

THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTY SEAT OF BOLIVAR COUNTY

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Although the story of the wanderings of the county seat of Bolivar County is told in the copy of the records of the Board of Police or Supervisors to be found in this volume, it seems especially fitting that a chapter be devoted entirely to this subject.

When the county was established in 1836, the county seat was promptly located on the property of Mr. William Vick, at Bolivar Landing in the lower part of the county, and was named Bolivar.

Five acres of land, including an overseer's house, were purchased for \$800 from Mr. Vick for county purposes. B. M. Hines surveyed and laid off the courthouse square, with town lots around it, and the lots were advertised for sale. In 1840, an order was passed by the Board of Police to build a courthouse, of one large room, to cost \$595.

In March, 1844, the Board of Police ordered that the county seat be removed "to the site known as Jackson's Point about five miles above the house of John V. Newman, and upon the land of Thomas Barnard, and there permanently located." This was above the present town of Beulah, on the bank of what was then the Mississippi River, and the spot is still called the "Old Courthouse Field."

The first court was held at Jackson's Point on August 6, 1844 and ten acres of land were ordered appropriated for the county seat. The name given at this meeting was Unum, but it was changed to Bolivia at the next meeting of the board, and remained the same.

It seemed to be impossible to purchase the land needed for the county, even the order of the board to condemn and appropriate the land did not meet with success, though the county surveyor had been ordered to lay off the county seat of Bolivia into town lots and advertise them.

As late as three years after the removal of the county seat to Bolivia, in 1847, the sheriff, Isaac Hudson, was authorized "to go to the owners of the land at or contiguous to where the courthouse stood, purchase the same and notify owner that damages will be assessed and land taken according to law." Another attempt was made to secure the land in 1851, with no success, so an act of the legislature was passed in November, 1851, authorizing the removal of the county seat from Bolivia to within one mile of a point opposite the mouth of the Arkansas River, to be designated by the board.

Three acres of land were purchased from Joseph McGuire for \$1000 with the right of way to the river, of sixty feet. This was on Indian Point opposite the town of Napoleon, Arkansas, at the foot of the Arkansas River. The county records were removed to the new county seat in April, 1852, and it was named Wellington.

Some doubt arising as to the legality of the proceedings in locating the county seat at Wellington, an election was ordered to take the sense of the people as to another change and the vote stood 65 to 13 in favor of its remaining where it was.

Just why or when the name of the county seat was changed from Wellington to Prentiss is not shown in the records of the county, but the records of the proceedings of the Board of Police of January 8, 1856, call the county seat Prentiss for the first time. There was a town at Prentiss before the county seat was removed from Bolivia, and we know that the county built a fine brick courthouse and jail at Prentiss after 1856.

There seems to be no record of the proceedings of the Board of Police from 1856 to 1866, some of the records having been destroyed by fire in the burning of the courthouse in Rosedale in 1877. The first iron safe was bought for the records in 1854; and in 1855 a committee was appointed to obtain drafts of county buildings. The courthouse and jail mentioned above were evidently the result of the work of this committee. The town of Prentiss was burned by the Federal fleet in 1862 and the courthouse and jail destroyed.

The circuit clerk at that time, Mr. W. R. Wright, seems to have had charge of the records during this period.

After the dark cloud of war had passed, we find the question of the permanent location of the county seat again up for settlement. Colonel F. A. Montgomery donated land on his plantation, "Beulah", and his offer to build a courthouse to cost \$1,600 thereon was accepted by the Board of Police, May, 1866. A log jail of two rooms was also built. The town of Beulah was the result, and it is still one of the important towns of the county.

But alas, "a permanent location" was not yet. In 1869, the agitation for removal began again, and the board was petitioned to move the county seat back to Prentiss. Landowners of the Prentiss territory offered to donate the land and to build a courthouse equal to the one at Beulah, free of charge to the county, and the board accepted the offer. In June, 1871, estimates and specifications were submitted to the board for a building to cost \$10,000 by H. T. Florey, R. J. Nugent, and W. F. Pearcefield. Their plans were accepted and bids authorized.

