



OIL MILL, MOUND BAYOU, MISS.

ARCH OF COTTON BALES, MOUND BAYOU, MISS., 1908

## Mound Bayou, Miss.

A Town Owned and Controlled Exclusively by Negroes

**T**HE only town in Mississippi, and perhaps the only one in the United States, in which every official, including mayor, the railroad, bank, and express company officers, is a Negro. It is five miles to the nearest Caucasian settlement, and there is only one white family residing within two or three miles of Mound Bayou, and that family does not live in the town.



I. T. MONTGOMERY

Mound Bayou is located on the Illinois Central Railroad, nearly midway between Memphis, Tenn., and Vicksburg, Miss. It is the tenth railroad station of importance in the 220 miles between these two cities, and the railroad has an approximate annual revenue of about \$30,000 in freight and passenger traffic from the town.

The town was founded in 1887 by Isaiah T. Montgomery, who had been a slave on the Mississippi plantation of Joseph Davis, a brother of Jefferson Davis. Young Montgomery received his early education on the Davis plantation and later in the home of Mr. Davis, whom he served as errand boy and then as secretary. When Admiral Porter, during the war, ran past the Vicksburg batteries with a portion of the Federal squadron, young Montgomery met him, became his cabin boy, and spent nearly all of the year 1863 in the United States service. At the close of the war, with his father and brother, he returned to Mississippi, and had charge of the Davis plantation for a number of years.

He was the only colored man to take part in the Mississippi Constitutional Convention which put the Negro out of politics in that state. His speech at the convention made a sensation and was published in the leading papers of the country.

While living in Vicksburg, in 1887, Mr. Montgomery was approached by a representative of the railroad company with a plan for undertaking a settlement of Negroes in what was known as "The Delta Country" in the Yazoo Delta. The company had about a million acres of land in this section. The land was subject to malaria. It was obstructed with great forests of timber, and tangled thickets of cane and briars, and was burned by the Southern sun. It was deemed unsuitable for white immigrants, and capable of being developed only by black labor.

Mr. Montgomery undertook the work of locating a town in this section, and the first settlers moved upon the new town site in February, 1888. The first survey included about twenty acres, and in 1889 there were two small business houses, in addition to a country store and two or three residences. To-day the town includes a tract of 75,000 acres, with a population of about 500, while the agricultural settlement, beyond the town, includes more than 40 square miles, owned and occupied by 2,500 colored people.

In all of this territory there are no saloons. The town and country are practically free from crime, and it is said that the town marshal and the neighborhood constable are the only idle persons in 40 square miles of territory. Nearly all the heads of families in the colony own property, and nearly every citizen of the town has an account in the bank.

The town is well laid out. There is nearly a mile of plank sidewalks, and in a desirable section of the town a handsome park of five acres has been developed. The town is well drained and in excellent sanitary condition, and its influence and example

is such that in the surrounding country the former one-room log cabins are rapidly giving place to the two, three, four, and six-room frame houses.

The government of Mound Bayou is simple but effective. The board of management of the town consists of a mayor and three aldermen, who meet monthly and serve without a salary. Mr. Isaiah T. Montgomery, the founder of the town, was the first mayor. The present incumbent is B. H. Creswell.

There are twenty-two mercantile houses, grocery, dry-goods stores, etc., that do an annual business of more than \$100,000. There are two blacksmith and repair shops, a live newspaper, three cotton gins, and representatives of the various professions.

#### "Best-Known Institution of the Town"

Perhaps the best-known institution of the town is the Mound Bayou Bank, established by Charles Banks in March, 1894. The bank has a paid-up capital of \$10,000 which is to be increased to \$25,000. From the first it has been a business success. Its clearings are made in New Orleans and Vicksburg, and the bank has New York and Chicago connections. It is owned entirely by colored men, and this exclusive Negro ownership was definitely stated in the charter, which was signed by Governor Vardaman.

The bank building is one of the best of its kind in that section of the state. It is a two-story pressed brick front structure, free from debt. During the cotton season the banking business is especially heavy, and the Mound Bayou Bank has handled in one month \$200,000. It handles all the cotton raised in that section, and it is a common sight to see as many as two to three thousand bales of cotton shipped by the institution in the cotton season. It not only handles the money of colored men, but it



STREET SCENE AND BANK, MOUND BAYOU, MISS.

handles the money and accommodates white people with loans, discounts, and exchanges.

Two other institutions that give the town prominence and standing are the new cotton-seed oil mill, costing \$40,000—the stock of which is owned largely by Negroes throughout the state—and the Mound Bayou Loan and Trust Company. The forests of oak, hickory, ash, cypress, and gum about

Mound Bayou afford an annual business of nearly \$10,000.

#### Good School Accommodations

The town and surrounding country are well supplied with school accommodations. In addition to the public schools, there is a Baptist High School, with 150 pupils, open eight months of the year, and the Mound Bayou Normal Institute, one of the schools of the American Missionary Association, with 155 students. A description of this school will be found on page 156. The church accommodations are ample. There are two Baptist churches, two Christian, one African Methodist Episcopal, and one Methodist Episcopal.

Mr. Isaiah T. Montgomery, who is still a resident of the town, is said to be the largest colored taxpayer in Mississippi.

#### Men Who have Helped Build the Town

Among those who, from the first, have had important parts in the building and development of Mound Bayou are the late Benjamin T. Green, who was associated with Mr. Montgomery in 1888; John W. Francis, president of the Mound Bayou Bank; Charles Banks, cashier of the Mound Bayou Bank, president of the State Business League, and vice-president of the National Negro Business League; Prof. A. P. Hood; John Cobb, de-



RESIDENCE OF CHARLES BANKS, MOUND BAYOU, MISS., "BOOKER T. WASHINGTON DAY," 1908

ceased; Mayor B. H. Creswell; R. N. McCarty, merchant and planter; W. T. Montgomery, postmaster and president of the Mound Bayou Loan and Trust Company; H. A. Goldbold, merchant; J. Parker Alderman; C. R. Stringer, treasurer; R. A. Fourshea, deputy sheriff; M. R. Montgomery, general merchant and planter; Rev. A. A. Cosey, pastor of the Baptist Church, secretary of the Oil Mill Company, and director of the bank; L. O. Hargrove, machine shop; Dr. J. H. Roby, physician; James A. Marr, merchant; Geo. Creswell, merchant; Robert Clopton, Jr., deputy and express agent; Rev. B. F. Ousley, principal Mound Bayou Normal Institute; E. W. Fletcher; Perry Strong; William Harris; J. H. Hibbler; Alex. Myers; C. S. Lockett; P. H. Black; Rev. John Jones;

Charles Williams; J. F. Brooks; E. L. Dickson; W. L. Groves; Geo. Hargrove; E. H. Isham, and others.

#### Dr. Washington in Mound Bayou

When Dr. Booker T. Washington made his memorable tour through Mississippi in 1908, he was entertained in Mound Bayou, and during his stay in town was the guest of Mr. Charles Banks. The picture of the house of Mr. Banks shows Dr. Washington and Mr. Banks standing together upon the veranda, surrounded by some of the prominent men and women of the town. The arch of cotton bales, erected on the main street, shows something of the chief product of Mound Bayou and vicinity. The cotton product is about five thousand bales.