

CHAPTER 1

Shubuta, Mississippi: Home of the Red Artesian Well

Migration fever hit Shubuta, Mississippi, and its surrounding areas in the beginning of the twentieth century and black families began traveling north to find a better life. In fact, so many blacks began leaving Shubuta that the local paper, *The Mississippi Messenger*, published the article, “Negroes Should Remain in South,” on 5 September 1919.¹ The article stated that blacks were not treated poorly and good employment was available. “They [three black surveyors from Chicago] declare they can now recommend that Negroes come south to find work; they assert they found no basis for the northern allegations that Mississippi would bear such a libelous epithet; they investigated farm labor conditions near a dozen cities and at the Archman convict farms; they discovered that Negroes could walk on the sidewalks of Mississippi cities without being lynched. . . .”² Despite this article and these supposed adequate conditions, African Americans wanted to leave Shubuta because of poor employment opportunities, poor educational facilities, and discrimination. These migrants left home seeking a better life for themselves and their families. A large number of the black migrants who left the Shubuta area moved to Albany, New York, during the 1930s and 1940s when Louis W. Parson moved north in

1927 and began returning by car to drive Mississippi blacks north. News of Albany spread by word of mouth, and blacks also left the area by train and bus.

Shubuta, located on the Chickasawhay River, was established around 1833 after the area was ceded to the United States from the Choctaw Indians with the Treaty of the Dancing Rabbit Creek on 27 September 1830.³ The word “Shubuta” is derived from the Choctaw Indian word *Shoboti*, meaning “smoky.” The Indians applied this name to the creek that is an arm of the Chickasawhay River with smoke-colored waters.⁴ Clarke County (the county in which Shubuta is located) was named after Judge Joshua C. Clarke, a native of Pennsylvania, a delegate to the Mississippi Constitutional Convention in 1817, and a Justice of the Mississippi Supreme Court.⁵ Clarke County was established in 1833.⁶

In 1855, the Mobile and Ohio Railroad came through Shubuta, and with it came shops and a depot. With the railroad came an increased population and prosperity. Shubuta was incorporated on 8 November 1865. The railroad brought many businesses such as hotels, restaurants, druggists, dry goods stores, and a furniture store. In 1879 the town’s first newspaper the *Mississippi Messenger*, was established and published by C. A. Stovall.⁷ During the late nineteenth century, Shubuta was the biggest city between Meridian, Mississippi, and Mobile, Alabama. In 1890 Shubuta’s population was 4,115 and in 1900 it was 4,316.⁸ Beginning in the late 1920s and 1930s Shubuta’s population began to slowly drop as the result of the closing of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad’s shops in Shubuta and the destroyed agricultural economy because of the boll weevil infestation.⁹

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Shubuta’s black population in 1930 was 2,359, which was 56.6 percent of the total population (4,170).¹⁰ African American family

structures in Shubuta were consistent with the rural South on the whole. Almost half (49.6 percent) of the 256 African American households in Shubuta in 1930 were considered nuclear.¹¹ In a study of the black family Herbert Gutman claimed, “The nuclear household retained its commanding importance among rural blacks . . . the typical southern black household in 1900 still had at its head a lower-class husband or father.”¹² A nuclear family denotes two parents and children or a husband and wife. According to the census, 26.6 percent of the black households in Shubuta were classified as extended, meaning the nuclear family plus one or more relatives. Only 7.8 percent of African American households were classified as augmented, which is defined as a family unit plus one or more non-kin. Non-kin could be lodgers, boarders, servants, or apprentices. Lastly, 1.6 percent of households were extended and augmented; meaning both kin and non-kin lived with the family unit.¹³ Gutman theorized that the existence of extended and augmented households in the South were adaptive strategies for dealing with the poverty that most blacks knew.¹⁴ According to the order in which the census was taken, many families with the same last name lived next door to each other, or in close proximity. This phenomenon is also supported in the oral history interviews. Only 8.6 percent of African American households in Shubuta were one-parent families, and 5.5 percent were single-person households. In most cases, 90.9 percent, one-parent households were the result of death of the spouse. The majority, 81.6 percent, of Shubuta’s households were male headed. This is also consistent with Gutman’s study: “Most southern black women headed neither households nor subfamilies. Far greater numbers of unmarried black women under thirty, for example, lived with their parents than headed households.”¹⁵

