

Mound Bayou History

Founded in 1887 the city of Mound Bayou Mississippi was founded by Isaiah T. Montgomery, and his cousin Benjamin T. Green former slaves of Jefferson Davis, brother Joseph Davis, former President of the Confederacy. These slaves however, were born into a family that ran the business sector of one of the largest and enterprising plantation in that area of the country. Montgomery's father, Benjamin Montgomery was the contributing factor behind the successful mastermind of the Davis' notable enterprise.

After the Civil War, Jefferson Davis and his brother Joseph Davis knew and understood quite well the shaky foundation of the existing situation in the South, and knew only too well that Montgomery's close relationship to Jefferson Davis posed a threat of the confiscation of his lands. Thus when Joseph Davis lands were returned to him in 1866, he had already signed an agreement with Benjamin Montgomery and Sons to act as rent collectors for 1866, and on November 15, 1866 he agreed to sell the lands to Montgomery for \$300,000, or \$75 per acre. In a period of confusion and animosity, Benjamin Montgomery had played his cards to the fullest, and the first true experiment in Black economic self-determination in Mississippi was about to begin.

The Montgomery's quickly prepared for their colonizing venture. by placing several advertisements in the Vicksburg papers such as the following:

"The undersigned (Montgomery) having secured for a term of three years the Hurricane and Brierfield plantations proposes to organize a community composed exclusively of colored people, to occupy and cultivate said plantations, and invites the cooperation of such as are recommended by honesty, industry, sobriety, and intelligence in the enterprise..."

Montgomery had told Davis that he preferred renting the land to tenants, and it was this system that he did, in fact, implement. All the land was titled in his name, and it was his commissary which furnished most of the people with supplies. The Montgomerys enlarged their commissary, constructed a smoke house, a saw mill, a gin, and their own dock. They charged a .50 per acre entrance fee, as well, to help construct levees. A system of self-government was instituted in which the governing body was a community council selected by the community. This council was entrusted with making laws, levying taxes for education, and retained the right to expel any member of the community for breaking the laws of the community. The first year, 1867, was nearly a complete disaster for the colony. A devastating overflow which produced several cases of cholera, combined with the attack of the cut-worm to place many colonists badly in debt. Nevertheless, the colonists did as well as could be expected, and in fact shipped more bales of cotton than any of their white neighbors. By 1869 the colonists were on their "feet, shipping twice as many bales of cotton as in 1867. The census of 1870 listed Montgomery as worth \$50,000, though others closer to the experiment claimed his wealth was closer to \$200,000. By 1873 one newspaper

article claimed Montgomery paid over \$2,000 per year in taxes, and at the Cincinnati Exposition that year, Montgomery and Sons, billed as the third largest cotton producer in the South, won all the prizes for cotton. Lerone Bennet, referring to this era, claims the Montgomerys entertained in "Gone with the Wind" style!

The most difficult problem facing the Davis Bend colony was its relation to the larger white society. The reaction to the colony was less than warm in most parts of the state. A Jackson, Mississippi newspaper commented in 1866, "All we have to say on the subject is that we would prefer not to be a planter adjoining or adjacent to one of these colonies." Though there were only 40 whites on Davis Bend in 1870, and the geography of the Bend gave the colonists some degree of isolation, they continually had problems with local whites. In 1865 some mules were stolen from the Montgomery's. They took the case to court and won the mules back, but they were returned diseased. Whites were now moving to overthrow the Reconstruction governments in the Vicksburg area. Montgomery's tenants were often stopped and jailed on trumped up charges; their wells poisoned and their ports (docks) burned by fires of mysterious origins.

As the federal influence constantly withdrew, the Montgomery's were placed in a virtually powerless position. Therefore, they concocted a strategy of political non-involvement that went a long way towards soothing relations with whites. Montgomery advertised in the local paper.

