

# Alfred Eugene McKie – In the Words of his Daughter

The quality of the article below written by Ruby Turner escalates the meaning of outstanding black women and men of Yalobusha County, Mississippi. Ruby teaches a lesson not only in black history but also in the history of Yalobusha County and beyond. I am almost embarrassed by how much I learned, especially about some of the things I should have known, not to mention those where I was missing the full story. Many more stories like these are out there that need to be told, even if Ruby is a hard act to follow. A retired educator and musician, she was featured

in this column on December 8, 2019, and in my book.

Ruby was born in Water Valley on October 30, 1928 and moved away in 1956 to pursue her dreams. As you will see, she is an extraordinary woman with great memories and the ability to share them in a most intriguing and enlightening way. The inspiring story of her father, Alfred Eugene McKie, an outstanding black man from Yalobusha County, reminds us that we need to continue documenting *real black history* for our youth of today and generations to come. Thank you, Ruby!



By Dottie  
Chapman Reed

Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. She published a series of articles in the North Mississippi Herald from August, 2018, through July, 2020, sharing the stories of unsung black women who made or are making a difference in Yalobusha County.

This is part two of the project that also features black men.

Reed can be reached at (678) 825-2356 or reed2318@bellsouth.net

[www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com](http://www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com)

## Seasons and a Daughter's Memories

By Ruby M. Turner

The following narrative is an account of the sixty-two-year gap that separated my father and me. It includes reminiscences of my parents, visual images from my father's autograph book, and my own memories. Specific relevant historical references are included, and it will conclude with a tribute to my father.

I. Alfred Eugene Kelley was born on July 12, 1866 to Eliza Kelley, a newly freed slave on the former slave plantation of her birth in rural Coffeetown, Mississippi. His fair complexion revealed his mixed racial identity, and his first season began in the shadows of his Scot-Irish father and grandparents on the former slave plantation. Eliza adored her son and saved his baby hairbrush, which is part of his memorabilia collection.

II. In 1865, during the immediate period following the Civil War, the War Department passed the Freedmen's Bureau Act to aid freed slaves who had left the plantations. One of the functions of the Bureau was to allow former slave plantation owners to retain their land, dividing it into parcels called sharecroppers farms. Eliza's family chose this option.

The country had begun the unprecedented altering of its course to admit the freed slaves. On December 6, 1865, the states ratified the first civil rights bill as the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. On July 9, 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, granting additional rights. Thus, former slaves and those born in the immediate post-Civil War period were inextricably entwined in the changes of this nation.

Eliza met Joshua McKie and, after a short courtship, were married. Joshua gave Alfred his surname, and Alfred began his new season. Several children were born of this union, some dying in infancy. Three survived: a daughter and two sons.

III. On February 23, 1870 – nine years after the state had seceded a system to educate children of former slaves was developed.

In 1872, Alfred enrolled in the rural Colored Coffeetown public school. He and his generation, along with former slave children who previously attended the Freedmen's Bureau schools after the Civil War, must be included in the discussion of this historical period, as Mississippi was required to alter its course to admit them and the freed former slaves.

In 1879, the McKie family moved to Water Valley, Mississippi. The Illinois Central Railroad Company was located there, and the city had a good economy. Alfred, then 13 years old, along with his siblings, enrolled in the Colored Water Valley public school.

Joshua and Eliza found work, and the family settled in their new environment. They also found Water Valley to be more culturally advanced than that of the surrounding rural areas. Domestic workers carried discarded newspapers and other reading materials home from their jobs; thus, colored residents were able to keep abreast of domestic and international news. Returning and visiting former slaves from cities along the Mason-Dixon Line brought with them new urban ideas as well.

IV. The McKie family found a church to worship in. This church was not a structured building but was a brush arbor meeting. It was located at the foot of a hill that sloped downward in a northerly direction from the upper level of Wood Street. Tree branches overlapped this area, forming a canopy, which afforded a sense of privacy and offered some protection from the elements. The street's name now is Walnut Street. This brush arbor meeting was an important part of Alfred's social life, allowing him to interact with younger church members.

In 1883, Joshua and Eliza purchased a house from Jeremiah Hanks. Alfred witnessed this transaction. The brush arbor meeting later purchased the adjacent land north of the McKie property from Jeremiah Hanks and built a church, complete with a belfry and large bell. Joshua was a deacon and one of the founders. The church was named Everdale Missionary Baptist Church.

