

Sumner, Miss. Quiet And Peaceful Since 1872 Finds Itself Storm Center of Lynch Trial

A Good Place To Raise a Boy

By Staff Correspondent

SUMNER, Miss.—A little Delta town which prides itself on its quietness and points to a sign which advertises it as "a good place to raise a boy" this week is the scene of a trial in the case of a fourteen-year-old boy whose body was found in the Tallahatchie River, which flows 10 miles to the east of Sumner, Mississippi.

For the second time since Joseph Burton Sumner led a band of pioneers into the area in 1872, Sumner has made the front pages of newspapers across the country.

For the second time also the Tallahatchie River has been an important factor causing national attention to focus on Sumner. In the 1870s and early 1890s the floods came and sent the residents hurrying to higher ground, as the waters flowed through the straits of Sumner and many other towns on each side of the Tallahatchie.

Sumner, because known as a good place to fish with the coming of flood control and its citizens settled down to a quiet existence.

Then, on August 21, the Tallahatchie yielded up the body of Emmett Louis Till, 14 of Chicago, who was murdered for allegedly insulting a white woman in nearby Money, Miss.

Sumner citizens had read that the Till boy had been taken from his uncle's home by two white men, Roy Bryant, 24 of Money and his half-brother J. W. Milam 26 of Glendora. The men had been charged with Till's kidnapping and were in the Leflore County Jail in Greenwood. This was close to home, but the case was Leflore County's problem. Sumner residents figured, however, that just justice was transferred to Tallahatchie County since the body was found just over the county line. Furthermore the body was found in a section which comes under the jurisdiction of the Circuit Court district at Sumner. Sumner and Charleston are the county seats, with Charleston, which has about 3,000 residents serving the area east of the river which bisects the county. Sumner has about 500 residents.

The full realization of what was to come hit Sumner residents when Milam and Bryant were arraigned on murder and kidnapping charges at the courthouse Sept. 6.

Telephone calls from New York, Chicago, Detroit and other large cities invaded the town with queries about "What's new in the Till case?"

TAKEN OVER TOWN
Newspaper men, photographers and television cameramen have taken over the town which doesn't even have a commercial photographer, but Sumner people are worried most of all about rumors which describe their home as a "hot" where racial tension is mounting.

"Sumner is just the place where the trial is being held. We didn't have anything to do with the case. Plenty of other places were more deeply involved, yet when the trial is over, no matter what the outcome, these other towns will be forgotten. Sumner won't be explained one Sumner resident.

Speaking for his fellow townsmen, William Simpson, publisher of the weekly Sumner Sentinel, said, "We certainly hope the trial won't be turned into a sort of Roman holiday. We want a fair and impartial trial handled just like any other case. After all, this is our town, we own property here, we'll live on here after this is all over."

There is evidently a feeling of bitterness on the part of townspeople who evidently resent what they feel is an intrusion. They consider to stir up trouble between Negroes and whites.

SIDE BY SIDE
It has been pointed out that Negroes and whites worked side



A STATUETTE OF A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER guards the Sumner County Courthouse where the sensational Emmett Louis Till trial is being conducted. The inset in the upper left corner is a

replica of a sign on Highway 49E advertising Sumner as "A Good Place to raise a Boy." This sleepy Delta town was unheralded until the start of the trial this week.

by side to carve out a place for the town. They worked to clear the underbrush and to turn a snake-infested swamp land into a thriving agricultural town surrounded by prosperous plantations.

One woman in pointing to the mutual trust of Sumner citizens said, "People of both races have always trusted each other. Why, there are only a few white people in Sumner who would hesitate to leave their children with a trusted Negro woman."

IN NO DANGER
One plantation owner citing what unfavorable publicity can do, or undo, said a Negro man who lived on his place went to Chicago with the body of the Till boy. "He got up there and started hearing reports of trouble in the South and called me and wanted to know if it was safe to come home. I told him to come ahead, he was in no danger."

Another resident stated that if a white boy's body had been pulled from the river, no one north of Memphis would have ever read about the case.

Sumner is a bit off the beaten path of motorists and consequently a number of Southern people weren't sure of its exact location. Two main highways sweep to the east and west, Highway 61 through Clarksdale to the west and Highway 31 to Grenada to the east.

Motorists driving south on Highway 61 turn southeastward on Highway 49E at Clarksdale. From Clarksdale, it's a 17 mile drive through plantation land to Sumner.

The town's business district is constructed in the "county seat square" fashion with the 45-year-old courthouse as the center. Parking meters are not used here.

Narrow, winding stairs lead from the courthouse lobby to the courtroom where Bryant and

2 Whimpering 2-Yr. Olds Get Spotlight at Trial

By Staff Correspondent

SUMNER, Miss.—Two whimpering two-year-olds, their faces scrubbed, wearing their Sunday best, were spoken to sharply here Monday and told to mind and behave. The cautioning person, who admonished his children to do the right thing in this county courtroom in Mississippi, was Roy Bryant. He is one of the two men who went on trial for murdering a 14-year-old Chicago boy.