"Regarding the suffrage question as of doubtful utility, the discussion of it and other political topics is more likely to produce contention and idleness than harmony in the community, such discussions will be discouraged." When Benjamin Montgomery was appointed Justice of the Peace on Davis Bend in 1867 (thus becoming the first Black to hold a state office after the Civil War), the event caused such resentment among local whites that he sent Isaiah around to them, assuring that he would not hear cases involving local whites. Despite the apparent submissiveness of Montgomery to local whites, it is quite clear that this was only used as a type of strategy to pacify whites, for he was intimately involved in securing Black control of the Davis plantations. He had locked horns with whites' in securing a Black postmaster at Davis Bend, and he kept himself well informed of all political movements in the state by sending Ben Green as observer to all political meetings. Moreover, the colonists participated in all elections, voting solidly Republican even in the election of 1876. By 1873 the colonists had established quite an empire; however, the next seven years would witness the total demise of this empire. Several factors were involved in this dramatic reversal. The price of cotton continued to fall drastically from the high point in 1863 of \$1.00 per lb. to less than .09 per lb. in 1880, The location of the plantations on the river left them vulnerable to continuous overflows, and many of the tenants began to get understandably discouraged migrating to Kansas, Oklahoma and other places in search of better fortunes. The clincher came in 1874 when Jefferson Davis, four years following the death of Joseph Davis, did an abrupt about face, and filed suit for the Brierfield Plantation, or its value in terms of the notes due the Davis estate by the Montgomery's, all of which had been willed to Jefferson's children. Davis fought the case all the way to the Supreme Court, finally winning in June of 1878 to have title reverted to him.

Though the lawsuit was not against the Montgomery's, Davis' intentions were less than clear. A newspaper writer of the times claimed Joseph Davis had been sincere in his dealings with the Montgomery's, yet Jefferson Davis had only wanted to "keep his property safe until the storm of indignation against him at the North should blow over, when he hoped to get it back." In any event, two years later, Davis instituted foreclosure proceedings upon the Montgomery's, and once again Brierfield was his. Benjamin Montgomery passed from this life in 1878.

He had accomplished some remarkable feats in his lifetime, but his death probably marked the end of the Davis Bend colony. Without him, the place just wasn't the same. Many of the settlers, discouraged by conditions in Mississippi, migrated north and west. Ben Green moved to the eastern part of the state, Thornton spoke of moving west, and Isaiah undertook a journey to Kansas to inspect conditions prevailing due to the massive influx of settlers to Kansas from the southern states. While there, Isaiah helped a group of ex-Davis Bend colonists establish themselves in a colony in Redmonsville later being eaten up by Topeka, purchasing land in the colony, land which he held for several years. Returning to Davis Bend in late 1879, Montgomery hoped to salvage their fortunes, but the foreclosure suit brought by Davis dashed these hopes. Thornton moved to North Dakota, and Isaiah moved to Vicksburg where he set up a small mercantile establishment. Davis Bend was finished.

Despite its shortcomings, the Davis Bend colony can be looked upon as a success, for from this colony arose Isaiah T. Montgomery, Benjamin T. Green, and a small band of people determined to be more than peons for a group of white merchants. Montgomery, molded in the image of his father, was the planter-philosopher; Green the son of a mechanic had been tutored extensively by the Montgomery's in their mercantile business. Together they would continue the heritage of Davis Bend, for in late 1885 cousin Isaiah approached Ben Green with an intriguing proposition — the formation of an all-Black town. Davis Bend was about to get a second chance.

The Founding of Mound Bayou, Mississippi

In the early 1880's a group of wealthy financiers had formed a company which eventually merged with other companies to form the Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railway. Existing until 1892, when they merged with the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad to become a part of the Illinois Central complex, the owners of the L.N.O.T. had purchased over a million acres of land from the Mississippi Levee Commission in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, an area which was sparsely settled, heavily wooded, flat and merged with the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad to become a part of the Illinois Central complex, the owners of the L.N.O.T. had purchased over a million acres of land from the Mississippi Delta, an area which was sparsely settled, heavily wooded, flat and swampy. The railroad was quite interested in gaining some profit from these lands, yet whites wouldn't purchase them for fear of the dreaded swamp fever. Therefore the railroad turned to the Black population, offering good prices on good terms in order to develop the area. Blacks jumped at the chance and heavy immigration to the Delta began to be registered in 1886. Isaiah Montgomery became deeply interested in this migration, and saw the opportunity developing to test his father's ideas once again. Via an unknown chain of events, Montgomery came into

