

Benton
County



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Beulah Mae Ayers,
Editor

A.S.C. ballots to be counted Monday

Voting for ASC committeemen ended on Thursday, and the ballots will be counted in public on Monday, December 7, in the Ashland courthouse.

In response to a request by the Citizens Club that federal agents be present at the counting of ballots to assure a fair count, the Department of Agriculture in Washington is making arrangements to send an agent from its office to be present in Ashland on Monday.

The voting was largely successful in terms of the amount of Negroes who voted. It is estimated that over 100 Negroes voted in Community C, close to 200 hundred voted in Community B, and almost 100 in Community A. Of this number, about 65 had to go to the office to get ballots, since they were not mailed any. They did this even though many had been warned by white landlords to have nothing to do with the elections.

The ASC office was not too cooperative with Negro voters. Besides not sending ballots to all eligible Negro voters, it often tried not to give ballots to more than one member of a family, even though each member made separate crops and was therefore eligible to receive a separate ballot.

The greatest problems came from

landlords, especially those in the first and second districts. Mr. W.T. Akins called his farmers together and told them to have nothing to do with the elections. Mac Akins told his farmers that if "that white lady" (COFO worker, Aviva Futorian) came on his property, he'd "give her h---." She came anyway, but he didn't do anything.

Many landlords tried to mark their hands' ballots. Some allowed them to do so. Others told them they had already sent their ballots in, and then marked them for the Negro candidates.

At least one woman in the first district was told to move by her landlord after she came back from the ASCS office where she had gone to get a ballot. Two men who were planning to go to the office with Bob Smith changed their minds after their landlord told them not to have anything to do with him.

Two COFO workers, Bob Smith and James Batts were arrested during the election, Bob on Monday, November 30 in Benton County by deputy Gene Salt, and James on Thursday, December 3, in Marshall County.

ALL CITIZENS ARE URGED TO ATTEND THE PUBLIC COUNTING OF BALLOTS IN ASHLAND ON MONDAY. SHO! EVERYONE THAT NEGROES WILL NO LONGER TAKE A BACK SEAT IN OUR GOVERNMENT!

Mathis trial postponed

The trial of Lawson Mathis, Benton County registrar, was postponed while both sides try to reach an agreement outside of court which will end discrimination against Negroes in Benton County who try to register to vote.

Mr. Mathis is being sued by the United States Government for discriminating against Negro voter registration applicants. One of the attorneys defending him is Mr. Hamer McKenzie of Benton County.

If an agreement is not reached by both sides by January, a trial will probably be held at the end of January. More details about the trial will be discussed at the special all-county meeting of the Citizens Club Tuesday night at Samuels Chapel.

Our trip to Oxford

by Beulah Mae Ayers

Some of the people of Benton County went to Oxford, Miss. on Tuesday, December 1st for the trial of Mr. Mathis. Some went as witnesses, and others as spectators. The witnesses were inside the jury room, so the spectators were out in the hall waiting.

There were more Negroes than whites in the hall, so the Negroes sat on the center benches, as the whites withdrew to the sides of the hall and watched. It was like at a movie where the people are watching, only we, the Negroes of Benton County, were on the screen.

I hope they will recognize us when they see us again, because they really looked us over.

Some of our COFO workers were there, and after they got there, we had an integrated group: our "doll" who works in Benton, and Frank who works in Tate were there, then we had some workers of our own color. Frank did some draw--

ings of both white and Negro spectators.

When the jury recessed, everyone was hungry, and we went to get our lunch. The first cafe was crowded, and some young man told us that there was a cafe down the street, so we started walking, but we were on a wild goose chase, similar to John Howard Griffin in his book Black Like Me. By the time we had turned around, some of the people in the group had found a place across the street called the Sportmen Club. They called the rest of us, and we went across the street laughing and talking, but we had the smile wiped off our faces by the slam of a door. We all looked up and we saw a tall old white man hooking the screen door to keep us out, and at the same time he was yelling, "You should be proud of yourselves."

We turned around and started across the street, and he followed us out yelling, "Next time you come back we'll be ready for you." Bob Smith started laughing at him, and everyone looked back and laughed, and that really made him angry. Aviva looked back at him and said, "You poor, old man."

So we didn't get to eat there, we ended up at the same place we left, and with the same people, so I didn't starve. I would like to know why he thinks he is so much more than a Negro that it nearly killed him to see white and black together?

Postmaster visits editor

by Beulah Mae Ayers

On November 17, Mr. G.L. Garrot, postmaster general, came to visit me. He was very nice, he talked nicely, and he had a copy of the Freedom Train. He asked me to ask the people to stop putting copies of the newspaper in the mailboxes without postage, because it was unlawful. I told him I didn't put papers in anyone's box unless they asked me to, and I haven't done that.

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He said, "I know you didn't do it, but you talk to the people who are doing this."

He seemed very apologetic. I think he was trying to please Tony Farese because he had the same issue of the paper that Mr. Farese had, dated Oct. 20. Although we are not responsible for Mr. Farese getting the paper, and we suspect he got it by unlawful means, I hope he enjoyed reading it.

Ashland jail integrated

by Beulah Mae Ayers

On November 30, Mr. Robert Smith, COFO worker, was arrested by one of Benton County's courageous deputies, Gene Salt, for wreckless driving.

Smith was arrested at 4:15 after he had carried some people down to the ASCS office to pick up ballots. He was carried to the Ashland jail. It was really cold Monday, but not too cold for our good deputy to put Smith in front of the jail, without heat or shelter, with a boy sitting in the car with the motor running to watch him.

Smith stood outside the jail until he got cold. After 1½ hours, he decided to ask to make a phone call. He knocked on the door long enough for the deputy to go to Ashland and back, before he got an answer. He was allowed finally to make a phone call, so he called the COFO office--they already knew about his arrest from Mr. J.D. Paige who had seen Smith being brought to the jail and had called the office.

