

A Brief History of DeSoto County Mississippi



At its organization on February 9, 1836, DeSoto County stretched from the Tennessee state line on the north to the Panola County line on the south; from the Mississippi River and Tunica County on the west to Marshall County on the east. A mistake in surveying placed the state line at what is now Winchester Road in Shelby County, Tennessee. In 1838, the line was resurveyed and moved to its present location.

The state appointed Felix H. Walker, John D. Martin, G. B. Cartwright, Beverly G. Mitchell and John T. Mosley as an Organizational Committee. These men made the formal application for a Writ of Election. Whig Governor Charles Lynch, knowing the 10 new counties leaned toward Jacksonian Democratic politics which would weaken his Whig Party in the state, refused to sign the Writ of Application. The Mississippi Legislature then received the Writ and formed the counties.

The first elections chose the following officers: C. B. Payne, Sheriff; Robert Atchinson, Circuit Court Clerk; Samuel T. Cobb, Probate Court Clerk; Humphrey Cobb, Probate Court Judge; J. D. Hallum, State Senator; Felix H. Walker, State Representative; and William Hukey Brown, President of the Board of Police consisting of Thomas Reid; Samuel M. King; B. G. Cartwright; and William McWilliams.

Edward Orne, commissioner of the Boston and Mississippi Cotton Land Company, was instrumental in buying up thousands of acres of land in the cession for the consortium. On January 25, 1836, Section 13 Township 3 Range 8 West was awarded to Chickasaw Til-Look-Hi-Yea, who sold the section to Edward Orne on June 16, 1836. On August 16, Edward Orne donated 40 acres of this section to the Board of Police for a county seat.

This 40 acres was planned and laid out with a 450 foot public square surrounded by 172 lots. In the two blocks around the square there were five streets north and south and five streets east and west. This plan still forms the center of Hernando, the county seat.

A public sale of lots in August, 1836, produced funds to build a courthouse and a jail. The contract was let on December 1, 1836. The town was called Jefferson. The Mississippi Senate changed the name from Jefferson to Hernando to avoid confusion with several other post office names in the state.

An

early newspaper states, "On April 27, 1836, when the county was first formed its white population was 140 souls." The 1837 tax list names 204 early settlers who paid taxes. By 1840, 757 heads of households and 6,990 persons were counted in the federal census.

article picture

In 1837 the legislature chartered the Hernando Female Academy, the first institution of learning in the entire Chickasaw Cession. The Hernando Male Academy opened for its first session on March 14, 1840.

Hernando elected its first board of aldermen in July, 1839. Within two weeks the board printed in the *Hernando Free Press* 19 ordinances, the first of which imposed a fine of one dollar on any person "driving a cart, dray, or wagon, or riding a horse faster than a trot."

Edward Orne and the consortium he represented had put in place the Hernando Railroad and Banking Company, which, as was customary at the time, issued its own bank notes. In his efforts to get control of the wildly inflated national economy President Andrew Jackson in 1837, issued the "Specie Circular" ordering government agents to accept nothing but gold and silver in payment for public lands. The Hernando Railroad and Banking Company, like numerous other banks, failed and a serious depression struck the entire county.

Many local citizens had bought stock in the railroad which was to run from Hernando to Commerce Landing in Tunica County on the Mississippi River. The roadbed for part of the railroad to Commerce Landing had been constructed. Commerce Road used this route to layout the wagon road. In 1839, the county newspaper headline read "Good Road to Commerce at Last!"

J. M. Lacey and Felix LaBauve published in 1839, the *Hernando Free Press*, the first newspaper that is extant. John Lavin brought his printing press from Vicksburg, Mississippi, to Commerce Landing in Tunica County, Mississippi, and was printing the *Commercial Reporter*

by 1839. In 1845, he moved to Hernando and founded *The Phenix*

(sic), copies of which may be read on film at the First Regional Library in Hernando. John Lavin was soon elected mayor of Hernando with Nathan Bedford Forrest elected as his constable.

