Prominent African Americans of Jefferson County

Selected Resources

Notable persons

Walter “Wiley” Jones (1848-1904)
Wiley Jones was one of the first wealthy African Americans in the South. Jones, a leading businessman, was an ex-slave who became a barber and a saloon owner. Jones was born in Georgia where he was one of six children of George Jones, a white planter, and Ann, a slave. He moved with his family to Jefferson County when he was five years old. Although Jones had no schooling, he would grow up to be a shrewd businessman and start several businesses, including a fifty-five acre recreational park near 17th and Main in Pine Bluff with a harness-racing track. Jones was also one of the first African Americans to receive a franchise to operate a mule-drawn streetcar system, which he called Wiley Jones Street Car Lines. While Jones never ran for office, he was one of Jefferson County’s most influential political citizens in the 1880s and 1890s.

Ottowa (O.W.) Gurley
Edited, from www.uncrownedcommunitybuilders.com/person/ottowa-o-w
Gurley was born in Alabama in 1868 but moved to Pine Bluff with his family in 1876, where he eventually attended the Branch Normal College (now UAPB). Gurley then moved to Oklahoma where he was a prominent businessman and community leader. Once proclaimed the wealthiest man in Tulsa, Oklahoma, O.W. Gurley saw his property and his wealth disappear on May 31st through June 1st, 1921 in the flames of the Tulsa Race Riot. The Tulsa Race Riot took nearly 300 lives and caused millions of dollars in damage, and primarily affected African Americans. Gurley testified before the Grand Jury that investigated the riot.

Sue Bailey Thurman
Edited, from archives.bu.edu/web/howard-thurman/sue-bailey-thurman-collection
Sue Bailey Thurman (1903 -1996) was an American author, lecturer, social historian and organizer. Thurman was renowned for her advocacy of interracial, intercultural and international understanding, and for traveling around the world promoting her vision of international peace and fellowship. Sue Bailey Thurman was born in Pine Bluff (the above link incorrectly states “Fort Bluff”) where she was the youngest of ten children.
Notable persons, cont’d.

Jane Oliver
*From African Americans of Pine Bluff and Jefferson County, by Jimmy Cunningham.*
Born a slave in 1862, Oliver was one of Jefferson County’s early African American female landowners. After borrowing $100 from banker R.M. Knox, she purchased 202 acres of land for farming and selling timber. She managed her business affairs and paid off her loans all without ever learning how to write, according to her 1938 interview with Bernice Bowden. Jane Oliver Apartments, a Pine Bluff housing project, bore her name for years.

Nettie Hollis Johnson
*From African Americans of Pine Bluff and Jefferson County, by Jimmy Cunningham.*
Johnson opened the first beauty shop of its kind in Pine Bluff in 1906. Her neatly arranged shop featured all black operators serving white women exclusively. Her entrepreneurial spirit was fed by working in her mother’s store, the Hollis Grocery Store, where she did clerking and bookkeeping.

Desegregation of the University of Arkansas School of Law
Developed by ASC. This curriculum packet was provided in conjunction with a screening of the film *I Am Not Your Negro* at ASC. This curriculum packet is a supplemental guide for educators to make regional connections to Southeast Arkansas’s history with the Civil Rights Movement and desegregation in higher education. It includes three lesson plans, primary source material from 1940s newspapers, and suggested additional reading and resources. To access this in-depth curriculum packet, visit [www.asc701.org/education-resources](http://www.asc701.org/education-resources)

Heritage Detectives: Discovering Arkansas’s Hidden Heritage
Developed by ASC. *Heritage Detectives: Discovering Arkansas’s Hidden Heritage* placed a historian and artist in Pine Bluff, Dumas, McGehee, and Lake Village classrooms to uncover and depict the diverse cultural influences of Southeast Arkansas. This project resulted in a pictorial history of the region, including the economic, cultural, and political influences that have shaped Arkansas and the lives of Arkansans. For more information, visit [www.asc701.org/heritage-detectives](http://www.asc701.org/heritage-detectives)

Other Resources


Encyclopedia of Arkansas. [www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net)

Pine Bluff/Jefferson County Historical Museum. Located at 201 E. 4th Ave., open Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM. Call them at (870)541-5402.