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Against All Odds: Facilitating Research on the First Black Legislators in Mississippi

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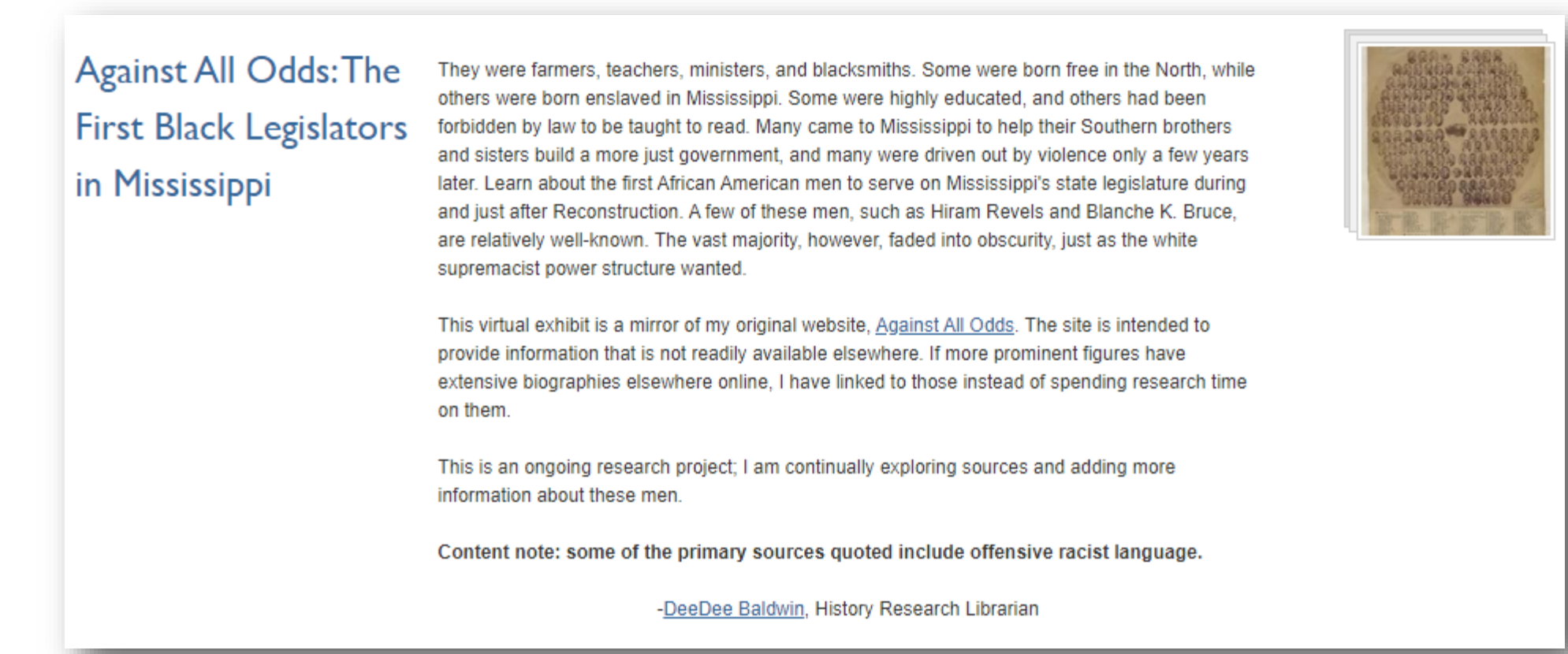
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Against All Odds: Facilitating Research on the First Black Legislators in Mississippi