Early Indians and Hernando DeSoto (map)

Indian artifacts collected in DeSoto County link it with prehistoric groups of Woodland and

Mississippian Indians.

The Mississippian Indians met Hernando DeSoto when he explored North Mississippi and, traditionally, came through DeSoto County. Some scholars project that DeSoto discovered the Mississippi River west of present-day Lake Cormorant, built rafts there and crossed to Crowley's Ridge, Arkansas. The National Park Service declared a "DeSoto Corridor" from the Chickasaw Bluff (Memphis) to Coahoma County, Mississippi.

Over 200 years passed and the Mississippian Indians disappeared. Meanwhile, the Chickasaw tribe moved here. Their "Long Town," several villages close to each other, was near present-day Pontotoc. The Chickasaws claimed land here as their hunting ground. Negotiations, begun September, 1816, between the United States government and the Chickasaw nation, concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Pontotoc in October 1832. During these 16 years government officials and Chickasaw tribesmen worked out and revised treaty details.

From 1832 to 1836, government surveyors mapped the 6,442,000 acres of the Chickasaw domain, dividing it into townships, ranges and sections just as it remains today. The Mississippi Legislature formed 10 new counties, including DeSoto, Tunica, Marshall and Panola Counties, from this land.

By treaty the land was assigned by sections (640 acres, or one square mile) to individual Indians. The Chickasaws, a numerically small tribe, were assigned 2,422,400 acres of land using this formula. The government disposed of the remaining 400,000 at public sale. The Indians received at least \$1.25 per acre for their land. The government land sold for 75 cents per acre or less.

Days of Expansion 1850-1861

In 1852, the state legislature chartered a stock company to build a plank road 22 miles long from Memphis to Nesbit. A similar road was built from Holly Springs to Memphis. These were toll roads and travel on them was not cheap. However, they offered relief from dust and mud. Highways 51 and 78 of today reflect these routes.

The Tennessee and Mississippi Railroad was chartered in 1853. On February 12, 1856, the railroad opened 12 and one-half miles to Horn Lake Depot. The first train arrived in Hernando to great celebration on April 22, 1856. On October 8, 1856, the trains ran 37 miles to Senatobia Depot, where the traveler could make connection with a four-horse stagecoach and make the trip on to Grenada in only 18 hours.

Gradually recovering from the Panic of 1837, DeSoto Countians cleared and developed the rich farm lands and built communities throughout the area. They did not know of the great tragedy that lay just ahead for the county and the state.

The Civil War 1861-1865

DeSoto County sent James Chalmers, Stephen Johnston and Thomas Lewers as delegates to

a convention in Jackson, Mississippi, that on January 9, 1861, adopted an Ordinance of Secession, the second state, after South Carolina, to secede from the Union. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was elected president of the Confederacy.

Civil War hostilities started on April 12, 1861, when Southern artillery shelled Fort Sumter in the Charleston, South Carolina, harbor. DeSoto County men and boys flocked to join one of the many companies being formed, often thinking only of the adventure and glory of the battlefield.

Three DeSoto Countians served in the Confederate Army with the rank of general: I. Patton Anderson, James Chalmers and Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Early in 1863, Memphis fell to the Union and was occupied by the Federals. DeSoto County, between the lines of Confederate and Union Troops, suffered raids on all hands and received no protection. In June 1863, the Federals, under the command of Colonel George Bryant, destroyed the courthouse and main business houses of Hernando. These troops sacked and burned buildings for five days. In 1864, Hatch 's command visited Hernando and burned a hotel and other buildings.

There is no exact list of local soldiers in Confederate service or of deaths and injuries suffered by them. The Board of Police spent much time during the war years extending aid to the families of soldiers to prevent starvation on the home front.

The Civil War took more American lives than any other war in our history. Its four years of struggle left a nationwide history of grief and bitterness that has been hard to overcome. On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to General U. S. Grant. Other southern armies soon followed. Many DeSoto County families tell of their returning soldiers trudging miles on foot to reach home. They also remember those family members who died in the struggle.

