United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only received FEB 2 0 1980 date entered APR 2 2 1980

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Nam	e				
historic					
and/or common	Neshoba County	Fair Histori	c Distric	t ·	
2. Loca	ation NW	W Best	ska or	M5 21	
street & number	Mississippi Hig	¥		-	not for publication
city, town . Col	Neshoba w dwater Community	<u>X</u> v	icinity of	congressional district	Third
state Mississ	ippi	code ²⁸	county	Neshoba	code 99
3. Clas	sification				
Category X district building(s) structure site object	Ownership public private both Public Acquisition in process being considere	Accessib yes: ı	cupied in progress ble	Present Use agriculture commercialX educational _X entertainment government industrial military	museum park X private residence religious scientific transportation X other: fairground
name Neshoba	County Fair Ass	are		provements. Other inumerous individuals	
city, town Phi	ladelphia	v	icinity of	state	Mississippi
	ation of Le	gal Des	cripti	on	
courthouse, regis	stry of deeds, etc.	Office of Neshoba Co		-	
street & number		······································			
city, town	Philadelphia	9		state	Mississippi
6. Repi	resentatio	n in Exi	sting	Surveys	
title Statewide	Survey of Histo	oric Sites	has this pro	operty been determined ele	gible? yes no
date 1979				federal <u>X</u> state	e county local
depository for su	rvey records Mis	sissippi Dep	artment o	f Archives and Histo	ry
city, town Jac	kson			state	Mississippi

7. Description

Conditionexcellentdeterioratedgoodruinsfairunexposed	Check one X unaltered X altered	Check one X original site moved date	
--	----------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Neshoba County Fair Historic District lies approximately eight miles southwest of the county seat of Philadelphia in the rolling hills of west-central Neshoba County, Mississippi. The large campground which comprises the district is readily distinguishable from the surrounding fields and forests of the rural countryside because of its dense residential development. Rustic two-story cabins compose ninety-six percent of the district's approximately 470 structures. Other structures include an entrance gate of random-coursed rocks, a ticket office, Founder's Square, with a pavilion at its center and a granite war memorial at the pavilion's northwest corner, a midway with numerous rides and booths (present only during fair week), an exhibit hall, three grandstands, a half-mile red-clay horse racetrack with livestock round-up area and stage on its northwestern side, and a number of horse and cattle barns.

Founder's Square has always served as the focal point of the Neshoba County Fair. At the square's center is a large pavilion, seating 1,000; rows of two-story cabins line the square's four sides. A uniform front-facade line is maintained around the square except along the south side, where an alley breaks the center of the row. Oaks planted in 1898 in rows around the square between the pavilion and the cabins today provide greenery and shade.

Around the turn of the century a midway was located north of Founder's Square and a race-track was built to the east. Later, cabin "subdivisions" were constructed on the midway's west side and around the racetrack. The earliest of these subdivisions, which are located north and south of Founder's Square, were planned as parallel rows with front facades facing a common street and a service alley in the rear for parking. Long rows of cabins have been built with front facades facing the racetrack, but the latest subdivisions, which are located closest to the district's northern boundary, have returned to the parallel-row-with-common-street plan (see photograph no. 6).

The Neshoba County Fair began as a picnic and its first participants arrived in ox-drawn covered wagons and camped out in the open air. Construction of cabins and other buildings began after the property was formally acquired, in 1893. The first cabins were one- and two-story structures with dirt kitchen floors, gable roofs, and front porches. Early photographs indicate that most cabins were frame, although some appear to have been of log construction, and more space separated the cabins on Founder's Square. At night, light was provided by giant bonfires in each of the square's corners, and later by pine knots placed on red clay-covered shelves atop ten-foot poles. Only two cabins remain from this early period, the Trapp family cabin, no. 16, and the Bobo family cabin, no. 121 (see photograph no. 3). They are both of the one-story gable-roof type and have a single front door and no windows. The Bobo cabin maintains its rough-sawn vertical-board facades, but the Trapp cabin now has painted clapboard siding. Before the 1920s frame hotels stood at the southwest and southeast corners of the square.

