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### The Story of Negro Disciples in Mississippi

Mrs. Charles C. Mosley

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*The Story...*

of Negro Disciples  
in Mississippi

MRS. CHARLES C. MOSLEY

MRS CHARLES C WOLFE

of Negro Disciples  
in Mississippi

No 2101

## THE AUTHOR

Mrs. Charles C. Mosley is a graduate of Jarvis Christian College at Hawkins, Texas. She is the author of "The Negro in Mississippi History." Her entire teaching career, with very little exception has been spent at Jarvis Christian College and Southern Christian Institute.

She is at present employed as Teen-Age Program Director of the Branch Y.W.C.A., Jackson, Miss.

Mrs. Mosley has been active in the work of the Christian Church locally and Nationally. Nationally she served two years as recording secretary of missionary organizations, and president of Ministers Wives' Fellowship. She was elected president of Missionary Organizations Education at the National Christian Missionary Convention of Disciples of Christ which convened in Memphis, Tenn. Aug. 22-28, 1950.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express appreciation to Reverend I. C. Franklin one of the earlier graduates of Southern Christian Institute for much of the history of the churches in Claiborne and Jefferson Counties. Brother Franklin has taught in the state, and has served in every capacity of the church during his long years of ministry.

My appreciation also goes to Mrs. Carrie A. Griffin of Shaw, Mississippi for her contribution of the history of the churches first organized in the Delta. Mrs. Griffin for many years has served as a teacher of that section.

Author.

## DEDICATED

TO the memory of those pioneer Disciples who started the flickering light of the Christian Religion burning in the hearts of a newly freed people of Mississippi. . . .

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## INTRODUCTION

Grand Gulf,<sup>1</sup> named for the whirlpools and eddies formed in the Mississippi by the current from the Big Black River and by a sand stone cliff jutting into the river. The danger of the Grand Gulf whirlpools was known to all early voyagers on the river, and a British settlement had been made at the mouth of the Big Black River before the American Revolution. On the level plain just above the eddy and cliff the town was laid out in 1828, was incorporated in 1833, and had a population approaching 1000 by 1860. It was an important river landing and to it cotton was barged down the Big Black River from as far as Jackson for transshipment. In 1835 Grand Gulf ranked third in commercial importance in the State, and for the next 20 years handled more cotton than any other town in Mississippi, not excepting Natchez or Vicksburg. A railroad, begun in the 1830's was completed to Port Gibson to take the place of a wagon road so bad that Joseph Jefferson, the actor, commented forcefully on its discomforts. Huge stores, buying fancy goods in New York and selling cotton in Liverpool, were grouped near the wharf. Two of the stores proprietors, Buckingham and Hume, were of the English gentry. Grog shops were plentiful and frequent duels were fought on the sand bar.

## THE STORY

The decline of Grand Gulf started when the river began to cut into the bluff. There were times when the town was moved piece meal away from the caving banks. Practically all that remained was destroyed by fire in 1862 when Federal gunboats were running the batteries in the successive campaigns against Vicksburg, General Grant said later that pistols would have been more appropriate—the gunboats and land batteries were so close together. The fall of Grand Gulf in 1863 was the prelude to the siege and fall of Vicksburg. Grant took the town and used it as his supply base for the remainder of the campaign. Traces of the Confederate fortifications, breastworks, and caves can be found on Tremount plantation back of the town, and trenches, still in good condition, are visible in the old cemetery. After the war, Grand Gulf's citizens attempted to revive the town life, but were again defeated by the river, which this time moved away toward the west. The river is now working in toward the one store and the few small houses that remain. The Federal Government has bought the cliff, from the top of which can be seen the Warren County Courthouse at Vicksburg, 25 miles away.

1. Reprinted by permission from, "Mississippi, a guide to the Magnolia state," W.P.A. Vikeng Press. 1943-p. 331



**This Monument Stands in the Historic Cemetery mentioned in the description of Grand Gulf. It is here that the first members of Salem Christian church are buried.**

Here in this historic and romantic setting, high upon a hill stands the first Christian church established for Negroes in the state of Mississippi. Its struggle for existence has been as hard as the struggle of Grand Gulf. Like Grand Gulf its struggle is a losing one. The membership has moved to towns where there are more opportunities for earning a living, and only a few are left to carry on the work of the church.

The church was organized in 1869 by a brother Owens, a white minister and Elder Eleven Woods. They came to Grand Gulf from Davis Bend which was just across the river in Louisiana. When Elder Eleven Woods came to Grand Gulf preaching the "New Gospel" there was one established church—the Baptist church. The few persons professing religion were members of this church.