The largest group, 38.3 percent, of African American households in Shubuta were childless, while 33.2 percent of the households had one to two children, 8.9 percent of the households had three to four children, 11.0 percent of the households had

five to six children, 6.2 percent of the households had seven to eight children, and lastly, 2.4 percent of the households had nine to ten children. No households had more than ten children.¹⁶ Lastly, 50.4 percent of African American families owned their own home, while 41.0 percent rented.¹⁷

In 1937 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) historical research project reported the following on African American homes in Wayne County (located less than two miles from Shubuta). "The homes of the negroes are mostly small unscreened frame buildings. The sanitary conditions of most of these homes leave much to be desired. However there are a few well built and screen homes and many are kept as clean as conditions will permit."¹⁸ Despite poor living and economic conditions for southern African American families prior to and during the Great Migration, African American families remained intact. Shubuta families were no different (see appendix 2).

BLACK CHURCHES IN SHUBUTA

For many African Americans in Shubuta, and the South in general, religion was a huge part of their lives. Church was a vehicle for African Americans to express themselves, form communities, and find refuge in the hostile South. E. Franklin Frazier, in his 1964 book about the history of the black church in America wrote: "The Negro church with its own forms of religious worship was a world which the white man did not invade but only regarded with an attitude of condescending amusement. . . . What mattered was the way he was treated in the church which gave him an opportunity for self-expression and status . . . he could always find an escape from such, often painful, experiences within the shelter of his church."¹⁹ According to several oral history interviews, devotion to God and attending church were important aspects of black Shubuta residents' identity.

In the beginning of the twentieth century there was only one official black church in Shubuta, the First Baptist Church.²⁰ By 1936 there were several small black congregations in Shubuta and surrounding rural areas. Most black churches were small, one-room buildings. Country ministers often traveled to many congregations to preach on different days of the week, and as a result blacks attended services at several different churches. Many of these rural churches held services monthly and had between fifteen and two hundred parishioners. In an interview, Shubuta resident Willis McDonald talks about going to many churches. “I go to Center Ridge Baptist Church in DeSoto [Mississippi] . . . I go to more than that one. I go to her church [his wife’s church, St. Matthew Baptist]. And then I go to Mt. Zion. I praise him everywhere. I don’t have discrimination on any church. They are all serving for the same purposes. That’s the way I feel.”²¹

Table 1. Black Churches, Pastors, and Membership in Shubuta, Mississippi, 1936

<i>Church</i>	<i>Pastor</i>	<i>Membership</i>
Altare	S. D. Arrington, Heidelberg	65
Bethlehem	W. A. Hardaway	156
New Zion	E. Lands	30
Pleasant Grove	F. D. Bender	55
New Salem		
St. Mary	Fred Bender	85
St. Matthew Baptist		90
Tribulation	W. A. Hardaway	75
Moses Temple	W. A. Hardaway	
St. Paul		
Sweet Pilgrim		

Source: Eva Haney and Anna B. Hardee, “History of Clarke County Mississippi, Assignment #26 (Washington, D.C.: Federal Writers Project, 1936), 41–42.

Alma McDonald, born in Shubuta in 1928, remembers going to church when she was a child. "I went to that church right in town . . . St. Matthew Baptist Church. Grandma used to take me there. . . . I joined this church when I was seven years old. I was baptized in . . . well they did not have anything to baptize you in, so I was baptized in the creeks. So my grandmother took all of us to the creeks and the preacher and everybody and we were baptized in Shubuta Creek. That last creek you ran over coming into Shubuta on [Route] 45. A lot of people were baptized in that creek."²² Because there was no church in their rural area, the Franklin family from Chicora, Mississippi, traveled weekly for church to what they considered to be the "city" of Shubuta.²³

Interviews reveal that many blacks had strong faith in God and their churches, which enabled them to deal with the harsh realities of living in rural Mississippi in the first half of the twentieth century. Discrimination and racism did not stop at the church door, thus the need for blacks to establish their own churches. W. E. B. Du Bois explained this phenomenon in one of his speeches: "[I]f there was any fellowship between Christians, white and black, it would be after the manner explained by a white Mississippi Clergyman in all seriousness: 'The Whites and Negroes understand each other here perfectly, sir, perfectly; if they come to my church they take a seat in the gallery. If I go to theirs, they invite me to the front pew or the platform.'"²⁴ Many preachers equated the black oppression in the South with the oppression of the Jews in the Old Testament. Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt was equated with African Americans moving north away from their oppressors.²⁵ For many Shubuta residents who did not migrate, church and their faith gave them reasons to continue living in the South despite the oppression. This faith is what gave other Shubuta residents the hope for a better life in the North.