V. In 1885, another season began in Alfred's life. He started working for the Illinois Central Railroad Company. He also expanded his social life. On December 25, 1885, his mother gave him a beautiful present, an autograph book. On that Christmas Day, he wrote his introduction, asking for the best wishes of friends. He and his girlfriend Frenchie used the lithograph page in a special ritual, naming the love birds after themselves to dedicate this book.

I have chosen a select representation of the mementoes from my father's autograph book beginning with his in-



Alfred Eugene McKie

roduction and the lithograph page.

The mementoes are embellished with artistic dots and ornamental drawings and have left within them the unspoken thoughts of the writers. They offer a historical treasured view of free-born Colored Americans, who were among the first generation to attend the first Colored public schools in Mississippi. They left in these images a view of Colored Americans freely engaging in a social life that had been denied to their slave-born parents.

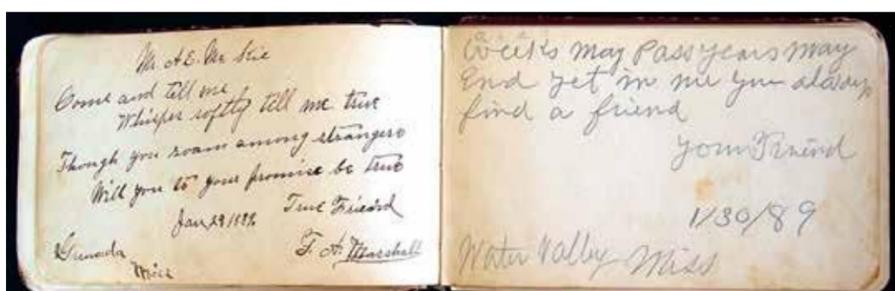
VI. Another season began in Alfred's life that would also bring about change. He married his sweetheart, Alice, and settled down. However, his happiness was short lived. His beloved sister, Anna, died suddenly on her 18th birthday. His wife, Alice, wrote a comforting condolence in his autograph book, but she too would die within the next two years.

Alfred decided to transfer to Chicago, the headquarters of the Illinois Central Railroad Company. He found Chicago to be a large, cosmopolitan city and adjusted quickly, finding a room with a congenial Irish family. Chicago had been chosen to host the Columbia Exposition World's Fair, and the city was teeming with newcomers seeking work. Alfred was excited and eagerly looking forward to this event. Years later, he reminisced of the special day set aside as "Colored Folks Day" with such notables as Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Frederick Douglass was the main speaker. He made his famous unscripted address, and the crowd rushed forward to shake his hand. Alfred was among them and invited Douglass to come to Water Valley to address the concerns of its Colored residents, but this meeting did not happen. Douglass died in 1895. But Alfred never lost the inspiration or his desire to serve his fellowmen.

VII. Alfred embraced his new life in Chicago, availing himself of the many cultural activities, especially the opera, theater, and classical concerts. Later in his life, he told about the Chicago Art Institute and the installation of the Lions. His reminiscences greatly expanded my knowl-

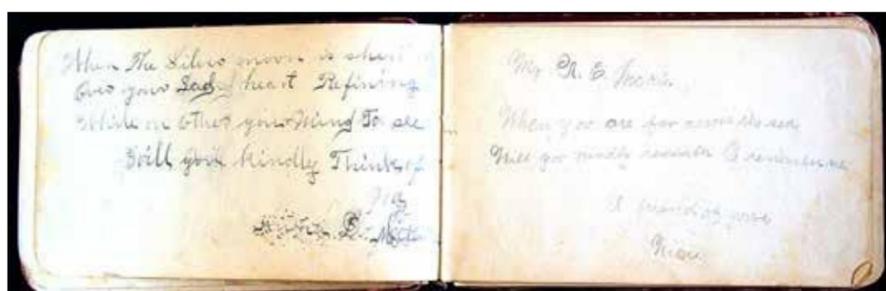


Alfred Eugene McKie received an autograph book for Christmas in 1885.



Mr. A. E. McKie,  
Come and tell me Whisper softly tell me true  
Though you roam among strangers  
Will you to your promises be true.  
True Friend, Jan 29 1889  
E.G. Marshall, Grenada, Miss

Weeks may pass years may end yet in me  
You always find a friend.  
Your Friend  
1/30/ 1889  
Water Valley, Miss



When the silver moon is shining and your  
sad heart refining  
While on others your mind to see  
Will you kindly think of me.  
Anna McKie

Mr. A. E. McKie,  
When you are far across the sea  
Will you kindly remember - remember me.  
A Friend of Yours

edge, opening new avenues that I looked forward to experiencing. Alfred found a church to worship in and developed leadership abilities that would help later in life.

