



THE CITY OF MOSS POINT, MISSISSIPPI · EST. 1901

The Moss Point History Tour

One hundred twenty five years where the rivers meet

PRINT EDITION · CITYOFMOSSPOINT.ORG/HISTORY

About this book

A century and a quarter on the water, from the moss-draped oaks to the largest pine lumber port in the country.

This is the print edition of the Moss Point History Tour. The full experience lives online at **cityofmosspoint.org/history**, where the story is told chapter by chapter with music and narration in the voice of Mayor Billy Knight Sr., recreated with his full authorization.

The photographs in these pages come from the city's own collections: the Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library, city archives, and the families of Moss Point. Each image is credited where it appears.

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BEFORE THE TOWN

The first people.



The Gulf Coast as the first European mapmakers drew it. Guillaume Delisle's map of Louisiana, 1718.

Long before the mills, before the town had a name, this land where the rivers meet belonged to other people. The Mohocti lived here, alongside their kin the Pascagoula and the Biloxi, in small villages on the water. When the first French explorers came up the coast in 1699, they found these families already home.

And they were only the newest. For thousands of years before them, people lived and fished on these same waters, leaving their shell mounds along the banks. The Pascagoula are remembered in an old story, of a whole people said to have walked singing into the river rather than be taken. Believe the legend or not, on a still night the water still seems to hum. This is where Moss Point begins. Not with us, but with them.

WHERE THE RIVERS MEET

Named for the oaks.



An electric streetcar beneath the live oaks, early 1900s.

Cattle herders called this place Mossey Pen Point, a shady resting spot where they penned their herds among the moss-draped live oaks before driving them along the rivers. Over the years the name wore down, from Mossey Pen Point to Mossy Point, and at last to Moss Point.

The oaks still stand where the Escatawpa and Pascagoula Rivers meet, on land first home to the Mohocti, and the water has carried the city's story ever since.

BEFORE THE BOOM

The first mills.



The McIntosh Lumber Company sawmill on McInnis Lake, photographed between 1890 and 1900. Mills like this one had worked these banks since the 1830s. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

Sawdust was in the air here a half century before the great lumber boom. Surveyor Thomas C. Rhodes, the namesake of Rhodes Bayou, opened one of the first sawmills on these banks in the 1830s, and the Beardslee and Bradford mill followed in 1836. In 1853 Walter Denny bought a Moss Point mill and built it into one of the leading operations on the river. Local histories tell how one early miller, William Griffin, dismantled his machinery during the Civil War and buried it deep in the Pascagoula swamp. When the war ended he dug it up, and Moss Point was sawing again almost before the smoke cleared.

1830s

THE EARLY CONGREGATIONS

Steeple over the mill town.



*The Methodist frame church erected in 1882, the congregation's home before Dantzler Memorial rose in 1914.
Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.*

Almost as soon as there were mills, there were churches. Moss Point's Methodists organized in 1852, in the decade before the Civil War, and in 1882 raised a frame church for the growing town. The Presbyterians followed on February 22, 1874, fourteen charter members, among them the McInnis and McLeod families, and the sanctuary they began building in 1878 still stands on Dantzler Street today, one of the oldest church buildings in Moss Point. Then in 1914 the Methodists built a landmark of their own, the brick sanctuary that today faces Moss Point High School across Weems Street. Designed by New Orleans architect William Drago, its cornerstone laid on August 22, 1914, it was raised in memory of Sara Griffin Dantzler of the lumber family whose name it still carries. Today it is Dantzler Memorial.

STEEPLES OVER THE MILL TOWN · CONTINUED



*The Presbyterian sanctuary begun in 1878 on Dantzler Street, one of the oldest church buildings in Moss Point.
Photo by Experienced Results.*



*Dantzler Memorial, the 1914 brick sanctuary facing Moss Point High School across Weems Street. Photo by
Experienced Results.*

1852

SACRED GROUND

The old burying grounds.



The oak-shaded grounds of Elder Cemetery. Photo by Experienced Results.

Beneath a stand of oaks on the edge of town lies Elder Cemetery, a burial ground that dates to the 1860s. A historical marker remembers the Elder family and the old Elder Ferry, and the earliest families laid to rest here, in the quiet shade of the oaks.

Across town on Magnolia Street lies the other old burying ground. Saint Paul Cemetery grew up around the Community Church, and its oldest tomb is dated 1868. Solomon Gregory, a man born before Emancipation, set the cemetery in order in 1898 and rests there today, among neighbors who were born in slavery and died free. And among its veterans lies Isabel Griffin, called Sister, who served in the Six Triple Eight, the all Black Women's Army battalion of World War Two whose service was honored with the Congressional Gold Medal.

THE OLD BURYING GROUNDS · CONTINUED



In Saint Paul Cemetery, the stone of Ida Marshall, born in April of 1852, before Emancipation. St. Paul United Methodist rises beyond. Photo by Experienced Results.



Saint Paul Cemetery on Magnolia Street, the city's other old burying ground. Photo by Experienced Results.

1860s

THE MERCHANT AGE

The man who made everything.



A piece of the translucent blue glass left when the 1887 fire melted Blumer's glass works into a slag heap. Pieces like this one still surface around Moss Point today. Photo by Experienced Results.

Adam Blumer arrived in 1869 and set about building everything a mill town needed. With Lorin Hand he ran the Blumer and Hand Foundry, then added a tannery, a shoe factory, a grist mill, and a brickyard, and served stretches as the town's postmaster besides. Local histories add a glass works to the list, and tell of a fire in 1887 that melted it into a slag heap of translucent blue glass. For years afterward residents chipped off pieces for their gardens, and the blue glass still surfaces along old fence lines today. The Blumer Building on Main Street keeps the family name, down by the Riverwalk.

1869

FAITH TAKES ROOT

The churches that carried the town.



*First Missionary Baptist Church on Main Street, organized 1874, photographed before the 2023 tornado.
Courtesy First Missionary Baptist Church.*

While Adam Blumer was busy building the town's businesses, Moss Point's families were building something made to last even longer. In the years after the Civil War, Moss Point's Black families worshiped together at Saint Paul Methodist, a one room church standing since around 1849 on ground that is now Saint Paul Cemetery, a congregation so central to life here that folks knew it simply as the Community Church. Out of that congregation, on September 20, 1874, eight members, five women and three men, organized the First Baptist Church. It grew right along with the town, raising a sanctuary on Main Street in 1902 and a brick one in 1956, its rolls carrying more than eight hundred names by midcentury. These churches did far more than hold services. Alongside congregations like Second Baptist, they raised up schools, choirs, and leaders. And when this city's hardest chapters came, it would be these same churches, time and again, that opened their doors first. That story was still to come.

1874

THE LUMBER YEARS

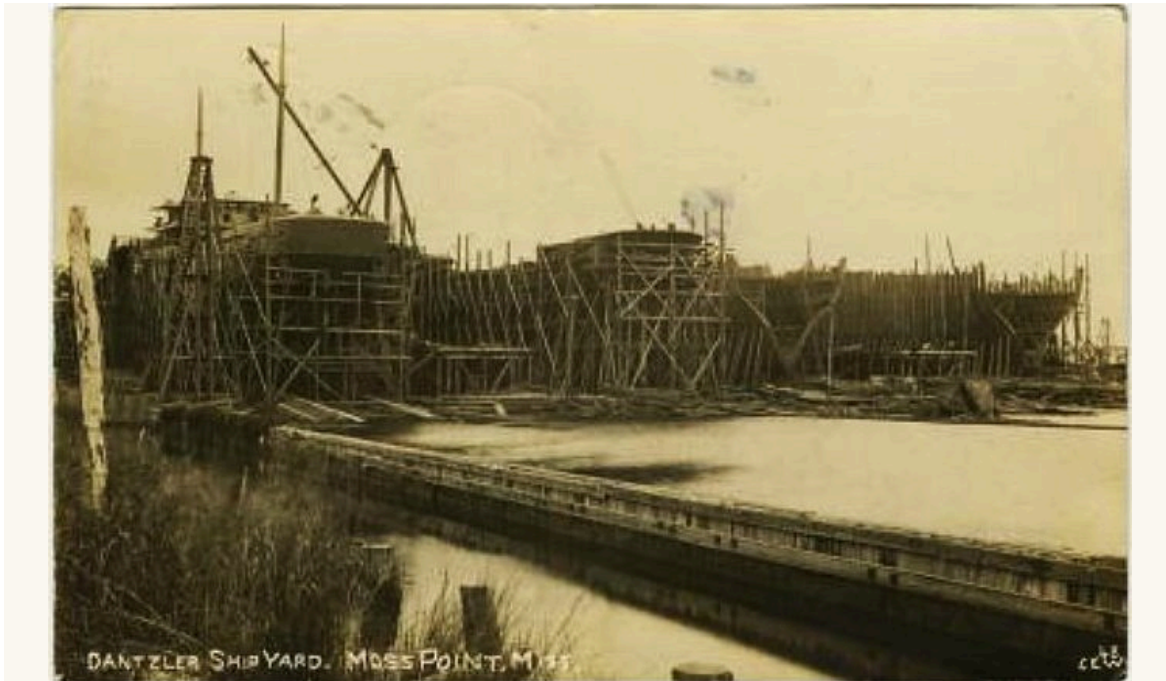
Built on longleaf pine.



A Moss Point sawmill, its tramway running out through the stacked lumber.

For decades Moss Point was the largest pine lumber export center in the country, better known in the ports of Europe and South America than in much of America itself. The L.N. Dantzler Lumber Company ran its sawmill on the Escatawpa from 1885 and grew into the largest exporter in Mississippi, with as many as nine sawmills inside the city and twelve along the river within a single mile.