Between 1942 and 1945 the fair was not held and a number of cabins deteriorated and were later rebuilt. A 1947 article contains an account of more than twenty houses, some old, some new, surrounding the speaker's pavilion. Cabins not rebuilt at that time, with the exception of two mentioned above, have since been replaced. The early fair contained a

FHR-8-300A (11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED FEB 2 0 1980

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

7 - DESCRIPTION

mixture of one- and two-story cabins, and although cabins now are required to be at least two stories, the present cabins are similar in type, scale, and proportion to the originals. Generally, the cabins are raised one to three feet, have two, three, or four bays, low-pitched gable roofs (facing the front), two-tier porticoes, and follow the earlier layout of living space below and sleeping areas above. A few cabins on Founder's Square have hip roofs, and a number have had the upper porch enclosed to provide additional sleeping areas. Uniform cabin lots sixteen feet in length by thirty feet deep with four feet between each cabin are now maintained. New cabin construction is required to meet these specifications. Materials, colors, and decorations are the most remarkable differences between the original and present cabins. Old and new cabins alike are predominately wooden, but modern materials such as plywood, standard building materials, and aluminum screening are used in the new construction. Concrete blocks have replaced field stone and brick foundations, and there are even a few cabins with concrete block walls. Composition and tin roofs have now replaced wooden shingles. Based on early photographs and accounts the original cabins appear to lack color and decoration. Cabins are now painted in various bright shades and include a number of multicolored facades. Diagonal, vertical, and horizontal boarding, painted tree trunks used as porch posts, a few examples of transposed millwork, colored lights, and numerous flags, posters, signs, and banners are the principal decorations. In the Founder's Square area are found the most imaginatively painted and decorated cabins. The newest cabins have a more prefabricated appearance and little individuality. General condition of the structures is good and any needed repairs are made annually in the weeks preceding the fair. No restoration activities as such are in progress and no structures have an intrusive effect.

INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURES

- 1. Entrance gate. Long central section with tall square pillars of random-coursed field stones at each end.
- 2. Ticket office. Small one-story frame building with gable roof; ticket windows on front (west) facade.
- 3. Founder's Square speaker's pavilion. Large wooden rectangular structure with gable roof, exposed rafters, wide eaves supported on posts; open on three sides (see photograph no. 2).
- 4. War memorial. Granite marker inscribed with the names of Neshoba County war casualties in World War II, surrounded with planted trees that serve as a perpetual growing monument to the county's war heroes; located at pavilion's northwest corner.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED FEB 2 0 1980
DATE ENTERED.

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

7 - DESCRIPTION

- 5. Founder's Square cabins. Location of the fair's original cabins; existing cabins have been constructed since 1946, with the exception of no. 16, one of two remaining original one-story cabins at the fair. Generally, all cabins on the grounds are two-story, two-, three-, or four-bay frame structures raised several feet on concrete blocks with gable roofs and two-tier front porches, and constructed of standard building materials. The most colorful cabins at the fair are found on the square. These show the most individuality through their decoration, mainly with bright multicolored facades and porch railings and front gables, with varying simple vertical, horizontal, and diagonal board patterns (see photograph nos. 1 and 4).
- 6. Harrison Park Midway. Occupied only during fair week, during which it is filled with approximately ten typical rides and amusements and numerous booths and stands.
- 7. Exhibit hall. One-story rectangular frame building with gable roof, double-leaf doors at each end; dirt floor covered with sawdust.
- 8. Grandstands. Three grandstands are on the racetrack's north side and have rows of wooden bleachers; the two western bleachers are covered with shed roofs.
- 9. Racetrack. Half-mile red-clay horse racetrack surrounded by simple wooden fence; grassy area inside track has a round-up area for livestock (fenced) and an elevated platform stage on northwestern side (see photograph no. 5).
- 10. Horse and cattle barns. One-story wooden structures with gable roofs and open sides.
- 11. Cabins 75-86, 87-110, 111-201, 202-270. B. 1950s. Very similar to those on Founder's Square but not as brightly painted. Painted tree trunks serving as porch posts are a vernacular decoration seen on a number of cabins.
- 12. Cabins 271-309, 400-407. B. 1960s. Have a fairly uniform and more durable appearance. Painted facades provide the only individuality.
- 13. Cabins 310-356, 501-532, 600-633. B. 1970s. Very similar to cabins constructed in the 1960s. Make an increasing use of standard building materials. Some three-story cabins. A number of cabins are unpainted.