EDUCATION

According to the 1930 census only 22.3 percent of black children in Shubuta under the age of eighteen attended school.²⁶ Educational opportunities for African Americans in Shubuta, and the South in general, were limited. Public schools were segregated and funding for them was not equal to that of white schools.²⁷ A 1930 letter from Mississippi State Education Agent P. H. Easom states the salary schedule for a Mississippi summer high school teacher was \$300 for director, \$250 for a white instructor, \$250 for a black principal, and \$150 for a black instructor.²⁸ Many African American schools only ran for six months out of the year because children were expected to help their families with farm work.²⁹ According to the Public School Register of 1875, there were only two schools for black children in Clarke County, while there were thirty small schools for white children.³⁰ By 1936 there were about forty schools for black children.³¹ “Most of them [the schools for black children] are small one-teacher schools scattered throughout the county but have the average equipment with the average efficiency for colored schools.”³² White children had larger, well-equipped, modern schools that included the Shubuta Institute and Military Academy and the Shubuta Female Academy.³³

The schools for black children in Clarke County were inadequate enough for the Rosenwald Fund to erect two new schools in the 1920s, in Shubuta and Quitman, specifically for rural black children. Julius Rosenwald, the son of German Jewish immigrants, lived in Chicago and worked as an executive for the Sears Roebuck mail-order company. Around the turn of the century, Rosenwald believed the state of education for blacks in the South was horrible and wanted to help. In 1912 the wealthy philanthropist paired up with Booker T. Washington to create a challenge grant program that led to the construction of 4,977 rural schools for black children.³⁴ In Clarke County both of these

schools were junior high schools. In 1936, the Rosenwald Junior High School, located in Shubuta, was valued at \$2,500. The school's three rooms were partially equipped with patent desks, window shades, a small library, and a piano.³⁵ In a Federal Writers Project (FWP) interview the school's principal, Sam Adams, said: "There are four teachers and nine grades of work. Friday afternoon literary programs are given; regular meetings of Parent Teacher Association; and Faculty meetings are called. Baseball and basketball games are played."³⁶ This was a big improvement over the area's other black schools.

Girlie Ferguson, born in 1927, went to a segregated school in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, until the fourth grade. She recalled

As far as I can remember, school was great. We had a regular, modern school, although the homemaking building was not directly connected to the school building. And we had regular flush toilets that were outside the school building. We had a regular classroom just like any other classroom. The fun part of going to school in Hattiesburg was the end of the year, which was in May, we always had these plays, and each class had a play and that was fun times because we got to be in these plays. I remember as a little girl, having a daisy costume made out of crepe paper.³⁷

During school Ferguson lived with her grandparents because their house was closer than her parent's house to her school. She walked seven miles to school each way. The only thing Ferguson was afraid of while living with her grandparents was that if she played on her way to school, and was late, she would be punished.³⁸

AFRICAN AMERICAN EMPLOYMENT

The biggest form of employment for African Americans in Shubuta was farming. According to the 1930 United States Census, there

were 485 farms with a total of 47,404 acres of land in Shubuta on 1 April 1930.³⁹ Less than half, 43 percent (110), of the 256 African American families who resided in Shubuta in 1930 lived on a farm, while 49 percent (118) of household heads in Shubuta were farmers or farm laborers.⁴⁰

According to Girlie Ferguson, whose parents and grandparents were sharecroppers in Shubuta, life during the early twentieth century was hard for most blacks. Farming was a low-paying, difficult occupation. Farmers worked long, labor-intensive days in extreme heat and hoped for a good crop return. School-aged children worked on farms to help their families. As a result, black children attended school only six months out of the year in Mississippi.⁴¹ Furthermore, sharecroppers and tenant farmers often had to deal with dishonest landlords. W. E. B. Du Bois agreed that harsh treatment toward African American sharecroppers was common. In his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois noted: "Just as centuries ago it was no easy thing for the serf to escape into the freedom of town-life, even so today there are hindrances laid in the way of county laborers. In considerable parts of all the Gulf States, and especially in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas, the Negroes on the plantations in the back-country districts are still held at forced labor practically without wages."⁴²