BUILT ON LONGLEAF PINE · CONTINUED

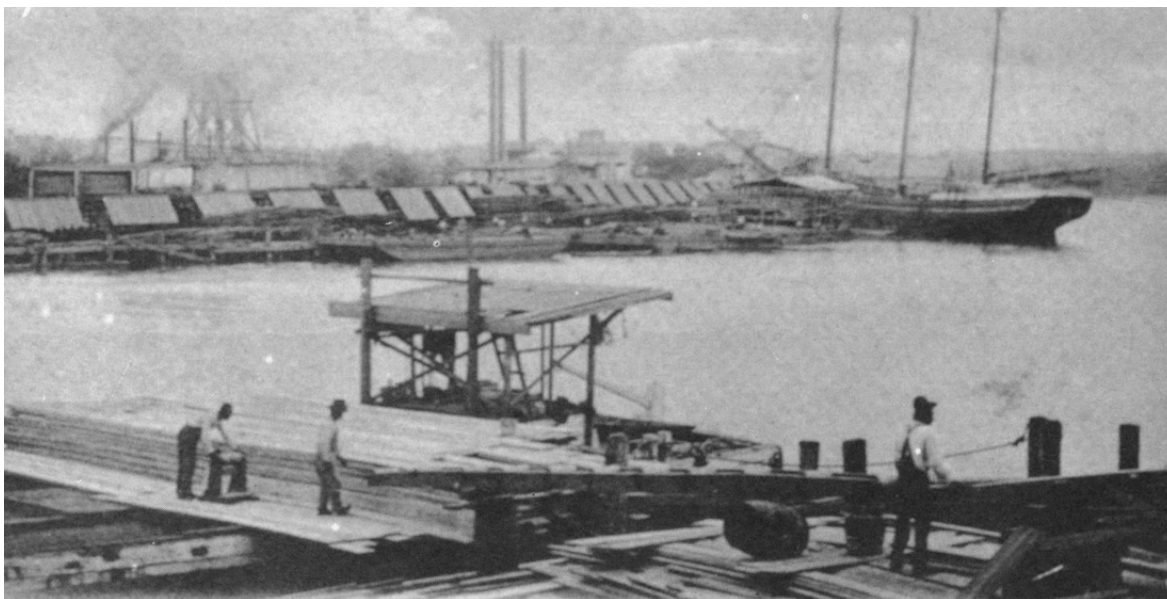


The Dantzler Ship Yard, Moss Point, about 1910.



The steamer Honduras of Duluth loads ties at the Moss Point waterfront.

BUILT ON LONGLEAF PINE · CONTINUED



The mill of the L.N. Dantzler Lumber Company, called the largest mill in the South in 1882. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

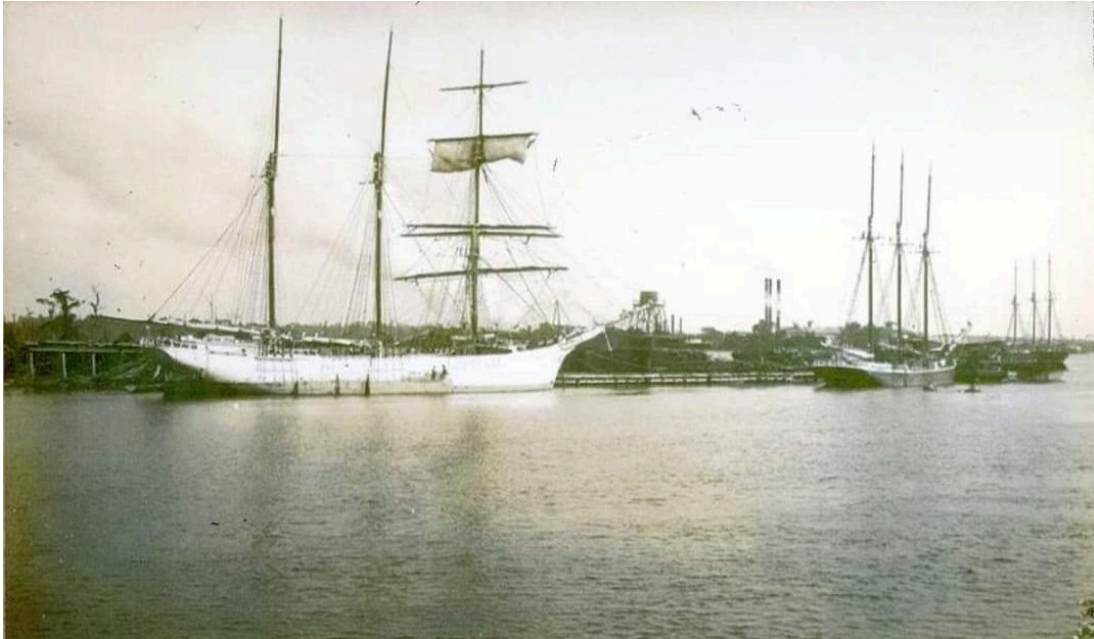


Dantzler's Mill on the riverbank, the largest sawmill in Moss Point. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

1885

THE WORKING RIVER

A harbor full of sail.



Sailing ships at the Moss Point waterfront, masts standing thick along the river.

Before the highways, the rivers were the highway. The Moss Point waterfront stayed crowded with schooners and steamers, masts standing thick along the banks, waiting to carry the city's lumber to ports in Europe and South America. The whole economy floated on this water.

A NATIVE SON

The boy who won the Derby.



Lonnie Clayton in his racing silks, 1890s. Public domain.

By several accounts, the jockey Alonzo "Lonnie" Clayton was born here in 1876, back when the town was still known as Mossy Point. In 1892, at just fifteen, he rode Azra to win the Kentucky Derby, and he is still remembered as the youngest jockey ever to do it.

1892

BEFORE THE BRICK

The street takes shape.



Main Street, Moss Point, about 1898.

In the 1890s Main Street was a wide dirt road lined with wood front stores and board sidewalks, horses and wagons working the ruts between them. It was already the center of things, years before brick blocks and a bank would give the district its weight.

1898

THE HEART OF THE CITY

Main Street rises.



Pascagoula National Bank at Main and Post Office Streets, 1907. Helena Moncrief Collection, Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

As the mills ran, a town grew up around them. Cowan's General Merchandise lined an unpaved street, Burnham's Drug Store opened in 1902. The Pascagoula National Bank anchored the corner of Main and Post Office in a columned brick building, and down the block J. H. Hill's Sugar Bowl sold fresh candy, cold drinks, and a game at the bowling alley out back.

MAIN STREET RISES · CONTINUED



The Sugar Bowl, J. H. Hill's five and dime, Moss Point. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

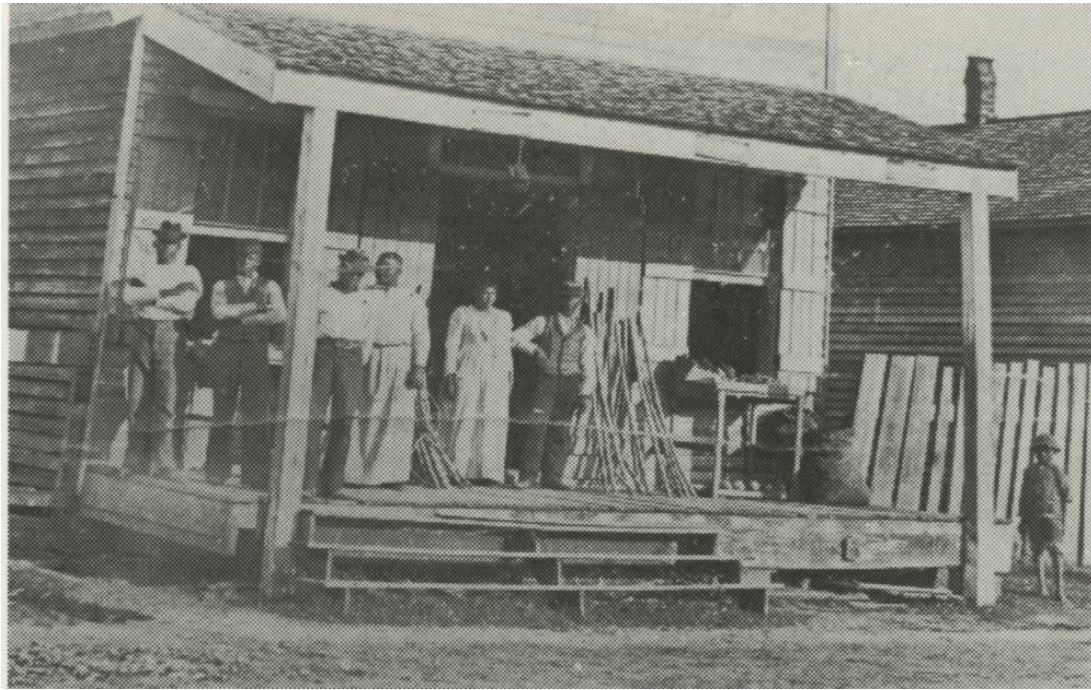


A rare Gulf Coast snowfall on Main Street, around 1920. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

1900

THE FIRST GENERATION FREE

The store Ada Williams built.



Ada Williams, in the doorway of the store she owned. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

Among the photographs the library has kept, there is one of a wooden store with a deep porch, goods stacked by the door, and a woman standing in the doorway. Her name was Ada Williams. The old caption gives her story in a few short words. Born a slave. Owned a successful store in Moss Point for many years.

That is all it says, and it is enough. In one lifetime, Ada Williams went from being counted as someone else's property to keeping the books of a business that was her own. The mills built this town, but stores like hers fed it and clothed it. The library has kept her photograph all these years, so her name would not be lost.

A MILESTONE

A city, not a town.



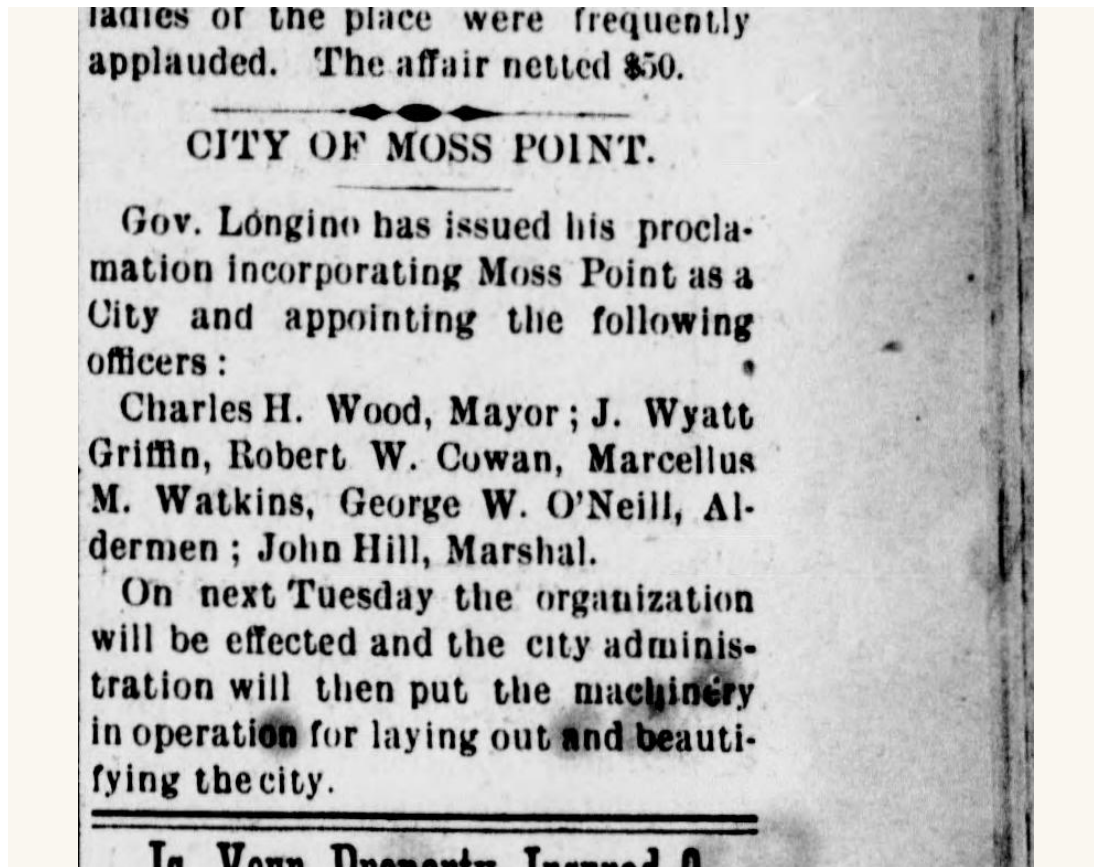
Downtown Moss Point from the river, around 1900, the mill town of more than three thousand on the eve of cityhood. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