Alfred was lonesome and invited his mother to come live with him, but she declined. However, he frequently visited her and his aunt who lived in Canton, Mississippi.

He filled his life with activities. He saw the turn of the century and considered Chicago his permanent home; however, in the middle half of the first quarter of the century, his life would abruptly change.

VIII. His mother suffered from a chronic illness, and her health declined suddenly. She had no choice but to ask her son to return to Water Valley. He left Chicago and returned. Another new season began that would bring contentment and fulfillment. He was now a mature man in his mid-forties.

He reunited with the Everdale Missionary Baptist Church, becoming the Sunday school superintendent and choir director, using the skills that he acquired at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Chicago. He enjoyed his duties at Everdale, but felt the need to do more and joined the Knights of Pythias and Prince Hall Masons. He became the Grand Chancellor of the Knights of Pythias. He was now in his late-forties and unmarried.

IX. Genora Morgan was the Sunday school secretary, and she and Alfred worked closely together. A courtship developed, and they were married in the spring of 1914. He was nearing forty-eight years of age, and she was twenty-two. Eight children were born of this union. The first child, a girl, died in infancy. Alfred's mother also died in late 1914.

Alfred successfully combined fatherhood, church duties, fraternal activities, and his work with the Illinois Central Railroad Company. He was known for his oratory and was often invited to address lodges of the Knights of Pythias in various states.

In 1921, he attended a fundraiser the organization convened in Kansas City, Missouri to aid the victims of the Tulsa, Oklahoma riot. He had a personal interest, as his friend J.H. Goodwin was a victim. During their friendship, Goodwin had told my father of his real estate losses.

X. The Smithsonian published an article in its April 2021 issue, titled "The Heart of Black Tulsa," which lists and describes the businesses that were destroyed by the White mob in the Greenwood District. Goodwin is listed in the article among the business owners: "J.H. Goodwin ran a funeral home, real estate investments and more. A prominent figure, he hosted visitors to Tulsa, such as George Washington Carver at his home. The attack destroyed his two-story brick building." The friendship between my father and Goodwin continued over the years.

XI. My mother, in her reminiscences, told me that my father continued to travel over the next several years, addressing lodges of the Knights of Pythias. His work filled his need to serve; however, his life would take a sudden downturn in 1928, and he would be forced to change directions. He suffered two major blows.

First, the Black Knights of Pythias had been under legal attacks for several years by their White counterparts, who sought to destroy the Black organizations. The Black Knights of Pythias in the State of Mississippi were forced to disband all lodges after a court order ruled in favor of the White Pythians. Several years ago, I read "Duty to the Race: African American Fraternal Orders and the Legal Defense of the Right to Organize" by Ariane Liazos and Marshall Ganz (Harvard University Social Science History Journal 28.3 (Fall 2004)). I have included the following selections from the introduction, as they add clarity regarding the Black fraternal organizations my father worked with and the significant roles they played in their battles to organize and exist:

"Although most of the African-American Civil Rights movement began in the 1950s, that movement was built on a foundation laid decades earlier." The authors cite the U.S. Supreme Court opinion in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), which outlawed racial segregation in schools in 1954, and the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. The authors further state that these "events" were not without their own "histories" and grew out of organizational infrastructures and strategies over many years in moments of resistance.

XII. My inclusion of the selections from "Duty to the Race" gave me a greater insight of the organizations my father served in and the contributions they made in laying

the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement.

His Knights of Pythias sword meant so much to him. I have included a photo of his sword, a tribute I wrote in his memory and the organization he served.

His sword with its Knight-crowned head stands in a darkened corner in its decaying sheath: a lonely sentinel and a reminder of battles fought, and victories won.

XIII. The second blow not only affected my father, but his family as well. The Illinois Central Railroad Company closed its shop where my father worked, and moved to other locations. Hundreds of men lost their jobs. The employees were given the option to relocate, but my father was close to retirement and chose not to accept the offer. This period was very painful, and he seemed unable to cope. My mother related to me that she took the helm and became the breadwinner as a laundress. She sought help from a white friend, Miss Will McClarty, who had been a benefactress to the Morgan family in the past. She offered my mother a job as a laundress for her male boarding house, and my eldest sister, Eliza, a babysitting job. Several months later, my father recovered from his depression and began his reinvention.