contact with the railroad land agent, George McGinnis, negotiated the proposition of an all-Black colony, and submitted a plan to the railroad which was "heartily approved." A series of trips ensued through the Delta in the fall of 1886. Montgomery, accompanied by a civil engineer, tramped through the wilderness for several months, searching for a site "as remote from other established settlements as possible." Finally, on July 12, 1887, he selected a site in Bolivar County just about half way between Vicksburg and Memphis. He returned to Vicksburg induced Ben Green, his cousin, to join him in the venture, and in late December, he and Green purchased 840 acres of land at \$7.00 per acre, paying \$420 down with the balance due in five annual payments. The spot selected was named Mound Bayou after the "large Indian mound located at the convergence of two bayous which drained the territory." It was a small beginning, but it was a beginning.

Montgomery and Green immediately began to attract settlers to their proposition, recruiting extensively throughout the South. Montgomery acted as land agent for the railroad offering 40 acre tracts at \$8 or \$9 per acre, though he required a \$40 entrance fee on each 40 acre tract. It is unknown how many people initially answered their challenge, but several different sources indicate that there were probably about thirty families which undertook this monumental task in the inhospitable Delta wilderness.

The fall of 1887 marked the arrival of the first group of settlers. Leaving their families behind, this sturdy group of men faced the typically difficult obstacles of forging a frontier community. Less than 75 acres were available for cultivation, land owned mainly by poor whites who had settled there years previously. The rest was covered by a thick coating of trees and undergrowth, through which the only means of moving was by hatchet or machete. The forests were filled with wild animals, and there was the ever-present fear of swamp fever, to which some settlers succumbed. Nevertheless, this small band of Black men, many of whom had struggled with the Montgomery's and the rest of the men fell to their knees and prayed for guidance in their momentous undertaking. Montgomery then turned to the men and exclaimed:

Why stagger at the difficulties that confront you; have you not for centuries braved the miasma and hewn down forests 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?

With a singleness of purpose the men set about clearing the land and Montgomery arranged with the railroad to have the men sleep on the night train to Memphis, where they would transfer to another train heading back towards Vicksburg in the morning. Ben Green rigged up a groundhog saw mill to lay by timber for homes, and by October the first cabin went up. These little cabins, constructed from the raw materials of the land, provided some protection from the elements, yet they were anything but comfortable. By the end of 1887 some 80 or 90 acres of land had been cleared, but a flood late in the year nearly destroyed all of their work. However, the settlers persisted in their efforts and in February of 1888 the first women and children arrived, and the first crops of corn and cotton were planted.

For several years the settlers just barely got by, the major means of subsistence being the sale of excess timber to the railroad for cross ties and staves. Some settlers sharecropped; others sent their wives and children to work as domestics or pick cotton for white planters, thereby "keeping the wolf from the door." It was not a comfortable existence, and some of the settlers didn't last. In fact, at the end of five years, many of the settlers including Montgomery were largely in debt to the railroad. However, Montgomery induced the railroad to renew the contracts whenever necessary, and if a man failed, another was put in his place. Simon Gaiter, one of the original settlers, offered this summary of life in these frontier days:

When I started to Mound Bayou, I had \$175 in total cash assets, and after purchases of land and provisions, I had left only ten dollars. I planted a garden, set my wife and children about to clear up land at \$4 per acre, while I myself went into the woods and engaged in getting out stave boards. In the fall most of the women and children of the neighborhood went to Shelby and picked cotton. In 1889 I picked cotton for the Messrs. Blanchard Bros., white planters, and I rolled logs at night, and made staves in the day...

The first few years brought the establishment of the basic institutions of the community. Montgomery's wife and Ben Green set up a small supply store in March of 1888, and began to cater to most of the colony's needs. They purchased the saw mill and erected the first gin.

A post office was set up at Montgomery's home, and train tickets were available in the store. Montgomery and his sister even began holding classes for the children in his home in the evenings, and the Green Grove Baptist Church was founded in another settler's home. Montgomery was clearly the town leader, and embodied the town government during the first few years, being as he was, the symbol of the hope of the town. To the settlers, Mound Bayou clearly represented the attempt to disprove the prevalent notion that Blacks could not control and develop themselves. A.P. Hood said it clearly in 1910;

"The Mound Bayou effort must not fail...a reputation of a race is at hazard."