8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 X 1800–1899 1900–	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric archeology-historic agriculture architecture artX commerce communications	• •	landscape architectur law literature military music philosophy X politics/government	e religion science sculpture X social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates		Builder/Architect		

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Neshoba County Fair, thought to be the oldest (Murphy Givens, "Neshoba County Fair: Tradition at its Best," Clarion-Ledger, July 22, 1979, p. 1) and largest campground fair in the United States ("Neshoba County Revue," The Neshoba Democrat, Aug. 3, 1961, p. 6), is Mississippi's oldest active county fair. The fair had its origins in 1889, when local residents sought a way to display and promote agricultural achievements and to improve farming methods. In recent years the annual weeklong fair has attracted more than 45,000 each year and earned a regional reputation for activities sponsored during fair week. The hospitable homecoming atmosphere at "Mississippi's Giant Houseparty" includes horse racing at the state's only licensed track, and a convention-like political forum. The feeling is widespread that "nothing in Neshoba County's history, dating back to 1833, has done so much to foster civic pride, encourage agricultural and livestock development, and bring Neshoba County family and friends together" as the Neshoba County Fair ("Neshoba County Revue," The Neshoba Democrat, Aug. 9, 1962, p. 4).

The fair's origin was an 1889 picnic in the Coldwater community. Several local men who had previously attended the Patron's Union, an educational, literary and social campground fair in adjacent Newton County emphasizing agricultural exhibits and improvements, organized a similar gathering in Neshoba County. The original group assembled for a day in a pine grove behind the Coldwater community school, about a quarter-mile from the present fairgrounds site. The women "brought their handiwork and some special cooking. The men brought farm products and animals to compare" (Florence Mars, Witness in Philadelphia [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977], p. 31). From their first gathering the fair was born, and in the early 1890s began to organize and develop. The Neshoba County Stock and Agricultural Fair Association elected its first board of directors on August 28, 1891, and acquired its first property, part of the present acreage, February 10, 1893. This was a four-acre deed of gift, and four acres more for 10 dollars, from R. B. and M. J. Harrison. The deed states "that when this ceases to be an Agricultural or a Educational institution this deed is null and void and stock holders shall have the liberty to move all of their property off said land" (Neshoba County, Miss., Deed Book X:468).

Following its official organization fair patrons began building rustic cabins on the grounds. The duration of the fair was increased from one to two or three days, and traditions were born. Agricultural and domestic exhibits, prominent when the fair was still a picnic, in later years became a source of rivalry and helped encourage growth and development in the region. Each community in the county had its own display and competition was fierce for the best overall exhibit. Individual prizes were also awarded in categories of cooking (pies, cakes, fresh and canned fruits and vegetables) sewing (quilts, dresses, needlepoint, crochet) farm products (corn, cotton, watermelon, and peanuts) (Mars, p. 34). Boys racing bareback around the campsite were also part of the earliest fairs, and horse racing became a fair tradition unique in Mississippi. Harness and running-horse races are held each afternoon at the only red-clay track in the country