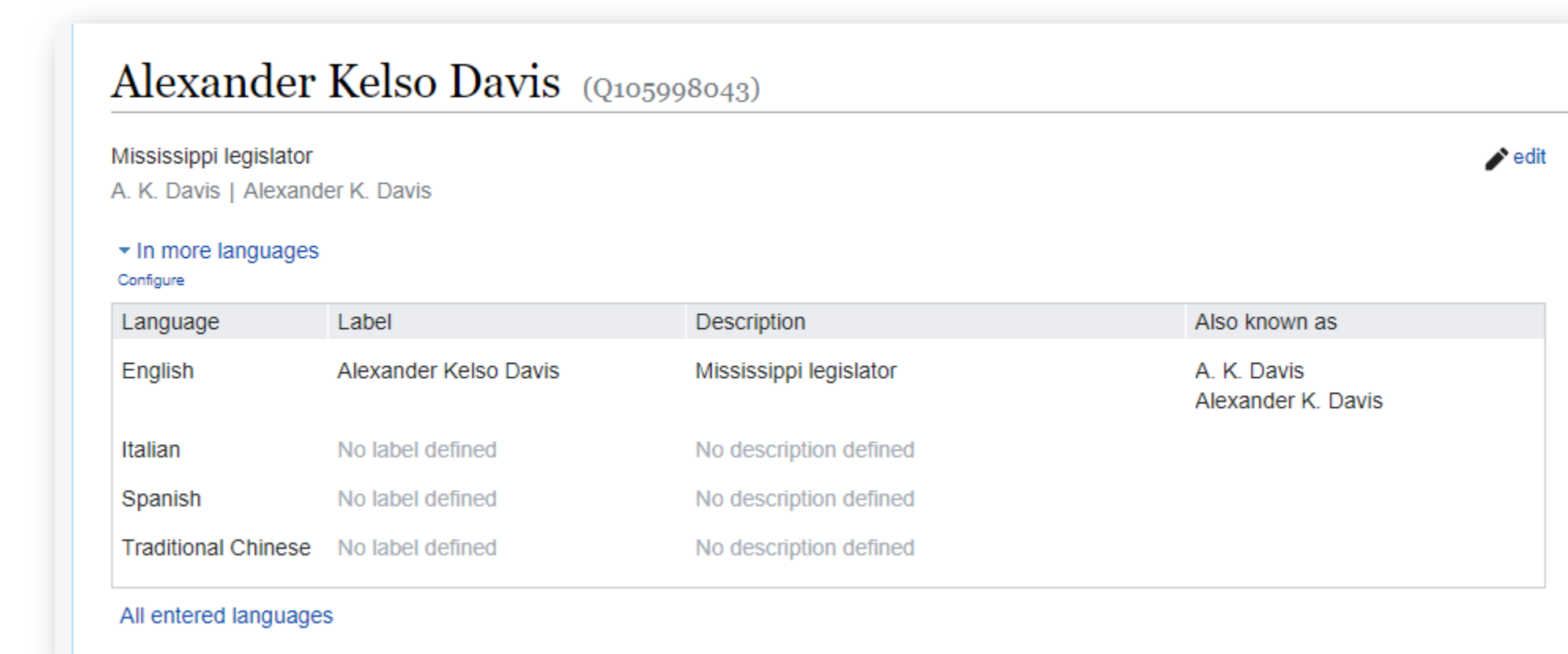
DeeDee Baldwin, Mississippi State University Libraries

DEVELOPMENT OF FURTHER PROJECTS

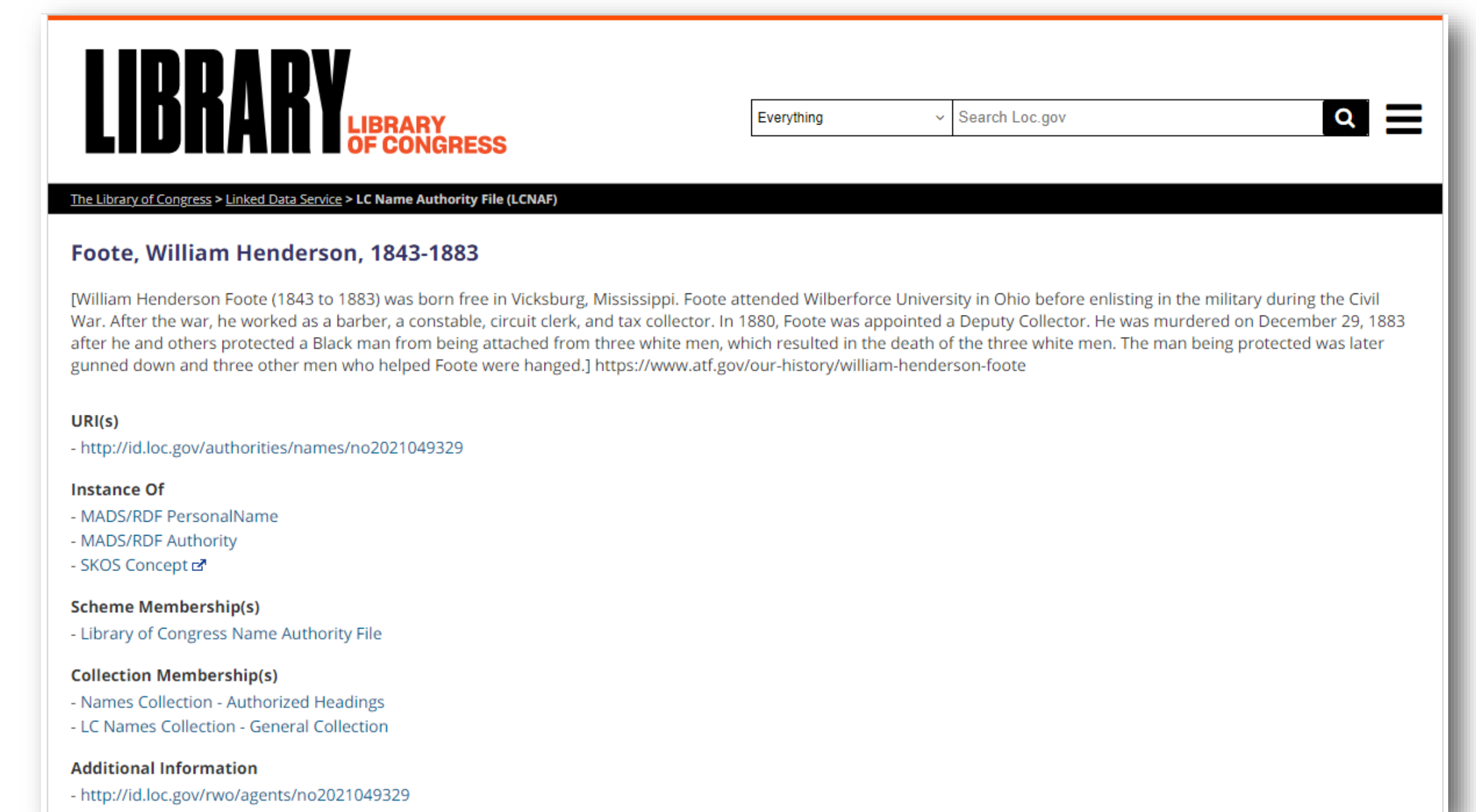
> **Omeka digital exhibit** as mirror site hosted by Mississippi State University Libraries