Once again the idea of an all-Black, self-determining community was at stake. The next thirty years would see the full blossom of this dominant idea

The Early Years

The early years were times of turmoil for the colonists. Faced with a seemingly impossible task, many of the early settlers were barely able to get by, while others left the colony entirely. However, from 1896 to 1914 this trend was almost completely reversed due to the immigration of large numbers of settlers, some of whom were escaping the "whitecaps" of southern Mississippi, a terrorist organization designed to displace Black landholders from their land. Montgomery also continued his advertising schemes, and held big celebrations on all holidays for the purpose of publicizing the growing town.

By 1898 the population of Mound Bayou had grown to such an extent that a certain group in town began clamoring for incorporation. At first there was a considerable opposition to incorporation, the argument being that incorporation would bring the loss of the pioneer spirit, as well as throw the burden of tax support upon the landholders. Nevertheless, the idea prevailed, and on August 16, 1898, Mound Bayou became an officially incorporated village with 183 registered voters. Isaiah T. Montgomery was appointed the first mayor; John W. Francis, George A. Lee, and James M. Marr were appointed aldermen; and William L. Grady and Alexander Myers were appointed marshal and treasurer, respectively.

The turning of the century marked the beginning of a substantial period of progress for the town of Mound Bayou. New settlers continued to flock to the community. Landholding by Black people increased not only in Mound Bayou, but also in Bolivar County as a whole; and as a result of the rising prices of cotton, the commercial life of Mound Bayou began to increase radically.

In 1903 Mound Bayou received its greatest stimulus with the arrival of one Charles Banks from Clarksdale. Only thirty years old, Banks was already a financial success, and a wizard in the handling of financial affairs. In 1904 Banks opened the Bank of Mound Bayou, one of the first Black-owned banks in the state of Mississippi. In 1905 he organized the Mississippi Negro Business League, and in 1907 held the first vice-presidency in the national organization headed by Booker T. Washington. His close relationship with Washington brought the wizard of Tuskegee to take a special interest in Mound Bayou. Washington visited Mound Bayou in 1907 and liked what he saw. From that day forth he was ever involved in attracting capital to Mound Bayou, and in fact, he wrote several articles about Mound Bayou, Charles Banks, and Isaiah Montgomery. By 1910 Mound Bayou had grown to half the size of Cleveland, was twice the size of Merigold, and was nearly equal in size to Shelby. The business life of the community centered about the production of cotton was booming. An article written in 1910 about Mound Bayou listed over 50 businesses as operating in the progressive town.

In 1907 Charles Banks, Isaiah Montgomery, and Booker T. Washington began organizing the proposition which was to be the ultimate reflection of the progress of Mound Bayou—The Mound Bayou Cotton—Seed Oil Mill. Billed nationally as an all-Black enterprise, the oil mill was endorsed willingly by the State Negro Business League in 1907, and Banks and Montgomery began to issue \$100,000 worth of stock at \$1 per share, hoping to amass the capital among the Black population of the country.

Mound Bayou placed big hopes on the oil mill project, and Banks told a group of would-be investors in 1910 that the oil mill was "to become one of the largest of its kind in the South, and will furnish employment to hundreds of energetic young colored men and women." The entrepreneurs were able to gather over \$80,000 by 1912, and on November 26, 1912 the oil mill was dedicated during impressive ceremonies which included a speech by Booker T. Washington. One of the few Black-owned co-op mills in the country, the project exuded a confidence and a determination reflected in Washington' speech on the occasion:

You can occupy the soil for all time on one condition, and that is that through your brains, through your skilled hands, that you can prove to the world that you can get as much out of an acre of land as the people of any other race can get out of that acre. But the very minute the world discovers that a man of some other race or color or religion can get more out of an acre than a black man, from that moment forward the black man will begin to lose his hold as a farmer. .

Thus, by 1912 Mound Bayou, known throughout the country as an outstanding example of the progress of Black people in the South, had achieved sizable proportions. Recognizing their substantial growth, the citizens applied to the Governor and received the status of a town, only 25 years after its founding. Mound Bayou had come a long way.