Most towns grow up and, in time, become cities. Moss Point skipped that step. In 1901 it incorporated directly as a city, already home to more than three thousand people. Governor Longino's proclamation seated the first city government, with Charles H. Wood as the first mayor.

1901

A YOUNG CITY

The marshal and the fire bell.



*Governor Longino's 1901 proclamation naming Moss Point's first officers, including John Hill, Marshal.
Pascagoula Democrat-Star.*

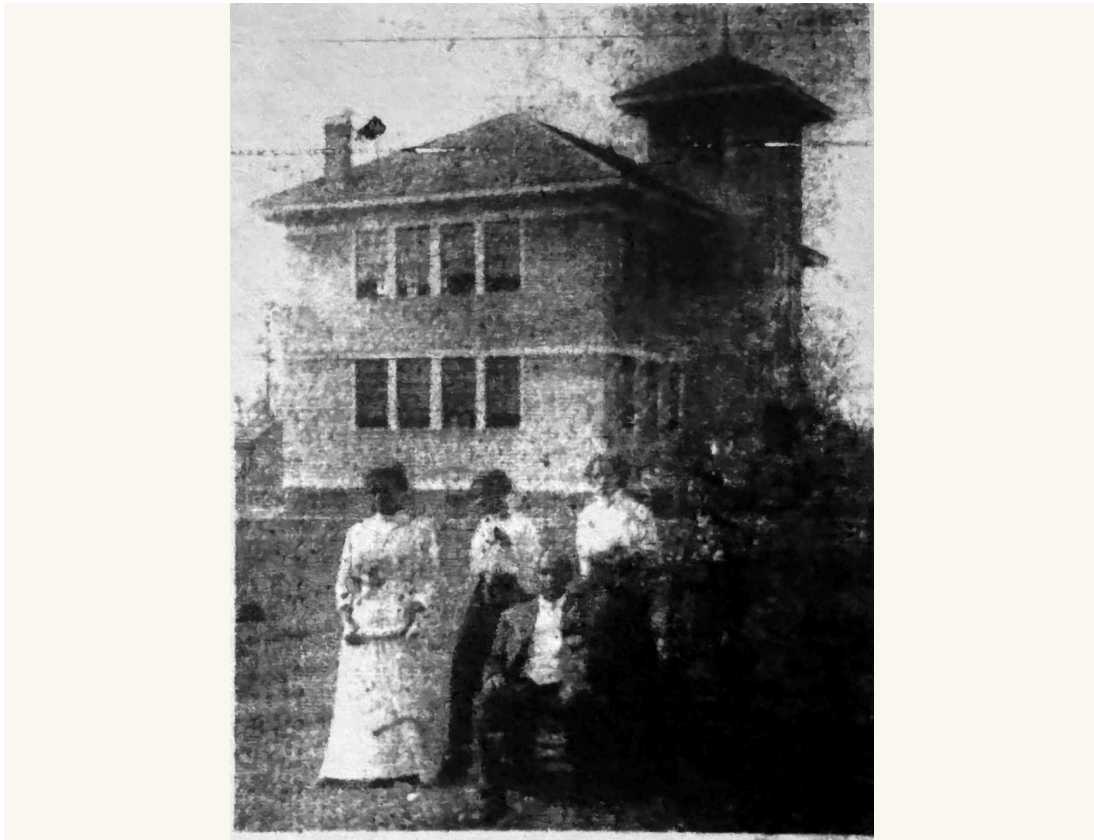
When Moss Point became a city in 1901, it needed men to keep it. Governor Longino's proclamation named the first city officers, and among them the town's first lawman, Marshal John Hill.

Fire was the older fear. For years the sawmills had fought their own flames with hand pumps and hired watchmen, until the townspeople raised a volunteer fire company of their own. Twenty-five men who dropped everything and came running at the sound of a whistle, with a steam engine that could throw water by the barrel. They hung fire whistles at the mills, so that wherever you stood in Moss Point, you would hear the call and know your neighbors were already on their way.

1901

SCHOOLHOUSES

The school on Magnolia Street.



Magnolia Academy photographed in 1910, the original two-story wooden schoolhouse, teachers gathered on the grounds. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

In 1902, a school opened on Magnolia Street for Moss Point's Black children, on the ground where Saint Paul Methodist stands today. Magnolia School started with the elementary grades and kept climbing, sending its first graduating class out into the world in 1912. Through the long years of segregation it grew into the heart of Black Moss Point; its colors were purple and gold, and its teams and its band carried a proud name, the Monarchs.

THE SCHOOL ON MAGNOLIA STREET · CONTINUED



Magnolia High's later brick campus with its 4-H Club, photographed 1959. The school began in 1902 as a two-story wooden academy on this same ground. Courtesy Magnolia Monarchs Alumni Association.

1902

NEW ARRIVALS

The Finns of Kreole.

Around the turn of the century, Gideon Laine and his Finnish Land Company drew Finnish families from the upper Midwest to the city's eastern edge, a settlement first known simply as Laine. In 1907 they finished the Finnish Lutheran Church of Kreole on land Laine gave, and it anchored the community for nearly eighty years. When the paper mill's tan kraft paper was later branded Kreole Kraft for its creole color, the name stuck to the railroad station and then to the neighborhood itself, and the Finnish families became Kreole's founding stock.

1907

THE YOUNG CITY AT PLAY

The town team.



The Moss Point town baseball team, winners of 1908. Cirlet Collection, Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

A few years after Moss Point became a city, it fielded a ball team good enough to call itself the winners of 1908. The players gathered for their photograph before the backstop at Beardslee's Green, townsmen and a couple of professors among them, the kind of Saturday that knit a young city together.

1908

SCHOOLHOUSES

Central High.



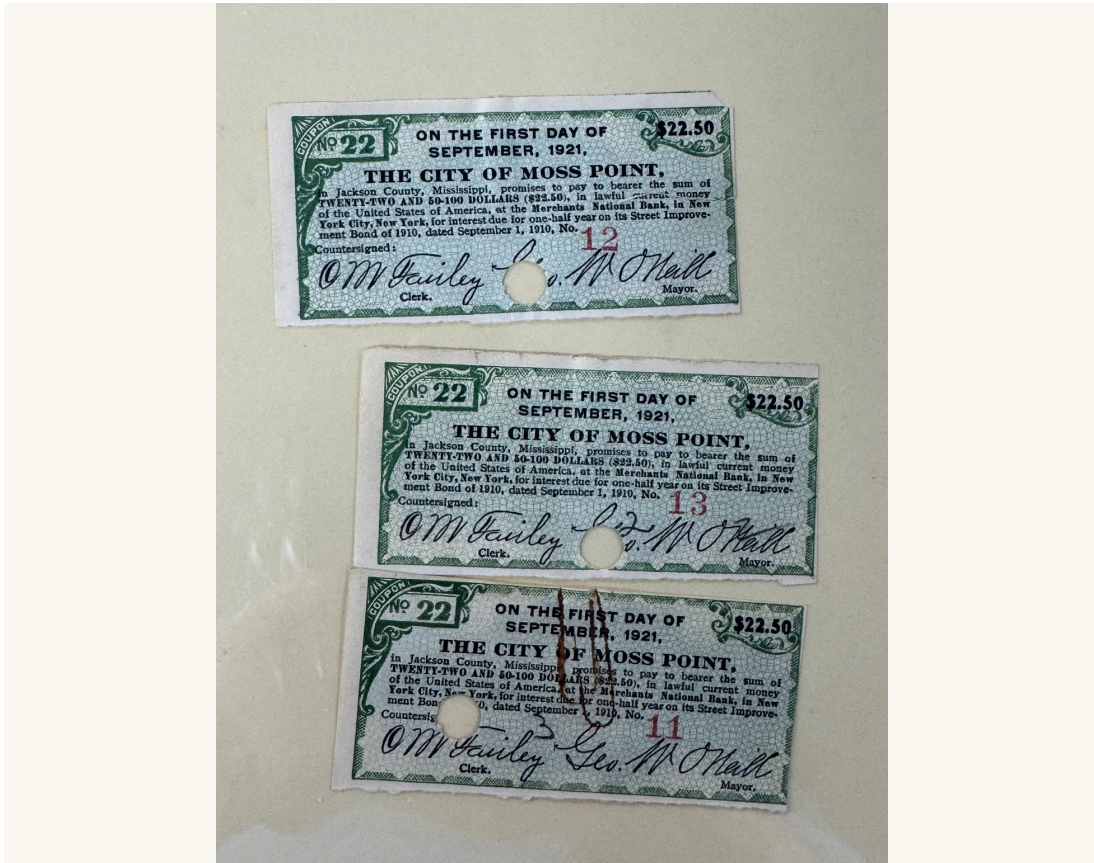
Central High School, Moss Point, photographed in 1914. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

Moss Point had kept a high school since 1883, when classes met in a two story schoolhouse and families paid tuition to attend. Then in 1908 came Central High, a three story brick building that served the town for decades, until it was condemned as a fire hazard in 1942.

1908

THE YOUNG CITY BUILDS

Paved with its own promise.



