

Dedication Ceremony for the

MORGANTOWN HISTORICAL MARKER



Saturday, March 12, 2022

1:30 PM

1449 Highway 587
Morgantown, Mississippi 39483



MORGANTOWN

Once known as Beardsville and Claude, Morgantown was settled ca. 1815 by Francis and William Lenoir, George Nixon, Robert Baylor, and Robert McGowan. The name was suggested by Lizzie Morgan as early as 1909. In 1884, C.N. Beard opened a school and Jim Morgan added a store in 1896 with a post office in 1904. Long connected with Pentecostalism, the town once had a depot, jail, mayor, and doctor. Sculptor Norman Boyles, Gen. Thomas Lenoir, legislator Kelly Hammond, theologian Leo Eddleman, and musician Jimmy Easterling are natives.

Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 2021

Order of Service

Welcome Louis F. Morgan

Greeting Representative Ken Morgan
Mississippi House of Representatives, District 100

About the Marker Louis F. Morgan
Morgantown Historian

Remarks William “Brother” Rogers
Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Prayer Vicki Dunaway Bracey
*Member, Morgantown Church of God
and Great Granddaughter of Lizzie Morgan*



Special Thanks To:

Larry and Mary Ann Morgan
William “Brother” Rogers (Mississippi Department of Archives & History)
Tony Morgan (Marion County Supervisor, District 3) and Road Crew
Jim Woodrick (Mississippi Department of Archives & History)
Elbert Hilliard (Mississippi Historical Society)
Tanner Williams
Bo Williams

*This historical marker is sponsored by Louis F. Morgan
in memory of Feldon “Bud” Morgan.*

About the Marker

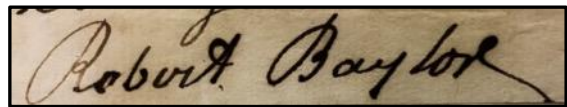
(Researched and Written by Louis F. Morgan, Ph.D.)

Native Americans were the first to inhabit this area. After 1800, other immigrants arrived. Among the earliest were ***Lieutenant Colonel George Henry Nixon*** (1778-1824) and ***Robert McGowan*** (1757-1821; sometimes spelled McGowen). They arrived with their families soon after the property in this area was first surveyed in 1810. Nixon also led the 13th Regiment of Mississippi Militia during the War of 1812, and McGowan's sons served in this regiment.

George Nixon lived across the creek between Pearl River and present-day Highway 587. He later moved across the river just northeast of present-day Foxworth before relocating to Pearlington, Miss.

Robert McGowan lived adjacent to Nixon with his property on the western side of present-day Highway 587 and encompassing the creek and present-day Morgantown Road toward Sumbax Road. He operated a mill along what was then known as McGowan's Creek, and his son James inherited the mill. Some of McGowan's descendants settled near present-day Darbun and others relocated to Hinds County, Miss.

Robert Baylor came to Marion County from Kentucky to build houses, including the Lenoir House. A native of Virginia, Baylor attended the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg and served in the Revolutionary War in his brother's regiment of Light Dragoons. He was from a prominent family in colonial Virginia, and his father was the first to bring thoroughbred horses to this country. Baylor's nephew, Major George Armistead, was the commanding officer at Fort McHenry in Baltimore during the famous battle that inspired Francis Scott Key to pen the poem "The Star-Spangled Banner", which is now our national anthem. Baylor University in Texas is named in honor of another nephew, Judge R.E.B. Baylor. Robert's daughter and her husband relocated from here to Hinds County after the State Capital was moved there. A son also lived here and was an early physician in this area. Baylor is buried at the William T. LeNoir Cemetery at Morgantown. His personal home remains and is owned today by Jimmy and Rhelda Easterling.

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Baylor". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, possibly aged, paper background.

Francis Barnes Lenoir was here by 1811 when Marion County was formed, serving as its Representative to the lower house of the Mississippi Territorial Legislature. He also served as a Captain of a company of Mounted Riflemen in the 13th Mississippi Militia (George Nixon's Company) in the War of 1812. In 1818, Lenoir moved across the Pearl River from this area and later relocated to Pearlington, Miss.

