along the side of the railroad in the hope” he would see them as his train passed, Washington found the trip through Mississippi fruitful. He commissioned Robert R. Moton, his travel assistant and eventual successor as head of Tuskegee Institute, to write an article about the trip, especially positive references to Mound Bayou and Banks, for publication in the December 1908 *Southern Workman*. Like Booker T. Washington, Moton had graduated from and worked at Hampton Institute, and in 1910 he became editor of the *Southern Workman*. Washington’s *The Negro in Business*, published in 1907, had already given high praise to Mound Bayou and its leaders, as would his ensuing books, *The story of the Negro*, published in 1909, and *My larger Education*, published in 1911. Washington’s articles also publicized Mound Bayou. Those published by *American Magazine* and *World’s Work* over his name invariably extolled both the place and the business and boosting activities of Montgomery and Banks. The *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, one of several white-owned magazines that detailed commentary on Mound Bayou and its community leaders in 1910. The magazine was surely inspired by Washington, for its “The Pioneers of Mound Bayou” portrayed the town as a model black-populated enclave that had even impressed Theodore Roosevelt. At Isaiah Montgomery’s invitation, the president had made a ten-minute whistle-stop there in 1907. The magazine of what the Negro could do in the matter of self-colonization.”

Washington’s endorsement might also have influenced G. P. Hamilton to include items

¹⁴ Charles Banks - delegate to the Republican National Convention - 1904 and 1908. Vicious hanging of two blacks alongside the railroad in an attempt to get the attention of B. T. Washington as his train passed.

on Banks and Montgomery in his *Beacon lights of the Race*, a collection of short biographies of contemporary African-American notables, published in 1911.¹⁵

Assisted and encouraged by national and local publicity efforts, Mound Bayou's boosters concentrated on amassing capital and enhancing business opportunities. Charles Banks and Isaiah Montgomery directed all of the larger fund-raising endeavors and many of the smaller ones. For practical as well as promotional reasons, Charles Bank's Bank of Mound Bayou played a particularly important role in establishing the community's economic climate. On March 8, 1904, the bank opened for business in a small, three-hundred-square-foot frame building; in 1910-11, it moved into a new, two-story brick building, widely regarded as one of the finest in town, with "solid oak tables, plate-glass windows, brass grills," and a modern, time-lock vault. Banks had chosen an auspicious time to launch the venture, thanks to the area's overall economic upsurge fueled by favorable cotton harvest and market conditions, and consequently the bank declared a 10 percent dividend its first year.

Before the bank's inception, townspeople and black hinterland settlers who needed to borrow money usually had to arrange in Tennessee or in neighboring Delta towns. In fact, Mound Bayou's bank came to act as a depository for money that area blacks owed to several Memphis businesses. The early success of the Bank of Mound Bayou made obvious the urgent need for more money for loans than the bank's original \$10,000 capitalization could provide. Around 85 percent of the Mound Bayou district's black farmers had to have a second mortgage to survive. To take advantage of this

¹⁵ Isaiah T. Montgomery and Charles Banks included in *Beacon Lights of the Race*, a collection of short stories published by George P. Hamilton in 1911. From the historical data of Milburn J. Crowe, 2000.

lucrative market, a second chartered financial institution, the Mound Bayou Loan and Investment Company, was found in 1906.

Area residents were accumulating wealth from their businesses and professional endeavors. These, in turn, brought the town regional fame as a commercial center, and, in 1910. Mound Bayou hosted the annual meeting of the state's Negro Business League. The Banks, Montgomery, and Francis families remained among the most successful entrepreneur. In 1908, Charles Banks felt comfortable enough with his projected income to commission the building of a new, "beautiful and elaborate" house, value at \$10,000. Isaiah and William Montgomery's banking, farming, real estate, and merchandising activities flourished. All three families held stock in various other local ventures, including the Bank of Mound Bayou.¹⁶ Two other stockholders and directors of the bank, Columbus R. Stringer and Richard R. McCarty, were also more prosperous than the average citizen. Stringer, born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1849, settled in Mound Bayou in 1899. Within ten years he established a merchandising business worth \$50,000, rivaling those of Francis and Montgomery. McCarty, one of the area's largest black landowners, operated, with his wife, a 640-acre plantation just outside the town. Born in Hannibal, Missouri, and raised near Delhi, Louisiana, he had worked as gin superintendent for a large, white-owned plantation in Louisiana before settling in the Mound Bayou area in 1889. In addition to his plantation store for his tenant, both Columbus R. Stringer and Richard R. McCarty while serving as directors and who owned stock in the Bank of Mound Bayou also proved to be savvy businessmen and were quite successful in all of their endeavors.

