

6

"To Build Up A Country Worth Living In" *The Cultural Development of Rosedale*

WILLIAM A. SULLIVAN, JR.

An early history of Bolivar County reports that the Mississippi Delta was settled following the mid-nineteenth century by men from Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Mississippi. And, according to the same history, these men, "being slaveholders, were all wealthy, as wealth was measured in that day and age. Better still, they were educated, cultivated people, with manners patterned from the English country gentleman, with the ideals of Washington and Jefferson—courteous men, whose chief aim in life was to build up a country worth living in, and to enjoy it to the fullest."

One must greatly respect the settlers' desire "to build up a country worth living in" out of a land "covered with great forest trees and a growth of evergreen cane (bamboo), through which no rider could pass, and only with difficulty could a man work his way through on foot." The town of Rosedale was no less formidable than its surrounding natural environment. The record of a young girl's arrival into Rosedale, or "into the mud of Bolivar County," is marked by a telling impression: "It was a very cold dark afternoon, with everything covered with a six inch snow, including a full six inches of mud under the snow." The ride to her lodgings she called "the wildest ride I had ever taken."

Dr. William A. Sullivan, Jr., is an Associate Professor of English at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi.

The following is a record of how men went about building a town worth living in—Rosedale, Mississippi. These particular activities, better perhaps than fine arts, reveal the peculiar culture of any particular society or community. It is a common tendency to focus on artistic expression rather than on common activity and behavior when culture is assessed. Ironically, it is just this significance of the everyday or commonplace which the artist tries to capture and convey to his audience.

The activities which express the cultural tonality of Rosedale citizens range from simple, public activities to exotic, elite activities. The town's newspapers often included notices of coming or past picnics and dances. One of the earliest such announcements is listed under "Personals" in the *Bolivar County Democrat* of August 22, 1889, and noted that "the colored people will picnic at Benois [sic] on the 31st. From the extravagant nature of the bills great times are anticipated. Excursion trains will be on the road." Frequently, the newspapers reported that there had been ample hayrides and dances for the young folk. Some of these events were slightly more special than others. For example, in the *Democrat* of June 4, 1902, and April 18, 1903, it was observed that "Hayrides and dances were the social features of the past week, complimentary of the many lovely visitors in our city," or "a most enjoyable dance was given by the young men of Rosedale, at the court house last Monday evening, in honor of the fair belles of Rosedale and their guests." *The Weekly Leader* for February 1, 1884, announced an oyster supper to be held in a few days by the Rosedale Missionary Society, but added, "at present the time and place has not been designated." According to the *History of Bolivar County, Mississippi*, "ladies of the church vied with one another to serve benefit oyster suppers in the fall, strawberries and ice cream in the spring." There is a fictional account of a fourth of July fish fry which is a grand combination of all the above celebrations of *joie de vivre* in the opening chapter of Mary Carson Warfield's unpublished novel, *Angola: A Tale of the South*—fish fry, dance, ice cream supper, hayride.

Another amusement pursued with high seriousness was drinking, or what Walker Percy has described as the aesthetic of "knocking it back." The *History of Bolivar County* devoted much space to this

amusement and iniquity. Clearly, most knocking-it-back activity was around Rosedale, easily accessible to river traffic, showboats, and steamboats, and the whiskey boats of the moonshiners and bootleggers on the islands in the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers.

Exotic saloons, such as the "Palace" and "Alhambra," were advertised in early Rosedale newspapers. According to WPA documents, "Saloon Days" were worse than "Dog Days" in Bolivar County: "There were so many drunk men and women of ill repute on the streets that no real lady would dare encounter such. Prior to 1900 there were saloons at every cross-road, two in Malvina, one at White Bridge, four in Gunnison, several on plantations near Gunnison, one in Beulah, one on the levee between Rosedale and Beulah and just as many in Cleveland, Shaw, and the other towns in east Bolivar County. These saloons were a great nuisance and did much to lower the morale of the men of the county." Others commented on the saloons' ill effect on morals of the men of the county.