He became a distributor of small publications and the Farmers' Almanac. His route covered several small towns, requiring travel by train and returning home in the wee hours of the morning. The Farmers' Almanac was a big hit with the farmers.

XIV. His reinvention continued after Mr. Jackson, a white candy salesman who had a car, hired him to be his assistant. His route covered many of the rural areas, and the farmers welcomed him. My father quit his job as a distributor of the smaller publications but retained the Farmers' Almanac. Jackson's next venture was to go into the hot tamale business. Jackson kept my father on as his assistant. My father had a natural knack as a salesman and liked interacting with people. In 1933, the Jacksons decided to quit the business and leave Water Valley. They offered to sell the secret recipe to my parents with lessons to my mother on how to make the tamales. My parents eagerly accepted the Jacksons' offer and became the new owners. My father purchased the equipment needed. He had a verbal contract with a Colored farmer named Sam to supply the dried corn shucks needed to wrap the hot tamales in.

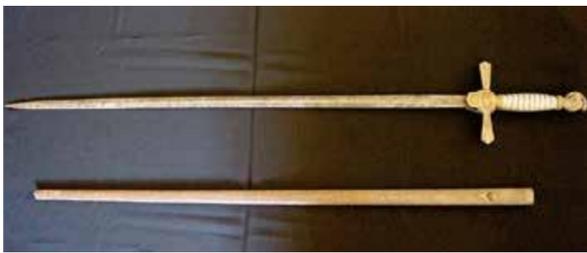
My father's financial condition had improved when he began receiving his retirement pension, and my mother no longer needed to serve as a laundress. His new business venture helped greatly. My eldest sister, Eliza, had graduated from high school in Jackson, Tennessee and soon would begin her career as a school teacher.

XV. In September 1933, my father began the hot tamale vendor business, choosing Grenada because it was larger than Water Valley and on the direct route of the Illinois Central Railroad Company passenger trains to and from Chicago to New Orleans. The passengers welcomed him and were good customers. He sang a little ditty to announce his presence in the neighborhood, and he had regulars. On his off days, he sold the Farmers' Almanac. But he did not neglect his church duties and continued his work with the masons.

My father was an avid reader and subscribed to the daily Memphis Press-Scimitar. He also purchased the Memphis Commercial Appeal from Turnage Drug Store on Sunday mornings. My father had not forgotten the inspiration he had received from Frederick Douglass and had become the President of the Sons and Daughters of African Ancestry. This benevolent organization had chapters in several northern Mississippi towns.

XVI. When an offer came to become the distributor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a black publication, he quickly accepted. He felt that colored residents of Water Valley needed a voice that addressed the concerns of inequality, prejudice, discrimination, and the racial atrocities that were not reported by White publications. The *Pittsburgh Courier* addressed these issues and a wide coverage of other news.

The *Courier* had an arrangement with the Colored porters who worked for the ICRR passenger trains on the Chicago-New Orleans route. The papers were hidden in



Alfred McKie's Knights of Pythias sword is a lonely reminder of battles fought and victories won.

the baggage car. As the southbound train slowed to approach the depot, my father would be waiting in the designated spot, and the porters tossed the bundles to his outstretched arms. He would quickly deposit the papers in his sling pouch and proceed home. My father had select clients whom he trusted would not betray him, as Black publications were not welcomed in the South.

The news in the *Courier* added to the conversations of my father and maternal grandfather, Syrus Morgan, who made dire predictions of a coming second world war, as Hitler marched across Europe. My mother also joined in those conversations as the war raged in China and Ethiopia. It was a stressful time, and my childhood was marred by these predictions.

On December 7, 1941, my father and sister Geneva attended the morning worship service at the Everdale Missionary Baptist Church. My mother and I remained at home. Later that morning, we heard the incessant blowing of the fire alarm, and my mother expressed fear without knowing the cause. My father and sister returned home after the service with the grim news that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. We were stunned, and a silence invaded our house and the neighborhood. That evening, we ate a tasteless dinner without saying a word. Two days later, as I was entering my parents' bedroom, I saw my father sitting in front of the unlit fireplace with his head bowed, uttering these words, "My sons, my sons..." I quietly closed the door, not understanding the scene I had just witnessed. My mother later explained to me that my father feared that my brothers would be called to serve in the army. Soon his fears were realized.