Smith then asked the officer, "Are you going to lock me up?" The officer unlocked the jail door and said, "You can go in if you want to."

They brought a white man in while Smith was there and put him in the cell with Smith, which means that Smith integrated the Ashland jail. The sheriff had taken this man out to try and collect his bond, but

when the deputy notified him of Smith's arrest, he returned to the jail. After the white man got in jail, he asked Smith, "What did you do? I had almost gotten my bond money, and the sheriff came flying back to Ashland doing 110. I've never rode that fast before. You must have done something awful bad!" Smith answered, "Yes, they've been looking for me for a long time."

James Batts arrested

James Batts was arrested Thursday December 3 in Holly Springs as he was about to go out to Benton County to take people to the ASCS office to get ballots. The charge was obtaining a license under false pretenses.

He had to spend the night in jail. At about 7 P.M., a white man came to the jail to see Batts. Batts had had a list of sharecroppers with him when the police arrested him, and Mr. Hurdle wanted to know what those names meant, since some of the people on the list were his sharecroppers. Batts told him they were a list he was supposed to give to a COFO worker, and assured him that his people had nothing to do with the movement. Mr. Hurdle seemed happy then and left.

Later that night, two more COFO workers joined Batts in jail. They were arrested while working on the ASC elections in Marshall County.

Fareses have busy day

Johnny and Tony Farese, our illustrious Benton County attorneys, had a busy day on Friday, December 4. They spent the day prosecuting 5 COFO workers, four in Marshall County, and one in Benton.

In Benton County, Mr. Tony Farese prosecuted Bob Smith on charges of wreckless driving. The trial was held at the home of Bobby James since, as Farese said, "We don't want to have ashow." About 20 Negroes came to the trial.

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Mr. Smith pleaded innocent to the charge against him, but was found guilty and fined \$118.00. Smith is appealing the case.

In Marshall County John Farese prosecuted James Batts who also pleaded innocent to charges against him. He too was found guilty and fined \$250.00 and 6 months in jail. Batts appealed the case to the circuit court.

Both Batts and Smith are safely out of jail and back "making trouble" in Benton County.

I Know a teacher, too

by Mamie Jeffries

Dear Mrs. G.N. Reaves:

How glad I am to meet you on this Freedom Train, saying, "I know a teacher." Let me join you by saying, "Glory, glory to you."

I, too, know a teacher. This teacher I know may not be the one you know, but he is like him and they both have plenty of company.

He is like a "daddy" of a big family. What daddy says goes. He says "do" and they do. He says "don't" and they don't.

They may not want to do what he says, but they keep it to themselves, fearing daddy. He may dislike what they want so much that he will put them out. What a pity! That is just like a big daddy with a big family. Daddy always thinks he must do all the planning and thinking for the family.

But suppose that family gets together, makes their own plans about what they want and sticks together, go up before daddy, tell him what they decided to do for themselves, and if daddy doesn't like it, put him out. We would see some changes made then, I'll bet you.

I think every Negro should get on board and ride away on the sunshine freedom train. It rides

easy when it gets heavy loaded.

Stand up and fight!

by Elise Brown

One day as I was walking down the sidewalk in Ashland, I met two white boys, about 9 and 6.

The largest one kept walking but the younger one stopped. He looked at me, then he licked his tongue out and stuck his fingers in his ears. He wasn't satisfied, so he spit on me. I really got angry then, but I just reached in my pocketbook and pulled out my handkerchief and wiped it off. Then I walked on.

I didn't feel so good over it. But I said nothing and did nothing. Many other children would have fought him if they had been raised as he was.

Yet I want my freedom! I want to do as white children. I want my freedom and I am willing to fight for it! Everywhere I go, people are talking about equal rights. The only way to get equal rights is to stand up and fight. Don't stand back and watch the next fellow fight and when he has won, don't jump up and say, "Look what we have done."

For instance, the teachers at Old Salem are afraid to register and vote. Why? Because they're afraid of Mr. Foster taking their jobs. I say, if you lose one job, get another one. If I was grown and had children, I wouldn't send them to Old Salem school to get an education.

We want our rights--equal rights. So let's fight and overcome today! If I were old enough, I would register and vote now.

BENTON COUNTY CALENDAR

Monday, Dec. 7: ASC ballots counted, 9 AM, Ashland courthouse.

Tuesday, Dec. 8: Citizens Club meeting, Samuels Chapel, 7:30 PM

Negro Poetry Section

IF WE MUST DIE

From "Harlem Shadow"

by Claude McKay

(Selected by Linda Fay Rutherford)

If we must die, let it not be like hogs,
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs
Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die, O let us nobly die
So that our precious blood may not be shed in vain.
Then even the monster we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumber us, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!
What though before us lies the open grave.

Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back.

To MR. HENRY REAVES

by Mamie Jeffries

Hello, Mr. Henry Reaves.
I am glad you made your trip.
I am sure you were well taken care of
Because God was on that ship.

What did you do?
Who did you see?
Was it our Uncle Sam?
Or our own Lyndon B?

I am sorry you were too late
To see the Kennedy man.
I am sure if you looked hard enough
You would have seen his flame.

Did you make your run a success?
Did you do your best?
As long as you are on the freedom train,
There will never be any rest.

(Editor's note: Because of the large amount of news in this issue, there is no room for the Negro history section. It will be continued next week, with the rest of the story of the underground railroad. Reminder: all articles are welcome--give them to an officer of the Citizens Club, to the editor, Beulah Mae Ayers, or send them to the COFO office, 100 Rust Avenue, Holly Springs, Mississippi).