A young lady's view of saloon days in Rosedale offers an interesting and different perspective. Florence Warfield Sillers recalled that "I lived for two years at the old and only hotel in Rosedale, and there my very young country bred eyes were opened to the ways of the Bolivar County boys. Drinking and gambling were favorite pastimes, and when the boys of those times *did* things, they did them right, whether for good or bad." In addition to the local saloons, Rosedale citizens had access to the whiskey boats and "blind tigers" on the river. The whiskey boats were used to conduct trade in illegal or bootleg whiskey. The "blind tigers" were subsidiaries of the whiskey boats—"House boats fitted up attractively and supplying every known drink and many gambling devices," according to the *History of Bolivar County*.

Amusements which were perhaps rewarding and even likely to help build up a country worth living in were furnished by theaters and showboats. Rosedale had a moving picture show as early as 1910 which was owned and operated by W. M. Priestley. As noted in an earlier chapter, until recently the "Talisman," established and so-named in 1916, was operative. The showboat is still a source of entertainment in Rosedale, even though it is not the same showboat

as in earlier days. The showboat of today usually has a play put on at a number of stops along the River by a company supported through a grant from the National Arts Foundation. There are also other river shows, such as the Joliet and Marquette simulated landing in the summer of 1973, or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers exhibit about the *Sergeant Floyd* in January, 1976.

Margaret Allen Green wrote an essay on the showboats for the *History of Bolivar County*. She indicated that after some inquiry she began to wonder whether Rosedale was the only town on the River where the elite indulged in such "common pleasures" as the showboats. To be sure, W. A. Percy's family had indulged, and in *Lanterns on the Levee* he described a visit on *The Floating Palace* with the same enthusiastic approval Mrs. Green had for her own experiences.

It is reported that the first showboat appeared in the vicinity of Rosedale in 1833. It was a large flatboat with a structure which housed a theater on it. It was the first of what came to be called the "floating palaces." Later showboats were accompanied by another smaller steamboat which was living quarters for crew and cast and which pushed the theater. According to Mrs. Green, all the showboats carried a calliope and a band and were elaborately strung with electric lights. *The Golden Rod* and *French's New Sensation* were the regular Rosedale showboats between 1900 and 1914.

A summary of the report of the showboat could not possibly replace the eyewitness account below:

Let us take a typical day in Rosedale in the fall of 1910. We are at school in the new school building over on Levee Street, so named because every other hundred yards parts of the old abandoned levee stood, with barrow pits behind. Suddenly far-off music is heard. Immediately the morning recitations are abandoned, and every one races to the windows shouting, "there's the calliope!" "The showboat has come!"

"Can we go to the parade, Miss Tillie?"

"We are going in a surrey tonight from Mr. Matthews' livery stable."

"Pop's going to take us in a box tonight, so if it catches on fire we can jump right in the river."

"We've got passes 'cause my cousin is the deputy sheriff. If some of the niggers have a cutting, they won't make the boat people stay over."

"Gosh, I'm going to run off with a showboat some day."

Much conversation of this type mingles with the strains of *Turkey in the Straw*, and Miss Tillie smilingly lets the children listen until the

calliope ceases. The excitement is too much for further study, though there is pretense of reciting.

Finally a band is heard closer, the parade has come up town. School is dismissed, and the children scurry away to see the showboat band. It is a brass band of, perhaps, twelve or fourteen pieces, the players in gorgeous colored uniforms, looking a little tired from their mile hike from the landing. But their music sounds glorious to the spectators. Children and Negroes crowd close, but the young ladies and men are careful to be at Chaney's Drug Store so they can easily step outside and hear without appearing too interested. After the band has played several pieces, one member gives out handbills, with a picture of the showboat, and an announcement of the program and the price of admission. Then a final selection, and the march back under the October sun.

In the afternoon a few lucky people drive down to the river just to look. They are few, because most people are saving their horses to drive to the show. Only once did I see a floating palace by daylight. It was decidedly disillusioning, for the washing was strung all along the top, the actors were disheveled, and the heroine was cleaning fish.

