

LEADERSHIP

Gunnison has furnished county, district, state, and possibly national leadership in various fields of service, among them being agricultural, business, religious, educational, civic, fraternal and governmental.

Some recognized examples are found in "The Mid-South and Its Builders," a large volume edited in 1920. It included the names of Dr. J. C. Brooks and Mr. J. M. Kirk, neighbors of Gunnison, and Mayor W. I. Brashears of Gunnison. These men were versatile and each excelled in several fields. Descendants of two of them are conducting extensive farming operations in this vicinity at present, and have various business interests elsewhere.

This community has produced other good businessmen, successful planters and cattlemen, also.

At one time two Gunnison men, Mr. S. M. Seaton and Mr. J. G. McGee, served simultaneously as presidents of two Rosedale, Miss., banks.

Among organizations in which Gunnison has supplied leaders are Baptist and Methodist boards lay leadership, associations, and ministry; Bolivar County and Mississippi branches of the American Farm Bureau Federation; Agricultural Soil Conservation (county and state); Bolivar County Livestock Assn., and Lions International.

Dr. H. L. Cockerham was a lay leader in county and state Baptist affairs in addition to leadership in his own church. He was, also, at one time a trustee of the Baptist Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

Numbered among some outstanding educators in their respective fields are some Gunnisonians.

These facts were compiled without extensive research, and could easily be added to.

NEGRO LEADERSHIP

Copied from "Special Magazine Edition of the BOLIVAR COUNTY DEMOCRAT, Aug. 26, 1905, Illustrated Write-up of the Best County in the State."

"J. T. Tatum (colored) is the proprietor of the white barber shop in Gunnison and he is an artist in his profession. He keeps up with the styles in hair-cutting and is doing a profitable business. He is an example of what a colored man with good business sense may become. He has made a good living at his trade, invested in real estate, and is now on the sunny side of easy street. He is Chairman of the Bolivar County Republican Committee."

In 1898 he had been appointed postmaster, however, he never actually served, as he employed Mrs. Martha B. James to perform the duties of the office.

Numbered among the successful Negro citizens of Gunnison was the late R. J. Woods who was a planter and also the largest individual stockholder in the Gunnison Planting Seed and Gin Company, Inc.

Other prominent Negroes were R. B. Sugarman, J. E. Walker, Silas Stewart, Polk Hightower, Rev. Will Lee and G. W. Pendleton.

SOME STORIES ABOUT

GUNNISON'S FIRST MAYOR

This story is about Mr. Sol Cohn, who, together with some friends, had been arrested in a neighboring town and charged with gambling. They all plead guilty and each was fined a like amount by the judge. Immediately after they were fined, the sheriff had a private conference with the judge, telling him that Mr. Cohn was a good friend of the sheriff, that he was the mayor of Gunnison and that the sheriff would appreciate it very much if the judge would remit Mr. Cohn's fine. Whereupon, the judge requested Mr. Cohn to come back before him. "Mr. Cohn, I have just been told that you are the mayor of Gunnison. Is this true?" "Yes, your honor," replied the mayor. "That being the case, as mayor you should be setting a good example. Therefore, the court feels that under the circumstances, your fine should be double that of your friends. So instead of \$10.00, your fine will be \$20.00."

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The other story includes a court scene also. This time a Reverend Mr. Whitehurst, a Methodist minister, having recently moved to Gunnison, was alarmed about the liquor situation here. He was determined to drive the bootleggers out of business. So he set about it in this way. He gave Uncle Heck, the Methodist church sexton, 50 cents with which to purchase a pint of whisky from a Negro bootlegger by the name of Batiste. In due time, Uncle Heck returned with the pint of whisky and presented it to the preacher. So the Reverend had Batiste arrested and brought into court. At the trial, Batiste plead "not guilty." Then Uncle Heck was put on the witness stand and to the surprise of Mr. Whitehurst, he denied having bought the whisky from Batiste. So the mayor said, "This is indeed a strange case. The defendant pleads 'not guilty,' the supposed witness says he didn't buy any whisky from the defendant, but the preacher has a pint of liquor in his possession. Therefore, it seems that if the court should fine anyone, it should be the possessor. Thus infuriated, the minister stormed out of the courtroom, saying as he left, "You are all going to hell." With the preacher's exit, Judge Cohn leaned back in his chair and enjoyed a hearty laugh.

GUNNISON STREETS

At first the streets of Gunnison were dirt. At times some of them were practically impassable in muddy weather. Wagon teams were known to have bogged down on business streets. Prior to World War I, the principal streets were graveled, as were roads connecting Gunnison with its neighboring towns. This was a great improvement and stimulated automobile sales.

Since Mississippi Highway No. 1 was paved through Gunnison, and a blacktop loop put through the business section of the town by the State Highway Dept., the Town of Gunnison, with the aid of the First Supervisor's District, has done considerable blacktopping. As money becomes available, more streets will be blacktopped. There has been wonderful co-operation between Supervisor O. J. Scott and the present town administration.