Sharecropping was a landlord-tenant relationship in which the tenant cultivated the owner's land and received a percentage of the profits, in either money or crops. Crops included cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, watermelons, and black-eyed peas.⁴³ Often the tenants had to buy or rent seeds, equipment, and animals from the landowners. Vernon Lane Wharton discussed some of the discriminations facing black sharecroppers in Mississippi in his book *The Negro in Mississippi*. He wrote

These small merchants [owners of small stores], often operating on credit themselves, wrote enormous mark-ups onto the prices of the goods they sold to planters or Negroes for payment at

the end of the season. The mark-up in the Summit region in 1871 was 100 per cent, raising the price of meal to seventy-five cents per bushel, of fat meat to twenty-six cents per pound, and molasses to one dollar per gallon. . . . In cases where the planter bought the supplies on his own credit and passed them on to the Negroes, the price generally underwent another increase.⁴⁴

Interviews indicate that not only did landowners try to cheat their black tenants out of money, but also out of crops. The result was that the sharecropper constantly owed money to the landowner. Sam McCann, a migrant from Mississippi, was the target of a dishonest landowner in Shubuta. Girlie Ferguson, one of McCann's several grandchildren, said her grandfather and parents bought products from the landowner's store using the credit he had from their wages. Although McCann and other family members knew exactly how much credit he was supposed to have, the landowner's wife allegedly changed the numbers in his account to make it look like he constantly owed money.⁴⁵ As a result, Ferguson said, the entire family—grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings—decided to move to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where two of her uncles were already working. Ferguson's father, Alfred Woodard, got a job working at Harper's Dairy Farm and Ferguson's grandfather, Sam McCann, got a job working on another farm.⁴⁶

Fred Thomas, a longtime Shubuta resident spoke about his experience sharecrop farming between 1930 and 1932.

They [migrants moving from Shubuta to Albany] just counted on it was better time up there than it was here. It had been rough . . . I was working for four bits a day . . . fifty cents a day . . . working forking the field and with the plow. I also worked in the sawmill. . . . And the railroad laying track and ties, spike them down. . . . I didn't go north because I had a family. I was living out on Mag Stanley's [a large plantation owned by Maggie Stanley] . . . we were farming down there and we had never been nowhere, so we just stayed around. I think I left there [the

Stanley plantation] in [19]32. I was treated all right. . . . I would be there plowing with Miss Maggie and they wouldn't be able to buy me feed. We would plow mules in the day and turn them out at night. . . . It had been just so rough down here, just so rough. After I stayed there two years and didn't make no money, I left. At the end of the year I would never clear nothing out of my cotton crops. . . . I wouldn't owe her [Maggie Stanley] anything, but she came and got all my cotton and paid for what I had got. I ain't owing her when I left, not a thing in the world. . . . After I got on my own I started making money.⁴⁷

Geneva Conway, the daughter of sharecrop farmers in Shubuta, Mississippi, in the 1930s, recalls that farming was so difficult for her father that he had to move out of town to try and make a profit.

My dad was a sharecropper. He had a wife and three children. My mother's family had always owned land and held their own. So they were always respected in this very small community [Shubuta, Mississippi], which is like a wide place in the middle of the road. My dad was a sharecropper. When he got ready to move us out of that environment of always working and never having any money at the end of the year; you always owed at the end of the year. He wanted to take us to Mobile [Alabama] to his sister's. He had to leave at night. He had to walk fourteen miles at night; he couldn't even catch the bus where we lived. He had to go away to catch a bus. By the time the sharecropper realized my father was gone, my father was in Mobile.

Then my mother and her three little children had to live and go back to safety and security on my grandfather's property because the High Sheriff would not come up to Sam McCall's place and cause trouble [because he was well respected in the community.] But he [the Sheriff] would cause trouble in several other places. He came with a gun, I was a little girl with my mother, and he wanted to know where Wash [Conway's father] was. But because she was Sam McCall's daughter, he didn't bother her. Our parents suffered greatly for where we are today.⁴⁸

Farming was such a physically intensive occupation that often children would help the family with chores. Eddie Johnson Burton, a migrant to Albany originally from Mathensville, Mississippi (approximately eight miles from Shubuta), grew up on the farm her father sharecropped. The family consisted of seven girls and three boys. "I never had to plow . . . my dad tried to teach me how to plow cotton, but I said I'm gonna trick him, I'm gonna try and cover up most of it so I don't have to pick so much. . . . All the other girls had to plow and cut pulpwood. We all had to work. The man [plantation owner] wasn't really too fair with him [her father], you know."⁴⁹ In order to help the family, Burton and her sisters would pick cotton and corn on a per diem basis for a local plantation owner.