The show began at 7 P.M. At six we had finished with supper and were ready to start. The favorite way to go was in a hay wagon—favorite, that is, for young people. But whatever rig we went in, we had a glorious sensation as we arrived at the top of the levee and caught our first glimpse of the boat, lighted from stem to stern, with myriads of electric lights on the boat reflected in the water. It was truly a floating palace. The teams were hitched to convenient trees, and we descended the steep banks of the river, crossed the gangplank, and were actually on the showboat. I would not trade my thrills on such occasions for all the movies in Christendom.

Once we were inside and seated, the fun began. There were always peanuts for sale, and baldheads were the targets for many of these, thrown by exuberant youngsters. The aim of the ungodly was none too accurate, and those seated near the unfortunate gentlemen were likely to receive a generous share of the missies, as May Jones, and I, who once sat immediately behind Mr. Alex Shattuck, can testify.

Finally the show began. Sometimes it was melodrama, but I remember more vaudeville. It was usually good and never obscene. I once saw a troupe of Japanese acrobats that I afterwards saw in Ringling Brothers' Circus. The show lasted for two and a half hours—a good evening's entertainment for people starved for the theater. The trip home was always sleepy. I can shut my eyes and see a typical family man struggling up that steep bank with a sleeping child over one shoulder and a lantern swung in his off hand, while the mother and several children came walking behind. Such a hunt as then began for our respective vehicles! The big search lights on the boat were always turned on the bank and kept there until the last struggling mule and buggy disappeared over the levee.

That "New and Elegant Passenger Steamer," the *Kate Adams*, as she was advertised in the *Bolivar County Democrat* of August 22, 1889, was every bit as fascinating as a showboat. There were other passenger steamers—the *Ozark Queen*, for example, announced to serve the Mississippi and White Rivers in the September 19, 1903, issue of the *Bolivar County Democrat*—but none generated popularity and affection as did the *Kate Adams*. She carried Rosedale to Arkansas City for baseball games; she furnished music for dancing; she carried the soldiers to war; she welcomed them home again. In short, the *Kate Adams* was an integral part of the life in Rosedale, from her beginning in 1882 until her burning in 1927. There were actually three different vessels during the forty-five year span.

In addition to the showboats, another form of entertainment was prominent in Rosedale's history. Indeed, Rosedale's cultural history would be incomplete without mention of the minstrels composed of black performers. According to M. J. Dattel, there were five of these minstrels who came to Rosedale each year. He recalled such performers as "Rabbit Foot," "Silas Green from New Orleans," and, he believed, "Sweet Georgia Brown." All of the minstrel stars traveled in their private train cars, and before they arrived, advance men had put up posters around town. Upon the arrival of the minstrel, there was always a parade downtown. As Mr. Dattel noted, "the tent had segregated seating and reserve seat sections." There was always a dance for the blacks "on the lower end." Dattel stated that "this was the real jazz; Bessie Smith and other great-time jazz performers used to perform in Rosedale" with the minstrels.

Also popular in Rosedale in the early part of this century were the Chautauqua speakers who appeared in tent shows, for Rosedale was on the circuit. Too, dance boats which plied the River between Memphis and New Orleans stopped at Rosedale and were most popular.

A community's folklore as well as its amusements often serves as a good index to its concerns and values. Fortunately, some of the folk wisdom relating to Rosedale life has been preserved. Originally collected as "Negro Superstitions," the following is only a representative selection of folk wisdom concerning charms, health and medicine, and the weather:

CHARMS

To keep the witches off, put a silver fork and a pair of scissors under your pillow for nine days and nights.

Put a flour sifter and mustard seed under the bed to keep off spirits.

Wear a dime around your ankle to keep sickness away.

To keep bad luck from overtaking you if you have to turn around and go back for any reason, always make a cross with your foot, spit in it, and no bad luck will follow.

HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Stick a rusty nail in the foot, soak it (the nail) in coal oil and put it over the door.

Wear a hog's tooth to avoid toothaches.

Tie nine knots in a string and put it around your head to cure a headache.

When a boy child is born, never cut his hair until he is seven years old, because if you do it cuts his speech off and he will never talk plainly. Bore holes in the ears of infants to make eye sight strong.

Boil springs from cedar tree four hours and rub on parts affected by rheumatism and it will go away.