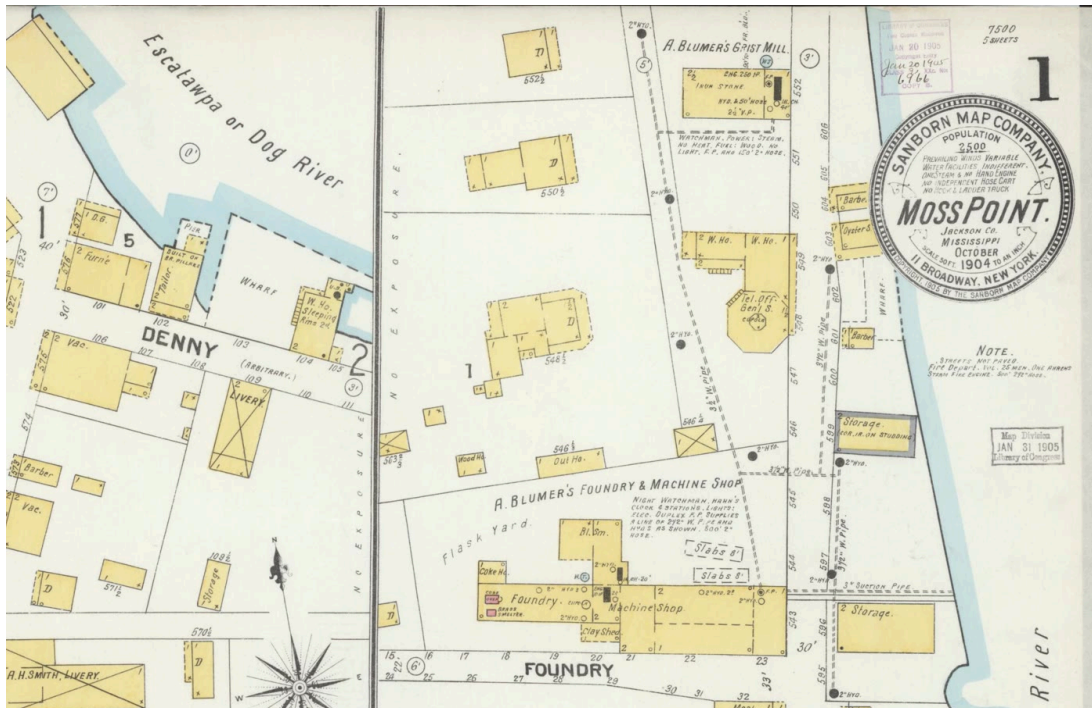
Street improvement bond coupons, each punched through the center when the city paid it.

Nine years after incorporation, the young city went to work on its streets the way the big cities did, by selling bonds. Moss Point's Street Improvement Bonds of 1910 paid four and a half percent interest, their coupons payable at the Merchants National Bank in New York City. A handful of those coupons survive, each one punched through the center, the mark left when the city paid it back. Moss Point paid every penny it promised.

1910

DISASTER

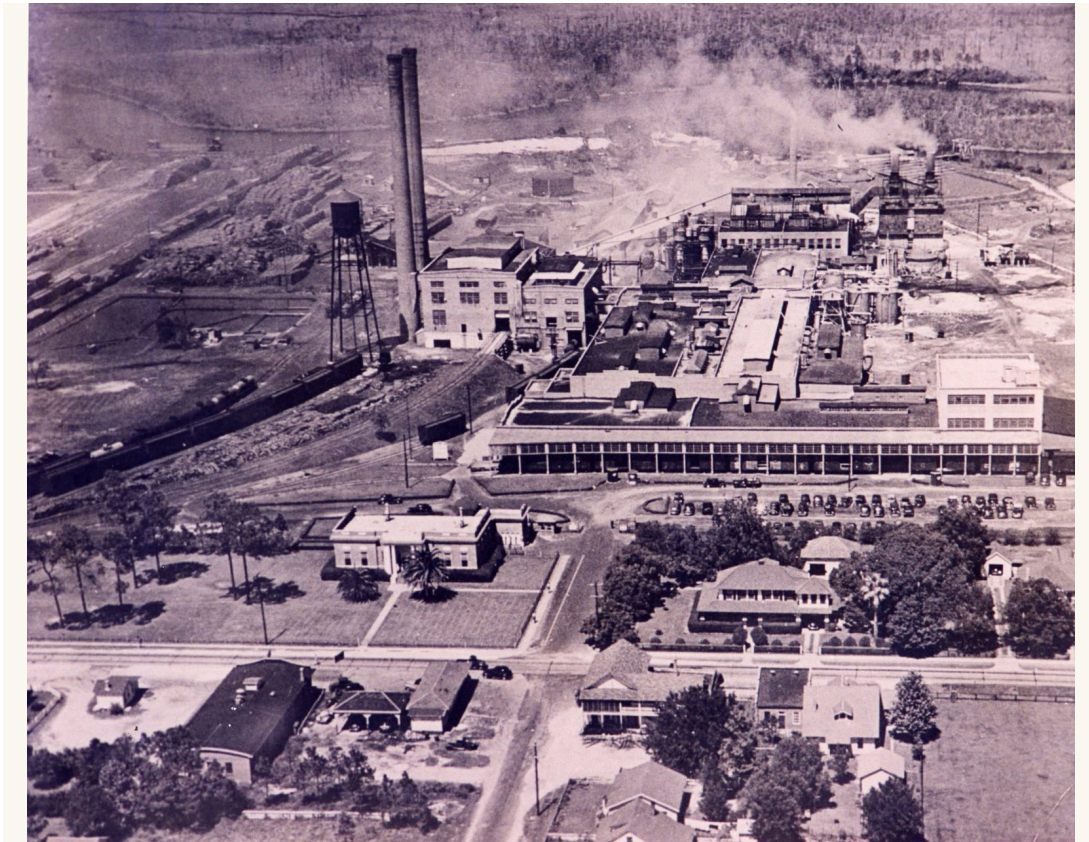
The year it burned twice.



1912

INDUSTRY ON THE WATER

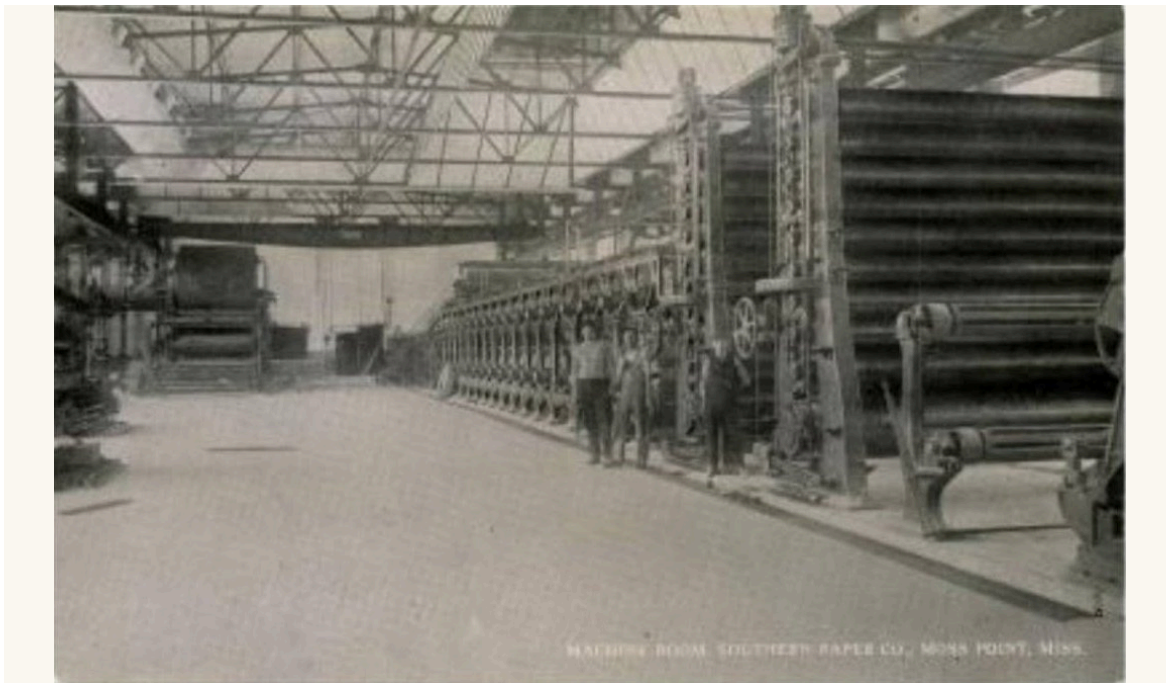
Paper and brick.



The mill on the Escatawpa, the works that ran for most of the century.

When the great pine forests thinned, Moss Point kept working. The Southern Paper Company mill rose on the riverbank in 1913, joined International Paper in 1928, and made paper here for the better part of ninety years before the machines went quiet in 2001. Nearby factories pressed the local river clay into brick, and the mill cut its own canals through the swamp, joining it to Nine Mile Creek.

PAPER AND BRICK • CONTINUED



The machine room at the Southern Paper Company mill, Moss Point.



Knocking off for dinner at the Southern Paper Company mill.

1913

THE HOME FRONT

The whole town turned out.



Members of the Moss Point Red Cross during the first World War, 1918. Cirlot Collection, Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

When the first World War reached the coast, Moss Point answered in white. The local Red Cross chapter, women and children together beneath the flags, organized relief and rolled bandages for the front. It is one of the oldest group portraits the city keeps, a picture of a place that has always shown up for its own.

1918

RAIL AND LOGISTICS

The Pine Knot Special.

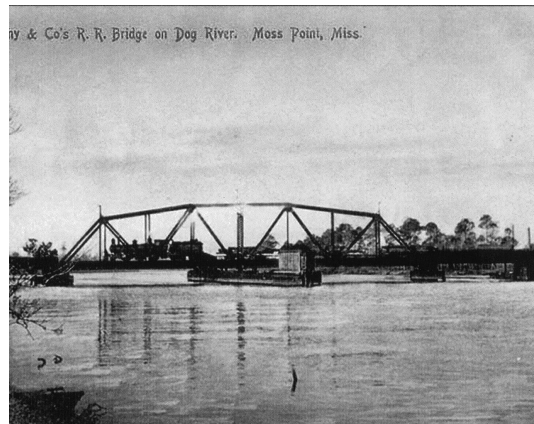


Moss Point and Pascagoula Railroad engine No. 2, a Baldwin locomotive built in 1888, photographed in the 1890s. From the Hoffman Howe Price Collection, Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

Rail has run between the twin cities since 1895, and after 1902 the Denny lumber firm pushed the little line deep into the timber country. A railroad once so lean it burned pine knots for fuel, it took the name Mississippi Export Railroad in 1922, and made its headquarters right here in Moss Point. It carried longleaf pine out of the woods and freight down to the coast.



