

Nationwide Civil Rights Education Delegation Visits Marks

January 8th, 2019 By Velma Benson-Wilson, Quitman County Administrator and Kevin Dayhoff, former Mayor of Westminster MD.



Marks, Miss. - On January 4, 2019, a nationwide delegation visited Marks, Miss. The 51-member delegation, from as far away as New England, Chicago, Connecticut, Seattle, Baltimore, and Westminster, MD. were part of an educational tour of historic civil rights sites in Atlanta, GA., Tuskegee, AL, Montgomery, AL, Ruleville, MS, and Birmingham, AL. The participants included folks from The Ira & Mary Zepp Center for Nonviolence & Peace Education at McDaniel College in Westminster, Md, the Carroll County Md. Branch 7014 of the NAACP, and Antioch University in Seattle, WA.

The primary focus of the visit to Marks was an interest in learning more about the “Poor People’s Campaign” led by Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). However members of the group, which included professors, students, former elected and appointed officials, retired law enforcement, farmers, and business owners; also expressed an interest in learning more about opportunities to share resources, experiences and expertise in areas such as tourism, government, public policy, education, and economic development.



Civil Rights Education Delegation.

toric civil rights activities in Marks during 1968. After an opening invocation by the Rev. Michael Jossell, Sr., pastor of the Mount Zion Baptist Church and Manuel Killebrew, current Quitman County Board of Supervisors president, who shared that he was there when the Mule Train rolled into Washington, DC and that he took part in helping with the construction of Tent City on the Mall in Washington, DC in 1968. Dr. Valmadge Towner, president of Coahoma Community College, participated in the panel discussion. He said that he appreciated the invitation to participate in the forum and that it is important for the local leaders of Quitman County to keep the storied history of the civil rights struggle alive. “This forum, allowed persons like me to actually hear firsthand accounts from persons who witnessed and or participated in the Mule Train experience,” said Towner. He also indicated that the nationwide civil rights education delegation visit to Marks is a testament to the importance of Quitman County’s contribution to the civil rights struggle in the 1960s. Towner is hopeful that this event and discussion will ignite a desire for younger people to learn more about their community’s past, so that they can authentically and deeply appreciate the amenities that we enjoy today.



*James Meredith***

Civil Right Activist James Meredith was present in the audience and the tour group had the opportunity to meet with him and hear his remarks. Meredith is an iconic figure in history and is credited with facilitating Dr. King’s visit to Marks in 1966 to attend Armstead Phipps’s funeral at Valley Queen Church. Phipps died of a heart attack during Meredith’s Walk Against Fear. The group was also honored with the presence of Ora B. Phipps, the widow of Armstead Phipps. Now in her 90s, she shared poignant insights and details about historic events from over 50 years ago.

In addition to panelists sharing the history of the Mule Train, Velma Wilson, Quitman County Administrator, focused further attention to important future economic and educational goals for the City of Marks and Quitman County. Wilson was joined by Jaby Denton of the Reclaimed Project, Mitch Campbell of the Marks Project and Dr. Evelyn Jossell, Superintendent of the Quitman County School District. The panel members shared insights and identified needs and

resources essential in helping the community to continue to re-invent itself, especially for the young families and children. Jossell stated, “The future generation needs to picture their lives with the necessary means to thrive, compete, and become productive individuals that one day will be a part of and give back to this community.”

Wilson emphasized the necessity for collaborative partnerships and private investors to help push forth the initiatives in which the City of Marks and the Quitman County Board of Supervisors have invested. These initiatives, according to Wilson, include the newly constructed Amtrak station and the first phase of the construction of a safe neighborhood playground. Also included is the beginning phase of the opening of a job and career training center, and the opening of a county-wide Interpretive Center. Other initiatives involve placing a priority on tourism by supporting the annual Mules & Blues Festival and the beginning stage of downtown revitalization as a result of the efforts of the Reclaimed Project that renovated an older building on Main Street which now provides free housing for teachers.

Killebrew hopes these initiatives and investments by the local stakeholders will attract businesses or companies that will locate in Quitman County. He further stated, “jobs would certainly help remedy the problem of our declining population, improve the overall living conditions of the citizens, increase the city and county tax revenues to invest more in education, housing, roads and bridges.”



*Charles Alphin, Sr., and tour participants sing, “We Shall Overcome”****

Lackey said at the end of the program, “It was so gratifying to know that these academicians thought Marks was the highlight of this civil rights tour of the places they visited in the south. This implies that Marks can become a historic destination, which of course is our dream.”

Zepp Center co-founders Drs. Charles Collyer and Pamela Zappardino have helped sponsor historical and educational tours since January 1997. Collyer and Zappardino said they were excited about the visit and the opportunities.

Kevin Dayhoff was on the tour. He writes history for the Baltimore Sun Media Group. He is a retired farmer, the former mayor of Westminster, MD., and the current secretary of the local Carroll County, MD NAACP branch. He said of the tour and panel discussion, “The purpose of studying history is not to go back to the past, but to bring the past to the present and use it to help shape the future.”

Charles Alphin, Sr., the director and CEO of DDK Historical and Educational Tours, which facilitated the visit, has been working with the King Center in Atlanta and guiding historic tours since the 1980s. He said after the visit, “If you do not know where you come from, you don’t know where you are going.”

For more information about Quitman County, please visit our website at: www.quitmancountymys.org



****Photographs courtesy of Kevin Dayhoff**



*Samuel McCray serving as tour guide.***



*Manuel Killebrew, Dr. Valmadge Towner, Helen Ingram, Samuel McCray, Reverend Michael Jossell, Sr. ***



*Dr. Hilliard L. Lackey III and Mrs. Ora B. Phipps***



*Jaby Denton, Mitch Campbell, Dr. Evelyn Jossell, and Velma Benson Wilson, County Administrator***