



The Centerpiece

FREE

A Heritage Center Publication * Durant, MS 39063 * Volume 1, No. 4, December 2016

Rams in the Bush: A Tribute to Ms. Pearl Brown

It is true that "God always has a ram in the bush." One of Durant's rams is Ms. Pearl Brown. Since 2007, Ms. Brown has prepared for, delivered to, and served her community. She never fails to respond to calls for assistance. For example, after the recent untimely death of Mrs. Swisher Hobbs, Ms. Brown came to the rescue and prepared a Thanksgiving dinner for as many as 150 seniors and other people who, for whatever reason, desired to partake. Ms. Brown, however, refuses to take credit for her actions. She contributes her success to a host of other ram volunteers and faithful donors. Among the volunteers to whom she gives credit are Lena Flowers, Lilliantine Johnson, Mary Potee, Shaun Butler, Worly Winters, "Little Tap" and females of the motorcycle riders social clubs. Among the donors to whom she gives a "Hats Off" is Mac's Fresh Foods who, according to Mrs. Brown "contributes each year without question." "Only what you do for Christ matters," acclaims Ms. Brown.



Historical Tidbits: The Makings of a School at Mileston

After providing land and houses for Black tenants at Mileston, Mississippi, during the 1930s' Depression, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) undertook a pilot project in 1939 to improve education for Negroes. Before starting the project, the FSA petitioned the Holmes County School Board to accept the school as part of the district's existing educational structure. "The facility," FSA official Ervn Jones promised the Board, "would be large enough to accommodate all students on land occupied by FSA tenants, as well those attending five Negro schools located on adjoining plantations." The Board discussed the matter at its October 1939 meeting but, after extensive consideration, decided to table the matter until planters on adjoining plantations were consulted to determine if "they approved of the school." Throughout 1939, FSA Representative Jones frequented Board meetings and entreated the group to accept the school. He assured the group that local whites -- not the federal government -- would control the school, and he promised that the FSA would create an organization called the "Holmes County Educational Set-Up." "The organization," he promised, "would be comprised of local whites who would manage the school." He finally convinced four of the five white Board members to accept the school, and the group voted to do so at the February 1940 meeting. The agreement, which was designed to appease white planters and line their pockets, ensured the continuation of unequal resources for Negro students as well as white control over curriculum content and grade level. Specifically, the group agreed to accept the Mileston facility providing the School Board would:

- Pay the salary of grammar school (not high school) teachers, only; thus limiting the curriculum to elementary level.
- Pay one-half the salary of teachers of vocational subjects—the federal government would pay the remaining one-half.
- .Make no contributions for the building program—the federal government would bear the entire cost.
- Not provide transportation for students attending the school.
- Receive from the FSA the same amount of money that previous owners of the 9,580 acres of property would have paid in property taxes—plantation owners lost the 9,580 acres to bank foreclosures during the Depression.
- Be permitted to supervise the Mileston School the same way the district supervised existing Negro schools.
- Be permitted designate the school as a vocational/agriculture/home economics school—thereby insuring an inflow of Smith-Hughes and other federal vocational funds.



Mileston Education Building erected in 1940. (Photo: S. Gist Photo Archives.)

The FSA agreed to abide by all of the above-listed conditions except the one that called for the federal government to pay taxes previously paid by the former plantation owners. Jones explained that it was illegal for the government to pay taxes but promised that the FSA would award grants to the district that equaled the amount of their tax assessment. At the same session, he informed the group that the government would purchase textbooks for children of FSA tenants.

Work on Mileston Colored School began in 1940, and the school opened in October 1941. Because area planters objected to a high school for Negroes in the Delta, the facility opened as an elementary school that offered courses from the first through the eighth grade. The Board named S. V. Marshall as principal. Marshall, a native of Macon County, Mississippi, and an Alcorn College graduate came to the area in 1933 to work at the Richland Colored School. He subsequently became principal at Richland but left to accept the position at Mileston. Throughout the 1940s, Mileston served as the "show-place" for Negro education in the County. Unlike the many one-room Negro Church and Rosenwald schools that dotted the county -- with their wood-burning heaters and outside toilets -- Mileston Colored School boasted a modern seven-room education building and a separate agricultural building. The education building was equipped with running water, inside toilets, a cafeteria and homemaking education quarters. The school was better equipped to offer secondary level courses than the other three schools in the County that offered high school training. (The next issue of *Centerpiece* tells how Mileston became a high school, reverted to an elementary school and ultimately closed.)

The Centerpiece is a free monthly publication of Migration Heritage Foundation (MHF). The Foundation disseminates local, regional and national heritage-related as well as community information. MHF is a Mississippi-registered nonprofit organization based at 351 SW Depot Street in Durant, Mississippi. For additional information, e-mail us at info@mhtr.us, write us at PO Box 247—Durant, MS 39063, or visit our web site at www.mhtr.us. Items received before the 5th of the month appear in the issue distributed by the 15th of the month. This publication is available at the following locations: Subway's in Durant; Gladys's Restaurant in Lexington; DB Ice Cream Parlor in Durant; and the Office of the Holmes County Chancery Clerk in Lexington.