A log train hauls longleaf pine out of the woods.



W. Denny and Company's railroad bridge on the river at Moss Point.

1922

DISASTER

The Great Fire.



The downtown district in ruins after the 1923 fire, the chimneys still standing.

In 1923 a great fire swept the heart of Moss Point. It tore through the downtown business district and the homes around it, left many families with nothing, and burned until only the brick chimneys stood against the sky. Within a couple of years, new brick storefronts had risen on the same ground, and Main Street was open for business again.



A resident walks through the debris the morning after.



Collapsed roofs and bare chimneys where storefronts had stood.

1923

THE GRIDIRON

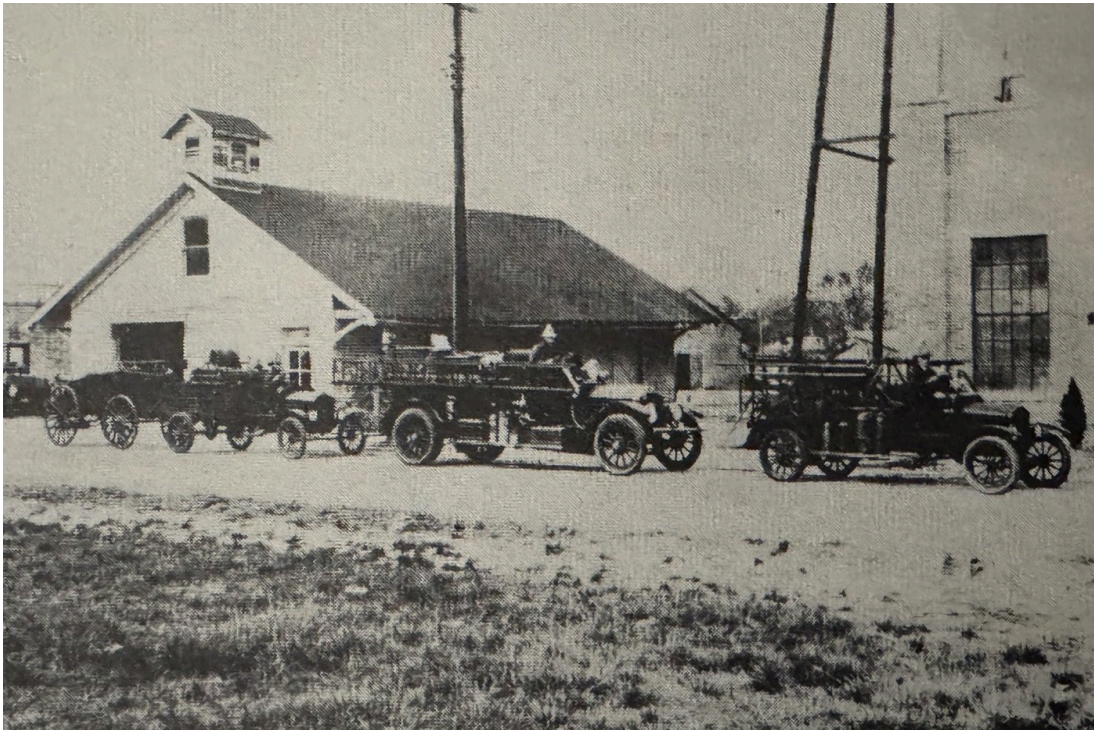
The Battle of the Cats begins.

Moss Point fielded its first football team in 1925 and lost the first meeting with Pascagoula by six touchdowns. The rivalry between the Tigers and the Panthers ran so hot that after the 1933 game it was called off for fifteen years.

1925

PUBLIC SAFETY

The fire department.



*The Moss Point Fire Department, engines lined up outside the station. From Jackson County, Mississippi:
Photographs from the Past, compiled by Thomas C. S. Wixon.*

The Battle of the Cats was not the only thing getting organized. After burning twice in eleven years, Moss Point answered the flames for good. In 1926, the city built its first municipal waterworks, laying its water mains with firefighting in mind, and moved City Hall into the new brick pump house on McInnis Avenue, crowned with an electric fire siren that could be heard for two miles.

The volunteer firemen who had once come running to mill whistles now rolled on motor engines, ladders racked and ready, out of a station of their own. That sturdy little pump house would go on serving the city for generations, in time as a firehouse itself. Moss Point had learned fire the hard way. It did not intend to learn it again.

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT · CONTINUED



Fire on Main Street, looking toward the Escatawpa. From Jackson County, Mississippi: Photographs from the Past, compiled by Thomas C. S. Wixon.

1926

DOWNTOWN IN ITS PRIME

The street at full stride.



Downtown Moss Point along Highway 63, 1930s.

By the 1930s, Main Street was paved and busy, cars angled at the curb in front of the drug store and the five and dime, Highway 63 running straight through the middle of a downtown at the height of its trade.

1930s

A HOMETOWN FIRST

Miss Mississippi goes to Atlantic City.



Dorothy Eley in her Miss Mississippi sash at Atlantic City, 1933. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

Dorothy Eley, a young schoolteacher and the daughter of Moss Point physician Dr. Carl Eley, won a statewide contest in Biloxi in August 1933 and carried the title of Miss Mississippi to the national pageant in Atlantic City, where she placed among the semifinalists. The official Miss Mississippi line begins the following year, so the record books start without her, but her hometown never needed convincing. She taught school here for decades afterward, and when she passed in 2005, days short of ninety six, her obituary said it plainly: she was the first Miss Mississippi.

1933

UNDER THE OAKS

Lovers Lane.



Lovers Lane beneath the Griffin Street oaks, 1939.

For generations a tunnel of live oaks arched over Griffin Street, and everyone in Moss Point knew the stretch as Lovers Lane. Couples courted in its shade, and folks here have long called it one of the prettiest spots on the coast.

1939

SCHOOLHOUSES

The brick school at Magnolia.



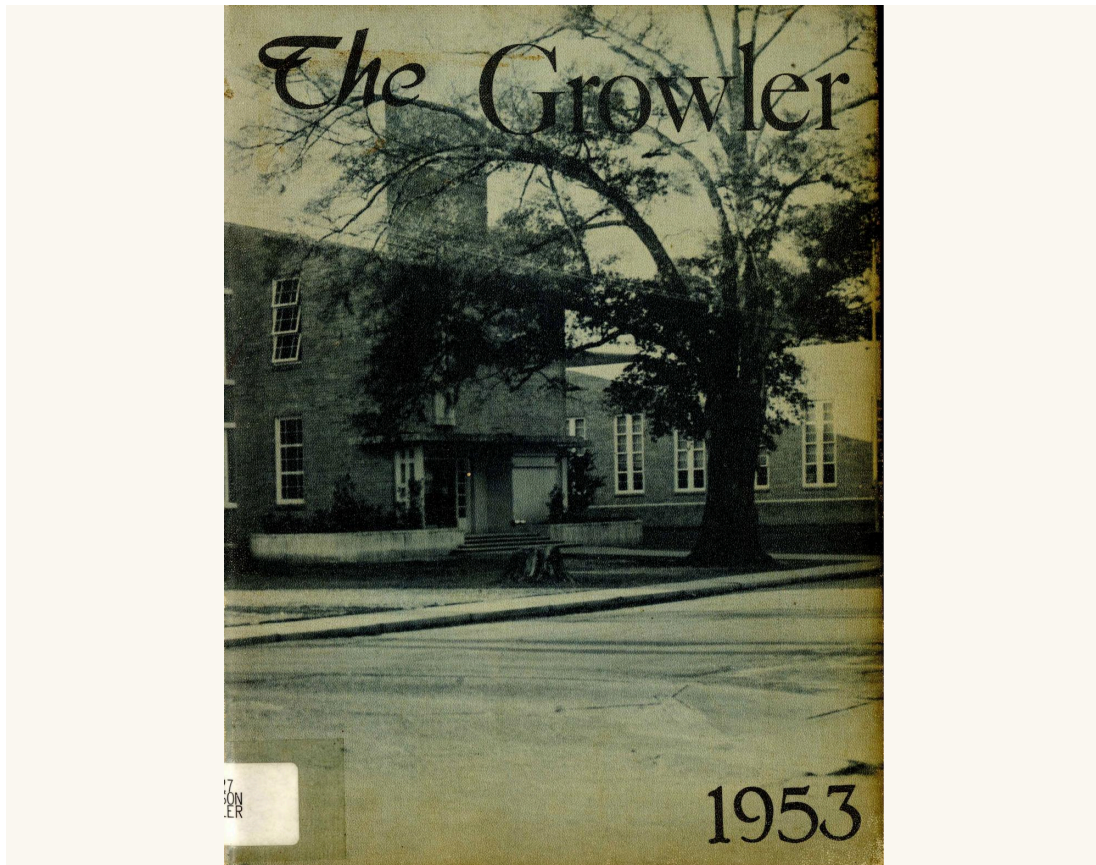
Magnolia's brick school building, raised in the early 1940s. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

The city kept building for its children. In 1941, President Roosevelt approved the money and the town voted almost unanimously to match it, raising two new schools at once. At Magnolia, that meant the first brick schoolhouse Moss Point had ever built for its Black students, with a cafeteria and new classrooms added after the war. In its prime, under Principal Henry L. Whisenton, that campus held seventeen classrooms, shops teaching carpentry, bricklaying and cabinet making, and a gymnasium that seated seventeen hundred, one of the finest anywhere on the coast. That school is gone now, but what it taught never left.

1941

SCHOOLHOUSES

The new high school.



The 1953 Moss Point High yearbook, from the school's first decade in the new building. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

When Central High was condemned in 1942, the town did not wait long. In 1943, on a Sunday in February, Moss Point dedicated its new high school, built partly from the salvaged brick of the old one, with a young principal named Eddie Khayat at its door.

For a generation, Moss Point High taught the town's white children while Magnolia carried its Black ones. Two proud schools, on two sides of one town, walking separate roads toward the same future.