The growth of Mound Bayou was also reflected in its dedication to the building of schools and churches, and other community organizations. Montgomery began quite early to provide for the education of the children. The first school, headed by M.V. Montgomery, became the Mound Bayou public school. Though having an enrollment of 200 by 1910, this school was at the mercy of the county board of education, which was less than willing to appropriate money for its operation. Therefore, Montgomery and Green in 1892, donated several acres of land for the establishment of a school "designed to supplement the inadequate curriculum of the public schools." This school, named the Mound Bayou Normal and Industrial Institute, was built via financial assistance from the American Missionary Association, and remained under the control of a local board of trustees. To these non-denominational schools was added a Baptist school in 1904. Organized under the Baptist State Convention, and founded by Mrs. A.A. Harris, the Mound Bayou Industrial College, commonly known as the "Baptist College," sported a school population of 200 by 1910, and with the other two schools, offered to Mound Bayou caliber of education unparalleled in most sections of the state. Montgomery may well have wanted to make Mound Bayou a "college town," for in 1887 he had helped found Campbell College. Affiliated with the A.M.E. Church, the college began holding classes in Vicksburg and Friar's Point in 1890. However, Montgomery induced the president of the L.N.O.T. Railroad to donate over 1,000 acres of land about 1 1/2 miles southeast of Mound Bayou to the college, in hopes of moving the college to the town. In 1892 Montgomery was elected president of Campbell College, and he revealed that he had plans for the land as a site of an agricultural education school. Unfortunately the plans never materialized, the school was moved to Jackson in 1898, and Montgomery resigned as president. Nevertheless, the college retained the lands for several years, and in fact began to build on the site some years later. A short drive beyond the co-op farm will reveal these buildings to an interested reader.

The early settlers of Mound Bayou expressed an abiding faith in religion, and quite early organized by the Green Grove Baptist Church in the home of one of the settlers. By 1891 Montgomery and a small band of colonists had organized the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and within the next ten years the number of churches multiplied rapidly, there being three Baptist, one A.M.E., one Christian, and one Methodist Church as well as several smaller Baptist churches in the surrounding vicinity. Green Grove Baptist, which eventually became the First Baptist Church, and the A.M.E. church were the first to erect permanent structures, in 1904 and 1905 respectively, and they were the town leaders in organizing youth groups for religious

instruction and civic betterment. The strong moral sentiment evident in these early churches may have been responsible for Mound Bayou's reputation as an orderly community due to its remarkably low crime rate.

Corresponding to the rapid growth of churches and schools was the proliferation of fraternal orders, secret societies, and various community organizations. By 1910 there was no less than 12 of these secret societies. Though these lodges carried out many social functions such as celebration of holidays or community barbeque's, their biggest function was their benefit and burial associations, which offered premiums at a price local people could afford. Several community organizations offered more specific assistance in other areas of community concern. Two clubs were founded to help farmers keep their lands from white merchants; a Farmer's Institute was founded to supplement the work of the Demonstration program in the field of agricultural education; two women's societies were formed to "overlook the moral fiber of the community," and one of these societies, the Renovators Society, organized the first Founders Day Celebration in 1909; even the ministers of the community formed a union.

Many of these organizations probably participated in sponsoring the Bolivar County Negro Fairs, gala celebrations begun in 1910 as an effort to exhibit the best products of Black people. Moreover, many of these groups sponsored recreational activities such as baseball and instrumental groups, and were decisive in setting aside several areas designated as parks. This was the Mound Bayou of 1910, a growing, progressive all-Black community striving to achieve self-determination in a land where Black self-determination was not accepted at all. The next thirty years would see this determination weakened and progress halted to some extent.

Depression, Division and Racism

Despite the economic boom of the early 1900's, Mound Bayou faced special problems being an all-Black town in a white society, problems faced several years earlier by the colonists at Davis Bend. One of these problems was the lack of capital within Mound Bayou. Montgomery and Banks tried several schemes to eliminate this difficulty, one of which was to secure philanthropic Northern white investment, a measure which provided the least amount of external influence upon the community. Both men traveled around the country soliciting capital from the Black community, but the deepest problem lay within the town itself. Many residents started going to surrounding white communities to purchase their supplies, unwittingly contributing to the prevention of the accumulation of capital in Mound Bayou. To prevent this action, and also to provide a healthy cooperative effort in Mound Bayou, Montgomery organized in 1911 the Farmer's Mercantile Cooperative, a merchandising store capitalized and controlled by Black farmers themselves. Successful to some degree, this store was clearly seen as an attempt to solve this delicate situation. For local whites were quite willing to receive this trade, as it helped to build their towns and not Mound Bayou. Moreover, they were glad to see Mound Bayou removed as an economic threat, and even contributed to it following the failure of the cotton economy beginning in the year of 1914.