Coming Events

Date/Time	Event	Location	Contact #
December 21, 2016 6 pm	Durant Missionary Baptist Church Annual Christmas Program Presented by the Youth Ministry	Durant Missional Baptist Church 16455 North Jackson Street Durant, MS	662-653-3261
January 8, 2017 3 pm	“Embrace Your Radio Station” WXTN AM 1000 Fund Raiser	Union Grove Missionary Baptist Church 150 Rhyne Street Lexington, MS	662-834-2206
January 15, 2017 2 pm	Mileston Community Development Association Steering Committee Meeting	District 4 Fire Station Thornton (Mileston), MS	662-897-3252
January-March 2017	Applications for Homestead Exemption Accept- ed	Holmes County Tax Collector 1 Court Square Lexington, MS	662-834-2465

Did You Know?

The Holmes County Supervisor Board meets the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month at 9 a.m. in the Board Room, 408 Court Square, in Lexington. The Board holds a workshop in the Board Room each Thursday before the 3rd Monday at 9 a.m. During the workshop, supervisors hear community input and establish the agenda for upcoming meetings. Attend the meetings and voice your concern as a community resident.

The Durant School Board meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at 5 West Madison Street in Durant. Call 662-653-3175 to verify time and location.

The Holmes County School Board meets the first Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at 313 Olive Street in Lexington. Call 662-834-2175 to verify time and location.

The Durant City Council meets the first and third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at Durant City Hall on Mulberry Street. Call 662-629-3314 to verify time and location. Note that the meeting on the first Tuesday is the same day as the Holmes County School Board Meeting. You are often unable to attend both meetings because they are only an hour apart and are held in different towns.

Let us know when Cruger, Goodman, Lexington, Pickens, Tchula and West elected officials meet, we will publish the information in the next issue.

Questions, Some Answers

Lexington Sale Barn Dilemma Continues—We are happy to report that a bit of progress has been made with demolishing the Sale Barn building—located on property that straddles City of Lexington and County of Holmes boundaries. Debris, bushes, shrubbery, etc. were recently removed from around the property. Miss Zep, who has spent numerous hours on WXTN/WAGR Radio relentlessly chiding for the property’s cleanup, reported that the recent cleanup resulted from actions of the County Supervisor Board—under the leadership of Supervisor/President James Young—not the property’s owner. Miss Zep further reported that the Board will take further action to demolish the facility after December 17, the end of the 60-day grace period to demolish the structure, which the Supervisor Board granted on October 17 at the property owner’s request. A recent visit to the site revealed that there has indeed been some clearing around the structure. Unfortunately, the clearing revealed a more devastating eyesore—a deteriorating structure in a sad, sad state of disrepair that can only benefit from complete demolition. Kudo’s to the Supervisor Board for your action. We ask that you continue to demonstrate your accountability to the citizens of Holmes County.

Rail Safety Issues Near Durant Depot—In the August, September and October, 2016, issues of *Centerpiece*, we asked, What’s happening with restoring the Depot in Durant? The building was designated a historic site approximately five years ago. With the exception of Christmas decorations placed on some doors of the dilapidated structure and vagrants frequenting the nearby grounds, not much appears to have been done since the last issue of the *Centerpiece*. While there hasn’t been much work on the structure, there has been activity near the structure. Trains have been slowly transgressing up and down the tracks on the east side of the Depot. This is both good and bad. The GOOD is long range in nature. Reusing the tracks—even if only for freight purposes—offers the potential to bring added life to Durant. The BAD is short range. It appears that testing the tracks with one or two cars has morphed into using the rails to slowly transport long trains with numerous tank cars. For example, a slow-moving tank car train that appeared to be a mile long stopped traffic in the heart of Durant for what appeared to be about 30 minutes. The problem at that time was there were no **crossing signals or gates** to warn pedestrians or motorist of the arrival and procession of the train. A train in motion, no matter what speed, is a safety hazard at any railroad crossing; it is an even more serious safety hazard on heavily traveled roads such as Mississippi Highway 12, which crosses the track in downtown Durant. This slow-moving, lengthy train also backed up traffic on nearby Mississippi Highway 51, another heavily traveled route that passes through downtown Durant. We ask Durant city officials and other cities experiencing similar safety problems to consult with railroad officials to ensure that proper signaling is used during tests, as well as other maneuvers.

Road Repairs—Will the County Supervisors, County School Board and Lexington Aldermen ever get together and make permanent repairs on roads leading from Highway 12 to the County School District Central Office, Bus Repair Garage, Career-Technical Center and Central Holmes Christian School (Swinney Lane, Olive Street and Kickernick-Elm Street and streets leading to Robert E. Lee Drive)? The deep potholes in these frequently-traveled, highly visible-public roads are eyesores and embarrassing. Does anyone care? We asked these questions in the August, September and October 2016 issues of *Centerpiece*, and with the exception of temporary patches, no visible improvements have been made. Hopefully, 2017 will bring permanent repairs, instead of temporary patches.

We Welcome Your Input—If you have questions or answers, e-mail info@mhtr.us or mail P.O Box 247, Durant, MS 39063.