

Coming: The Lost Black History

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A cloud of dust flies behind a pickup truck carrying a load of cattle to auction, as panoramic fields of wild Cosmos nod their golden heads in the sweltering July heat. As I drive along the backroads of White County for my first visit with Telmon Boyd Nix on this hot Tuesday morning, I watch the driver ahead of me as he no doubt contemplates the market price of beef. Cattle prices are down this year. A bad year to be in the cattle business. As he brakes his truck for the sharp curve ahead on the narrow gravel road, a buck deer emerges from the edge of the field along East Cadron Creek in search of water and a bean field.

The summer heat has scorched everything, including the tall wild sage grass growing along the rich bottomland that extends from Cadron Ridge just north of Mount Vernon to Rose Bud and beyond. Once this fertile land grew thousands of acres of cotton, the signature crop of the South...

Along Nix Road by the old Dupriest plantation, the road bends sharply, revealing the remains of an old barn with its decaying cedar shake shingles. Eighty-seven Telmon Boyd Nix remembers how by the light of a harvest moon at age ten he baled hay behind a mule-driven hay sickle owned by James Dupriest. After long days in the landlord's cotton fields, laboring from sunup to sundown, men like sharecroppers Deacon Logan and Tom Drucker, and lots of other hired hands worked until midnight stacking the hay in that barn by the light of a harvest moon.



Telmon Boyd Nix

Just up the road a quarter mile and over the next rise ... if you drove on up the fence row a piece to the end of the meadow, you can still see the slab grave markers, facing backwards to the road, marking the burial sites of over seventy-five graves at the Mount Olive Bedford African-American Chapel Cemetery. Herein lie the remains of those black pioneers who settled the area.

There on a slope of rocky hillside not fit for farmland, rest eternally the men and women of **The Colony**. Many came to the area searching for land of their own and education. Directly across the dirt road by the cemetery are the remains of an old dilapidated frame building, its front roof resting on the floor joists. It was here that the children of some one hundred colony residents walked for miles to have their first school experience at the Julius Rosenwald School for African-Americans. Standing nearby is their church, the entrance blocked by a tree downed in a recent windstorm.

In the opposite direction from the Mount Olive Bedford African-American Church Chapel bordering the Dupriest plantation stands the recently renovated Bethesda Church for whites. Its white clapboard siding has a fresh coat of paint, new windows, and a neatly manicured lawn. Just beyond the churchyard and beneath a one hundred year old oak is an ancient Indian burial crypt. The aged flat rock, stacked three feet above ground, mark an American Indian burial site. These flat rock symbolize the Native American Indian and white cultures that cohabited this land since early Colonial times, while for many years the African-Americans remained segregated...

The majority of the story of The Colony is told by Telmon Boyd Nix, the grandson of a Freeman and now the only living survivor of The Colony in White County. Through interviews with him, his childhood friend, Mildred Dupriest, and others, I am able to present their recollections of the lost history of The Colony...

The author is a member of the White County Historical Society. Read her fascinating account of "The Lost Black History of White County" in the 2002 edition of White County Heritage, to be published in December. It's free to all Society members who have renewed memberships for 2002. Membership dues are \$12 per year and should be sent to WCHS, P.O. Box 537, Searcy, AR 72145.