

BENTON
COUNTY



"It's that Freedom Train a comin'; get on board, get on board."

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Beulah May Ayers, editor



FREEDOM
VOTE

OCTOBER 30 & 31
NOVEMBER 1 & 2

RAINY DAY FREEDOM DAY IS HELD!

Last Friday, October 16, thirteen Negro citizens of Benton County went to the courthouse to register to vote. Over twenty more Negroes waited all day at Sims Chapel, where they were studying the constitution, but they were unable to go down to the courthouse because it took all day to register thirteen people.

Mr. Mathis, the county registrar refused to register more than one person at a time, even though he was asked to do so. Those who registered now have 30 days in which to hear whether they passed or failed. According to the new civil rights law, they also have the right to receive copies of their votes if they request them from the registrar.

It is not expected that many of those who registered will pass the test, but even this has a purpose. For if enough fail, the federal government can bring a suit against the registrar which would force the automatic registration of Negroes.

Voter registration drives in Benton are being carried on during rainy days when it is too wet to pick cotton. All interested people meet in a church, study the constitution, and then go down to the courthouse. The next time it rains, all interested are invited to meet at NEW SALEM church. People can register to vote as many times as possible--until they pass the test.

District Meetings

Last Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights, district meetings were held to discuss candidates for the ASCS elections. Because of the rainy weather, the election of candidates for the ASC ballot was put off to a later date. It is likely that meetings for these elections will be held on Tuesday, October 27 for the second district,

for the Second district, Wednesday October 28 for the Third district, and Thursday, October 29, for the First District.

Tonight an all-county meeting of the Citizens Club is being held in Hebron Chapel.

Rally in Chicago

On Sunday, October 25, 1964, a rally to raise money for the Wayne Yancey Community Center in Benton County will be held in Chicago, Illinois. It is being planned by the sisters and brothers of Wayne Yancey, and they are being helped by former citizens of Benton County who now live in Chicago.

It is expected that 5,000 persons will attend the rally. Mr. Henry Reaves who is deeding the land for the Center has been invited to speak. Other speakers will be Stokeley Carmichael, 2nd District Director for COFO, and Aviva Futorian, COFO worker.

Testimony Taken

Testimony on unfair treatment of Benton County Negroes is now being prepared for the Justice Department in Washington. Anyone who feels they have received unfair treatment from the FHA, REA, private loan companies, or the county Welfare Department, should contact their district chairmen of the Citizens Club who will contact a COFO worker to take testimony about this.

Students Write Letters

Students from Park Forest, Illinois have written letters to students in Benton County in order to get to know them and discuss common problems. The college prep class is making a tape recorded discussion to send to the students in Park Forest, Illinois.

Joining the Freedom Movement

by Mrs. Mattie Beard

One Tuesday in June I went to the dentist to have my tooth pulled and I saw a drove of people going down the street. Someone asked me did I know who they were. I said no, "Who are they?" They said, "Those are the people who are going to make the colored and white people mix." My husband said, "I am going down to their office."

So he went and he signed up. He came back and told me that he had joined the freedom work. I told him I wanted to join too. So I went on for a week, and I went to the first meeting that was held in Benton County.

The church was crowded that night. There were six freedom workers on one side and six on the other side. Still no one had asked me to sign up. I wondered if I had been left out.

I had one desire and my desire was to get a seat beside Pete Cummings. I did, and he asked me if I had signed up. I said no.

He asked if I wanted to sign. I said, "Yes, I do want to sign. I wish I could signed four or five of those freedom registration forms." He said, "No, only one name is all you can sign." He asked me, "What do you want, Mrs. Beard?" I said, "FREEDOM, man, Freedom!"

And I've been in the freedom movement ever since.

News from North Benton

by Rebecca P. Dorse

We of North Benton County spent Saturday afternoon having fun at the Mid-South Fair in Memphis. There were four families of us: the Franklins, Washingtons, Williams, and Dorses. There were 24 children and 4 adults.

FARM REPORT:

by Robert Smith

Who may vote in the ASC election?

Anyone of legal voting age who has an interest in a farm as owner, tenant, or sharecropper.

All farmers including tenants and sharecroppers who share in the crop of a farm are supposed to vote in the ASC election to be held in December. In the spring, the ASC agents came around surveying cotton. At that time they were supposed to take the names of all those eligible to vote. But many names were not taken.

How can we tell if we are registered?

A letter will be sent to each farmer between October 28 and November 3 telling them that nominations are open to have candidates' names placed on the ballot. If you do not get this letter by November 3, then you are not on the list of eligible voters. This means that you cannot vote in the ASC election in December. Then once again, you stand to be cheated out of your cotton allotment.

If you do not receive that letter, please contact me, Bob Smith, or Aviva Futorian, or an officer of the Citizens Club, and let us know.

Stand up and Fight!

by Gloosie Clardy

We Negro fellow men ought to stand up and fight for our rights. What we Negroes ought to do is tell the white man we won't be his slaves anymore.

What we Negroes want to do on the land we live on, for instance, if we want to build another room to the house, we are afraid to do it because he might put us in jail or sue us.