We picked corn, and they would pay us so much a pound. Now the cotton . . . he [the owner of the plantation] would say, "Oh I love to get those Johnson girls because they can pick a bale of cotton a day." My sisters, my older sisters could pick 350 pounds of cotton a day. I would pick 250 pounds. It's a bulb, I had to pick it out and it will stick you if you don't do it right.

. . . We would stop at a store up there and get us lunch. We would be on the back of the truck by seven a.m. . . . We would get Ike and Mikes [a frosted cake with pink icing] . . . cheese, sardines, and crackers, and a big belly washer, that's what I call a big Pepsi. And that would be our lunch. And we would pick cotton all day until about three [p.m.] and he would bring us home and we would get washed up and we would do our chores at home.⁵⁰

In addition to farming, Shubuta blacks often found work at one of the lumber companies surrounding the area. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were as many as six lumber mills producing sawed lumber at one time.⁵¹ This brought prosperity to the area during a time when the cotton farms were suffering from boll weevil damage. The largest lumber mill was

the Brownlee Lumber Company that had the capacity to produce about 80,000 feet of lumber per day.⁵² According to the 1930 United States Census, 16 percent of African American males who were household heads worked in various lumber mills in and around Shubuta.⁵³ The majority of these men were identified as laborers, but some were identified as log sawer, edgerman, chopper, and logger.⁵⁴ Two miles away in Wayne County there were also several small sawmills employing African Americans and one hardwood veneer mill where black women were employed to stack lumber for \$1.00 a day.⁵⁵

The 1930 United States Census reported a few African American heads of households in Shubuta holding jobs other than farming and sawmill labor. Some of these were preachers (3.3 percent), cooks (4.6 percent), laundry workers (4.6 percent), truck drivers (1.2 percent), and insurance agents (0.8 percent).⁵⁶ (see appendix 3).

Domestic work and farming were the major employment opportunities open to African American women in Mississippi during this time. All of the heads of households who reported their occupation as cooks (4.3 percent) and laundry (4.3 percent) were female. Exactly one-third, 33.3 percent, of the wives reported working with a private family. Cooks, maids, and nurses earned between \$1.00 and \$3.00 per week plus two meals a day.⁵⁷ Although the 1930 United States Census lists a small percentage of black women holding jobs, women during this time worked all day regardless of categorized employment. According to Girlie Ferguson, women in her family spent their days farming, cooking, canning fruits and vegetables, making and mending children's clothing, and basically doing whatever had to be done.⁵⁸

Oral history interviews with Shubuta residents discuss older children and adolescents working on a per-diem basis despite the fact the United States Census did not show evidence of it. For example, Eddie Burton recalled the following:

My mother used to work for a lady called Mayfair Charmichel, and she was the overseer of the welfare in Quitman. My mom did the work for her. She was working for seven dollars a week. Then when my mom stopped, I was nine years old and I started taking care of her. I did cleaning. They had two bedrooms—no three bedrooms—a kitchen, and a dining room, and two baths. I cleaned that everyday. And on Saturday she discovered that I could make biscuits. And on Saturday morning she wanted me to come early and make biscuits for breakfast! And I said, “I’m tired, I cook and clean . . . and baby-sit.”⁵⁹

This was all done after Eddie Burton attended school in the mornings.

Despite the fact that the majority of African Americans in Shubuta were forced into unskilled and service occupations, the Federal Writers Project (FWP) workers for Clarke County seemed surprised that black residents were unable to get ahead. In 1936, the FWP workers reported the industrial progress of African Americans in Shubuta.

Industrially, the Negro has not progressed so rapidly [in Clarke County]; however, many of them learn little trades and do little extra jobs. The following is a list of names of those Negroes who have been issued licenses to carry on their trades in Clarke County.