Cotton prices had begun to fall slightly early in the year, but by the end of the year a rather mild depression hit the cotton-growing communities of the Delta. The Bank of Mound Bayou, which had heavy investments in loans to cotton planters, was placed in a situation where its ample assets could not be converted to cash. Though not a single irregularity of any kind was found on the books, the state banking authorities, in a completely illegal move, closed the Bank, charging that the Bank's securities were worthless due to the fact they 'represented Negro properties in a Negro town.' When the Bank closed, many people in Mound Bayou were compelled to go white merchants and bankers for the funds to furnish themselves with supplies, and some of these merchants raised their interest rates, or stipulated that the farmer's cotton had to be taken to gins in their towns. The oil mill, Mound Bayou's pride and joy, suffered equally as badly. Due to the lack of capital Charles Banks was forced to sell the securities of the oil mill to a Northern white financier and a white Memphis businessman. The latter was selected as manager of the mill, but he proved to be a rogue, absconding with some of the money, in early 1915 the oil mill closed.

Nevertheless, the citizens of Mound Bayou were not the type to give up easily. In late 1915, after court case cleared the former bank of all the criminal charges, a new bank, the Mound Bayou State Bank was reopened. The oil mill was rented to a white and began its operations once again. This measure, in active opposition to the ideals of enterprise, was pushed on Montgomery and Banks because local whites began a highly successful boycott of the oil mill, and because on the national level, a cottonseed oil monopoly was actively working to eliminate the competition of such locally owned mills. The price of cotton, a commodity of great value to the war effort, began to increase radically, reaching a high point in 1919 of over 75 cents per pound. Montgomery once again saw the chance for Mound Bayou to take a leadership role in the Delta. Soliciting funds throughout the country, Montgomery also convinced the citizens of Mound Bayou to float over \$100,000 worth of bonds for the construction of a modern high school. This school, finished in 1920, claimed the impressive title of the Mound Bayou Consolidated Public School and County Training School, though it was commonly known as the Bolivar County Training School.

The school was housed in a modern three story brick building with all of the latest improvements, held classes nine months a year, and sported a curriculum emphasizing "rural principles almost entirely." Probably one of the best Black high schools in the state, one observer claimed in 1929 that Mound Bayou had become the educational center of the Delta, Thus, despite adversity, Mound Bayou continued to strive for success.

The years of 1919 through 1922 spelled economic disaster for Mound Bayou. In 1919 the price of cotton had brought tremendous profits to many people, and speculation was rampant. The following year, seeing prices open at 85 cents per pound, many people held out for \$1 per pound, only to see the market crash to a devastating 11 cents per pound. This crash reverberated throughout the Delta, throwing many into debt, and causing several suicides in the Merigold area. Though many Black farmers had made as much as \$1900 the year previously, too many had been duped by white merchants into purchasing commodities for which they now could not pay. Those farmers who had purchased supplies on credit from these merchants were also in the same helpless situation. Thus, following the crash many merchants instituted

foreclosure proceedings against their debtors, and thereby gained their land. By 1923 Black farmers in the Mound Bayou area had lost over 4,000 acres of land.

The result of this depression were plain to see. The Mound Bayou State Bank, though lasting longer than any other Black bank in Mississippi (except one), could not pay off its loans and was forced to close in 1922, never to open again. The oil mill, faced by depression and white boycott was finally closed in the mid-twenties, and just 10 years later was torn down. Many settlers, discouraged by the loss of their lands, moved North to Chicago or St. Louis many businesses fell into decay, and the one booming town was kept from further growth.

