

**Appendix H**

**Princeville, Edgecombe County, North Carolina**

**Princeville White Paper**

**Historical Summary**

**March 2014**

## Princeville, Edgecombe County, North Carolina

### 1. Historical Overview

In the tenuous times from the conclusions of the Civil War to the beginning of World War I, African-Americans followed four basic approaches to overcoming the racial dichotomy ingrained in southern society: political action within the Republican party; focus on economic self help, morality, and racial unity; direct opposition to social injustice; and migration or “exodus” from the region. Sometimes black leaders took a combination of these positions or shifted from one to another. A comparatively few blacks, however, chose a fifth course of action – self-segregation and self-determination within the borders of an all-black community. Princeville (originally called Freedom Hill) in Edgecombe County, North Carolina, was one such community.<sup>1</sup>

At the conclusion of the Civil War, Union Troops occupied the Tarboro area of Edgecombe County, at which time many slaves left the farms and plantations of the County and surrounding areas and came to the vicinity seeking freedom and Federal protection. Their flight was typical of many slaves throughout the South who migrated to cities and towns in search of their day of “jubilee,” a celebration of their status as freedmen. Although most African-Americans remained on the farms and plantations or returned to the countryside after experiencing hardships and disappointments of life in the city, a number stayed to find new lives in old established municipalities like Tarboro (incorporated in 1760) or in a few cases formed their own communities in the shadow of white populated towns. The African-American refugees who settled in the low swampy land across the Tar River south of Tarboro in 1865, were the first inhabitants of one of those separate communities.<sup>2</sup>

Uncertainty faced the freemen who came to Tarboro seeking a new existence. Having departed their old life as slaves, often with little more than the clothes on their backs, these former bondsmen faced a tremulous and possibly bleak future as illiterate, unskilled, and penniless freedmen. They congregated around the Union troops who bivouacked on the south side of the Tar River and who furnished the freedmen with rations and protection. The land on which the Union soldiers and former slaves encamped was the property of white planters John Lloyd, whose land lay on the east side of Old Sparta Road (present day U.S. Highway 64) leading south from Tarboro, and Lafayette Dancy, whose land was on the west side of the road.

Although it was Federal policy to advise the emancipated slaves to return to the plantations and work for their old masters, a large number of the freedmen across the river from Tarboro elected to remain there and form their own community under the auspices of the Union army and the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, known as the Freedmen’s Bureau.<sup>3</sup> The freedmen named

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<sup>1</sup> Joe A. Mobley, “In the Shadow of White Society: Princeville, a Black Town in North Carolina 1865-1915”; Editor North Carolina Historical Review, Volume LXIII, Number 3, July 1986; Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources (NCDCR) hereinafter cited as Mobley, Princeville, A Black Town in North Carolina, 1865-1915.

<sup>2</sup> Rembert W. Patrick, “The Reconstruction of the Nation”, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, page 12; William S. Powell, the “North Carolina Gazetteer,” Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968, page 397 and 478.

<sup>3</sup> The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, usually referred to as simply the Freedmen's Bureau, was a U.S. federal government agency that aided distressed freedmen (freed slaves) in 1865–1869, during the Reconstruction era of the United States. The Freedmen's Bureau Bill, which created the

their new village Freedom Hill (also sometimes known as Liberty Hill). They adopted the name from the nearby hill or knoll called Freedom Hill from which northern soldiers had addressed them – telling them that Union victory had set them free.



Those freedmen who continued to reside in the camp began to erect crude huts and shanties. No precise description of the type of living quarters built by the ex-bondsmen has been discovered for Freedom Hill, but the dwellings probably resembled those found in freedmen's camps in other parts of the state.




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The Freedmen's Bureau, initiated by President Abraham Lincoln and was intended to last for one year after the end of the Civil War. It was passed on March 3, 1865, by Congress to aid former slaves through legal food and housing, oversight, education, health care, and employment contracts with private landowners. It became a key agency during Reconstruction, assisting freedmen (freed ex-slaves) in the South. The Bureau was part of the United States Department of War. Headed by Union Army General Oliver O. Howard, the Bureau was operational from 1865 to 1871. It was disbanded under President Ulysses S. Grant. At the end of the war, the Bureau's main role was providing emergency food, housing, and medical aid to refugees, though it also helped reunite families. Later, it focused its work on helping the freedmen adjust to their conditions of freedom. Its main job was setting up work opportunities and supervising labor contracts. It soon became, in effect, a military court that handled legal issues. By 1866, it was attacked by Southern whites for organizing blacks against their former masters. Although some of their subordinate agents were unscrupulous or incompetent, the majority of local Bureau agents were hindered in carrying out their duties by the opposition of former Confederates, the lack of a military presence to enforce their authority, and an excessive amount of paperwork. President Andrew Johnson vetoed a bill for an increase of power of the Bureau, supported by Radical Republicans, on February 19, 1866.

Such structures, which were usually one- or two-room “cabins” or “huts”, were made of boards split from logs by hand. For a few of the houses the builders managed to secure sawn boards for floors and windows. Chimneys usually were constructed of sticks and clay. <sup>4</sup> (See photo below)

Although the black settlers did not hold legal title to the Freedom Hill camp during the first days of Reconstruction, the white landowners evidently made no effort to evict them. Initially, the owners probably did not attempt to remove “squatters” because of the presence of the Union troops. In addition, the land was of such poor quality and so susceptible to flooding that it held little value or interest for the white owners. As a result of the property’s propensity for flooding, few if any buildings stood on the land when the freedmen occupied it in 1865.



depended.

Not only was there little white opposition to the former slaves becoming squatters at Freedom Hill, but the white community generally saw the black community as a partial solution to the social problem brought about by the abolition of slavery, in what had been one of the state’s largest slaveholding counties. For many whites, a separate black community such as Freedom Hill provided Tarboro and Edgecombe County a way to keep displaced former bondsmen at a social Distance, but, at the same time, to retain in the area the laborers, farm workers, servants, and artisans upon whom the town’s and county’s economy

Throughout the Reconstruction period the inhabitants of Freedom Hill continued to live in most cases only a step away from slavery. Although the Freedmen’s Bureau gave them some aid in the form of food, clothing, medical supplies, and transportation, the freedmen received little such assistance after the early days immediately following the war. Research in the records of the Freedmen’s Bureau indicates that the organization’s contribution to the welfare of the ex-slaves in the Tarboro area was minimal.

Like blacks throughout the South following the Civil War, the most desired goal of the people of Freedom Hill was to become legal landowners---not just squatters. Their first choice to obtain land came during Reconstruction when the property comprising Freedom Hill was sold by the heirs of John Lloyd to Henry H. Shaw, a planter. Shaw then sold plots to the freedmen who could secure sufficient funds to purchase small parcels. The land---so susceptible to flooding---was cheap, especially in the lean years of Reconstruction when property values fell. Other former slaves who could not buy simply continued to take temporary possession of tracts without color of title.

