

## SPRING HILL COMMUNITY

The Spring Hill Community is located in the northeastern part of Montgomery County, Mississippi. The area of the community is about 35 square miles. During it's heyday, there were about seventy-five families in the community. Sixty or more of these families were land owners. However, during the 1950's, a great migration to northern cities began, as younger people sought factory jobs in places like Chicago and Detroit.

The community interests centered around the church, school, farming and economic development.

The major businesses of the community dating back to the 1870's and well into the twentieth century consisted of the following: All families were farmers. James Townsend owned and operated a cotton gin, which began as a horse gin, and later converted to a steam gin. He owned and operated a saw mill, planer mill, blacksmith shop, and grist mill. Charlie Loggins owned and operated a waterwheel powered cotton gin. Johnnie Shelton owned and operated a grist mill.

The carpenters of the community were: George Purnell, John Henry McCuiston, John L. Shelton, F. L. Shelton, and Paul Purnell.

The machinists of the community were: Henry Harrison and Artis Golden.

In 1936, Ruben Shelton opened a general store which proved to be a great asset and convenience to the community. When he decided to move away in 1953, he sold the business to two nephews, Raphael McCuiston and Dewey Townsend. Townsend sold his share to McCuiston in 1961. The store stayed in business until about 1975.

Spring Hill School and Spring Hill M. B. Church, were established during the same period of time- around 1870. The school house was located directly across the road from the church. The first structure was a frame building with one big room. A curtain in the center of the room divided it into a two-room facility. The building, constructed by parents of the Spring Hill Community, was a two teacher school that housed grades 1 through 8. The school term varied from 4 to 6 months.

About the year 1929, the community decided that a larger school house was needed. So the community members got together, tore down the two-teacher school house, and constructed a building to accommodate three teachers, auditorium and coat rooms. This building housed grades one through nine and the school term was six months.

Parents and patrons of the school were determined to provide the best educational opportunities as possible for



the children. The community leaders were aware of educational agencies that would provide teachers for rural communities. One of the programs they wanted was a vocational program headed by a vocational agriculture teacher. This was possible under the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. In 1932, the trustees of the Spring Hill School (Johnnie Shelton, Frank Purnell and Sylvester Townsend) convinced the county superintendent of education to provide this teacher.

The vocational agriculture teacher (I. H. Montgomery) had a greater impact on improving the educational program than anything prior to 1932. He worked with the farmers in increasing the yields of cotton, corn and improving cattle and hog production. During this period of time all households in the community adopted a live-at-home program with emphasis on producing and preserving food for the family.

In 1936, still striving for better educational opportunities for its youth, the Spring Hill community established a high school. The school trustees backed by the community, hired Mr. C. H. Dukes as principal and vocational agriculture teacher with the understanding that a high school building for grades one through twelve would be constructed. Up to that time there had never been a high school anywhere in Montgomery County for black boys and girls.

Principal Dukes and the trustees organized the community for constructing the building, equipping the school, and hiring the necessary teachers. Money had to be provided for this project, so the community set out to raise as much of the needed funds as possible. The school trustees, being men of trust and dependability, were able to borrow enough to supplement what the community had already raised.

The head carpenter (John Henry McCuiston) was hired and all other labor was provided by the community. The material for the job was bought and placed on the grounds. The building (six classrooms) was completed and equipped by mid-September 1936, in time for the opening of school.

In addition to the cost of the building, the parents had to pay tuition to help offset the operational expenses. Teachers' salaries had to be supplemented, and in fact, the full salaries had to be paid for two months because Montgomery County did not provide 8 month school term for black boys and girls. Parents had to buy teaching materials and textbooks for their children.

The school continued to grow. The first graduating class was in 1938, and consisted of five members (Eunice Shelton, Annie Mae Shelton, Calvert Shelton, Dewey Townsend



and Willie F. Hester. All five graduates entered Howard M. H. College, Jackson, Mississippi, in the fall of 1959.

In the early years of the Spring Hill school, the county did not provide public transportation for black boys and girls. Some children had to walk four or five miles to school the way. During the 1940's, a private bus system was set up to provide transportation for some of the children. Of course, the parents of children had to pay for this service.

During the late 1940's under the administration of Principal F. M. White, several elementary schools were consolidated with the Spring Hill Central Junior High School, Jones Chapel, New Creek. In addition, plans were made to have high school students from Oak Hill and Pleasant Hill Community to Spring Hill.

The Spring Hill Vocational High School has always managed to have a good basketball team. However, the transfer of high school students from Oak Hill and Pleasant Hill made the basketball team much more competitive. Many great basketball players were produced by this team. It must also be noted that Spring Hill Vocational High School was the only school in the area with a gymnasium. The gym was built by the community during the administration of Principal F. M. White.

The Spring Hill Vocational School has a very good assembly program. The faculty was made up primarily of college graduates and above. This was not the case in most black schools of the area during this period. As a result, the percentage of high school graduates entering college was unusually high.

Then, in the late 1950's the county embarked upon a consolidation plan for the Negro schools. In 1960, a new school plant was built at Hattiesburg, Mississippi that housed all Mississippi county students except Oak Hill elementary students.

The parents, patrons and friends of the Spring Hill Vocational High School were deeply shocked and saddened when the school was closed in 1960. It had served well for 20 years. The school had touched the minds and hearts of many boys and girls. The graduates and students who attended Spring Hill Vocational School are serving well in many parts of the United States of America. Thanks to the leaders of the Spring Hill community for the vision they saw in educating the children.