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COVER IMAGE—Charcoal pit at Gainesville, Mississippi, on the Pearl River in Hancock County in 1912. Photograph courtesy of the Hancock County Historical Society.

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Charcoal Burning in Mississippi: A Forgotten Industry

by Thomas J. Straka

The early manufacturing industries of Mississippi were centered on the state's forest resources, the most prominent of those industries being lumbering and naval stores (turpentining).[1] Often forgotten is a third forest-based industry, charcoal burning, which was also very important in south Mississippi.[2] In 1886, for example, lumber accounted for 85 percent of the commercial activity on the Pascagoula River, while, surprisingly, charcoal production accounted for 11 percent, and turpentine/rosin only accounted for 3.5 percent.[3] The charcoal industry is part of the "coast lore" of Mississippi:

> Men covered in the residue of the charcoal they sold came to Biloxi in mule-drawn wagons during the early 20th century, bringing loads of their cargo. They came to sell their charcoal, which they had made in the back counties of the Coast, primarily to the men who would use the fuel to prepare their food on small furnaces aboard the schooners of Biloxi's fishing fleet. But these men represented only a few who worked in the charcoal industry, which was one of the Coast's early major industries. . . . [The industry] did not begin to diminish until gas and electricity were introduced in New Orleans shortly before World War I. For many years, schooners collected the charcoal from the kilns in such places as those along the banks of Bluff Creek in Central Jackson County where the industry thrived. . . . Schooners, which were polled [sic] and later towed by tugs, came out of Bluff Creek often laden with as many 3,000 sacks of charcoal. Once leaving the creek and reaching the Pascagoula River, they set out under their own sail to New Orleans where their cargo would be used for cooking and heating. The schooners were eventually replaced by freight trucks which hauled their cargo on the highways. This did not occur, however, until the 1930s, after the old industry

[1] John K. Bettersworth, "The Beginnings of Manufacturing in Mississippi," *Social Science Bulletin 5*, no. 1 (October 1951), 4-6.

[2] Charles E. Chidsey, "Charcoal Industry an Important One," *Pascagoula Democrat-Star* (Pascagoula), December 16, 1910, p. 1.

[3] "Review of 1886," *Pascagoula Democrat-Star* (Scranton, MS), January 21, 1887, p. 2.

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was on the wane.[4]

The charcoal burning industry is generally recognized in most southern states, as nearly all of them possessed iron resources and large smelting furnaces fueled by charcoal to process the ore.[5] That was not the case in Mississippi, even though its neighboring states of Alabama and Tennessee had very active charcoal production, supporting thirty-one iron furnaces in 1880.[6] Nonetheless, south Mississippi's vast forest resources presented an economic opportunity for charcoal burners due to nearby urban markets and efficient transportation routes (using its inland rivers and specialized schooners). Charcoal burners helped establish communities and contributed to the developing economy. They are an important part of Mississippi's economic history, yet the charcoal pits and kilns that produced the charcoal have vanished, and few remember the industry.[7] Even so, its importance should not be underappreciated; in 1902, the industry's stature was summarized as:

> The charcoal industry is on a boom in South Mississippi, and many of the firms engaged in the business are preparing to double the capacity of their kilns. The demand for charcoal has greatly increased during the past few months, and the prices are steadily maintained. One firm recently established has a capacity of 10,000 barrels of charcoal per month, and the business is becoming one of the most important features of the lumber industry in that section.[8]

The 1938 Works Progress Administration *American Guide for Mississippi* presented an overview of the industry:

> The charcoal kilns were operated by men of the non-slaveholding class who lived among the pines of south Mississippi. Small individual operators were scattered throughout the Piney Woods section. They used the crudest and cheapest methods

[4] Dale Greenwell and Billy Ray Quave, "Charcoal Making Was Big Industry," *Sun-Herald* (Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula), February 15, 1976, p. D-2.

[5] James M. Swank, *History of the Manufacture of Iron in All Ages* (Philadelphia: The American Iron and Steel Association, 1892), 258-300.

[6] American Iron and Steel Association, *Directory to the Iron and Steel Works of the United States* (Philadelphia: American Iron and Steel Association, 1880), 50-51, 56-58.

[7] Mississippi histories on forests and forestry emphasize lumbering and turpentine production as industries that impacted the state's forests. The two most substantial state forestry histories only mention the charcoal industry in passing: Nollie W. Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt, 1840-1915* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1962), 29, 72; James. E. Fickle, *Mississippi Forests and Forestry* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 48, 254.

[8] "Mississippi Matters," *Okolona Messenger*, September 3, 1902, p. 5.

> and, as little capital was involved, the individual output was small. Conical mounds covered with pine needles and earth and left open at the top were used as kilns. Each kiln could contain enough pine slabs or blocks to make several hundred pounds of charcoal. New Orleans was the chief market for the product; though Mobile and the towns along the Coast used it for cooking and heating purposes, and here also the masters of sailing vessels purchased a supply.[9]

There is some south Mississippi charcoal production jargon that aids

Burning charcoal pits, most always called charcoal or coal kilns in Mississippi, and usually constructed in groups of six to ten so that the charcoal burner could supervise multiple charcoal pits simultaneously. From Scranton Chronicle*, January 30, 1904.*

in understanding the industry's history. Charcoal production was called charcoal burning, and the producers were called charcoal burners.[10] Most often they were just called coal burners. Charcoal was commonly referred to as coal, and the formal term for a charcoal burner was collier. Charcoal was produced in earth-covered mounds called charcoal pits or masonry kilns made of stone, brick, or both.[11] In south Mississippi, most charcoal was produced in charcoal pits that were frequently referred to as charcoal kilns. This shorthand resulted in charcoal pits usually

[9] Federal Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration, *Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 107.

[10] Jackson Kemper, III, "American Charcoal Making in the Era of the Cold-Blast Furnace," *The Regional Review* 5, no.1 (July 1940), 3-14.

[11] Thomas J. Straka, "Charcoal as a Fuel in the Ironmaking and Smelting Industries," *Advances in Historical Studies* 6, no. 1 (March 2017), 56-54.

being identified as coal kilns.

The Market

Following the Civil War until the early twentieth century, the coastal counties of Mississippi supported a strong charcoal production industry that supplied the New Orleans market. Even after the emergence of electricity and gas in New Orleans, for at least a half century, charcoal was a major fuel for that urban area.[12] The primary means of charcoal transport to New Orleans was by charcoal schooner making use of the many navigable bayous. Over fifty schooners with crews of three or four men each supplied New Orleans.[13] Also, a sizable amount of charcoal arrived in New Orleans by rail (Illinois Central Railroad, Southern Railway, New Orleans Great Northern Railroad, and Louisville and Nashville Railroad) from as far north as Purvis and Lumberton in Mississippi and Franklinton in Louisiana, with the greatest producing areas being the three coastal counties of Mississippi.[14] In 1900, the price of charcoal had risen significantly, enticing charcoal burners to increase the number of charcoal pits along the Louisville and Nashville Railroad between West Pascagoula and Ocean Springs. The scene was reported as: "The conical mounds can be seen smoking like miniature volcanoes near, far and wide from the windows of passing trains."[15]

New Orleans used more charcoal than any other city of the same size in the United States, estimated at 300,000 to 500,000 barrels annually. Wholesale prices ranged from twenty-five to seventy-five cents per barrel, with an average price of thirty cents per barrel. The top price would occur when weather delayed the charcoal schooners. Charcoal burners were paid ten to fifteen cents per barrel; after delivery by a schooner, then the retailer would add ten to fifteen cents per barrel to the wholesale price. The charcoal was sold in corner groceries and small shops and on the streets by criers. Nearly every household in the city used it.[16]

The region north of Bay St. Louis was an important area for charcoal,

[12] John K. Cross, "Story of a Forgotten 'Art'," *Stone County Enterprise* (Wiggins, MS), November 14, 1968, p. 6.

[13] "The Charcoal Trade," *Weekly Times-Democrat* (New Orleans), November 28, 1885, p. 5.

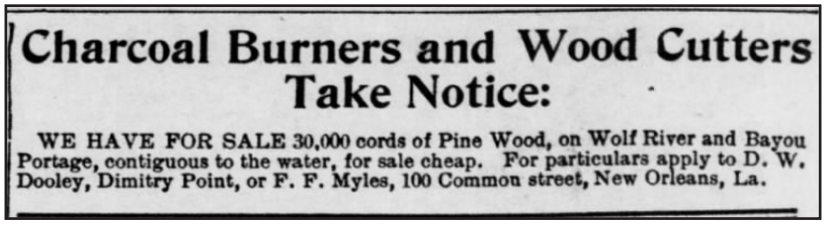
[14] *Stone County Enterprise*, November 14, 1968, p. 6.

[15] "Ships That Pass," *Pascagoula Democrat-Star* (Scranton, MS), October 5, 1900, p. 3.

[16] "The Charcoal Trade," *St. Tammany Farmer* (Covington, LA), April 24, 1886, p. 2.

turpentine, and rosin production, but charcoal was ranked as the most important industry, with all its product destined for the New Orleans market.[17] In 1906, on the Wolf and Jordan Rivers, which empty into Bay St. Louis, the combined timber-based industries were ten to twelve sawmills, ten to fifteen charcoal operations, and twelve turpentine operations.[18] One observer noted the main charcoal production area in Harrison County was the region north of the Tchoutacabouffa River from Ramsey Springs west to Kiln, where "charcoal was loaded on ox and horse drawn wagons and carried to Stiglett's Landing near Coalville Church, a landing near Brashier's shipyard on the Back Bay, on Bayou Bernard, and also on the Jordon River."[19] The community of Kiln was named for the immense charcoal kilns built by the early inhabitants on the banks of the river for easy transport to New Orleans.[20] Charcoal burners were of French descent and charcoal burning had been in their families for generations. The charcoal burning art was systematic and passed down over generations.[21]

In Harrison County, the center of charcoal industry was about three miles northwest of Biloxi in the Woolmarket community: "Here it was



Charcoal Burners and Wood Cutters Take Notice:

WE HAVE FOR SALE 30,000 cords of Pine Wood, on Wolf River and Bayou Portage, contiguous to the water, for sale cheap. For particulars apply to D. W. Dooley, Dimitry Point, or F. F. Myles, 100 Common street, New Orleans, La.

Large amounts of timberland in Hancock County (this might be 1,000 acres) attracted charcoal burners and woodcutters. From Sea Coast Echo *(Bay St. Louis), June 9, 1906, p. 1.*

that the coal kilns dotted the landscape and the sweet smelling smoke from the charring pine logs arose to the sky, both day and night year after year."[22] Coalville near the Biloxi River, named for its charcoal burning

[17] "The Charcoal Burner," *Daily Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS), February 26, 1901, p. 2.
[18] "$30,000.00 for Jordan and Wolf Rivers," *Sea Coast Echo* (Bay St. Louis, MS), January 19, 1907, p. 1.
[19] O. M. Smith, Jr., "Charcoal Industry," *Daily Herald* [Biloxi-Gulfport], October 21, 1975, p. A-4.
[20] "Kiln: The Charcoal Town," *Daily Herald*, August 29, 1956, p. 4; James F. Brieger, *Hometown Mississippi* (Jackson: Town Square Books, Inc., 1997), 237.
[21] *Daily Clarion-Ledger*, February 26, 1901, p. 2.
[22] "Woolmarket," *Daily Herald*, December 14, 1945, p. 10.

settlers, was part of the Woolmarket community.[23] Charcoal burning was so widespread that in 1905, when Gulfport was "just emerging from the mud," as one resident recalled, there were charcoal kilns burning where Tenth and Eleventh Streets are today.[24] Occasionally, up to two dozen schooners would anchor between Deer Island and Point Cadet waiting for their turn to go up the Jordan River to load charcoal.[25]

The principal market in Jackson County was Vancleave, a village on Bluff Creek, a stream that flowed into the West Pascagoula River. Charcoal schooners from New Orleans received the charcoal there. The Jackson County charcoal burners shipped 270,000 barrels of charcoal, at 13 cents each, from Vancleave in 1893, with about the same shipped from six other points in the county. [26]A second market for the charcoal of Jackson County was Fort Bayou, which emptied into the Biloxi River at Ocean Springs. [27] This bayou provided an interesting image of the charcoal schooners and the magnitude of the trade:

> . . . when the fleet is in one may cross the bayou by stepping from the deck of one schooner to the other. Bluff Creek is one of those streams peculiar to the South, very narrow, but exceedingly deep. . . . The bayou is so narrow that schooners passing frequently graze one another. In riding through the woods near Fort Bayou one will frequently see before him what appears to be the wings of some great white bird winding its way through the pines, but it is only a charcoal schooner descending the bayou on its way to New Orleans, which is the principal market and southern distribution point for charcoal." [28]

The charcoal schooners crossed Mississippi Sound, then Lake Pontchartrain, and accessed the city via canals to the Old and New Basins. At the time, canals connected to a harbor at Lake Pontchartrain and turning basins in the city.[29] At the turning basins:

> There [the schooners] lay a dozen at a time. A week is usually spent in disposing of cargoes. Frames ten feet high, erected around and above the decks of these schooners enclose

[23] "Coalville Church Observes 110th Year on Sunday," *Daily Herald*, May 26, 1962, p. 6; Brieger, *Hometown Mississippi,* 244.

[24] "From Gulfport's Picture Album," *Daily Herald*, March 2, 1959, p. 4.

[25] *Daily Clarion-Ledger*, October 21, 1975, p. A-4.

[26] *Grenada Sentinel,* January 13, 1894, p. 4.

[27] Charles E. Chidsey, "Takes Half Acre a Day for Charcoal," *Hattiesburg News*, December 17, 1910, sec. 2, p. 1.

[28] *Pascagoula Democrat-Star*, December 16, 1910, p. 1.

[29] Richard Campanella, "From Canal to Interstate," *Preservation in Print* 46, no. 8 (November 2019), 14-15.

> charcoal, piled above deck. Thus loaded, the schooner is a grim, ungainly looking craft. There are sixty or eighty schooners engaged in the trade. Their capacity varies from 1500 to 3000 barrels of charcoal.[30]

Charcoal Pit Operation

Charcoal was produced by partially burning (carbonizing) wood to remove water vapor and volatile gases, leaving a carbon residue. Wood

A charcoal schooner in Old Basin, New Orleans. Photograph courtesy of Library of Congress, Image LC-DIG-det-4a13313, original from Detroit Publishing Company.

was carefully and tightly stacked in a mound shape for a charcoal pit, covered with leaves and soil to keep the air out, and then ignited. Combustion was controlled by regulating the air flow to the burning wood. Once the water vapor was driven out, the dry wood began to break down at just over 500°F, and the heating process peaked at about 750°F. [31] The resulting process produced charcoal, with a carbon content of approximately 80 percent. It was a concentrated heat source and burned much cleaner than the original wood.[32] The weight advantage was illustrated in an old observation about a charcoal pit that "ten horses will draw the

[30] *St. Tammany Farmer*, April 24, 1886, p. 2.

[31] Thomas J. Straka and Wayne C. Ramer, "Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site." *Forest History Today* 16, no. 1&2 (Spring/Fall 2010), 58-62.

[32] Andrew J. Baker, "Charcoal," in *Encyclopedia of American Forest and Conservation History*, ed. Richard C. Davis (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983), 73-77.

wood and three horses draw the charcoal away." [33]

While hardwood was generally preferred for charcoal production, pine was preferred in Mississippi's Piney Woods region. The charcoal burning site was usually in a thick pine stand where a circular area of thirty to fifty feet would be cleared. The charcoal pit was built on the cleared circle, or hearth.[34] The term "pit" is a misnomer because a charcoal pit was built on level ground. In addition, the ground had to be hard and firm to allow for a "seal" against the entrance of air to the pit.[35]

Charcoal pits were located on the highest and driest part of the tract, with the woodchoppers proceeding to virtually clearcut the tract, harvesting even the smallest sapling.[36] In most of the country, timber was cut into four-foot lengths, called billets, with large diameter wood

A three-tier charcoal pit. Notice the earthen covering on a layer of hardwood leaves (instead of pine needles) and a chimney in the center instead of lightwood. Photo courtesy of Douglas H. Page Jr.

split into pieces for better burning. Some charcoal burners in south Mississippi used multiple lengths of three, four, and five feet for billets.[37]

[33] "How Charcoal Is Made," *Savannah Morning News* (Savannah, GA), June 27, 1901, p. 7.

[34] "Making Charcoal," *Pascagoula Democrat-State* (Scranton, MS), December 9, 1887, p. 1.

[35] Gustaf Svedelius, *Hand-Book for Charcoal Burners* (New York: John Wiley and Son, 1875), 30-34.

[36] *Hattiesburg News*, December 17, 1910, sec. 2, p. 1.

[37] "About Charcoal Burning," *Weekly Corinthian* (Corinth, MS), November 9, 1904, p. 11.

Once the hearth was cleared and leveled, a center pole (four to six inches in diameter and thirteen to fourteen feet in height) was erected in its center. In many parts of the country a small "chimney" was built around the center pole using small wood; the chimney was filled with kindling used for ignition.[38] In south Mississippi, instead, lightwood was stacked around the center pole for a radius of about one foot and to a height of five feet. Then the five-foot billets were carefully stacked upright and tilted slightly towards the center around the lightwood, continuing outward in a circular fashion creating the first tier of the charcoal pit.[39]

Once the first tier was constructed, more lightwood was added around the center pole and a second tier constructed in the same manner using the four-foot billets. Once complete, the three-foot billets were used to construct a third tier.[40] Industrious charcoal burners might even add

Charcoal pit at Gainesville, Mississippi, on the Pearl River in Hancock County in 1912. The two charcoal burners are shoveling dirt onto the pit. Photograph courtesy of the Hancock County Historical Society.

a fourth tier. Due to the slight tilt of the billets, the three tiers would form a mound shape. This three-tier mound might have been thirty feet in diameter at ground level, eight feet in diameter at the top, twelve feet high, and contained about thirty cords of wood.[41]

[38] Kemper, *American Charcoal Making*, 3-14; "Charcoal Burning," Scranton Chronicle, January 30, 1904, p. 4.

[39] *Pascagoula Democrat-Star,* December 16, 1910, p. 1

[40] *Hattiesburg News*, December 17, 1910, sec. 2, p. 1.

[41] *Stone County Enterprise*, November 14, 1968, p. 6.

When the wood was in place, the charcoal pit was ready to be covered by digging a small ditch around the pit's edge, serving the purpose of draining off rainwater and supplying dirt for covering the pit (or "banking up"). The wood mound was covered with a layer of dirt, but first a layer of pine straw was applied so that the dirt would not fall into the pit. The charcoal burner used a crude ladder, usually made of pine saplings, to reach the top of the pit.[42]

The actual charcoal burning took place after the pit was banked. At this time, the collier's skills became important because the whole venture depended upon them. If too much air reached the wood, or if it burned too hot, the whole pit could end up as worthless ash; or if air were insufficient it might not char all the wood.[43]

Ignition occurred at the top of the pit where the lightwood column and center post were allowed to burn downward until the charring process began in the stacked bolts, belching black smoke.[44] As the lightwood column disappeared more billets were dropped into the hole (called feeding the pit).[45] Once the cordwood began to char, white smoke appeared first, which was mainly water vapor from the drying wood. When the wood was dry, the smoke turned blue or gray (even yellow at times).[46] The collier could judge the progress of the "fire" by the amount and color of the escaping smoke.[47] Gases could accumulate inside the pit, and on rare occasions an explosion occurred, with pieces of wood flying out of the pit, and even more rarely a charcoal burner casualty resulted from the flying wood.[48]

The work of the charcoal burner and his helper was constant. It was a twenty-four-hour-a-day job, and a small lean-to or hut was built for shelter. Vigilance was required that just enough air was allowed into the pit and that the burning occurred evenly across the pit. Holes or cracks in the dirt would be patched (so that the pit would not be "burnt out"), and if an area was not burning hot enough, holes would be punched into the covering at groundline to draw the fire down. Sometimes voids occurred

[42] "How Charcoal Is Made," *Savannah Morning News* (Savannah, GA), June 27, 1901, p. 7.
[43] "Charcoal Burners," *Brookhaven Leader*, August 6, 1885, p. 1.
[44] "Charcoal Burning," *Scranton Chronicle*, January 30, 1904, p. 4.
[45] *Hattiesburg News*, December 17, 1910, sec 2, p. 1.
[46] *Weekly Corinthian,* November 9, 1904, p. 11.
[47] Straka and Ramer, "Hopewell Furnace," 58-62.
[48] *Pascagoula Democrat-Star*, December 16, 1910, p. 1.

as the wood "burned," and those would need to be compressed.[49] A skilled charcoal burner could judge the degree of burning just by running his hand through the escaping smoke.[50] A mallet was used on the sides to eliminate a void. But on top of the kiln the collier might need to jump up and down over the void, called "jumping the pit." This was another danger as occasionally the covering and wood no longer supported the collier. On rare occasion a collier got badly burned by falling into the pit, or even burned to death.[51]

The continuous twenty-four-hour-a-day nature of a charcoal burner's duties were summed up by an early nineteenth century observer:

> The coal burner and his helper were never idle; it was a day-and-night job. They lived in a lean-to of brush, did their own cooking, and it is safe to say that no one changed clothes during the entire burning period. It can also be surmised that the coffee pot was always hot. I leave it to your own imagination how the burners looked; but one had to make a living, and no one ever heard of government relief in those days.[52]

When a charcoal pit had burned through, after two weeks or longer for a large pit, it was sealed and allowed to smother out. After cooling, the charcoal would be "raked out" or "drawn out" with long-handled rakes into concentric circles around the pit.[53] There it could be observed, doused with water if necessary, and allowed to cool until the collier was confident it would not reignite. For some very large pits the whole process might have taken a month. The hearth was often reused to save the work of clearing a new one and the "charcoal dust" remaining after burning was used as the new covering.[54]

The charcoal burner led a difficult life, most of it alone in the forest, and under primitive conditions. It was described by one observer as:

> The charcoal burner leads a gypsy life. His cabin is near by the kilns, and in it is the picturesque disorder that is natural to man in the woods. His kitchen utensils are most in evidence. His bed is wholly secondary. He eats to live and lives to work with only an occasional "spree" in some nearby town. In the

[49] "Burning Charcoal," *Asheville Daily Citizen* (Asheville, NC). January 23, 1891, p. 3.
[50] *The Chronicle* (Pascagoula and Moss Point), May 21, 1962, p. 7.
[51] *Sun-Herald*, February 15, 1976; "Dead in a Charcoal Pit," *Morning Journal and Courier* (New Haven, CT), May 10, 1889, p. 3; "With Charcoal Burners," *Essex County Herald* (Island Pond, VT), March 24, 1893, p. 6.
[52] *Hattiesburg News*, December 17, 1910, sec 2, p. 1.
[53] Kemper, "American Charcoal Making," 3-14.
[54] Straka and Ramer, "Hopewell Furnace," 58-62.

> woods sobriety is everything to his craft. He is a wonder to the visitors, as he plunges into thick smoke and heat, and works in the choking fumes with the fortitude of a salamander. When the kiln is working best the smoke and fumes are worst, and to keep the kilns so necessitates the constant attention of the burner. These fumes are considered detrimental to health under ordinary circumstances, but the compensating life in the woods seems to make the charcoal burner a hardy specimen of his race.[55]

Charcoal pits were part of some local communities. In 1878 in Brookhaven, the local newspaper editor warned that the "coal kilns should not be allowed to die out." The smoke from the kilns scared off the mosquitos and helped prevent yellow fever.[56] At Saucier in Harrison County, local merchants developed charcoal operations to supply the New Orleans and national markets with boxcars of charcoal leaving Saucier weekly.[57] Not all communities were fond of charcoal pits. In 1938, Canton outlawed charcoal burning within the corporation limits.[58] Some moonshiners took advantage of the charcoal pits by hiding their still near a charcoal burning site to disguise the peculiar smoke and odor from law enforcement.[59] Charcoal burners were competitive and very much concerned with the price paid for a barrel or bushel of charcoal. In 1887, competing charcoal burners set fire to charcoal kilns near Ocean Springs because the owner was not charging "sufficient" rates.[60] Charcoal burners apparently had their own enforcement of labor group standards.

Marketing the Charcoal

Once thoroughly cooled, the charcoal was raked into sacks and hauled with an ox- or mule-drawn wagon to a charcoal depot where it was sold, or perhaps just delivered to a dealer who had provided an advance for the fuel (it was not unusual for the charcoal burner to be

[55] *Savannah Morning News*, June 27, 1901, p. 7.

[56] *Brookhaven Ledger*, September 12, 1878, p. 2.

[57] Wayne A. Saucier, The History of Saucier, Mississippi. https://thesaucierfamily.weebly.com/the-history-of-saucier-mississippi.html; "Saucier News Paragraphs," *Daily Herald*, June 22, 1921, p. 6.

[58] "Laws and Ordinances," *Canton Herald*, February 21, 1838, p. 3.

[59] "A Coweta Man in Trouble," *Herald and Advertiser* (Newman, GA), June 11, 1897, p. 9; "Enforce the Laws," *Hattiesburg American*, July 20, 1891, p. 4.

[60] *Pascagoula Democrat-Star* (Scranton, MS), May 1, 1881, p. 2.

heavily indebted to the dealer).[61] The charcoal depot would commonly be along the shores of a tidal stream or at a railhead. A unique feature of charcoal wagons were the floorboard planks that could be pulled out if the charcoal caught on fire in transit. The charcoal might be lost to burn on the road, but the wagon would be saved. Plus, the floorboards could be pulled for easier unloading.[62]

The charcoal burner had to both produce and market the charcoal, or involve a middleman. Charcoal marketing and sales were integral necessities of life in the large cities like New Orleans or Mobile. The end of the charcoal burning process meant the product must be marketed and:

> When the tar ceased to flow and the smoke ceased to rise the charcoal burner knew that the pit was burned out, and after

A charcoal wagon hauling sacks of charcoal, probably en route to the Louisville and Nashville railhead at Fontainebleau. Courtesy of the Daniel C. 'Danny' Seymour Collection via oceanspringsarchives.net.

> allowing a day or so for cooling, he shoveled off the sods and earth, pouring water on such chuncks [sic] of coal that happened to be on fire, and was then ready to load the products of his labor into a dusky, black covered wagon, and with his mules to pull it, drives to town and make himself hoarse shouting, "Cha-r-r-coal! Cha-r-r-coal!" He got about 25 bushels out of a cord of wood and 25 cents out of a bushel of coal. Considering the value of wood and the time required to make and sell, the charcoal burner didn't get rich very fast. In fact, he was always a laborer, dressed in blue jeans.[63]

[61] *Stone County Enterprise*, November 14, 1968, p. 6.
[62] Straka and Ramer, "Hopewell Furnace," 58-62.
[63] *Pascagoula Democrat-State*, December 9, 1887, p. 1.

The nature of the work required charcoal burners to toil throughout the region's forests, often in isolated places. In 1909, the American Bible Society claimed to have received a plea from the "poor Creole charcoal burners in southern Mississippi" for Bible study services. They responded with services involving twenty-three days traveling 422 miles, as "the people are so badly scattered, doing their work in the charcoal camps."[64] Charcoal burners, while isolated, still had to deal with the owners of the wood they burned, teamsters to transport the charcoal, and merchants who sold them supplies. The burner was his own master, and if he knew the markets well, could make a "decent living."[65] Yet the American Bible Society missionary gave a contrary view of the charcoal burners' situation:

> I have tried for months to get into touch with the charcoal burners of southern Mississippi. They are robbed by the owners of the forests; they are robbed by the persons who transport their products; they are robbed by those who sell goods and services to them—in fact, they are kept almost in slavery and want. No care is given to their education or uplift, and when in the winter of 1909 I tried to teach them to read and write and give them the Truth in Christ Jesus, I was ostracized. [66]

In most of the country, the unit of measure for charcoal was the bushel, but in south Mississippi, it was the one-hundred-pound flour barrel. Sacked charcoal delivered to a tidal stream was carried aboard schooners, where it was deposited into barrels.[67] The entire hold of the ship would be filled with barrels, and special deck stanchions that projected above the rail lines to just short of the sail booms would allow barrels to be stacked on deck. These deck loads sometimes made the ship top-heavy, and a storm or squall could capsize the boat resulting in the loss of cargo. A charcoal schooner sometimes carried from 1,500 to 2,000 barrels.[68]

Payment was made to the charcoal burner upon delivery. A typical charcoal pit contained thirty cords of wood and required twenty to twenty-five days of work for two men. Charcoal usually sold at the depot for eight to thirty cents a barrel, but twenty cents was a common

[64] *American Bible Society, Ninety-Fourth Annual Report of the American Bible Society (New York: American Bible Society, 1910), 212.*

[65] "Charcoal Burners," *Sea Coast Echo*, June 1, 1912, p. 3.

