A Case Study
Assessing the Possibilities

Booneville, Mississippi

The Small Town Center 1997
From the fall of 1996 to the fall of 1997, Mississippi State University architecture students and members of the MSU Center for Small Town Research and Design (Small Town Center) spoke to many of you, participated in round-table discussions, photographed and sketched various aspects of your town and developed areas of research. In March we made a presentation to the Rotary Club and placed the presentation in a gallery at the Northeast Community College for a couple of months. We then ran a series of articles describing some of the things that we discovered and ideas that we had heard from some of you. We want you to continue to share your opinions: are we still presenting ideas that you think have potential and that you’d like to see the leaders of your community pursue or ideas that you believe would never work? Your opinions and continuous involvement in this process are essential. Planning a city is an

Booneville, Mississippi
A Case Study Assessing the Possibilities

This work includes a series of newspaper articles that we have written over the course of the Fall 1997 semester. These articles include ideas and observations that were made from the Fall of 1996 through the Fall of 1997. This collection of information serves as the final report for the City of Booneville.

Whittlers on the Prentiss County Courthouse lawn.
act of community participation and an expression of belief in its future. The work that we are going to present attempts to show how considering the places we live in might play a larger role in generating more choices and better decisions for your city. While our approach is based upon examining the physical character of your neighborhoods, physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems. But neither can healthy economic and social conditions be sustained without a supportive physical environment. This work seeks to help you begin to design solutions that:

- Generate innovative, creative options
- Fit into the community
- Build upon the positive, physical aspects of the place
- Create a physical environment that addresses economic and social problems
- Are both functional and beautiful

We have been greatly inspired by your organization of the community-wide construction of the Children’s Park; by the establishment of a beautification committee; by your becoming a Main Street Community; and by the commitment of your leaders and citizens to communicate their ideas with us. Your 1998 Program of Work is very impressive and has addressed many of the things we had discussed in 1997. We found this statement in a book called Planning to Stay by William Morrish and Catherine Brown and have adapted it to you because we believe that it is a good benchmark from which to proceed:

*We, the citizens of (Booneville), have been given a great physical legacy. The gift of our city has been built block by block, layer by layer, for more than one hundred years by those who came before us. Spreading outward from our downtown core—and helping to sustain it—are homes, infrastructures, services and the diverse social fabric, which is our commonwealth. But we recognize that our city is at a turning point. Therefore, we declare our stewardship of this legacy and pledge our efforts to ensure safe neighborhoods, stable schools, affordable housing, amenable streets, resourceful development, equitable access to goods, services, and jobs, and an integration of the natural environment. Let our acts not diminish this gift, but leave it greater, better, and more beautiful than it was given to us. This ground—our common ground—is a good place to start.*

---


---

**What Have You Inherited?**

*The moment comes: we intersect a history, a long existence, offering it our fresh discovery as regeneration.*

In exploring one’s heritage, past priorities of a society are discovered and begin to help us understand how our current perceptions and principles have been shaped. Each of you has your own personal history which has helped to form what we know as Booneville’s history. In clarifying historic identity we should not be working towards identifying a
sanctioned overarching history, but instead towards revealing a rich and complex view of collected individual tales.

Finding historical artifacts of Booneville, which give us clues, has been a great challenge. We have found a few things which we believe scratches the surface of what may exist. We are certain that with each artifact there are memories and stories that need to be recalled.

**Artifacts Collected Thus Far**

In the beginning of our search we found that the only historical information that the City reserves for public access is in the Northeast Regional Library in a book entitled *History of Prentiss County, Mississippi*. In it, there is a recount of Booneville’s early history, a collection of photos, and a chronological account of events and building constructions from 1861 to 1984. We urge you to document the past thirteen years of history so that the story may continue [Since this research began, the past fourteen years have been documented in a book entitled *Prentiss Counties Memories*]. We then pursued the possibility that old maps and photos might be stored at the Prentiss County Courthouse, but had no luck there.
From there, we went to Mississippi State University’s Mitchell Library and found a Sanborn map of Booneville dated 1910. The Sanborn Map Company was an establishment in New York which documented towns and cities across the country for insurance companies. These maps are beautifully made with an incredible amount of detail describing buildings and civic infrastructures. We then traveled to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and found three other Sanborn maps on microfiche dating 1904, 1921, and 1943.