In the 1870s, a number of freed slaves began acquiring lots primarily near the Tar River and along the Old Sparta Road (now U.S. Highway 64). In those locations in the first two decades after the Civil War, they built simple one- or two-room houses or improved upon the crude structures thrown up immediately after the war. Especially considering that during the hard times of Reconstruction, blacks possessed little cash to invest in construction.

Little can be gleaned about economic life in Freedom Hill during Reconstruction. One significant development, however, stands out. Although located in North Carolina’s most prominent plantation regions, Freedom Hill, unlike most black communities founded in the South after the Civil War, did not have a population chiefly employed in agriculture. The 1880 Census, for example, reveals that the single

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<sup>4</sup> Horace James, Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina, 1864: History and Management of the Freedmen in this Department up to June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1865 (Boston: W.W. Brown Printers, n.d.), pgs 8-9.

largest number (43) of the 379 inhabitants was agricultural laborers – farm workers employed for wages. Twelve of the 379 were farmers, either sharecropping or farming for themselves. The majority of the residents, however, worked in non-agricultural capacities. Among the latter group, the largest numbers (30) were day laborers and the next largest (25) were laundresses. Other inhabitants included skilled and semi-skilled workers: carpenters, brick masons, blacksmiths, painters, seamstresses, nurses, cooks, draymen, a mattress maker, and a shoemaker. Several black school teachers also settled in the village prior to 1880. Additionally, Freedom Hill began to show the beginnings of small-scale commercial activity when black grocers Gordon Jenkins and Richard Lawrence opened small grocery stores near the Tar River Bridge. The increasing tendency away from farm labor continued dramatically in Freedom Hill in the coming years.<sup>5 6</sup>

A few whites resided in the black village in the two decades following the Civil War, and some of them were part of its economic life. In 1880, forty-five whites were living or operating businesses in Freedom Hill. Most of them were farmers (primarily sharecroppers) who tilled nearby tracts in the county. The white population also included grocery and barroom owners T.C. Johnson and John C. Whitehurst, as well as miller Thomas O’Berry. Other whites were William T. Godwin, a wheelwright, schoolteacher Melvin Drew of New York, and dry goods merchant Charles G. Peale.<sup>7</sup> Apparently white farmers who resided in the village lived apart from blacks and had little social contact with them. Presumably, however, significant day-to-day contact occurred between white merchants and the freedmen. The white tradesman, especially T.C Johnson, played an important role in the black community, because their hiring of former slaves to work in their stores trained those blacks to operate businesses of their own. Beyond that inadvertent contribution, the role of whites in the village proved to be primarily one of opportunism rather than assistance.

In the black village across the river from Tarboro, education gained a toehold in the first two decades following the Civil War. An American Missionary Association (AMA) school for blacks was organized in Tarboro soon after the war ended, but, as in other areas of the South, it was difficult to keep northern teachers for long periods of time. Despite that difficulty, the blacks of Freedom Hill and Tarboro remained anxious to continue schooling. In 1868, they urged black legislator Henry C. Cherry of Tarboro to obtain a teacher for them. In September, Cherry wrote to the secretary of the AMA requesting a teacher.

Susan Clapp, an AMA teacher in Plymouth, North Carolina, informed the secretary that the freedman of Tarboro had a good schoolhouse and that the whites of the town and area generally favored education for former slaves.<sup>8</sup> Clapp later recommended that a black teacher, Robert S. Taylor, be sent to Tarboro to teach the freedmen. The AMA issued Taylor a certificate and assigned him to Tarboro. In October 1870, Taylor wrote the AMA secretary requesting financial aid and reporting that he had thirty students enrolled. After teaching in Tarboro for three years, Taylor settled in Freedom Hill where he

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<sup>5</sup> Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Edgecombe County, North Carolina, Population Schedule pages 5-6 and pages 39-42.

<sup>6</sup> Rabinowitz, Howard N., Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890 (New York: Oxford University Press), pages 61-96. Rabinowitz has shown that the tendency for black men to be unskilled laborers and black women to be laundresses or domestics also existed between 1865 and 1890 in southern cities such as Atlanta, Montgomery, Nashville, Raleigh and Richmond. Much of what Rabinowitz has concluded about black economic structure in those urban centers is applicable to Tarboro and Freedom Hill/Princeville.

<sup>7</sup> Edgecombe County Census, 1880: Population Schedule pages 5-6 and pages 39-42.

<sup>8</sup> Mobley, Princeville, A Black Town in North Carolina 1865-1915, pages 345-346.

continued to teach children and some adults.<sup>9</sup> The 1880 census lists him as one of six black school teachers residing in Freedom Hill. He subsequently became one of the community's most influential and important leaders, serving as a county justice of the peace and two-term state senator. Education in Freedom Hill received a considerable boost in 1883 when the community's first public school, called the Graded School, held classes. In the years to come the school made significant progress under the leadership of a number of important black educators such as Taylor.<sup>10</sup>

Religion played a large part in the lives of the inhabitants of Freedom Hill in the period 1865-1885. Missionaries provided religious instruction, and the community's freedmen also attended services at Tarboro. The 1880 census does not list a black minister living in Freedom Hill; however, a local tradition asserts that the Mount Zion Primitive Baptist Church (its 1890s building now standing on Church Street) was founded in 1871.<sup>11</sup> The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which tradition claims arrived during the Reconstruction, may also have been active in Freedom Hill in that period, although there is no conclusive evidence of a minister or church building during that era; but such a church had definitely been built by the 1890s.<sup>12</sup> As in other aspects, such as commercial development and education, religion made a beginning in Freedom Hill before 1865, but it was not until after that the growth of churches and other institutions accelerated.

Perhaps the greatest strides in the period of 1865-1885 were made in politics. Early during Reconstruction the residents of Freedom Hill began working to acquire political rights. In September, 1865, they were among the 1,500 blacks who met in Tarboro to choose delegates to a statewide freedmen's convention that was to assemble in Raleigh that month. The members of the black convention (which included the Tarboro delegates) appealed to a white convention, meeting at the same time, to provide for black suffrage and other rights in drafting a new state constitution. The efforts of the black delegates failed; the white convention ignored the appeal for black suffrage.

Later, however, under the congressional plan of reconstruction, blacks in North Carolina, virtually all of whom supported the Republican Party, received the right to vote for or against a convention to form a new state constitution. During the autumn of 1867 elections were held to decide the question of whether such a convention should be called and to elect delegates to that convention. At that time, the number of Edgecombe County blacks who voted in Tarboro for a convention outnumbered the whites who voted against it, 1,191 to 234. The voters of Freedom Hill helped elect three black delegates to the convention from Edgecombe County: Henry Baker, H.A. Dowd, and Henry C. Cherry. When the constitutional convention met in Raleigh, Edgecombe's three black delegates attended.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Clapp to the Reverend E.P. Smith, November 27, 1869; Robert S. Taylor to the Reverend George Whipple, October 10, 1870, American Missionary Association Archives, North Carolina Letters.