William Thomas Lenoir moved here from South Carolina soon after his uncle, Francis. William's family operated a plantation here prior to the Civil War, living in the antebellum home designed by Robert Baylor and built by the labor of those enslaved by the Lenoir family. After the war, William's son Walter farmed the land through the 19th century. Two other sons, Blanchard and Taliaferro, moved from this area but were prominent figures in Mississippi society. William's brother, Hope Hull Lenoir, settled at what is now White Bluff. William and several members of his family are buried at Morgantown.



Other early families settling nearby include Alexander, Beard, Cooper, Dunaway, Hammond, Morgan, Newsom, Pearson, Powell, Prescott, Smith, and Thornhill, some of whom moved to what is now Morgantown.

Christopher Nelson Beard Sr. opened Beard's School here in 1884 in a one-room log cabin on his property. Beard was a successful farmer with significant financial means for this area in the late 19th century. He provided the school primarily to help educate his children, but it served all area children who were able to attend.



By 1888, this area was known as **Beardsville**. A Post Office operated briefly, from April 1888 to January 1889, with Aaron Anderson Beard, a brother to C.N. Beard Sr., serving as Postmaster. Aaron's daughter, Charlotte, is the earliest recorded interment in what is now Morgantown Cemetery. She was buried in 1876.

James Austin "Jim" Morgan and his wife, Samantha, opened a **store** in 1896 after relocating here around 1890 from the Carter's Creek / Enon Community. The original store, located near the Lenoir Cemetery, burned in 1929, and a new building was erected at this current location that same year.

Morgan opened a **Post Office** in his store in 1904, enlisting the help of William B. Russell, who used his political connections to secure the deal. The Post Office, and subsequently the village, was named **Claude** after Sallie "Claude" Russell [Cooper], the daughter of Will Russell. Jim Morgan served temporarily as Postmaster (September 16, 1904 to November 5, 1905) and was followed by his son, B.J. Morgan. The Post Office, always located inside a local store building, remained active until it was closed on March 31, 1993. Thereafter, Morgantown residents were placed on the rural route. The community was permitted to retain the place name of Morgantown in its official mailing address while sharing the 39483 Zip Code with Foxworth. A rural route already had delivered mail from Foxworth to a few homes in Morgantown after 1925, with Lorena K. Easterling serving as the first mail carrier for that service.



In 1898, the cabin housing Beard School became too small to accommodate the students. Jim Morgan donated timber for a new school building, located on his property near the present-day intersection of Highway 587 and Morgantown Road. The annual school term was six months to accommodate the planting and harvest seasons, and the teachers were James Hezzie Newsom Sr. and his wife, Effie Hammond. When that building also became too small, a larger, two-story school was built across the road in about 1908 and named **Morgantown** High School. [After this building burned, West Pearl Consolidated School opened in 1931 at a new location closer to the church and store. West Pearl operated until West Marion opened in the late 1950s. The building later served briefly as West Marion Academy in the 1970s].

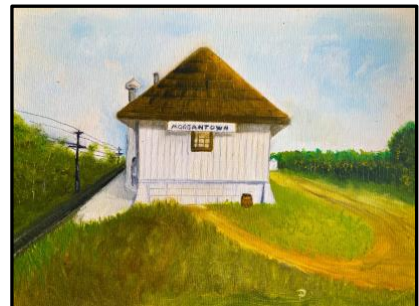


The use of the name Morgantown is credited to **Elizabeth “Lizzie” Morgan**, the wife of Jeff Morgan and a sister to Jim Morgan. Lizzie was dissatisfied with the name of Claude for the village and began lobbying for the name to be changed to Morgantown. Her wish was realized with the arrival of the railroad. Overhearing those working on the railroad discuss the name of the town, Lizzie quickly remarked, “Seems to me it should be called Morgantown with all the Morgans a livin’ here!” It was settled. Morgantown became the name of the town, and newspaper articles began referencing the new name by 1909. The Post Office officially changed its place name from Claude to Morgantown, on February 27, 1915, more than five years after local residents had adopted the name Morgantown.