¹⁶ Columbus R. Stringer, a director and stockholder in the Bank of Mound Bayou was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1849-relocated to Mound Bayou in 1899. He operated a successful merchandising business.

One of the town's youngest businessmen, Livingston Brooks, born in 1888, came to Mound Bayou with his parents as a young child. Although barely twenty-one in 1909, he already operated a grocery and produce store as well as livery stable. George A. Lee, one of the village's first aldermen, was educated at Tougaloo College and Fisk University and then studied law at the Illinois College of Law in Chicago. After graduation in 1908, he returned to Mound Bayou and established his legal practice there.

The majority of blacks who swelled Mound Bayou's population and the rosters of its lodges during the first decade of the twentieth century came from Natchez and the southwestern part of the state where the "white-cappers," a Ku Klux Klan-like organization, had been harassing prosperous black people since the mid-1890s.¹⁷ Connections with the Montgomery family had brought earlier accounted for a number of newer settlers from Natchez. But it was escape from racially motivated white hostility that caused many Mississippi blacks to relocate to Mound Bayou. Isaiah Montgomery described these newcomers as "generally the best class, mainly thrifty homeowners, fairly intelligent, but not educated." Charles Schweringen and his sons Albert and Thomas are good examples successful cotton planters at Brookhaven, Mississippi in Lincoln County, they relocated to Mound Bayou in 1903 and by 1909 they owned and farmed four hundred acres. Hood thought that the Schweringens typified "the class of Negro farmers of whom the 'white-caps' in our southern tier of counties made such an effort to rid themselves several years ago." Isaiah Montgomery, in letters to Washington and others, chronicled some of the harassments such people had suffered. He wrote that one man who had owned a 1,500-acre plantation came to Mound Bayou

¹⁷ The KKK and like organizations harassed prosperous African Americans. It was escape from racially motivated white hostility that caused many Mississippi African Americans to relocate to Mound Bayou.

because the terrorists disliked his property and demanded that he stop hiring farm workers, including his own Children, after they come of age, if he wanted to keep his property, and the white leaders of his former community refused him protection.¹⁸

Another victim, Montgomery wrote, had owned a grocery and an adjacent pool hall until his neighbors told him to close his business and either don the overalls of a manual laborer or leave town. Yet another, who had owned a hack business, was told he must sell one of his vehicles. Obviously, these refugees were a bonanza to the business interests of their new home. During the 1904 gubernatorial campaign in Mississippi, racial incidents proliferated.

Supporters of James K. Vardaman, the Democratic candidate, persecuted blacks throughout the state. Those with money either moved to other regions, such as Oklahoma and (Native American) Indian territories, or into all-black enclaves. Whites ran workers away from a black widow's farm located ten miles southwest of Mound Bayou, but concentrated number of blacks within the town afforded relative security from overtly hostile manifestations of white racism, if not from its effects on education and suffrage. Yet, according to Isaiah Montgomery, even in Mound Bayou several of "the best people in the colony," especially those originally from the area of "white-cap activity," became frightened and left the state. In 1904, only 83 blacks from the Mound Bayou area met state voting requirements, and although blacks outnumbered whites in Mississippi, fewer than 14,000 could vote, compared to about 115,000 franchised whites. Vardaman, who had nearly pathological abhorrence of blacks, was the first statewide candidate to succeed by campaigning on a platform that combined progressive populism with race -baiting. As

¹⁸ More white racism. James K. Vardaman, a white racist race-baiting democratic gubernatorial candidate who had nearly pathological abhorrence of African Americans was successful using racist tactics.

governor from 1904 to 1908, he fought monopolies, favored regulation of transport and commerce, and prompted legislation to improve the material well being of poor whites while denying the improvements to black citizens.