1943

A COAST STORY

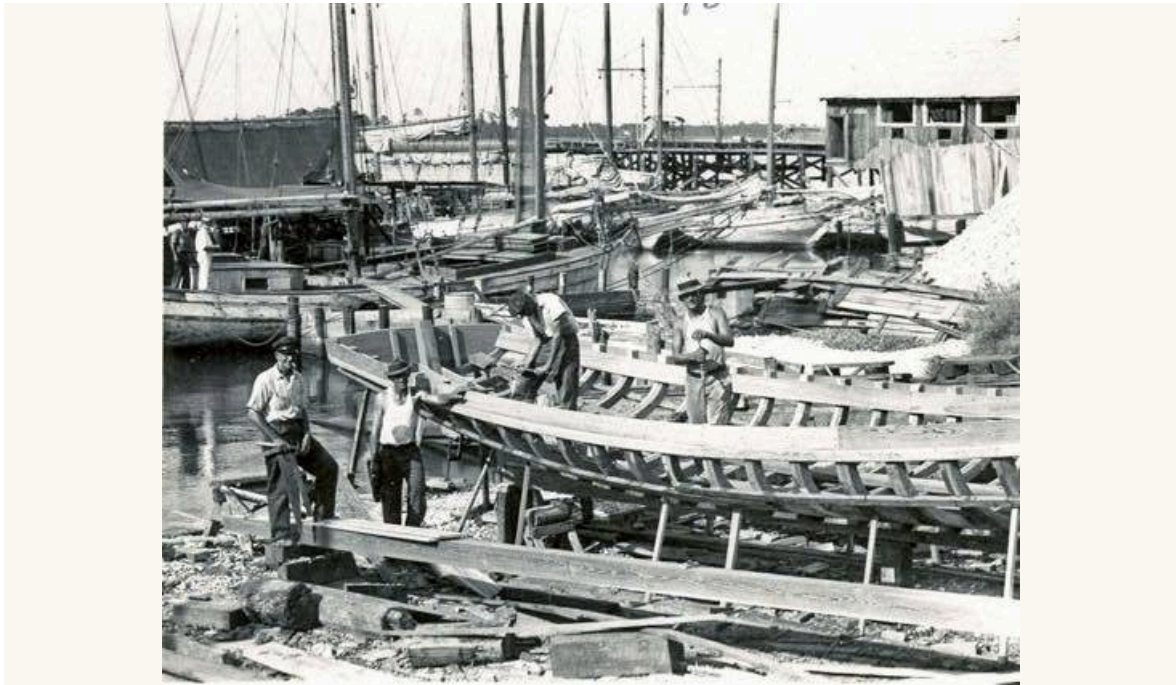
When Elvis came to the shipyard.



A young Elvis Presley, early 1940s.

The war years swelled the twin cities with shipyard workers until every spare room, trailer, and tent had a tenant. As the story goes, a boy named Elvis Presley spent a short, hot stretch of that decade on the coast while his father Vernon took work building boats at the Moss Point shipyard. The pay was steady and the summer was brutal, and before long the Presleys packed up for home. The boy went on to become the most famous voice in America, and the coast kept the story for itself.

WHEN ELVIS CAME TO THE SHIPYARD · CONTINUED



Boatbuilders at work on the Moss Point waterfront.



Moss Point from above, 1948.

1940s

SUMMERS ON THE RIVER

The municipal pool.



MOSS POINT MS. SWIMMING POOL 1946-1962 - ESCATAWPA RIVER & DENNY ST. IN BACKGROUND
The Moss Point municipal pool on the Escatawpa River, 1946 to 1962. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

For a generation, summer in Moss Point meant the municipal pool on the Escatawpa, the high dive, the school bus parked at the fence, and a shrimp boat sliding by on the river behind the swimmers. It ran from 1946 into the 1960s, and for the kids who grew up here it was the whole summer.

THE RIVALRY

They bury the hatchet.

When the rivalry finally resumed at War Memorial Stadium in 1948, as local histories tell it, the two schools dug a grave at midfield during halftime and buried a hatchet in it. Moss Point won that night 24 to 0, its first victory in the series, and the Battle of the Cats has been played in peace ever since.

1948

ON THE GULF

The menhaden boats.



Menhaden crews haul in a purse seine, photographed 1968. NOAA Fisheries Collection, public domain.

In the 1950s, a new kind of harvest took hold on the river. Omega Protein began rendering the small, oily menhaden into fish meal and oil on the Escatawpa, its Ocean Harvesters boats running out into the Gulf, and the steamers that chased them built right here in town.

1950s

THE CHEMICAL AGE

New work on Elder Ferry Road.

In 1952, a chemical plant rose on Elder Ferry Road, and for most of the next fifty years it ran under names the whole town knew, Thiokol, and later Morton Thiokol. Moss Point workers there turned out polymers, sealants, and adhesives that went into products all over the world, including the liquid polysulfide the industry called rocket polymer.

1952

LIGHTS ON MAIN STREET

The night the Joy went dark.



The Joy Theatre on Main Street, Moss Point.

The Joy Theatre was the downtown picture show, its tall marquee rising over the storefronts with a Texaco station on the corner. It had burned once before, in 1935, only months after it first opened, and the town built it right back the next year. On New Year's Eve of 1958, just an hour after the last show let out, fire took the Joy a second time. As folks here still tell it, it burned so hot it cracked the windows of the restaurant across the street, and the marquee never lit again.

1958

THE RIVER CITY SOUND

A blues tradition.



The Magnolia High School Band, Moss Point. Courtesy Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library.

Through all its working years, Moss Point kept a soundtrack going. In the days of segregation, Black performers moved along a network of clubs, lodges, and dance halls across the South that came to be called the chitlin circuit, and Moss Point was a stop on it. The big touring acts played the Knights of Pythias park, and later the Magnolia Elks. New Orleans bandleaders brought their orchestras to town, and the clubs along Frederick Street kept music of their own. Even Super Bowl champion Verlon Biggs owned one, the Kickoff Club, run with his old band director, Carlton Reese.

And the circuit ran the other way too. Boss Tatum, a Moss Point saxophone man born in 1887, toured the traveling shows with Bessie Smith, then put a saxophone in the hands of his young nephew, Charles Fairley. Fairley came up through the Magnolia School band, made his name in the clubs of New Orleans, and spent nine months on the road with Otis Redding, from the Apollo Theater all the way to France. In 1968 he came home, worked three decades in the shipyards, and still played four or five nights a week. The town remembers them all today, with a marker on the Mississippi Blues Trail along Main Street, and in the generations still coming up through the Monarchs band tradition.

Freedom Summer on the river.



*The Victory Lodge on Bowen Street, a Prince Hall Masonic hall used for Freedom School classes, still standing today.
Photo by Experienced Results.*

In the summer of 1964, Moss Point became an active organizing ground for the movement. Freedom School classes met at community buildings including Second Baptist Church and the Victory Lodge on Bowen Street, teaching Black history, civics, and the vote to forty students at first and eighty by the second session. The mass meetings filled the Knights of Pythias Hall on Magnolia Street, the center of Black community life and a stage that had hosted James Brown and B.B. King, with as many as three hundred people, even after the hall was firebombed that June. It was dangerous work. On July 6, as a meeting sang, gunfire from a passing car wounded seventeen year old Jessie Mae Stallworth, and when Black men reported the shooting, it was they who were arrested. Stokely Carmichael came that July and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that August, and by summer's end the movement here had gathered roughly twelve hundred Freedom Democratic Party registration forms. One of the local teenagers who lived it, John Davis, later called it the greatest experience of his life.

FREEDOM SUMMER ON THE RIVER · CONTINUED



The Knights of Pythias Hall on Magnolia Street, where the mass meetings were held and the firebomb struck in June 1964, still standing today. Photo by Experienced Results.

1964

THE YARDS

The river built ships.



The Halter yard on Elder Ferry Road, on the Escatawpa. Courtesy Max Derbes Realtors.

Shipbuilding here goes back to the 1880s, when Sorrento-born John De Angelo opened the yard everyone called the Italian Shipyard, turning out wooden schooners, tugs, and barges on the Escatawpa. In 1966, Halter Marine came to the river, and the boom was on. James K. Walker Marine took over the old Italian Shipyard site by the Highway 613 bridge, the yard this town still remembers as the Walker Yards, and in 1978 Moss Point Marine opened its gates in Escatawpa. By that same year, the Halter yards were building nearly half of all the offshore supply boats in the world, and some of them slid into the water right here.

1966

ONE CITY, ONE SCHOOL

The last class of Monarchs.



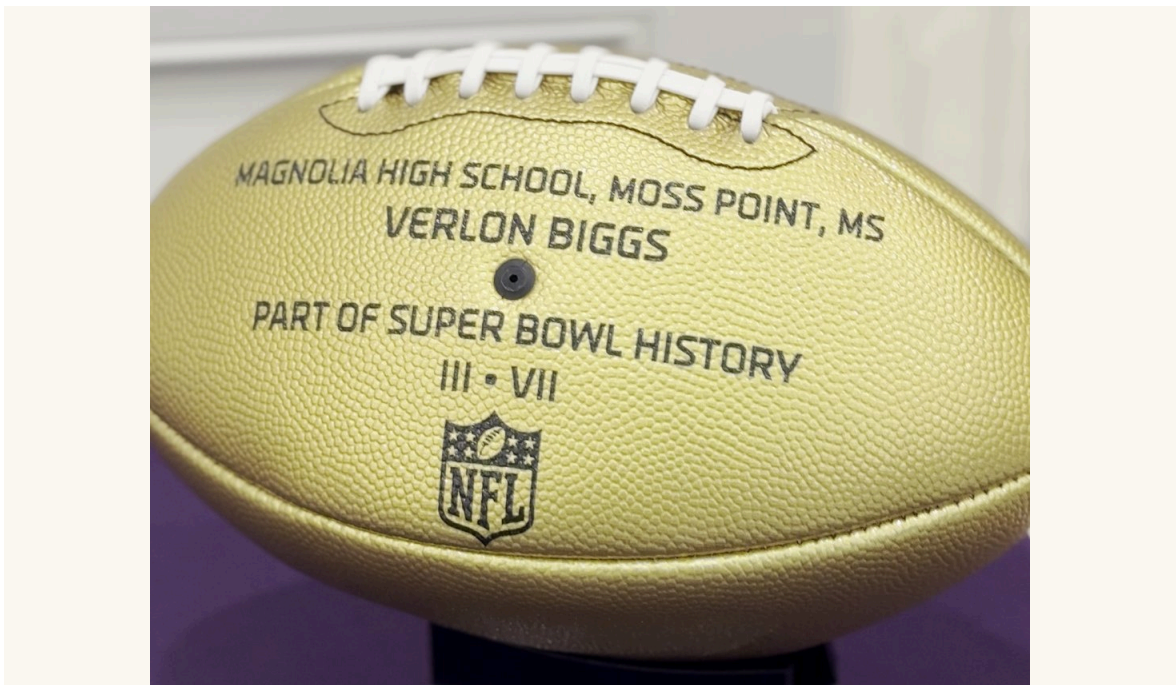
A Magnolia High Monarch band uniform and shako. Photo by Experienced Results.