<sup>10</sup> Edgecombe County Census, 1880: Population Schedule, Page 5; J. Kelly Turner and John L. Bridgers, Jr., History of Edgecombe County (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1920), page 382, hereinafter cited as Turner and Bridgers, History of Edgecombe County.

<sup>11</sup> Mary W. Matthewson and Melvin Ray Hart, The Saga of Freedom Hill: A Story of the Town of Princeville," in the Edgecombe Story (Tarboro: Edgecombe County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), unpagged, herein after cited as Matthewson and Hart, "Saga of Freedom Hill."

<sup>12</sup> See *Southerner*, September 26, 1901; February 22, 1905; Sanborn Insurance Maps of Tarboro, 1923. The 1923 map shows that the AME Zion's Prince Chapel (possibly named for Turner Prince) was located on the east side of present-day Church Street between what are now Walston and Dancy Streets.

<sup>13</sup> Zuber, North Carolina during Reconstruction, pages 13-14; *Southerner*, November 14, 1867.

Ratified in a separate election, the new state constitution of 1868 extended voting and legal rights to blacks living in Freedom Hill and throughout the state. With the readmission of North Carolina to the Union in July of that year, the residents of Freedom Hill became full United States citizens.<sup>14</sup>

During the period that blacks in Edgecombe County were making their first venture into politics, the Ku Klux Klan became active in North Carolina and in the County. But because Freedom Hill had a sizable population of freedmen who could retaliate against the Klan, blacks in the village did not often fall prey to the activities of that violent area of the Conservative party.<sup>15</sup> Drawing upon mutual protection in a black community, the citizens of Freedom Hill continued to exercise their right to vote, casting their ballots for Republican and black candidates in county elections until 1875 and in state and national elections for the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As residents of the second Congressional District known as the “Black Second,” they also helped elect four blacks who served in Congress from that district: James E. O’Hara, Henry P. Cheatham, John A. Hyman, and George H. White, who was from Tarboro.<sup>16</sup>

Two of Freedom Hill’s residents were state politicians – schoolteachers Robert S. Taylor and William P. Mabson. While residing in the black community Taylor became active in the Republican Party and was elected a county justice of peace for five years. He then edited the Negro newspaper *Edgecombe Watchman* in Tarboro. In 1885, he gained a seat in the state Senate and was reelected in 1887. There, as a former teacher, he labored hard to secure public support for black education. He also served on committees for privileges, elections, and claims, and became a strong advocate for justice and equal protection of the law for blacks in the state.<sup>17</sup>

William P. Mabson of Freedom Hill also held state political office. After the Civil War he came to Edgecombe County from Pennsylvania as a teacher and Methodist minister. In the 1870s Mabson served as the head of the Republican Party in Edgecombe County, was elected to the state House of Representatives and Senate, and was a member of the state Constitutional Convention of 1875. As a black legislator, Mabson worked to ensure that blacks had a voice in the political process, attacking on one occasion the Democrats (formerly Conservatives) for attempting to diminish black influence by legislative gerrymandering of Tarboro wards. He also spoke out against the violent outrages of the Ku

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<sup>14</sup> Hugh Talmage Lefter and Albert Way Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, third edition, 1973), pages 487-491;

<sup>15</sup> For an account of the Ku Klux Klan as a violent component of the Conservative party and the Klansmen’s avoidance of areas of black strength, see Otto H. Olsen, “The Ku Klux Klan: A Study in Reconstruction Politics and Propaganda,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXXIX (July 1962), pages 340-362.

<sup>16</sup> Eric D. Anderson, Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872-1901: The Black Second (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), pages 4-5 and pages 56-57, hereinafter cited as Anderson, The Black Second. In 1875 the Democrats (formerly Conservatives) amended the state Constitution to prevent blacks and Republicans from holding most county offices. Thus, after that year, blacks in Freedom Hill, as those throughout the state, continued to help elect congressman, state legislators, and some county officials. But until the Republicans-Populist coalition of the 1890s, they had little voice in the politics of county government. John A. Hyman (1840-1891) served in the national House of Representatives from 1875-1877. James E. O’Hara (1844-1905) was a member of the House from 1883 to 1887, and Henry P. Cheatham (1857-1935) served in the House from 1889-1893. George H. White (1852-1918) of Tarboro, the last black congressman until 1929, represented North Carolina in Congress from 1897 to 1901.

<sup>17</sup> North Carolina Assembly Sketch Book, Session 1885 (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1885), page 6; North Carolina Legislative Biographical Sketch Book, Session 1887 (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1887), Page 4; Anderson, The Black Second, page 323; Frenise A. Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), pages 150-151, and 159 cited as Logan, The Negro in North Carolina.

Klux Klan in the state and served on the important Proposition and Grievance Committee in the state Senate.<sup>18</sup>

Furious with Mabson's efforts in the House to aid blacks politically, Tarboro Democrats attempted to have him expelled from the General Assembly. On one occasion they claimed he had committed perjury in giving testimony against the Ku Klux Klan activity in Orange County; on another that he was not a resident of Edgecombe County and therefore not entitled to that county's district seat in the House. In January, 1873, the House declared Mabson's seat vacant on the basis of the latter charge, but he was elected to the state Senate from Edgecombe in the following year and again in 1876.<sup>19</sup> Although Edgecombe whites generally considered Mabson a radical with a "rancorous nature," they reluctantly admitted he "was a negro of some ability." Following his political career, Mabson returned to Freedom Hill for a time and became one of the county's foremost leaders in education.

By 1885, the citizens of Freedom Hill has gained an economic and political foothold in postwar North Carolina. A number of them had become legal landowners, some had established small businesses, and others were employed in Tarboro and on nearby farms. Schools and churches were operating in the community, and the residents took part in elections. Many of the inhabitants began looking toward establishing their own incorporated town as their next milestone as free men.

Their reasons for wanting an incorporated town were varied. The experience of living in Freedom Hill during the Reconstruction had proven the advantages of maintaining a cohesive black community to satisfy mutual interests and provide protection. The legal incorporation of the community would solidify those advantages with the sanctity of a legislative act and offer further escape from white hostility and discrimination. In addition, the ability to elect town officials and pass ordinances would restore to the black inhabitants of Freedom Hill a role in local politics denied since the Democrats proscribed their involvement in county government in 1875. Most of all, the creation of a black town—segregated from white society – would provide an opportunity for the residents of Freedom Hill to succeed on their own without white interference or discrimination.<sup>20</sup>

Instilled with the concepts of self-help and voluntary segregation, the people of Freedom Hill began working for the establishment of their community as an incorporated town.<sup>21</sup> In general, the whites of Tarboro and Edgecombe County favored the incorporation of the black community. As during Reconstruction, a separate black settlement solved for whites the dilemma of retaining a labor force but at the same time keeping former slaves at a social distance. Recently, however, Edgecombe had come under considerable danger of losing its labor force as a result of a black migration movement sweeping the South.