Annie Thomas, Shubuta, Mississippi—Soft Drinks
 Ethel Smith, Quitman, Mississippi—Soft Drinks
 Dora Donald, Quitman, Mississippi—Lunch Stand
 Edwin Price, Enterprise, Mississippi—Cobler [Cobbler]
 Charles Moody, DeSoto, Mississippi—Barber
 Nathan Hunter, West Enterprise, Mississippi—Café
 Carrie Fisher, Shubuta, Mississippi—Soft Drinks
 Ed Redford, Enterprise, Mississippi—Barber
 Georgia Estes, Langsdale, Mississippi—Lunch Stand &
 Gen. Mdse.
 Jonnah Portis, Stonewall, Mississippi—Lunch Stand
 Jim House, Crandall, Mississippi—Lunch Stand⁶⁰

To make employment matters worse, cotton farming became even more difficult for everyone in Shubuta during the first few decades of the twentieth century because of boll weevil infestations. African American tenant farmers were most likely hurt the worst because they operated on credit of future crop returns. Many tenant farmers had to absorb their landlord's losses as well as their own, "the advances furnished to the negroes can be held down to very low limits in case of necessity," in this case the necessity was the boll weevil.⁶¹ In June of 1914, the *Mississippi Messenger* reported the condition of the cotton crop was the poorest since 1871 due to the boll weevil.⁶² One year later, the newspaper reported that an additional 18,000 square miles of territory became infested.⁶³ The cotton pest continued to be a nuisance into the next decade. The *Mississippi Messenger* reported the following statistics on its front page on 21 December 1923 about the weevil infestations.

Weevil Effects Showing Strong

Boll weevil ravages in the South are showing up in cotton ginning reports and reports from the Census Bureau and these reports are comparatively small.

The Clarke [County] report of cotton ginner prior to November 14 amounted to 1746 bales against 3550 to same date last year, Lauderdale [County] this year ginned 3955, compared to 6071 last year, Wayne [County] this year ginned 1697 and 2725 last year; Jasper [County] ginned 2862 this year against 4880 last season.⁶⁴

Boll weevil infestations added to the destitution of African American sharecroppers. These sharecroppers were the first ones to move away from crop destruction because they were affected the most. Grossman claims, "Neither black farm owners nor white farmers moved as readily as black tenants from infested areas, largely because the latter had the least latitude to react by changing the crop mix and were most subject to the impact of the boll weevil

on the ability of credit.”⁶⁵ Many of the migrants to Albany from Shubuta were sharecroppers.

DISCRIMINATION

W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, written in 1903, examined what it was like to be black and in the southern United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

No wonder that Luke Black, slow, dull, and discouraged, shuffles to our carriage and talks hopelessly. Why should he strive? Every year finds him deeper in debt. How strange that Georgia, the world-heralded refuge of poor debtors, should bind her own to sloth and misfortune as ruthlessly as ever England did! The poor land groans with its birth-pains, and brings forth scarcely a hundred pounds of cotton to the acre, where fifty years ago it yielded eight times as much. Of his meager yield the tenant pays from a quarter to a third in rent, and most of the rest in interest on food and supplies bought on credit. Twenty years yonder sunken-cheeked, old black man has labored under that system, and now, turned day-laborer, is supporting his wife and boarding himself on his wages of a dollar and a half a week, received only part of the year.⁶⁶

Discrimination in the South against African Americans was a major force that pushed migrants north. Racial biases and violence were the roots of many problems for blacks in regard to employment, justice, education, and socialization. Oral history interviews indicate that Shubuta was no different than the rest of the South when it came to discrimination against blacks.

The red artesian well, Shubuta’s most famous landmark, is an artesian well that produces water the color of ice tea. For decades locals and travelers drank the red water for its medicinal properties. Doctors claimed that the red water would aid gout,

acid indigestion, rheumatism, lumbago, a painful bladder, and constipation.⁶⁷ The earlier well had a wall dividing it. One side was for blacks; the other side was for whites. Girlie Ferguson, born in 1927, remembers an incident that occurred at the artesian well when she was a young girl revisiting Shubuta after moving to Albany.

On Saturdays we went to town. We had gone to town and there was a well in this little town. The well had a faucet where the water came out and there were two sides to it. My Uncle Willie [McCann] went to one side and was drinking, so being from Albany and not knowing what goes on in the South that much, I went to the other side to drink. Then Uncle Willie gave me a slap across the face. I said, "What did you do that for?" He said, "You'd rather I do it than the white folks do it." So there was a black side and a white side.⁶⁸

Eddie C. McDonald, an African American Shubuta resident who migrated to Denver, Colorado, and then returned to Shubuta to retire, recalled what it was like living in Shubuta in the 1930s.

