



The Centerpiece

FREE

A Heritage Center Publication * Durant, MS 39063 * Volume 1, No. 5, March 2017

In line with the mission of Migration Heritage Foundation, each issue of the Centerpiece brings you local, state and national historical tidbits. The following are several:

Editorial: Why March is Women's History Month

Women's history celebrations are done to highlight the contributions of women of all races, creeds and origins to events in history and contemporary society. Too often the women were unsung heroes and sometimes their contributions go unnoticed. The idea for March being Women's History Month dates back to March 8, 1911, when International Women's Day was first celebrated. In 1978, the Sonoma CA school district expanded the celebration to Women's History Week, the week surrounding March 8. In February 1980, President Jimmy Carter issued a presidential proclamation declaring the week of March 8, 1980, as National Women's History Week. In 1987, after being petitioned by the National Women's History Project, Congress passed Pub. L. 100-9 which designated the month of March 1987 as Women's History Month. Since then, Congress has passed additional resolutions requesting and authorizing the sitting President to proclaim March of each year as Women's History Month. In this writer's humble opinion, many women are still unsung heroes today, and we should take advantage of every opportunity to accentuate the important contributions women make to society.

A Tribute to Mr. Walter Bruce—by Pearlle Brown

Walter Bruce was a "Moses" for Holmes County, Mississippi. He was not afraid for himself, and fought to the very end for freedom and justice. Some who hold offices and positions today throughout this state should take lessons from Mr. Bruce. He stood in the "gap" for us; even when it was dangerous not only for him but for his family. I was reminded over and over again at his funeral of his great loves, his church, his family, the community and the Freedom Democratic Party (FDP). Mr. Bruce was chairman of the Holmes County FDP chapter over 50 years, and he also directed the Durant FDP Chapter.

All hail to Mr. Walter Bruce!! Rest in peace knowing that your great work and memory linger on. Thank you for your bravery and unwavering work in an effort to free us spiritually and humanly.

A Brief History of Durant, Mississippi—by Sylvia Gist

Responding to demands of an industrial revolution, wealthy southern planters and northern merchant capitalists cooperatively set forces in motion to lay rail lines to transport raw materials from the South to profitable manufacturing plants in the North. So, the years before the Civil war and extending into the twentieth century, witnessed rail lines sprouting throughout the country. After 1850, states speedily began to charter rail companies, and Mississippi was no exception. The Mississippi Central Railroad organized under a state law passed March 10, 1852. Railway construction started shortly after then in the town of Canton. As tracks crawled throughout the nation, towns and cities sprang up along the lines and many provided loading docks to move cotton, timber and other raw materials to northern-based plants for processing.

Illinois' General Assembly issued a charter to Illinois Central Railway Company (IC) on February 10, 1851. The IC rapidly began expansions that went in all directions from Chicago. One line moved south from Chicago through Kankakee, Urbana, Centralia and the southern border city of Cairo. From Cairo, the line extended south to Tennessee and connected to Mississippi lines that terminated in New Orleans. From Centralia, Illinois, another branch moved northwest and connected at Freeport, Illinois, with the Chicago to line that ran through the state of Iowa to Sioux City, on the western border of the state. Another branched off the Chicago to Sioux City path at Cherokee and traveled west to Omaha Nebraska.

Durant was one of the many cities in that sprouted along north/south tracks through the center of Mississippi. Durant incorporated in 1858, the same year Mississippi Central Railway finished extending tracks north from Canton to Durant. Connections subsequently extended north from Durant to Grenada, where they divided; with one branch moving northwest to Memphis, Tennessee, and the other northeast to Jackson, Tennessee, and onward to Cairo, Illinois. The Durant depot was central to the IC's ability to move raw materials and passengers. The city sat on the IC rail line about 140 miles south of Memphis and 250 miles north of New Orleans. The municipality was named for Louis Durant, a Choctaw Indian chief who lived on a bluff just across the nearby Big Black River. While most Mississippi-based Choctaw Indians were forcibly moved west across the Mississippi River to Indian Territory, Louis Durant, was allowed to remain, undoubtedly because of his wealth and mixed heritage from a prominently connected family. Black slaves, imported from the east to provide free labor on plantations were brought to the area and quickly replaced Indians who moved west. Perhaps because of the number of black slaves in the area, or for other reasons, the area surrounding the city of Durant was known as the "dark corner" of Holmes County.