Integration came to Moss Point in stages, beginning in 1965, when the first handful of Magnolia students chose to cross town to Moss Point High under what was called freedom of choice, while the two schools carried on side by side. In the spring of 1970, Magnolia High School graduated its last class of Monarchs, and that fall the choice ended and the schools became one. Moss Point's students came together under one roof at Moss Point High, and the Magnolia campus carried on as the junior high. But nobody who wore the purple and gold ever stopped being a Monarch. The alumni association they founded in 1981 still fills these streets every other Fourth of July weekend for the Great Magnolia Homecoming, and in 2026 the Monarchs and the city broke ground together on Magnolia Memorial Park, set to open for the school's 125th anniversary.

THE LAST CLASS OF MONARCHS · CONTINUED



The Monarchs' 1967-68 GCAC boys basketball championship trophy, coached by Ira Polk. Photo by Experienced Results.



A commemorative football honoring Magnolia's Verlon Biggs, part of Super Bowl III and Super Bowl VII history. Photo by Experienced Results.

1970

LIVING MEMORY

Main Street in color.



Main Street, Moss Point, around 1970.

Within living memory, downtown still pulled the whole town in. Cars angled at the curb, the Daniel Rexall drug store on the corner, awnings out against the coast sun. It is the Moss Point a lot of people still picture when they think of home.

A CROWN COMES HOME

Toni Seawright makes history.



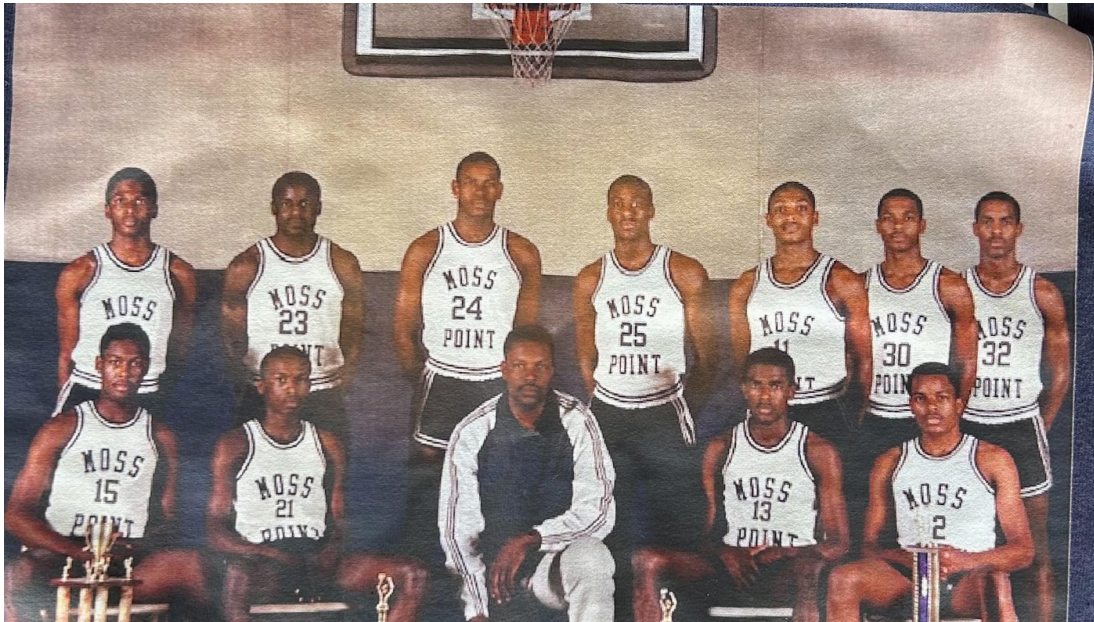
Toni Seawright, Miss Mississippi 1987. Public domain.

Toni Seawright grew up in Moss Point, was homecoming queen at Moss Point High, and became the first African American to earn a music degree at Mississippi University for Women. On July 18, 1987, she was crowned Miss Mississippi in Vicksburg, the first African American woman ever to hold the title, and her hometown cheered her all the way to Atlantic City, where she finished fourth runner-up at Miss America. She went on to tour in *The Wiz*, perform on Broadway, and appear on Nickelodeon's *The Naked Brothers Band* alongside her own son.

1987

THE HARDWOOD

Coach Haynes and the Tigers.



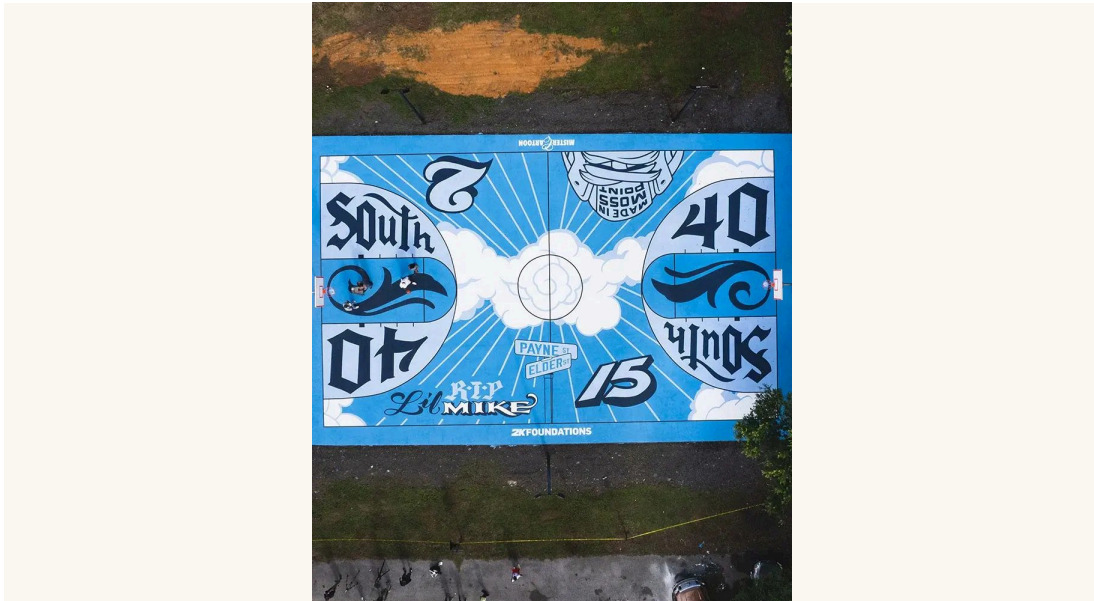
Coach Arthur Haynes and the 1987 Tigers, from a commemorative team shirt. Photo by Experienced Results.

Moss Point's game was never only played on Friday nights. Twice, Coach Arthur Haynes took the Tiger basketball team all the way to the State Playoffs, and all of Moss Point went with them. Haynes patrolled the Tiger bench for more than thirty years, from 1968 to 1999, and when it came time to name the high school gymnasium, there was only ever one choice. His name is on it still.

1987

THE SOUTH SIDE

The South 40.



The South 40 court from above, its mural by Mister Cartoon. Courtesy 2K Foundations.

Where Elder and Payne streets meet, a stretch of ground that had been a swamp, and then a city dump, became the heart of a neighborhood folks call the South 40, named for the original forty friends who grew up meeting there to play basketball. Those friends made each other a promise, keep the drugs off this corner, and for more than thirty years they have kept it, still gathering at the court every Thursday.

One of the men who shaped those boys was Coach Calvin “Choke” Stallworth, the first Black coach to work alongside Coach John Welch in the Moss Point Recreation Department, a man who spent his life coaching basketball and pushing Moss Point kids toward college. At his passing, the players he had raised were still living all through this community, the youngest of them forty years old, the oldest seventy four. In 2021 the city named that ground Calvin “Choke” Stallworth Park in his honor. That same summer, fresh from an Olympic gold medal, NBA All Star Devin Booker of Moss Point High came home and rebuilt the court, crowned with a mural by the artist Mister Cartoon. The South 40 still looks after it, and its tournaments and toy drives are on the city’s calendar to this day.

THE SOUTH 40 · CONTINUED



Devin Booker shoots on the new court, August 2021. Courtesy 2K Foundations.



Mayor Billy Knight presents Devin Booker the key to the city, Devin Booker Day, 2021. Courtesy 2K Foundations.

1990s

THE DYNASTY

A Tiger dynasty.

The Tigers went on to bring home five state championships, in 1983, 1991, 1996, 1997, and 2000. Head coach Billy Miller started the winning, taking Moss Point to its first title in 1983, and Jerry Alexander took over from him and kept it going with the last four. Alexander's name is now on the field at Dantzler Stadium.

By 2000

SHIPS FOR THE WORLD

Launched at Moss Point.



NOAA Ship Oscar Dyson, launched at the Moss Point yard, October 2003. NOAA photo, public domain.

The shipyards were raising champions of their own. In 1998 the Moss Point yard delivered the Kennicott, a 382 foot ocean going ferry that still carries travelers across the Gulf of Alaska today. The Army's biggest watercraft, the Besson class logistics ships, came off the ways at the Escatawpa yard. And in 2003, the town watched the Oscar Dyson slide into the river, the first of a new class of NOAA research ships built right here, among the quietest fisheries survey vessels in the world.

But by then the tide was turning. The Walker Yards had gone quiet back in 1985. In 2001, International Paper and the old chemical plant closed in the same year, and in 2016 the last of the big shipyard work moved down the river. Across three decades, more than fourteen hundred jobs went with them. What stayed was a town that knew how to build, and how to build back.

2003

HURRICANE KATRINA

The water came.



The National Guard delivers relief supplies to Moss Point after Katrina, September 2005. FEMA, public domain.

On the morning of August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina came ashore at the Louisiana line and put Moss Point in its strongest quadrant. The surge drove the rivers backward into town. Downtown flooded. Water rose into City Hall itself. Nearly half the homes in the city were damaged, and twelve lives were lost across Jackson County. On a coast that had already endured Camille in 1969, this was the storm all others would be measured against. Church crews and volunteers arrived almost before the water fell, and they were still coming years later, carrying families back into their homes.

2005

THE WILD RIVER

The river gets a front door.



The Pascagoula River Audubon Center, raised among the oaks and magnolias on Rhodes Bayou. Photo by Experienced Results.