This new gospel which Elder Woods preached caused much confusion. He was arrested and carried to Port Gibson, the county seat, eight miles from Grand Gulf to be tried. The judge opened court in the usual order. The charge was that this new gospel which Elder Woods was preaching was causing confusion and was about to split the Baptist church.

After the judge had heard the testimony elder Woods was ordered to preach a sermon of this "New Gospel," before the court in his own defense. The story goes that after the sermon was finished the judge rendered the following verdict, "that gospel as preached by elder Woods could not be counterfieted."

Elder Woods was released. The lock was taken from the door and the congregation was allowed to worship in peace for a while. It seems that Elder Woods was preaching in the Baptist church for it was after the trial that the church split. The old master of one of the pioneer members, a Mr. Charles Pearson, whose name is carried by some of the remaining members of the small membership today (Aug. 1950,) gave the land upon where the Church now stands. There are only eight members left. These are the children and grandchildren of the first membership of that first Christian church.

A look at the present church roll is revealing. Classified as one of the mothers of the church is Mrs. Mary White. Her grandparents were Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Miller. Her parents were Mr. and Mrs. Bradley, Mrs. Lenora Pierce McAlpin, whose parents were Mr. and Mrs. William Pierce. Mrs. McAlpin a former school teacher owns the one store referred to in the description of Grand Gulf. In addition to the store she owns most of the rent houses in the small settlement. For many years Mrs. McAlpin has been the acknowledged leader of the settlement. In 1935 she learned that the government was giving tombstones free of charge to Civil War Veterans.

Mrs. McAlpin was successful in getting fifteen of these stones. Some were for, John McWilliams, Edward Lewis, Henry Davis, the Grandfather of Mrs. McAlpin, Sam Jones, George Peters and Allen Bishop, on his tombstone was the following inscription, "Allen Bishop, C. 2-47 U. S. Col. Inf." The other Nine are not listed. More than half of these men fought not only for the



**Salem Christian Church, Grand Gulf, Mississippi  
Founded in 1869.**



Four of the eight adult members of Salem Christian Church. Front row left to right—Mrs. Dora Watson, Mrs. Alice Pierce, Back row, Little grand-daughter of Mrs. Dora Watson, Mrs. Mary White and Mrs. Lenord Pierce McAlpin.

liberation of the slaves, but for the liberation of the soul as members of the Christian Church.

To continue, however, with the list of the present membership we find Mrs. Dora Watson, Whose mother and father were Mr. and Mrs. Asberry, Mrs. Alice Pierce, whose parents were Mr. and Mrs. William Tyler, Mr. William Tyler, Jr., the only man member of the church, and likewise the only deacon, Mrs. Nancy Tyler, Mrs. Lizzie Turner and Mrs. Ross, grand-daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Miller and daughter of Mr. and Mrs. White. The members have preaching once a month by an itinerant minister.

There is not a missionary society as the president, Mrs. Joanna Howe died in September of 1949. There had been two other presidents prior to her time, Mrs. Ella Carrol Pierce and Mrs. Mary White. The members are proud of the present benches which were sent by Reverend King R. Brown who purchased them from the white Christian church of Port Gibson, the white congregation was replacing the old ones in their church with new pews. They are also proud of the fact they are still worshipping in the church building that was erected by their ancestors.

Another early church established in Claiborn county was Mundal Grove, twenty years later this church was moved to Port Gibson and took on the name of Christian Chapel. The build-



**Grand Gulf only store a carry over from the glorious past, This store is the property of Mrs. Lenora McAlpin member of the Salem Christian Church.**

ing was purchased from the white Christians of that city. A recent check of records revealed the building to be about one hundred and thirteen years old. Pine Grove, Bura, Rose Hill, Forest Grove, were among the pioneer churches established in Jefferson and Claiborne county.

Aside from Brother Eleven Woods there were many other fine ministers who assisted in establishing the churches. A few of these were: Elder W. A. Scott, Sr., John Turner, W. A. Parker, John Wormington, Elder George Hall, Ned Patterson, Frank Slater, B. F. Trevillion, Miles Smothers, W. R. Sneed, K. R. Brown and John Lomax.

In the early 70's about two miles North of Black Hawk in Carroll County, Ellen Dale (Mount Zion) was organized. The second church in the county was Bethel. Leaders in establishing these churches were Elders, William Ramey, Gen. Herndon, Mansfield Johnson and Henry Cathern. Some of the first officers were Alex Payton, Nolan Echols, and others.