9. Major Bibl	iographica	l Referer	nces	
Brown, A. J. History Company, 1894.	of Newton County	y <u>from</u> 1834 to	1894. Jackso	n: Clarion-Ledger
	cural historian winspection of Nesho			f Archives and History g. 1, 2, 1979.
10. Geograph	nical Data	UTM N	IOT VERIFIFI	
Acreage of nominated propert Quadrangle name McDonalc UMT References	y <u>approx. 43 acres</u> l, Miss.	= ¥CDEVEL ,	Quadran	gle scale <u>1:24000</u>
	3 6 2 1 7 2 0 Northing 3 6 2 1 3 4 0	B 1 6 Zone D 1 6 F 1	2 9 2 8 1 0 Easting 2 9 2 8 0 0	3 6 2 1 7 1 0 Northing 3 6 2 1 3 2 0
Verbal boundary description	on and justification		N.	
Area enclosed by red	line on accompany	ing map.		
List all states and countie	s for properties over	lapping state or c	ounty boundarie	S
state	code	county		code
state	code	county		code
11. Form Pre	pared By			
name/title Jody Cook, Ar	chitectural Histo	rian		
organization Mississippi History street & number P. O. Box			late January	
——————————————————————————————————————			elephone (601)	
city or town Hattiesburg				ippi 39401
12. State His	toric Pres	ervation	Onicer (ertification
The evaluated significance of				
As the designated State Histor 665), I hereby nominate this pr according to the criteria and p	operty for inclusion in t rocedures set forth by t	he National Register he Heritage Conserv	r and certify that it ration and Recreati	has been evaluated
State Historic Preservation Off	icer signature	Chura. 1	hillian &	
title State Historic Pr		S DE L'ANS DES SE	CANTON OF ROLL WAN	February 13, 1980
I hereby certify that this	property is included in t	the National Registe	r Joens to on the t date	4/22/80
Reeper of the National Regis	Sumi		date	4/22/80
Chief of Paylonation				The second state of the second

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED FEB 2 0 1980

DATE ENTERED. APR 3 2 1980

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 & 8 PAGE 3

7 - DESCRIPTION

14. Cabins 701-731. B. 1979. Some of the lots in this subdivision lack cabins. Space exists for thirty additional cabins. Cabins in this subdivision have the most prefabricated appearance of all cabins at the campground. The little decorative individuality shown on these cabins can perhaps be attributed to their recent construction (see photograph no. 6).

8 - SIGNIFICANCE

("Neshoba County Fair Returns for '72's Giant Houseparty," Clarion-Ledger-Jackson Daily News, July 30, 1972, p. 2B). The exhibition of livestock, one of the early fairs' educational functions, is continued to the present day with beef and dairy cattle shows. The dairy cattle show was recently approved by the legislature as a statewide dairy show (The Neshoba County Fair 1979 program, p. 19).

The Neshoba County Fairgrounds became a political arena early on in its history. Beginning with the first governor to speak at the fair, Anslem J. McLaurin (1896-1900), practically all governors, United States senators and representatives, numerous state and local officials, and candidates for all the above offices have spoken at the fair. James K. Vardaman, John Sharp Williams, Theodore G. Bilbo, and Pat Harrison were fair favorites. Mississippi Sen. James O. Eastland, former president pro tempore of the Senate, is the highest ranking U.S. government official to speak at the fair. Contributing to the fair's reputation as a "political springboard for Mississippi office seekers" is the fact that during an election year, candidates appearing here have the opportunity to speak before their largest single crowd (Givens, p. 14A).

The earliest extant fair program is from 1908 and lists contests for the best speech by boys and girls under twelve, best declamation by boys and best recitation by girls over twelve and under sixteen, best essay by young lady and best speech by young man (nonprofessional), best elocution by any person, and a number of addresses by government officials, preachers, and professors. Entertainment consisted of music provided by regional brass bands, a pigeon-shooting contest, and an exhibit by the Gladney and Olmstead Dissolving View Company. Old-timers also remember contests for the most colorful dress and the prettiest baby, where infants were judged on facial beauty and by how fat and fine they were. Around the turm of the century the fair gained a midway with tent shows. Coleman's Show was its first attraction, featuring a bucking mule and

FHR-8-300A (11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED FEB 2 0 1980
DATE ENTERED 2 2 (981)

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 4

8 - SIGNIFICANCE

a flying jenny (Clark Porteus, "Three Farmer Friends Got to Talking," <u>Memphis Press-Scimitar</u>, Aug. 2, 1947). Another early tent show offered a petrified man with one arm (Mars. p. 32).