[66] American Bible Society, *Ninety-Fourth Annual Report*, 203.

[67] *Stone County Enterprise*, November 14, 1968, p. 6.

[68] *Hattiesburg News,* December 17, 1910, sec. 2, p. 1.

price.[69] A three-tier, thirty cord charcoal pit, operated by a very efficient charcoal burner, could produce from 1,000 to 1,200 bushels of charcoal. Output of a charcoal pit depended upon the quality of the collier. Some top-notch colliers asked for a premium for better quality charcoal. It all depended on how well the wood was stacked, how well the air flow was regulated, and how well the collier could read the progression of the burning process.[70]

Most of the charcoal was destined for New Orleans, and schooners were the usual means of transport; one observer summarized the market as:

> Go to New Orleans, the metropolis of the South, at any time; go to the New or Old Basin and view the fleet of vessels (schooners) there. See the thousands of sacks of charcoal that are being deposited there and retailed later throughout the city from any where from 45 to 90 cents per sack, depending upon the size of the sack and the season of the year, and ask where it comes from. The answer will be, the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. There schooners ply up such streams and rivers as the Jordan and Wolf, where the charcoal industry flourishes and places in active commission a fleet that possibly without this trade would not exist.[71]

By 1906, the sustainability of the charcoal industry had become an issue. Timber availability had declined, and the charcoal industry's raw material costs were increasing. Near Ocean Springs, a railcar load of charcoal cost $240 that year, whereas only a few years earlier a high price would have been $60 to $80 per carload. A newspaper column summed it up: "Timber is getting too scarce and valuable."[72] In New Orleans it was called a "charcoal famine" with the "ever-familiar figure, the charcoal vendor, begrimed with dirt from head to foot, seated on a spring wagon, drawn by a lean horse," described as "disappearing from the streets."[73]

[69] *St. Tammany Farmer,* April 24, 1886, p. 2.

[70] Thomas J. Straka, "Historic Charcoal Production in the US and Forest Depletion: Development of Production Parameters," *Advances in Historical Studies*, 3, no. 2 *(March 2014), 105.*

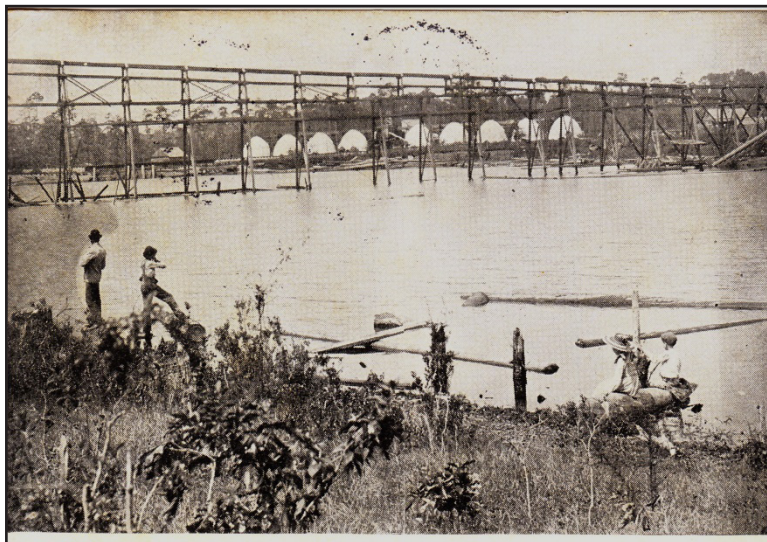
[71] Chas. G. Moreau, "The Mississippi Coast; A Valuable Asset," *Sea Coast Echo*, October 2, 1909, p. 1.

[72] "Highest Price for Charcoal Ever Reached," *Sea Coast Echo*, August 25, 1906, p. 1.

[73] "Charcoal Famine," *Sea Coast Echo*, August 11, 1906, p. 1.

Beyond the Charcoal Pits

Burning kilns in the woods was associated in many minds with the image of a tar kiln. Tar kilns and charcoal kilns were kindred structures.



The Charcoal plant from across the mill pond, Poplarville, Miss.

Mississippi had sets of large brick conical charcoal kilns in the early twentieth century that looked misplaced, as they were more commonly associated with iron furnaces. When these were built in the early twentieth century, charcoal kilns were routinely collecting the chemicals that resulted from carbonization, and charcoal became a secondary product. Photograph courtesy of Mark Clinton Davis, Pearl River County Historical Society.

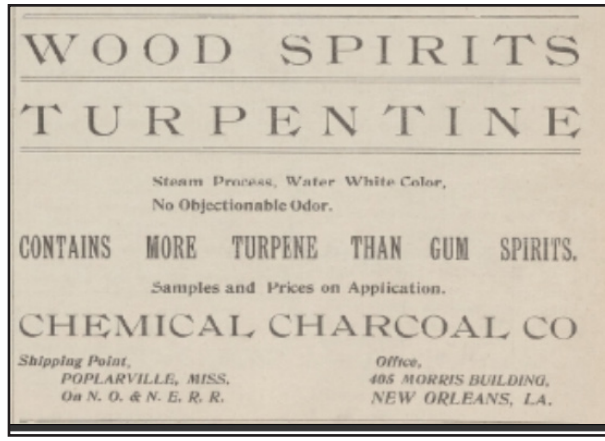
Both involved mounds of wood, covered in earth, with an opening on the top and slight ventilation holes, and almost air-free burning of wood.[74] The difference was that a tar kiln used "lightwood," the resinous boles, branches, and stumps of longleaf pines, as the wood; plus, a gutter was dug at the bottom to drain the liquid that condensed from the heated resin, with the liquid tar usually collected in barrels.[75] Tar and pitch (condensed tar) were used on wooden sailing vessels to preserve the riggings and to caulk the side and bottom of the ship (which is why they

[74] Percival Perry, "The Naval-Stores Industry in the Old South, 1790-1860," *Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 4 (November 1968), 310-311.

[75] Robert B. Outland III, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 20-21.

were called naval stores). Since nearly the same production process was used as in charcoal making, tar kilns made a by-product – charcoal (roughly twenty-five to thirty bushels per cord of lightwood) that was sold for blacksmithing purposes.[76]

Charcoal was an incidental product of more than just tar kilns. In the late nineteenth century, charcoal burners realized that a valuable product was contained in the smoke that rose from charcoal pits and kilns.[77] Soon chemical plants used brick or concrete kilns or iron retorts



This advertisement from the Savannah Naval Stores Review and Journal of Trade *from May 5, 1906, describes one of the primary products of the Poplarville charcoal kilns.*

to produce charcoal primarily to capture the chemicals from the smoke that was condensed into products such as wood alcohol, acetate of lime, and wood oils. Even plants set up to primarily produce charcoal would capture the chemicals as profitable by-products. While a charcoal pit might produce twenty-five bushels per cord of wood, an iron retort would produce sixty bushels to the cord.[78] The value of the charcoal could pay for the wood and the cost of the burning process, leaving chemicals as pure profit.

In 1902, the Chemical Charcoal Company opened a charcoal plant

[76] James P. Barnett, *Naval Stores: A History of an Early Industry Created from the South's Forests*, General Technical Report SRS-240 (Asheville, NC: USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, 2004), 12-13; "Turpentine and Tar," *True Democrat* (Paulding, MS), July 30, 1845, p. 4

[77] "Charcoal," *Pascagoula Democrat-Star* (Scranton, MS), March 11, 1887, p. 4.

[78] *Pascagoula Democrat-Star*, December 9, 1887, p. 1.

in Poplarville.[79] It involved a row of large white brick charcoal kilns. The appearance from afar was more like the iron region of Alabama with its many iron smelters. Charcoal burning evolved from charcoal pits to charcoal kilns, and then chemical plants.[80] The low capital requirements for charcoal pits meant they continued to be popular, while corporations and iron furnaces invested in brick kilns. Many industrialized charcoal plants became chemical plants that also produced charcoal. That was the case in Poplarville. Charcoal production in Mississippi developed following national market trends to include corporate charcoal kiln operations and chemical plants. Properly, these chemical charcoal companies were termed the softwood and hardwood distillation industry. In 1929, the state forester announced that wood distillation and charcoal manufacturing industries had entered Mississippi's elite group of million-dollar industries with $2.5 million of product value, using only second growth timber, stumps, and other products without a market.[81] A half dozen of these chemical charcoal companies were scattered around Mississippi by 1938.[82]

Charcoal kilns, the masonry kind (brick, stone, or a combination of the two), were part of early charcoal burning in Mississippi.[83] It is extremely difficult to determine where these kilns were located as the nomenclature was loose in Mississippi. Earth-covered and brick structures were both usually called kilns. So, the literature is seldom conclusive. While most charcoal was produced in pits, a few large commercial operations were certainly scattered across the state using masonry kilns. Mississippi Department of Archives and History site files confirm several brick charcoal kilns on different sites in Hancock County.[84] It is interesting that the management plan for the Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area contains a number of charcoal kiln operations in its historical listing of the lumber industry; it is plausible some of these

[79] "The Charter of Incorporation of the Chemical Charcoal Company," *Free Press* (Poplarville), March 20, 1902, p. 4.

[80] Robert K. Winters, Gardner H. Chidester, and J. Alfred Hall, *Wood Waste in the United States* (Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service, 1947), 27-30.

[81] "A Two Million Dollar Industry," *Greenwood Commonwealth*, September 21, 1932, p. 4.

[82] Mississippi State Planning Commission, *Progress Report on State Planning in Mississippi* (Jackson: Tucker Printing House, 1938), 59.

[83] Edward Beglinger and Edward G. Locke, "Charcoal—Its Manufacture and Use," *Economic Botany*, 11, no. 2 (April 1957), 160-173.

[84] Personal communication with Patty Miller-Beech, MDAH, July 21, 2021.

were large commercial operations with permanent masonry kilns.[85] By 1922, large sawmills in Jackson County were building masonry charcoal kilns to utilize waste from their plants. At Vancleave, five kilns were under construction to convert waste lumber slabs into charcoal for which there was a good market.[86]

Following World War II due to migration to the suburbs, outdoor recreation began a steady expansion, including outdoor barbecuing, utilizing the new charcoal grill designs, and the new charcoal briquette.[87] This commercial opportunity was not overlooked in Mississippi with its huge forest resource.[88] In 1959, the Mississippi Industrial Research Center in Jackson began a Small Business Administration-financed project to increase the manufacture of wood products in the state, with a focus on furniture and charcoal.[89] Commercial charcoal operations developed throughout timber regions of the state in the mid-twentieth century. Most used large rectangular brick or concrete kilns and produced lump charcoal, while two produced charcoal briquettes.[90] Charcoal briquettes are commonly sold in stores and are made from compressed charcoal with a binder like corn starch.[91]

In 1961, there were seven charcoal companies in Mississippi: Attala Land and Wood Products Company in Kosciusko, Black Creek Charcoal Company in Lexington, Blackjack Charcoal Company in Bruce, Dixie Farms in Satartia, Dizzy Dean Enterprises in Pachuta, Eaton and Clark in Taylorsville, and Price Lumber Company in Shuqualak.[92] These plants tended to use "scrub" timber from local farmers, giving them a market

[85] Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, *Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Areas Management Plan* (Biloxi: Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, 2005), 111-120.

[86] "Mills Adding Charcoal Kilns," *Daily Herald*, April 4, 1922, p. 3.

[87] Kristin L. Matthews, "One Nation Over Coals: Cold War Nationalism and the Barbecue," *American Studies*, 50, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2009), 5-34; Dashka Slater, "Who Made That? (Charcoal Briquette)," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, September 28, 2014, p. 19.

[88] "New Industry Idea," *Daily Herald*, July 17, 1959, p. 4; "May Be a Good Bet for State Industry," *Clarion Ledger*, June 16, 1959, p. 8. "Backyard Chefs Restore Importance of Charcoal," *Hattiesburg American*, August 9, 1960, p. 6.

[89] "Charcoal, Furniture Industries Studied," *Clarion-Ledger*, June 27, 1957, p. 16.

[90] "Charcoal Plant Fires Up,' *Holmes County Herald* (Lexington, MS), April 7, 1960, p. 1; "Dizzy Dean Helps Ross and Hugh Open Pachuta's First Industrial Plant," Holmes County Herald, April 26, 1962, p. 44; "Attala County Has New Land Wood Products Home-Owned Company," Star-Herald [Kosciusko], February 25, 1960, p. 1; "Charcoal Industry in Lafayette County," *Columbian-Progress* (Columbia, MS), June 16, 1964, p. 4.

[91] Mark Beason and Leslie Roark, "Hardwood Hard to Beat When Firing up the Grill," *Clarion-Ledger*, August 14, 2013, p. 3D.

[92] USDA Forest Service, *Charcoal and Charcoal Briquette Production in the United States, 1961* (Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service, 1963).

for "undesirable" tree species like hickory and blackjack oak.[93] By the end of the decade, most of the plants were no longer in operation.[94]

Dizzy Dean Enterprises in Pachuta provides a good example of the life cycle for one of these charcoal plants. In late 1961, construction of a large charcoal plant was announced at Pachuta and became the small community's first industry.[95] A $150,000 bond issue was required, and the enterprise was a subsidiary of Mississippi Industries. Estimates were

A 1937 cutover yellow pine forest near Kiln, Mississippi. Notice the lack of logging slash. Charcoal burners may have utilized the debris for their charcoal pits. Photograph courtesy of Library of Congress Image LC-USF34-017969-C, photographer Dorothea Lange.

for annual production of 10,000 tons of charcoal briquettes, employment for 100 workers, and purchase of over $200,000 of "waste" hardwood timber annually.[96] In 1969, the firm became a subsidiary of Hood Industries,[97] and in early 1970, Hood Industries was acquired by Masonite

[93] "New Attala Wood Products Co. Ships First Charcoal Made Here," *Star Herald*, May 19, 1960, p. 1.

[94] Dwane D. Van Hooser, *Mississippi's Forest Industry*, Resource Bulletin SO-12 (New Orleans, LA: USDA Forest Service, Southern Forest Experiment Station, 1968), 25; Daniel F. Bertelson, *Mississippi Forest Industries, 1972*, Resource Bulletin SO-43 (New Orleans, LA: USDA Forest Service, Southern Forest Experiment Station, 1973), 27.

[95] "Dizzy Dean Enterprises to Build Large Charcoal Plant at Pachuta," *Clarke County Tribune* (Quitman, MS), October 6, 1961, p. 1.

[96] "New Industry Comes to Pachuta, Thanks to Dizzy Dean and BAWI," *Clarke County Tribune*, March 9, 1962, p. 1.

[97] "Dizzy Dean Becomes a Hood Subsidiary," *Clarke County Tribune*, October 31, 1969, p. 1.

> receiving the seed or "mast" from the neighboring pines, are in a few years crowned with clusters of thickly-growing pine saplings that make the only picturesque spots in an otherwise barren landscape.[105]

While charcoal burning in Mississippi did not produce the forest devastation experienced in some of the charcoal iron furnace regions, it was still significant. Charcoal burning was notorious enough to attract the attention of the editors of an influential political magazine in 1884, *Puck*, which published a centerfold political cartoon reflecting the growing concern over it.[106] At the time, one of the greatest concerns following forest devastation was damage to the watersheds and the dangers of

Political cartoon from January 9, 1884, issue of Puck *magazine warning of the dangers of forest devastation caused by charcoal burning. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Image LC-DIG-ppmsca-28283, artist was Joseph Ferdinand Keppler.*

floods and droughts.

Lumbering and turpentining usually got most of the attention as the culprit in cutover southern forests, but in other regions of the country, charcoal burning was recognized as a major forest conservation

[105] Pascagoula Democrat-Star, December 16, 1910, 1.
[106] *Puck*, 14, no. 357 (January 9, 1884), 290, 296-297.

problem.[107] At the end of the nineteenth century, the South was becoming the new principal lumber source. The forests of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan had been "practically denuded." The stated cause was "reckless lumbering, charcoal burning, and the manufacture of paper pulp [which had] co-operated as forces of destruction."[108]

The aforementioned Puck political cartoon showed burning charcoal pits in the middle ground, with the background strongly implying that indiscriminate logging for charcoal production resulted in clearcut land, eroded riverbanks, and a flooded downriver town. The woodcutters in the foreground have wood at their feet, most likely billets just the size needed for charcoal pits. Hovering above the two woodcutters, a female apparition labeled "Public Spirit" holds up her arm and warns, "Preserve Your Forests from Destruction and Protect Your Country from Floods and Drought."

These predictions of permanently devastated forests proved to be untrue as Mississippi's second-growth forests, coupled with publicly accepted conservation measures, provided the basis of a vast forest industry across the state.[109] Charcoal burning was an important component of southern Mississippi's early economic development. Later, a more commercial charcoal industry impacted most of the state. The environmental impact on the state's forests and wildlife is seldom considered when the industry is discussed, but it had an impact recognized across the country. It is an important part of Mississippi's forest and economic history.

Conclusion

Today, charcoal burning is an almost invisible element of Mississippi's early economy and history. The southern states all began with solid forest-based economies and continue to have them, owing to an abundance of forest resources and the implementation of conservation practices.[110] They almost all had some mix of forest products industries,

[107] Charles E. Chidsey, "Some Uses and Abuses of Our Forests," *American Lumberman*, October 12, 1918, 52-53. This article contains two interesting photographs of a southern Mississippi charcoal pit, showing pit construction and the finished pit.

[108] "Forestry in the South," *St. Mary Banner* (Franklin, LA), March 8, 1902, p. 1.

[109] "Wood Using Industries Proving Boon to State Timber Growers," *McComb Enterprise-Journal*, June 28, 1956, p. 9.

[110] Matthew Pelkki and Gabrielle Sherman, "Forestry's Economic Contribution in the United States, 2016," *Forest Products Journal* 70, no. 1 (January 2020), 28-38.

Corporation.[98] In 1978, Masonite Corporation sold its Charcoal Division to Husky Industries, a major national charcoal producer.[99] Husky Industries ceased operations at the plant in 1985.[100] The short history of the small charcoal operation was typical for firms that developed to satisfy the post-World War II outdoor recreation demand.

The Forest

Charcoal burners could use almost any scrap of wood to produce charcoal.[101] Often, they cleaned up after logging operations and removed the logging debris (small stems and branches). Most charcoal burners owned no land of their own and leased "timber rights" from a forest owner, paying so much a barrel of charcoal produced from the timber.[102] In northern hardwood stands often the timber would regenerate on its own and charcoal burners could utilize the same timber stands after several decades for a second charcoal operation. In some cases, charcoal was produced in Mississippi on second growth pine stands, with charcoal burning occurring on the same land a second time, but devastated forests were more common. Charcoal burning occurred along the Gulf Coast so widely it is surprising how pervasive it was; even residents of Cat Island, which was wooded, produced charcoal for the New Orleans market.[103] Across the lower South thousands of acres were cleared annually for charcoal production, with recklessly denuded forests creating an "inevitable disaster" such as flooding and wildfire problems.[104]

The landscape near a charcoal operation in 1910 was described as:

> On a journey from Pascagoula through the charcoal country to Vancleave one will traverse miles of land that are practically stripped of their timber, save here and there, where a thick cluster of pine saplings indicate where a kiln has been. . . . These coal-kiln sites, being well drained by the ditch that surrounds the kiln and enriched by the chemicals that soak down into the earth from the burning wood, are seed beds that,

[98] "Masonite Acquires Hood Industries, *Clarke County Tribune*, March 13, 1970, p. 1.

[99] "Masonite Corporation Sells Plant to Husky Industries," *Clarke County Tribune*, September 1, 1978, p. 1.

[100] 'Husky Plant Will Close January 31," *Clarke County Tribune*, December 27, 1984, p, 1.

[101] Dale Greenwell, *D'Iberville and St. Martin* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 41.

[102] *Hattiesburg News*, December 17, 1910, sec. 2, p. 1.

[103] John Cuevas, Cat Island: *The History of a Mississippi Gulf Coast Barrier Island* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011), 16, 37.

[104] "Courting Floods in the South," *Southern Herald* (Liberty, MS), April 28, 1883, p. 1.

including charcoal production, mostly to support charcoal iron furnaces. Mississippi's early economy followed this pattern, with a foundation in agriculture, forest resources, and a manufacturing industry centered on sawmills. [111] There was no iron industry in Mississippi that required charcoal fuel, but close-by urban markets created a demand that fueled a large market for Mississippi charcoal. The market for Pascagoula charcoal even reached along the Texas coast.[112] One does not have to look hard to find clues of an important industry, like place names: Kiln in Hancock County, Coalville in Harrison County, Coll Town in Jackson County, and Coaltown in Lamar County.[113]

The technique and science of charcoal burning is quite similar to turpentining; both used kilns of some sort to burn wood in anaerobic conditions to produce useful forest products. Turpentining, perhaps because it was an almost uniquely southern enterprise, captured regional imaginations and is well-entrenched in southern culture and recognized in histories of its forest industries. Not so for charcoal burning. Few people today, mainly a few members of county historical societies and scattered descendants of charcoal burners, are even aware charcoal burning was once an important industry in parts of the South. It is truly a forgotten industry.

It is surprising that, when historical narratives tell the story of early forestry in Mississippi and the widespread forest devastation that preceded forest management and development of a second forest, charcoal burning is usually relegated to footnote status. While its impact tended to be concentrated in certain areas, the impact was quite intense, and it did contribute to forest destruction. Its impact might be lost to time, but observers at the time could not help but notice.

One letter to the editor in a coastal newspaper noted:

> In commenting on the destruction of the great pine forests along the Coast we charged it all to the lumbering interests and failed to charge a great portion of the destruction to the coal burners who destroyed all the timber that was not large enough for the lumber mills which for many years did not cut or use anything that did not square 12 inches at the top of the log. The coal burners would follow the timber men and cut all

[111] John Ray Skates, *Mississippi: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1979), 133.

[112] *Weekly Times-Democrat*, November 28, 1885, p. 5.

[113] August 29, 1956, p, 4; Gladys B. Legg, "Coalville Methodist Church Is Celebrating Centennial This Month," *Daily Herald*, May 22, 1952, sec. 2, p. 1; "The Charcoal Burners of the *Pascagoula," Pascagoula Democrat-Star* (Scranton, MS), June 26, 1885, p. 2; Jillian Kramer, "Lamar County Road Recalls Early Industry," *Hattiesburg American*, December 11, 2007, p. 3.

> of the timber that left on the land. Of course, with permission, in most cases of the owner of the land, but in many cases they were not particular as to who the land belonged to.[114]

The forest devastation part is forgotten too. Both parts need to be remembered; charcoal burning was part of the early history, culture, and economy of Mississippi, and part of that history involves the destruction of the state's virgin forests. Nonetheless, it is history that tells an interesting story.

[114] John H. Lang, "Coal Burners and Depleted Forests," *Daily Herald*, May 6, 1936, p. 6.

The Friars Point Coup and Aftermath: Historical Memory and Personal Character in the Era of Redemption

By William R. Sutton

Prelude

The Mississippi Delta—a two hundred-mile swath of extraordinarily flat and fertile land drained by the Yazoo River and its tributaries, the Sunflower, the Coldwater, and the Tallahatchie rivers—was originally an area of dense swamps, heavy forests, and languid bayous. The land was difficult to clear but profitable when it was, especially when worked by large workforces of enslaved people or, later, freedmen. Coahoma County lies in the northern third of this area and, due to its proximity to the Mississippi River, was settled early, after the Choctaw chief Greenwood LeFlore duplicitously sold out his people to the United States in exchange for protection of his antebellum slaveholding empire. By 1860, roughly three-fourths of the population of Coahoma County were enslaved, and the population percentages remained stable as they transitioned to freedom after 1865.

The Delta has long been renowned for cotton production and the blues, both inextricably linked by labor systems (first slavery, later sharecropping) enriching White planters (the beneficiaries of the cotton industry) and exploiting Black workers (the originators of blues music). While both cotton and the blues are still rightly celebrated in the Delta, the grinding poverty of the area remains problematic for residents and noticeable to visitors, like President Bill Clinton, who in 1999 came to Coahoma County in the heart of the Delta as one of the five areas highlighted in his nationwide Poverty Tour.[1] Predictably, Clinton celebrated the Delta's claims to fame and promised government aid to address the poverty, but, equally predictably in these public displays where historical

[1] Twenty years later, Coahoma County would still rank ninth in the entire country in terms of "deep disadvantage," a rubric developed to include health, education, and social mobility statistics as well as the usual measures of poverty. https://news.umich.edu/new-index-ranks-americas-100-most-disadvantaged-communities/.

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memory might conflict with the present, there was no acknowledgement of the historical dynamics that have contributed so much to racialized poverty in the Delta. It is the purpose of this paper, then, to explore one aspect of those dynamics as revealed in the story known as "the Friars Point riot" of 1875 and to draw attention to the effects of historical memory, as revealed in competing versions of the causes and results of the event itself, as well as in contradictory judgments of the ethics and integrity of the leading participants.

The interplay between race and poverty in the Delta is complex. For example, a year after President's Clinton's brief visit in 1999, Dorothy Jenkins, a former sharecropper and president of the Farrell-Sherard Habitat for Humanity affiliate, received word from the national office in Americus, Georgia, that her organization had won the coveted Jimmy Carter Award for the most productive small affiliate in the entire country. In an area recognized for its high rates of poverty and once considered by Habitat officials to be too small and impoverished to be viable, this recognition was a remarkable accomplishment. Farrell and Sherard are largely Black hamlets in western Coahoma County, and the unincorporated crossroads of Sherard shares its name with a remarkably successful planter family that has thrived in the Delta since eighteen-year-old John Holmes Sherard arrived in 1874. Accompanied by ex-slaves from the family holdings in Alabama and continuing for the next five generations, the Sherard family and these African-American workers labored, tied inseparably to the land and its cotton economy while occupying separate socioeconomic spheres and epitomizing the dynamics of paternalism, according to the exigencies of sharecropping and the mores of the Jim Crow South.[2] Thus, those present at Ms. Jenkins's public announcement of the prize at the Sherard Volunteer Center in March 2002 represented an interesting mix: a contingent of proud Black homeowners (Habitat partners whose hard work and hospitality had inspired countless observers), representatives of the Sherard family (wealthy planters who had donated land and the Center to Habitat), and a group of outside volunteers (people who would have once been known as "carpetbaggers").

[2] J. H. Sherard's paternalism was legendary in Coahoma County. Miriam Dabbs, "The One Hundred Years of J. H. Sherards," Here's Clarksdale 7 (Jan.-Feb. 1974), 6-7; Abigail Davis, "Race, Religion, and Reform in the Modern Mississippi Delta" (unpublished senior honors thesis, University of Illinois, 1997, in possession of author, 1-2).

Introduction

At the heart of this well-deserved celebration of community improvement in 2002 lays a darker tale. In his later years, John Holmes Sherard, the patriarch of the family donating the land for the Farrell-Sherard Habitat affiliate, had remarked humorously that Coahoma County in the early days was a jungle requiring him to "kill the bears and run out the carpetbaggers," with the latter category, of course, referring to the post-war biracial Republican Party that ruled Mississippi until it was ousted violently by White supremacist Democrats in the mid-1870s.[3] The key event in that process in Coahoma County, known as the "Friar's Point Riot," directly involving the young John Sherard,[4] followed a pattern previously established by groups throughout Mississippi known as "white-liners, "bull-dozers," or "tax-payers," in the infamous "struggle of the white men to . . . re-establish white supremacy in the State," by whatever means necessary, in the words of one of its proud instigators.[5] In Vicksburg, Yazoo City, and Clinton during 1874 and 1875, similarly orchestrated "riots" had driven Radical Republicans from office and killed hundreds of Black Mississippians.[6] White insurrectionists rationalized their extra-legal behavior by claiming that biracial Republican political

[3] Dabbs, "One Hundred Years of J. H. Sherards," 6.