Center Point church is an off spring from Bethel, and the last church organized in what was then known as the N. E. District. Union Grove was the last church organized in Carrol County. This church grew to be very influential, but due to the death of its leaders and the loss of many of its members, and through the exodus which followed the depression years, the church was abandoned.



**Planters Hotel of Port Gibson, Miss., for more than one hundred years has been a land mark of Claiborne County, This building at one time was in possession of Rev. K. R. Brown dynamic leader of the early church.**

In about 1887 the Mississippi State Convention was organized. Elder Woods was the first evangelist. The first work done by the convention was to purchase Christian Chapel from the white Christians of Port Gibson. Elder J. G. Keyes followed Brother Eleven Woods as State Evangelist. He served until 1899.

The officers to follow were Elder M. Smothers, State President, Elder K. R. Brown Secretary, and Brother William Blackburn, Treasurer. Next in order came Elder W. A. Scott, President. L. C. Williams, Secretary, Elder K. R. Brown, State Evangelist, and Dr. J. E. Walker, Treasurer.

In 1922, Elder I. C. Franklin was elected President of the State Convention, Elder N. R. Trivillion Vice-President, Brother L. G. Williams, was re-elected Secretary, and Dr. J. E. Walker was re-elected Treasurer. Elder B. C. Calvert, was elected State Evangelist. At his death Elder H. D. Griffin was elected.

In 1939, the late Brother N. R. Trivillion was elected President of the State Convention, Elder Edward Griffin, Vice President and Elder I. C. Franklin, State Evangelist. Brother L. C. Williams was re-elected secretary and Doctor J. E. Walker was re-elected Treasurer. In 1943 the same officers were re-elected with the exception of Elder I. C. Franklin. Elder T. E. Brooks was elected State Evangelist. Elder T. E. Brooks served as evangelist for two years. Elder S. D. Yarber was elected State Evangelist. The former officers



**Christian Chapel, Port Gibson, Miss. Stands as a monument to the unified efforts of Mississippi State Convention for Disciples of Christ.**

were re-elected with the exception of Brother L. C. Williams. Brother Williams resigned after forty years of service as secretary of the State Convention. Brother A. C. Williams was chosen as his successor. Brother A. C. Williams term was cut short by death. Brother D. B. Bush the assistant secretary served the remaining term.

In 1896 the Women's Missionary Society was organized. Mrs. Sarah Blackburn, Mrs. King Brown, Mrs. Hattie Griffin, and Mrs. Georgia Franklin were some of the first presidents and members. These fine women gave of their time, money and energy in order that the message of missions might be spread at home and abroad.

Other fine women followed some of whom were Mrs. Sadie Shaffer, Mrs. N. R. McCarty, Mrs. Ida Conwell and the late Mrs. King. Mrs. King like the soldiers of old died with the "Sword in her hand". Death came to her while she was presiding over the womans day program at her church in Port Gibson. The State President for 1950-51 is Mrs. I. S. Spiller also of Port Gibson.

The roll call of the pioneers of the church and the missionary society find many of the descendants of these fine families have made and are continuing to make their contribution to the work of their forefathers. Mrs. Rosa Brown Bracy, a daughter of Reverend and Mrs. K. R. Brown became the second Secretary for Women's Missionary organizations for Negro churches. It was her privilege to follow Mrs. Sarah Bostick of Little Rock, whose

contribution to missions is widely known. Mrs. Bracy served ably for more than twenty years. She was loved by the entire brotherhood, so much so that even today (August 1950) her appearance is an audience, brings joy to many hearts and ovations from the entire group.

Mr. and Mrs. William Blackburn are kept alive through the work of their children especially the work of their son Cleo Blackburn. The story of his work and life would make volumes of its own therefore we will only take time to mention his monumental work which will stand as a beacon through the years, the building of Flanders house at Indianapolis, Indiana.

Let us look again at the Bethel Church of Carrol County, in the old Hemingway district, it was here that the idea of establishing a school for Negroes of the State of Mississippi was born. It is the real birth place of Southern Christian Institute. Through the efforts of Brother Thomas Munnell, Secretary of the Home Missionary Society the school was opened. The stay in this district was brief, as was also the stay in Jackson. In 1875 a charter was granted by special act of Legislature to the Southern Christian Institute. In 1882 the present sight was purchased and school was opened in the fall with Mr. and Mrs. Randal Faurot and Miss Anna Brown in charge. Thus another seed was planted by the Disciples in Mississippi.