In August 1942, my youngest brother Roy was drafted. He served in the European Theater of WWII. In October 1943, my brother Alfred was drafted in the army and served in the Pacific Theater of WWII. My brother Lincoln was next and remained in the States as a tech sergeant, training soldiers for combat duties. Understandably it was a time of uncertainty for the McKie family for the duration of the War.

In January 1942, the hot tamale business came to an end as the beef needed for tamales was no longer available. My parents welcomed this rest. My father became a deacon in the Everdale Missionary Baptist Church and enjoyed his new position. The *Pittsburgh Courier* had been sold to the *Chicago Defender*, and my father continued as a distributor. Then, in the mid-1940s, James Daniel, the proprietor of a small grocery store on "the Block" sold the *Defender*, ending Alfred's work as the local distributor.

My father's health also began to decline in the late-1940s, and he became bedridden. On January 10, 1951, he quietly entered into eternity.

My father left a legacy, evidenced by testimonials over the years from those whose lives he had touched, helping many of them, through his leadership, to positive changes. Those testimonials were heartwarming and have blessed our lives.

XVII. This narrative will conclude with a heartwarming story of my father, which my mother related to me when I was a child, and a tribute in my father's memory.

My mother told me of my father's account of a sunrise he had seen over the water when he visited friends in Gulfport, Mississippi. His friends took him to where the waters of the Gulf of Mexico run inland to form a body of water that runs east. As the dawn broke, he saw the sun seemingly rise from the depths of the water and majestically ascend into the bright sky. He was so awed by this sight and wanted to share it with his two small chil-

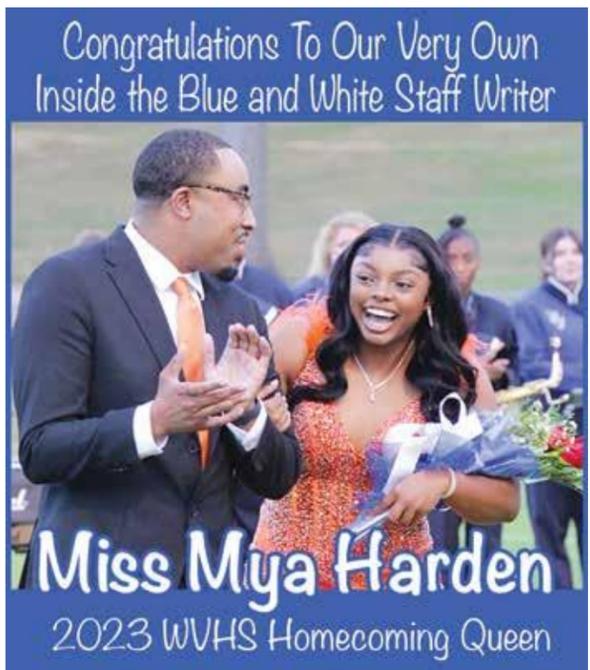
dren, William and Eliza. My mother consented, and he took them to his friends in Gulfport, to the same area, and watched the sun rise.

This story warmed my heart and showed me a sentimental side of my father. Years later, I shared the story with my children. I did not know how much it impressed my eldest daughter, Marianne, until the summer of 1993, when my brother Lincoln and I visited her in Manassas, Virginia to attend the commencement of Marianne's daughter, Lisa, from the University of Richmond. After the service, we had a celebratory dinner hosted by her father and his wife. After dinner, we drove to Corolla, North Carolina on the outer banks of the Atlantic Ocean. Marianne had rented a large two-story beach home. In the early hours of a prearranged time, Marianne, Lisa, and I met on the upstairs wrap-around veranda. There, we looked out over the Atlantic, and, as the dawn broke, held hands and watched the sun seemingly arise from the depths of the water and ascend into a bright blue sky. It was a moving tribute in memory of my father, Alfred Eugene McKie.

## Closing

You can find the December 8, 2019 article about Ruby McKie Turner at [www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com](http://www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com) under Phase 1.

Watch for upcoming information about the Annual Water Valley Art Crawl on October 14, which will feature many of the Outstanding Black Women of Yalobusha County (OBWOY). The OBWOY display will be located in the Main Street office at 207 North Main on Oct. 14 at 6:30 p.m.