The reputation of the Neshoba County Fair throughout the region and state aided its continuation during the 1920s and 1930s, when similar fair and exposition organizations folded because of lack of participation, and the fair continued to be held annually until World War II. Following the four-year war shut-down, there was question of the fair's prospects for renewed success as the number of farmers as well as the general population of the county began a dramatic decline (Mars, pp. 42-43). The 1946 reopening was successful, however, and the Neshoba County Fair survived as it changed with the times. tional activities of horse racing, livestock exhibition, and political speaking resumed, but others were changed or replaced. The community-achievement showcase, long a source of education and improvement, lost the competitive spirit that gave the exhibits their great impact. This loss of interest is perhaps attributable to the consolidation of county schools from thirty-three community schools to five (Florence Mars, interviewed by Jody Cook, architectural historian with Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Hattiesburg, at the Neshoba County Fair, Aug. 2, 1979). Displays of county products are still exhibited, however, and have grown to reflect the newer industrial as well as agricultural improvements.

Fair entertainment, originally provided by local talent, has been increasingly commercialized and supplied by outsiders since the 1950s. The post-World War II era brought beauty contests, acrobatic artists, a large midway, and appearances by the cast of the Grand Ole Opry. In the 1970s an art exhibit was added, as well as big-name country music entertainment (Loretta Lynn, Jerry Lee Lewis, Mel Tillis, and Barbara Mandrell). Reflecting the diffusion of the fair's participants, days have been designated as Meridian Day (Wednesday) and Jackson Day (Thursday), and people from these towns prepare programs for their respective days.

The contribution of the Neshoba County Fair to this very rural region of Mississippi is immeasurable, and though fair activities have greatly expanded to accommodate a larger audience, the fair has retained a number of traditional activities and early customs including late-night sings, gospel sings, square dances, and the continuity of family traditions. A large number of cabin owners are descendants of the original fairgoers and have owned family cabins and attended the fair all their lives.

The sense of place conveyed by the Neshoba County Fair Historic District comes from its interconnection of historic associations and architectural cohesiveness. The fair has an integrity of location, which has maintained its traditional function as a fair-grounds for ninety years. The setting and its focal points, Founder's Square with its

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED FEB 2 0 1980

DATE ENTERED APR 2 2 1080

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 & 9 PAGE 5

8 - SIGNIFICANCE

center pavilion and the racetrack, exist and function as originally designed and built. Though the original cabins, referred to as "tents" and shanties by their occupants, have disappeared, their replacements follow the original vernacular type. The district's sense of time and place is created by the unity and interdependence of the campground's structures in combination with a communality experienced by those attending the Neshoba County Fair.

The Neshoba County Fair stands out from its rural surroundings because of the concentrated residential development of the district unique in this county. Boundaries have been drawn to include all residential construction and other structures associated with fair activities. A number of the cabins are of recent construction but occupy land belonging to the Fair Association since before the turn of the century. Cabins are well maintained and do not require any preservation efforts. Owing to the similarity of building types, construction methods, and materials, this district contains no intrusions.

9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Givens, Murphy. "Neshoba County Fair: Tradition at its Best," <u>Clarion-Ledger</u>, July 22, 1979.

Huie, William Bradford. Three Lives for Mississippi. New York: WCC Books, 1965.

Mars, Florence, Neshoba County historian. Interviewed by Jody Cook, architectural historian with Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Hattiesburg, at Neshoba County Fair, Aug. 2, 1979.

Mars, Florence, with assistance of Lynn Eden. <u>Witness in Philadelphia</u>. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977.

Meridian [Miss.] Public Library. Subject files on Neshoba County.

Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson. Subject files on Neshoba County.