Reconstruction Days 1866-1875

The industrial North became rich during the war years by manufacturing war goods, but the South, which had been ruined by fire and the sword, had a bitter story. The end of the war found DeSoto County bankrupt, its fields desolate of crops and its economic life destroyed. On December 12, 1867, a county meeting was called to discuss the prevention of famine during the months ahead.

An influx of new citizens arrived in DeSoto County from the north and from foreign countries by 1870. At the same time, members of many county families moved west to Arkansas, Texas and California.

Politically, following the surrender, DeSoto County, like all of Mississippi, was under military

rule. Officials of the county were appointed by Adelbert Ames, the military governor. With the outstanding leadership of local citizens DeSoto County was able to avoid the bloody riots and the extravagant administrations other area experienced.

"Carpetbaggers" (newcomers arriving from the North with their possessions in satchels of carpet material) and "Scalawags" (local citizens who expediently cooperated with them) were appointed as county officials. DeSoto County was fortunate that many of these appointees were good citizens who attended faithfully to the welfare of the county.

At this time, the Board of Police was abolished and the Board of Supervisors established. After Tate County was formed the Beat or Supervisor District lines were redrawn in DeSoto County.

On February 25, 1870, Mississippi was readmitted to the Union. In 1876, Adelbert Ames was replaced as governor by Democratic Governor John M. Stone. The struggles of Reconstruction continued. Hotly contested elections followed in the next few years, but at least they were elections.

The Constitution of 1869 established the Mississippi Public School System. Most Mississippians opposed public schools because times were so hard and there was little money to pay school taxes. DeSoto County established its first free public schools in 1871.

Newspapers were practically nonexistent during the war. In May 1866, W. S. Slade published *The People's Press*, the first DeSoto County paper after the hostilities ended. In the fall of 1868 he wrote in *The People's Press*, "Notwithstanding the burning by Yankee soldiers and their stealings combined-notwithstanding the many failures of heretofore rich farmers who have been declared bankrupts- we can boast of more stores and a larger stock of goods than ever."

Two trains a day ran in and out of Memphis. County roads, in bad repair, trailed through the area. Major bridges had been destroyed during the war and smaller ones had fallen in making travel in the county hazardous.

DeSoto County still had a burned out shell for a courthouse. Court was held in any space available and witnesses had to wait outside in all weather for their turns in court. Concern about the lack of a courthouse led to bids from other communities to build a courthouse in that community if it could become the county seat.

The agitation was strongest from that part of the county that lay south of the Coldwater River. Petitions to probate court asked that the county be divided. In 1873, the state legislature divided the county and formed Tate County south of the Coldwater River. In 1870 the county's population stood just over 32,000 people. The division of the county caused the loss of about 10,000 as reflected on the 1880 census.

"Four Ways" was an inn and stage coach stop at Pleasant Hill Road and Old Highway 51 at Nesbit, Mississippi. In 1845 Dr. A.D. McNeese bought the property and built a log cabin on the hill above a spring. Sometime around 1861, he built the three story inn just East of the cabin. In 1862 he sold it to Dr. Nathaniel Winningham. Nails for building the inn were hand forged. They were square with blunt ends. Concrete for the foundation of the cabin and inn, as well as fence posts, feed and water troughs was hand made by the laborers.

The mahogany stair case came from France in sections. It was shipped to New Orleans, then sent up the Mississippi on river boats, and on to Nesbit in wagons. It was put together with pegs. Marshall County Courthouse in Holly Springs has a double staircase of the same materials and design.

During the Civil War years, the inn was used as a military conference site by Jefferson Davis. As president of the Confederacy he met there with General Nathan Bedford Forrest and other officers.

Lex and Fronie Wooten bought "Four Ways" in 1946 and sold it in the early 1960s. The house was torn down in 1969.

On June 1, 1871, contractors Seebring and Lee had 22 workers on the square removing the ruins of the old courthouse with rebuilding to start immediately. DeSoto County had solved its most pressing problem with the courthouse completion in 1872.