Poor economic conditions and political and legal constraints led some Negroes to leave the state. Beginning in 1879 there was a general exodus of blacks from North Carolina to the Midwest, especially

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<sup>18</sup> Legislative Record Giving the Acts Passed, Session Ending March 1877, Together with Sketches of the Lives and Public Acts of Members of Both Houses (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1877), page 9, hereinafter cited as Legislative Record, 1877; Anderson, The Black Second, page 57; Logan, The Negro in North Carolina, page 26.

<sup>19</sup> Enquirer (Tarboro), December 16, 1871; January 4, February 1, 1873; Tod R. Caldwell to Speaker of the House, January 25, 1873, and Proclamation of Tod R. Caldwell, January 27, 1873, Governors Letter Books, Tod R. Caldwell, State Archives.

<sup>20</sup> Mobley, Princeville, A Black Town in North Carolina 1865-1915, Page 350.



Kansas and Indiana. Such migrations occurred throughout the South, and the black emigrants were frequently called “exodusters.” In the last half of the nineteenth century a great shortage of labor existed in the Midwestern states, which in general extended to blacks more economic, political and legal freedom than did states in the “redeemed” Democratic South.<sup>22</sup>

Fearful of losing a source of labor, whites in Edgecombe County first attempted to frighten blacks into staying in the county. The white Democratic press in 1880 warned Edgecombe blacks, including those in Freedom Hill, that they would fall victims to starvation and disease if they left the state and blamed the idea of an exodus on Republicans, who Democrats claimed were seeking to exploit blacks.<sup>23</sup>

William P. Mabson was an outspoken leader in urging blacks from Freedom Hill and Edgecombe County to relocate in the Midwest and thereby gain better political and economic opportunities. Although he personally chose to remain in the state, Mabson attempted to raise a party of blacks from Edgecombe to make the journey under the leadership of three out-of-state exodus “bosses.” Despite the thirty people he promised to enlist for the trip, only nine or ten showed up for the journey, and those were mostly curious children. A few of Freedom Hill’s residents may have departed to seek improved conditions, but most of them rejected the lure of Kansas or other places. They preferred the safety and stability of an imperfect, yet cohesive black community to the uncertainty of a journey into the unknown. The *Tarboro Southerner* noted the reluctance of local blacks to migrate and announced, “Although the exodus of the negro in other portions of this State has been large, the Edgecombe County negro does not seem to fall into line very fast. The general sentiment of the negroes here is that Edgecombe is good enough for them and that they intend staying in it.” Some blacks in the state at this time also entertained notions of emigrating to Liberia in Africa, but no evidence exists that those living in Freedom Hill ever undertook such a move.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, whites still feared an exodus and saw the creation of a black town as another way to entice blacks to stay and labor in Tarboro and Edgecombe County. Furthermore, whites could point to a black town as an indication that blacks preferred to live apart from the rest of society. In addition, permitting Afro-Americans to have political autonomy within their own borders represented no real threat to white political supremacy at the county level. Whites, however, stopped short of admitting that Negroes were entitled to the privilege of self-government. Instead, they explained that a formal government would establish much-needed law and order in the black settlement. The *Southerner*, for example, reported that because there was crime and disorder in Freedom Hill, “We would...suggest to the good citizens there, and there are many of them, that they petition to the legislature which will soon be in session to have it incorporated. It should have a name, but let us have no “boro” or “ville” to the end of it. Let it be called Garfield. The name is good, and a slight tribute of appreciation will thus be paid a great Man.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Logan, *The Negro in North Carolina*, pages 117-135; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) pages 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> *Southerner*, March 4, 1880; Alan D. Watson, Edgecombe County: *A Brief History* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1979), pages 89-90, hereinafter cited as Watson, Edgecombe County: *A Brief History*.

<sup>24</sup> *Carolina Banner (Tarboro)*, March 22, 1889, hereinafter cited as *Carolina Banner*; Logan, *The Negro in North Carolina*, pages 120-121.

<sup>25</sup> *Southerner*, March 16, 1882.

The *Southerner's* name preference was suggested by the recent assassination of President James A. Garfield. North Carolina blacks recalled the Republican president as an antislavery man, Union General, and a friend of blacks. But, despite the advice of the *Southerner*, the blacks across the river from Tarboro chose to name their new town Princeville, after Turner Prince, a carpenter who had been born a slave in North Carolina in 1843 and was one of Freedom Hill's earliest residents.<sup>26</sup> Like many others, Prince used the skilled trade he had learned in slavery, carpentry, to build a free community for his family and other former slaves.

As a result of petitions by blacks and whites in Edgecombe County, the North Carolina State legislature in February, 1885, passed an act to incorporate the town of Princeville. The act stipulated that the new town was "subject to all the provisions of law applicable to the town of Tarboro with the exception of the modifications that were enumerated in the act of incorporation." These provisions stated that the new Princeville officers would be a mayor, five commissioners, a clerk, a treasurer, and a constable. Taxes on real and personal property were limited to ten cents annually on every one hundred dollars valuation. The act allowed a poll tax of thirty cents but did not restrict the right of the town to tax retailers of liquor, wines, or "privileges," or deny any "power over animals likely to commit nuisances." The town was to vote as one ward "and be subject to such modifications of the laws of Tarboro as may be enacted by this General Assembly, and no other." The act scheduled the first election for town officers to be held in May 1886. Until that time, the following men were to serve as officers by giving bond and taking oaths of office: Milton Pittman, Mayor; Turner Prince, M.S. Dancy, Harry Smith, Orren James, and Henry Sparrow, all commissioners; Victor E. Howard, Clerk; Gordon Jenkins, Treasurer; John Henry Norfleet, Constable.<sup>27</sup>

The incorporation of Princeville as a town in 1885 marked a significant point in the development of the black settlement. Prior to that year, the inhabitants had made only a rudimentary beginning in a world that still suffered from Civil War. Perhaps, with the aid of a Republican-controlled Congress, their greatest achievement before 1885 had been the establishment of basic political and civil rights. Education had made a substantial start, but commercial development was limited to a few businesses near the Tar River Bridge. Only a few dwellings lined Old Sparta Road. The crude shanties and other buildings were indicative of the lean years between 1865 and 1885.

In the next two decades, Princeville underwent further changes and reached a high point in its history. Schools and churches made considerable strides. Black political power and social rights reached a peak before receding under an onslaught of white supremacy and "Jim Crowism" in the 1890's. Economically, Princeville



<sup>26</sup> Powell, *North Carolina Gazetteer*, page 397; Edgecombe County Census, 1880: Population Schedule, page 5; Will of Turner Prince, 1912, Edgecombe County Original Wills, State Archives. Turner Prince died in Princeville in 1912.

<sup>27</sup> Private Laws of North Carolina, 1885, c. 29. The corporate limits of the new town were: "Beginning at the upper side of the Albemarle and Raleigh Railroad Bridge on the banks of the Tar River, opposite Tarboro; thence running a straight line to Battle Bryan's lower spring; thence south-east to a line parallel to the Albemarle and Raleigh Railroad, seven hundred and fifty yards; thence east to a stake in H.H. Shaw's field; thence north to Tar River bank; thence down said river to the beginning."

benefited indirectly from the commercial and industrial development in Tarboro in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

One indication of Princeville's economic upswing was an increase in the number of black retail businesses. This change mirrored a general statewide trend for black merchants who made steady advances in the two decades after Reconstruction.