Despite growing racial cordial tension in Mississippi, Mound Bayou's blacks generally enjoyed cordial relations with their white neighbors. Many of the 250 whites who lived in the area did business with the town's black merchants.¹⁹ Several whites, including a telephone technician who trained black employees of his company to operate communication equipment, stayed in the town at least temporarily. Mound Bayou's hotel had several rooms reserved for white customers, while its bakery provided goods to residents of several predominantly white-populated towns in the Delta. Literature boosting the town frequently emphasized support and cooperation between blacks and whites in the Mound Bayou area. For example, in his *Negro Town and colony*, Banks attempted to soothe prospective settlers' fear of white hostility by asserting that area whites, unlike those in southern Mississippi counties, behaved in a well-disposed manner toward their black neighbors and wanted them to succeed.

During the 1907 Mississippi Negro Business League meeting at Meridian, Charles Banks, with support from leading blacks of Mississippi, transformed Montgomery's dream into a project by persuading the league to sponsor the construction of a mill at Mound Bayou. Edward W. Lampton, presiding bishop of the Eighth Episcopal district of the A.M.E. Church, which included Mississippi, bought the first one hundred shares of stock, setting an example for the individual members of A.M.E. congregations. Although his purchase reinforced the close ties between his denomination

¹⁹ African Americans in Mound Bayou generally enjoyed cordial relations with their white neighbors. **All footnotes not stating their origination** are from the historical notes/collections of Charles C. Stringer, Sr.

and the prominent boosters of Mound Bayou, it did not ensure rapid sales for the remaining shares, and the mill did not actually begin operations until late 1913. Banks and other promoters scheduled the mill's opening for 1911, but they still needed to raise \$35,000 to \$50,000 before the plant could begin operating. Delta blacks and Banks continued to look elsewhere for potential investors. He asked about selling oil mill bonds to any of their friends who wanted to invest funds on a "safe and sound basis that will yield them proper returns and at the same time afford the Negro an opportunity" to succeed in a major business effort. Banks apparently failed to produce any investors, and, since the promoters were still substantially short of the needed funds, Banks postponed the mill's opening.

Desperate, the promoter then turned to Washington, asking for his assistance in contacting white capitalists willing to invest \$30,000 to \$40,000 in mill bonds. Banks told Washington that the mill project had already incurred debts of about \$15,000 and needed another \$15,000 to \$20,000 to purchase seed and hire mill workers. Banks approached Andrew Carnegie without an introduction from Washington. Banks had requested a written reference from Tuskegee, but Carnegie had insisted that Washington not intercede with him on behalf of solicitors. Carnegie evidenced some interest in the cottonseed oil mill project and asked Banks to provide him with letters of endorsement from whites living in the Mound Bayou area. Banks did so, but he failed to persuade the tycoon to invest in the mill's mortgage bonds.

Montgomery again solicited support for this pet project, sending formal outlines of his trust plan to several northern white philanthropists. He suggested that although the office for the trust was to be located in banks to ensure the goodwill of powerful white

Southerners, Montgomery did not arouse much interest in the plan, even though he had strong support from Washington and enthusiastic letters of reference from L. K. Salsbury, one of the largest cotton planters in the world; C. P. Monterey, editor of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* newspaper; and both of Mississippi's U.S. Senators. Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears and Roebuck, was the only potential investor who responded favorably. He asked that the fund have a five-man board of trustees, consisting of three northern whites, one southern white, and one southern black, and made a tentative agreement to risk \$50,000. The Sears executive said he would increase his investment to \$250,000 over time, should the original amount return a modest 4 percent. Although there were many setbacks, these setbacks did not stop Banks and the other promoters from staging a ceremonial plant opening by the famous Booker T. Washington on November 25, 1912, four months after residents celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mound Bayou's founding. They hoped and believed that a public, widely ballyhooed start-up of the mill would renew interest in the endeavor and increase opportunities for selling stock shares and bond certificates.²⁰ Banks worked hard to ensure a memorable experience that would reflect very well on the town, the race, and the mill project. At Washington's suggestion, he sent prominent blacks and whites letters of invitation to the event. Invitation addressed to African-Americans highlighted the quality, size, and cost of the plant and emphasized its black ownership, identifying it as the only black-owned cottonseed oil mill in the United States.