The next 15 years brought a series of depressions and disasters which contributed to the problems of Mound Bayou. Another cotton depression occurred in 1926, only to be followed by a disastrous fire that destroyed several businesses in town. Four years later the entire country entered a big depression, and once again the Delta was hard hit. Combined with the increasing mechanization of cotton agriculture, this depression worked towards the elimination of the Black small farmer.

Finally, in early 1941 the town was struck by its second disastrous fire, this one nearly destroying the entire business section of town. Despite the devastation of this period, the town faced internal problems which were equally as troublesome.

The early government of the town had been essentially "communal" in spirit. Town meetings were held in which all important issues were discussed and decided. However, factions began developing as early as 1892, when Montgomery and Green dissolved the old partnership which founded the town. Green was shot four years later by an unknown assailant after an argument, and the split was buried. But by 1912, some differences of opinion had developed between Banks and Montgomery. These differences may have been healthy for the community had not the split widened in 1917. That year, Banks' supporter, Mayor Creswell, for some reason did not hold municipal elections, Montgomery had his son-in-law, Mr. E.P. Booze, appointed as mayor, along with an entirely different slate of aldermen. Creswell held elections a month later, and he was re-elected. Booze held a set of elections several weeks later, and he was elected mayor. The argument was taken to court, where in 1918, Booze lost. Thus, for nearly a year, Mound Bayou had two separate city governments! The causes of this factionalizing are wrapped in mystery, but its legacy was evident for 20 years.

In 1919 Benjamin Green's son, Mr. B.A. Green, was elected mayor, once again over E.P. Booze. Following Isaiah Montgomery's death in 1924, and the departure of a discouraged Charles Banks in 1922, these two men continued to oppose each other for mayor, and though cooperating on some issues, represented two factions in the town. The split was apparent even during the gala Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations, when two separate celebrations were held, one by Mayor Green, and one by Mr. Booze. The full effect of this feud on the town is unclear, but it surely deterred both men, and the town, from concentration on their common enemy—poverty, injustice, and racism.

Mound Bayou did not escape this enemy, for the simple reason that Black people possessed no political power in the state. And strangely enough, a portion of this powerlessness could be traced to the actions of none other than Isaiah T. Montgomery! When the settlers had come to Mound Bayou in 1887, many were attempting to escape the physical intimidation of racist white politicians. They found in Bolivar County a system of politics known as the "fusion principle," in which whites took all of the good county offices for themselves, and allowed the Black people a few offices which had no power. Montgomery and other Blacks accepted this system only because their lack of political organization gave them no other choice, and in 1890 Montgomery was elected on such a fusion ticket to represent Bolivar County in the Constitutional Convention, a meeting called to eliminate the Black man's vote, and thus his power. The only Black man in the meeting, Montgomery could have protested violently the entire meeting instead, he chose to remain and salvage what he could. Incredibly enough, he voted both for the institution of a poll tax, and the use of the infamous "understanding clause." Though his motivations and strategy are much too complex to be covered in their entirety here, it would appear that Montgomery was attempting to play the same game that his father had played at Davis Bend with the surrounding white society. Nevertheless, he realized that it was a mistake. In 1901 he wrote Booker T. Washington that the federal government would have to intervene so that Blacks could have the power to determine their own lives through the power of the ballot. Seeing this as a remote possibility, he and Banks chose the only other avenue available to them—working behind the scenes in Republican politics. Both he and Banks were active in fighting the racists in both the Democratic and Republican parties, and it was Montgomery who founded the Committee of One Hundred, an organization which in 1946, many years after his death, took the first steps towards eliminating the mistakes of the past by attempting to re-establish the Black vote. And it was Montgomery's daughter, Mrs. Mary Booze, who became a Republican National Committeewoman from the state in 1924, and who was actively involved in this struggle. Nevertheless, the internal factions of Mound Bayou deeply hurt this struggle, and the only result of these feuds was the mysterious murders of another daughter of Montgomery, and E.P. Booze himself. These murders opened the door for a raid on Mound Bayou in 1939 by the National Guard, a raid which had no justification, and an event which served notice who the common enemy really was.