While at the MS Dept. of Archives & History we also found a dozen files describing public and private historic structures: the Prentiss County Courthouse, the old Booneville High School, First Methodist Church, First Baptist Church, the old U.S. Post Office building, the Booneville Hardware warehouse building, the Price Home, the Richard Berry Smith Home, the Patrick Place and the entire exchange of letters and newspaper articles between Mayor Murphy, the Mississippi Dept. of Archives & History and historic archaeologist Jack Elliott (see Appendix). A discovered text (also,
see map on page 3) from Hometown Mississippi by James F. Brieger had an interesting way of identifying the relation between geography, industry and identity:

*Booneville owes its existence to the building of the Mobile & Ohio Railroad which was projected in 1948 and completed in 1858. The town was named for Colonel Reuben Boone whose family’s names are listed in the town’s first census. Booneville is the highest point on the railroad and is said to have been chosen by the Indians as a place of refuge from storms because of its protection from the southwest by the Tippah Hills.*

As we continued our search, we discovered that Mayor Lambert has a collection of photos and that Tom Vanstory also has a wonderful collection of photos and that Tom Vanstory also has a wonderful collection.
of black and white photos along with a blueprint of an old town plan, date unknown.

**Two Suggested Directions**

First, *collect and archive the found information*: Adhering to the Copyright laws, purchase copies of maps. Make photo negatives of old photos and print new copies. We recommend that the public library keep copies and that the Chamber of Commerce have images digitally available for future publications.

Second, *create a Booneville Heritage Week*: Appoint a Town Historian and/or Historical Committee that includes people who have an intense interest in collecting stories, photos of the public schools, and photos of the community college. These things could be collected by the following:
• Essay contest where children would collect stories of events from relatives and friends of the family about the life in Booneville;
• Photography contest where past and current photographs of landmark buildings and places would be exhibited and awarded;
• Story-telling event where those that have a story to tell would gather with others and exchange the stories—these could be recorded and contribute to the folklore of this place;
• Region-wide bus tour of historic Civil War sites related to the Booneville area battles;
• Bring in a well-known historian or literary scholar to speak about southern culture and its history;
• Series of interviews with long-time residents would be published in newspapers;
• Tours of historic buildings, houses, cemeteries and landmarks;
• Display historically significant newspaper editions that have shaped the local history;
• Gallery exhibit of collected historic photos and maps (each year add to the collection).

History only exists as it can be recalled. Identify means of collecting information, make it alive and meaningful. Develop a Folklore of your place. Keep the search for knowledge of the past alive through many interpretations. The “facts” may sometimes conflict, sometimes they may align—it is this variety of views that helps give a place character.

Shaping an Identity

Your identity is inherited by its history, yet it is continually reshaped. It is important to understand Booneville’s role in the larger regional context of the local counties of northeast Mississippi and within the larger tri-state region. This can be achieved by recognizing the strengths of your institutions as well as recognizing the landscape qualities which make your city unique. We have identified aspects of Booneville which are commonly identified among citizens of Booneville and those from other communities. We have illustrated these issues on the map on page nine. Does the following list of items adequately identify the institutions you might list if you were describing this place to a stranger?

Established and Evolving Regional Institutions

I. Northeast Mississippi Community College. This college is established within a fairly large territory considering that the other nearby two-year and four-year colleges are Ole Miss, MSU, MUW; as well as out-of-state Jackson State Community College, TN, University of North Alabama and Northwest Shoals Community College, AL. NEMCC serves an important niche in that it gives young people the opportunity to attend school near their home; to pursue a fine two-year degree; or to complete some basic courses before pursuing a degree at a larger University. The college has a clear physical presence within Booneville. Yet, the college seems a bit detached from its community in that those we interviewed weren’t always
aware of events and classes that they might participate in. How can the potential of this place as a center for cultural events and adult education be fully realized?