Rub grease on a rusty nail and hang it on a tree to keep infection from a wound.

Catnip tea would relieve colic in infants.

Wearing brass bands around the wrists makes you strong enough to combat any enemy.

If you boil your vittels too long you get all the "substance" out of them.

WEATHER

When it is lightning and thundering, always cover the mirrors in the house with a white sheet as mirrors draw lightning.

To kill a snake and turn him on his back will cause it to rain.

Put an ax in the ground to split a storm.

If it thunders before seven it will rain before eleven.

If a cat turns his back to the fire to sleep, it is a sign of bad weather.

From the same, predominantly black, intellectual environment that produced the preceding folk wisdom came the blues which captured the imagination first of America, then of Europe, in the 1930's. The blues originated in the South and were carried North, especially to Chicago, by artists such as Big Bill Broonzy, Leadbelly,

Josh White, and Bessie Smith. A legendary figure belonging to this group and to Rosedale is Robert Johnson, who wrote his own lyrics and sang the blues in nightspots around Rosedale in the 1930's.

There are numerous tales of outlaws exploiting innocent people along the frontiers of the South, especially during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The best known of the outlaws are the Murrell and Burrus, or Burrows, gangs, but Rosedale had its own particular outlaws, those who operated from hideouts on the islands of the Mississippi. It is hardly surprising that from these tales would come a tale of an outlaw with the redeeming qualities of a Robin Hood.

Two versions of the life, times, and execution of Milford Coe, who settled on Island 76, or what is now Caulk's Point, are preserved in WPA documents. The first version was given by W. W. Stone and the second and longer version by J. C. Burrus. In the two different accounts it is obvious that Coe and his exploits have become the property of the folk.

In Stone's words, the situation was as follows:

Mississippi has become involved in a quarrel with Arkansas over the ownership of Island No. 76 in the Mississippi River. The dispute is one of many that have been caused between states by the Mississippi River's habit of shifting its channel from time to time.

The Arkansas title to the property is based upon successive covenants beginning with the United States government, while the Mississippi title is derived from a tax sale made in Bolivar County in that state. But what is thought greatly to strengthen the Mississippi title is the big lynching of 1886.

A bandit named Coe settled on the island during the Civil War and gathered around him a large number of negroes. He became a terror to all the neighborhood country. He and the negroes descended on the plantations and carried off everything.

Finally the white people of Bolivar County would stand the outrages no longer. A mob was organized, several boats were secured and a descent was made on Coe's Island. The negroes were easily dispersed. Coe and his lieutenants were captured and strung up to some of the big trees growing on the island. The Mississippi attorneys urged the lynching in support of Mississippi's right to the island and point to it as proof that the state of Mississippi has always assumed and, when necessary, exercised jurisdiction over the territory, whereas Arkansas had taken no steps to suppress the nuisance or prevent those marauders from preying on its citizens.

J. C. Burrus wrote to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* in 1902 telling the following narrative about Milford Coe and his band of marauders:

Milford Coe, some years prior to the war, "overseed" on the Egypt Plantation, in Bolivar County, belonging to the Lobdell estate. At the outbreak of the war he joined the Bolivar Troop, First Mississippi Cavalry Regiment, and at the battle of Belmont it was demonstrated that he was a constitutional coward. He returned to Bolivar County and was engaged as "Overseer" by Rhodes Estill, whose plantation was situated on Lake Bolivar, three miles from Bolivar Landing, which was just opposite the lower end of the Island 76. When the Mississippi River came into the possession of the United States fleet, Mr. Estill, who was a chronic invalid, on several occasions sent Coe to the gun-boat Mormore, stationed near Bolivar, to present presents to the officers and to sell it protection for himself and property. Coe was and always had been very fond of "John Barleycorn," and this with other motives induced him to become a renegade to the South and desert to the cause of the North.