The introduction of barbed wire to fence in livestock and the passing of state laws to make it illegal to allow livestock to run at large stirred the county. For many weeks farmers hotly debated the issue in "Letters to the Editor" in the county newspaper. The wire was expensive and many feared it would injure their stock.

Moving On 1876-1900

D.C. Campbell died on September 5, 1878, in Hernando of yellow fever. This dread illness, which had no known cause, nor cure, and few treatments, was a scourge in DeSoto County. The Hernando epidemic in six weeks killed almost half its inhabitants. There were also cases all over the county. The epidemic did not abate until frost came to the area on October 29. The people knew that cold weather would stop the illness, but did not know that destroying mosquitoes was the key.

At the turn of the century people still depended on horseback, wagon, buggy, or foot for personal transportation. Candles or the new, bright kerosene lamps provided light. Fireplaces or stoves vented into flues provided heat from burning wood or sometimes, coal. Brick lined cisterns caught rainwater during rainy spells. Elaborate gutter systems around the roofs of buildings caught rainwater in the cisterns or rain barrels. Main roads were gravel surfaced, but side roads were dirt-dust in dry weather, mud when it rained.

In 1886, the Illinois Central Railroad bought out the Mississippi and Tennessee Railroad. In the town of Hernando a few lawyers and merchants installed telephones. The Cumberland Telephone and Telegraph Company had its exchange at the corner of Holly Springs and Temple Streets. Across the street the post office sold the new prepaid two cent stamps, but

many people still sent mail without postage and the person receiving the letter had to pay the bill.

The economy of the county rested on agriculture with cotton as the important crop. Farmers kept livestock for their own use and many town dwellers had vegetable gardens and kept chickens, a hog and a milk cow in the backyard. Hunting, fishing, organized picnics and traveling circuses furnished entertainment for everyone.

The social life in each community centered around the activities of its local school and church. There were over 80 small public schools in the county. A notice in the county newspaper stated that a school would be established where there were 25 children of school age. A trip to the county seat was event enough to get your name mentioned in the "Locals" column in the local press.

A New Century – 1901

In 1902 a steel fence was erected around the courthouse at the cost of \$1,500. The county newspaper changed its name from *The Hernando Press* to *The Times Promoter*. Subscriptions were one dollar per year.

The Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad built a line through the western side of the county. Railroads offered "Excursion Tickets" at low prices to special events. For the Confederate soldiers annual convention in New Orleans the rate was one cent a mile each way.

A free booklet entitled *How To Put Up Your Own Telephone Line* was offered to those who wanted telephone service. Cotton sold for 10 cents a pound that fall.

In 1909 the supervisors had three public wells dug around the court house square. A gasoline powered pump was installed to furnish running water for the courthouse. The supervisors also proposed issuing \$150,000.00 in bonds to gravel main roads over the county. This brought a flood of letters to the editor both for and against the bonds. A petition to require an election failed and the bonds were issued.

A citizen's request for an outside auditor to audit the county expenditures was denied because the board felt that if mistakes had been made they were unintentional. Public pressure made the board agree to hire an auditor and then found that they could not legally pay him from county funds.

The Board of Supervisors hired the county's first Agricultural Agent, Mr. W. T. Glenn, for \$25.00 per month. In one month he reported working 26 days, traveling 471 miles, assisting 81 farmers and vaccinating 94 calves.

The DeSoto County Agricultural High School was established at Olive Branch, affording local students an opportunity to attend a boarding school. In 1912, Randle University School, a private school founded in 1899 by E. H. Randle, closed and its furniture was sold to the public by E. L. Rawls, Hemando merchant.

The first automobiles appeared locally about 1913. By 1915, automobiles were so numerous

that they were bothersome. They frightened horses, ran too fast, made too much noise, and stirred too much dust. Horse runaway accidents caused by frightened animals were reported. A town speed limit was 12 miles per hour. Robbers and safe blowers came into town, did their dirty work and sped away in automobiles. The blown up Hernando Post Office safe was found in Horn Lake Creek.