[4] Sherard's involvement is mentioned by another young participant, George Maynard, who went on to become a widely respected lawyer in Coahoma County. George Maynard, ed., Memoirs and *Letters of George Fleming Maynard* (Privately published, Carnegie Public Library, Clarksdale, MS, 2003), 100.

[5] Frank Johnston, "The Conference of October 15, 1875 between General George and Governor Ames," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, 6 (1902), 65; Orville Vernon Burton, *The Age of Lincoln* (New York, Hill and Wang, 2007), 292-94.

[6] As Louisiana freedman and subsequent Exoduster Henry Adams explained to a Senate hearing in 1880, "If the colored men are attacked, they call it a riot, because they are killing the colored men. You never hear of the colored man raising the riot, because he never gets the chance. If he shoots at a white man, they kill fifty colored men for the one white man that was shot." Adams, in Dorothy Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen: Black People Tell the Story of Reconstruction* (New York, De Capo Press, 1976), 438. For more on Adams, see Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 71-107. See also Vernon Wharton's instructive typology of such "riots." Vernon L. Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890* (New York, Harper & Row, 1965), 221-22 and Nicholas Lemann, "Deconstructing Reconstruction," *Washington Monthly*, Jan./Feb. 2013. (http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/january_february_2013/features/deconstructing_reconstruction042046.php?page=2).

corruption was at the root of oppressive taxation and embezzlement[7] and that federal protection for freedmen had encouraged the ex-slaves to make secret Nat Turner-style plans to massacre innocent Whites. In reality, however, White supremacist goals revealed that the aspiring planter class was desperate for the re-establishment of an exploitable, controllable labor force to replace that lost with the abolition of slavery. As one Delta planter put it bluntly to one of his sharecroppers, "This plantation is a place for me to make the profit, not you."[8] This perspective was not lost on the ex-slaves: "[M]y people can never do well and generally become land-owners in the South. Our old masters will ever regard us as legal property, stolen and forcibly taken away from them, and if they can't get our labor for nothing in one way, they will invent some other plan by which they can, for they make all the laws and own all the best lands."[9] Of course, presumably as a result of the Union victory in the Civil War, the federal government held the upper hand in legislating postwar arrangements, but when the Grant administration refused to enforce its own laws, the new planter aristocracy achieved impressive advances in consolidating its power by the 1870s.[10]

When White supremacists in Coahoma County organized their rebellion in October 1875, they targeted Sheriff John Milton Brown, a heretofore respected Black transplant from Oberlin, Ohio, an evangelical Protestant hotbed of pre-war abolitionism. The leader of the attack on Brown was the chameleonic James Lusk Alcorn (erstwhile Republican, former governor, and current U.S. senator), one of the richest men in the South and a political opportunist par excellence, eager to regain his lost political power. Equally involved was James R. Chalmers (ex-Confederate general, former aide to the notorious Nathan Bedford Forrest, and deeply implicated in the atrocities of the infamous Fort Pillow mas-

[7] Republican corruption was "paltry" compared to Democratic excesses after Redemption because "conservatives simply had more experience in government in Mississippi and knew where the money was." Donald Mabry, "Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1865-75," *Historical Text Archive*, http://historicaltextarchive.com/sections.php?action=read&artid=587.

[8] Sydney Nathans, "'Gotta Mind to Move, A Mind to Settle Down': Afro-Americans and the Plantation Frontier," in William J. Cooper, Jr., Michael F. Holt, and John McCardell, eds. *A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 218.

[9] Albert T. Morgan, *Yazoo; Or, On the Picket Line of Freedom in the South: A Personal Narrative* (Washington, DC, 1884, reprinted by Russell and Russell, New York, 1968, introduction by Otto Olsen).

[10] Jared Black, "'Forcibly If They Must:' The Construction of False Justifications for the White Supremacist Revolution in Mississippi, 1875" (unpublished senior honors thesis, University of Illinois, 2011, in possession of author, 15-22).

sacre),[11] who was called upon by Alcorn to provide an extra-legal army to support his insurrectionist plans. As always, the stated rationales hinged on charges of political cronyism, economic malfeasance, and threats of Black mass murders of Whites. True to plan, only a handful of Blacks and one or two Whites died in the confrontation, but to "run out the carpetbaggers," in J. H. Sherard's memorable phrase, was an accurate description of the work of the White "Redeemers" involved in the Friars Point "riot." Also accomplished in the uprising and even more significant, however, was the economic agenda behind the illegal political action. At the height of the melee, as reported by participant George Maynard (and presumably within the hearing of his fellow combatant, J. H. Sherard), Chalmers's commanding voice could be clearly heard shouting the essential instructions: "Don't kill these negroes, boys; we need cotton pickers."[12]

[11] On April 24, 1864, the *New York Times* reported, "The blacks and their officers were shot down, bayoneted and put to the sword in cold blood. . . . Out of four hundred negro soldiers only about twenty survive! At least three hundred of them were destroyed after the surrender! This is the statement of the rebel General Chalmers himself to our informant." Cited in Richard Fuchs, *An Unerring Fire: The Massacre At Fort Pillow* (Rutherford, NJ, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984), 84. For more on Fort Pillow, see Andrew Ward, *River Run Red: The Fort Pillow Massacre in the American Civil War* (New York, Viking Press, 2005); John Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, A Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Bruce Tap, *The Fort Pillow Massacre: North, South, and the Status of African-Americans in the Civil War Era* (New York, Routledge Press, 2014); and James Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historical Sites Get Wrong* (New York, Touchstone, 2007), 233. Chalmers delivered his own self-justification to Congress fifteen years after the fact. James R. Chalmers, *A Personal Explanation by Hon. J. R. Chalmers of Mississippi, Delivered in the House of Representatives of the United States, May 7, 1879* (Washington DC, 1879).

[12] George Maynard in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library. In another version, Maynard quoted Chalmers: "Don't shoot, Boys. Let the poor devils go. We need them to pick our cotton. Wait until they pass, then we'll get on our horses and give them a good chase." Maynard to Mary Robinson, in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file. As Wilber Gibson, another eyewitness, later noted, "The cotton was all in the fields and if they had wanted to kill them, they couldn't have afforded to do so." Wilber Gibson in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file. After a similar White supremacist attack earlier in Yazoo City, Albert Morgan recorded, "It was proclaimed in the streets, 'Spare the niggers' so long as they behave themselves." J. S. McNeily, "Climax and Collapse of Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1874-1896," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* v. 12 (1912), 408. Chalmers's animosity toward the aspirations of freedmen was longstanding. His brutal conduct toward surrendered Black soldiers at Fort Pillow was well documented, as an eyewitness tentatively identified him even ordering the murder of an eight-year-old African American boy captured during the conflict. *U.S. Congress Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, "Fort Pillow Massacre."* House Report No. 65, 38th Congress, 1st Session, 5, 51.

Thus, there was in fact no massacre at Friars Point as there had been two years earlier at Colfax, Louisiana.[13] Sheriff Brown, however, was successfully run out of town, and, after narrowly escaping with his life, he moved to Topeka, Kansas, where he continued his civic service as an agent for the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association, extending opportunities to many so-called "exodusters" fleeing similar White supremacist violence that had resulted in his own ouster. During that same period, however, Alcorn, Chalmers, and other White Mississippians (including J. H. Sherard) had successfully solidified their control over every aspect—economic, political, social, and legal—of life in Coahoma County, instituting the exploitative system of sharecropping that would create decades of racial discrimination and disempowerment and would contribute to patterns of poverty that Habitat for Humanity would be challenging a century and a quarter later.

While the Civil War led to the abolishment of slavery, the decade following its official military end made it abundantly clear that the war's results were not accepted, especially in Mississippi.[14] The counter-revolutionary aspects of the incident at Friars Point in 1875, no surprise to historians of Reconstruction, was a significant moment in the long and calculated White supremacist project to expel Black leadership from positions of power and to deprive the freedmen of their political rights. An oft-neglected subtext to this story line, however, has concerned itself with creating historical memories and, ultimately, public memorials to make this insurrectionary and violent process appear much more honorable, both in terms of the reports of those directly involved at the time but also in the judgments of later histories.[15] This necessity, in turn, required the construction of a narrative of alleged injustice being corrected by methods, quasi-questionable to be sure but ultimately capable of rationalization. In this narrative, the personal moral character of the major agents becomes a focal point, and the conclusions drawn from these character comparisons continue to inform and justify the dominant interpretations of the Friars Point conflict. Thus, this incident (and its

[13] Charles Lane, *The Day Freedom Died: The Colfax Massacre, the Supreme Court, and the Betrayal of Reconstruction* (New York, Henry Holt, 2008); Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), 12-20; Bianca Zaharescu, "A Tale of Two Riots" (unpublished manuscript in possession of the author, 2007).

[14] Lehmann, *Redemption*, 241.

[15] Loewen, *Lies Across America*, 11-15; Douglas Overton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York, Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 346-57.

subsequent aftermaths) warrants deeper examination, both in the events of the "riot" itself, and in the ethical comparisons of the most prominent personalities involved—James Lusk Alcorn and John Milton Brown.[16]

Historiography

The historiography of Reconstruction in Mississippi has paid scant attention to the Friars Point incident. Both James Garner's 1901 study, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, and an extended article in *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* (1912) by J. S. McNeily, editor of the influential *Greenville Times*, entitled "Climax and Collapse of Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1874-1896," barely mention Friars Point and conclude that Reconstruction was a colossal failure due to misguided attempts to involve politically inexperienced freedmen prone to the machinations of opportunistic politicians like carpetbagger Adelbert Ames.[17] Of course, W. E. B. DuBois challenges these interpretations in *Black Reconstruction in America*, as he focuses on the economic aspects of Reconstruction, especially the planters' determination to use race as a way to exploit both poor Whites and Black sharecroppers, but Garner's work remained the standard interpretation and sustained the Lost Cause narrative.[18]

By the 1960s, revisionist historians proved ready to question the conclusions of what DuBois called "the southern white fairytale."[19] Vernon Wharton's *The Negro in Mississippi 1865–1890*, Otis Singletary's *Negro Militia and Reconstruction, and Herbert Aptheker's To Be Free: Studies in American Negro History*, question many of the myths surrounding the justification of White supremacist illegality, but the Friars Point riot and its protagonists played a supporting role to better-known incidents

[16] Alejandra Collopy, "Character Comparison in Historical Memory: John Milton Brown and James Alcorn;" Avanti Chajed, "Albert T. Morgan and Racialized Respectability" (unpublished papers in possession of author).

[17] James Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (New York, Macmillan Company, 1901); McNeily, "Climax and Collapse," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* (1912), 283-474.

[18] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York, Free Press, 1998).

[19] Ibid., 715.

in Vicksburg, Yazoo City, and Clinton.[20] More recently, William Harris's *The Day of the Carpetbagger: Republican Reconstruction in Mississippi* includes some coverage of the riot but unfortunately relies exclusively on James Alcorn's self-serving and disingenuous versions presented to the *New York Tribune*.[21] The most recent historiography of Mississippi Reconstruction emerges in the shadow of Eric Foner's seminal Reconstruction, with examples being Nicholas Lemann's *Redemption* (in which he argues that the struggle in Mississippi was simply part of the larger, as-yet-unfinished Civil War), Nancy Bercaw's *Gendered Freedoms*, (in which she recasts this conflict as a struggle over patriarchal authority rather than a contest over economic opportunity), and Douglas Overton's *The Wars of Reconstruction* (in which he exhaustively details the successes of White supremacist violence in preventing Black activists and their White allies from turning the promises of freedom into reality for the ex-slaves.)[22] Again, however, the Friars Point story is either short-changed or ignored entirely, and in none of these works is there any discussion of the character issue of the chief antagonists, Alcorn and Brown.

Though the staunchly anti-secessionist Alcorn joined the Confederacy purely to retain his credibility in Southern society, though he openly undercut the Confederate war effort by trading directly with the Yankees, and though he later masqueraded as a Republican in order to establish himself politically as well as to keep Black voters under control, his standard biographer, Lillian Pereyra, ascribes Alcorn's long

[20] Singletary gives the conflict a paragraph, Wharton, just two sentences (191-92) and, despite insightful treatment of the Vicksburg and Clinton troubles, Aptheker never mentions it at all. Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*; Otis A. Singletary, *Negro Militia and Reconstruction* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1957); Herbert Aptheker, *To Be Free: Studies in American Negro History* (New York, International Publishers, 1969).

[21] William C. Harris, *The Day of the Carpetbagger: Republican Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana University Press, 1979). Harris devotes only four pages to Friars Point, and he uncritically accepts Alcorn's version. But Harris in another work writes that Alcorn's corruption charges were "exaggerated, "as did James Garner. William C. Harris in Otto Olsen, ed., *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 95; Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, 320. See also Molly R. Smith, "The Friars Point Coup" (unpublished paper in possession of author, 14).

[22] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, Harper & Row, 1988); Lemann, Redemption; Nancy Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Household in the Delta, 1861-1875* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 2003); Overton, *Wars of Reconstruction*. Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003) mentions Friars Point as one of the "riots" that "seemed to epitomize the 'Mississippi plan,'" (p. 298) but also gives no details.

and convoluted political machinations to nothing more pernicious than his "persistent" Whiggery.[23] Similarly, in the most careful coverage of the incident and the personalities of its principal rivals, Linton Weeks highlights Alcorn's "mercenary mercantilism" and blithely concludes, "In other words, Alcorn's main concern remained the same as usual: enough war and hatred, let's get back to business." In addition, he finds nothing objectionable in the actions of Alcorn's ally, ex-Confederate general James R. Chalmers whom Weeks simply credits with "restoring order to the county."[24] In a surprising twist, however, Weeks (like many of Brown's contemporaries, White and Black) finds the sheriff a sympathetic character—particularly noteworthy since the other works either ignore Brown or facilely repeat the derogatory comments offered by his arch-nemesis, Alcorn.[25]

But John Milton Brown, it turns out, does not actually disappear from the historical record at all—mention of his career after leaving Mississippi, however, only appears in sources related to the history of African Americans in Kansas.[26] Randall Bennett Woods, for instance, in *A Black Odyssey*, calls Brown, with no evidence cited, "ambitious and evidently unscrupulous"—a "ruthless" politico, one of "a quadrumvirate of ambitious and colorful politicians" seeking control of patronage

[23] Lillian Pereyra, James *Lusk Alcorn, Persistent Whig* (Baton Rouge, LSU Press, 1966). Alcorn even manages to win praise from W. E. B. DuBois, who refers to the crafty politician as the "most advanced Reconstructionist" in Mississippi. Du Bois, Black Reconstruction, 436. And Kenneth Stampp calls Alcorn "a man of complete integrity." Kenneth Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction: 1865-1877* (New York, Vintage Books, 1965), 184.

[24] Linton Weeks, *Clarksdale and Coahoma County: A History* (Clarksdale, Carnegie Public Library, 1982), 54-57. Using a plethora of primary sources available in the Clarksdale Public Library vertical files, Weeks's locally published work is the basis for Nicholas Lemann's summary of the "riot." Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 13-14. Despite his centrality to the story, Chalmers has been largely ignored in this secondary record, with an exception being Ward, *River Run Red*, 369. Other authors mention his interrupted service in Congress, memorable for being overturned for voter fraud by a challenge from the Black politician, John Lynch. Robert Fulton Holtzclaw, *Black Magnolias: A Brief History of the Afro-Mississippian—1865-1980* (Shaker Heights, OH, The Keeble Press, 1984), 35. See also John R Lynch, *The Facts of Reconstruction* (New York, 1913).

[25] Weeks, *Clarksdale*, 43, 56-57; Lemann, Promised Land, 12-14. Steven Hahn actually quotes Brown's testimony before the Senate in describing the situation faced by the Exodusters, without mentioning his name. Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet, 359. William Harris discusses the careers of exiled Radicals after 1875, even some who ended up in Kansas, but Brown is not among them. Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 714-23. Neither does he appear in Eric Foner's list of Black Republicans run out by the Redeemers. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 607-08.

[26] George Maynard's laconic summation was "John Brown settled in Kansas and moved his family there and died." Maynard to Mary Robinson, September 7, 1929, in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file.

power within the "black and tan" wing of the Kansas Republican Party. Thomas Cox (*Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865–1915*) and Robert Ahearn (*In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879–1880*), on the other hand, emphasize Brown's acclaimed work with the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association, a reputable charitable organization that both helped thousands of Black emigrants and also allowed Brown to continue his respectable career as a race spokesman.[27] Tellingly, the authors do mention Brown's Mississippi career in passing, though they assiduously avoid any discussion of why he left. Thus, the complete narrative of John Milton Brown's exceptional career, which extends far beyond his ignominiously enforced exit from Mississippi, remains unwritten, despite the extensive testimony he delivered before a U.S. Senate committee investigating "the Causes of the Removal of Negroes from the Southern to the Northern States" in 1880.[28] Such an omission is truly unfortunate, because this story provides an important window into the character of the other antagonists in the Friars Point "riot" and into the subsequent public memories of Reconstruction and Redemption based on those personal comparisons.[29]

Coahoma County in the Era of the Civil War and Reconstruction

The Civil War touched the residents of Coahoma County the way war often affects people—no great battles, a glaring absence of martial glory, a few examples of individual heroism—but mostly reports of general disruption and the occasional acts of thievery and extortion against civilians by both sides. The official end of the fighting left the county in confusion and occasional conflict, with freedmen determined to appropriate their access to genuine freedom and White supremacist planters

[27] Randall Bennett Woods, *A Black Odyssey: John Lewis Waller and the Promise of American Life, 1878-1900* (Lawrence, The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), footnote 35, 209,16-18; Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Robert G. Ahearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-1880* (Lawrence, The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978).

[28] Woods, *A Black Odyssey*, 17; Cox, *Blacks in Kansas*, 57. This omission is particularly problematic in the latter work, as Cox simply states "John M. Brown, a black Topekan, emigrated from Mississippi in 1877" and then cites for this information, with no further comment, Brown's highly significant story about his flight from Mississippi in footnote 35 on page 57. Brown's forty-odd pages of testimony appear in *Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern to the Northern States, in Three Parts*, 3 vols. (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1880), 2:351ff.

[29] Orville Vernon Burton, "The South as 'Other,' the Southerner as 'Stranger,'" *Journal of Southern History*, v.74 (February, 2013), 15.

equally determined to return Black workers to their pre-war condition as an exploitable, controllable labor force.[30] And conflict did erupt on March 31, 1866, when one of those White planters killed an ex-slave in a labor dispute. The planter was former Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest, who in 1861, had left his Green Grove plantation (just south of where John Sherard would later establish his operation) to become one of the most begrudgingly respected cavalry officers of the Civil War. But, as mentioned previously, Forrest's reputation had been sullied during the conflict by allegations that his men (including his aide, James Chalmers) had cold-bloodedly slaughtered surrendered Black Union troops in the infamous Fort Pillow massacre in 1864—a crime many believed compatible with his pre-war occupation as a slave trader.[31] After surrendering to Union forces at Gainesville, Alabama, in 1865, Forrest returned to Coahoma County to run his plantation, worked by two hundred contracted freedmen when this fatal incident occurred.[32]

Thomas Edwards, the freedman Forrest killed, was every bit as hard-bitten as the ex-general; in fact, Edwards's reputation for violence included stories of animal abuse and wife-beating.[33] Just weeks before his death, Edwards had led the Green Grove freedmen in a dispute over the terms of their contracts, even contacting the Freedmen's Bureau for help, and Forrest had decided to reassert his authority over his work force by ordering them to clean the grounds on their Sunday off, which is when the altercation with Edwards took place.[34] As might be expected, many of the freedmen present objected strenuously to the killing of Edwards and forced Forrest to take refuge in his mansion, where he remained until local officials arrived to arrest him. Forrest

[30] Foner, *Reconstruction*, xxv-xxvi; James Loewen and Charles Sallis, eds., *Mississippi: Conflict and Change* (New York, Pantheon Press, 1974), 149-159.

[31] John Cimprich and Robert C. Mainfort, Jr., "Fort Pillow Revisited: New Evidence about an Old Controversy," *Civil War History*, 28 (December 1982), 293-306; Court Carney, "The Contested Image of Nathan Bedford Forrest," *Journal of Southern History*, 67 (August, 2001), 601-30. "His life was an incredible combination of hard work, shrewd dealing in not-quite-honorable professions, brilliant tactics, and racism toward Black people. These characteristics all combined help explain his success as a slave trader, general, and planter." Loewen and Sallis, eds., *Mississippi*, 128.

[32] Nine-year-old J. H. Sherard actually witnessed the surrender (in which James Chalmers was also paroled). Interview with J. H. Sherard, July 22, 1936, in "Nathan Bedford Forrest" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library.

[33] *Friars Point Coahomian*, April 20, 1866; Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms*, 117-18.

[34] Ibid., 135-37. The freedmen's success included a clause preventing White overseers from supervising Black workers, thereby impressing a Freedmen's Bureau official who commented, "I find that when one or more freedmen becomes dissatisfied, others are very liable to sympathize with them, in case one leaves, others will follow." Dan Pleck, "Timeline of Coahoma County History" (unpublished paper in possession of author, 2.)

was ultimately released on $10,000 bail, and after a cursory investigation, he was exonerated.[35] By then, however, Forrest had had enough of Coahoma County; he immediately sold out and ended up a year later in Pulaski, Tennessee, where he became the leader of a newly formed fraternal organization dedicated to White supremacy and indigenous terrorism, the Ku Klux Klan.

Despite his well-earned prominence, however, Nathan Bedford Forrest was not the most powerful planter in post-war Coahoma County. That honor went to the county's largest landholder and most powerful politician before, during, and after the Civil War—James Alcorn. Personally opposed to radical secessionists before the War, Alcorn decided to follow the path of least resistance in 1861 and secured for himself a commission as a brigadier general in "The Army of Mississippi," which was composed of state troops. After his unremarkable sixty-day enlistment expired, a disgruntled Alcorn returned to his plantation in Coahoma County where, except for one month of desultory militia service, he devoted himself to increasing his personal wealth by breaking the Confederacy's self-imposed cotton blockade.[36] As he explained forthrightly to his wife safely established on her family's plantation in northern Alabama in December 1862:

> I have been very busy, hiding and selling my cotton. . . . If I escape the burners I will be able to realize $20,000 or more. I am busy I assure you and am making my time count. I got back from Helena last night, took in two days fifteen bales and sold them for $3200.00 over two hundred dollars per bale, I am now selling at 40 cents per pound; in addition to the money I have on hand. . . . I wish, however, to fill my pocket—and should the war continue, we will spend our summer in New York—and leave them to fight who made the war. . . . If I live, and the sky should again clear up, and the political sea become calm, I can in five years make a larger fortune than ever.[37]

Always the astute businessman, Alcorn insisted that his northern buyers pay for his smuggled cotton in gold, and, by the end of the war, Alcorn was widely considered one of the wealthiest men in the South.

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[35] *Friars Point Coahomian*, April 20, 1866; "Nathan Bedford Forrest" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library.

[36] Pereyra, James Alcorn, 53-55; 68-69; Steven Yafa, *Big Cotton: How a Humble Fiber Created Fortunes, Wrecked Civilizations, and Put America on the Map* (New York, Viking, 2005), 170-71. His militia charge was to round up runaway slaves and Confederate deserters in Coahoma County.

[37] Weeks, *Clarksdale and Coahoma County*, 43; Pereyra, *James Alcorn*, 63.

As his biographer summed it up (with no sense of judgment), "His adroit responses to the challenges of the war years had enabled him to save a good part of his fortune."[38]

When the war ended, Alcorn quickly affiliated himself with the Republican Party. His political stance toward the freedmen was vintage opportunism—he favored Black suffrage for the purposes of political power and patronage, but privately disparaged any suggestion of actual economic or social equality between the races. Alcorn quickly won election to the United States Senate but was denied his seat in 1865 as Congress struggled to come to grips with Southern postwar intransigence. In 1869, Alcorn won the Mississippi governorship as a Republican,[39] but resigned in 1871 to take a seat in the U.S. Senate. In one calculated and effective move as he left the governorship, Alcorn established an all-Black college, commemorating himself, and named as president the respected Black U.S. senator, Hiram Revels, in the process maintaining a segregated University of Mississippi and removing a potential threat to his political ambitions.[40] During the next four years, he would be locked in a bitter battle with Radical Republican Adelbert Ames, a decorated Union veteran from Maine and a staunch proponent of rights for freedmen, with a strong aversion to political hypocrisy. In 1873, Ames defeated Alcorn decisively in the race for governor, as even Alcorn's own sharecroppers voted for Ames.[41] While the country continued to wrestle with the implications of political restructuring, racial equality, and economic recovery, the meanings of Union victory and Confederate defeat became increasingly clouded. And nowhere were these uncertain developments more conflict-ridden than in Mississippi.

The Counter-Revolution: Redemption in Mississippi

By the summer of 1874, the situation in the Magnolia State was getting worse for Black citizens. White supremacists, including James Alcorn when he was governor, had come to eschew the night-riding

[38] Ibid., 73.

[39] On a train ride back to Coahoma County from college in Virginia in 1867, George Maynard overheard a heated conversation between Alcorn and someone identified only as "Colonel," in which Alcorn clarified his reasoning in joining the Republican Party: to "save our people from being robbed by 'carpetbaggers and scalawags.'" Maynard, ed. *Memoirs*, 18-19.

[40] Holtzclaw, *Black Magnolias*, 100.

[41] Foner, *Reconstruction*, 539.

terrorism of the formally disbanded Klan but now armed Democrats publicly drilled in open defiance of the state government, its largely Black militias, and the increasingly disinterested federal troops stationed in Mississippi.[42] In Vicksburg, Yazoo City, and Clinton, White supremacists sufficiently subverted the electoral process through intimidation and outright violence, with an intermittent but half-hearted federal response. The apparent lesson of those last six months in Vicksburg—that unsubstantiated charges of corruption would be tolerated while outright terrorism might not be—was not lost on other Mississippi White supremacists.[43] This was the context in October 1875, as White supremacists in Coahoma County mounted a concerted effort to oust Sheriff John Milton Brown.

Brown, like other politically effective ambitious and idealistic sheriffs Peter Crosby and Albert Morgan, allied himself to the Radical Republican governor, Adelbert Ames.[44] Though Ames and James Alcorn remained implacable foes, there was no hint of overt tension between Brown and Alcorn in the early months of Brown's tenure, and a number of prominent Coahomans had posted the requisite bond for Brown to assume his elected position.[45] But that all changed in early October when White rabble-rousers began to gin up an incendiary discourse aimed at Brown specifically and Black participation in politics generally. According to James Chalmers, Brown "had been making speeches to the Negroes, advising them to prepare for a fight, and that he had secretly brought in ammunition," and Chalmers called on Whites "to prepare

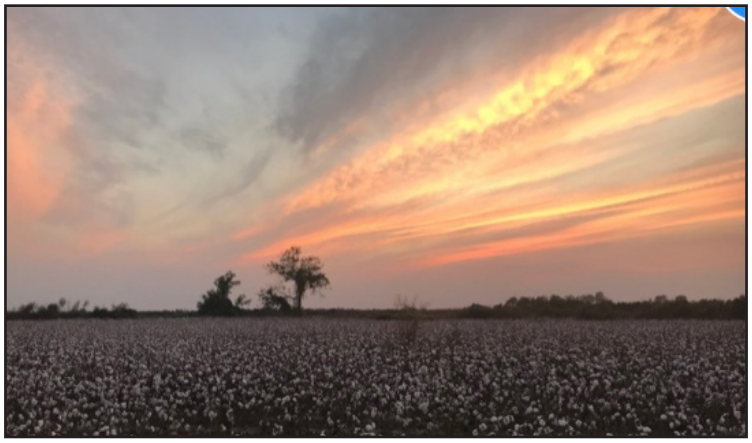
[42] Christopher M. Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse: African American Education in Mississippi, 1862-1875* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 160.