In 1863 he was located on Island 76 with about fifty fugitive slaves (men, with their women and some children) under his command. There were also other renegade white men with him whose names I will not mention here. A tall, powerful negro named Tom, who had been foreman on the plantation of Col. Christopher Fields, near Bolivar acted as his first lieutenant. Here in this island fortress these miscreants dwelt with a wood yard to supply Uncle Sam's boats at war prices, and every once in a while Coe would have a boat put him and his men on this (Mississippi) side of the river and would raid the country adjacent, collecting many fine mules and fat herds of cattle and fugitive slaves, which he would transport to his island home, and would dispose of the property at his leisure. On one of these forays he swept everything from the plantation of Estill and cursed and abused his some time employer with all the rancor of bitter hatred. He also on this raid took all of the mules from plantations of William Sillers and others. He never raided the Egypt plantation or R. S. Gibson nor my father's, stating as a reason his forbearance that Gibson and my father had always treated him kindly, my father having once nursed and cared for him throughout a long and dangerous illness. Here on this island, in command/ of a band of miscreants as evil as himself, ripe for treason, strategems and spoils, this desperate robber dwelt a perpetual menace to the welfare of our people in a radius of many miles, until his name became as much terror to our citizens as was that of the "Black Douglas" to the English near the Scottish border. Some time late in the year '63 or early '64 six men belonging to Evans Scouts, Ross Texas Brigade, commanded

by Bob Lee, then serving with Evans, afterward first lieutenant in Harvey's Scouts, sent a negro boy, 18 years old, a servant of Howell Hines, as a spy to the island, who after joining Coe's band and remaining several days, he returned with full information as to the location of the camp, numbers, etc., and also with the important intelligence that all of the arms (while not on a foray) were by Coe's order kept in the house occupied by Coe and his white associates.

Some night after this an old flat-bottom bateau containing six white men and this negro boy moved with muffled oars through the darkness and fog, silent as a phantom, across the murky waters of Old Mississippi, on as gallant and as desperate a mission to be success or death to every man of that silent group.

Quietly they landed on the bar below the camp, stealthily and in Indian file they approached the hut occupied by Coe. Quickly the door was forced and by the flash of a dark lantern Coe and his white comrades in arms looked into the nearby muzzles of six "Army Colts," while "Hands up: no noise" was uttered by a voice, the quiet intensity of which was sufficient to make one's hair rise and goose bumps crinkle one's flesh.

Quickly these white men were bound and gagged and leaving two men to hold the hut and the arms, the other five soon captured and corraled the negroes—some of whom they had tied—they then moved all away from camp to an open place in the woods, bunched them with the stern assurance that the first one to move or make any noise would be killed. About daylight the next morning a "Sutler" trading boat, commanded by a Capt. Booker, landed at the wood yard landing. Leaving two men to guard the prisoners, the other five men, disguised in Yankee overcoats, walked aboard and in less than five minutes the boat and all were in their possession. They then used this boat as a ferry to cross their captives to the Mississippi side and made the boat pay them a large "bonus" not to burn her. "Luck" was with them, that the gunboat was at the time away on some mission.

The mules and any property identified was restored to the planters from whom it had been stolen or taken. Mr. Estill and Mr. Sillers regained most of their stock. The fugitive slaves were released with the command to return to their masters, which most of them obeyed. Coe was taken before Mr. Estill, where he demonstrated his cowardice by agonized prayers to Mr. Estill to plead for his life to be spared. Coe, one of the other white men and Tom were shot, an easier and more honorable death than they deserved.

The tale of another outlaw who originally operated from Big Island, directly across the Mississippi from Rosedale, eventually became the tale of a folk hero. A folk hero is the person who best represents and embodies the values of a particular group of people.

His stature is maintained and even magnified by the stories about him which are told among members of the group. So long as the group survives, the folk hero lives in its oral tradition. He may fade into oblivion when the group disintegrates or is radically modified; he may live but be altered beyond recognition when the literary artist attempts his portrait. The following is a report on the surviving oral tradition of a Mississippi Delta, and Rosedale, folk hero, Perry Martin.