Visitors to the ceremonial mill opening found Mound Bayou filled with optimism. The audience loved the mill-opening ceremony. According to one

²⁰ "The only Black-owned cottonseed oil mill in the United States." Taken from the Historical Collections of Charles C. Stringer, Sr. Charles C. Stringer, Sr. was born in Mound Bayou, Mississippi.

enthusiastic witness, “Strong men wept and the women cried for joy.” Another black expressed his pleasure by stating that if cotton was king, blacks had moved closer to the throne.²¹ The *New York Tribune* claimed, “Mound Bayou has become in civic life of colored people what Tuskegee is to their educational life.” The *Tuskegee Student* newspaper, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* Newspaper, and other publication also saluted the project.

In May 1913, Banks made arrangements to sell the additional \$15,000 worth of certificates on hands, to B. B. Harvey, a white man who owned the Memphis Cotton Oil Company. In addition to buying the bonds, Harvey leased the mill plant for five years, agreeing to assume the conditions of Rosenwald’s bond purchase and repayment plan while also remitting 50 percent of the profits to the black stockholders. Satisfied with this arrangement, Rosenwald provided his \$25,000, and in October the mill, at least, began to run. Since it was the only predominantly black-owned plant of the sixty-eight mills then operating in Mississippi, several editors of black newspapers felt inspired to promote the venture by reporting favorably on its actual opening. They generally reprinted verbatim a news release written by Banks and disseminated by the Tuskegee “machine” that advertised stock for sale, either directly from the project’s headquarters in Mound Bayou or from its traveling salesmen. Washington protective of his own credibility and of Rosenwald’s philanthropic support, again warned the banker to be strictly and fully carried out,” for “if (he is) disappointed in this investment he will loose faith in our entire race.”

²¹ Mound Bayou saluted by the *New York Tribune*, the *Tuskegee Student* newspaper, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* and other publications regarding the cottonseed oil mill. Mr. Milburn J. Crowe, 2000.

financial condition of his own Memphis mill, which operated at a deficit Banks, for reasons having to do with his bank, was greatly relieved to have the mill in operation.

Questionable business decisions, in combination with the residual effects of the poor harvest in 1911 and the ongoing effects of a depressed economy, had undermined the Bank of Mound Bayou's fiscal health.²² None of the promoters was yet rid of difficulties with the mill, however, B.B. Harvey proved a most unfortunate choice as financial backer and lease-operator. Even though the mill earned a healthy \$12,567 profit during its first season of operation, Harvey neglected to make the necessary interest payments to Julius Rosenwald. Instead, he embezzled the money designated for payments, using it to improve the. In the troubled economic conditions of the pre-World War I depression, Bank's struggle to save the bank became ever more difficult. Between January 1913 and January 1914, depositors withdrew over \$35,000 from the financial institution. Eventually the bank closed. Banks was determined to deal honorably with all who had backed the oil mill and also with the Mound Bayou bank's investors and depositors. He believed that, had the state authorities not closed its doors, he could have collected the bank's overdue and outstanding loans within a short time.

By January 1915, Banks recovered his optimism and decided to establish a new financial institution, and Scott and Washington pledged their aid. "*Outside of Tuskegee...there is no community in the world (in which) I am so deeply interested,*" Washington declared, and he wrote Montgomery that he wanted nothing to stand in the way of reopening a black-owned bank in Mound Bayou.

²² State authorities close Mound Bayou Bank. Charles Banks recovered his optimism opened a new financial institution with the aid of Booker T. Washington. According to Dr. E. J. Stringer, October 1990.