[43] Black, "'Forcibly If They Must'," 15-22; Foner, Reconstruction, 558-60; Holtzclaw, *Black Magnolias*, 44. One of the leaders of the Tax-Payers was Robert Alcorn, James's cousin and editor of the Democratic Jackson (MS) *Weekly Delta*. This was just one example of Alcorn family "nepotism" in the Delta. Pereyra, *James Alcorn*, 133 n. 30, 172.

[44] Reflecting on his decision to enter Mississippi politics, Ames later wrote, "[I]t seemed to me I had a mission, with a big M." Dunbar Rowland, ed. *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons*, 2 vols. (Madison, WI, Selwyn Brant, 1907), 1:85.

[45] McNeily, "Climax and Collapse," 283, 303-10. For the important role of bondsmen in attempting to rein in the power of elected but impecunious Black officials, see Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 256-59.

themselves."[46] Further stoking tensions, rumors abounded that Friars Point was soon to be visited by Congressman (later Senator) Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, a crafty Democratic leader who had made



Cotton field scene of Friars Point coup confrontation by Clark's Bridge over the Sunflower River. Image courtesy of William R. Sutton.

himself nationally noteworthy in a fawning eulogy over his longtime political opponent, the abolitionist and Radical, Charles Sumner, but who still raised the suspicions of Radical Republican and Black voters.[47] In the midst of this growing tension, Black and White Republicans met in Friars Point on October 2 to choose a slate for upcoming elections.

The end result of this activity was almost predictable. Alcorn publicly accused Brown of embezzling $4,725, planning to steal $7,000 more, and plotting to arm the county's freedmen in his attempt to create a corrupt political ring in Coahoma County. Brown promised to respond to Alcorn's

[46] McNeily, "Climax and Collapse," 399. The ex-Confederate Chalmers had become something of a local White supremacist enforcer during Redemption. When freedmen in Tunica County just north of Coahoma had rampaged through the town of Austin in August 1874, after a White man had been found innocent of the murder of a Black child, Chalmers led 300 armed White vigilantes to punish and arrest the offenders. Greenville Times, August 15, 1874, cited in Willis, *Forgotten Time*, 132-33; Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, 190; Ward, *River Run Red*, 369

[47] *Report of the Select Committee*, 2:352. Lamar may have backed out because he feared further agitation would cause Governor Ames to send in Black militia to protect Brown. That, in turn, might spark a violent confrontation that could force President Grant to send in federal troops—an intervention which the White supremacist leaders feared most. Singletary, *Negro Militia*, 94. A silver-tongued hypocrite, Lamar loved nothing better than to stir up racist riff-raff and then pose as the bastion of respectable reason in his quasi-apologetic rationalizations for their outrageous behavior. For more on Lamar, see Harris, "Mississippi" in Olsen ed., *Reconstruction and Redemption*, 92 and https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/lucius-quintus-cincinnatus-lamar

unsubstantiated allegations publicly, but before such a meeting could be held, word reached Friars Point on October 5 of Blacks aiming to "plunder and burn" Friars Point.[48] They were allegedly led by "General" Bill Peace, an ex-slave and former Union soldier described (by Whites again) as something of a plantation enforcer. He was said to be leading a small "army" of Blacks toward Friars Point on foot or mule-back and armed with pistols and shotguns.[49] In reaction to these growing rumors, Alcorn and Chalmers organized a similarly small group of Whites and advanced toward the bridge over the headwaters of the Sunflower River, southeast of Friars Point. There, joined by white-liners from Helena, Arkansas, and all under Chalmers's command, they attacked the group of freedmen from two directions and quickly scattered them, apparently killing no one in the process.[50] The Blacks fled southeast towards Clarksdale with Whites in close pursuit, but under orders not to harm their foes.[51]

For two days, chaos reigned after the White army got word that Blacks had murdered an uninvolved White man named Scott. In the end, Alcorn summed up the death toll of the "riot"—two Whites, one of whom shot himself accidentally, and five Blacks killed, with the murders of the latter all justified due to the evil initially unleashed by the nefarious Brown.[52] Brown, in the meantime, with help from White friends, had ended up in Helena, Arkansas, across the Mississippi River from his county. Denying vehemently that he was in any way the instigator of the trouble, Brown sent a flurry of telegrams to Governor Ames asking for help and asserting, "My county is in charge of an armed force. It is out of my power to restore law and order. I have been driven from my county by an armed force. I am utterly powerless to enforce or to restore order."[53] But Ames, under attack from all sides and deserted by the

[48] *Report of the Select Committee to Inquire into the Mississippi Election of 1875, with the testimony and documentary evidence* Senate Report no. 527 (2 vols.), 44th Congress, 1st Session [hereafter known as the Boutwell Report], 1:69-70. A similar report fueled White supremacist violence in Yazoo County after Albert Morgan's ascension, as the local paper confidently announced that Blacks were "coming in to burn the town." Morgan, Yazoo, 388. And, in Columbus, District Attorney Henry Whitfield reported a White attack on a peaceful Black parade and a subsequent "reign of terror, caused by an alleged combination of the negroes to fire the city." Bradley G. Bond, *Mississippi: A Documentary History* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 137.

[49] Wilber Gibson, in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library.

[50] Singletary, *Negro Militia*, 141.

[51] George Maynard, in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file. Clarksdale Public Library.

[52] Boutwell Report, 1:71.

[53] John Brown, telegrams to Adelbert Ames, October 6-8, 1875, Ames Governor's Office papers, MDAH, Jackson, MS.

federal government, had nothing to offer, and Brown stayed hidden, in fear for his life.

Meeting less than two weeks after the conflict, the County Board of Supervisors declared Sheriff Brown's bond void and declared that "John Brown is no longer Sheriff of Coahoma County."[54] The supervisors ordered a special election for November 2 (eventually won by M. L. Alcorn, son of James) while Brown made his last fruitless attempt to regain his rightful position.[55] After three weeks, however, it had become clear that no help was forthcoming and Brown fled the area.[56] Alcorn disingenuously concluded his summation of the affair to a subsequent federal inquiry, "The election which succeeded was peaceable. The [anti-Brown] republicans carried the county by a large margin." General Chalmers was equally smug in his summary, "We killed two negroes and wounded five that were caught with arms and pardoned all the rest. Sheriff Brown fled the county. The negroes swear they will kill him if he returns. All quiet now."[57] But what had happened in Coahoma County was not really a riot—it was actually an extralegal paramilitary coup, with the duly elected power structure removed by Chalmers's armed vigilantes and replaced by Alcorn's duplicitous allies. As a Republican who had observed the entire affair wrote to the Senate Committee later investigating the travesty of democracy, "The slaughtered dead of Coahoma speak in thunderous tones against the treachery of the pretended friend and betrayer of the negro—Alcorn."[58] But that portrayal—as accurate as it was—would not be the last word on the Friars Point incident. Instead, James Alcorn would immediately initiate a public relations battle to

[54] Board of Supervisors minutes, 150, in "Coahoma County—Reconstruction" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library.

[55] Ironically enough, Alcorn's "rebellious son" was one of the few White Republicans to support Brown, and Brown corroborated this to the Senate Committee years later. Boutwell 1:26; *Report of Select Committee*, 2: 382. Alcorn, obviously aware of this family schism, nevertheless lied about it in his Senate testimony in 1876. Boutwell, 1:67. This may well have been a reflection of Alcorn's unwillingness to acknowledge that he had lost control of his family, a point of immense pride in the paternalistic world of the Delta planters, and Milton would commit suicide in 1879. Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms*, 1-2; Pereyra, *James Alcorn*, 186.

[56] John Brown, telegrams to Adelbert Ames, October 24, 26, 1875, Ames Governor's Office papers, MDAH, Jackson, MS; George Maynard to Mary Robinson, September 7, 1929, in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file.

[57] McNeily, "Climax and Collapse," 399.

[58] E. Stafford to George Boutwell, June 5, 1876, cited in Foner, *Reconstruction*, 560.

legitimize the coup by justifying actions that one observer called "most . . . unjustifiable."[59]

The Opening Salvor: The Alcorn Version of "the Friars Point War"

Besides concocting the charges leading to the "riot," James Alcorn and his people produced a coherent narrative that utilized the coded language of White supremacy to defend their vigilante actions. The first report started sensationally, "Negroes threaten to burn Friars Point, Coahoma County, Miss.," and went on to repeat the essentials of the Alcorn agenda—Brown had embezzled, Brown had returned from Memphis with massive amounts of ammunition, and Brown had stirred up Blacks "with speeches" designed to convince them "that the whites intended to kill them."[60] In response, readers were urged to come to Friars Point, armed and ready to aid Alcorn and Chalmers.[61] Later reports began to shift attention (and the basic nature of the race-based discourse) toward freedman leader "General" Bill Peace, who like Thomas Edwards, had a reputation for martial organization and fierce independence. In the world of Redemption, however, these positive attributes became racialized and therefore condemned; in this new account of the fray, Peace was a neighborhood bully and, most tellingly, "a big, black Negro," with hatred in his heart and mayhem on his mind.[62] Emphasizing the race angle now also enabled Alcorn to de-politicize the process as he insisted that "both Democrats and Republicans" were "united to resist an incendiary effort on the part of Sheriff Brown" who has been organizing Blacks into

[59] Blanche Butler Ames, comp., *Chronicles from the Nineteenth Century: Family Letters of Blanche Butler and Adelbert Ames, Married July 21st, 1870* (1935), 211.

[60] *Memphis Appeal*, cited in *New York Times*, October 6, 1875. Though the *Times* dutifully reported this "news," it followed with a qualifying sub-headline, "The Danger Believed to Be Magnified." For the next few days, newspaper reports from Memphis and Helena (AR) sources were republished in papers all around the country, including *Hartford* (CT) *Courant*, *Atlanta Constitution*, *Boston Globe*, and *New York Times*, and *Tribune*.

[61] "The Sheriff of Coahoma County caused our town to be invaded this morning by an armed band of negroes. We drove them back. We are fully organized for defense, with Senator Alcorn and Gen. Chalmers in command. The Sheriff has fled the country. Send us aid immediately." *New York Times*, October 7, 1875.

[62] Fifty-five years later, Wilber Gibson would describe Peace in typically racist terms. "Dr. Peace had a good deal of trouble keeping the negroes from stealing his cattle and hogs in those days. So Bill suggested to the doctor to let him recruit a company of negroes and he would keep order on the plantation. This turned out just like things generally do when a negro is placed in power." Wilber T. Gibson in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library.

"armed bodies."[63]

With politics eliminated as a source of contention and the blame fixed squarely on Brown, Peace, and the Black population of Coahoma County, the public relations war over numbers (and the implicit threat of Black violence) kicked in. As the *New York Tribune* noted, Blacks outnumbered Whites five to one in Coahoma County, but the actual "riot" was initially reported as pitting seventy cavalrymen and forty infantry (armed, to be sure, with the latest Winchester rifles) against two hundred Blacks on foot or mules armed with shotguns and pistols.[64] Slowly, however, these numbers began to grow, until two hundred fifty Whites were challenging three hundred Blacks.[65] By October 7, however, reports had Black forces numbering five hundred, and in the very same article, citing new evidence from the Helena *Avalanche*, the number became one thousand.[66] Many years later, in the ongoing project to justify the necessity for White extra-legality, the number (referred to as a "regiment") would balloon to five thousand, roughly equivalent to the entire Black population of the county, according to the 1870 U.S. Census. [67]

James Alcorn's ability to access White fears and to turn the entire issue to achieving his own political interests led him to send a self-effacing telegram to U.S. Attorney General Edward Pierrepont, two days after the skirmish at Clark's Bridge.

> Having read several incorrect and sensational dispatches touching the recent race troubles at Friar's Point, I beg to assure you there need be no alarm for the peace of this county. Several hundred armed negroes who have been incited by an ill-tempered Sheriff, marched into our town and were rapidly repulsed by the whites under the lead of the most prominent citizens, who have been following up the armed bands of negroes and dispersing them with as little violence as possible, and urging them to go home. The mob has been dispersed and I think will remain quiet. There is no question of politics in this excitement. The whites are to a man for defense. Those of the negroes who have been misled are fast being reconciled.

[63] *Memphis Appeal*, cited in *New York Times*, October 7, October 8, 1875.

[64] Wilber T. Gibson in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library; *New York Tribune*, October 10, 1875.

[65] *Helena Avalanche*, cited in *Hartford Daily Courant*, October 6, 1875.

[66] *Memphis Appeal*; *Helena Avalanche*, cited in *Hartford Daily Courant*, October 7, 1875.

[67] *New York Tribune*, October 7, 1875; *Helena Avalanche*, cited in *Hartford Courant*, October 6-7, 1875; *Memphis Appeal*, cited in *Hartford Courant*, October 7, 1875; George Maynard, "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library; Wilber T. Gibson, "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library. The official population figure in the 1870 census for Black people living in the county was 5,381.

> A community of planters may be relied upon for the kind treatment of the laborer. The whites have made no demonstration of hostility toward the negroes of this county, but are anxious to cultivate the most friendly relations. My name has been most ridiculously associated in the matter. I trust you will not give credence to the share given me in this affair by the telegrams. Respectfully,
>
> J. L. Alcorn
> United States Senator[68]

Pierrepont was receptive to Alcorn's disingenuous claims; the attorney general himself had written Adelbert Ames just three weeks earlier, quoting President Grant's unfortunate capitulation to White supremacist terrorism to the beleaguered governor: "The whole public are tired out with these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South, and the great majority are now ready to condemn any interference on the part of the government."[69]

In a lengthy summation strategically sent October 12 to the *New York Tribune* and a week later to the Jackson *Clarion*, James Alcorn laid out the entire rationalization for the Friars Point coup specifically and for White supremacist Redemption generally. Entitled "THE FRIAR'S POINT WAR: AN ACCOUNT BY SENATOR ALCORN," the piece was provocatively subtitled "Sheriff Brown the author of all the mischief" and provided its national audience a picture of a respectable and wronged electorate reaching the end of its patience with longstanding political corruption. Alcorn began by explaining how "a number of wealthy planters, all Conservatives" became Brown's bondsmen "so that Brown might be controlled in the interests of peace." Even this, however, failed to stop Brown from establishing a political "ring for the plunder of the county" by granting multiple offices to his cronies and by coercing reluctant Black voters to support him, all of which had duly "alarmed the tax-payers."[70]

Six weeks prior to this dispatch, Alcorn alleged, Brown began agitating local Blacks in preparation for the upcoming elections, as he "stirred their blood by recitations of Clinton and Vicksburg."[71] In anticipation of similar potential threats in Coahoma County, Brown "urged

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[68] *Hartford Courant*, Oct. 8, 1875.

[69] Burton, *The Age of Lincoln*, 304-05; McNeily, "Climax and Collapse,"394-95. For Ames's disappointed response to his wife, see Ames, *Chronicles from the Nineteenth Century*, 183.

[70] *New York Tribune*, October 12, 1875.

[71] Black, "'Forcibly If We Must'", 15-34; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 558-62; Aptheker, *To Be Free*, 177-84.

them to arm themselves" because "the white man had had his day," and was bragging that the county now belonged to Blacks. To make the point clear, Brown "was reported to have brought a large amount of ammunition to the county." But the clincher came on October 2 when Brown's henchmen, according to Alcorn, forced a Republican nominating convention to endorse his corrupt ticket and reinforced the results "with the deafening noise of many drums" in an impromptu and intimidating victory parade through the streets of Friars Point.[72] In response to such aggressive tactics, Whites "now began to counsel for defense."[73]

October 2 was also the day that James Alcorn made his first public charge regarding John Brown's alleged embezzlement. In his dispatch, Alcorn claimed that Brown responded angrily to the charges and drew his pistol, but the presence of so many aroused Whites prevented any violence from erupting at that point. Brown did promise to reply officially to the charges, after being so urged by his White bondsmen, but the official reply, of course, never came, because on that Tuesday (October 5), "several hundred" Blacks, "armed with shotguns, pistols, and sabers" and "much excited by liquor" approached Friars Point threateningly. When Brown went out to "turn the negroes back," he encountered the "negro General" [Bill Peace] who allegedly "swore at Brown and threatened to shoot him for his cowardice." As a result, the Black force retreated for a couple of miles (to Clark's Bridge, south of Friars Point) to regroup and add reinforcements, at which point "nearly 100" mounted White men attacked. "The Whites charged," wrote Alcorn. "The negroes ran. Brown and Smith [a Black ally of Brown] threw down their arms and ran for life. Both escaped. No one was killed or wounded. The Whites pursued, and it was thought that the negroes had dispersed."[74] The Friars Point "riot, according to James Alcorn, was over.

The rest of the "war" was anticlimactic. According to Alcorn, Blacks under General Peace retreated across the county to Jonestown, where

[72] "Black Republicans had a custom of bringing drums to political rallies and banging on them. . . . But in southern plantation country drums carried a special charge, since for Negroes they represented an importation of African culture and were also useful as a potential means of communication between plantations. Therefore, for whites, drums conjured up the possibility of insurrection by the Negro majority." Lemann, *Redemption*, 152. See also Bond, *Mississippi*, 137 and M. Susan Orr Knopfler, *Where Rebels Roost: Mississippi Civil Rights Revisited* (self-published, 2005), 105.

[73] *New York Tribune*, October 12, 1875.

[74] Ibid. "Smith" was George C. Smith, a political operative who would later factor into Brown's Kansas story but was unmentioned in any other account of the incidents in Mississippi.

they instituted temporary chaos in that town, stealing ammunition from stores and "violently" threatening Whites there. Ex-General Chalmers, however, quickly disbanded these dangerous and lawless elements, and soon, "all was quiet." Alcorn concluded:

> Peace, the negro general, escaped. Not more than four negroes have been killed. One of these was brutally shot. He had come from an adjoining county. Added to the above casualties, two white men under arms were seriously wounded. This is all. The county is much disordered. We have lost a week's work, but believe there will be no further trouble, unless Brown . . . supported by the Governor, attempts to return to the county. Should this be done, I cannot guess at the consequences. You have the facts as I believe them to be.
>
> J. L. Alcorn, United States Senator
> Friars Point, Miss., via Helena, Ark., Oct. 11, 1875[75]

Though Alcorn had been careful to cite the obligatory rationalizations for the coup (political corruption, economic malfeasance, and the threat of race war waged against Whites), his conclusion inadvertently revealed the truth behind the Friars Point coup. As freely articulated by his cousin George, "[T]his trouble will cost the people, white and black, a great deal, as no cotton is being gathered, and every day counts."[76] But Alcorn himself remained optimistic as he asserted, "there need be no alarm for the peace of the country" because the "community of planters may be relied upon for kind treatment of laborers."[77] A year later, in testimony before a Senate committee investigating the abuses in Mississippi and with apparently no sense of irony at all, Alcorn would proclaim his "abiding faith in the bright future of our section of the country" where "the vicious will be restrained before the majesty of the law" and where "peace with all its incident blessings will abide with us forever."[78]

The Later Rebuttal: John Milton Brown Before the U.S. Congress

Five years after fleeing such "peace," John Brown's appearance before the United States Senate Select Committee (investigating the

[75] Ibid. Though this is Alcorn's only mention of outside Black agitators, within five years, this claim would become central to the justification narrative. *New York Times*, March 27, 1880; *Atlanta Daily Constitution*, March 28, 1880.

[76] *Helena Avalanche*, cited in *Hartford Daily Courant*, October 7, 1875.

[77] *Hartford Courant*, October 8, 1875.

[78] *New York Times*, August 17, 1876.

causes of the "Exodus" of southern African Americans in response to Redemption violence) painted a very different picture. In forty-one pages of sworn testimony, interspersed with hints of both humor and horror, Brown made it abundantly clear that the violence was a coup not a riot, and he received a sympathetic hearing from many of the senators even as he elicited antagonism and ridicule from others, especially Democratic (and ex-Confederate) Senator Zebulon Vance of North Carolina. Typical of the banter between Brown and Vance was an exchange related to the actual likelihood of Brown's assassination.

> Q [Vance]: Well, in all these troubles, you were not murdered?
> A. [Brown]: No, sir; I believe not.
> Q: When did you get back again; you were going to speak of that?
> A: I went back on a Saturday, once when I thought that everything would be quiet, and I asked for twenty days' time in which to fix up my business with them; and said that after that, if they were determined, I should leave the State, I would than [sic] go; that all I wanted was a chance to fix up my affairs; but I was informed that very evening was fixed for my murder; that men were gathered for that purpose, white and black both, and they intended to murder me that night; so I took the advice of my wife, whom was ill at the time, with a little babe, and she begged me to leave, and I took her advice, and went to Helena that evening.
> Q. They always managed to let you know what they were going to do, and to give you a chance to get away, it seems?
> A: Yes, sir; I had some friends there among both the whites and blacks. [79]

Brown's testimony started with his decision, back in 1873, to abandon his nascent teaching career at Hopson's Bayou in southern Coahoma County for the attractions of political office, being nominated for sheriff on a pro-Ames Republican ticket that included Alcorn's estranged son, Milton, for treasurer and a White Democrat for county surveyor. According to Brown, Alcorn had hated him ever since, "because I ran against his nephew [D. F.] and beat him for sheriff. He went against the [local Republican] party and I went for it. I carried our county against him. I had no particular bad feeling against him, but I knew that he had against me." This subterranean "bad feeling" would erupt in full-blown revolt two years later, as Alcorn switched allegiances again to join local Democrats who "had the names of all the leading Republicans on their dead-list," with Brown's name heading it, and "when we met they were

[79] *Report to the Select Committee*, 2:374.

to come out and take us out and hang us or shoot us."[80]

Brown's background discussion of the coup began with two separate incidents of racial violence in counties next to Coahoma (Tunica to the north and Tallahatchie to the southeast) that provided invaluable context. The first such incident occurred in Austin in Tunica County in the summer of 1874. A White passenger on a Mississippi River steamboat had taken exception to a Black man's singing and when the latter refused to stop on the grounds of his newfound social equality, the White man opened fire, wounding the man and killing his child. When the murderer was subsequently released on low bond, local Blacks objected and in the resultant backlash, led by the ubiquitous enforcer, James Chalmers, six Blacks were killed, with no White casualties.[81] The second incident occurred earlier in 1875 when three young White drunks from Tallahatchie County, with no legal authorization, had threatened to arrest a Black citizen of Coahoma County for allegedly voting fraudulently. The accused man ran, and the Whites shot at him but missed. In their intoxicated frustration, the young men then rampaged through a nearby plantation, insulting some Black women living there. Black representatives then demanded that authorities in Tallahatchie County arrest the perpetrators, but Tallahatchie Whites refused. With the threat of an armed confrontation looming, Brown successfully defused the situation.[82] But these situations would tie directly into the tense atmosphere developing in the autumn of 1875. More importantly, they provided a context for a more accurate assessment of Alcorn's misleading assertion that Brown had been encouraging Coahoma County Blacks to arm themselves and prepare for violence. Caught in a classic case of "damned if you do, damned if you don't," Brown directly addressed this disingenuous claim when he later referenced the Tallahatchie tensions. To the consistently obnoxious questioning of ex-Confederate Senator Vance who asked him, "And you said in your speech that they should prepare their guns, or fix them up and make them serviceable?" Brown replied:

> Only in this way. The Tallahatchie people had started over

[80] Ibid., 2:351-52, 392.

[81] *The Greenville Times*, August 15, 1874, cited in Willis, *Forgotten Time*, 132-33; Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, 190; *Report of the Select Committee*, 2:356-57. Chalmers, incidentally, as a Mississippi congressman, was in the audience during Brown's testimony, and corroborated points of it. Ibid., 2:377. This fact outraged Brown's Kansan co-worker, Laura Haviland. Laura S. Haviland, *A Woman's Life Work: Labors and Experiences of Laura S. Haviland* (Cincinnati, 1881), 493. See also Morgan, *Yazoo*, 439.

[82] *Report of the Select Committee*, 2:357.

> to murder them. I told them that I would not advise them to stand by and see their families and themselves die and be murdered, without resistance, without an effort to defend themselves. I told them to keep their guns in readiness; but not to make any demonstration until they were attacked; but that if these white men should come to pillage and to murder, I told them they had a right to protect themselves. But I told them to abide by the law.[83]

Senator Vance and Brown continued to spar throughout the latter's testimony. When Vance insolently inquired, "You think that a colored man is as good as a white man?" Brown retorted, "In every respect. If I did not, I would not be a Christian."[84] But when Vance asked Brown to verify Alcorn's entire *New York Tribune* statement to the committee, he inadvertently provided Brown with the opportunity to correct the record, and the former sheriff made the most of it. To the claim that he (Brown) had recruited General Peace, Brown asserted that, instead, he had in his possession back in Topeka "a written statement . . . given under oath, that I never sent for him." Brown also systematically carefully explained the origins and inaccurate interpretations of the allegations related to the embezzlement charges—charges made possible by Alcorn's relative, D. L. Alcorn, manipulating the records in his position as county treasurer.[85] But the most chilling parts of his testimony dealt with the violent and murderous nature of the coup—details completely ignored in Alcorn's white-washed version but corroborated in essence by later eye-witness accounts of the perpetrators themselves.

Whereas Alcorn's report placed Brown at the center of the tensions, Brown explained to the committee the various ways he sought to defuse the increasingly volatile situation. On the night before the confrontation, Brown approached the White leaders and told them, "If you are going to kill me, do so, but do not disturb the other people." This opportunity, however, did nothing to satisfy the White supremacist need for a scenario in which they could justify such a murder, so Brown went home unharmed. The next morning, as groups of armed Blacks and Whites gathered near Friars Point, the sheriff approached both "armies'" asking for immediate dispersal, but, instead, Chalmers and his men rode out of town to attack the freedmen and Brown left to seek the help of Tunica County Sheriff Manning in forestalling the violence. His efforts,

[83] Ibid., 2:383.
[84] Ibid., 2:386.
[85] Ibid., 2:381-3.

however, proved to be in vain; instead, Brown reported, after dispersing Peace's forces, the Whites set off on a terroristic rampage, murdering unoffending Blacks as well as potential leaders like Monroe Lewis, following a well-established White supremacist pattern of assassinating freedmen who could become leaders of Black communities.[86]

After listening to Brown's lengthy description of the coup and its deleterious effects on the majoritarian Black population of Coahoma County, Senator William Windom of Minnesota steered the testimony to Brown's work in Kansas among the Exodusters. When asked directly why freedmen were fleeing the South, Brown replied, "They generally give in answer three causes. They said there was no security for life, liberty, or property. This is about what they claim." When pressed for further detail, Brown elaborated on the travesty of the "shot-gun policy." "They say that since the war, and for the last few years especially—since 1875, I suppose—hundreds of colored men have been killed in the State of Mississippi . . . in riots and private broils, or have been shot down by white men, but that they never saw a white man hung or sent to the penitentiary . . . for killing a colored man; I know I have never heard of one." The ex-sheriff then concluded that "every colored man's life is at the tender mercies of the lowest white man in the community."[87]

Besides the lack of legal protection, Brown also explained the dynamics of racial discrimination devised by the planter-merchants and their lawyers in the exploitative system of sharecropping emerging among the freed population, and the concomitant refusal of Whites to admit publicly its illegality.

> They claim that there is no discrimination under the laws between white and black. The trouble is there is discrimination in the execution of the laws; if a colored man comes before court in a case with a white man the white man will get the best of it. They charge high prices for the land they rent. . . . The rent must be paid first, out of the crop; next in order comes the merchant's lien, owing for supplies furnished; this is arranged so as to take up all that has been raised on the place. . . . Just before picking time comes, the merchant sends men around from place to place to see how the crop is getting along; how many bales will probably be made. By this means the merchant knows how large to make his bill. He lets the

[86] Ibid., 2:353-54. George Maynard told in his memoirs of two Blacks captured by White troops after the death of the plantation manager, Scott, and subsequently executed. George Maynard, to Mrs. Mary Fisher Robinson, September 7, 1929, in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library.

[87] *Report to the Select Committee*, 2:361.

