

Extracts of interest from:

[Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State](#)

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This book was part of a nationwide series of guides in the 1930s that created work during the Depression for artists, writers, teachers, librarians, and other professionals. This classic book is a lively collaborative project that covers a distinct era in Mississippi from the hills to the Delta to the Gulf Coast. Even today this guide is an engaging look at the Magnolia State and includes driving tours featuring many of the state's treasures.

Of a total 586 pages, about 164 pages are of general information and history; 100 pages of description and city tours of Biloxi, Columbus, Greenwood, Gulfport, Holly Springs, Jackson, Laurel, Meridian, Natchez, Oxford, Tupelo and Vicksburg; and the final 250 pages of descriptive road tours through the state along federal and state highways.

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**Tour 7 (pp 406 – 412)**

Clarksdale – Indianola – Yazoo City – Jackson – Hattiesburg – Gulfport. US 49, US 49W.

Clarksdale to Gulfport, 317 m.

Yazoo & Mississippi Valley R.R. parallels route between Clarksdale and Jackson;

Gulf & Ship Island between Jackson and Gulfport.

Route paved throughout; two lanes wide.

Tourist accommodations in larger towns.

Sec. a CLARKSDALE to JACKSON, 157.6 m., US 49, 49W.

US 49 swings southward through the Delta and, until it meets the bluff hills at Yazoo City, in a hundred miles gives a good presentation of the new Delta and the old. The rapidly growing towns in the northern section have for the most part been established since 1900; many of the extensive plantations lying between them are owned and operated by corporations. Southward, the route traverses a section along the Yazoo River that is part of a land grant settled by Alvarez Fisk in the 1820's. Here along the river's bank and in the network of lakes that cut this country into hundreds of small islands are a number of the Delta's oldest homes. In these durable houses live descendants of the original landholders, growing cotton on the same plantations their ancestors cleared more than 100 years ago. In the summer the Delta is first a great field of green plants, then, after the bolls appear, a vast whiteness of cotton with the shapes of Negro pickers silhouetted against it in bold relief. In the winter the land lies sluggish, a rich black bog of unending flatness, while the rivers and bayous rise to stand level with the levees. In early spring come the overflows. Southeastward from Yazoo City US 49 crosses the hills that separate the

Pearl River valley from the Yazoo basin. The bluff country is studded with shortleaf pine and hardwood trees, with the bottom lands cleared for farming.

At CLARKSDALE, m. (173 alt., 10,043 pop.), is the junction with US 61 (see Tour 3, Sec. a).

The section S. between Clarksdale and Yazoo City is perhaps the most uniform of the State, the scenery, the evenly spaced towns, and the social and economic interests giving it the atmosphere of a large, friendly neighborhood.

MATTSON, 7.5 m. (163 alt, 200 pop.). De Soto's expedition passed immediately S. of here, and Charlie's Trace cut directly through the center of the village. Charlie's Trace, alleged to have been made by a Choctaw Indian, was a short cut from Sunflower Landing on the Mississippi River to a point in the hills 12 miles S. of Charleston, Miss. It was often the route of the outlaws who marauded through this section in the early 1800's. An INDIAN MOUND in the center of the village is made conspicuous by a small cemetery perched on top of it. The mound, said to have contained approximately 50 burials, has been excavated by archeologists from the Smithsonian Institution and artifacts have been removed.

At TUTWILER, 15.8 m. (157 alt., 873 pop.), US 49 forks into US 49W (R), which this route follows, and US 49E (see Side Tour 7A). Tutwiler is strung along Hobson Bayou in typical Delta fashion, the residences on one side and the stores on the other. The bayous, which run like veins through the Delta, are distinguishing marks upon a majority of the towns and, with grassy banks accented by willow and cypress trees, are spots of natural beauty. In the fall the cypress trees turn rusty red, giving color to an otherwise somber scene. Tutwiler, like all Delta towns, is liveliest on Saturday, when people from outlying plantations come in to trade.

ROME, 20.7 m. (146 alt., 250 pop.), for all its grandiose name is a plantation town. The daily train of the branch line of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley R.R., stopping here to pick up bales of cotton and an occasional passenger, is known locally as the Yellow Dog, commemorating the stray canine that used to chase the train through the village each time it passed.