Booker T. Washington's serious illness marred the early November opening ceremony Banks planned for the new bank.²³ The bank was sanctioned to open on October 23, 1915. Since Scott's appearance as an honored guest had to be cancelled, and his death on November 15 ultimately spelled disaster for Mound Bayou. Thereafter, the town and its principal boosters would lose the national visibility they had enjoyed for more than fifteen years due to the great Tuskegeean's vigorous support, though his death did not seem to produce an immediate or profound adverse effect on local development. With the establishment of the new bank and the boosters' resumption of control over the cottonseed oil mill, the residents of Mound Bayou looked toward a prosperous future, even though for years local white farmers might refuse to sell their seeds to the mill. Lacking Washington's guidance and counsel, however, Banks and Montgomery began to drift apart. Montgomery, after securing his financial position by syndication his landholdings, dissolved his partnership with Banks and began a fight for preeminence. The power struggle peaked during the 1917 municipal elections, when a group of Bank's supporters won. Angry and alleging fraud, Montgomery, esteemed among Mississippi whites for being Joe and Jefferson Davis's houseboy, persuaded the racist Governor Theodore G. Bilbo to oust the winners. In partnership and with Washington's support, Montgomery and Banks had built Mound Bayou, had kept it intact through the desperate years of depression, and had then created their basis for industrial development.²⁴

²³ Booker T. Washington died November 15, 1915. Charles Banks and Isaiah T. Montgomery began to drift apart. Montgomery and Banks had built Mound Bayou. Historical collections of C. C. Stringer, Sr.

²⁴ After Montgomery and Banks split Montgomery focused on his personal wealth and political influence until his death on March 7, 1924. Taken from historical data provided by M. J. Crowe, Historian.

After their split, Montgomery focused on increasing his personal wealth and political influence until his death on March 7, 1924. Banks, more concerned with racial solidarity than Montgomery ever was, continued his efforts to boost the town and to help lead the National Negro Business League into the 1920s. When they were both gone, the town gradually lost vitality. Apart from the races of its citizens, today Mound Bayou is almost indistinguishable from any other small Mississippi Delta town.²⁵ From 1887 until World War I, the town promoters helped to ensure the profits by skillfully securing new settlers and outside financial assistance through the manipulation of boosting themes laced with Black Nationalism. Their well-crafted advertising, along with their never-ending courting of Booker T. Washington, provided Mound Bayou population. Most of the credit goes to Montgomery and Banks, two indomitable black capitalists. Isaiah Montgomery, as Joe Davis's teenaged body servant and private secretary, had learned how to speculate and how to ingratiate himself with powerful whites for the purpose of making money. Charles Banks during his youth had internalized the idea that a combination of racial pride, hard work would increase the prestige of African-Americans. ***Through joint speculative endeavors, Montgomery and Banks made money, heightened racial pride, and built a black town.***

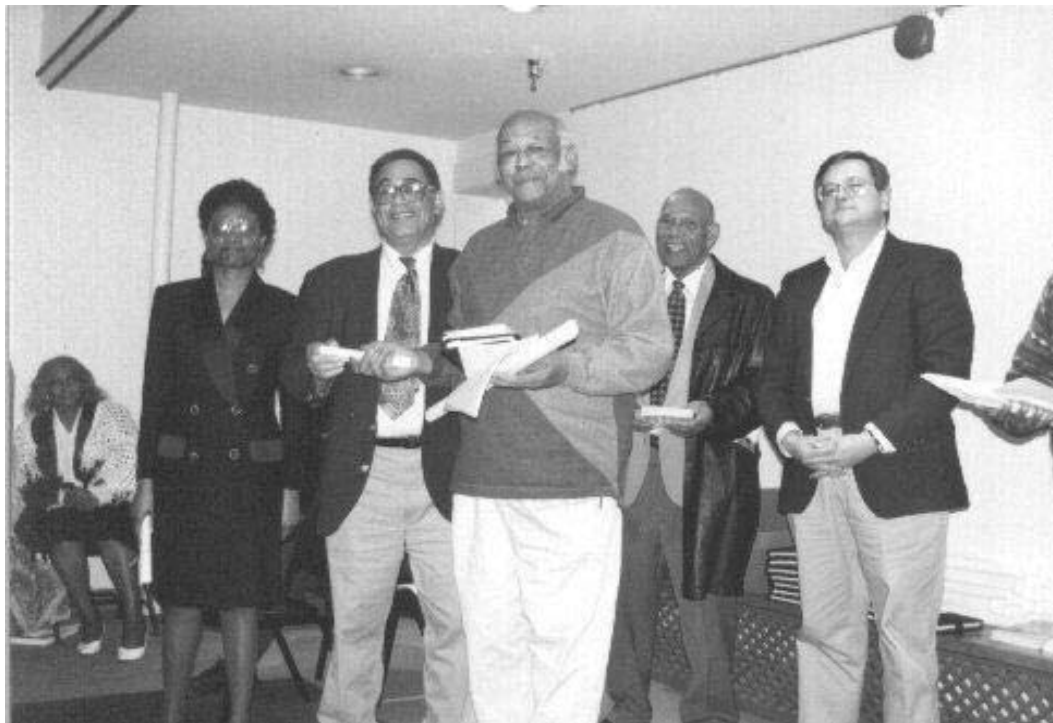
²⁵ Charles Banks, more concerned with racial solidarity than Montgomery ever was, continued his efforts to boost the town and help lead the National Negro Business League into the 1920's. When they were both gone, the town gradually lost its vitality. Apart from the races of its citizens, today Mound Bayou is almost indistinguishable from any other small Mississippi Delta town. M. J. Crowe Historical information.