In Princeville, black merchants were predominantly small businessmen...who concentrated upon owning general stores and grocery stores and upon manufacturing and selling liquor.<sup>28</sup> Their chief customers remained the black agricultural laborers and sharecroppers who predominated in Edgecombe County.

In 1880, there were only two black grocers or general store owners in the community, but by 1900, the number

had grown to ten. Their stores were located along Old Sparta Road primarily near the Tar River Bridge. The owners were James Faithful, York D. Garrett, Orren James (shown above), Edward Hart Tice, James Thorne, Henry N. Cherry, Samuel Lawrence, Henry Jenkins, and John James. In 1900 two black women, Alice Nobles and Eliza Madison, operated their own restaurants, and Richard Powell had a butcher's shop, all on Old Sparta Road. A 1913 map reveals that a cabinetmaker, cobbler, jeweler, and three restaurant owners were in business near the bridge. The buildings constructed by the small-town black entrepreneurs were simple one-room wooden structures, occasionally featuring a second room for storage or a residence.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the most successful of the grocery and barroom owners was Orren James, who worked earlier as a clerk in the white man T.C. Johnson's barroom in Freedom Hill. James soon established his own business at the intersection of Old Sparta Road and Market Street (now Mutual Boulevard). The two-story brick building (shown above and now demolished) that he constructed there around the turn of the century was the most impressive commercial structure of the period. James lived upstairs and ran his general store and barroom on the lower level. James became one of the town's political leaders, serving a number of terms as Mayor and town commissioner. Local tradition claims that when the Tar River flooded Princeville in 1919 (flood of record), James was seen leaving the town by boat, holding onto a "chest full of money." After the 1919 disaster, James moved to Tarboro where he established a residence on Pitt Street, although he continued to operate his store in Princeville<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Logan, *The Negro in North Carolina*, page 231. According to Logan, the number of black merchants grew partly because of the general improvement in the post-Reconstruction economy and partly as a result of the "refusal of white businessmen to employ Negroes in other than menial occupations." Logan further notes that "some Negroes in an effort to free themselves from the wage earning class became their own employers."

<sup>29</sup> Edgecombe County Census, 1880: Population Schedule, pages 5-6; Edgecombe County Census, 1900: Population Schedule, pages 6-11; Levi Branson (ed.), *North Carolina Business Directory, 1890* (Raleigh: Levi Branson Office Publisher, 1889), vii, page 275; Sanborn Insurance Maps of Tarboro, 1913.

<sup>30</sup> Edgecombe County Census, 1880: Population Schedule, page 5; Matthewson and Hart, "*The Saga of Freedom Hill*"; Joe A. Mobley interview with James Edward Bridgers, merchant and former mayor, Princeville, March 10, 1981, hereinafter cited as Bridgers interview. Orren James died in Tarboro in 1939.

Another successful grocer was York D. Garrett, who became a leader in the local Republican Party, ran for the legislature, and served as a justice of the peace in the 1890s. As did James, Garrett moved to more socially prestigious Tarboro after acquiring wealth from his store in Princeville. He also operated a business in Tarboro and became a deacon and treasurer of Union Baptist Church. According to the Southerner, “He was one of Tarboro’s most worthy and respected Colored citizens.”<sup>31</sup>

Although successful businessmen enjoyed considerable influence in Princeville, few of the town’s merchants were as fortunate as James and Garrett. Retail commerce did improve around the turn of the century but not on a large scale; many businesses failed. A number of factors, common in black towns throughout the South and Midwest, frequently resulted in the total failure or rapid turnover in ownership of stores in Princeville. The most significant reason was merchants in Princeville simply could not compete with white businessmen in towns like Tarboro. Without capital black merchants could not stock the volume or variety of goods that the Tarboro store owners provided for their customers, black as well as white. Nor could they afford to allow credit as their white counterparts could. This inability to grant credit was particularly devastating because the postwar crop-lien system depended upon the extension of credit by merchants to farmers and sharecroppers. Black merchants also had to purchase their stock of goods from white wholesalers who were reluctant to give them credit, especially in hard times.<sup>32</sup>

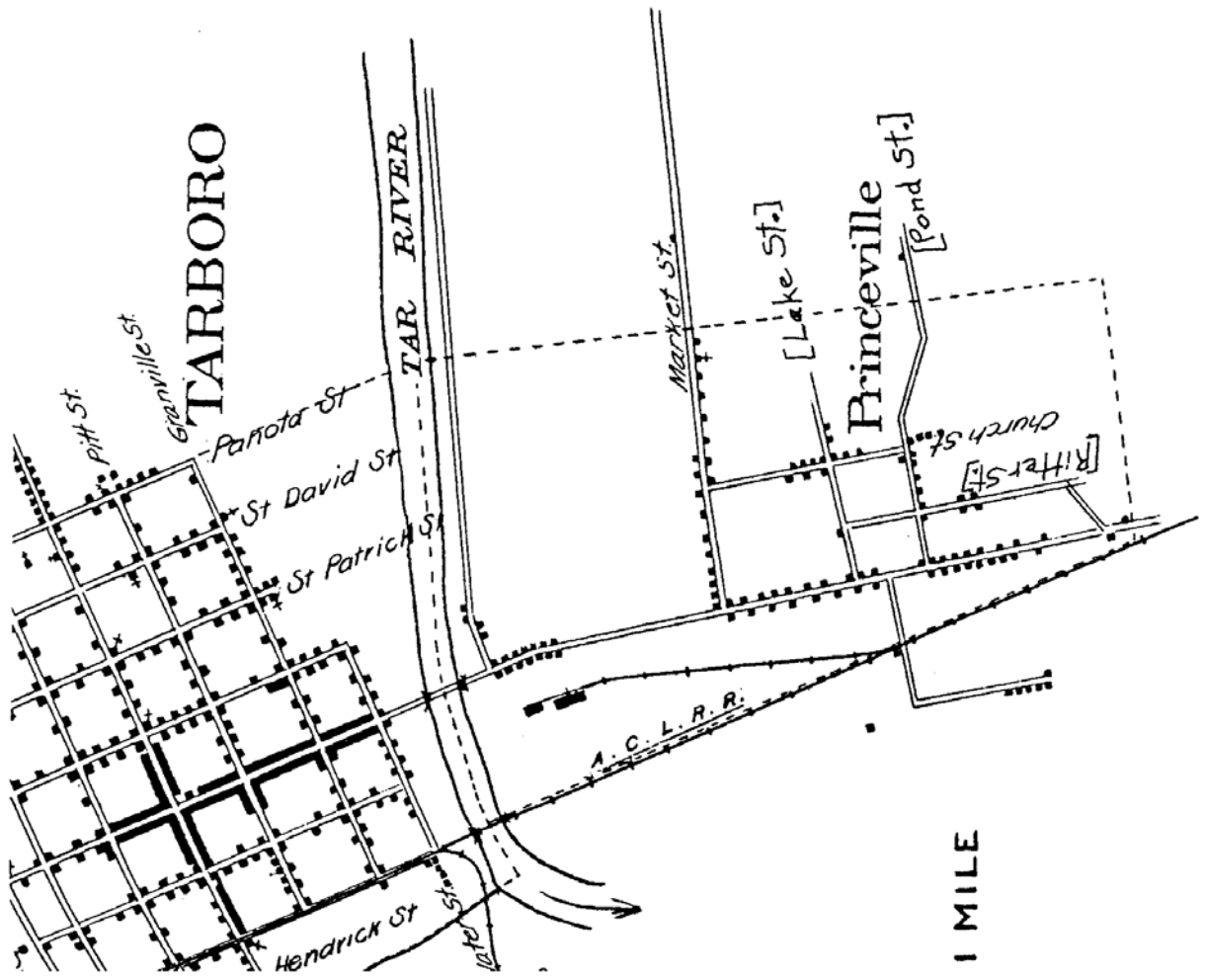
The new industrialization in Tarboro coupled with a late nineteenth century agricultural depression created a significant change in the types of occupations of Princeville residents. Manufacturing also brought Princeville its most significant period of economic progress at a time when other black communities in South Carolina, Mississippi, Kansas, and Oklahoma were experiencing decline, primarily because they remained tied to an agricultural economy. Of course, the people of Princeville took no large or direct share of the new prosperity accompanying manufacturing, although a number of them found laboring jobs in the new industries. Most of the benefits of industrialization came directly to blacks through the white residents of Tarboro who received the profits and salaries of the plants and mills as well as improvement in retail activity spawned by industrialization. When economic conditions improved in Tarboro, more whites began hiring laborers and servants. In the absence of agricultural employment for blacks, the population of Princeville provided sizable sources of such town jobs.