Another thing we can do is to keep Goldwater out of the White House.

NEGRO POETRY SECTION:

(The following two poems were written by Langston Hughes, a famous Negro poet now living in New York City).

THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its mussy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

* * * * *



DREAM BOOGIE: VARIATION

Trinkling trebel,
Rolling bass,
High noon teeth
In a midnight face,
Great long fingers
On great big hands,
Screaming pedals
Where his twelve-shoe lands,
Looks like his eyes
Are teasing pain,
a Few minutes lage
For the Freedom Train.

* * * * *

And from our Benton County poets:

JOIN THE FREEDOM FIGHT

by Beulah Mae Ayers

We sing that we want "freedom."

We say we want our "freedom."

But how will we get our freedom?

If we don't stand on our own two feet?

I can't get it for you

Nor can you get it for me.

But don't let others do it for you

And then say you are free.

Now the ones that do their job

And stand up for their rights,

They are helping themselves and others,

So join the Freedom Fight!

NEGRO HISTORY SECTION:

THE SLAVE POET--PHYLLIS WHEATLEY

William Brown often wondered whatever became of his slave Crispus. Not even a reward brought him back. "Ah, well," he probably mused to himself, "there are many more blacks where that one came from."

He was not wrong, for in Africa there were millions living and unborn who were to know the crack of the slave driver's whip and the miseries of perpetual toil without reward.

One of them was a little girl. You might think that she was entirely different from little white and brown girls over here, but she was not so different after all. She probably played ring around a rosy and hide and seek. Maybe she skipped rope and played hop-scotch.

One day a frightful thing happened. Somehow this little girl had got away from the other boys and girls when a very queer man rushed to her. She tried to get away, but in her terror she fell. A strong and powerful hand grasped her and held fast. Struggle as she might she could not get away. What use to scream? Every one else was far away, and those who might be nearby hid themselves for fear.

She was carried away. Far away from the land of laughing children. Snatched away from the freedom of the wide fields and sunny meadows. Some years later she described this terrible event in these words:

I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate,
Was snatch'd from Africa's fancied happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labor in my parent's breast!
Steeled was that soul, and by no misery moved,
That from a father seized the babe beloved.

When she had partly recovered from her fright she discovered herself in a ship. There were many other children and men and women on board. Everybody was sad. Their heads hung low, and they seldom spoke. Oh, for a breath of air! A drink of cool water! A mother's tender kiss or a loving father's fond embrace!

At last land was sighted. It was the city of Boston, in the United States of America. They told the little girl to walk off the boat onto the dock. She looked about her. The confusion and bustle added to her fright. Those noisy wagons and carts! The yelling of dock hands as they moved goods along the docks!

"What's to become of me?" she thought. A lady passing by spied her, clad as she was in the single dirty carpet which circled her waist. "What a cute little girl," she said to herself, as her glance met the child's sad, wondering eyes, so big and so hungry for Africa. "I should like to take her, but I want someone who can do my housework, and this child is too little and too frail."

The lady turned to look at another captive who was older and more robust. "She would make an excellent helper in the house," the lady

remarked. But the frightened, haunting look in the sad-eyed little maiden of seven would not leave her. Her own mind was troubled at the thought of going off without her. Finally she decided that she would take her.

Thus it was that the little girl became the property of Mrs. Susannah Wheatley of Boston, wife of a well-to-do tailor, whose name was John Wheatley.

They called her Phillis. Phillis became the little ward of Mary Wheatley, who was the seventeen-year-old daughter of the Wheatleys. Nathaniel was her twin brother. Mary came to love Phillis as if she were her own little sister. The same love was extended to Phillis by the other members of the household. Soon Phillis became as one of the family, quite apart from all the other servants of the house. She was clad as one of the family, sat at table with them, and went about with them visiting and being entertained by their friends. She was known as Phillis Wheatley.

She liked to sit down and watch Mary Wheatley, especially when Mary took the big quill pen and, dipping it into the ink, proceeded to write a letter to some friend. "I wish I could do that," sighed Phillis.

One day, Mary found Phillis outside the house trying to write on the wall with a piece of charcoal. Mary immediately set about teaching Phillis how to read and write. And how fast she did learn! In less than a year and a half she could read any portion of the Bible. By the time she was twelve years old she was writing letters to friends near and far, and to persons of very high station.

One day when she was about thirteen she showed something to her foster-sister Mary. "How do you like this?" she asked. To Mary's amazement Phillis had composed a poem. "Do you know," she said, "sometimes in the middle of the night I dream such lovely things to write, but when morning comes they are all gone and I can never recall them again."

"Well," said the Wheatleys, "you shall have a table alongside your bed, and on it shall be paper and pen and ink, and a light. Whenever you feel like writing you can do so."

Phillis made remarkable progress. She wrote poem after poem, dedicating them to famous men and women, and winning the admiration of numbers of people who knew of her gift. By the time she was seventeen she had mastered Latin so fully that she wrote verses in imitation of the Latin authors. These added to her fame. She wrote a poem to George Washington and sent it to him with a letter. Washington was so pleased that he invited Phillis to come and visit him.