(4)

“Mr. Milburn J. Crowe”

Today, Mound Bayou is still alive and well but needs all of the assistance the town can receive.²⁶ A very good friend of mine, Mr. Milburn J. Crowe is on the move doing all in his power to revive Mound Bayou. If only there were more people like Mr. Milburn Crowe I believe the town would be in a much better position. We should all say “thank you” to Mr. Crowe for all of his hard work for he is a man among men and a very good example of what a real man looks like. Thank you Mr. Milburn J. Crowe.

Mr. Milburn J. Crowe (center)

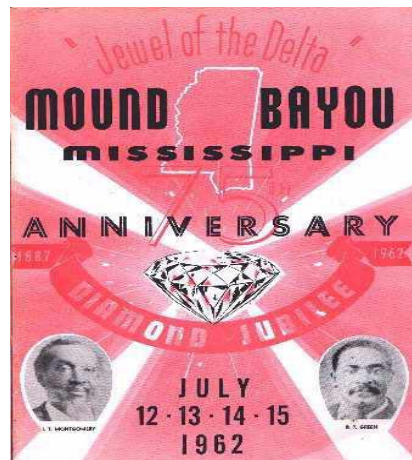


Mr. Milburn J. Crowe

&

Friends

²⁶ Mr. Milburn J. Crowe resident and Historian of Mound Bayou, Mississippi.



Mr. Milburn J. Crowe

City of Mound Bayou

CLG Coordinator

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Notary * Money Gram Agent * Delta Bus Lines Agent

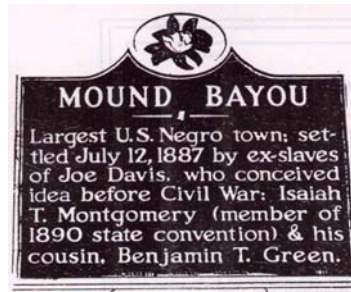
Mound Bayou Heritage * MDEZA Commissioner

Mississippi African American Historical Preservation Council of

The Mississippi Heritage Trust

111 Years of Continuous Self- Empowerment

MISSION STATEMENT – We as a Modern Community, strive to continue to provide African Americans with a unique sense of cultural identity and social well-being. Our community seeks to continue to empower and inspire citizens with the ability to reach their maximum potential as competent American citizens in our efforts of “Building upon a Self Empowerment Dream” to establish Mound Bayou as a “City of Integrity.”



SPECIAL QUALITY OF LIFE CONCERNS

Small communities need tax bases strengthened, so they can provide the delivery of services necessary for quality of life of its citizens. Worker's commuting to another community for employment receive a disproportionate amount of benefits than workers living within the community where the industry is located, while receiving the same salary. Commuting workers have added costs and inconveniences.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOALS

Our present economic development goals are to: (1.) Reduce the City's debt to a sustainable level, (2.) Reduce the poverty level and dependency on government transfer payments, (3.) Increase the number of small manufacturing firms in Mound Bayou, (4.) Increase the number and upgrade existing service and retail business in the city, (5.) Increase employment opportunities for young men and women who do not go on to college, (6.) Develop Mound Bayou as a viable tourist, recreation, and retirement destination, (7.) Develop an ample supply of quality and affordable housing, (8.) Increase the population, and (9.) Preserve our historical resources.