In those rebuilding years, the river gave the town something back. In the fall of 2015, ten years after Katrina, the Pascagoula River Audubon Center opened on Rhodes Bayou, a cypress and glass building raised on ten wooded acres, with gardens, boardwalks, and a covered dock for watching birds and launching kayaks. The grounds keep pieces of the town's older story too: a remnant of the trolley line that once ran between Moss Point and Pascagoula, and a small wood frame cabin from about 1905 known as the Scout Hut.

The center is the front door to the Pascagoula River itself, the largest free flowing river left in the lower 48 states, saved in the 1970s when more than 35,000 acres were set aside for the public. More than 200 kinds of birds live and breed in the surrounding swamps and marshes. The town built by sawing the river's timber now keeps the front porch to its wild side.

THE RIVER GETS A FRONT DOOR · CONTINUED



The center's covered dock and boardwalk on Rhodes Bayou from above. Photo by Chandler Borries.



Setting out by kayak into the marsh. Photo by Chandler Borries.

2015

TESTED, AND REBUILT

It always rebuilds.



Merchants & Marine Bank on Main Street, its roof torn away. Courtesy Lori Elizabeth Grayban.

On the afternoon of June 19, 2023, an EF-2 tornado dropped out of a summer storm and cut more than two miles through the heart of town with winds near 130 miles per hour. It stripped roofs from the Merchants and Marine Bank and First Missionary Baptist Church on Main Street, and lifted the gym roof off the high school while students sheltered inside. More than three hundred homes and businesses were damaged. Not one life was lost. Then the town filled with helpers, more than fourteen hundred volunteers in the first year, among them Amish crews who stayed four months raising new homes where the storm had passed. Moss Point rebuilds. It always has.

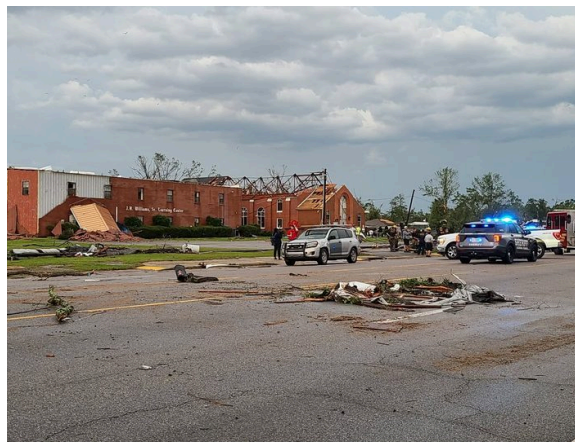
IT ALWAYS REBUILDS · CONTINUED



First Missionary Baptist Church, power lines down across the road. Courtesy Lori Elizabeth Grayban.



The Arthur Haynes Gymnasium at Moss Point High, its roof lifted while students sheltered inside. Courtesy Lori Elizabeth Grayban.



The J.W. Williams, Sr. Learning Center, with police, fire, and EMS on the scene. Courtesy Lori Elizabeth Grayban.

IT ALWAYS REBUILDS · CONTINUED



Mayor Billy Knight Sr. and Dr. Washington clearing storm debris by hand in the days after the tornado.



A family's home, its roof torn open and the yard full of downed trees. Courtesy Lori Elizabeth Grayban.



Within the year, new homes rose where the storm had passed. Photo by Experienced Results.

2023

THE 125TH YEAR

Opened, and sealed again.



A public works crew member hands the recovered contents up to Alderman at Large David Chapman.

On the Fourth of July, 2026, in the city's 125th year, Moss Point gathered on the downtown riverfront to open a piece of its own past. Fifty years earlier, during the nation's bicentennial in 1976, the community had sealed a time capsule and buried it here beside the Escatawpa. The city lifted it out and opened it in front of the crowd, laying the keepsakes on the table: bicentennial steins with bright red lids, old coins and a dollar bill, a yellowed front page from the Mississippi Press Register. Then, in the same ground, the city buried a new capsule, sealed to be opened in 2076. The children who pressed in for a closer look are the ones most likely to see it come back up.

OPENED, AND SEALED AGAIN · CONTINUED



A recovered Mississippi Press Register front page, shown to the crowd at the riverfront ceremony.



Children study the recovered keepsakes, the generation most likely to see the new capsule opened in 2076.

2026

A WORKING RIVER CITY

Still a working river city.



The Omega Protein menhaden fleet on the Escatawpa today. Photo by Experienced Results.

And the Moss Point those children will inherit is still what it has always been, a working town. On the Escatawpa, the menhaden boats still run, one of the city's oldest industries and the longest still going. The Mississippi Export Railroad, headquartered in Moss Point for more than a century, keeps hauling freight along the line it laid. And next to Trent Lott International Airport, Northrop Grumman builds advanced aerospace and unmanned systems, a whole new industry grown up on the edge of town.

STILL A WORKING RIVER CITY · CONTINUED



The Mississippi Export Railroad, still working the line today. Photo by Experienced Results.



Trent Lott International Airport, with Northrop Grumman on the lot beside it. Photo by Experienced Results.

Today

COME SPEND A DAY

The city you can visit now.



The downtown riverfront boardwalk on the Escatawpa. Photo by Experienced Results.

The River City is also a place to spend a day. Downtown is small and walkable, with local shops, the old drugstore, a shaded plaza strung with lights, and a boardwalk reaching out over the Escatawpa. There is a park for nearly every neighborhood, and the quiet bends of the Singing River to paddle. Down at the Pascagoula River Audubon Center on Rhodes Bayou, you can rent a kayak or watch the birds from the covered dock. The calendar stays full too, with the River Jamboree every May, classic cars cruising the riverfront each fall, and a lighted boat parade every Christmas.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

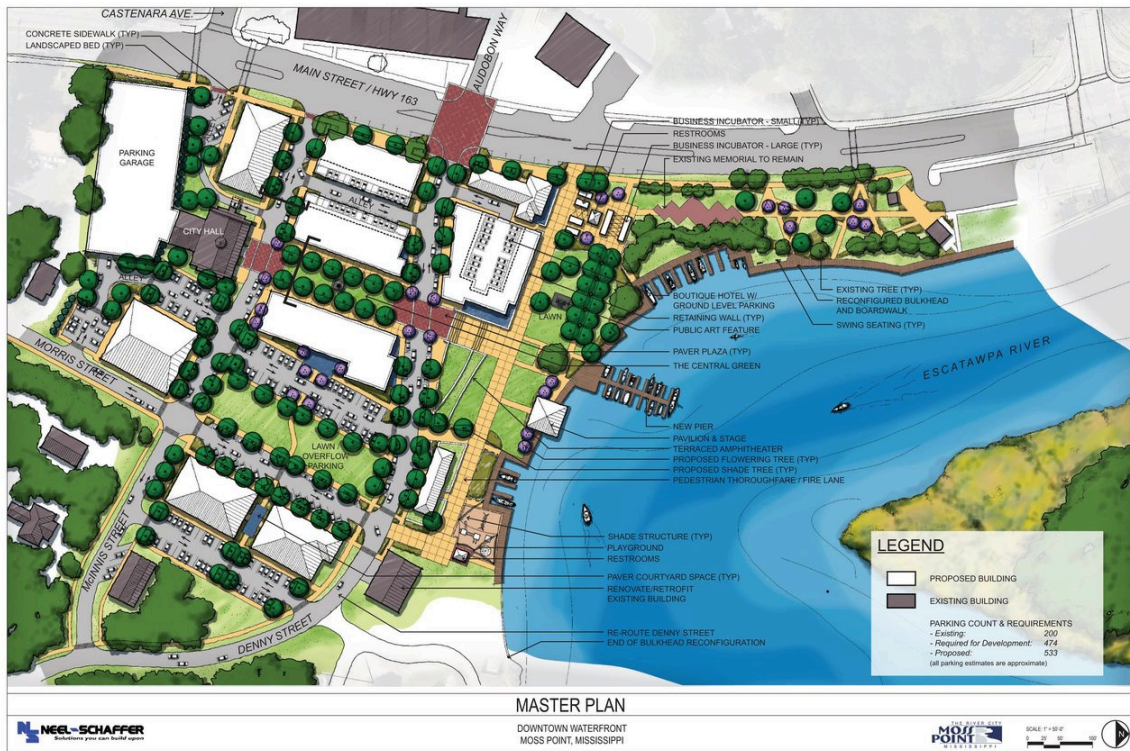
Building what comes next.



The Interstate 10 corridor, the River City Mile. Photo by Experienced Results.

Moss Point is busy building what comes next. Mayor Billy Knight Sr. was elected in 2021 and returned to office in 2025 with ninety three percent of the vote, the first mayor in decades to win a second term. He started with the foundations. More than 4,700 new water meters went into the ground across the city, so Moss Point no longer has to estimate anyone's bill, and the city no longer has to subsidize the water bills of its citizens. Neighborhood drainage systems, neglected for decades, have been dug out and made new. And the building hasn't stopped. There are plans for a new riverfront district downtown. Along Interstate 10, a fresh mile of commercial frontage is set to break ground. New dealerships and a travel center are rising on Highway 63, and the old paper mill site, quiet since 2001, is being cleared for the next big employer, with new neighborhood housing to go with it. For a town that has rebuilt itself again and again, the next chapter is one it finally gets to plan, not just survive.

BUILDING WHAT COMES NEXT · CONTINUED



The downtown waterfront master plan, the next riverfront district.



One of more than 4,700 new water meters installed across Moss Point, ending years of estimated bills.
Photo by Experienced Results.



Crews on Kimberly Drive replace the old asbestos cement water line with new PVC main. Courtesy Neel-Schaffer.

BUILDING WHAT COMES NEXT · CONTINUED



The new water main joined in the trench before the ground closes back over it. Courtesy Neel-Schaffer.



A rebuilt sewer pump station, raised above the flood line so rising water can no longer drown it. Courtesy Neel-Schaffer.



Mayor Billy Knight Sr., the first Moss Point mayor in decades to win a second term.

Tomorrow

Proud of its past, building its future.

One hundred twenty five years on the river, and the story is still being written. Come get to know Moss Point, then come see it for yourself.

Researched, written, and produced for the City of Moss Point by Experienced Results, in honor of the city's 125th anniversary.



The Moss Point History Tour

Experience the full narrated tour, with music and the voice of Mayor Billy Knight Sr., at **cityofmosspoint.org/history**.

Produced by the City of Moss Point with Experienced Results.

Photographs courtesy of the Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library, the City of Moss Point, Experienced Results, and the families of Moss Point.