In September, it seems that other plans were ordered by the board, and were accepted at the October meeting. Bids were

authorized, and a building committee appointed—then a lull in the proceedings.

In the late fall of 1871 a petition was circulated by Charles Scott and others to remove the county seat from Beulah to the small town of Riverton, on the river six miles above Beulah. This move was opposed by General Charles Clark, Colonel F. A. Montgomery, Major W. E. Montgomery, Dr. J. I. J. Shelby, Mr. George Baldwin, and others; and Walter Sillers, then a college lad, was employed by those opposing the change to carry a counter petition over the county, which he did with such thoroughness that he obtained an overwhelming majority of the signers against removal, and this move was abandoned. The Radicals were now in full power, and an act of the legislature of the state was surreptitiously procured, authorizing the Board of Supervisors to appoint a commission to locate a seat of justice. This was on March 30, 1872. On April 12, 1872, the board passed an order "that the records be removed to the County Seat as located by the said Commissioners, as soon as suitable buildings for offices could be obtained."

On May 22, 1872, the Board of Supervisors, consisting of one white man, E. Storm, and three Negroes, met at "Lower Rosedale", in the house built by J. H. Fields as a residence (but where his wife refused to live.)

The commissioners, C. M. Bowles (Negro), M. B. Sullivan (Carpetbagger), and H. T. Florey (Radical), were appointed to locate the county seat. A committee was appointed consisting of E. Storm, H. T. Florey, and George Y. Scott, to negotiate for the purchase of the Field residence for a courthouse, and the stable for a jail; \$10,000 was paid for the residence and \$4,000 for the stable.

The records were ordered removed to the new county seat at once, which order was obeyed promptly under cover of the darkness of that night, to avoid the danger of an injunction by the people of Beulah.

This new county seat was named Floreyville, in honor of the Radical leader, H. T. Florey.

The name was changed from Floreyville to Rosedale by legislative enactment in 1876, when the representatives from Bolivar County were Colonel Green Clay, Dr. J. I. J. Shelby, and the senator, J. R. Chalmers. Rosedale was the name of an adjoining plantation owned by Mr. Lafayette Jones.

According to the minutes of the Board of Supervisors of 1872 and 1873, the sum of \$10,000 was paid for the building and \$9,314 spent for repairs and improvements of this new courthouse; the original cost of the wooden stable bought for a jail was \$4,000, with \$3,100 spent for repairs, making a total expenditure of \$26,414. In 1877 this courthouse burned, and many of the records were

lost. It was rebuilt by the insurance companies. A brick jail was built in 1887 by contractor Frank Hull of Jackson, Mississippi.

In 1889 the old frame building was removed to an adjoining lot and served as a town hall. It was replaced by a handsome brick courthouse, costing \$36,000, a goodly sum in those days. The architects were Bartlett and Company, Little Rock, Arkansas; the contractor was J. F. Barnes.

In 1900, the county was divided into two judicial districts, with the line running north and south through the center of the county; Rosedale remained the county seat of the first district, and Cleveland was made the county seat of the second district. Rosedale is situated on the Riverside Division on the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad and the Mississippi River, about the center of the length of the county, and Cleveland is a little south of due east of Rosedale, on the main line of the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad.

A brick courthouse and jail were built in Cleveland in 1900, and immediately the town began to grow.

In 1921 the two-story brick courthouse at Rosedale was condemned, because of the undermining of the foundations by seep water from the Mississippi River during the high water. It was torn down and a modern one-story brick and stone structure, costing over \$100,000, erected in its place during the years 1922 and 1923, which is the pride of the western side of the county. The architects of this building were Kramer and Lindsley of Jackson, Mississippi, and the contractor was S. W. Leard, of McCool, Mississippi.

Cleveland entered the claim that its courthouse was not large enough to accommodate the business of that side of the county, and it was torn down and replaced by a magnificent three-story brick and stone building, costing about \$150,000. This was completed in 1924. The architects were Overstreet and Company, Jackson, Mississippi, and the contractor, W. C. Stout.

Such is the story of the courthouses and county seats of Bolivar County.