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ALLOWANCE PROCEEDINGS	
DATE:	AUGUST 2023
It is hereby ORDERED that claims be allowed and paid from the following funds in the listed alongside each to wit:	
GENERAL COUNTY	\$ 372,248.04
PARK PATROL	\$ 4,545.89
YALO CO MS G O HOSP B & I	\$ 167,350.00
REAPPRAISAL MAINTENANCE	\$ 22,985.17
E-911	\$ 39,360.39
MULTI-PURPOSE BLDG. OPERATION	\$ 2,165.68
YALOBUSHA COUNTY GARBAGE	\$ 63,751.82
RURAL FIRE	\$ 8,808.86
FIRE REBATE	\$ 1,770.00
Chancery Deputy Fund	\$ 8,945.90
DISTRICT ONE ROAD	\$ 178,058.13
DISTRICT TWO ROAD	\$ 23,371.33
DISTRICT THREE ROAD	\$ 24,575.78
DISTRICT FOUR ROAD	\$ 34,041.89
DISTRICT FIVE ROAD	\$ 53,916.06
COUNTY UNIT	\$ 503.36
DISTRICT ONE BRIDGE	\$ 20,893.90
DISTRICT TWO BRIDGE	\$ 12,765.10
DISTRICT THREE BRIDGE	\$ 7,252.36
DISTRICT FOUR BRIDGE	\$ 6,217.10
DISTRICT FIVE BRIDGE	\$ 8,712.66
ERBR	\$ 1,297,966.11
RUBBISH LANDFILL	\$ 7,197.84
ENVIRONMENTAL CLEAN-UP	\$ 2,185.00
INDUSTRIAL OPERATION	\$ 12,790.95
TRAFFIC VIOLATION	\$ 5,828.50
IMPLIED CONSENT	\$ 730.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM FUND	\$ 1,640.00
OTHER MISDEMEANORS	\$ 1,394.75
OTHER FELONIES	\$ 329.70
COURT CONSTITUENTS	\$ 62.50
TRAFFIC TRAUMA	\$ 750.00
STATE COURT EDUCATION	\$ 90.00
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FUND	\$ 112.00
DRUG ABUSE/DRIVERS LIC	\$ 81.00
UNINSUREI MOTORIST	\$ 610.00
2% BOND FEE 83-39-31	\$ 382.00
Victims of Human Traff	\$ 336.25
DPS FUND #3747	\$ 848.00
COMP. ELECTRONIC COURT SYSTEMS FUND	\$ 641.00
CIVIL LEGAL ASSISTANCE	\$ 205.00
SCHOOL MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 10,242.36
VICTIM BOND	\$ 70.00
ADULT DRIVER TRAINING	\$ 30.00
INTERLOCK DEVICE FUND	\$ 100.00
SPECIAL ELECTION EQUIPMENT	\$ 2,931.02
AJINOMOTO CAP LOAN	25347.58
TOTAL	\$ 2,435,141.48

A motion was made by Kenny Rogers and seconded by Eddie Harris to allow the amount of the claims for a roll call vote and the result was as follows:

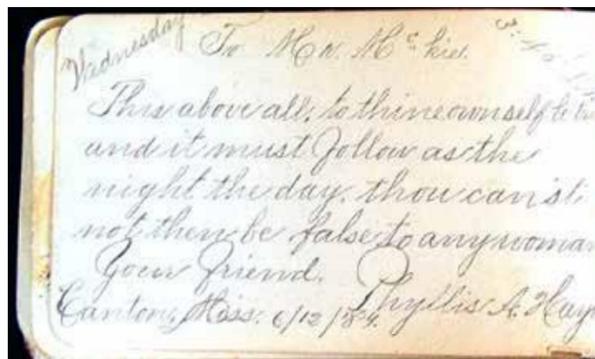
The motion	Cayce Washington	voted	yes
	Kenny Rogers	voted	yes
	Kenny Harmon	voted	yes
	Eddie Harris	voted	yes
	Caylon Gray	voted	yes

It is hereby ordered that claims be allowed and paid from the above funds in the total amounts listed alongside each.

It is hereby ordered that the following be allowed the amount set forth opposite their names for services at this term payable out of the General County funds:

Amy F. McMinn - Attending Board Meetings 3 days \$60.00 so ordered, this the 7th day of August, 2023.

Attest  
  
 Amy F. McMinn, Clerk  
  
 Cayce Washington  
 BOARD PRESIDENT



Wednesday 3:40 PM  
 To Mr. McKie  
 This above all to thine ownself be true. And it must follow as the night the day. Thou canst not then be false to any woman.  
 Your Friend, Phyllis A. Hayes, Canton, Miss, 6/12/1889

While the brightly star light gives  
 While here on earth you live  
 Keep at thy guns of remembrance  
 Will you remember me  
 Anna McKie

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