Neshoba County, Miss. Chancery Clerk. Deed Books X, Y, RR, FFF.

Neshoba County Fair Association, Philadelphia, Miss. Files on Neshoba County Fair.

FHR-8-300A (11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED FEB 2 0 1980
DATE ENTERED APR 2 2 1980

CONTINUATION SHEET

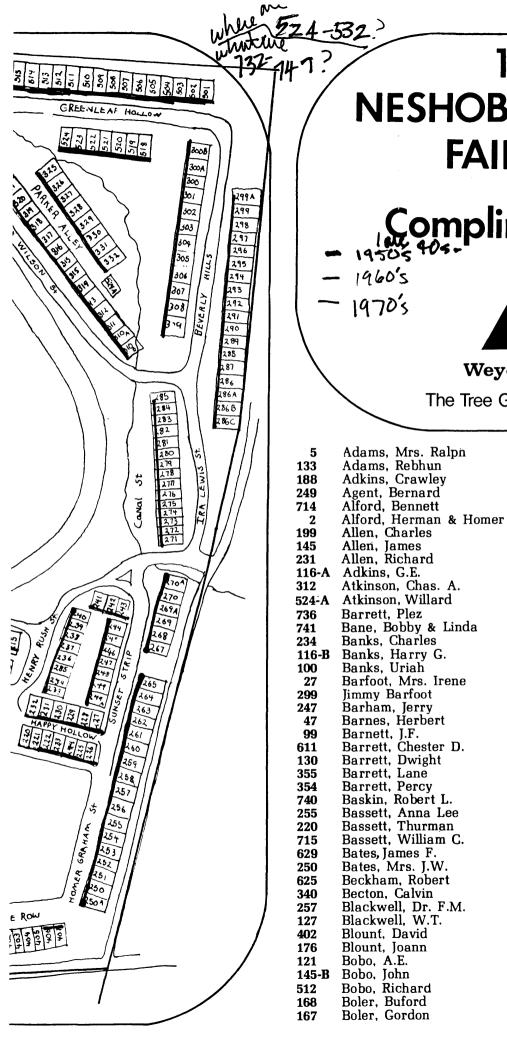
ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 6

9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Rand, Clayton. Ink on My Hands. New York: Carrick and Evans, 1940.

Spendrup, Ellen J., secretary of Neshoba County Fair Association. Interviewed by Jody Cook, architectural historian with Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Hattiesburg, at Neshoba County Fair, Aug. 1, 1979, and by telephone Dec. 3, 1979.



1979 **NESHOBA COUNTY** FAIR MAP

Compliments of



Weyerhaeuser

The Tree Growing Company

295

75

Coghlan, Ioe

FEB 2 0 1980 NATIONAL REGISTER

RECEIVED

Bounds, Buck Bounds, Melton R. 528 Bowen, Dr. Frank W. 400 Brantley, Gilbert Brantley, Karl Brantley, Marzene Brantley, R.C. 623 605 176 201 Breckenridge, Mrs. Lillian 300-B 328 Breland, Glenwood Breland, Glenwood Breland, Kenneth Breland, Raymond Bulger, Stanley L. Burkes, Billy J. Burnett, Jimmy Burns, Jeanne 271 286-A 270-A **504** 107 216 159 106 Burrage, Olen Burton, Onus Bush, Mrs. D.W. Butts, T.C. 353 162 257 Byars, Jack Byars, Roy Butler, Wayne 348 344 **522** 630-A Breazeale, Paul V. Callahan, Lewis R. 738 Cannon, H.Z. 112 Cannon, M.L. 113 Cannon, Mrs. Marshall 74 Cannon, U.E. 114 Carter, John Castle, Mrs. Christine 347 308 62 Chaney, L.M. 145-A Cheatham, Crede Cheatham, Dwight 517 Cheatham, Randolph 276 213-B Chisolm, Curtis 148 Chisolm, Nelson Clark, C.R. 144 270 Clark, Herman Clark, James Clark, Robert Clay, W.E., Sr. 104 201