The dream of the great people that started the first church and the Southern Christian Institute has been fully realized. Out of the churches grew such noble leaders as Elder J. G. Keyes, Spring McCollough, Tom Porter, W. D. Sneed, Walter Miller, Brother Henry Hunter and many others.

Southern Christian Institute has not only furnished leadership for the state but for the Brotherhood as a whole. August Singleton the first graduate from Southern Christian Institute for many years headed an institution for orphans in the state of Kentucky. Mr. Singleton today is helping a number of boys and girls attend school at S. C. I., some of her earlier leaders were Jacob Kenoly, Missionary to Africa. Rev. P. H. Moss the first National worker for church and young people. and Reverend and Mrs. Harry G. Smith Missionaries to Africa. Reverend and Mrs. S. S. Myers, of Kansas City, Missouri, Reverend and Mrs. Robert LaTouche of Chicago, Illinois. Reverend Richard R. Davis of Chicago. Reverend R. H. Peoples of Indianapolis, Reverend and Mrs. Prince Grey of St. Louis Missouri, Reverend and Mrs. D. C. Heath of Roanoke, Virginia, Reverend and Mrs. Edward Griffin of Shelby, Miss., and Reverend P. C. Washington of California.

Serving as National Secretaries are Mr. E. J. Dixon, Mr. Lorenza Evans and Mrs. Bernice Blackburn Holmes the three have their offices in Indianapolis, Indiana. Outstanding in their own right are Mrs. Rosa Page Welsh widely known as a singer of

note and ambassador of good-will, Mrs. Carnella Jaimson Barnes, at one time the successful Secretary of Missionary Organizations and at present is employed at the Avalon Christian Church at Los Angeles, California, and Reverend and Mrs. B. L. Jacobs who for more than thirty years have served as teachers of their Alma Mater. Time and space will not permit the listing of the countless number of others who are doing an equally fine job in the field of preaching and teaching in the state and throughout the country.

Many of these fine leaders as children came out of the churches, this the never ending circle, the church feeds the school the leaders to go back home and serve the church and community.

Eighty-one years have passed since the establishing of that first church at Grand Gulf. The doors of some of the Pioneer churches have closed. Examination of the list of churches as given in the Year book (1949) Disciples of Christ, Pg. 489 finds many of them still in existence. Antioch (Port Gibson) Claiborne, County. Bethel, Coila Carroll, Center Point, (Greenwood) Leflore, Christian Chapel, (Port Gibson) Claiborne, Clarksdale (Cohoma) College Addition, (Jackson) Hinds, Fayette, (Jefferson), Forest Grove, (Tillman) Claiborne, Hermanville, (Claiborne), Holly Grove, (Indianola) Sunflower, North Jackson (Hinds) Johnson Chapel, (Cedar Bluff) Clay, King David Chapel (Hermanville) Claiborne, Little Zion, (Fayette) Jefferson, Lorman, (Jefferson), Macedoina, (Pascagoula), Jackson, McKinneys Chapel (Sunflower), Mound Bayou (Bolivar). Mt. Beulah (Patterson) Claiborne, Mt. Zion (Hankinson) Claiborne, Pine Grove (Port Gibson) Claiborne, Providence (Tillman) Claiborne, Rose Hill (Red Lick) Jefferson, St. Elmo (St. Elmore) Claiborne, St. Luke (Patterson) Claiborne, Salem (Port Gibson) Claiborne, Shaw, Bolivar, Southern Christian Institute, (Edwards) Tillman Chapel, (Tillman) Claiborne, Union Hill (Hermanville) Claiborne, Vicksburg, Warren, West Point (Clay), Around thirty-eight churches altogether with a membership of 2174.

The Story of the Negro Disciples of Mississippi would not be complete with out recognizing the work of Prof. J. B. Lehman, the late President of Southern Christian Institute. Mr. Lehman and his good wife were untiring in their efforts to train young men for the ministry. President Lehman served in what ever way he could in helping to organize some of the churches of the state. The Church at Edwards, Mississippi was organized by him. For a time he served as the Pastor and the students went into town on Sundays for the services.

Other Pastors to follow President Lehman were Rev. W. A. Scott and Rev. P. H. Moss. circumstances which affected the other churches affected this one also. The membership died or moved away. Today (August 1950) Mr. Ralph Singleton is the only member of that pioneer group living in Edwards.

The Christian womans Board of Missions shares equal honors with President Lehman, for in addition to serving as President of Southern Christian Institute which was under its auspices, he also served as secretary of Negro work.

. . . "The Light shineth in the darkness and giveth light to all around."