At PARCHMAN, 24.0 m. (140 alt., 250 pop.), is the MISSISSIPPI PENAL FARM, a prison operated on an agricultural system. The farm is a typical Delta plantation, consisting of 15,497 acres planted in cotton, corn, and truck, with cotton the leading crop. The prisoners, separated into small groups, live in camps. The present (1937) number of prisoners is 1,989. A brick yard, a machine shop, a gin, and a storage plant are operated by convict labor. The prison is self-supporting and operates at a profit when the price of cotton is good. The "fifth Sunday" of months that have more than four Sabbath days is visitors' day, and it is then that Parchman is best seen. A train called the Midnight Special brings the visitors to the farm, arriving about dawn and leaving at dusk. The Negro prisoners have made up ballads about the train, which they sing and chant while they work, waiting for fifth Sunday. One song is:

"Heah comes yo' woman, a pardon in her han'  
Gonna say to de boss, I wants mah man,  
Let the Midnight Special shine its light on me."

Between Parchman and Indianola the Delta's largest plantations are concentrated. In late summer the fields are solid with white bolls; in winter they are singularly colorless, the furrowed ground covered with the previous year's cotton stalks. Against the encircling sweep of skyline are blurred the bare branches of trees.

WHITNEY, 29.1 m. (26 pop.), is headquarters for the Gritman-Barksdale plantation, owned and operated by a large Northern life insurance company. Divided into small tracts, the acreage of the plantation is worked by tenants on the sharecropper system.

Cotton fields stretching out interminably for miles on both sides of the highway are dotted with the tenants' cabins, each with its small front porch, a cistern, and a garden for growing vegetables, and each shaded by a chinaberry tree or two. The furnishings are few, usually consisting only of beds and chairs. When the families are large, the children often sleep on pallets on the floor.

DREW, 31.7 m. (136 alt., 1,373 pop.), is a pleasant town typical of the new Delta in its lack of provincialism. Drawing a wealthy planter trade, the shops cater to expensive tastes for smart frocks, shoes, hats, and the latest novelties. Restaurants offer a good cuisine. Drew citizens have forgotten the roomy Southern Planter type of architecture to build compact English and Georgian Colonial cottages.

RULEVILLE, 37.7 m. (131 alt., 1,181 pop.), like Drew, draws a substantial prosperity from the surrounding plantations. Here is a privately supported Chinese school for the children of the few Chinese families here and in Drew.

COTTONDALE, 40.2 m., is a group of neatly whitewashed tenant cabins clustered around a spreading, white frame plantation big house. The plantation bell in the yard is typical of the Delta, being used to summon hands from the fields. When rung its noisy clang is heard to the most remote corners of the plantation.

At 40.6 m. is the junction with a graveled road.

Left on this road 0.9 m. to an EXPERIMENTAL VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FOR NEGROES, established in 1914. The school consists of a one-story frame administration building, a professor's home, a frame bungalow type dormitory for faculty members and girl students, and 12 acres of land. Besides the regular vocational subjects, with emphasis on agriculture and home economics, the school offers a regular four year high school course. It is supported jointly by Federal and county funds and has approximately 230 students.

At 42.1 m. is DODDSVILLE (124 alt., 317 pop.), a plantation center for trading and shipping cotton.

Toward the S. the preponderance of Negroes is striking. About the plantation stores a majority of the people are Negroes, and practically all the tenant cabins are occupied by Negroes. The Negroes' aged automobiles and slow-moving mule teams furnish a large part of the traffic along the highways.

At 50.4 m. is the village of SUNFLOWER (117 alt., 530 pop.). On plantations in the vicinity perhaps more cotton is grown per acre than in any other part of the State.

South of Sunflower the highway passes through a swamp fairly well wooded with cypress, oak, and holly trees to cross Sunflower River at 36.8 m.

At 55.3 m. is the junction with a graveled road.

Left on this road 0.6 m. to FAISONIA PLANTATION with a story-and-a-half Georgian Colonial type cottage, unpretentious but roomy and gracious appearing. A large veranda is screened against mosquitoes, and the house sits high on brick pilings to protect it from Delta floods. About the house are many things that make for comfortable plantation life – shade of live oak, cedar, and pecan trees, servants' quarters, a carriage house (now used as a garage), fruit trees, and an artesian well. The boat landing on the river is a reminder of the days when Sunflower River was navigable and cotton was shipped downstream to New Orleans by boats that came back laden with imported luxuries. The plantation was bought by George W. Faison during the War between the States.

At 58.5 m. on US 49W is the junction with US 82 (see Tour 6).

INDIANOLA, 59 m. (117 alt, 3,116 pop.), the county seat of Sunflower on cypress-shaded Sunflower River, developed on a clearing made near Indian Bayou in the late 1830's. Ginning and compressing, along with administering justice, are its chief businesses.

Between Indianola and Inverness, "red cotton," a variety recently imported and grown with success in this area, adds color to the landscape.