The railroad **depot** at Morgantown was built in 1912. It was located on the western side of the tracks on the New Orleans Great Northern line at milepost 109.61 from New Orleans. A highlight for local residents was riding “The Rebel” passenger train to New Orleans.

The earliest Christian settlers to this area brought their faith practice with them. The Lenoir family was Methodist, and



boats would bring Methodist ministers to the Lenoir House a few times each year for preaching and administering the sacraments. The Lenoir Methodist Church was organized at nearby White Bluff in 1837, later becoming a Baptist congregation in 1909. In 1868, there was a migration of families from Carter's Creek (Pike County) to what is now the Holly Springs / Mount Sinai community. By 1872, the Holly Springs Baptist Church had organized nearby and was the primary church for most families living here who attended religious services.

In 1911, a Baptist Sunday School began at Morgantown, led by Reverend Richard A. Eddleman, who was the superintendent at Morgantown School and a Baptist minister. The Sunday School was sponsored by Holly Springs and Society Hill Baptist churches. The regular services continued through 1913, but they ceased after Eddleman was appointed to another school and moved from Morgantown.

The first church to organize in Morgantown was the Church of God, and for more than a century Morgantown has served as a center for **Pentecostalism**. In 1915, Reverend Warren Evans Sr., along with his wife, Nancy Beard Evans, and children, returned to Morgantown from Florida. Evans had become a minister with the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) and was the first Pentecostal evangelist in Marion County. Even when he was beaten by White Caps because of his preaching and left for dead, he miraculously survived and established the first Church of God congregation in southern Mississippi at Morgantown. This community has served as a ministry center from which numerous Pentecostal churches in southern Mississippi and Louisiana can trace their roots, and it also served as state headquarters for the Church of God in Mississippi from 1918-20, 1923-25, 1928-32, and 1937-39. Many early state camp meetings and conventions were held at Morgantown and a number of state administrative bishops resided in the community. It also is where Reverend R.R. Walker joined the Church of God, becoming the denomination's first minister with a college degree. Morgantown also had the first brick sanctuary for the Church of God in Mississippi, built in 1945



to replace the original building. In addition to the Church of God in 1915, Morgantown is where the Oneness Pentecostal movement (now known predominantly for the United Pentecostal Church) was first introduced into Marion County in 1920 and the Church of God of Prophecy in 1958. The community's religious history has been recorded in several popular and academic books and papers about Pentecostalism.

The Village of Morgantown was incorporated on January 6, 1922. Although it is uncertain how long it remained incorporated, it is believed to have become unincorporated near the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Morgantown had a **mayor** during the years it was incorporated. Among its mayors were B.J. Morgan, Freddie W. Alexander, Albert Boyles, Kelly J. Hammond, and perhaps others.



Legal document from 1926 including the embossed seal for the "Mayor of the Village of Morgantown"

Morgantown even had a **jail** at one time. It was a small, open-air structure made of iron bars and located on an area of land near the railroad tracks. It served mostly as a "holding cell" until the county sheriff could arrive from Columbia and as a place for a few rowdy locals to be kept until they were sober enough to return home. By the 1940s, the jail was no longer needed and was converted into an in-ground storm shelter behind a house about a half-mile away, where it remains today.

Morgantown also had a resident **doctor**. In the early years, doctors would come to this community from other locations by boat or on horseback if they lived within reasonable distance. By 1910, Dr. John G. Prine was the resident physician at Morgantown, soon after receiving his medical degree from the University of Tennessee in 1909. At Morgantown, he first boarded with Louis and Hollie Beard Morgan when they owned the Lenoir House by the river. Dr. Prine soon secured his own residence, from which he dedicated one of the rooms to his medical practice. From 1910 to the early 1940s, he delivered most of the babies in the community and tended to most of the residents. He also served four years in the Mississippi Legislature as a Representative and taught in the public schools of Marion and adjoining counties.