In the face of depression, division, and racism, Mound Bayou continued to survive, and continued to pursue programs designed to allow Mound Bayou to fulfill its greater potential. In 1929 the Mound Bayou Foundation was formed for the purpose of attracting one million dollars in capital into the disaster-stricken town. It was their efforts which brought the resettlement program to Mound Bayou, a program which brought Black people back from the cities to their own lands. And it was this organization which helped organize a fabulous celebration in 1937 on the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the town, an event which included a speech by the nationally known orator Roscoe Conkling Simmons, and an exhibition race by Jesse Owens. Moreover, only one year after the destructive fire of 1941 the Taborian Lodge dedicated in Mound Bayou one of the few Black-controlled hospitals in the country. Combined with its modern educational system, Mound Bayou once again turned itself defiantly towards the future. A new era had begun.

Rebirth and Reaction

Strange as it may sound, the last thirty years of the history of Mound Bayou are probably the most difficult to discuss and assess. This difficulty is directly related to the many significant transformations that the town has undergone changes which indicate the growth of a new era of possibility.

The \$100,000 Taborian hospital, finished in 1942, was the brainchild of Sir P.M. Smith, son of the founder of the Knights and Daughters of Tabor, and signaled the rebirth of the town of Mound Bayou. Serving the needs of the heretofore too often neglected Black population of the Delta, the hospital opened up new opportunities for Mound Bayou, attracting new citizens as well as top notch doctors such as Dr. P.M. George and Dr. T.R.M. Howard. Educated at several top schools, Dr. Howard proved to be a leading figure in the refacing of the town.

Despite his feud with the hospital and the consequent erection of his own clinic under the auspices of the United Order of Friendship, Dr. Howard spearheaded many significant new developments.

His pet project, Goodwill Park, provided young and old alike with recreational facilities which included a zoo and a swimming pool. He became the president of Magnolia Life Insurance Company, a company to which he attracted a man destined to take a special place in Mississippi history—Medgar Evers. Along with other town leaders, Howard led the slow struggle to regain the lands lost years previously, a discouraging battle confounded by white loan sharks who preyed on those in such circumstances as the citizens of Mound Bayou. The town reflected these efforts with the first population increase since 1920, rising by over 50% from 1940 to 1950. Moreover, several new businesses were built, including a new hotel and restaurant.

In the early 1950's Mound Bayou finally took the leadership openly of Black people in the state. In 1951 Dr. Howard and many other Mound Bayouans, as well as many Black people from all over the state, gathered at Cleveland to form the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership. The council's goals were clearly stated.

To guide our people in their civic responsibilities regarding health, education, religion, registration and voting, law enforcement, tax paying, the preservation of property, the value of saving, and in all things which will make us stable, qualified, conscientious citizens.

Mound Bayou became witness to several mass meetings over the next four years, and to many people Mound Bayou had become not only a medical and educational center, but the Black political center of the state.

Nevertheless, there were those who doubted the organization, both Black and white. Some citizens of Mound Bayou, fearful of their positions and the possible adverse reactions of local whites, attempted to block these meetings, claiming that "the best people of Mound Bayou" didn't want them. Though there were enough people to continue the meetings, the White Citizens Council, the latter day version of the KKK, did begin to become active. It may well have been their economic pressure on Dr. Howard, as well as physical threats because of his activities against J. Edgar Hoover about the unjust way the Emmet Till murder investigation was handled, which forced him to leave Mound Bayou in 1956. The loss of Dr. Howard was a severe loss to the town, for it was his type of leadership which helped to establish the growing political power of Black people in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, and the country as a whole. This political power could only offer to Mound Bayou new opportunities which had been denied as long as Davis Bend. The victories won in the civil rights struggles were also victories for Mound Bayou. From 1960 to 1970 the population nearly doubled. In 1962 the 75th celebration of Founders Day attracted National attention, including a 30 minute special by Huntley and Brinkley. The Exposure offered by this celebration led to many new programs for Mound Bayou.

Thus today Mound Bayou truly stands at the edge of a new era, an era in which its true potential can be fulfilled.

The Mound Bayou Movement (MBM) is a plan designed to bring revitalization to the historic city of Mound Bayou Mississippi. It was formed to become a paradigm for the movement development for cities in the US and abroad. The MBM will help restore the city of Mound Bayou, bring it to an even greater glory, and be an example for other cities to follow.