When I interviewed the late Charlie Crawford he was seventy-three and, after fifty-three years of service, the retired town marshal of Rosedale. He had the distinction of having been the first person in town to "lay eyes" on Perry Martin. On a hot summer afternoon in 1918, Crawford drove out to River Landing to see the *Kate Adams* come in. While he was waiting, the *Keen Kutter* put in, and off the boat stepped a small, lean man of about forty, who carried a Winchester rifle on his shoulder and a forty-five pistol in his belt. "You taking me to town?" the man asked Crawford. Crawford thought perhaps he should and answered, "Yes." Driving to town, neither man spoke. When they reached Rosedale, some four or five miles from River Landing, Crawford took the man to the Courthouse, located in the center of town.

The stranger got out of Crawford's roadster, and Crawford started to leave. The stranger said, "Hey, where are you going? I thought the sheriff sent you to pick me up and take me in. I'm Perry Martin and I just killed five men over on the River. Would you take me to the Sheriff's Office?" Crawford led Martin to Sheriff Lacy's office and later gained the unwanted reputation for having "brought in" Perry Martin. Lacy called the sheriff of Desha County, Arkansas, just across the River from Rosedale. Martin talked to the Arkansas sheriff, telling him he would have to complete some business matters before he could come in. They agreed to meet three days later in Arkansas City, the Desha County seat. Both men kept the appointment. The men Martin killed had attempted to steal some timbers he had felled and was floating down-river to a mill. Martin was simply protecting his property.

Eleven years after this incident, in 1929, Martin pulled his river club boat out of the water and set it on blocks in a cypress grove on the river side of the levee in Rosedale. He remained in that spot until

he died on September 9, 1968, spending only one night away from his boat. That was in 1950 when Martin let his wife, Lou, buy a house on the Rosedale side of the levee. They spent the night together in the new house, but Perry got sick and could not sleep. Thereafter, Martin slept in his boat, Lou in her house. They maintained a genial marital relationship, however, and always took their meals together.

During the eleven years between 1918 and 1929, two important things happened to Martin. He killed a man and had to serve time in the Arkansas State Penitentiary, and he gave up the timber business and took up moonshining. Martin's term in the Penitentiary was the final result of a man named Ed LaGrue penning a hog which Martin claimed was his. When LaGrue refused to surrender the hog, Perry had him arraigned by a Justice of the Peace, who secured the property for him. Martin got word that LaGrue had said he would kill Martin on sight. Fortunately for Martin, he saw LaGrue first. Martin was on the east side of the White River where it flows into the Mississippi northwest of Rosedale. LaGrue stepped out of the woods on the west bank. Martin shot across the water at LaGrue, hitting him right between the eyes. A trial for manslaughter ended in Martin's conviction and in his being sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.

Martin served only a year, and when he was released his life proceeded in new directions. He was the son of a wealthy rice farmer and had been educated for the ministry. He had much interest in Arkansas politics, state and local. But in 1920 he left the rice farm, a wife and two children, and settled on Big Island, Arkansas, an island of some 121,000 acres located about eight miles northwest of Rosedale. During the Prohibition years, Big Island was reportedly one of the largest whiskey-producing areas of the United States. It was populated exclusively by fugitives from the law and/or moon-shiners. Earl Drury, seventy-eight, a retired moonshiner and after twelve years service retired constable for Rosedale, operated a still on Big Island during the same years as Perry Martin. He said that just sitting in front of his still, he could see an additional twenty-one stills in operation. I asked Drury if life were not rather dangerous

Island. "Naw," he said. "On Big Island, there was lots of law and order—more than there ever was or ever will be in Rosedale. [We were talking in the Sheriff's Office in Rosedale.] If there was an argument, somebody got killed." According to Drury, the main figure in the enforcement of the law on Big Island was Perry Martin, who wore a deputy sheriff's badge awarded him by the Desha County sheriff.

More important than Martin's role as lawman among outlaws was the fact that he was the best among many good moonshiners. His skill was acknowledged by his peers and lauded by his consumers. An indication of the care with which Martin made moonshine came from an interview I had with an ex-moonshiner, himself known for having produced high quality corn whiskey. He told me he was running a very large still when Martin came by and indicated that he was cooking it off too fast. The moonshiner tried to explain to Martin that he had a very large still. Martin said it did not matter what the size of the still, good whiskey had to be cooked off very slowly.