In 1916, a power plant in Hernando furnished the first electricity for the area. It only operated from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

World War 1 and the 1920s

The war that had raged in Europe since 1914, commanded little local attention. President Wilson won reelection on the theme of "He will keep us out of the war." On April 6, 1917, the United States entered the war. The DeSoto County Military Registration Board consisting of W. L. Harrison, Sheriff; W. F. Wood, Circuit Court Clerk; Dr. T. M. Jones, County Health Officer; and S. N. Savage, Tax Assessor, set up the registration of every male from 21 to 30 years of age. Numbers were assigned and drawn for young men to go for military examination. In DeSoto County 2,096 men registered.

Though unprepared to wage a war the people attacked the problem with energy. Everyone from the smallest child up was called on to increase production of food, to make vegetable gardens in flower beds, and to can, dry, and preserve the produce. "Meatless Days" and "Wheatless Days" called on the population to conserve meat and wheat for the boys "Over There." Liberty Bond drives raised extra funds for the war effort.

The St. Mihiel battle of September 1918, was the first distinctly American offensive of the war. DeSoto County young men participated. At least three DeSoto trained nurses: Miss Annie E. Logan, Miss Frances Dement Lester and Mrs. Edna R. Campbell, served overseas in military hospitals.

In 1917, a group of Memphians agitated for a graveled state highway from Memphis via Hernando to Winona. Years later these plans came to fruition as the Jefferson Davis Memorial Highway. Today we call it Highway 51.

Under the leadership of county Agricultural Agent Thompson in 1919, farmers in the Olive Branch area shipped two cooperative box car loads of cattle to market in St. Louis. The stock yards there paid higher prices.

In 1915, 828 citizens of the county owned automobiles. There were 4,415 mules and horses that year. The weight limit for log wagons was 12,000 pounds.

Slot machines were ruled gambling devices and prohibited in the county. Whiskey stills, bootlegging, theft of livestock, poultry and cotton, and theft of evergreen trees and shrubs in the country at Christmas kept Sheriff G. T. Thomas and his deputies busy. Deputies were not on salary, but were paid from fines collected from the miscreants.

Home Light and Power Company bought the local electric company and promised to keep the electricity on for 24 hours a day. The post office installed individual mail boxes. In Tunica County 2,300 acres of cut-over land was offered for sale at \$4.00 per acre.

In 1926, the first school buses carried some children to school. Most still had to walk. Farmers organized the DeSoto County Farm Bureau in 1927. Mrs. B. J. Tonner was elected in 1928, as DeSoto County's first female state representative.

Depression Days

On October 29, 1929, the New York Stock Market crashed, sending the whole country into a deep depression that bottomed out in July 1932. Little money in circulation, farm foreclosure notices and delinquent taxes were the order of the day in DeSoto County as in all other rural areas. However, the country people had the advantage of knowing how to produce food. With the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt as the new president of the United States in 1933, the country began to slowly work its way out of the Depression. Numerous public works programs afforded employment at the local level. The Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, set a minimum wage of 25 cents an hour for a 45 hour work week. Beginning in 1935, controversial social security laws to give pensions to the aged, and aid the unemployed and the infirm were enacted.

A Works Progress Administration (WPA) project of 1935, established a DeSoto County Public Library. When the Federal money for this project stopped the county continued a small yearly appropriation to keep the library alive. When the new courthouse was built in 1940, a room was designated for the library which consisted of the leftover books from WPA days.

In 1940 a fire that lasted all night destroyed the beloved "French Castle Courthouse." Just as the county was beginning to recover from the deep financial depression many citizens could not see having to rebuild. The first proposal for a bond issue failed. The plans went back to the drawing board for a little trimming and the next bond issue passed. This building, the central part of the present courthouse, was so handsome that all the county was proud of its beautiful building.

The building of the Arkabutla Dam, begun in 1939, afforded many local men jobs in this momentous project. The dam, completed in 1943, when the country was in the midst of World War II, was not dedicated until the occasion of its 50th anniversary in 1993.