2. Industry. Many people that we interviewed were very proud of the quality and number of industries Booneville has attracted, and rightfully so. It makes good sense that Booneville would continue to draw more industry with its convenient location to major connecting highways. As new industry is attracted, where will it be located? What is Booneville’s particular niche in the larger regional context? How can the city strengthen its support to industry and industry support civic life? Can a higher quality of life be shared?

3. New Earth and Science Center. The facilities and curriculum of the new Earth and Science Center will establish your community as a leader of public education in the northeast Mississippi region. Such centers are rare and exhibit an extraordinary commitment to a community’s future via its
young people. It will attract young families. What will their housing, commercial, and service needs be? Not only can this center serve the youth enrolled there but might it also serve youth from the larger region? Your community can serve as a leader with its model pilot program among public educators, how can you actively shape this new identity?

4. New Agricultural Center. This new center will allow for larger assemblies and events. Might this facility support industry, public education and college-life activities? Are there northeast Mississippi or tri-state activities that need a location? What is the role of this new center?

**Arrival Points into Booneville**

5. Well-marked Highway 45 Arrival Point. This entry into the city is well-marked and well-engineered. We believe that more attention could be given to the perceived quality of this entry. In the Spring, the red clover in the median is extraordinary. We believe that it should be more heavily planted at this location and be developed with other types of flowers and seasonal plantings. The concrete islands at the arrival ramps should be redesigned with plantings to make the entry into Booneville more memorable.

6. Potential Extraordinary College Street Arrival Point. We discovered this poorly-identified entry into the city after visiting Booneville a few times. It became our favorite entry into the city with the beautiful historic College Street, a gentle turning road in the rolling pastoral landscape. For the first-time visitor this entry into the city could make a very favorable impression, if the visitor knew that it existed. First, this road should be marked as a historic road leading to the Chamber of Commerce/Tourist Center, not allowing truck thoroughfare. Second, Booneville has a great opportunity to serve the Highway 45 tourist with restaurants, gasoline and hotels and should seek the highway signs that indicate these amenities. Third, this entry could also be highlighted with median wildflowers and red clover, and the concrete islands could be replaced with plantings.

7. Important North Entry Needs to be Developed. At this point the speed and direction of traffic changes. This is a very significant transition point from a higher speed highway into the local traffic roads. We see this point as an opportunity to design plantings, lighting and civic signage which announce the Booneville community.

8. Important South Entry Needs to be Preserved and Enhanced. We recognized a unique condition as one passes the small lake to the east and the rolling landscape rises to the city limits. We believe that the small lake and the pastoral landscape should be preserved and enhanced.

9. Important East Entry Needs to be Developed. This entry into the city seems to be a well-established one and with a little development could be more pronounced. It is unique in that three roads come together here. We recommend that plantings, lighting and civic signage be developed.

**Consider New Connections Between Your Institutions**

10. New Connecting Road. This new connecting road that is being developed is going to significantly change the traffic flow in the city. We
believe that this road will become a vital connection to the neighborhoods and institutions along Third Street, as well as an alternative path to get from the south side of town to the north side. This street has a wide street width and has the opportunity to become a civic neighborhood boulevard in contrast to Second Street which has a lot of traffic and activity. We recommend that the “Third Street Boulevard” be developed with tree plantings, perennials, sidewalks and lighting to project the city’s pride of its place.

II. Connecting Road Proposal. The dairy road connection has opened up an important connection from old Highway 45 to the east side neighborhoods. It seems that if another minor connecting road were made, as shown on the map on page nine, new opportunities for southeastern residential growth would be established.

II. Proposed Eaton Public Golf Course. In the course of our work in Booneville, Rhett Eaten has suggested that some of his land be developed as a public golf course. This is a generous and outstanding offer the community should rally behind. Its location and public nature would offer the Booneville community opportunities for further established regional identity.

Public Sectors: The Municipal Sector

Perhaps the most readily recognizable of your city’s public sectors is your Municipal Sector. The buildings and spaces that comprise this sector are those that house your civic facilities such as the County Courthouse, the new 4-County Electric building, and the newly relocated Chamber of