Martin's moonshine gained him a national reputation among consumers. As one informant told me, "People who weren't even whiskey drinkers drank P.M. when they could." I have been told that even today moonshine sold in New Orleans frequently carries the Perry Martin label, the label that used to signify the very best. When a Rosedale native made a purchase in a Pittsburgh drugstore recently, the proprietor recognized the accent and asked what part of the deep South he came from. To the man's answer the proprietor replied, "I know Rosedale well. I bought moonshine whiskey from Perry Martin and others there in Rosedale by the boxcar load during the depression era." Junebug Holloway, manager of a restaurant in Cleveland, Mississippi, said that while he was a soldier stationed near New York City in the 1940's, he found P.M. in all the higher class bars. Bolivar County Deputy Sheriff Sibley, stationed in Rosedale, told me that in 1964 he had seen a sign over the bar in a tavern in Northwest Chicago which read: Perry Martin Special-354 a shot.

Naturally, the reputation of P.M. was greatest in the local community. Martin's son Myron reports that he had Mississippi Highway Patrol escorts when he delivered kegs of P.M. to Jackson for

gubernatorial inaugural balls. A man in Rosedale remembered P.M. as "so good and so strong it would make a little rabbit walk right up and spit in a bulldog's face."

Perry Martin at ninety ran his last batch of moonshine in the summer of 1967, just a year before he suffered a fatal stroke. He was raided and fined, his still destroyed. He had made only one run on his new still, and in a moment of frustration he abandoned the craft which had made him famous.

There are four reasons given for the high quality of Perry Martin's moonshine. He used the basic Kentucky recipe—one part corn to one part sugar, sometimes cutting the corn by as much as half by mixing in rye malt. But he had this advantage: he used water from the Mississippi. People who saw Martin's stills were always impressed by the immaculate cleanliness and the brilliant sheen of the copper parts. Third, he always cooked it slowly and in small batches. Finally, and some say most importantly, it was rocked under willow trees by the ebb and flow of the Mississippi along its banks.

Reactions to Perry Martin by his admirers are of two varieties—both very favorable. The first was summed up well by Russ Quentin, manager of the Conservation League Restaurant at Beulah Lake, which lies along the Mississippi just south of Rosedale. Quentin knew Martin because he had been friends with Peck, Lou's son by a former marriage. Quentin told me, "I knew the roughest man in Rosedale—so rough didn't *nobody* mess with him. Well, this man wouldn't even mess with Perry Martin." This image of Martin is supported by those who remind you that Perry killed seven, nine, eleven men. The number varies. I have confirmed only seven killings, one of which was that of the step-son Peck. Mrs. Myron Martin, the daughter-in-law, who lives across the gravel road from the ruins of Perry's Club Boat and next to his "Blue Hole," told me she had never been near the location before she married Martin's son. "These were Perry Martin's woods," she said. "Nobody came here that didn't have business here." To Mrs. Martin one of the most frightening things about Martin was that one never heard him in the woods until he was face-to-face with him. Quentin tells of the time, however, when he was going through the woods looking for Peck and did not come face-to-face with anyone. Instead, a gun barrel between the shoulder blades surprised him. Quentin said he was

given detailed directions for finding Peck but was advised not to turn around. He did not.

The other view of Martin stresses his popularity, generosity, and humor. It is said that Perry Martin entertained the most eminent Mississippi statesmen and politicians on his Club Boat. His greatest popularity, surprisingly perhaps, was and still is among those who were responsible for local law enforcement. Martin was not unique among moonshiners in enjoying good relationships with lawmen.

I asked a retired moonshiner if he was ever bothered by local law officers. He replied, "Only trouble with local law was them drinkin' up my whiskey." Unlike most counties in Mississippi, Bolivar County has never offered a bounty for locating and destroying moonshine stills. The local lawman was, when possible, a defender from the revenuer, who was a foreigner minding what was not his business. As one Rosedale lawman told me, "We were *all* in moonshine then, either making, selling, or drinking it." Charlie Crawford said, "Perry Martin had a reputation for being dangerous, but he was the most honest man I ever knew. He tended to his own business, let everybody else's alone." Crawford said he always tried to give Martin warning if he knew his still was going to be raided. Sometimes Crawford himself had to raid Martin's stills. Of these raids, too, Martin always had warning.