> colored man come and buy a few things, run up an account, charging four or five prices for everything. For instance, he will charge twenty to twenty-five cents a pound for sugar, for which you or any white man would pay eight or nine cents; . . . If the colored man refuses to pay the bill, which is as I have said, is always made large enough to cover the value of the entire crop, after paying the rent, the merchant comes into court and sues him. . . . And the colored men soon learn that it is better to pay any account, however unjust, than to refuse, for he stands no possible chance of getting justice before the law.[88]

But, of course, the Black man was still necessary to maintain as a source of labor; that was precisely why the exodus was considered a problem worthy of the Senate's time. Reminiscent of Chalmers's memorable instructions to his men to refrain from a Colfax-style massacre at Friars Point, southern planters still needed cotton pickers, and the freedmen were the first option.

Post-coup Aftermath: Alcorn, Brown, and Historical Memory

Despite John Brown's detailed report to the Senate in 1880, the conflict at Friars Point in October 1875 continues to be known, when it is referenced at all, as a riot of unruly Blacks intent on damaging the interests of Whites and threatening them with personal violence.[89] This falsehood was due to the success of the Alcorn narrative, and John Brown acknowledged as much in a critical exchange with Senator Windom at the end of his Senate testimony.[90] When Windom asked Brown, "Is not [Alcorn's] dispatch to the *Tribune* about the character of the dis[putes] generally sent North whenever there were any difficulties between the races in the South?" the ex-sheriff responded, "Yes, sir; that was the character of them, and that is where we lost the South. It was our understanding that dispatches like that were sent North and believed

[88] Ibid. 2:361-62. Yale anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, studying Delta economic arrangements in depth in the 1930s, estimated that three-quarters of the planter-merchants in the area routinely cheated sharecroppers. Lemann, *Promised Land*, 19. For more on this horrific dynamic, see Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice That Remade a Nation* (New York, Crown Publishers, 2008).

[89] Ibid., 13-14. See also wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarksdale,_Mississippi.

[90] "Senator Alcorn of Mississippi writes to the *New York Tribune* a clear and concise account of the outbreak at Friars Point from which it appears that Sheriff Brown, a colored carpetbagger from Ohio, was responsible for the whole trouble. The evidence all goes to show that in this case the whites have been the victims of outrage." *Boston Daily Globe*, October 13, 1875.

there. . . . These were sent to keep the eyes of the Northern people turned away while they got ahold of the States."[91] Besides presenting a skewed view of the incidents themselves, this narrative also made it possible for the public and posterity to pass judgment on the personal characters of the principals involved.

By scapegoating John Brown, the Redeemer narrative of the Friars Point coup deflected attention from contemporary Mississippians' conflicted assessments of the two White leaders involved, James Alcorn and James Chalmers. Despite being well known as a political chameleon and distrusted as such, Alcorn found "no barrier to his presiding over a Delta domain in a style befitting a prince" after the coup, just as he had promised his wife while he was smuggling cotton during the war, and was generally celebrated as a prominent Redeemer, as he worked tirelessly to promote funding for a levee system to protect the interests of planters like himself.[92] His main ally, James Chalmers, however, did not fare as well in the court of public opinion; after gaining a seat in Congress fraudulently and then losing that seat, even his own hometown paper concluded "Every honest man in this district knows that Mr. [John R.] Lynch was elected by over five thousand majority, and Gen. Chalmers counted in by fraud. When Congress meets and Mr. Lynch takes his seat, Gen Chalmers will have plenty of time to find out what a little man he really is."[93] Five years later, the paper continued its attack. "But ambition, or rather vanity, has been his bane. He is one of the ablest men in Mississippi and better informed on political questions than any other man I have ever heard speak. . . But for all that, he is

[91] Ibid. 2:361-62. Yale anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, studying Delta economic arrangements in depth in the 1930s, estimated that three-quarters of the planter-merchants in the area routinely cheated sharecroppers. Lemann, *Promised Land*, 19. For more on this horrific dynamic, see Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice That Remade a Nation* (New York, Crown Publishers, 2008).

[92] "Gen. Alcorn was a Whig up to'59, a Union man in '60, a secessionist in '61, a fire-eater in '62, a peace-man in '63, a growler in '64, a rebel in '65, a reconstructionist in '66, a scalawag in '67, a radical in '68, and a bitter-ender in '69," complained one political opponent (and that was before the conflicts of Redemption). Amos R. Johnston, *Speech of Hon. Amos R. Johnston, at Sardis, Mississippi, October 13, 1869, on Alcorn's Record*, cited in Pereyra, *James Alcorn*, 102. See also Harris, *Day of the Carpetbagger*, 715; *Foner Reconstruction*, 605, and James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 93.

[93] *Friars Point Gazette*, July 15, 1881. See also Elaine Gu, "John Roy Lynch: Epitome of Respectability" (unpublished paper in possession of author, 4-5.) In the aftermath of Fort Pillow, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles suggested that Chalmers, as well as Forrest, be tried for murder, but President Lincoln demurred. Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles in Three Volumes* (1911), vol. 2:25.

one of the most unreliable and dangerous men in Mississippi, and under his leadership, the ship of State would soon be wrecked."[94]

ßThe character defects of White supremacists, however, paled in significance when compared to their self-appointed negative referent, the allegedly pernicious John Brown. In the Redeemer narrative, Alcorn could present himself, ably aided by Chalmers, as a disinterested Cincinnatus, re-engaging politically only when his beloved Coahoma County was being threatened by a rapacious interloper—a man, according to Alcorn, who thrived by surreptitiously stoking racial tensions and succeeding in his schemes only through the Machiavellian manipulation of the easily misled majority. As fascinating as this picture appears, however, participants in the coup themselves explicitly rejected this demonized depiction of John Brown so painstakingly presented to the public by Alcorn. The lawyer George Maynard, a recent college graduate in 1875, recalled fifty years later that "most of us knew in Friars Point, that John Brown did not start the riot and was really opposed to it." Maynard's brother, Joe (a veteran of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg), in fact, was so convinced of Brown's innocence that he risked his own safety to insist on providing safe passage for the deposed sheriff through the armed White vigilantes who had been looking to kill him.[95] Another White observer, Wilber Gibson, similarly concluded years later, "Now John Brown was not a bad Negro, as I saw some of his checks to his bondsmen twenty years after he had made his escape across the river and out West where he had been successful. I doubt very seriously his getting [embezzled funds]."[96] Thus, the pretext for the coup—Brown's alleged corruption—seemed improbable even to his opponents in the power struggle. Instead, Brown's actions throughout the confrontation now appear exemplary—rather than risk an all-out race war, in which the unorganized and out-gunned Black community would likely fare poorly, Brown gave up his constitutional rights and, long after his coerced departure, insisted on repaying bond debts caused solely by the

[94] *Friars Point Gazette*, July 16, 1886. See also Rowland, *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History*, 1:390-91.

[95] Maynard to Mary Robinson, in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library.

[96] Wilber Gibson, in "Friars Point Riot" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library.

illegal violence of his White opponents.[97]

This picture of a frustrated and unsuccessful peacemaker came through powerfully in his Senate testimony in 1880. The real story of John Brown's character, however, becomes obvious in his subsequent career in Topeka, Kansas, where he established a small farm north of the city in 1877. Two years later, Brown joined the newly-incorporated Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association (KFRA) as its general superintendent, appointed by Governor John P. St. John, working alongside Quaker abolitionist veterans Elizabeth Comstock and Laura Haviland and local philanthropists, and performing "what they deem to be simple duty to a very much abused people."[98] In real terms, this meant helping the Exodusters find employment and suitable living situations in Topeka and other areas of Kansas, in order to assuage local fears that the refugees "would become a burden on the corporation of Topeka."[99] This action was part of the larger agenda to encourage respectable habits "through education, discipline, and moral training" among the refugees, as a way to refute the racism that so often plagued them.[100] During the first year alone, Brown estimated that the KFRA had helped 25,000 refugees from Southern states, and by the end of its operation, 60,000, with two-thirds of that number "in a destitute condition when they arrived."[101]

According to observers impressed with the work of the KFRA, John Milton Brown was at the very heart of the success of the mission. One admirer, after spending two days with Brown in an extensive tour of the operation, called the general superintendent "a colored man of unusual cultivation and executive ability" and commented about him, "We were

[97] In a final indignity, the Mississippi state legislature passed a bill in 1877, allowing the state to sell Brown's abandoned land holdings in Coahoma County to pay off one of his bondsmen, John Clark, James Alcorn's brother-in-law and the namesake of Clarksdale. H. K Sage papers in "Coahoma County—Reconstruction" vertical file, Clarksdale Public Library. This action provided the basis for a later slander in a Jackson paper. "John Brown, run out of Coahoma County after a 'race riot' during the campaign of 1875, six years later was declared to have embezzled a large sum for which his sureties were liable." Jackson *Weekly Clarion*, July 21, 1881, cited in Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi*, 169.

[98] Gov. John St. John to Horatio Rust, January 16, 1880, in Rust Papers (LM 504), Kansas Historical Society. St. John's selection of Brown also speaks to the latter's character, as the governor was explicitly worried about "charges of corruption against those engaged in distributing moneys and supplies." Woods, *A Black Odyssey*, 30.

[99] Ibid., 30; *Report of the Select Committee*, 2:359.

[100] Woods, *A Black Odyssey*, 46. See also Brent M. S. Campney, "W. B. Townsend and the Struggle Against Racist Violence in Leavenworth," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 31 (Winter 2008-2009), 262-64.

[101] Ahearn, *In Search of Canaan, 60; Report of the Select Committee*, 2:359; Topeka *Daily Capital*, March 19, 1881.

favorably impressed with his earnestness and devotion to the cause of his brethren at the South; and with his efforts to elevate and assist to an independent position those who had come under his care." His co-worker, Elizabeth Comstock, praised Brown as "our very able and efficient superintendent" and hailed him as "second only to Fred. Douglas [sic] as an orator."[102] As far as Brown's charges themselves were concerned, they could hardly express enough gratitude to the man who personified access to opportunity promised them but so long delayed.

When the KFRA finished its task of getting the first wave of refugees somewhat settled, John Brown turned his attention back to his fruit farm and began to involve himself in Republican politics again. In 1886, however, this decision inadvertently resurrected the ghost of the Friars Point coup, in the person of George Smith, a man of questionable reputation from Brown's Mississippi Reconstruction days.[103] Smith, a newly arrived ally of Edward McCabe (Brown's opponent for the state auditor's nomination), immediately dredged up James Alcorn's old embezzlement charges against Brown, as a way of clearing the way for a McCabe victory in the primary.[104] Brown responded vigorously to the charges, but subsequently lost the election and, in an unusual twist, sued Smith for libel.[105] During the much publicized trial six months later, the judge forced Brown to not only establish that Smith was lying but also that Smith's falsifications had actually cost Brown the nomination. Facing such obstacles, Brown still managed to convince eight of the twelve White jurors of the validity of his claims, even as he lost the case.[106] But, in the process, Brown also produced a highly creditable witness, J. B. Johnson (Speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives), who testified that, after making trips to Mississippi in 1881 and 1886 to check Coahoma County records, he could corroborate all of Brown's assertions of honesty![107] As a result of this manufactured imbroglio, then, John Brown had actually managed once again to enhance his hard-won reputation,

[102] Elizabeth Comstock, "A Circular Letter," in Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association miscellaneous documents file (LM 504), Kansas Historical Society; Comstock, "A Day Among the Kansas Refugees."

[103] J. S. McNeily named Smith as one of those who "went north with their stealings." McNeily, "Climax and Collapse," 456. The race was noted back in Mississippi, with Brown still condemned as a "defaulter." *Friars Point Gazette*, July 2, 1886.

[104] Woods, *A Black Odyssey*, 88-89.

[105] *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 6, 1886.

[106] *Topeka Kansas Daily State Journal*, June 28, 1886.

[107] *Topeka Weekly Commonwealth*, January 27, 1887; Topeka *Kansas Daily State Journa*l, January 25, 1887; *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 4, June 5, June 6, June 13, 1886.

with one local paper reporting their "hearty approval" of a man they commended for retaining his "individual honesty and capacity . . . even in the face of personal defeat."[108]

For the next ten years, John Brown continued to attempt to bring real political clout to Kansas's Black communities.[109] In 1897, however, he finally gave up on a quarter century of working for biracial Republicanism by joining the Populist-Democratic reform movement of Governor John W. Leedy.[110] One year later, with the advent of the Spanish-American War, Brown enlisted in the U.S. Army, and, in light of his previous service as colonel in the "colored" state militia, was commissioned as major of the all-Black 23rd Kansas Volunteer Infantry. Though his unit arrived in Cuba after the actual fighting had ceased, the troops participated in the repatriation of Spanish soldiers and the construction of various public works projects in the San Luis province and earned a reputation for being orderly and disciplined.[111] The unit returned in 1899 and at that point, John Brown retired from public life to attend to his prosperous one hundred-acre farm north of Topeka.[112] There, he became a leader in the Sunflower State Agricultural Association, an

Sherard commissary in Coahoma County. Image courtesy of William R. Sutton.

[108] *Topeka Kansas Daily State Journal*, June 28, 1886.
[109] Woods, *A Black Odyssey,* 104-05.
[110] Ibid., 115; Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 131.
[111] Woods, *A Black Odyssey*, 194.
[112] Museum of the Kansas National Guard, Historic Units. http://www.kansasguardmuseum.org/dispunit.php?id=32; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Kansas Negroes and the Spanish-American War," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 37 (Autumn, 1971), 300-13; http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/cool-things-african-american-officer-s-saber/16803.

extension service for Black farmers in Kansas, and continued to advocate for political and economic rights for African Americans.[113] He died on January 11, 1923, and was powerfully eulogized in the *Plaindealer*, Topeka's leading Black newspaper. In the death of Colonel John Milton Brown, the paper asserted,

> Kansas and America loses a great man who was faithful and honest to a cause and Race. He was a born leader. . . . He took the light of Liberty to Mississippi after the Civil War. He was Sheriff of Cohoma [sic] Co., Miss. and stood up for human rights. . . . He came to Kansas and superintended the Barracks in North Topeka where thousands of colored men came from the south and had to be cared for by friendly whites who gave money, food, and raiment. Col. Brown was one of the leaders who saw to their welfare. If it had not been for him Kansas would not have had near the colored citizens. . . . He is the last of the Old Heroic Race spirited [sic] who lived and worked for a Race in Kansas. . . . He was of the Fred Douglas [sic] type. . . . He bought a farm . . . over thirty-five years ago which has grown in value every year since. Some say they thought it was too much money to go into a black man's hands. . . Peace to the ashes of the last great colored man of Kansas of the old school who left a history of doing things and not all talk.[114]

Postscript

"We study history," asserts Douglas Overton, "not as a quaint exercise in antiquarianism, but to understand the present,"[115] and "the present" in Coahoma County remains rooted in the racial injustice of the past. Moreover, these patterns of injustice are manifested psychologically as well as socioeconomically, with monuments to White contributors sanitized while monuments to Black contributors remain largely non-existent.[116] Despite the clear evidence of John Brown's integrity presented by White contemporaries like George Maynard, Joe Maynard, and Wilbur Gibson (and presumably shared by their co-insurrectionist,

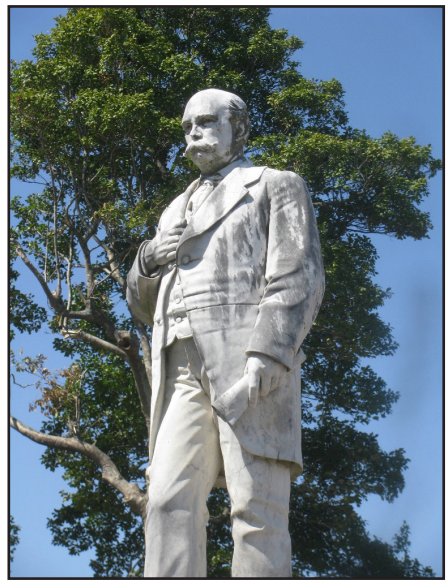
[113] *Topeka Journal*, December 9, 1914; Topeka *Mail and Breeze*, February 2, 1900; Cox, *Blacks in Topeka*, 157.

[114] *Topeka Plaindealer*, January 12, 1923.

[115] Overton, *Wars of Reconstruction*, 346.

[116] Selective historical amnesia is not unusual in the Delta. Not until 2007 was a marker erected at the Tallahatchie County courthouse in Sumner, to commemorate the infamous scene of the acquittal of Emmett Till's murderers. In that same year, the biracial Emmett Till Memorial Commission sent a letter of apology to Till's family, which begins, "We the citizens of Tallahatchie County believe that racial reconciliation begins with telling the truth. We call on the state of Mississippi, all of its citizens in every county, to begin an honest investigation into our history. While it will be painful, it is necessary to nurture reconciliation and to ensure justice for all." *Resolution of the Emmett Till Memorial Commission May 9, 2007.*

J. H. Sherard) and corroborated by the Kansas Speaker of the House in the Brown-Smith libel trial, and despite the tremendous significance of the Friars Point coup to subsequent developments in Coahoma County and the entire Delta, there is no representation of any of this in the White-dominated collective memory. In Friars Point today, there are



Gravesite statue of James Alcorn in Alcorn Cemetery in Friars Point. Image courtesy of David Bergvelt

three historical markers. One commemorates the origins of bluesman Robert Nighthawk, one marks the site of an old Methodist church, and one draws attention to a building slightly damaged by a Yankee gunboat when the house was sitting closer to the river. On a road between Friars Point and Clarkdale that approximates the route taken by Peace's scattered followers after Chalmers's attack is the memorialized location of the cabin (now reconstructed in the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale) where ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax first recorded the Delta farm worker soon to be known as "Muddy Waters" on his path to worldwide musical influence. A few miles in the other direction, on Highway 1, a marker proudly illustrates the folly and failure of the Union plan to dig a ditch to connect the Yazoo drainage to the Mississippi, so that Union forces could bypass the Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg. Ten miles south on the same highway, an old plantation commissary, appropriately marked, "Sherard, 1874," still functions as an office for

the largest operation in the area.

Farther east, just off legendary Highway 61, a marker celebrates James Alcorn as former governor, senator, and creator of the levee system that protects the area from the flood ravages of the Mississippi. Two miles further, atop an old Indian mound on the shores of Swan Lake in the family cemetery, stands a statue of Alcorn posing as the model of the heroic planter-patriarch, overlooking his sprawling Eagle's Nest plantation. But nowhere is there a mention of the Friars Point coup, nor, of course, is John Milton Brown (or any other "carpetbagger" the young John H. Sherard was forced to "run out"[117]) remembered.[118]

Though John Holmes Sherard played only a minor role in the Friars Point coup, his personal history shares remarkable similarities to John Milton Brown's. Sherard was born in 1855 and came to the Delta in 1874; Brown was born in 1853 and came to the Delta in 1871. Both arrived as vigorous and ambitious young men, both lived long and productive lives, and both persevered through significant trials and personal challenges.

Farrell-Sherard Habitat for Humanity (now Fuller Center for Housing) dorm in Clarksdale. Image courtesy of William R. Sutton.

Sherard, the White man, encountering no political or economic resistance after the Friars Point coup, built an impressive, still prosperous Delta empire bearing his name. He was involved throughout his life in charitable operations, including the founding of the Methodist Hospital

[117] Dabbs, "One Hundred Years of J. H. Sherards," 6.

[118] For similar contests over properly memorializing racial conflicts in Selma, AL and Charleston, SC, see Overton, *Wars of Reconstruction*, 351-57.

in Memphis, still one of the premier medical institutions in the South,[119] and his name rightly remains a benchmark of personal character in that section of the Delta.[120] The Black man, Brown, on the other hand, met so much resistance in his effort to access postwar opportunity that he was forced to remove permanently from the Delta, saddled with unfair bond debt, and bedeviled by interminable political whisperings. Despite these obstacles, Brown proved resilient and he, too, succeeded professionally and socially, becoming equally well-respected in his community at his time of death, but his name has disappeared in the collective historical memory. Moreover, where Sherard's ambition was celebrated and the moral ambiguities surrounding his empowerment through the results of the Friars Point coup were historically ignored, Brown had to fend off repeated attacks on his ethical character in regard to his success, both in Mississippi and in Kansas. Both Sherard and Brown were eminently respectable men, but, as so often is the case, race trumps respectability, so their stories are remembered very differently.

Regardless of the subsequent histories of Sherard and Brown, the racialized poverty that was one result of the Friars Point coup and similar White supremacist attacks on law and order in Mississippi during Redemption remains to bedevil the future of the Delta, and while it is never easy or comfortable to confront the present by unearthing a disturbing or contentious past, it is undoubtedly still necessary.[121] Though Coahoma County has made some remarkable strides in pioneering attempts to address the effects of poverty and to affect racial reconciliation through, for instance, the collaborative work of Habitat for Humanity and its successful Collegiate Challenge program (begun in the tiny hamlet of Coahoma and responsible for sending by now a quarter million college students all over the world to do Habitat work over their spring breaks), the work of addressing injustice through the

[119] Methodist Health Systems, *Building a Dream: The Story of Methodist Hospitals of Memphis* (Memphis, Taylor Publishing, 1986), 1-7, 16. The family dictum was "Never sell the family land and love the Methodist Hospital!" Interview with Maggie Sherard in Davis, "Race, Religion and Reform."

[120] Similarly, Sherard's co-insurrectionist, George Maynard, exhibited his personal character when he decided to accept the legal case of poor black farmers, Lewis and India Thomas, against prominent white planter, William Dickerson, in 1886. Vladimir Alexandrov, *The Black Russian* (New York, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2013) 16.

[121] Overton, *Wars of Reconstruction*, 350. For insights related to this dynamic, see Ward, River Run Red, xv.

proper memorializing of events remains to be accomplished.[122] How ironic (and perhaps hopeful) that, now, the descendants of planters (like the current Sherard family) and the descendants of sharecroppers (like Dorothy Jenkins), along with a new wave of volunteer "carpetbaggers" (like the ones whose research efforts have contributed significantly to this recovery of the historical relevance of the Friars Point coup) have found ways like Habitat to work together to alleviate some of the pernicious effects of its outcome.[123]

[122] William R. Sutton, "Challenging Legacies of Economic Oppression and Religious Neglect: Habitat for Humanity in the Mississippi Delta," in David L. Weaver-Zercher and William H. Willimon, eds., *Vital Christianity: Spirituality, Justice, and Christian Practice* (New York, T & T Clark, 2005), 212-24.

[123] James Loewen, *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited About Doing History* (New York, Teacher College Press, 2009).

The Piazza Brothers: From Italian Immigrants to Industry Leaders in Mississippi, 1853–1914

By Shaun Stalzer

Through hard work and industrious spirit, the Piazza brothers became successful leaders in the agricultural, tannery, grocery, restaurant, theater, and hotel industries in Mississippi during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They represented a select group of Italians who migrated to Mississippi during the antebellum era and preceded the much larger Italian diaspora to America that occurred during the 1880s to 1920s. Upon their arrival they faced significant social and cultural obstacles while they navigated a foreign country not always receptive to Italian immigrants.

Portrait of the Piazza Brothers[1]

[1] Undated photograph of the Piazza brothers. Public Members Photos and Scanned Documents, Ancestry.com. Uploaded on January 4, 2017. Available at: https://www.ancestryinstitution.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/9081525/person/6882701591/media/091ace56-821f-4cbb-8f58-c98ee8a560af?_phsrc=joR118&_phstart=successSource.

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Yet they established themselves as leaders in the business community for over half a century and became synonymous with the development of the towns of Crystal Springs and Vicksburg. This work utilizes a variety of sources to document who the Piazzas were, and how they became successful business leaders in Mississippi. The primary focus will be on three of the brothers: Natale (1830–1914), Frank (1835–1907), and Vincent (1841–1924). Appendix One provides brief biographical sketches of the brothers. Appendix Two provides a small sample of the performances held at the Vicksburg Opera House while owned by the Piazzas. Appendix Three is a list of the county taxes paid by the Piazzas in Copiah and Warren counties during this time period.

Photograph of Natale Piazza[2]

Italian Origins

The Piazza brothers originally came from Faenza,[3] a small city in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, situated at the foothills of the Apennine Mountains.[4] The city was built during the Roman era and is well known

[2] Natale is wearing an Order of the Crown of Italy medal in the photograph. Undated photograph of Natale Piazza. Public Members Photos and Scanned Documents. Ancestry.com. Uploaded on September 11, 2016. Available at: https://www.ancestryinstitution.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/61351519/person/48069433614/media/c3904ffc-4325-46d9-81a2-7fec1098e16d?_phsrc=joR118&_phstart=successSource.

[3] "Memorial for Natale Piazza," Findagrave.com. Memorial 13995551. Created on April 18, 2006. Available at https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13995551/natale-r.-piazza.

[4] "Faenza," Emilia Romagna tourism website. Accessed August 16, 2021. Available at https://emiliaromagnaturismo.it/en/towns/faenza.

for its ceramics and agricultural production. Little is known about the family's early history, but during the mid-nineteenth century Italy underwent considerable social and political upheaval that precipitated much of the Italian diaspora to the Americas.[5]

At least one brother, Natale Piazza, fought in the Italian revolutions of 1848-1849.[6] Military records are not available for the Emilia-Romagna region during the pre-unification era, but based on Natale's birth city, he likely served as part of the Papal States army fighting against Austrian forces.[7] Although the Italian armies were defeated in the 1840s during this phase of the *Risorgimento*, popular figures such as Giuseppe Garibaldi eventually led Italy to national unification in 1861.[8]

Italians in Mississippi

The Piazzas moved to Mississippi in 1853, preceding the height of the Italian diaspora to America from the 1880s to the 1920s. According to historian Russell Magnaghi, the first phase of Italian immigration consisted mainly of northern Italians who arrived in small numbers, became businessmen, or entered crafts, while being rapidly assimilated into the local society. This first phase matches the Piazzas' experience perfectly. In contrast, the second phase of immigrants consisted largely of individuals from southern Italy, especially Sicily, who often became laborers on plantations. The latter group experienced greater discrimination and even lynchings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[9]

Why was Mississippi a destination for the Piazzas and other Italian immigrants? The state's close proximity to New Orleans and the relative ease of moving up the Mississippi River certainly played a role. Moreover, Italians had a long connection with the history of the region, taking part in the Hernando De Soto expedition in the 1540s and serving in various

[5] John A. Davis, *Italy in the Nineteenth Century 1796-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a more comprehensive discussion of the aftermath of the Napoleonic Era in Italy, see Alexander Grab, *Napoleon and the Transformation of Europe* (London: Red Globe Press, 2003), and Denis Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

[6] "Natale Piazza is Dead at Age 83," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 28, 1914, p. 1.

[7] "Italy Military Records," Familysearch.org. Last edited on May 20, 2021. Available at: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Italy_Military_Records.

[8] John A. Davis, *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 132-153. For a good biography of Garibaldi, see Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[9] Russell M. Magnaghi, "Louisiana's Italian Immigrants Prior To 1870." *Louisiana History*, XXVII, (Winter 1986): 68.

capacities during the French and Spanish colonial eras.[10] An example from the early nineteenth century is Pierre Maspero (1771–1822), who was born in Como, Italy, and emigrated to New Orleans, where he opened the New Exchange Coffee House on Chartres Street. The coffee house became a popular meeting place for planters and merchants in the city, and an often told, but apocryphal story is that General Andrew Jackson planned the defense of New Orleans there in 1814.[11] These early Italians paved the way for future generations to live and settle in Mississippi.

The chart below shows the foreign-born Italian immigrant population from 1850 to 1920 at both the national and state level.[12]As can be seen, Mississippi represented only a small section of the Italian immigrant population in the United States. Remarkably, the Piazza brothers moved to Mississippi at a time when there were only a little over a hundred Italian immigrants in the entire state. Because of this small sample size, the Piazzas offer perhaps the best-documented example of these early Italian immigrants to Mississippi.