INVERNESS, 67 m. (112 alt., 683 pop.), was named for the Scottish city by a native who gave the railroad a right-of-way through her plantation. Though many plantation settlements had been made in the vicinity much earlier, the town was not settled until 1904.

Right from Inverness on a graveled road to HOLLYWOOD, 2.2 m. (open by permission), an early American 17th century type house built in 1855. It was erected exclusively with slave labor, and bricks, puncheons, floors, walls, and joists were hand-made. Logs used for walls are 50 feet long and are pinned together with wooden pegs, the cracks being filled with sassafras blocks and plaster to make them airtight. The house sits upon a high ridge, and when built was

surrounded by a grove of holly trees. During the flood of 1882 all the cattle of the section were driven here for protection, and when hay gave out the holly trees were cut and fed to them. One of the owners of the house was killed in an upstairs room by a Negro slave, and his ghost is alleged to haunt the house today.

Between Inverness and Yazoo City the highway penetrates the lake country of the Delta. This is the rendezvous for fishermen and hunters throughout the State. In the labyrinth of streams game fish abound, and even wild turkeys, deer, and foxes are in the dense woods along their banks. Cotton fields still figure predominantly on the scene but, with the usual gins and compresses, large sawmills show themselves in the towns.

At 71.2 m. is the junction with a graveled road.

Right on this road to the PRENTISS MOUND, 1.6 m., standing 20 feet high and well wooded. Built by the Indians in prehistoric times, the mound was given local fame when Seargent S. Prentiss addressed a group of Jackson lawyers from its summit in 1841. The lawyers were on a bear hunting trip and Prentiss' speech, in a light vein, was said to be "not for publication."

At 73.7 m. the highway crosses LAKE DAWSON, a narrow winding stream, its bank outlined by cypress trees. Fishing here is excellent.

ISOLA, 73 m. (107 alt, 519 pop.), on the banks of Lake Dawson, was established in what was then a wilderness abounding in deer, wildcats, foxes, turkeys, and bears. The name was given to suggest its remote location. Two years later a large sawmill was built on the banks of the lake and as the country was gradually cleared other mills were established. Lumbering gives the town its tone today.

The further S. the route goes, the more scenic it is, with frequent hardwood forests breaking the monotony of featureless cotton fields, and ribbons of lakes winding through the flat land.

BELZONI, 83.1 m. (124 alt., 2,735 pop.), is a part of the section purchased by Alvarez Fisk in 1827. Fisk laid out streets, measured off lots, named his town Fisk's Landing, and then waited for buyers to come, amusing himself meanwhile hunting and fishing on his plantation. The influx of settlers, however, was less than Fisk expected. At the time of the War between the States only a dozen or more families had arrived at Fisk's town, now called Belzoni in honor of the Italian archeologist, Giovanni Battista Belzoni, an acquaintance of Fisk's. When Grant was planning the siege of Vicksburg, he sent a fleet of 19 gunboats up the Yazoo River to open the way to that city. The boats gave out of fuel on the way, and the Federal soldiers stopped at the squat log HOUSE OF STEVE CASTLEMAN on the river, where they knocked down fences and took them away to burn for fuel. The W. S. KNOTTS HOME, Jackson St., faces the Yazoo River from the top of an Indian mound. The house marks the original site of Fisk's Landing.

The Yazoo River parallels the route between Belzoni and Silver City. In this section the watermarks on houses and trees tell the history of past Delta floods. During high water in the spring, when the river overflows its banks, a majority of the occupants of the cabins in the river flats "refugee" to the hills.

SILVER CITY, 89.1 m. (361 pop.), is sprawled perilously close to the banks of Silver Creek, but is protected from its high water by a steep levee. Formerly the village was called Palmetto Home for the plantation around which it grew. The first house was recently burned but palmettos growing luxuriantly around the marshes of the creek indicate why it was so called. The /.

PARASOTT HOUSE, on Silver Creek, is a dogtrot duplex. Two brothers built the house of logs in the 1850's, separating



#### CULTIVATING A FIELD OF YOUNG COTTON

duplicate living quarters by a wide central hall. This hall has now been enclosed, and the logs have been weatherboarded, but the design of the house remains unchanged.

Between Silver City and Yazoo City the cotton fields fast lose themselves in densely wooded swamps, the country becomes more sparsely settled, and the Yazoo River constantly appears and disappears (L). An occasional gloomy stretch of swampland, rank with cypress, palmettos, and low thickets, and overshadowed with gray moss, gives a vivid conception of the old Delta area before clearings were made and levees built.