Billy Joe Estes, at that time Chief of the City Police in Rosedale, told me that Martin wasn't bothered by the law because he was as good a man as he was a moonshiner. His business was on the river side of the levee, and except to get haircuts and to vote, he stayed away from Rosedale, on his side of the levee.

A natural question about Perry Martin is, "What happened to the money he made?" The standard answer is, "He gave it away." In addition to his own family, he took in a girl deserted in a river boat, reared her, and sent her to college. He also took in a boy who now lives in Rosedale and reared him. He was a ready and effective host, happy to entertain customers or visitors.

In addition to refreshments, Perry Martin served his guests humor. He liked to tell about the time he was raided by a bald-headed revenuer who turned up each broken bottle of moonshine and poured it on his head. The revenuer said he hoped it would make his hair grow. Martin said he knew better; the man just wanted

the chance to drink what dripped past his outstretched tongue! Martin's favorite anecdote was one about Ned Filch. Ned loved the beer which formed in barrels of fermenting mash. He always carried a "slop jar" when he visited a still, so he could taste and test the beer. A revenuer surprised him drinking the beer one day and assumed he was operating the still. The revenuer told Ned to put his hands over his head or he was a dead man. Ned finished his beer and smacked his lips. Then he turned to his assailant, respectfully saluted with his right index finger, and said, "Well, sir, if you kill me right now, you'll never kill me when I feel no better."

Perry Martin is the folk hero of the "River Rat Folk," who live within a twenty-mile radius of Rosedale. Preserved in an oral tradition, he embodies the aspirations, appetites, and biases of these folk whose lives and livelihoods are so closely associated with the Mississippi River. In his *Lanterns on the Levee*, Percy wrote his description of the "River Rat": "Illiterate, suspicious, intensely clanish, blond, and usually ugly, river-rats make ideal bootleggers. The brand of corn or white mule they make has received nation-wide acclaim. They lead a life apart, uncouth, unclean, lawless, vaguely alluring." Perry Martin was not in every way a member of this group. He was well-educated, a former planter, a hunter rather than a fisherman, but as the river-rat folk hero he does give us a clue to the vague attraction Percy felt for these people. Honest, generous, proud, self-confident, independent, Martin spurned genteel society but also demanded its respect. To this day the "River Rat" has resisted assimilation in American society, and he sees in Martin's moon-shining activities and lifestyle reflections of the essential qualities he admires in himself.

Not surprisingly, early newspapers in Rosedale were marked by the type of violence described above. Charles M. Hull, editor of the *Bolivar County Democrat*, was shot down and killed in the streets of Rosedale. His murderer, L. L. Weissinger, editor of the *Bolivar County Review*, fired the fatal shot from the doorway of the Sky Parlor saloon. The violence followed a long feud which had been carried on in the respective newspapers. Weissinger made an escape, and the *Democrat* of August 8, 1889, offered rewards for his capture and several eyewitness accounts of the murder. A heated but only

verbally violent controversy was carried on a few years later between R. J. McGuire, editor of the *Democrat*, and John Farrar, editor of the *Journal*. The early Rosedale newspapers dealt almost exclusively with the essentials of day-to-day existence: trade and politics. The value and importance of the early newspapers can only be realized with the knowledge that there was not a public library in Rosedale until 1935.

For over thirty years a journalist who hailed from Rosedale was one of the most widely read and most popular writers in Mississippi. Florence Sillers Ogden's "Dis and Dat" column first appeared in the *Delta Democrat Times* of Greenville and later in the *Clarion Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*, covering the period 1939 to 1971. "Dis and Dat" columns covered a wide range of topics, but some of the very best editions are accounts of events which have particular political, historical, or social significance for Rosedale. Under the pen name Dorothy Perkins, Mrs. Ogden wrote numerous short stories, plays, and poems, which are now being processed in the Delta State University Archives and Manuscript Repository. In these writings as well as in the "Dis and Dat" columns there are expressions of human values and human sympathies which are convincing evidence of success in the efforts to build up a country worth living in.