Phillis Wheatley wrote all these lovely things between the ages of thirteen and twenty years. Perhaps one of the most interesting is this brief stanza in reference to herself and her race:

Remember, Christians, Negroes black as Cain
May be refined and join the angelic train.

When Phillis was about twenty years of age her mistress proposed that she accompany her foster-brother Nathaniel to England. Phillis

had a glorious time in England. People from all over London sought her out and entertained her. While she was abroad her friends back home collected a number of her poems and published them in a book.

As a climax to her happy visit, her English friends arranged to present her to King George III. But just at that time she received word that she must return to America at once as Mrs. Wheatley was seriously ill. She immediately set sail and returned to Boston.

Mrs. Wheatley did not live long after Phillis returned. The youthful poetess was distressed at the loss of this kind lady who had really been a mother to her. Unfortunately this was not to be all of her sorrow. Soon after this Mr. Wheatley died. Her beloved foster sister had married and that left Phillis quite alone. Life seemed dark for her.

A gleam of sunshine came in the form of a romance with a Negro named Peters. This man was a respected grocer and reputed to be quite wealthy. The two were married. For some reason, however, the marriage was an unhappy one. Even the blessing of three children did not help much. In her sorrow and disappointment Phillis Wheatley Peters withdrew herself altogether from the friends who once sought her out, and lived alone with her three children, supporting herself and the little ones by working in a cheap boarding house.

The winter was a terribly severe one. The children, suffering from cold and hunger, took ill and died one after the other. Phillis was heart-broken. In December of the same year (1785) she herself died broken and grief-stricken.

It is said that a relative of Susannah Wheatley was passing along the streets of Boston on the bleak December day of the funeral. She noted the funeral procession passing by.

"Who is dead?" she asked

"It is Mrs. Phillis Peters," came the reply. To her sorrow she learned that dear Phillis Wheatley was being taken to her last resting place.

Phillis was only thirty-one years of age at the time of her death. Perhaps, being a poet, it was intended that she should pass away early.

* * * * *

The following is one of the poems written by Phillis Wheatley:

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery moved
That from a father seiz'd his babe lov'd:
Such, such was my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

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NEWS FROM TIPPAAH COUNTY

NEGRO FREEDOM

by Laura Strong

Ever since December 18, 1865, when Amendment Thirteen was ratified by the Secretary of State, the Negroes have been free. At least the white people of Mississippi want the Negroes to feel that we are free. Freedom means equality. Therefore, we Negroes are not free.

The white people of Mississippi think, we as Negroes, want freedom in order to be able to marry some one of the white race. What we Negroes want are better job opportunities, higher wages, privilege to go into restaurants and sit down and eat, rights to register for voting, better schools, and above all some of our Negroes to be leading citizens of the United States. Some of us Negroes are actually afraid to stand up and be counted in the helping of the Freedom Democratic Party. I want to help in every way I can for Negro Freedom, and I will fight to the end for what I feel is for us, the Negroes of the United States.

FREEDOM NOW!

Tippah County is presently having an all out campaign for organizing the Freedom Democratic Party (FDP). The two men leading the new drive are Amos Rogers, assistant county chairman, and Sam Lee Rogers, associate chairman of Antioch community. There are also two civil rights workers who are in the county every day. They are Marjorie Merrill and Gloria Xifaras. Two girls from Antioch help them: Laura Strong and Charleane Hill.

MEETINGS: Antioch community meets regularly every Friday night at 7:30 and Freedom School meets on Wednesday nights at 7:30. All are welcome. Ripley had a meeting last week at the Church of Christ under the leadership of county chairman Rev. James and consent of Rev. Beard. The next meeting will be on Monday Oct. 26 at St. Paul's Church, 7:00. We hope to have 100 people from Ripley attend.

Ruckersville had a meeting also and fifty-five attended. The next meeting will be on Tuesday Oct. 27 at Bethlehem Church, 7:30.

WHAT IS THE FREEDOM VOTE?

The Freedom Vote is being discussed at all meetings everywhere in Mississippi and especially in Tippah County. It is a chance for all people of Mississippi to vote in an election. You do not have to be a registered voter. You only have to be 21. Some of the people on the ballot will be qualified Negroes. People will vote in their community

BALLOT BOXES: at Antioch Oct. 31, Nov. 1, 2. At St. Paul's Oct. 31.

At Church of Christ Nov. 1. Attend your meetings to find out where the others will be.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A FREEDOM SCHOOL

By Charleane Hill

I have realized as being a Negro that something has been kept from us in our public schools, and this is one disadvantage in the public high schools. We as Negro students don't have an opportunity to learn about what our fellow men as Negroes have done for this country and for themselves as Negroes, and for freedom of other Negroes. We have established a freedom school at Antioch Missionary Baptist Church. I have been attending the weekly meetings and the school. That's how I found out about the Negroes of this country of long ago and what part they played in this country and other countries.

This is why I think it is so important for all teenagers to attend the Freedom School. It enables them to learn much more about American History as well as Negro History. So please think about some of the things I have said, for if everybody feels as I do about Negro Freedom, we will fight for what we really deserve: and that is "FREEDOM".