

The BOOKER T. WASHINGTON Papers

"There is another distinction that is more than likely to come to Mound Bayou as the years go by, and our schools and churches improve in power and capacity; as our streets are drained and paved, our oil lamps replaced by electric lights, and the old, antiquated, characteristic Delta pump is replaced by clear streams of artesian water. Negroes will begin to make this their resident home, even though they are engaged in business or make their livelihood elsewhere. There will be an atmosphere in which to raise their children, and they will find here social conditions for their wives and daughters very much to their liking. There are those who ask, 'are you not afraid that some day the whites will be moved to wipe out Mound Bayou by violence?' Knowing the controlling force among the whites in this section, as I do, gathered by a stay of thirty-three years among them, I say, 'No, we are not afraid.' The Negroes who have shaped and controlled the destiny of Mound Bayou understand conditions too well to allow any radical or indiscreet policy to prevail here. On the one hand, there are too many white men around us or in easy reach who are our friends and willing to see that no impediment is thrown in our way, or undue advantage is taken of us by irresponsible parties. This has been demonstrated on several occasions."

Isaiah Montgomery is hopeful and confident of the future. He is now sixty years old, but takes an active part in every movement that relates to the upbuilding of the colony which he founded. He believes that his work at Mound Bayou is only just begun and his townsmen share that belief.

World's Work, 14 (July 1907), 9125-34.

¹ Charles Banks in the early twentieth century took over from Isaiah T. Montgomery the leadership of the all-black town of Mound Bayou, Miss. Born in nearby Clarksdale in 1873, Banks was educated at Rust College. From 1891 to 1903 he was the senior partner of Banks & Bro., a general store in Clarksdale. In 1903 he founded the Bank of Mound Bayou, serving as its cashier until 1914. In an effort to strengthen the economic base of the town as well as to advance his fortunes, he founded the Mound Bayou Oil Mill and Manufacturing Company, which processed cotton-seed oil. He was also active in an insurance company and a loan and investment company. A leader of black Masons, Banks used his fraternal connections throughout the state in search of capital for his enterprises. A Republican, he was a delegate to the national conventions of 1904, 1908, and 1912. BTW befriended Banks's business enterprises as part of his encouragement of the town of Mound Bayou and of Banks as a symbol of black economic success. At a meeting with Banks at Tuskegee the philanthropist Julius Rosenwald agreed to lend money to the Mound Bayou cotton-oil mill in 1913, and Banks also raised funds from BTW's New York banker friends for the Bank of Mound Bayou in 1914. (See Meier, "BTW and the Town of Mound Bayou," 396-401.)

² William Thornton Montgomery, brother of Isaiah T. Montgomery, was vice-president of the Mound Bayou Bank and president of the Mound Bayou Business League. He also was a land agent for the Y. & M. B. Railroad, a merchant, and a lumber dealer in Mound Bayou.