As a result of the improved economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Princeville expanded its borders and laid out a number of unpaved streets. A 1905 map indicates that there were 109 buildings standing in Princeville in that year. Most of these, both residential and commercial, stood on Old Sparta Road and Market Street (see map next page). Church Street had the

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<sup>31</sup> *Southerner*, December 10, 1928. Garrett died in Tarboro in 1928.

<sup>32</sup> Mobley, *Princeville, A Black Town in North Carolina, 1865-1915*, page 357; the impact of agricultural depression and shortage of capital on black merchants in towns in rural areas has been described in Crockett, *Black Towns*, pages 138, 157, 164-165. The turnover in Freedom Hill and Princeville store owners is reflected in the Edgecombe County Census, 1880, 1900 and 1910.



town's churches and a number of residences. A few structures were located on the River Road and on Pond, Lake and Ritter Streets.<sup>33</sup>

Signs of improvement were also visible in other areas and institutions. The public school or graded school, established in 1883, made significant progress under the leadership of a number of important black educators. Perhaps the best known of these was William P. Mobson, who became principal of the graded school in 1888, having already served as school examiner for Edgecombe County. The graded school did remarkably well in the period, considering that education "actually retrogressed in Edgecombe during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. According to one historian, Eric D. Anderson, the percentage of black students attending school in the county declined significantly in that period.<sup>34</sup> The 1880 and 1900 censuses however indicate that in Princeville a large majority of the school-age children were attending classes in those years and the literacy rate in Princeville showed considerable improvement. By 1910 literacy had improved even further. In the census of that year, almost all of the adult residents and school-age children reported that they could read and write. Of those who could not, the vast majority were born before the Civil War, usually being over sixty years old.<sup>35</sup>

In 1909 the Princeville Graded School held its first graduation exercises. Instruction included academic courses, but the emphasis was on vocational training. The strong emphasis upon training black students to be skilled workers reflected upon the educational philosophy of Booker T. Washington, who maintained that natural training for blacks was the key to their achieving economic security. School terms usually were held for four months of the year.<sup>36</sup>

Similar to education, religious activity and the number of churches in Princeville grew in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Mount Zion Primitive Baptist Church continued to expand its membership under the leadership of the Reverend Abraham Wooten. The present church building was constructed in the 1890s on Church Street. In 1892 the congregation purchased a lot just below the colored cemetery on Williamston Road which they used as a burial ground for its members.<sup>37</sup> In 1906 another black congregation, the Macedonia Baptist Church appeared. It met for a time in Orren James' store and then moved to a new church building on Stag Street (an extension of what is now Mutual Boulevard) west of Old Sparta Road. In 1914, the structure burned and was replaced by another one on the same site.<sup>38</sup>

The political world of blacks received a severe blow as the nineteenth century drew to a close. A political campaign built upon the notion of "white supremacy" was launched by the Democratic Party during the 1890s in an attempt to eliminate the Negro from politics and regain control of the state

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<sup>33</sup> Map of Edgecombe County, North Carolina, 1905, Compiled from Maps of the United States Geological Survey and from Private Surveys by Albert Pike and W.N. Brown, Topographers, USGS, Map Collection, State Archives; Sanborn Insurance Maps of Tarboro, 1923; *Southerner*, October 12, 1899.

<sup>34</sup> Matthewson and Hart, "Saga of Freedom Hill"; Anderson, The Black Second, pages 326-327.

<sup>35</sup> Edgecombe County Census, 1880: Population Schedule, pages 5-6, pages 39-42; Edgecombe County Census, 1900: Population Schedule, pages 6-11; Edgecombe County Census, 1910: Population Schedule, pages 23-30.

<sup>36</sup> *Southerner*, June 16, 1909

<sup>37</sup> Farmers' Advocate (Tarboro), April 13, 1892, hereinafter cited as Farmers' Advocate; Matthewson and Hart, "Saga of Freedom Hill."

<sup>38</sup> Matthewson and Hart, "Saga of Freedom Hill"; Sanborn Insurance Maps of Tarboro, 1923. In 1923 the church was the first one to have electricity. The 1914 building has since been razed.

government that had been lost to Republican-Populists in the election of 1894. The Democrats in 1898 determined to keep blacks from the polls through intimidation, manipulation of elections and fraud. White supremacy organization such as the “Red Shirts,” who were most active in the southeastern portion of the state, resorted to violence to prevent blacks from voting.<sup>39</sup> In Tarboro, in September, the editor of the *Southerner* stirred up anti-Negro sentiment by proclaiming, “From now until Election Day North Carolina’s political war will be waged upon the color line. White people must stand together in this election.” He declared, “...or the negro will go one step higher in the political scales and whites lower. Protect your wives and children by voting for a white man’s government.”<sup>40</sup> According to historian Alan D. Watson, 5,000 Democrats from Edgecombe and several surrounding counties gathered in Tarboro in October “to hear speeches, applaud the marching band, eat barbecue, and endorse white supremacy.” One reporter at that time observed that “Edgecombe Democrats have proclaimed to the world that they will no longer submit to Negro rule.” Intimidation of blacks worked for the Democrats in Edgecombe County, and the party of white supremacy carried the election.<sup>41</sup>