Italian Immigrant Totals, 1850–1920[13]

To continue this statistical analysis at the county level, the

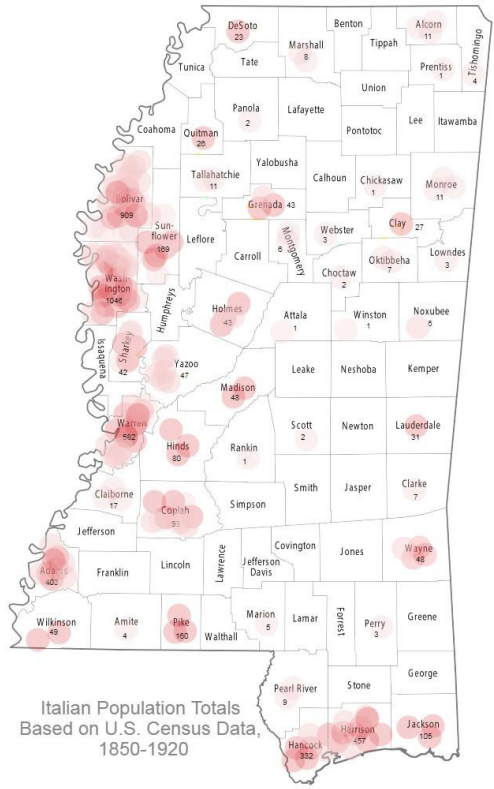
[10] "Italians in Mississippi," *Mississippi History Now*. MDAH. Accessed August 8, 2021. https://mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/italians-in-mississippi.

[11] Russell M. Magnaghi, "Louisiana's Italian Immigrants Prior To 1870." *Louisiana History*, Vol. 27 (Winter 1986): 43-68. Samuel Wilson, "Maspero's Exchange: Its Predecessors and Successors," *Louisiana History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring, 1989), 191-220.

[12] Campbell Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1950-1990. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999. Available at https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1910foreignbornpop.pdf. Each census year was consulted to gather statistics: 1850 Census, Table XV, Nativities of the Population of the US, page xxxvi. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850a/1850a-06.pdf. 1860 Census, Table 5, Nativities of the Free Born Population, page 271. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-22.pdf. 1870 Census, Table VII, Nativities by Counties, page 361. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1870/population/1870a-35.pdf 1880 Census, Table XIV, Native and Foreign Born Population by County, page 516. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1880/vol-01-population/1880_v1-14.pdf. 1890 Census, Table 33, Foreign Born Population by County, page 637-638. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1890/volume-1/1890a_v1-16.pdf 1900 Census, Table 34, Foreign Born Population by County, page 764. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1900/volume-1/volume-1-p13.pdf 1910 Census, Table I, Foreign Born Population by County, page 1044-1059. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1910/volume-2/volume-2-p9.pdf 1920 Census, Table 12, Foreign Born Population by County, page 543. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1920/volume-3/41084484v3ch05.pdf.

[13] Ibid.

Italian Immigrant Population, 1850-1920		
Year	**U.S.**	**Mississippi**
1850	3,679	121
1860	11,677	114
1870	17,157	147
1880	44,230	260
1890	182,580	425
1900	484,027	845
1910	1,343,125	2,137
1920	1,610,113	1,841



Mississippi counties with the largest Italian populations spanning this time period were Washington (1,046), Bolivar (909), and Warren (582). There was a large uptick in Italian migration after 1880, which coincides with the second wave of mostly southern Italians noted previously. This group largely went to the Delta counties to work on plan-

tations, although a significant portion also went to the coastal counties of Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson. These coastal counties are close to New Orleans and contain the cities of Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, and Biloxi. Coming in at number three on the list is Warren County, which contains Vicksburg, where the Piazzas eventually settled and established their business empire. The map on page 65 shows where Italian immigrants settled in Mississippi.

Mississippi Beginnings

The Piazza brothers emigrated from Italy and settled in Crystal Springs in Copiah County in 1853.[14] They started working in the tanning business and also were some of the earliest pioneers in the fruit and vegetable growing industry in Crystal Springs (the self-proclaimed "Tomatopolis of the World.")[15]

The Piazza brothers owned a plantation and vineyard of several acres a few miles south of Crystal Springs situated along the banks of Turkey Creek.[16] There are references to their growing tomatoes, grapes, celery, radishes, cotton, strawberries, and peaches for market during this time period.[17] Their greatest success came with the production of tomatoes and grapes. Their method for training tomato plants was described as follows:

> They have about two acres in the vegetable, and their mode of pruning was introduced here from Italy. The tomatoes resembled a beautiful vineyard and the golden fruit hung as thickly as clusters of grapes. The great benefit to be derived from this system of pruning, is the ripening of the fruit, nearly all at one time, hastening them into market early in the season before prices go down. All the laterals are taken out, and only one single plant allowed to remain, which is trained to a stalk—and the top cut off leaving each plant about two or three feet in height. The secret of the system is that instead

[14] "Natale Piazza is Dead at Age 83," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 28, 1914, p. 1.

[15] Copiah County Historical Files. Works Progress Administration County Files. p. 13. Available via the Mississippi Library Commission: https://mlc.lib.ms.us/wp-content/uploads/Digitized%20Microfilms%20/Copiah%20County.pdf.

[16] "Trip to the Country—Tomato Growing," *The Comet*, June 26, 1880, p. 4.

[17] District 1; Annual, Monthly and Special Lists: Records of the Internal Revenue Service, 1791-2006; Jan-Dec 1866. Ancestry.com. p. 55. Available at https://www.ancestryinstitution.com/imageviewer/collections/1264/images/rhusa1862_101906-00068?treeid=&personid=&hintid=&queryId=79d54751764f75d173af113c72d3bee7&usePUB=true&_phsrc=joR126&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&pId=7920165. "Vegetable Crops," *The Comet*, March 11, 1882, p. 4. "Paragraphs of All Sorts," *The Comet*, November 20, 1880, p. 4. "Raising Celery," *The Comet*, January 14, 1882, p. 4.

> of having so much superfluous foliage taken up by the plant it is thrown into the fruit. The French adopt a similar plan, but not so successfully as that of the Italians. Messrs. Piazza Bros. will net fully $250 per acre from this pruning system which calls for a great deal of perseverance and attention to make it a success. We learn that they expect to bring over several Italians another year; and embark more closely in this business which they seem to so thoroughly understand.[18]

During the late nineteenth century, agricultural production in the Crystal Springs area was aided by the expansion of railroads across the state. The completion of the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern railroad in 1858 offered service from New Orleans to Jackson, while the expansion of the Illinois Central opened up larger markets in the North such as Chicago in the 1870s.[19] This expansion proved to be a tremendous boon for the Piazzas' agricultural enterprises. One article summarized the nascent industry:

> "Tomatoes and other vegetables were being shipped north as early as 1876, but shipping on a large scale did not begin until a decade or more later. In 1889, Crystal Springs shippers sent a representative north to investigate markets and this was apparently the start of the really big commercial shipping operations for the Copiah city. Crystal Springs had a big advantage over its northern competitors. The Crystal Springs tomatoes could hit northern markets about the time northern farmers began planting."[20]

The history of the relationship between the tomato and Crystal Springs solidified as the industry expanded in the twentieth century. By the time it reached its peak in 1927, Crystal Springs was reportedly the largest tomato producing region in the United States, and in the 1930s the city began an annual festival dedicated to the tomato that is still observed today.[21]

The Piazzas were also prodigious growers of grapes. In 1873, they grew some 20,000 pounds of grapes.[22] Reports indicate they grew the

[18] "Trip to the Country—Tomato Growing," *The Comet*, June 26, 1880, p. 4.

[19] "Copiah County Historical Files," Works Progress Administration County Files, pp. 181 and 187. Available via the Mississippi Library Commission: https://mlc.lib.ms.us/wp-content/uploads/Digitized%20Microfilms%20/Copiah%20County.pdf.

[20] "Meeting Your Mississippi Neighbors," *Jackson Clarion Ledger*. February 6, 1955. MDAH. Subject Files.

[21] "The Crystal Springs Tomato Industry—Then and Now," *The Meteor*, May 20, 1992. MDAH. Subject Files. "Good Reason to Make Merry, Real Cause for a Jubilee," *Clarion Ledger*, June 24, 1932, p. 6.

[22] "Local Brevities," *The Vicksburg Herald*, August 16, 1873, p. 4.

Delaware, Ives' seedling, Concord, and Catawba varieties of grapes over the years.[23] The success of their grape production in 1880 is described in the following excerpt:

> Mr. Piazza has on hand 300 crates ready for shipping. A crate holds about 24 quarts or so many pounds. They are carefully cut and placed in the quart boxes, so as to show off the best advantage—put into the crates, and shipped to New Orleans or Chicago, wherever they command best prices. Grapes are now worth, in New Orleans, from 10 to 20 cents per pound. Mr. Piazza expects to ship between five and six tons. Those not shipped will be made into wine.[24]

Although the Piazzas moved on to other business ventures in the following decades, their contribution to the truck farming industry in Crystal Springs was significant. They perhaps did as much as any other family to bring the truck farming industry to Crystal Springs, and it was their success in agriculture that allowed them to pursue further business ventures in the state.

Saddlery Business

The Piazzas also entered the tanning and saddlery business in 1854.[25] According to Natale's obituary, the Piazzas operated saddleries in Crystal Springs and Clinton until the end of the Civil War and also

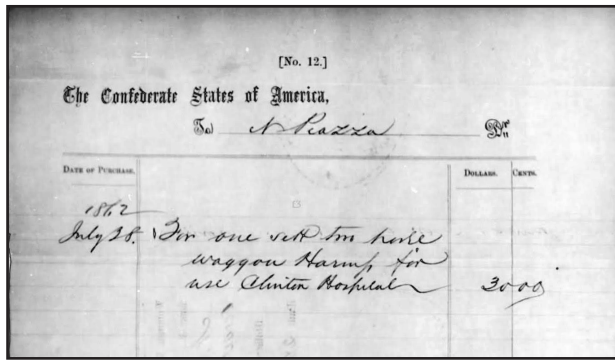
in Vicksburg after 1870.[26] Few sources document their work in the antebellum period, but during the Civil War, receipts indicate that they sold leather for shoes and saddles, as well as wool and horses to the

[23] "Trip to the Country—Tomato Growing," *The Comet*, June 26, 1880, p. 4. "Local Matters," *The Vicksburg Herald*, July 29, 1877, p. 3. "Local Matters," *The Vicksburg Herald*, August 16, 1877, p. 3. "Crystal Springs Correspondence," *The Weekly Clarion*, July 3, 1878, p. 3.

[24] "Trip to the Country—Tomato Growing," *The Comet,* June 26, 1880, p. 4.

[25] Untitled Article. *The Yazoo Herald,* October 27, 1876, p. 3.

[26] Natale Piazza is Dead at Age 83," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 28, 1914, p. 1.



[No. 12.]

The Confederate States of America,

To A Piazza Dr.

Date of Purchase.		Dollars.	Cents.
1862 July 28.	For one set two horse waggon Harness for use Clinton Hospital	300	00

Receipt for a Two Horse Wagon Harness[27]

Confederate army.[28] This materiel was important for the war effort, and the Piazzas likely stayed busy during the war years. For example, the voucher on page 68, dated July 28, 1862, documents a set of harnesses for a two-horse wagon fabricated by the Piazzas that was used for a hospital in Clinton.

Further research indicates that the same wagon harness was used by the Confederate army, which created a makeshift hospital on the first floor of Provine Chapel on the campus of Mississippi College in Clinton. Both Confederate (in 1862) and Union forces (in 1863) used the chapel as a hospital for wounded soldiers during the war.[29]

After the war, the Piazzas opened a saddle and harness business in Vicksburg on Washington Street. Records indicate that the Piazzas operated the saddlery from 1871 until 1911.[30] After moving to Vicksburg, Natale partnered with William Beaty, who had already been operating a saddlery in the city since at least 1855.[31] The Piazza and Beaty partnership lasted until 1873, when they dissolved the partnership amicably, and the Piazza brothers took over sole ownership of the Washington Street location.[32] In 1876, Natale also briefly partnered with Joseph L. Maganos in a sewed and screw-wired boot factory located on Washington and Crawford streets. The factory employed nine people,

[27] Ibid.

[28] There is no indication from military records that the Piazzas saw service during the war. "Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, 1861-65," Fold3.com. National Archives. Available at https://www.fold3.com/image/49792616.

[29] Walter Howell, *Town & Gown: The Saga of Clinton and Mississippi College* (Clinton, MS: Walter Howell Books), 131. See also Richard and Nannie McLemore, *The History of Mississippi College* (Jackson, MS: Hederman Bros.), 77.

[30] "Natale Piazza is Dead at Age 83," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 28, 1914, p. 1.

[31] "New Saddlery Warehouse," *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, July 7, 1855, p. 3. "Advertisement," T*he Vicksburg Herald*, December 6, 1868, p. 4. "Advertisement," *The Vicksburg Daily Times*, September 14, 1871, p. 1.

[32] "Dissolution of Partnership," *The Vicksburg Herald*, April 16, 1873, p. 1.

and its goal was to make Vicksburg the "shoe market of the South."[33] No mention of the success of the boot factory can be found, however, and Maganos had moved on to the saloon business by 1884.[34] Nonetheless, Natale continued in the saddlery profession and in 1896 furnished the Vicksburg Hospital with a regulation army ambulance that replaced an old vehicle worn out by an increase in malaria and smallpox cases in the area.[35] In 1911, Natale suffered a stroke and was unable to continue working in the profession.

William Tillman's Saddlery Store on Washington and Clay Streets in Vicksburg, circa 1861–1865 (one block away from where the Piazza's saddlery was located after the war).[36]

In addition to the saddlery store, the Piazzas also owned or leased a variety of other businesses during this time period in Vicksburg, almost all concentrated on Washington Street. These businesses included an opera house, hotels, a saloon and oyster house, a grocery and dry goods

[33] "Jos. L. Maganos & Co.," *The Vicksburg Herald,* September 1, 1876, p. 8.

[34] "Card of Thanks," *The Vicksburg Herald*, June 29, 1884, p. 4.

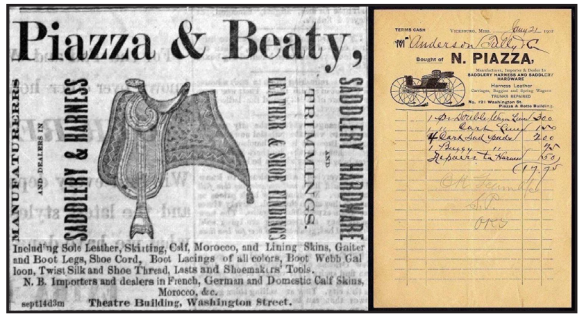
[35] "News Items," *The Daily Commercial Herald*, October 24, 1896, p. 6. "Ordered an Army Ambulance," *The Daily Commercial Herald*, August 4, 1896, p. 5.

[36] "Street view in Vicksburg, Miss.," Library of Congress, accessed August 15, 2021, available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2013649018. *Vicksburg City Directory*, 1860. (H. C. Clarke, Publisher), accessed August 18, 2021, available at https://sites.rootsweb.com/~holler/dir1860.htm.

store, billiard tables, barber chairs, a mineral well, and a cigar store.[37]

Saloon, Restaurant, and Grocery Businesses

Frank Piazza opened a saloon known as "The Bank" in late 1865 at the corner of Washington and Crawford streets in Vicksburg. It advertised the best brands of wines, liquors, and cigars and was located under the Vicksburg theater. In 1868, his business model appears to have shifted, as he began offering fresh oysters on the shell to patrons.[38] By 1873, he advertised fresh fish, oyster, and beef lunches every day, and offered families reduced prices.[39] On Christmas Day that year, he served oyster soup, roasted pig, wild turkey, and red fish.[40]


Piazza & Beaty,
MANUFACTURERS AND DEALERS IN SADDLERY & HARNESS
LEATHER & SHOE FINDINGS AND TRIMMINGS
SADDLERY HARDWARE
Including Sole Leather, Skirting, Calf, Morocco, and Lining Skins, Gaiter and Boot Legs, Shoe Cord, Boot Lacings of all colors, Boot Webb Galloon, Twist Silk and Shoe Thread, Lasts and Shoemakers' Tools.
N. B. Importers and dealers in French, German and Domestic Calf Skins, Morocco, &c.
sept14d3m Theatre Building, Washington Street.
Bought of N. PIAZZA.

Newspaper Advertisement and Receipt for Piazza's Saddlery Store[41]

The 1870 Census offers insight into the individuals whom Frank Piazza employed at the saloon-restaurant. He relied on immigrants and persons of color as well as other Italians: J. Cunio (bartender) and L. S. Lastaly (bartender), as well as Benjamin Buckearty (bartender) from France. The Black staff included S. Camper (cook), L. Bricksby (domestic

[37] The mineral well was on Vincent Piazza's property on East Grove Street near 5th North Street in Vicksburg. The water was sold for 25 cents delivered anywhere in the city, or 10 cents in person. Series 1208 Privilege Taxes. Record Group 29 Auditor. MDAH. The Piazzas paid taxes on the following businesses from 1870-1899: retail liquor, opera house, saddlery and harness store, hotel, merchant, pool and billiard tables, barber chairs, cigar store, and grocery.

[38] "Bank Saloon," *The Vicksburg Herald*, October 10, 1868, p. 2.

[39] "Piazza's Bank Saloon," *The Vicksburg Herald*, December 10, 1873, p.3.

[40] "Lunch at Piazza's Today," *The Vicksburg Herald*, December 25, 1873, p. 4.

[41] "Advertisement," *The Vicksburg Daily Times*, September 14, 1871, p. 1. "N. Piazza Business Receipt." Public Member Photos and Scanned Documents, Ancestry.com. Uploaded on June 3, 2019. Available at https://www.ancestryinstitution.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/9081525/person/6882701591/media/82a9b87b-90f0-4834-9a13-62a6e6e06a99?_phsrc=joR118&_phstart=successSource.

servant), and George Williams (porter).[42]

The Bank Saloon is not mentioned in newspapers after 1874, but Frank Piazza did open a grocery store at the corner of Cherry and Grove streets that he operated continuously until his death in 1907 (after which his son, John, took over the business).[43] Frank's brother, Louis Piazza, also owned a grocery and dry goods store on Grove Street from 1889 until his death in 1897.[44]

Frank Piazza was also president of the Italian benevolent society, Margherita di Savoia, a fraternal organization for the Italian community of Vicksburg. Although little is known about this organization, in the 1890s the society held an annual picnic at Magnolia Hall Grove four miles southeast of the city. The event celebrated the beginning of the Italian revolutions in 1848, and the society was named after the Italian queen of the same name.[45] Their tacit acceptance in the community was demonstrated by the notable guests in attendance: George S. Irving, president of the Warren County Board of Supervisors, and U.S. Representative T. C. Catchings. [46]

On the other hand, local merchant Vincent Bonelli also attended the picnic, which is of interest because in 1874 he and two of his brothers had to temporarily flee Vicksburg due to threats from a local lynch mob.[47] Such threats highlight just how precarious daily life for Italian immigrants could be in the South (a fact only confirmed by the rise of lynchings during this time). As Gauthreaux states, "The racial classification of Italians also became important to the southern white ideology. With these immigrants, nativists considered them white as long as they did not attempt to upset the white power structure in the

[42] U.S. Census Bureau, 1870. Vicksburg Ward 4, Warren County, Mississippi. Ancestry.com. Available at https://www.ancestryinstitution.com/imageviewer/collections/7163/images/4273809_00512?usePUB=true&_phsrc=slm153&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&pId=36486853. Additional genealogical searches for these employees yielded no results.

[43] "Frank Piazza & Son," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, January 17, 1907, p. 8. "Frank Piazza is Dead," *The Vicksburg Herald*, July 6, 1907, p. 5.

[44] "Burglary on Grove Street," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, September 4, 1889, p. 4.

[45] "The Society of Margarita de Savoia," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, June 16, 1890, p. 4.

[46] "The Italian Picnic," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, June 8, 1891, p. 1.

[47] "A Voice from the Departed," *The Vicksburg Herald*, August 18, 1874, p. 1. "Vincent Bonelli Returns," *The Vicksburg Herald*, August 20, 1874, p. 1.

South."[48] A second possibility was the threat of economic competition that such immigrant businessmen represented to the nativist members of the community. The Bonelli example provides too few details to know what happened conclusively, but other lynching cases of Italians offer more information.[49]

Natale as Italian Consul

Natale Piazza was also the Italian Royal Consular Agent for Mississippi, serving in that post for some thirty years.[50] The most urgent matter that required his attention during his term in office was the lynching of Italians in the region.[51] The number of Italians lynched in the South is estimated to be at least twenty-four, resulting from six separate incidents dating from the years 1886 to 1910. As consul for Mississippi, Natale Piazza personally aided in the investigation of three of these incidents: Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1886; Tallulah, Louisiana,

[48] Alan Gauthreaux, *An Inhospitable Land: Anti-Italian Sentiment and Violence in Louisiana, 1891-1924*. Master's thesis, (University of New Orleans, 2007), 14. See also: Alan Gauthreaux, "An Inhospitable Land: Anti-Italian Sentiment and Violence in Louisiana, 1891-1924." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 51, no. 1 (2010): 41-68.

[49] For more information on the concept of varying degrees of whiteness, see: Brent Staples, "How Italians Became White," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2019. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/12/opinion/columbus-day-italian-american-racism.html; and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Rac*e (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[50] "Natale Piazza is Dead at Age 83," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 28, 1914, p. 1.

[51] The most infamous, and best studied, case of the lynching of Italians came in 1891 when eleven Italians were lynched by a mob of nearly 10,000 in New Orleans after the death of police chief David Hennessy. For a more in-depth analysis of the 1891 lynching consult: Alan Gauthreaux, "An Inhospitable Land: Anti-Italian Sentiment and Violence in Louisiana, 1891-1924," Master's Thesis, (University of New Orleans, 2007); Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: The True Story of the Largest Lynching in U.S. History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977). Patrizia Salvetti, *Rope and Soap: Lynchings of Italians in the United States* (Bordighera Press, 2017). Jessica Barbata Jackson, *Dixie's Italians: Sicilians, Race, and Citizenship in the Jim Crow Gulf South* (LSU Press, 2020).

in 1899; and Erwin, Mississippi, in Washington County in 1901. [52]

The first reported lynching of an Italian in Mississippi occurred in 1886 in Vicksburg. Federico Villarosa, an Italian fruit vendor, was arrested for the attempted rape of a ten-year-old girl. After being taken to the county jail, the local sheriff requested that the governor send the militia to maintain order, but they ultimately failed to prevent a mob from hanging Villarosa from a tree in front of the jail. This case is notable because it was the only example of an Italian victim in which the justification for the lynching was an alleged sexual crime (as opposed to economic competition or the victim's ethnicity). The Italian-language press in the U.S. condemned the extrajudicial killing, stating that lynchings were typically reserved for those who had already confessed to crimes or who were found guilty in court. Despite protests from Italian officials and the press, no actions were taken against any of those who lynched Villarosa.[53]

The second example occurred when five Sicilians were lynched in Tallulah, Louisiana, just across the Mississippi River from Vicksburg, in 1899. The victims included three brothers, Frank, Joseph, and Rosario Defatta, as well as Giovanni Cirano and Guiseppe "Joe" Defina, all of whom were natives of Sicily, working as fruit vendors and grocers in the small Louisiana town. The three brothers were naturalized U.S. citizens, while the other two were still Italian citizens. Disagreements allegedly began with Dr. J. Ford Hodge over a goat kept by one of the Defattas, leading to a physical altercation, the doctor being injured, and ending ultimately with the lynching of the Italians by unidentified

[52] The six lynchings are Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1886; New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1891; Hahnville, Louisiana, in 1896; Tallulah, Louisiana, in 1899; Erwin, Mississippi, in 1901; and Tampa, Florida, in 1910. Lynchings of Italians also occurred outside the South: Louisville, Kentucky, in 1899; Denver, Colorado, in 1893; and Walsenburg, Colorado, in 1895. Additional attacks against Italians that are connected more with the history of labor protests and violence also occurred in Eureka, Nevada, in 1879; Ashdown, Arkansas, in 1901; and Davis, West Virginia, in 1903. See Patrizia Salvetti, *Rope and Soap: Lynchings of Italians in the United States*, (New York: Bordighera Press, 2017), p. 41-166. Jessica Barbata Jackson, *Dixie's Italians: Sicilians, Race, and Citizenship in the Jim Crow Gulf South* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2020), 83 and 101-126. Patrizia Famà Stahle, "The Italian Emigration of Modern Times," (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2010), 70-162. It is important to note that the number of Italians lynched is small in comparison to the data for African Americans lynched during this same time period (with one estimate placing the number at 3,446). Mississippi also led the nation in lynchings with a total of 581 for both races according to the Tuskegee Institute. C. W. Johnson, "Tuskegee University," Tuskegee University Archives. Available at: http://archive.tuskegee.edu/repository/digital-collection/lynching-information/.

[53] Patrizia Salvetti, *Rope and Soap: Lynchings of Italians in the United States*, (Bordighera Press, 2017), 42.

members of the community.[54]

Natale Piazza helped with the investigation into the murders of the five Italian men, working alongside Enrico Cavalli, a representative of the Italian consulate for Louisiana.[55] According to one source, "The investigators studied citizenship papers at the parish courthouse, viewed the scene of the attack on Dr. Hodge, examined the sites of the hangings and conferred with several witnesses to the grisly incident." Natale also paid the funerary cost to have the men reinterred in a Vicksburg cemetery.[56]

In his official communications, Natale noted the difficulties of getting any sworn affidavits as part of the investigation due to fears of reprisal from the community. He was skeptical of the local coroner and sheriff's impartiality and was incredulous that the people responsible for the lynching could not be identified in a town of only 400 people. He ultimately believed the lynching occurred because of ethnic animosity, jealousy of the town's merchants because of the success of the Tallulah Italians, and finally opposition to allowing the Italians to vote. He recommended that the governor get involved so that those responsible could be brought to justice.[57]

The lynching horrified the Italian community, and Italy sought justice for the families of the victims. Efforts were led by the Italian ambassador, Baron Francesco Fava, who unsuccessfully pleaded with U.S. Secretary of State John Hay to use his authority to have the state attorney general intervene. Despite assurances of good faith from State Department representatives, local officials were reluctant to investigate the matter and in the end none of the guilty were held responsible. However, after two years the U.S. finally agreed to pay an indemnity

[54] Edward F. Haas, *Guns, Goats, and Italians: The Tallulah Lynching of 1899*, North Louisiana Historical Association, vol. XIII, Nos. 2 & 3, 1982. See: http://sites.rootsweb.com/~lamadiso/articles/lynchings.htm. For a more complete description of what transpired see: *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, U. S. Dept. of State, (Washington, 1901), 440-466 and 715-736. Available via the University of Wisconsin: https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/EAQEQP7GTIAOM8F. See also N. Walzer. "Tallulah's Shame" in *Harper's Weekly*, August 5, 1899, p. 779. Available at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039259802&view=page&seq=1&skin=2021.

[55] "Tallulah Lynching," *Natchez Democrat*, July 25, 1899, p.1. Edward F. Haas, *Guns, Goats, and Italians: The Tallulah Lynching of 189*9. North Louisiana Historical Association, vol. XIII, Nos. 2 & 3, 1982. See: http://sites.rootsweb.com/~lamadiso/articles/lynchings.htm. "That Tallulah Affair," *Natchez Democrat*, July 25, 1899, p. 3. "Signor Cavelli Returns from Tallulah," V*icksburg Dispatch*," July 25, 1899, p. 4.

[56] Edward F. Haas, *Guns, Goats, and Italians: The Tallulah Lynching of 1899*. North Louisiana Historical Association, vol. XIII, Nos. 2 & 3, 1982. See http://sites.rootsweb.com/~lamadiso/articles/lynchings.htm.

[57] Patrizia Salvetti, *Rope and Soap: Lynchings of Italians in the United States*, (New York: Bordighera Press, 2017), 99-101.

of $4,000 to two of the victims' families. Even then, this indemnity, or "blood money," was only given to those who were still Italian citizens because the U.S. government refused to recognize any claims for those who were naturalized citizens.[58]

The third lynching occurred in 1901 when a father and son, Giovanni and Vincenzo Serio, were lynched in Erwin, Mississippi, in Washington County. Another individual, Salvatore Liberto, was also injured in the attack. The Serios were transient vendors of fruit and vegetables and were killed by rifle shots while they were sleeping outdoors on the roof of a house owned by a friend. The cause of this shooting supposedly arose out of an earlier altercation that resulted when a horse the Serios owned trespassed onto the plantation of G. B. Allen. This case differed from the other lynchings in that these men had not been accused of a crime before they were assassinated and some eight months had passed between the initial incident and their murders.[59]

The response of the Italian ambassadors and the U.S. government followed a similar pattern in each lynching case. Any protests by the Italian officials were met with statements of regret for the tragedy and the promise that everything would be done to find and punish the offenders. Yet while investigations were ordered by the governors of Mississippi and Louisiana, the local authorities refused to make any serious effort to identify the perpetrators of the crimes, and no one was ever charged.