Morgantown's history is filled with positive examples of individuals with a good work ethic, ability, ingenuity, and determination who have contributed to the betterment of our community and even our world. This marker includes only a sample of such individuals, including those whose birth occurred here in the community and who have become known throughout the state and nation:

Norman Ivan Boyles (1936-2012), the son of Reverend Ralph and Helen Herrington, became respected nationally as a sculptor and artist. After graduating from West Pearl High School at Morgantown and Lee University in Tennessee, he served in the Air Force as a communications specialist. He then graduated from Tulane University and became a German professor at the University of Arizona. He also was a poet, musician, and painter. Boyles later moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he married Jeanne Chieffo and established himself as a bronze sculptor at the Shidoni Foundry. His commissioned bronze work is displayed throughout the country, including his sculpture entitled "On Silver Wings" commissioned for the Mary Kay company's 25th anniversary. That piece is displayed prominently at the Mary Kay headquarters in Texas. Norman is buried in the Santa Fe National Cemetery, but he requested a memorial marker also to be placed at Morgantown because of his enduring love for the community.



Brigadier General Thomas Blanchard Lenoir (1829-1874) was the son of William T. Lenoir and Sarah Elizabeth James and born at the Lenoir House in what is now Morgantown. Lenoir studied at Bowdoin College in Maine prior to the Civil War and then married Emma Clark, the daughter of Mississippi Governor Charles Clark. During the Civil War, Lenoir served Mississippi as Inspector General of State Troops (Confederate) from 1863-64 and was Adjutant General from 1864-65. In 1868, he relocated with his family to Thayer, Kansas, where he died in 1874 and is buried.

Kelly James Hammond Sr. (1901-1960) was the son of Robert Washington "Bob" Hammond and Rosa Line Morgan. He was educated at Morgantown School, the University of Mississippi, and Cumberland University. His earliest public speaking opportunities were at the local school and the Church of God, where he attended until joining the Baptist Church upon entering politics. Hammond maintained his residence at Morgantown and served here as a mayor and lawyer. He later represented Marion County in the Mississippi Legislature, where he was one of the "Little Three" who were ardent supporters and lobbyists for the policies of Governor Theodore G. Bilbo. Recognized as one of Mississippi's greatest orators, Hammond was nicknamed "the silver-tongued orator." He ran unsuccessfully for the office of Governor, but continued in political office until his death in 1960 and was a political product of his time in Mississippi history. He was married first to Carrie Mae Thornhill, and they had one son, Kelly Jr. "Dickie Boy". This son was tragically killed in a hunting accident at Morgantown in 1946. Hammond married second to Otelia Bracey.



Dr. Henry Leo Eddleman (1911-1995) was born at Morgantown to Reverend Richard A. Eddleman and Flossie Nora Lucille Power. His father was the school superintendent at Morgantown during that time. Dr. Eddleman graduated from the Louisville, Kentucky seminary in 1935 and became a missionary for the Baptist Foreign Mission Board to Palestine, where he taught school and ministered to Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Nazareth. He later served as president of Georgetown College in Kentucky and as president of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He also served as an editor for the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn. Dr. Eddleman died at Louisville, Kentucky, in 1995 and is buried at Morristown, Tenn.



Jimmy Easterling (1934-2023) was born at Morgantown to Johnnie James “Jim” Easterling and Ruby Smith. He enjoyed a life centered around making and sharing music and, with his wife, Rhelda Morgan, also of Morgantown, owned and operated Easterling Music Company in Vidalia, Louisiana, for 57 years. He assisted countless musicians and churches with music and sound needs for several decades. A 40-year member of the traveling band “The Mississippians”, Easterling also wrote and recorded songs, some of which were recorded by other singers, including Country Music singer Marty Robbins who had a hit with Easterling’s “Hello Daily News”. Among Easterling’s early personal recordings are “You Don’t Really Know”, “Another One of These Days”, and “If It’s Not Love (It’s The Next Best Thing)”. Interestingly, best-selling author Greg Iles credited Easterling with helping him make connections that inspired Iles to write the Natchez Burning trilogy. Easterling renovated the antebellum Baylor-Newsom House at Morgantown, where he enjoyed weekend getaways of front-porch sitting and reminiscing.



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