Milburn J. Crowe, Compiler

Historian

Mound Bayou

Cradle of African American Self Government in

America-

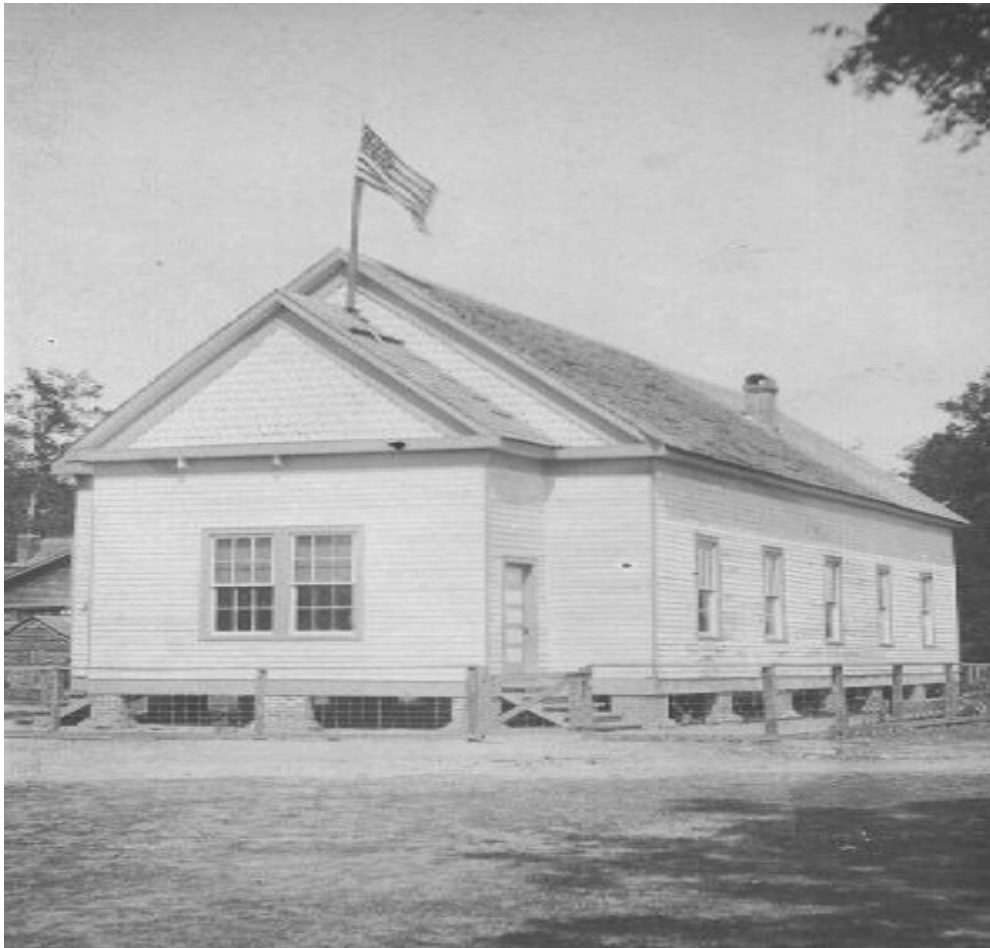
The founding of the Colony-

Where God and liberty dwelt-

No discrimination and no segregation-

The jail was torn down because it wasn't needed-

No living together, either marry or leave town-



MOUND BAYOU SCHOOL BUILDING

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Mound Bayou Heritage

MDEZA Commissioner

Mississippi African American Historical Preservation Council of the Mississippi Heritage Trust (1997, 1998, 1999)

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MUSIC

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NEWSPAPERS AND SERIALS

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The Piano Lesson: Family, History and Identity. New York: Plume,
 1990.

Ph.D. Dissertation

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 University, 1979.