The motivations for these three lynchings had notable reverberations for the Piazzas. Not only did Natale help investigate each incident personally, but the history and experience of the Piazzas, and in particular Frank and Louis Piazza, closely mirrored that of the victims, as they were all members of the grocery industry in their respective towns. The Defatta brothers had lived in the Tallulah area for at least six years prior

[58] "Italian Comment on Lynching," *Vicksburg Dispatch*, Juy 25, 1899, p. 2. "Government Will Pay Indemnity For Tallulah Lynching," *The Weekly Democrat*, October 17, 1900, p. 8. "Tallulah Lynching," *Natchez Democrat*, December 4, 1900, p. 4. "Tallulah Lynching," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, January 30, 1901, p. 2. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, U.S. Dept. of State, (Washington, 1901), pp. 440-466 and 715-736. Available via the University of Wisconsin: https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/EAQEQP7GTIAOM8F. Patrizia Famà Stahle, "The Italian Emigration of Modern Times," (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2010), 107. Available at https://aquila.usm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1965&context=dissertations. Patrizia Salvetti, *Rope and Soap: Lynchings of Italians in the United States* (New York: Bordighera Press, 2017). Available at http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/modlang/carasi/courses/0000000.SPRING.17.TEACHING/03.ITAL-AM.spring17/04.ITAM.COURSE.MATERIALS/ITAM.ARTICLES/SALVETTI.complete.pdf.

[59] Patrizia Salvetti, *Rope and Soap: Lynchings of Italians in the United States*, (New York: Bordighera Press, 2017), 111-130.

to the incident, and Frank Defatta had obtained significant commercial success in the local grocery business by owning two stores. The Defatta brothers' grocery businesses thus likely threatened certain members of the Tallulah community, which could have been a precipitating factor in the lynching.[60] These tragedies must have deeply resonated with the Piazzas, given their similarities with the victims and the tangible threat to their very way of life.

The Theater Business

Success in the agriculture, tanning, and restaurant businesses allowed the Piazzas to expand their empire to include ownership of the Vicksburg Opera House. As owner, Natale Piazza attempted to provide the best theatrical entertainment for the city by soliciting the most popular performers available and by improving the physical appearance of the theater. His ownership lasted from 1869, when he first took over, until 1898 when a fire destroyed the building and he moved on to other ventures.[61]

Various predecessors to the Vicksburg Opera House had existed on the corner of Washington and Crawford streets during the nineteenth century. From 1853 to 1869, the theater at this location was commonly referred to as Apollo Hall, although it was also called Washington Hall and the Vicksburg Theater in local newspapers.[62] From 1870 to 1872, it was also known as Thompson's Opera House after the then lessee and manager, J. W. Thompson.[63]

Theater in Vicksburg dated back to at least 1836.[64] Although Natchez had the more established theatrical community in the antebellum era, by mid-century Vicksburg garnered considerable attention from traveling stage companies and performers. In general, theatrical troupes from larger cities in the North, and also from Europe, visited Vicksburg

[60] Jessica Barbata Jackson, *Dixie's Italians: Sicilians, Race, and Citizenship in the Jim Crow Gulf South* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2020), 83.

[61] "Notice," *The Vicksburg Herald*, November 19, 1869, p. 2.

[62] "The Campbells are Coming," *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, December 13, 1854, p. 2. "Untitled," *The Vicksburg Herald*, September 28, 1869, p. 3. "P. F. Edwards Advertisement," *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, February 6, 1855, p. 4. "A. Waltemeyer Advertisement," *The Vicksburg Daily Times*, February 22, 1868, p. 4.

[63] "The City," *The Vicksburg Daily Times*, September 14, 1870, p. 1.

[64] James Smith Ferguson, "A History of Music in Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1820-1900," (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 1970), 77. For examples of early broadsides for the Vicksburg Theater in 1838 see: "Broadsides Collection," Images 1710-1713, MDAH, Available at: https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/broadsides/detail/532422.

during the late fall through spring months on established circuits that followed major transportation lines throughout the South.[65]

Theater in the nineteenth century consisted of a variety of popular performances, including operas, dramas, tragedies, minstrel shows, pantomimes, concerts, circuses, comedies, burlesques, brass bands, magic acts, lectures, and photographic exhibitions. Countless performances were held at the Vicksburg Opera House during its reign as the leading entertainment venue in the city. A small sample of advertised performances (see Appendix Two) in Vicksburg newspapers demonstrate the type and variety of acts at the theater. Such performances were generally not by local performers, but by traveling theatrical troupes.[66]

From 1869 to 1898, when Natale Piazza and his business partner, James Botto, owned the Vicksburg Opera House, they utilized two methods to improve the theater and attract more patrons. The first involved frequently renovating the building to make it more aesthetically appealing to audiences, while the second involved attempting to secure the best and most popular performers of their day.[67]

In 1873 they made repairs and improvements to the opera house, which included bringing an artist from New Orleans to create scenery for the stage and building a secondary egress into the back alley in order to alleviate concerns in case of fire.[68] In 1884, a carpenter from Chicago was hired to build scenery, and a new drop curtain was installed with a landscape design in the center surrounded by twenty spaces for local advertisements.[69] Also at this time, notable local architect William Stanton was hired to raise the front of the building thirty feet to accommodate the

[65] Guy Herbert Keeton, "The Theatre in Mississippi From 1840 to 1870," (PhD Diss., Louisiana State University, 1979), 25.

[66] For a discussion of the history of minstrelsy consult the following: Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Annemarie Bean, James Vernon Hatch, and Brooks McNamara. *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996); and Frank Davidson Costellow, "The Rise, Development, Decline, and Influence of the American Minstrel Show," (PhD diss., New York University, 1952.

[67] James Botto served as a bookkeeper and secured performances for the opera house. U.S. Census Bureau, 1900. Vicksburg Ward 4, Warren County, Mississippi. Ancestry.com. Available at https://www.ancestryinstitution.com/imageviewer/collections/7602/images/4120352_00281?usePUB=true&_phsrc=slm154&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&pId=28454641.

[68] "Local Brevities," *The Vicksburg Herald*, August 20, 1873, p. 4.

[69] "The Opera House," *The Vicksburg Herald*, September 19, 1884, p. 4.

construction of an ornamental frontispiece.[70] Further additions included new scenery, ornamental gold leaf painting, a guard chain on the front of the stage, chandeliers brought in from Cincinnati, elegant scarlet and blue lambrequins made for the box seating, and new curtains.[71] In 1887, new scenery was painted by St. Louis artists, which included a gothic room, plain room, parlor scene, and a Romeo and Juliet balcony scene.[72] Renovations thus occurred frequently, and helped to improve the overall experience for theatergoers.

One of the main concerns for Piazza and Botto was procuring what they considered family-friendly acts for audiences on a regular basis. For example, Piazza and Botto canceled a scheduled performance of an all-female minstrel company, "Adamless Eden," because of its "questionable character".[73] The exact nature of the show is difficult to gauge from available sources, but in 1887, the show returned to Vicksburg at a rival theater.[74] Reviews for the 1887 show noted that the performers "give far better entertainment than their predecessors. Nearly all the members are talented either vocally or instrumentally. The girls are younger and ever so much better looking than those of the other party."[75]

Natale Piazza advocated the arrest of unruly audience members on two separate occasions. In 1881, the Piazzas petitioned the city police to arrest any person who interfered with the entrance to the theater (no indication was given as to why).[76] More directly, in an 1896 editorial entitled "A Public Annoyance," one journalist noted the "disgust of the better element . . . for some of the obstreperous occupants of the gallery." Asked what should be done about the disturbances, Natale stated that if a few of the disorderly could be arrested and fined, then such behavior might be curbed.[77]

The Piazza Opera House burned on April 4, 1898. According to newspapers, the fire started in S. O. Pitt's drug store on the first floor, followed by the Piazza harness factory and buggy warehouse. Natale

[70] "A First Class Opera House at Last," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, May 26 1884, p. 4. "Our Theatre," *The Vicksburg Herald*, June 10, 1884, p. 4. For more information on architect William Stanton, see: ELMALVANEY, "Architects of Mississippi: William Stanton," Preservation in Mississippi Blog, January 5, 2012. Available at https://misspreservation.com/2012/01/05/mississippi-architects-william-stanton/.

[71] "The Opera-House," *The Vicksburg Herald*, September 23, 1885, p. 4.

[72] "The Opera House," *The Vicksburg Herald*, September 3, 1887, p. 3.

[73] "Not in Vicksburg," *The Vicksburg Herald,* November 13, 1884, p. 4.

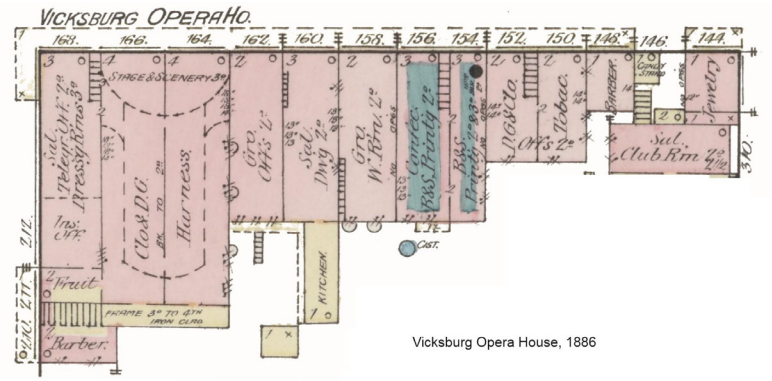
[74] "People's Theater Advertisement," *The Vicksburg Herald*, January 26, 1887, 4.

[75]"An Adamless Eden," *The Vicksburg Herald,* January 27, 1887, p. 4.

[76] Untitled Article. *The Vicksburg Herald*, October 18, 1881, p. 3.

[77] "A Public Annoyance," *The Daily Commercial Herald*, October 28, 1896, p. 5.

had a large stock of carriages, buggies, saddles, harnesses, and other merchandise estimated at $8,000 in value destroyed in the fire. The second floor included offices rented to doctors and insurance brokers. The third floor was the opera house. Natale Piazza was asleep in his private room on the third floor and nearly lost his life in the fire.[78] He only had insurance coverage of $15,000 for the entire building, while total damages were estimated at $125,000.[79]



1886 Sanborn Insurance Map for the Vicksburg Opera House.[80]

After the fire destroyed the opera house, there was some interest in the community to rebuild, but Natale and his associate, James Botto, decided to construct an office building at the same location instead.[81] The Piazza and Botto building was constructed by H. L. Lewman of Louisville, Kentucky, and completed in early 1899.[82] Some of its first tenants were the Postal Telegraph Company, the Merchants National Bank, and Piazza's saddle and harness shop.[83]

[78] "Opera House Burned," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, April 5, 1898, p. 4.

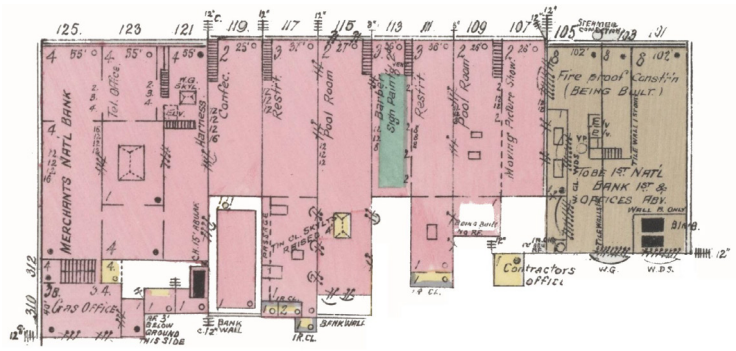
[79] "Opera House in Flames," *Vicksburg Dispatch,* April 5, 1898, p.4. "Editorial Brevities," *Weekly Clarion Ledger*, April 14, 1898, p. 2.

[80] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Vicksburg, Warren County, Mississippi. Sanborn Map Company, April, 1886. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn04536_001/.

[81] "Natale Piazza is Dead at Age 83," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 28, 1914, p. 1.

[82] ELMALVANEY, "Builder Pics: M. T. Lewman & Co.," *Preservation in Mississippi Blog*, February 24, 2011. Available at https://misspreservation.com/2011/02/24/builder-pics-the-lewmans/.

[83] "Local Lines," *Vicksburg Evening Post,* April 19, 1899, p. 4.



1907 Sanborn Insurance Map for Washington and West Crawford streets. Notice the Opera House replaced by the Merchants National Bank and the soon-to-be built 1st National Bank.[84]

The Hotel Business

The Piazzas also entered the hotel industry, further cementing their status as leaders in the Vicksburg community. Vincent Piazza opened the Pacific Hotel located on Washington and Veto streets in 1879.[85] The hotel was centrally located next to the railroad depot, landing, and telegraph/exchange offices. Advertisements noted that it was open all night and offered meals for all arriving trains.[86]

A number of other hotels existed in Vicksburg in the nineteenth century, including Vicksburg Hotel (1826–1843; 1929–1967), Washington Hotel (1838–1970s), Prentiss House (1843–1890), and Carroll Hotel (1891–1967).[87] Historical information and exact dates for years of operation for the hotels is difficult to ascertain due to inconsistent sources and overall lack of information. But by the late 1880s, the local press began clamoring for bigger and better hotels to accommodate the demands of a growing city. The Washington Hotel and Prentiss House were built prior to the Civil War, but by the 1880s had become outdated

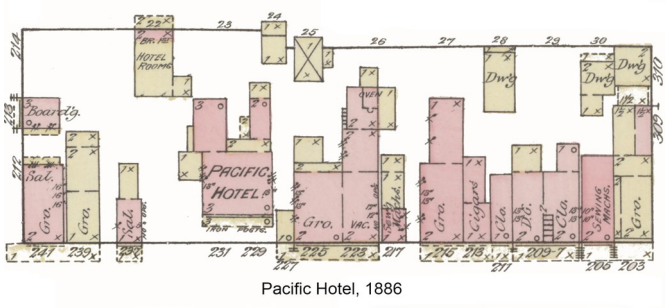
[84] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Vicksburg, Warren County, Mississippi. Sanborn Map Company, May, 1907. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn04536_005/.

[85] "Brevities," *The Vicksburg Herald*, February 9, 1879, p. 3.

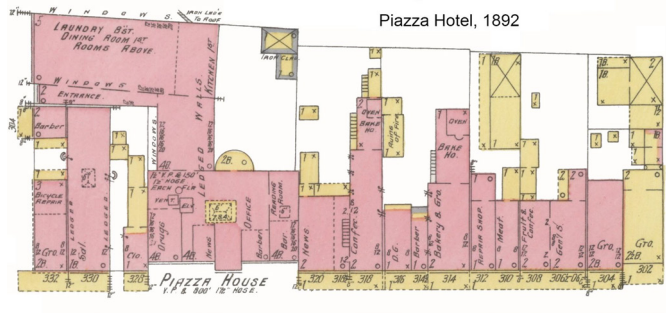
[86] "Pacific House," *The Vicksburg Herald*, April 19, 1881, p. 1.

[87] Thomas Richardson, In and about Vicksburg: An Illustrated *Guide Book to the City of Vicksburg*, (Wentworth Press, 2016); "Warren County Historical Files," Works Progress Administration County Files, 687-688; p. 779. Available via Mississippi Library Commission: https://mlc.lib.ms.us/wp-content/uploads/Digitized%20Microfilms%20/Warren%20County.pdf.

and needed repair.[88] The Pacific House and Vicksburg Hotel also needed expansion during this time period. [89]



1886 Sanborn Insurance Map for the Pacific Hotel.[90]



1892 Sanborn Insurance Map for the Piazza Hotel.[91]

[88] "Notice," *The Vicksburg Herald*, June 12, 1885, p. 1. "The Prentiss House," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, December 8, 1890, p. 1. "The Old Prentiss House," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, January 30, 1891, p. 4.

[89] "Hotels," *The Vicksburg Herald*, June 2, 1885, p. 2.

[90] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Vicksburg, Warren County, Mississippi. Sanborn Map Company, April 1886. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn04536_001/.

[91] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Vicksburg, Warren County, Mississippi. Sanborn Map Company, April 1892. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn04536_002/.

Exterior Drawing of the Pacific House Hotel.[92]

Paying careful attention to these developments, Vincent Piazza pushed for building a larger, more modern hotel in place of the Pacific.[93] In 1889, work began to demolish the old Pacific House and to expand the foundation onto Veto Street. The architect was William Stanton, and the hotel increased in estimated value from $50,000 to $75,000.[94] Construction of the Piazza Hotel, as it was named, was completed in 1890 and expanded the total footprint of the original hotel. The main building on Washington Street had four stories and a basement, while the wing on Veto Street contained two stores, with a dining room on the second floor. The third and fourth floors contained a total of 114 guest rooms.[95] A modern steam heating plant was installed in the hotel in 1906, and the cuisine was described as the "very best the market affords."[96]

In 1901, physical ailments caused Vincent Piazza to transfer control of the hotel to Jay Chandler temporarily, but Vincent returned to running the hotel in 1905.[97] In 1909, due to Vincent Piazza's continued illness, the hotel was sold to Vincent Lavecchia. Piazza remarked that construction costs of the original hotel totaled $85,000, and that the estimated value

[92] Thomas Richardson, *In and about Vicksburg: An Illustrated Guide Book to the City of Vicksburg*, (Wentworth Press, 2016).

[93] "Local Lines," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, April 6, 1886, p. 4. "News Items," *The Vicksburg Herald*, April 9, 1886, p. 4.

[94] "Local Lines," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, April 6, 1886, p. 4. "News Items," *The Vicksburg Herald*, April 9, 1886, p. 4.

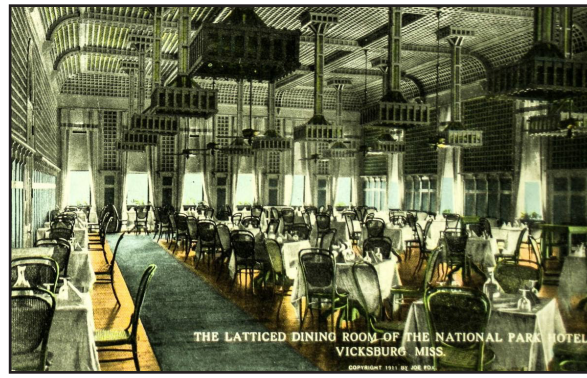
[95] Breaking Ground for the New Hotel," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, May 25, 1889, p. 4.

[96] "Hotel Piazza," *The Vicksburg American*, February 23, 1906, p. 1. "Hotel Piazza," *The Monday Morning News*, June 17, 1907, p. 13.

[97] "The Hotel Men," *The Vicksburg Herald*, September 15, 1901, 3. "Ready for Business," *The Vicksburg Herald*, October 28, 1905, p. 5.

for the furniture, building, and lot had now increased to $135,000 (or roughly $4 million in today's dollars). The name was changed to the National Park Hotel upon transfer of ownership.[98] With this sale, the era of Piazza hotel ownership in Vicksburg ended after three decades. Such continuity is a testament to the influence the Piazzas held in the Vicksburg community over the years.

Exterior of the National Park Hotel, Undated.[99]



Interior Dining Room of the National Park Hotel in 1911.[100]

The twentieth century was not kind to Vicksburg's historic hotels. In the decades following 1910, the city began to decline. Then on December

[98] "The Piazza Hotel Sold," *The Vicksburg Herald,* August 3, 1909, p. 5.

[99] "National Park Hotel, Vicksburg, Miss." Cooper (Forrest Lamar) Postcard collection. MDAH. Available at https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/cooper/detail/18889.

[100] "The Latticed Dining Room of the National Park Hotel, Vicksburg, Miss." Cooper (Forrest Lamar) Postcard collection. MDAH. Available at https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/cooper/detail/19508.

5, 1953, a tornado ravaged much of downtown Vicksburg, leaving a path of destruction in the historic business district that led to many buildings being razed. In the 1960s and 1970s, urban renewal projects resulted in the demolition of many dilapidated buildings, including the Washington Hotel, the Piazza-Botto building, the Carroll Hotel, and the Piazza Hotel (National Park Hotel).[101] Thus these historic buildings that represented the halcyon days of Vicksburg came to an unceremonious end.

Washington Street, c. 1910–1920. The Piazza Hotel is on the left.[102]

Conclusion

The Piazza brothers are an excellent example of how, through hard work, tenacity, and entrepreneurship, Italian immigrants rose to the top of the business world in Mississippi. The Piazza brothers first migrated to America and settled in Mississippi at a time when there were just over a hundred other Italians in the state. They used their experience and valued expertise to build a sizable empire in the agricultural, tannery, grocery, restaurant, theater, and hotel businesses. They not only became respected businessmen, but also served their fellow Italian compatriots when they were under the greatest threat from nativist sentiment and attack. Natale's work as consul, in particular, helped the Italian government investigate the lynchings of Italians, and he also attempted to give solace to the families of the victims. The story of the Piazzas is

[101] Kenneth P'Pool, "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. Vicksburg, Mississippi," MDAH, 1992, pp. 10-11.

[102] Library of Congress. [*Washington Street, Vicksburg, Miss.*] Detroit Publishing Co., c. 1910-1920. Available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016814142.

illustrative of successful Italian immigrants' contributions to the state and provides fresh insight into Mississippi's rich ethnic history.

Appendix One. Abbreviated Biographies of the Piazza Brothers.

John Piazza: (December 2, 1827–May 12, 1908): born Giovanni Damiano in Faenza on December 2, 1827; according to newspaper articles, John remained in Italy and lived in Bologna. He visited America in 1890 to celebrate the completion of the Piazza Hotel and died May 12, 1908, in Vicksburg.[103]

Natale Piazza: (September 5, 1830–February 28, 1914): born Natale Raffaele in Faenza; fought in the first Italian Wars of Independence in 1848-1849; settled in Crystal Springs in 1853; operated a tannery in Clinton throughout the Civil War; grew tomatoes, grapes, etc. on farm in Crystal Springs; owned the theater building at corner of Washington and Crawford streets in Vicksburg; owned saddlery store on Washington Street; owner of Vicksburg Opera House; built Merchants National Bank building after fire destroyed opera house; Italian Consul for Mississippi for thirty years; investigated Tallulah lynchings of 1899; died February 28, 1914.[104]

Frank Piazza: (February 7, 1835–July 5, 1907): born Francesco Gaspare in Faenza; owned a saloon and restaurant known as "The Bank" under the opera house in Vicksburg in 1865; opened an account at Freedman's Bank for his wife Mary; in an altercation with Black deputy sheriff Charles H. Smith; owned a grocery store on Cherry and Grove streets; died July 5, 1907.

Joseph Piazza: (September 5, 1832–March 21, 1904): born Guiseppe Antonio in Faenza in September 1838; moved to New York in 1855; moved to Crystal Springs in 1865 at request of his brothers; engaged in fruit business; moved to Vicksburg; 1858 married Effizia Conterno in New York; had three sons (August, Julius V., and Amadio Frank); 1872 returned to Crystal Springs; son Julius became one of the largest

[103] "A Family Reunion," *The Daily Commercial Herald*, October 2, 1890, p. 4. "Untitled," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, July 6, 1891, p. 1. "Death of John D. Piazza," *The Vicksburg American*, May 13, 1908, p. 1.

[104] "Natale Piazza is Dead at Age 83," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 28, 1914, p. 1.

fruit importers of Chicago, and Amadio connected with United Fruit Company in New Orleans; died in 1904.[105]

Louis Piazza: (November 9 1839–July 16, 1897): born Luigi Domenico in Faenza on November 9, 1839; 1870 census listed as mechanic; tanner on 1880 census; owned a grocery store on Grove and North streets in Vicksburg in 1889; died July 16, 1897.

Vincent Piazza: (July 24, 1841–January 5, 1924): born Vincenzo Gaspare in Faenza on August 25, 1841; owner of the Pacific House hotel in Vicksburg in 1879; owned plantation on Sunflower River, eight miles east of Arcola station on the Mississippi Valley Railroad; opened the Piazza Hotel in May 1891; sold mineral water from a well on Vincent Piazza's property on Grove and North streets; paid privilege tax on billiard tables and barber chairs; took break from hotel business in 1901 due to illness but returned in 1905; died November 18, 1923.

[105] "Joseph Piazza," *The Vicksburg Herald*, March 23, 1904, p. 5.

Appendix Two. Sample Performances.

Sample Performances at the Vicksburg Opera House, 1869-1898		
Date	**Performance**	**Type**
Oct. 20, 1869	"Honeymoon: Or How to Rule a Wife": Effie Warren	Comedy
Apr. 28, 1870	La Rue's Minstrels & Brass Band	Minstrel
Sep. 15, 1871	William Carleton, Irish Comedian	Comedy
Mar. 9, 1872	Blind Tom	Pianist
Mar. 27, 1873	Martinetti Ravel Pantomime Troupe; Jacko the Brazilian Ape	Pantomime
Oct. 30, 1874	Wallack Comedy Co.	Comedy
Jan. 22, 1875	Tony Denier's Pantomime Troupe	Comedy
Oct. 13, 1877	Sprague & Blodgett's Original Georgia Minstrels	Minstrel
Nov. 16, 1877	Harry Robinson's Minstrels	Minstrel
Feb. 8, 1878	South Carolina Minstrels & Brass Band	Minstrel
Apr. 24, 1878	German Opera Troupe & Military Band	Opera
Oct. 11, 1881	Milton Nobles	Dramatic Comedy
Jan. 6, 1882	Morton's Big 4 Minstrels	Minstrel
Feb. 11, 1882	Fay Templeton's Star Opera Co.	Opera
Jun. 15, 1882	Oscar Wilde	Lecture
May 9, 1883	Eclectic Dramatic Club	Drama
Jan. 29, 1884	M. B. Leavitt's Gigantean Minstrels	Minstrel
Nov. 9, 1884	Grau's Famous New York Opera Co.	Opera
Jan. 21, 1886	Zera Semon with Bell's Original Marionettes	Minstrel
Feb. 23, 1888	Bartram & Burbidge Comedy Co.	Comedy
May 15, 1888	Panorama of Ireland	Photograph Exhibit
Mar. 24, 1889	Hillyer's Lilliputian Wonders & Grand Gift Carnival	Exhibition
Sep. 12 1891	Richards & Pringle's Famous Georgia Minstrels	Minstrel
Jan. 17, 1892	Al G. Field & Co's Famous Minstrels	Minstrel
Mar. 2, 1893	Primrose & West's Famous Minstrels	Minstrel
Feb. 21, 1895	Swedish Quartette Co.	Concert
Feb. 20, 1897	Prof. Louis Favor–X Ray Exhibition	Exhibition
Feb. 17, 1898	Frawley Comedy Co. of San Francisco	Comedy
Apr. 5, 1898	N. C. Goodwin presenting "A Gilded Fool"	Unknown

Appendix Three. County Taxes

Personal Tax Assessments for the Piazza Brothers[106]							
Copiah County							
1874	N. Piazza	6 cows, $60	2 horses, $150	4 mules, $225	3 carriages, $75	merchandise, $1,500	
1882	N. Piazza	9 cattle, $65	2 horses, $100	3 mules, $350	5 carriages, $200	1 watch, $25	2 guns, $70
1882	N. Piazza	merchandise, $800					
1883	N. Piazza	8 cattle, $55	5 horses, $200	5 mules, $250	5 carriages, $125	1 watch, $35	merchandise, $600
1884	N. Piazza	9 cattle, $90	7 horses, $525	4 mules, $300	8 carriages, $200	1 watch, $25	merchandise, $800
1884	L. Piazza	1 mule, $75	1 carriage, $25	1 watch, $30			
1884	John Piazza	1 horse, $75	1 carriage, $25				
1885	L. Piazza	1 mule, $100	1 carriage, $35	1 watch, $6			
1885	Joe Piazza	8 cattle, $100	5 horses, $400	3 mules, $250	5 carriages, $200	merchandise, $1,000	
1892	John Piazza	1 horse, $50					
1896	Joseph Piazza	3 horses, $75	2 mules, $60	2 carriages, $30			
1896	John Piazza	1 horse, $40	1 carriage, $15	1 piano, $40	4 cows	6 hogs	
1897	Joseph	3 horses, $90	3 mules, $90	3 carriages,	1 watch, $10		
	Piazza			$40			
1897	John Piazza	1 horse, $40	2 carriages, $40	1 piano, $40	4 cows		
1898	Joseph Piazza	2 horses, $50	3 mules, $50	4 carriages, $30			
1898	John Piazza	1 horse, $20	1 watch, $15				
1899	Joseph Piazza	2 horses, $50	2 mules, $50	2 carriages, $30	2 watches, $25		
1899	John Piazza	2 mules, $60	1 carriage, $15	4 cows			
Warren County							
1871	Frank Piazza	1 watch, $150	merchandise, $1,050				
1889	N. Piazza	1 horse, $75	1 carriage, $50	merchandise, $3,500			
1889	Louis Piazza	1 horse, $25	1 carriage, $15	merchandise, $150			
1897	Louis Piazza (estate)	1 horse, $35	1 carriage, $10	1 piano, $75			
1897	Frank Piazza	1 horse, $50	1 mule, $40	2 carriages, $30	merchandise, $800		
1897	N. Piazza	1 horse, $25	1 watch, $10	merchandise, $3,500			
1897	Piazza Hotel	household furniture, $3,000					
1900	Frank Piazza	1 horse, $40	1 mule, $60	1 carriage, $30	merchandise, $900		
1900	Piazza Hotel	household furniture, $3,000					
1900	John Piazza	1 horse, $40	1 carriage, $20	merchandise, $250			
1900	N. Piazza	merchandise, $2,500					
1900	Vincent Piazza	piano, $150	watch, $25				

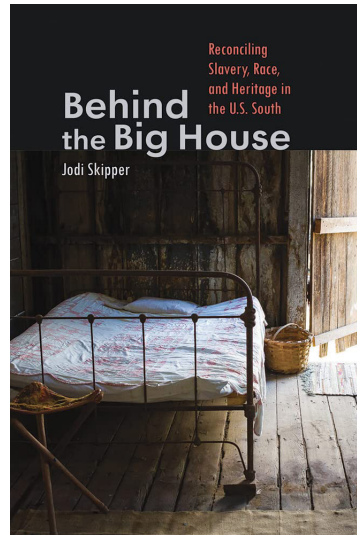
[106] Series 1202, County Tax Rolls, 1818-1902. Record Group 29 Auditor. MDAH. See boxes: 3634, 3635, 3636, 3637, 3638, 3639, 3656, 3784, 3785, 3786, 3787, 3788, 3959.