A logical result of the 1898 campaign was the enactment of so-called Jim Crow laws in North Carolina.<sup>42</sup> These were statutes designed to legitimize a policy of racial segregation by requiring that separate public facilities be established for whites and blacks.<sup>43</sup> Inhabitants of Princeville, like blacks throughout the state and region, were affected by the Jim Crow laws and the institutionalization of racial segregation. But because Princeville blacks were then part of a separate and exclusively black town, the impact of segregation may not have been as great for them as other blacks who were more closely tied with white society.<sup>44</sup>

Even more than that of 1898, the election of 1900 proved harsh for blacks. During the campaign white political terrorists such as the Red Shirts were probably more active than in 1898. Edgecombe County whites who wanted to end black suffrage and office holding formed organizations known as “white supremacy clubs” to achieve that end. These clubs were particularly visible just prior to the election.<sup>45</sup>

In an effort to remove blacks entirely as a political factor in the state, the Democrat-controlled legislature proposed an amendment to the state constitution that would disfranchise most Negroes in North Carolina. The “suffrage amendment,” as it was known, stipulated that all citizens who registered to vote must have paid a poll tax and be able to read and write any section of the constitution. Such a literacy test would have disfranchised illiterate whites as well as blacks. But an additional provision to the amendment known as the “grandfather clause” exempted illiterate whites from the strictures of the suffrage amendment until 1908; but had no effect upon illiterate blacks who as former slaves possessed no right to suffrage before 1867. In the election of 1900, intimidation by white supremacy clubs kept

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<sup>39</sup> Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), pages 136-154, hereinafter cited as Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics*.

<sup>40</sup> *Southerner*, September 8, 15, 1898.

<sup>41</sup> Watson, *Edgecombe County, A Brief History*, page 85.

<sup>42</sup> Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics*, page 189.

<sup>43</sup> Mobley, *Princeville, A Black Town in North Carolina, 1865-1991*, page 370.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Lefler and Newsome, *North Carolina*, 559-562; Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics*, 198-214; Watson, *Edgecombe County: A Brief History*, page 86.

blacks away from the polls. Election fraud also discounted Negro votes. The Democrats won the election, and the suffrage amendment passed. Residents of Princeville did not vote in this election. Although the passage of the suffrage amendment denied the voters of the black town their right to elect state and Federal officials, they remained unmolested in their municipal elections and continued to elect town officials as before.<sup>46</sup>

But even that privilege was soon in jeopardy, for the rise of white supremacy brought with it a serious threat to Princeville's continued existence as a town. As racism and black disfranchisement gained momentum, Tarboro and Edgecombe County whites began calling for Princeville's abolishment. These whites saw a successful black community as a threat to the doctrine of racial supremacy. Apparently, they reasoned that a community of Negroes who had proven themselves capable of success in business, religion, education, politics, and self-government ran counter to the whole concept of black inferiority. Furthermore, the racial fear spawned by white supremacy led whites to become more suspicious that violence against them might result from allowing blacks to live in a united mass, relatively free from the controls of white "law and order."<sup>47</sup>

Although their primary purpose of having Princeville abolished may have been to bolster the doctrine of white supremacy, local whites used an argument of crime and public misconduct among Princeville's inhabitants as justification for terminating the black town. ("Ironically, that was the same reason that whites had given for supporting the incorporation of the village in 1885."<sup>48</sup>). *The Southerner* insisted that Princeville's charter should be revoked by the legislature and the town annexed to Tarboro. The newspaper maintained that this measure would enable the Tarboro police and other officials to exert control over Princeville and thereby prevent violence and other crimes among the Negroes.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the white claims, violent and unlawful activity was probably no worse in Princeville than in most biracial communities. To further strengthen the creditability of their community as well as to improve living conditions and increase revenues, the citizens of Princeville approved a new set of town ordinances in 1907. These new regulations addressed public conduct, commercial activity, and improved sanitation. The ordinances also established new tax levies by which the town hoped to increase its

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<sup>46</sup> Lefler and Newsome, *North Carolina*, pages 559-562; Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics*, pages 200-203, and pages 209-210; Election Records, Edgecombe County Miscellaneous Papers, State Archives; Bridgers Interview with Joe. A. Mobley. [The political power of the people of Princeville and blacks throughout the South has been ended by intimidation and extralegal measures that violated the rights and privileges granted by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. After 1901, when southern blacks no longer had the right to vote, the Republican party abandoned its efforts to support black interests. It became instead the "lily-white" Republican party, whose existence revolved around Federal patronage. For many years thereafter, neither political party in the South attempted to reinstate the right of suffrage among the black population. In Princeville the inhabitants would not vote again until the New Deal era when the Democratic Party began to supersede the Republican party of the Reconstruction period in more closely advocating the interests of Afro-Americans. George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967, pages 165-169, pages 540-543], hereinafter cited as Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*; Bridgers interview.

<sup>47</sup> Lefler and Newsome, *North Carolina*, pages 559-562; Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics*, pages 200-203, 209-210; Election Records, Edgecombe County Miscellaneous Papers, State Archives; Bridgers Interview with Joe. A. Mobley.

<sup>48</sup> Mobley, *Princeville, A Black Town in North Carolina, 1865-1915*, page 371.

<sup>49</sup> Ordinances of the Town of Princeville, N.C., 1907, Edgecombe County Miscellaneous Papers, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Ordinances of Princeville, 1907.



revenue.<sup>50</sup> It was this last measure that further conflict developed among the Princeville residents, and once again the black “capitalists” -- merchants and other businessmen -- acted more for their own profit than in the interest of the community. The new taxes were imposed primarily on businesses and other commercial establishments, and merchants, shop owners, and craftsmen rose in opposition to the new tax ordinances. Their protest culminated in 1909 when a number of them petitioned the legislature to revoke Princeville’s charter. In their petition they complained that the new taxes on businesses and real estate were unjustified, that the town commissioners had sufficient revenue, and that “additional taxes will be taxation without representation.”<sup>51</sup> Rather than increase taxes to improve conditions in Princeville, a number of its prominent merchants sought to dissolve the very municipality that had made their opportunity to achieve financial success. Some of these black entrepreneurs even joined whites who were seeking to exploit Princeville for their own gain.<sup>52</sup>

Living conditions in Princeville in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were far from ideal. Sanitation was a problem. The constant flooding and the high water table resulted in stagnant water and breeding of mosquitoes. The contamination of drinking water and the close proximity of privies to wells brought disease and sickness. The 1907 town ordinances improved health conditions to some extent by ordering more stringent controls on loose animals, garbage disposal, the use of lime in privies, and other sanitary measures.<sup>53</sup>

Census records make possible some general observations about family life in Princeville from 1890 to 1910. During that period almost all inhabitants lived in single-family homes. In 1910, for example, 154 dwellings accommodated 164 households. The size of families appears to be about the same size as those white families in Edgecombe County; what role infant mortality may have had in this is not certain. In 1880 the largest family in Freedom Hill consisted of three adults (mother and two daughters) and eight children. In 1910, the largest household had 13 children, but that number included seven grandchildren. Occasionally, teenagers worked as laborers, but children generally were not part of the work force in Princeville. The censuses of 1880-1910 credited virtually all adult males with having employment (or at least one occupation), except for a very few, which included those 65 years of age or older. The overwhelming majority of women worked at job besides caring for families, and most were saddled with both responsibilities. In 1880, only 20 women out of the female population of 201 were listed as keeping house. In 1910, 39 women in a female population of 357 had the responsibility of caring for children and households. The census of that year lists but four adult women (ages 19 to 25) without employment either outside the house or raising families. The number of Princeville mulattoes (Norfleet, Battle, and others) indicates that miscegenation had been a common occurrence in the area in the antebellum period.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ordinances of the Town of Princeville, N.C., 1907, Edgecombe County Miscellaneous Papers, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Ordinances of Princeville, 1907.