World War II

The war raging in Europe and the aggression of Japan in China gave DeSoto County thinking citizens cause for concern. However, people reacted in stunned disbelief when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor at 6:30 a.m. on December 7, 1941. With much of the United States Naval power damaged or destroyed local citizens responded full force to the war effort. The Selective Service Board registered and called young men to service. At home rationing boards regulated the purchase of everything from sugar and shoes to gasoline and automobile tires. Everyone participated in firearms registration, salvage drives, war bond rallies and victory gardens.

The scrap-iron drive claimed the 1902 iron picket fence around the courthouse, and a 35 mile

an hour speed limit for all road was enforced to conserve gasoline. On the farm even dead animals were salvaged for the war effort. Their fat was made into explosives.

President Roosevelt made his weekly "Fireside Chats" to DeSoto County families gathered around their radios to hear his latest news about the war effort. The struggle was long and bitter with many DeSoto Countians being injured or killed in the process.

Governor Paul B. Johnson Sr. announced that at the fall school session, 1942-1943, state owned textbooks would be issued for every elementary or high school child in the state.

The determined effort of all the citizens brought victory in the European war on May 7, 1945, and in Japan on September 2, 1945. This ended the largest war the world had ever known in terms of worldwide casualties and money.

Gradually things returned to normal on the home front. Rationing ended a little by little.

Returning service men and women had new ideas for county progress. They needed civilian jobs and homes for their families. Housing starts multiplied.

Into the Modern Age

In 1948 the first television station began broadcasting from Memphis and some DeSoto Countians, equipped with tiny screen, black and white sets and good antennas, entertained friends with television parties. Gradually the price of television sets came down, the number of stations went up and the citizenry was well and truly "hooked on the tube."

Hernando rapidly became the "Marrying Capital" of the nation as couples poured into town from everywhere to say their vows. Two women from Las Vegas rented space and opened a "Marriage Chapel" with a complete ceremony for a fee. *Life Magazine* sent reporters to cover the story. This ended on June 29, 1958, after the state legislature passed a blood test and three day waiting period law. Even now, 50 years later, visitors to Hernando often say, "You know, we got married here!"

DeSoto County State Senator I. W. "Jack" Hudspeth of Cockrum introduced and got passed in the state legislature in 1946, an enabling act to allow more county support of public libraries. The DeSoto County Library had about 3,000 mostly old books, \$100.00 per year to buy new books, and \$1,200.00 to pay two staff members. In 1946 Mrs. Amma Gray Horn, DeSoto County educator and philanthropist whose picture hangs in the Hernando Library, bequeathed her entire estate to the DeSoto County Library. The bequest gave impetus in 1950, to the formation of the First Regional Library of Mississippi, a system that has served as a model for other regional libraries since then.

DeSoto County men served in the Korean War, 1950-1953, but this "police action" did not have the impact of World War II on the county. In 1954 DeSoto County schools reorganized into one county-wide school system with an elected County School Board. Second in size only to the Jackson, Mississippi, City School System, this progressive action put the county educational system in the forefront of Mississippi schools.

Fred Goldsmith of Memphis, purchaser of the historic Gayoso Hotel in Memphis, gave DeSoto County a group of murals depicting the travels of Hernando DeSoto in 1520. A public subscription of \$1,500.00 hired Mr. S. H. Chism to hang and restore the murals. They remain today a point of interest in the courthouse.

Hundreds of farmers started dairy farms making DeSoto County a leading dairy county of Mississippi. Local farmers helped organize the Mid-South Milk Association, a marketing cooperative for their product. In June 1960, over 600 people attended the June Dairy Month Celebration when Miss Kay Gartrell was crowned DeSoto County Dairy Queen.

Many farmers, realizing the importance of diversified farming, also added fine beef cattle to their farm plans. In addition to the traditional cotton crop, they planted more soybeans and wheat.

The First Regional Library Headquarters Building in Hernando, made possible by a DeSoto County bond issue, was dedicated August 4, 1968.

