Benjamin T. Montgomery Family Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2021

Contact information: https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact

Catalog Record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm73040857

Additional search options available at: https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms021002

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Manuscript Division staff, 2021
Collection Summary
Title: Benjamin T. Montgomery Family Papers
Inclusive Dates: 1872-1987
Bulk Dates: 1872-1971
ID no.: MSS40857
Creator: Montgomery, Benjamin T., 1819-1877
Creator: Montgomery family
Extent: 15 items
Extent: 1 container
Extent: .4 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm73040857
Summary: Papers relating to Benjamin T. Montgomery, his son Isaiah T. Montgomery, other children and grandchildren, and material concerning the African American towns of Davis Bend and Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Benjamin T. Montgomery was born into slavery, enslaved by Joseph Davis (older brother of Jefferson Davis), manager and later owner of Davis Bend, Mississippi, and an inventor. Isaiah Montgomery founded Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Diary, speeches, biographical essays, and printed matter concerning Mound Bayou.

Acquisition Information
The papers of the Benjamin T. Montgomery Family were acquired by the Library of Congress in 1971 by gift from Mrs. Eugene V. Wood and Gladys B. Shepperd and by purchase in 2019 and 2021.

Processing History
The 1971 gift and the 2019 purchase of the Benjamin T. Montgomery Family Papers were processed and described by Manuscript Division staff in a data sheet and catalog record. With the 2021 purchase, a finding aid was created by Karen Linn Femia.

Transfers
Photographs have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of the Benjamin T. Montgomery Family Papers. Patrons are encouraged to contact the Prints and Photographs Division in advance of a research visit.

Copyright Status
Materials from the Benjamin T. Montgomery Family Papers are governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.) and other applicable international copyright laws.

Access and Restrictions
The papers of the Benjamin T. Montgomery Family are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Division prior to visiting in order to determine whether the desired materials will be available at that time.
Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Benjamin T. Montgomery Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Family History

Benjamin T. Montgomery (1819-1877) was born enslaved in Loudoun County, Virginia. In 1836 he was moved to Mississippi and sold to Joseph E. Davis (1784-1870), older brother of Jefferson Davis and owner of Davis Bend and Hurricane Plantation located on the Mississippi River. Inspired by social reformer Robert Owen's utopian socialism, Davis attempted to create a paternalistic communitarian social order for the enslaved people of Davis Bend. Montgomery thus was allowed access to literacy and books. In 1842 Montgomery opened a general store and eventually became the manager for most of the business dealings of Davis's plantation. Montgomery's mechanical skills led to his invention of a boat propeller, however, the patent application was denied in 1858 because an enslaved person was not a United States citizen. Montgomery married Mary Lewis in 1840, and they had four children who lived into adulthood. After the American Civil War, Davis loaned money to Montgomery for the 1866 purchase of Davis Bend. The town of Davis Bend was a completely African American community populated by some of the formerly enslaved members of the plantation community and new citizens recruited by Montgomery. The general store begun years earlier, Montgomery & Sons, continued as a successful retail establishment and the cotton growing business of Davis Bend prospered up until around Montgomery's death on May 12, 1877.

William Thorton Montgomery (1843-1909) and Isaiah T. Montgomery (1847-1924), Benjamin and Mary's sons, took over business concerns and ownership of Davis Bend, but plunging cotton prices and Mississippi River flood waters created financial struggles. In 1881 Jefferson Davis took legal action and repossessed the property for the Davis family. William Thorton moved to the Dakota Territory, returning to Mississippi years later, but Isaiah remained in Mississippi. Isaiah, in partnership with two cousins, founded Mound Bayou, the first all-Black town in the Mississippi Delta, in 1887. The town remains today. He initiated a number of commercial enterprises and held public office as mayor and receiver of public monies in Jackson, Mississippi. He was a delegate to the Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of the Benjamin T. Montgomery Family span the years 1872-1987, with the bulk of the material dating from 1872 to 1971. The collection items pertain to members of the Mississippi African American family of Benjamin T. Montgomery and his wife, Mary Lewis Montgomery. The Montgomery parents and children were all enslaved by Joseph E. Davis, older brother of Jefferson Davis, at Davis Bend, but post-Civil War became business entrepreneurs, public office holders, owners of Davis Bend, and founders of Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Included in the collection is the 1872 diary of Mary Virginia Montgomery (daughter), an 1890 speech by Isaiah T. Montgomery (son), biographical sketches of Isaiah's daughter and son-in-law, Mary C. Booze and Eugene P. Booze, a brochure celebrating the 100th anniversary of Mound Bayou containing biographical information on the Montgomery family, and a thesis, unpublished manuscript, printed matter, and a photographic postcard all relating to Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Items document the Montgomery family, the founding of the African American community of Mound Bayou in 1887, and agricultural and economic developments, education, politics, and the social life and customs of Mound Bayou.

Arrangement of the Collection

This collection is arranged alphabetically by title of written work or name of individual followed by two one folder additions.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.
People
Booze, Eugene P. (Eugene Parker), 1878-
Booze, Mary C. (Mary Cordelia)
Davis, Joseph E. (Joseph Emory), 1784-1870.
Montgomery family.
Montgomery, Benjamin T. (Benjamin Thornton), 1819-1877.
Montgomery, Isaiah T. (Isaiah Thornton), 1847-1924.
Montgomery, Mary Lewis.
Montgomery, Mary Virginia, 1852-

Subjects
African Americans--Education.
African Americans--Mississippi--Davis Bend.
African Americans--Mississippi--Mound Bayou.
African Americans--Mississippi.
Agriculture--Mississippi Mound Bayou.
Community development--Mississippi--Mound Bayou.
Education--Mississippi--Mound Bayou.
Slavery--Mississippi.
Slaves--Mississippi.

Places
Davis Bend (Miss.)--History.
Mississippi--History, Local.
Mound Bayou (Miss.)--Economic conditions.
Mound Bayou (Miss.)--History.
Mound Bayou (Miss.)--Politics and government.
Mound Bayou (Miss.)--Social life and customs.

Titles
Montgomery family papers
## Container List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Booze, Eugene P., circa 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Booze, Mary Cordelia, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Montgomery, Isaiah T., speech, 1890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| BOX 1     | Montgomery, Mary Virginia, diary, 1872  
           | (2 folders) |
| BOX 1     | "The Montgomery Saga, From Slavery to Black Power", unpublished manuscript by Gladys B. Shepperd, 1971  
           | (2 folders) |
| BOX 1     | "Mound Bayou: A Study in Social Development," by Maurice Elizabeth Jackson, 1937 |
| BOX 1     | Printed matter, 1898, 1929-1938 |
| BOX 1     | 2019 Addition: 100th anniversary of the founding of Mound Bayou, Miss., brochure, 1987 |
| BOX 1     | 2021 Addition: Postcard with message depicting Mound Bayou, Miss., 1913 |