“LOGO”
CITY OF MOUND BAYOU
1887

APPENDIX**Charles C. Stringer, Jr.****HCOM 475: Senior Capstone****Spring 2002****Capstone Research Prospectus****Professor Paul Fotsch****February 11, 2002****Capstone Project Advisor: Professor Debra Busman****1. The Proposed Title of my Capstone Project:****“JEWEL OF THE DELTA”****MOUND BAYOU, MISSISSIPPI**

This section defines the scope of my project (who, what, when, where, why and how), the importance of the topic, and the major question I am researching. I have read many articles and books on my topic and have visited Mound Bayou, Mississippi many times. This has allowed me to develop a focused understanding of what I have researched and what I intend to research.

My question is why was Mound Bayou, Mississippi founded? Why did the people of Mound Bayou seem to have done better in every way back then compared to how Mound Bayou and its people are doing today? This is somewhat of a two-part question that can be easily changed to one question.

Ex-slaves owned by James Davis and Jefferson Davis founded mound Bayou, Mississippi. Their names were Isaiah T. Montgomery and Benjamin Green. The town is located on US Highway 61 in the Mississippi Delta approximately 84 miles South of Memphis, Tennessee and approximately 140 miles North of Jackson, Mississippi. My hometown, Clarksdale, Mississippi is located approximately 25 North of Mound Bayou.

Mound Bayou was started where two drainage ditches or bayou's met. There was an Indian Mound located at the intersection where the two bayous are. The town was later named Mound Bayou

2. The Learning Outcomes to be integrated are MLO s 2, 3, and 7.

MLO s 2, 3, and 7 will be used in the project to demonstrate the ability to interact ethically and effectively in interpersonal and group communication and decision making processes. Also, understanding why and how beliefs, values, assumptions and communication practices interact to shape ways of being and knowing. I will apply Creative Writing skills to the production and presentation of this project.

3. The Research Questions I propose to answer in my project :

Who founded Mound Bayou, Mississippi, when was Mound Bayou founded, exactly where is Mound Bayou, Mississippi located, what is Mound Bayou, why and how was Mound Bayou, Mississippi founded? Why was Mound Bayou, Mississippi an all Black town and what is the status of Mound Bayou today in reference to population, crime, the economy, and any and all pertinent references to status? Why did many of my relatives settle in Mound, Bayou, Mississippi? Why do I love Mound Bayou and the Mississippi Delta so much? Why is Mound Bayou, Mississippi called “The Jewel of the Delta?”

These questions do reflect what I need to know about my topic. The list of questions is complete. It addresses the major questions I need/needed to ask. The questions clearly correspond to the direction of the research project. The research required to answer the questions is possible within the Capstone timeline.

4. Working Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources I have identified to date:

PRIMARY SOURCES Archives and Manuscript Collections

Cemetery and Funeral Home Record

Courthouse Records

Delta Blues Museum

University and Library Records

Novels

Photo Album - (Janie H. Stringer) – Grandmother

The Department of Archives and History

Government Documents and Publications

Interviews

Music

Newspapers and Serials

SECONDARY SOURCES Articles

Books – Example:

Bergman, Peter M.

The Chronological History of the Negro in America. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

Ph, D. Dissertations

5. The list of places to try to find additional sources is complete. The disciplinary approach is described. The type of publication found is described. My basic research strategy is summed up.

6. I believe the form I used/am using is the appropriate form for the topic. The description is detailed and specific enough, I believe. I don't know whether or not a model might exist for the form I want my Capstone to take but I am completely satisfied with the form taken. A research paper that combines archival research and oral histories is the form taken.

I did not list each and every source I am using but I did list the categories reflected. I feel certain that I have done and am doing what is necessary to make my project a complete success. I have in the past and will continue to work with the librarian I am assigned to work with.

My reasons for submitting my work ahead of schedule include:

- (a) Not falling behind with my class schedule.**
- (b) Due to the PTSD (post- traumatic stress disorder), Depression, Anxiety and Sleep Apnea and a few other complaints, I must stay ahead because I never know when the PTSD will kick in.**
- (c) This will give me adequate time to re-write any work that is not acceptable.**

Thank you very much for any and all consideration concerning this matter.

Respectfully,

Charles C. Stringer, Jr.

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