Back in those 1930s it was pretty rough back there. We had to work hard, and the schools weren't too easy to get to . . . there was very little work in Mississippi. . . . It took twelve families to sign in order for the electric company to bring lights our way. We had to walk one mile to get our mail because the mailman would not bring our mail to us. At that time you could not even see the light at the end of the tunnel. I think that's why I made up my mind to go and seek work. I left in 1954. It wasn't until the 1950s that things started to gel for us around here.⁶⁹

When asked about what was different about Shubuta after returning home in 1994 to retire than when he left in 1954, McDonald had some interesting observations. "Now we [African Americans] can drink from the same fountain. When I left here there was a fountain with two pipes and water flowing out of each

side. One was for white and one was for black. When I came back they had changed that and made it one faucet. . . . In 1954 when I left here we could not vote at that time, but when I got to Denver, in 1956, and had a chance to vote, I did, and I have been voting ever since. And I have not missed hardly anything.”⁷⁰ McDonald also remembered that before he left Shubuta black people had to guess the right number of jelly-beans in a large jar before they were allowed to vote.⁷¹

Even the Works Progress Administration’s historical surveys comment on questionable disenfranchisement tactics in the area. The whites first tried to influence who they thought were the more intelligent blacks in the area to vote for the right candidate. When this approach failed, the whites then questioned the rights of blacks to vote at all. An argument ensued that the blacks’ ballot was destroyed. The Ku Klux Klan also terrorized African Americans so they would be too afraid to vote.⁷²

Another Shubuta resident, Willis McDonald, recalled Mississippi’s segregation during an interview. “Let me emphasize this. There were two places down there in Shubuta that were not segregated as far back as I can remember, those two doctors’ offices, Dr. Hand and Dr. Baydean. Everybody was in that same room. Whoever came in and signs their name on that list and he [Dr. Hand] took them as they came in. It was no one person was over here and one over in this room. . . . The funeral home was not segregated either, everybody was in the same thing.”⁷³

Reverend John Johnson from Shubuta told his son, McKinley Johnson, that he had to leave Mississippi or he would have been dead.⁷⁴ In an interview about his father, Johnson remembered, “He would never raise a family under those discriminatory practices, nor could he have a wife that would put up with those sharecropper experiences. They were a touch above slavery. His independent spirit would not let him stay there.”⁷⁵ John Johnson felt that blacks in Mississippi had such a hard life that after he established himself

in the North he returned south to transport blacks to Albany.

The Shubuta newspaper, the *Mississippi Messenger*, was published for the white citizens of the area. The majority of African American news that was reported dealt with lynching around Mississippi and when blacks did something unlawful. It was rare for African Americans to be praised or just plain reported about in the local Shubuta newspaper. Starting in December 1921, the *Mississippi Messenger* began running a front-page cartoon called “Hambone’s Meditations,” which served as a barometer for the general feelings of the white population toward blacks. These cartoons featured a white man in blackface who spoke in black dialect. The cartoon creators mocked African American work ethic, church, wives, law enforcement, and work relationships. These cartoons ran for about two years. One example in 16 December 1921 “Hambone’s Meditations,” featured a sloppily dressed man in blackface slowly fixing a fence. The caption read, “Talk bout lockin’ folks up in jail fuh workin’ on er-Sunday—ef dey eveh ketch me at dey kin’ o’foolshness dey bettuh lock me in de crazy-house!!!!”⁷⁶ Many of the issues that “Hambone’s Meditations” scoffed at were reasons that oral history participants in this study cited for moving north.

The most atrocious form of discrimination took the form of lynching. Between 1882 and 1962, the state of Mississippi had 538 black lynchings, which was the highest number in the United States.⁷⁷ Lynching was also common in Shubuta. Usually when it occurred, it took place off a bridge at the end of East Street. Present-day Shubuta residents know this bridge as the “hanging bridge.” One of the most horrifying incidents in Shubuta’s history happened on 21 December 1918 when four black youths were accused of murdering a dentist named Dr. E. L. Johnson. The suspects, Andrew Clark, age fifteen; Major Clark, age twenty; Maggie Howze, age twenty; and Alma Howze, age sixteen, all pleaded innocent. The horrific account was published in the