Book Reviews

Behind the Big House: Reconciling Slavery, Race, and Heritage in the U.S. South.

By Jodi Skipper (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2022. Foreword, Acknowledgements, Introduction, Epilogue, Appendix A, Appendix B, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Pp. ix, 218. $27.50 paper. ISBN: 9781609388171.)

Jodi Skipper's *Behind the Big House: Reconciling Slavery, Race, and Heritage in the U.S. South*, captures the dual and interwoven nature of how slavery is remembered or omitted through contrasting interpretations of historic homes in Holly Springs, Mississippi, providing a personal roadmap of community-focused activism and its partnership with academia. The nature of her book hinges on two words, "priority" and "why." The scope is essentially a two-fold analysis of the Behind the Big House program in Holly Springs and the corresponding Marshall County program, Gracing the Table. The former is aimed at providing agency to previously overlooked enslaved people and the structures that housed them, often adjacent to the more frequently visited main homes on antebellum pilgrimage trails, hosted by the Holly Springs Garden Club. The latter illustrates how the lives of diverse individuals behind Gracing the Table have enabled a space for discussions and events centered on racial reconciliation. The dual nature and scope of Skipper's book might initially seem to be trending towards a few different directions for the reader. Yet, Skipper contends and demonstrates that these components can fit together as puzzle pieces towards a more equitable representation of the past and greater present awareness.



Skipper's thesis, rooted in her position as both an activist and public anthropologist, is that these programs provide a more inclusive model for historic home preservation and tourism, while serving as spaces for community engagement and reconciliation. Yet, going back to the keywords of "priority" and "why," Skipper contends that just as her own personal journey has been one of continual navigation, historic home preservation and tourism programs contain myriad forces that complicate a clear path to desired outcomes, depending on the vantage

point of the stakeholder. These currents include divergent community receptiveness, bureaucratic priorities, varying degrees of participation, and funding hurdles. Skipper's main contribution to the scholarship is in demonstrating that the localized Behind the Big House and Gracing the Table programs collectively provide broader models of the antebellum South, with a realistic portrayal of the successes and challenges facing such work. *Behind the Big House* fits into an evolving field of literature. While her audience can be defined as both general and scholarly, Skipper's work can be considered alongside notable titles, such as John Michael Vlach's *Back of the Big House: The Architecture* of *Plantation Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993), and more recently, *Remembering Enslavement: Reassembling the Southern Plantation Museum* (University of Georgia Press, 2022), authored by Amy E. Potter, et al.

Skipper achieves most of her objectives, presenting these programs in Mississippi as positive models, shedding light on the agency of not just the formerly enslaved but also a diverse group of contemporary actors, such as Chelius Carter, Jenifer Eggleston, David Person, Alisea Williams McLeod, and Rhondalyn Peairs. Skipper effectively connects the dots between historic home sites, tourism, efforts at racial reconciliation, and the journeys of participants. However, in the second chapter, "Heritage Tourism in Mississippi," while setting the context of what is promoted or forgotten through blues music tourism, Skipper makes no mention of the partnership between the late Bill Luckett, a White former city mayor and member of the NAACP, and one of Mississippi's most famous residents, actor Morgan Freeman, in their purchase of the Ground Zero Blues Club in Clarksdale. If one is to make the argument that blues music has been promoted by the state at the expense of African American artists, what about private investment and the corresponding mission of such participants, across racial lines in Clarksdale?

Additionally, chapters one and five could be drawn closer together in sequence. Sources vary from personal reflections, interviews with program participants, blogs, political and tourism sources, to secondary sources on public history and slavery. The book is well written, although through an autoethnography approach, which as a historian, took some initial adjustment. Skipper is candid and readers should appreciate the conversational tone throughout. Scholars will appreciate her inside take on integrating student involvement as part of her curriculum, as well as personal reflections of bridging community-based work and academia. Recommended for readers interested in Holly Springs history, Mississippi history, public history, tourism, southern studies, and historic site management and equitable representation.

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Gin, Jesus, & Jim Crow: Prohibition and the Transformation of Racial and Religious Politics in the South. *By Brendan J. J. Payne. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022. Pp. 304. $45 hardcover. ISBN: 0807171486.)*

Policy development is a complex process that can vary by location and time period. Religious and racial factors have also exerted significant influence during America's history of cultural conflict. Brendan Payne demonstrates this in his 2022 book, *Gin, Jesus, and Jim Crow*, which examines the prohibitionist period from 1885 to 1935. Payne, chair of the Department of History at North Greenville University, coins the term "Gin Crow" to signify the era in which Jim Crow laws coincide with southern Prohibition. He uses a wide collection of primary sources to compile this work, including denominational convention minutes, local newspapers, and election data. Not only is Prohibition questioned in this account, but also Christian liberty, political norms, and racial fairness.

Early portions of *Gin, Jesus, & Jim Crow* highlight the variance among southern denominational leaders during earlier stages of the Prohibition movement. While Christian rhetoric was shaped by both southern drys and wets, Payne brings attention to "the neglected role of Christian rhetoric for wets" (7). In doing so, readers are exposed to a mixture of theological and denominational approaches toward this issue. Payne's rendering of the late-1880s transition from traditional teachings to new scriptural interpretations is interesting, particularly his commentary on the two-wine thesis (recognition of Biblical references to both alcoholic and nonalcoholic wine). Such instances steered the eventual evolution from communion wine to modernized Christian rituals. Ultimately, Payne contends that earlier statewide votes for Prohibition failed not because of Black voters' influence, but rather due to southern ministers' inability to unify the vote of their congregation.

Most of Payne's work centers on the political undercurrents of the 1880s and early-1900s. Readers will discover that while Whites were often split on the issue, Blacks were essentially regarded as swing votes. This spawned interracial coalitions between brewers and Black wets—including Black ministers—that impacted statewide elections in locations such as Florida (1910) and Texas (1911). Payne uses this and similar instances to showcase how the Prohibition dispute "roused African Americans who saw an opportunity to regain the political clout they enjoyed during Reconstruction" (45). As the position of White drys was threatened, Jim Crow's purpose of maintaining White supremacy through disfranchisement and voter suppression became a tool to fulfill the interests of southern drys. Thus, as Black votes decreased and the local option replaced statewide bans, Prohibition gained a lasting presence throughout the South. Ultimately, Payne states that "resistance to prohibition in the 1910s represented the last great show of Black electoral strength in the South against Jim Crow voting restrictions until the Voting Rights Act" (110).

Readers may think of Jim Crow and the enactment of prohibition as two disconnected subjects; however, *Gin, Jesus, & Jim Crow* weaves the content into an appealing and comprehensive work. As a result, it may become difficult for some readers to view Prohibition without thinking of the racial component. Yet, those expecting Mississippi to have a large presence in this book will be disappointed. Payne references a limited number of statewide restrictions (i.e., the 1839 "gallon law" and an 1865 Black Code banning the sale of liquor by people of color) and its prolonged Prohibition policy following the 21st Amendment. Otherwise, the book is more attentive to episodes from other states. Readers in search of Mississippi's Prohibition history can turn to sources such as Janice Branch Tracy's *Mississippi Moonshine Politics* (2015). Nonetheless, the substance of *Gin, Jesus, & Jim Crow* effectively describes the role of alcohol in altering southern society.

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The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation. *By Thavolia Glymph. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. Acknowledgments, figures, notes, bibliography, index of names, index of subjects. Pp. 379. $37.50 cloth, $27.95 paper. ISBN: 9781469653631.)*

The Women's Fight places women's political activity at the center of the story of Civil War America. Thavolia Glymph's work provides a much-needed corrective as Black women's "politics and their wartime struggles remain largely invisible" despite the substantial scholarship of the conflict (10).

While historians have made progress deconstructing the artificial boundary between home front and battle front, Glymph's work builds on that foundation and merges it with the work historians have done in broadening concepts of what activity should be understood as political in nature. Glymph explains how the war involved all women in both formal and informal struggles for power. Her work points out that the very existence of White women refugees in the South directly chipped away at the Confederate project. Black southern women developed "anti-slavery politics through their lived experiences" (93). Just about every move made by enslaved women in wartime displayed the weakness of pro-slavery arguments and indicated a refusal to accept limits on the war's potential to redefine power. *The Women's Fight* also explains that while White northern women of some means "turned their parlors into factories" (132), poor and working-class women also sacrificed for the Union, often as labor in their wealthier counterparts' homes. Unionist women also vied with each other to make sure that aid agencies deployed hard-earned supplies to their men. White northern women, however, failed to conceive of their Black female contemporaries as capable of the same level of political identity in the conflict. Black women, North and South, repudiated the notion that the war was a primarily

White affair.

An essential part of Glymph's contribution is to connect these various groups of women using the touchstone of the political nature of home, a framing that has been used by historians in their quest to understand the conflict, but which Glymph applies with unprecedented breadth. Civil War era women from disparate backgrounds all relied on an understanding of home that linked freedom and citizenship. The Civil War created new versions of old tensions rooted in that essential foundation. From White southern women sleeping on the roadsides, Black southern women rooting themselves behind Union lines, to both races of northern women's domestic economies, Glymph shows how women understood each other in relation to those concepts encapsulated in the idea of home. Her model is sure to inspire similar ambition in future studies of women in American conflicts.

A strength of the book is its scope, as it is not devoted to one group of women, gathered by race or region. Readers of this journal, however, may be especially interested in how the story Glymph tells played out in places like Mississippi, or the lower Mississippi Valley generally. In this region, enslaved women, White southern women, and newly arrived northern women (responding to the humanitarian crisis in Union-occupied territory) all advanced their political agenda, grappling with each other and federal forces to influence and understand the war. Confederate-leaning White southern women behaved so fiercely as to force the U.S. Army to reconsider the status of women as non-combatants. Black women, experiencing a statelessness that White women did not, made high-stakes claims on U.S. Army territory and resources. The federal government leaned on Black women's labor but was not necessarily committed to offering consistent protection to women refugeed from slavery. In fact, many soldiers resented their presence.

Not only should *The Women's Fight* be assigned to students at both the undergraduate and graduate level, but it should be on the shelves of every Civil War era museum and interpretive site and employed in training docents and interpreters. The public is always interested in women's "roles" (as they usually put it, which has always struck me as resigning women to adjuncts or auxiliaries) in the Civil War. But too often, the story is limited to the image of isolated White women in safe, quiet, apolitical homes dutifully rolling bandages waiting for news. While the academy has moved far beyond such an image, Glymph's book utterly obliterates it, offering an impressively comprehensive view of women shaping the war, not watching from the sidelines.

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Arkansas Tech University

Until I Am Free: Fannie Lou Hamer's Enduring Message to America. By Keisha N. Blain. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021, Acknowledgements, notes, index, image credits, about the author. Pp ix, 181. $12.97 cloth, $24.95 paper. ISBN-13:9780807061503

Keisha N. Blain's *Until I Am Free* is one of the most recent biographies about the incredible civil rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer. In this biography, Blain centers the voice of an impoverished and disabled Black woman whose contribution to the Black freedom struggle is overlooked in mainstream scholarship. In doing so, *Until I Am Free* is a bottom-up approach to chronicling the civil rights movement as it prioritizes the voice of an ordinary Black woman and centers her philosophy on issues concerning poverty, state-sanctioned violence, and grassroots activism. A majority of the chapters begin by blending contemporary issues with past problems to accomplish the goal of the book which is to show, "Hamer's words are timeless," and that her advice "offer[s] hope and guidance for those of us who are committed to social justice today" (xviii). Showing that today's social issues mirror obstacles that Hamer worked to resolve, Blain is confident that present freedom fighters can apply her ideology to solve contemporary struggles.

Until I Am Free argues that mainstream accounts of Black social movements prioritize the movement activity of men, and when Black women are championed, it is the same few activists. Blain contends, "however, the historical record is far richer and more interesting than many realize, including a diverse array of activists and leaders from different classes and walks of life" (ix-x). With a compelling argument, Blain expands the historical record by inserting Hamer's activism into the public memory of the civil rights movement. She adds to the historical scholarship on Black women's participation in the civil rights movement in general, but to the historical canon on biographies about Fannie Lou Hamer, specifically. Joining these historians, Blain is urging her audience to reimagine the civil rights era by placing marginalized Black women at the center.

Blain invites the reader into the life of Hamer by highlighting the ways Hamer's upbringing impacted and shaped her future organizing philosophy. She inherited her mother's determination and acquired her father's faithfulness to God. Furthermore, Blain uses Hamer's life as a lens to illuminate the lives of other Black sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta by revealing their stark reality of being unaware of their right to the ballot. After Hamer learns she has the right to vote, she joins the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1962 and begins her career as a civil rights activist.

In chapter two, Blain begins by detailing the story of Sandra Bland, a Black woman who mysteriously died in police custody in 2017, to show the continuum of state-sanctioned violence that permeates Black women's lives. Hamer, just like Bland, experienced violence at the hands of the state when she was forcibly sterilized in 1961 and was violently beaten in a Winona jail in 1963. Blain situates

Hamer's experience in a broader context to show the experiences of Black women in Sunflower County, and the reader learns that more than half of the Black women were forcibly sterilized in this county in the 1960s.

Chapter three discusses how Hamer emphasized the importance of centering everyday people in the fight for freedom and how contemporary Black women also see this significance. Blain centers the story of a contemporary Black woman that led grassroots initiatives after the death of Breonna Taylor in 2020 with the goal of bringing awareness to her story. Blain could have begun the chapter with the story of George Floyd, a Black man who was also killed by police in 2020, and the grassroots activism that transpired afterwards. But in choosing to center the murder of a Black woman, she remains committed to her overall goal of the book.

The last chapter, "Try to Do Something," covers the anti-poverty campaigns that Hamer initiated in her home county in the mid-1960s. She established a Freedom Farm that was able to feed local starving families and give jobs to local people. Blain again bridges Hamer's life to the lives of other Black Mississippians, and as a result, the reader learns that in 1960, three-fourths of all families in the Mississippi Delta lived below the poverty line.

The question that drove this biography is: What might we learn, and how might our society change, if we simply listened to Fannie Lou Hamer? In an attempt to answer this question while privileging Hamer's unique perspective, Blain organizes the biography thematically and incorporates the speeches of Hamer, oral and written interviews, newspapers, and archival documents. She includes primary sources from The University of Mississippi archives, University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, the Fannie Lou Hamer Papers from the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, among many others.

Not only is Blain's storytelling bottom-up, but the source materials exemplify her commitment to piecing Hamer's story together with sources that privilege her viewpoint. Implementing strategies from her public history training, Blain avoids using academic jargon which demonstrates her commitment to reach a broader audience. This method of storytelling reveals that Blain is seriously invested in not only uplifting marginalized Black women in her scholarship, but also ensuring that ordinary people beyond the academy are able to immerse themselves in the lessons of Hamer, which is the true way to honor Hamer's legacy.

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Land of Milk and Money: The Creation of the Southern Dairy Industry. By Alan I Marcus. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021. Acknowledgements, illustrations, notes, index. Pp. ix, 317. $50 cloth. ISBN: 0807176052.)

Beginning in the 1920s, dairy processing plants began popping up in rural towns all across the South—kicking off a thriving southern dairy industry

that many hoped would serve as a panacea for the cotton South's economic problems. Veteran historian of agriculture, science, and technology Alan I Marcus, in his work *Land of Milk and Money: The Creation of the Southern Dairy Industry*, traces the rise of southern commercial dairy from its beginnings in Starkville, Mississippi, through its expansion across the South during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Marcus argues that the Borden Company, a northern-based milk producer with a strong desire to expand into the South, found a willing partner in the city of Starkville, which itself sought to move away from economic dependency on cotton without departing too far from its agricultural roots. With support from boosters in town and farmers in the countryside, Borden's new Starkville milk condensery plant brought the town a measure of economic success and freedom. As Marcus shows, the success of Borden's Starkville condensery kicked off the rapid growth of the southern dairy industry as other small southern towns fought to make dairy their own golden ticket to economic prosperity.

Using newspapers, chamber of commerce records, and local and USDA agricultural reports, Marcus begins with a discussion on the New York-based Borden Company in the years before and immediately after World War I. Facing labor strikes and a highly competitive northern milk market, Borden used innovative advertising strategies–including everything from hiring nutritionists to hosting cooking classes—to pull ahead of competitors. Advertising alone was not enough, however. Marcus analyzes Borden's further efforts to diversify production and geographic location, first by building a successful new condensery plant in Fort Scott, Kansas, before looking even farther south for expansion.

Meanwhile, small southern towns were in crisis. Marcus discusses how a rising fear plagued Starkville and other small towns struggling to maintain their economic footing in the face of plummeting cotton prices. For Starkville boosters, dairy production seemed like a promising way out. Local farmers remained skeptical, however, even though the region's natural grasses made cultivating cotton difficult. Not giving up, agricultural advisors encouraged farmers to raise cattle alongside cotton, allowing the cows to graze on the pesky grass in return for supplying farmers with milk to sell and manure to use on other crops. Once convinced, these farmers made dairy farming a key part of Starkville's agricultural landscape.

Impressed with this growing dairy industry, Borden officials agreed to build its first southern milk condensery in the Mississippi town. Its success, Marcus contends, depended on continued buy-in from surrounding farmers and sharecroppers, including those within the local Black community. This alliance among northern dairy businessmen, Starkville elites, and rural dairy farmers—both Black and White—forms the heart of Marcus's book. Working together, these groups helped facilitate the "Starkville Miracle," transforming the city into a model for small town economic prosperity.

And a model it was. Marcus spends two of his final chapters

outlining how other southern locations worked to follow in Starkville's footsteps. Towns like Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and Waco, Texas, pushed their surrounding farmers to raise more cattle so they too could attract the attention of northern milk producers like Borden, Carnation, and PET. Like in Starkville, the triumph or failure of milk condenseries and processing plants in these towns depended on their ability to galvanize local farmers into producing the milk supply necessary to yield large quantities of both liquid and condensed milk. While not all towns succeeded, the southern dairy industry, with Starkville at its center, proved profitable and resilient—even through the difficult years of the Great Depression. Here, Marcus could have expanded his analysis, as he only mentions the Depression briefly in a short appendix. A deeper dive into the Depression years may have helped to further cement his argument about the importance of dairy to the New South economy.

But wanting to read more hardly constitutes a complaint, and Marcus's well-researched and well-written work on the southern dairy industry astutely adds to growing literature on the New South as it transformed from its dependency on King Cotton to the corporatized Sunbelt, home to enterprises like Walmart, FedEx, and Coca-Cola. Analyzing the southern dairy industry in this context highlights the role of southern small towns within this process and how an alliance between rural and urban helped to make it possible.

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Black Bodies in the River: Searching for Freedom Summer By Davis W. Houck. (University Press of Mississippi, 2022. Preface, notes, index. Pp. ix, 153. $99 cloth, $25.00 paper. ISBN: 9781496840790.)

During the aftermath of one of the most significant mass movements of the twentieth century for Black Lives, rhetoric scholar Davis Houck contributes a timely book to civil rights movement historiography in *Black Bodies in the River: Searching for Freedom Summer*. In this work, Houck analyzes the 1964 murders of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, Henry Dee, and Charles Moore to show how the rhetoric surrounding the search for their bodies—specifically, the assertion that multiple bodies were discovered in the river prior to locating Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman—has influenced historical memory. This assertion, he argues, served a purpose for major civil rights organizations in the state who were seeking to provoke the federal government into assisting with their work by insinuating that the Black bodies exhumed while searching for the missing civil rights workers were nameless and obsolete when compared to Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney. According to Houck, many movement veterans claimed "that murdered Black men in Mississippi matter/mattered far less—to the nation, to the press, to the federal government—than murdered white men" (121).

Houck further contextualizes the Freedom Summer murders by detailing the 1963 Freedom Vote to show how White involvement with

Black civil rights workers in the state was intended to elicit a governmental response. The federal government's involvement after the murders of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner provided an opportunity to further reinforce this tactic, since many Mississippians believed that the government intervened only because of the murders of Goodman and Schwerner, both of whom were White. In contrast, Mississippi's long history of brutality against Blacks went unnoticed.

The 1964 Freedom Summer—considered an "invasion" by Mississippi's White establishment—contributed to a rise of anti-Black violence in the state. Under the leadership of Samuel Bowers Jr., nearly all of the Ku Klux Klan klaverns in the state prepared for the rise of civil rights activity that summer. By discussing the lives of Moore, Dee, Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman, Houck "aims to document the extent of racial hatred that motivated their killings, including what these civil rights workers faced on a daily basis" (xi). Throughout the summer of 1964 in Mississippi, there were many racial incidents involving civil rights workers. According to Freedom Summer historiography, many of these incidents have been either overlooked or ignored. According to Julian Bond, the "master narrative" of the civil rights movement privileges Whites who traveled to Mississippi in the summer of 1964 over the native Mississippians who were active in the movement.

Houck's historiographical intervention forces us to rethink how we write about and teach Freedom Summer, which is a critical part of the civil rights narrative. Houck goes beyond Bruce Watson's popular narrative, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 that Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (Viking Press, 2010), and Doug McAdam's *Freedom Summer* (Oxford University Press, 1990), both of which in his opinion privilege "white intercession over Black activism" (98). Houck's contribution uses rhetorical criticism and historical acumen to detail the narrative surrounding Freedom Summer and how public memory surrounding the major events of the summer of 1964 was subsequently misconstrued. In particular, he details how museums and historical markers in Mississippi have been influenced by how the events surrounding Freedom Summer are remembered. Houck's book intervenes to set the record straight. He meticulously probes newspapers, monographs, interviews, films, biographies, and memoirs about Freedom Summer to show how it has been remembered. The narrative is well organized and clearly written. *Black Bodies: Searching for Freedom Summer* should be read by anyone interested in Freedom Summer and public history.

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Mississippi Zion: The Struggle for Liberation in Attala County, 1865–1915. By Evan Howard Ashford. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022. Acknowledgements, illustrations, notes, index. Pp. ix, 233. $99 cloth, $25 paper. ISBN: 9781496839732)

The story of African Americans in Mississippi is one of liberation, not reaction or declension, according to Evan Ashford's *Mississippi Zion*. Focusing his attention on Attala County, which lies in the central part of the state, Ashford contends that scholars have treated African Americans, post-emancipation, as lacking true power because their attention has largely focused on the period from Reconstruction to Jim Crow—a period marked by its systemic narrowing of political access. By contrast, Ashford argues that this singular attention to political power ignores the reality that many of the White minority's attempts to control and limit African Americans were a direct response to assertions of Black agency. Historians have narrowed their focus to African American responses to White power. They have often described Black agency within the environment of Black-majority counties of the Mississippi Delta, or have limited their studies to neat periodization. Ashford instead argues that, by examining Attala County through an era of liberation—which he marks as the fifty years between 1865 and 1915—a more nuanced picture emerges of African American power and control.

Mississippi Zion moves beyond traditional narratives of Reconstruction—and its demise—arguing that liberation (both as a concept and period) defined the experience of both the newly freed and succeeding generations. By combining the longer historical perspective with the framing of liberation, Ashford is able to articulate a vision of African American activity and to identity that vision manifested in new forms of control by freed African Americans. Ashford wishes to combat the framing of the period as one of African Americans as powerless because they lost elected offices following Redemption. Rather, he emphasizes that it was the exercise of newly granted freedom and control that prompted the backlash on the part of White Mississippians.

Ashford's focus on Attala County (African Americans were a sizeable minority but never a political majority), and his use of genealogy provides a perspective that illuminates how a liberation mentality took root in various families over succeeding generations and shaped the community over time. Additionally, the attention to individuals and their achievements is an excellent reminder that historians must not let narratives of control and domination overshadow the identities and moments of agency that exist in the historical record. For example, though Kosciusko Industrial College came to prominence during the period of Redemption, it also contributed a number of graduates, who Ashford has identified, as going on to contribute to Black Attala and beyond. For example, Dr. Leroy Dabbs, a graduate of Kosciusko Industrial College, attended Meharry Medical College before eventually serving in the World Medical Association of the United Nations in 1946. Dabbs and the nu-

merous other names, some of whom appear only briefly, are recorded in Ashford's pages as emblematic of the constant push for liberation.

Experts of the period may contend that Attala County is like so many other counties in Mississippi grappling with what emancipation and freedom mean. Ashford's conceptual framing of liberation, however, as well as his thorough tracing of families and individuals found in: court documents, WPA materials, census records, personal diaries, and photos (some of which he began collecting at age eleven) help to distinguish this localized study of liberation and control in the decades following the Civil War in Mississippi. The various characters and narrative details make this a work suitable for undergrads, the general public, and experts, who can glean nuances from this unique county-level study, to complicate the study of post-Reconstruction Mississippi, even as they recognize its outlier status.

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NOTE TO PROSPECTIVE CONTRIBUTORS

Initial submissions should be made to editor Dennis J. Mitchell, dmitchell@meridian.msstate.edu or P.O. Box 571, Jackson, MS 39205-0571. Preferred manuscript length is 25–40 pages (double-spaced), exclusive of footnotes. The *Journal* encourages the inclusion of illustrations—photographs, drawings, maps, tables—that enhance the essay.

The Chicago Manual of Style (latest edition) should be followed, with some exceptions (primarily dates: the *Journal* prefers "December 1, 1866," to Chicago's "1 December 1866").

For more information contact *Journal of Mississippi History* editor Dennis J. Mitchell at dmitchell@meridian.msstate.edu or 601-479-6293.