MIDNIGHT, 94.1 m. (250 pop.), was born of a poker game played beside a campfire in the dismal swamp here 50 or more years ago by a party of hunters. One of the men laid claim to the land upon which they had stopped, placing it as a bet. He lost. The winner, looking at his watch,

said, "Well, boys, it's midnight, and that's what I'm going to call my land." He settled here to build the first house upon the exact spot where they had camped that night.

At 99.5 m. (R), visible from the highway, is an INDIAN MOUND. It is especially conspicuous because of a plantation bell perched on its summit.

South to Yazoo City the highway winds. Festooning moss drapes the trees, making the woodlands perennially picturesque, while their density makes them an excellent habitat for wild game.

As the highway crosses Yazoo River, 113.2 m., the Yazoo Bluffs, visible in the foreground, give a striking contrast of Delta with hills.

YAZOO CITY, 114.6 m. (120 alt., 5,579 pop.), offers a contrast of Delta with bluffs, part of it being built on a low flat bordering the river, and the other perched precipitously on steep hills above. The town was established in 1824 as Hanan's Bluff, and for many years, with its booming river trade, was a more important town than Jackson. It was incorporated in 1830 as Manchester, in 1839 its name was changed to Yazoo City. During the War between the States major battles and a great many skirmishes took place on the river. At low-water periods the hulk of an old gunboat sunk by the Federals is visible. In 1904 fire swept the town and destroyed its ante-bellum homes and buildings. Rebuilt since that time, Yazoo City is modern in appearance. During the flood of 1927, a large Red Cross camp for refugees stood on the bluff above the river, sheltering people from the vast inundated area in northwest Mississippi, Yazoo City is the birthplace (1867) of Rear Admiral Thomas Pickett Magruder, D.S.M., now retired from active service.

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### **Side Tour 7A (pp 420 – 423)**

Tutwiler – Greenwood – Lexington – Pickens. US 49E, State 12.

Tutwiler to Pickens, 98.2 m.

Yazoo & Mississippi Valley R.R. parallels route to Tchula.

Paved highway to Greenwood; remainder under construction.

Accommodations in towns.

US 49E, branching southward from US 49W at Tutwiler, follows the eastern rim of the Delta to Tchula. At Tchula the route swings eastward to climb from the Delta into one of the oldest settled sections of the Central Hills and to end at Pickens. The Delta is flat and black, with numerous lakes and bayous; it is a cotton land divided into extensive plantations and cultivated by the labor of Negro tenants. The hill country is the stronghold of the small farm owner and of

numerous though small sawmill interests. Here diversification has made headway in its fight against King Cotton, with dairying and cover crops becoming a part of every farm.

At TUTWILER, 0 m. (157 alt., 873 pop.) (see Tour 7, Sec. a), is the junction with US 49W (see Tour 7, Sec. a).

SUMNER, 5 m. (618 pop.), is divided by CASSIDY BAYOU. The bayou, the longest in the State, has its ghost. At intervals for 25 years the ghost has appeared at the home of Boone Jenkins, a farmer living one mile N. of Sumner. Each appearance is accompanied by weird voices and the shriek of a woman. Persons who have followed the voice say that it leads to the bayou and, in some instances, to the Indian mounds in the vicinity; the mystery of the Cassidy ghost has never been solved.

WEBB, 7m. (153 alt., 531 pop.), is the twin of Sumner, the interests of the two towns being almost inseparable. On the old highway between the two are a cotton mill and cemetery shared by both.

Left from Webb on a graveled road to TALLAHA SPRINGS, 3 m. (overnight accommodations, boating, fishing, hiking).

At SWAN LAKE, 10.3 m. (147 alt, 100 pop.), a low, white frame plantation house (R) is typical of the modern Mississippi planter home.

Left from Swan Lake on a dirt road to the STATON HOUSE, 2 m., a typical ante-bellum plantation home, built with slave labor in the latter part of the 1820's by Eli Staton and given to his eldest son, James Harvey Staton. It is of the story-and-a-half post-Colonial type, with wide white clapboarded walls, two chimneys at each end, and a small square portico. The house faces a levee built before 1830; in the Negro quarters near the house is the first Staton home, a squat log structure.

South of Swan Lake there are 10 Negro cabins to every white cabin, and Negro schools, churches, and cemeteries predominate. Scantly clad children play in the cabin yards, men and women fish on the banks of bayous and lakes and in late summer pick the cotton.