<sup>51</sup> House Bill 1537, General Assembly Papers (1909); Matthewson and Hart, “Saga of Freedom Hill”; Bridgers interview with Joe A. Mobley; *Southerner*, March 4, 1909.

<sup>52</sup> Joe A. Mobley, Princeville, A Black Town in North Carolina, 1865-1915, page 375.

<sup>53</sup> Ordinances of the Town of Princeville, N.C., 1907, Edgecombe County Miscellaneous Papers, State Archives, hereinafter cited as Ordinances of Princeville, 1907.

<sup>54</sup> Edgecombe County Census, 1880: Population Schedule, pages 506, and pages 39-42; Edgecombe County Census, 1900: Population Schedule, pages 6-11; Edgecombe County Census, 1910: Population Schedule, pages 23-30.

Family structure and life underwent a recognizable change in one especially important aspect between 1880 and 1910. During that period the percentage of households headed by females continued to increase at a significant rate. In 1880 for example, seven percent of the households were headed by women. In 1900, the percentage had grown to 27, and by 1910, 30 percent of the Princeville families had females as heads. Although males continued to head the majority of households in Princeville from 1880 to 1910, there was, nonetheless, a definite and growing tendency toward a matriarchal society in the black town in those years. One may speculate as to why a trend toward female-dominated households occurred in Princeville between 1880 and 1910. As has been shown, industrialization converted Princeville's workers into a day-laboring and service oriented work force. This conversion may have had a detrimental effect on adult males in that most of them fell into the uncertain and possibly demeaning category of day laborers. That is, their employment varied according to immediate demand and lacked the stability of a fixed job. Most women who worked outside the home, on the other hand, enjoyed the certainty of steady, if menial, jobs as domestics, cooks, nurses, laundresses, and so forth. Thus, a situation that gave women regular work and salaries of sporadic employment and income may have led males to abandon the family out of poor self-esteem or to seek better economic opportunities elsewhere.

Although economic conditions and family relationships could be difficult in Princeville, the residents attempted to live as pleasant a social and cultural life as possible in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They celebrated holidays such as Emancipation Day on January 1 of each year and Independence Day on July 4. The churches of the community were the center of social life and frequently sponsored revivals and prayer meetings, which were accompanied by picnics, games, and socializing. Schools held exercises and cultural events.<sup>55</sup>

On the eve of the United States' entry into World War I, Princeville had achieved a modicum of success as a black town. The years 1880-1915 brought white supremacy and the abolition of black political rights, but not before the people of Princeville had made their voice heard in the political arena. The same period witnessed a modest economic improvement, which was reflected in the development of town government, schools, churches, and building trends and styles. This relative economic progress—which apparently did little to stabilize traditional family life in the black village—resulted indirectly from the impact of industrialization in Tarboro. World War I however, marked a turning point for Princeville as it did for southern Afro-Americans in general. During and after the war, which stimulated the nation's industrial economy, blacks in significant numbers migrated from the South to northern cities to find employment and escape white supremacy.<sup>56</sup> Between 1910 and 1923, Princeville's population declined from 636 to 300.<sup>57</sup> Those inhabitants who sought better opportunities and fled the north took the first steps out of the shadow of white dominance that had cast itself across the Tar River from Tarboro since the end of the Civil War.<sup>58</sup>

Since that time, and until 1999, the Town of Princeville had grown steadily, to a peak population of approximately 2,100 residents, just prior to Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd. The Town boasted approximately 30 commercial establishments, seven churches, and approximately 1,000 residences; most modest one-story homes, plus a Town Hall, elementary school, Police, Fire Department, and service facilities.

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<sup>55</sup> Bridgers interview; *Southerner*, September 6, 1900; August 31, 1905.

<sup>56</sup> See Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, page 69, 541.

<sup>57</sup> Edgecombe County Census, 1910: Population Schedule, pages 23-30; Sanborn Insurance Maps of Tarboro, 1923.

<sup>58</sup> Mobley, *Princeville, A Black Town in North Carolina, 1865-1915*, page 378.

The Town has great pride in its cultural significance, its history, and its survival in the face of constant challenges.

The greatest challenge for Princeville, however, then and now, was and is the constant threat of the Tar River flooding. After the flood of 1958, Mayor W. Ray Matthewson contacted Gov. Luther Hodges asking for help for Princeville's flood problem. In turn, Hodges requested the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to come from Wilmington to study the problem. Matthewson, mayor pro-tem J. E. Bridgers, and the town commissioners worked long and hard to push for the building of a dam. A flood control project, which called for the building of a dike, was finally approved in 1959, and the construction was completed in 1967. The dike served the town well until the Great Flood of 1999, after which it was repaired to continue protection from high water.

Throughout its history, Princeville has suffered from repeated flooding (1865, 1887, 1908, 1919 (flood of record), 1924, 1928, 1940, and 1958). After the building of a levee between 1965 and 1967, to prevent frequent flooding, the Town saw many modern improvements, the expanding of its borders, a growth in population and an increase in the number of business. In 1999, a 500-year flood caused by Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd overtopped and by-passed the northern end of the existing levee and wiped out the town, destroying or severely damaging almost all residences, destroying six of seven churches and virtually all of the Town's commercial structures, bringing national attention to Princeville. President William J. Clinton visited the flooded community and issued Executive Order No. 13146.

The 2009 supplement to the 2000 census showed that Princeville's per capita income was \$11,550, or 43% of the national average of \$27,041. Its median household income was \$19,412, or 37.7% of the national median household income. Fully 43.5% of the population lives below the poverty line; 3.2 times the national average. Its residents are largely female (61 percent) and elderly (51 percent), and only 3 percent held a college degree.

While many of the Town's residents displaced by the flood that accompanied Hurricane Floyd in 1999 have returned, and the population has rebounded to near 2,000 persons, the generally well-below median individual and household incomes, property and content values, and continued flood threat, put a damper on local investment, commercial investment, the return of businesses displaced by the flood, and job creation. Residents have lower-than-average mobility, due to lower-than-average automobile ownership, education, and no access to public transportation. All of the above factors play into the inability of the community to significantly rebound, or to justify Federal investment according to current economic project justification criteria.