In 1970 DeSoto County schools accomplished an orderly and effective integration of the public schools. By 1970 soybean acreage had overtaken cotton as the number one crop. Dairy herds gradually decreased as more and more pasture land was turned into subdivisions.

Governor Ross Barnett cut the ribbon to initiate the selling of homes in the Southaven Community in 1958. Before 1960 over 1,000 people called it home. The city was incorporated March 25, 1980.

Dover Elevator Company at Horn Lake opened in 1963. Holiday Inn bought 3,000 acres at Olive Branch in 1969 to open its Holiday Inn University, hotel, golf course complex. From that beginning has come the vast growth in that part of the county of industries of every kind.

In 1964 Interstate Highway 55 opened through Hernando and soon extended to Jackson, Mississippi, and beyond. The interstate highway system effectively linked DeSoto Countians with the rest of the country.

In the Gulf of Tonkin on July 30, 1964, North Vietnamese PT boats fired on American destroyers cruising there, starting United States involvement in the Vietnamese War. President Johnson was given authority by the United States Congress to "prevent further aggression." Again a war was never declared, but the action lasted until November 1, 1968. Local citizens served in the effort.

New one-family homes numbered over 1,000 per year in the early 1970s, a population growth that gets greater each year.

The untimely death of Elvis Aaron Presley shocked the county. He had spent time riding horses at his ranch on Goodman Road and made friends as he toured over the county on his motorcycle. Friends remembered the pony he gave their little girl, the day he stopped at their farm to buy some ducks from their yard, or shopping at the sporting goods store when he came in to make a purchase.

The first cellular phone call in 1983, foreshadowed a time when the cellular phone accompanied almost everyone as they drove, worked or shopped.

In August 1988, the people of the county realized a dream when Baptist DeSoto Hospital invited everyone to an open house and began receiving patients.

In 1988, 71 percent of the participating voters of deSoto County approved a sweeping change in conducting of county business when they voted in the County Unit System to replace the old Beat System.

DeSoto Countians' friend, lawyer, and State Representative John Grisham published his first novel, *A Time To Kill*, in 1989. He signed books at local libraries and sold a few thousand copies. His second effort, *The Firm*, hit the best seller list and made those early copies of *A Time To Kill* much sought after.

The Federal census of 1990 reported the county population at 67,910. In 1992 the estimate was 74,020, making DeSoto County the fastest growing county in the state of Mississippi and ranking it sixth in population.

The Federal government approved building an interchange on Interstate 55 at Church Road. This culminated years of planning and applying for the project January 1995, marked the expected completion date. It took a little longer.

On January 1, 1994, the County Board of Supervisors signed a six year, county-wide, curb side garbage pickup contract with a fee of \$5.00 per month per household.

The Mississippi State Auditor, in 1994, praised DeSoto County as the only county in the state to fully comply with the County Unit System under a County Administrator. He congratulated the team- work between the Board of Supervisors, the Administrator, the Road Manager and the road crews.

In February 1994 at the end of a mild winter, DeSoto County, and indeed all of northwestern Mississippi, was blasted with an ice storm that downed power lines and paralyzed the area for two weeks or more.

Plans to build a DeSoto County Civic Center prompted the distribution of survey forms asking for citizen opinion.

The arson fire that destroyed the historic Hernando High School building on August 18, 1994, dismayed citizens county-wide. The burned out shell was razed and a new County Department of Education Building replaced it by 1998.

By 1999 the county was making the transition from its traditional agricultural base to an urban economy. Only three dairies remained in the county. The small family farmer had all but gone. Most who stay in farming have large acreage operations. Subdivisions now grow in cotton fields

and shopping areas occupy cow pastures.

Entering the new millennium DeSoto County looked forward to the opening of its new civic center, the new DeSoto County Central School Campus on Getwell Road, and a DeSoto County Historical Museum. Citizens routinely use their home computers to solve problems and tend to business. Looking back to the beginning, people wonder if the next century holds as many changes as the last one. The answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

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Courtesy of the DeSoto County Geneological Society