Both Bryant and his alleged partner-in-crime J. W. Milam brought their four baby sons to court. The youngsters scampered over the accused—lape-chewed gum, played cowboy, squealed and in general enjoyed themselves while their grim faced fathers face the bar of Mississippi justice.

Accompanying the two men Monday were their attractive wives, one of whom was the recipient of the wolf-whistle from young Emmett Till of Chicago.

"Mrs. Carolyn Bryant, the 21-year-old brunette, was dressed in a simple dark grey dress with high neckline. She leaned close to her husband, her fingers clapping. She remained passive and silent."

Mrs. Juanita Milam, 27-year-old wife of the other defendant, wore a lighter colored grey suit on Monday morning. The collar and sleeves were trimmed in white and her long hair was bound in a bun at the nape of her neck.

When the children grew restless, the mothers held them, but they finally broke away and explored the court room.

Bryant's two sons, Lamar, 2 and Roy, Jr., 3 and Milam's two, Harley, 2 and Bill, 4 seemed perfectly at ease in the area of charged excitement.

Once Bill Milam picked up a toy pistol and fired an imaginary shot at Roy, Jr.

Bill, the oldest child present, clambered over the rail and stamped down the aisle making little boy noises. He ran his hand along the courtroom railing poked, apparently deriving great satisfaction from the machine-gun click that he produced.

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Argus Pres. On-the-Scene

By STEVE DUNCAN
Argus Staff Correspondent

SUMNER, Miss.—As the trial of two white men accused of the murder of Emmett Louis Till got underway in this sleepy Mississippi town of 500 residents at 9 a. m. Monday, a number of Negro press representatives—including

Mrs. Nannie Mitchell-Turner, president of the St. Louis Argus Publishing Company—were on hand to observe and report the proceedings.

Newsmen covering the sensational trial of suspects in the brutal slaying of the 14-year-old Chicago youth were:

James L. Hicks, Afro-American newspaper and NNPA correspondent; Alex Wilson, editor of the Memphis Tri-State Defender; and Ernest Withers, photographer for that newspaper and Miss Clytie Murdock, Simson Booker and photographer David Jackson of the Johnson Publications of Chicago.

In keeping with the tradition of this state, Negro newsmen were afforded separate and unequal facilities. Separate press tables were provided, newsmen, with that of the Negro reporters in a far corner to the right of the courtroom which made it difficult to hear some of the proceedings.

However, the Negro press was made as comfortable as possible in the sweltering Mississippi heat by a Negro employee of the Sumner County Courthouse and a small boy who acted as runner for the press corps.

Anderson Scales, 66-year-old courtroom employee, provided the group with drinking water, luxury during the proceedings.

Mrs. Turner was the only high executive of the Negro press present at the open session of the trial. She is treasurer of the National Negro Publishers Association.

Leonard J. Harris

The St. Louis Argus

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REV. MOSE WRIGHT (indicated by arrow) testified Wednesday as the state's first witness in the Till murder trial. Here Wright, flanked by two grandsons, waits in the rear of the courtroom while jurors were being selected to hear the case.

Naacp Disavows Support Of Till Fund Raising

By STEVE DUNCAN Argus Staff Correspondent

MOUNT BAYOU, Miss.—The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People announced Tuesday it had not authorized a fund-raising speaking tour for Mrs. Mamie Bradley, mother of the 14-year-old Mississippi lynch victim, Emmett Louis Till, nor had it received any monies reportedly raised in Chicago at the time of the Till funeral.

Apparently some individual or organization capitalizing on the Till tragedy, used the name of the NAACP to raise funds for personal gain.

The militant NAACP, whose very name strikes fear in the hearts of bigoted southerners, make crystal clear it had no part in this dastardly scheme. It is a telegram to Mrs. Ruby Hurley, a field representative. The national office of the NAACP authorized Mrs. Hurley to release this information to the press.

The wire said:

"You may let reporters know the NAACP has not and is not organizing a fund raising speaking tour for Mrs. Bradley, as our lawyers have advised—we have no basis for funds for legal action in the Till case in as much as responsibility for legal action to secure justice in this case rests with the State of Mississippi."

"We had no hand in financial arrangements in Chicago, nor have we received any monies reportedly raised in Chicago at that time. The NAACP will press the fight on all forms of discrimination and oppression in Mississippi and elsewhere as well as on the system which makes racist crimes like the Till murder possible."

"For this long range struggle we welcome and need funds but we feel that our sponsorship of a tour exploiting the brutal Till slaying would be subject to misinterpretation."

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