Negroes make almost a ritual of the cotton picking. They stoop before the plants, pull the white seedy cotton from the bolls, and place it in long white sacks, which they trail behind them. Each movement is graceful and rhythmic, and is often performed to the accompaniment of song. These cotton-picking songs are rarely sung in chorus, but rather as a number of harmonizing solos. The tune varies from a minor note of despair to a triumphant major:

"Old Massa say, 'Pick Dat Cotton! (oratorical tone)

Can't pick cotton, Massa (whining tone)

Cotton seed am rotten! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

MINTER CITY, 23.8 m. (350 pop.), was settled when Delta land was selling for 25¢ an acre. The J. A. TOWNES HOME, the oldest in the county, on the western bank of Tallahatchie River, is a log house built near the ground with a breezy open hall.

At 3.5 m. is the junction with a graveled road.

Left on this road to SHELLMOUND, 0.5 m. (75 pop.), the site of a battle between the Chakchiuma and allied Choctaw and Chickasaw. Legend says the battle gave the Yazoo (Ind., river of death) River its name.

At 39.2 m. is the junction with US 82 (see Tour 6).

US 49E turns R. on Grand Blvd. which crosses the river and becomes Fulton St.

GREENWOOD, 43 m. (143 alt, 11,123 pop.) (see GREENWOOD).

*Points of Interest.* Cotton gins and compresses, Terry collection of old relics, and others.

Right from Greenwood on Grand Blvd., here old US 82, to the WRECK OF THE STAR OF THE WEST, 2.4 m., visible in Tallahatchie River when the water is low. The ship was scuttled at Fort Pemberton during the War between the States to block the channel and prevent passage of Federals in their effort to get to the north side of Vicksburg. It was captured at Sabine Pass by General Van Dorn without a shot being fired; the officers and crew were ashore on a frolic. General Van Dorn, singularly enough, was in charge of a cavalry detachment at the time. On the same road is the SITE OF FORT PEMBERTON, 3.2 m., marked by a cannon. This fort was thrown across a narrow neck of land separating the Yazoo and Tallahatchie Rivers and delayed considerably the fall of Vicksburg. Confederate soldiers, not knowing the war was over, manned the fort for two months after peace was signed.

The route continues on Fulton St.; R. on Henry St. ; L. on Mississippi Ave. (US 49E).

At 50.8 m. (R) is ARCHERLEADER PLANTATION (private), a two-story white frame house with one of the best collections of fine old furnishings in the State; these were brought from Anchuka, the ancestral home of the Archer family (see Tour 3, Sec. b). This plantation has some of the better type tenant cabins of the Delta. Three and four rooms large, they are painted white with green trim.

Between Archerleader and Tchula the bluff hills are visible (L), contrasting sharply with the low, wide Delta horizon.

TCHULA, 67.8 m. (130 alt., 907 pop.), is divided by Tchula Lake. The lake at one time was navigable, being known as Little River, and was the shipping point for an abundance of cotton. Though no longer used for river traffic, the lake now gives the town commercial importance in that it abounds in catfish. Thousands of pounds of fish are caught annually and marketed in

neighboring towns or shipped to distant markets. Boats, with Negroes to paddle them, are available for 25¢ an hour, and in the vicinity are numerous camping sites equipped with cabins.

At Tchula is the junction with State 12. The route continues southeastward on State 12, climbing from the lakes and bayous of the Delta into the bluff hills that mark the central part of the State.

LEXINGTON, 80.8 m. (209 alt., 2,590 pop.), the seat of Holmes Co., is one of the older towns of the Central Hills. Established as a trading post immediately after the Treaty of Doak's Stand, Lexington was incorporated on Feb. 25, 1836, and in 1906 was raised to the status of a city. Though a trading center for the surrounding farm country, shipping 12,000 bales of cotton and 300,000 pounds of butter annually, Lexington is largely dependent on the lumber and the sand and gravel industries.

Left from Lexington on the old road to Emory to the J. H. ROGERS HOME, 8 m. (open by permission), a large rambling two-story house built by Col. J. H. Rogers in 1817. The construction of the house, built of hand-hewn lumber, was planned and supervised by Kirl Dixon, a Negro slave. Divided by a wide hall, open at each end, the house contains five bedrooms, a dining room, and a kitchen. The house, like the farm land surrounding it, has been in the possession of the Rogers family since its erection. Strangely, neither land nor house has ever been mortgaged.

The route between Lexington and Pickens passes through low-rolling hill lands, where small sawmilling interests supplement the incomes from small diversified farms of cotton and corn, and dairying.

At 96.6 m. is the junction with US 51 (see Tour 5, Sec. a), 1.6 miles N. of Pickens (see Tour 5, Sec. a).