So essential was the city of Durant to Illinois Central's operations that the company operated a line in 1892 named Durant Illinois Central (Durant IC). These tracks extended northeast from the city through plantations and other shipping ports terminating in Aberdeen. As the Twentieth Century dawned, IC's was a primary carrier of freight and passengers traveling north from the South to major industrial cities in the Midwest, West and East during the Great Migration that started with full intensity around 1916, shortly before World War I.

Coming Events

Date/Time	Event	Location	Contact #
March 9, 2017 at 6:30 pm	Meet and Greet Day with the Durant Police Department	K&K Building, 350 West Magnolia Street Durant	662-653-3314
April 8, 2017 2 pm	Mileston Community Development Association	District 4 Fire Station Thornton (Mileston), MS	662-897-3252
January-March 2017	Applications for Homestead Exemption Accepted	Holmes County Tax Collector 1 Court Square Lexington, MS	662-834-2465

University of MN, Duluth Students and Faculty to Visit Holmes County

Approximately 40 students and faculty from the University of Minnesota at Duluth will visit the county on, Thursday, March 9 at 3 pm at the Vocational Technical Center in Lexington. A Civil Rights Presentation will be provided at the center for this group. These UM-Duluth visitors will stop in the county in their way back to MN from a visit to the Gulf Coast.

March 20, Holmes County Clean-up Kickoff Begins

If you listened to Ms. Zep last week, you should have heard that March 20., 2017, has been designated Holmes County Cleanup Kickoff Day. On that day, and continuing thenceforth, everyone in the county should not only make sure that the area around where they live is free of trash and debris but should also go out to nearby streets, roads, highways and byways and pick up trash and other items that make us and our community look so unkempt. We hope our elected officials will assist by providing garbage bags, arranging for onsite bag pickup, etc. If our elected officials don't step up to the plate, don't let that stop you. As private citizens, we can provide and handle our own bags.

Milton Olive Statue Possibly Planned for Court Square

It is rumored that a bronze statue to honor of our own Milton Olive is being planned for the Court Square and the unveiling is planned for this coming Memorial Day. We certainly hope that this is not just a rumor. As more details surface, the Centerpiece will report them

Important Recurring Meetings

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 662-653-3314 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.

Progress on Questions, Some Answers

Lexington Sale Barn Progress—If you visited the Sale Barn site lately, you probably saw that progress is indeed being made. Thanks to the unrelenting efforts of Miss Zep, the building has been demolished and cleanup is well underway. Ms. Zep spent numerous hours on WXTN/WAGR Radio chiding the absentee landlord and elected officials to clean up the property. We thank her for her effort and express appreciation to those elected officials to made the cleanup a reality.

Rail Safety Issues Near Durant Depot—We are happy to report that the safety hazards and other problems that came with testing railroad tracks for reopening through Durant has not been observed lately. The frequent, slow-moving, lengthy trains that backed up traffic on Highways 51 and 12 have either been halted or discontinued. Thanks to all who helped in this effort.

Road Repairs in Lexington—Roads leading from Highway 12 to the County School District's Education Service Center, Bus Repair Garage, Career-Tech Center and Central Holmes Christian School (Swinney Lane, Olive Street and Kickernick-Elm Street and streets leading to Robert E. Lee Drive) continue to need repairs. The deep potholes in these frequently-traveled, highly visible-public roads are still there and they real are eyesores and embarrassments. Does anyone care? We asked these questions in the August, September, October and December 2016 issues of the *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.

The Centerpiece is a free periodic 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 Sylvia Gist at info@mhtr.us, write to 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.