> **Wikidata entries** for every legislator, excluding a handful that already existed



> **Library of Congress authority records**, assisted by metadata librarian Lauren Geiger (in progress)



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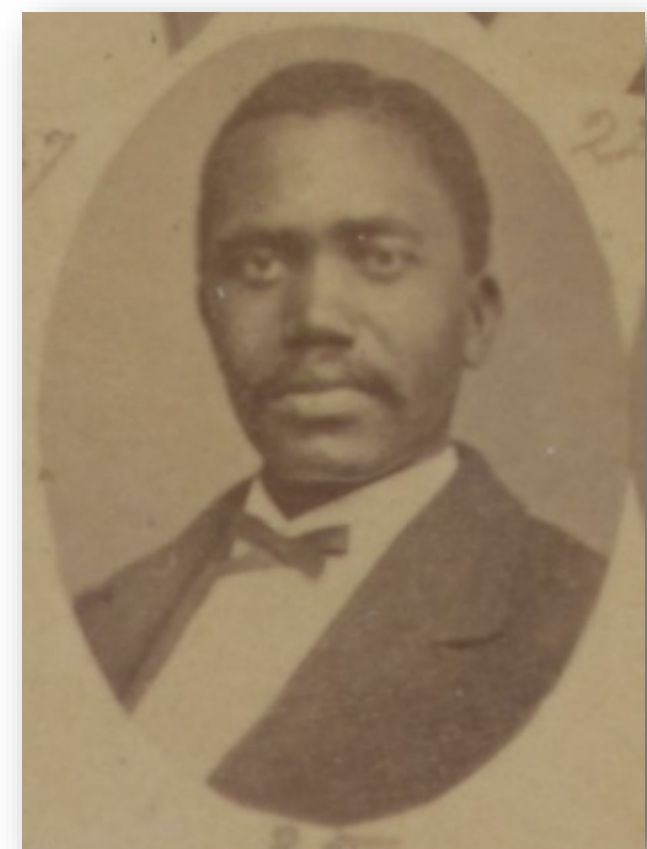
Just over 150 Black men served as state or national legislators for Mississippi from 1870-1894. A few, such as Hiram Revels and John R. Lynch, are relatively well-known and well-documented. Others faded into such obscurity that I am still unable to find any information about them at all. I created **“Against All Odds”** out of personal interest in the subject matter, a desire to pay tribute to these trail-blazing men, and a perception of the difficulty in finding information about most of them. The site is run on the free blogging software WordPress and utilizes subscriptions to Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank.com, and NewspaperArchive.com, along with free websites such as Chronicling America and FamilySearch. Because the cost of subscription sites can be so prohibitive, and because many people do not know how to search them thoroughly or effectively, **“Against All Odds”** meets an accessibility need in addition to an information need. The site is an ongoing project for which I continue to do research and add information.

Librarians and archivists in search of research projects should consider identifying information gaps in their local/state/regional holdings—particularly in relation to marginalized and under-represented groups—and developing digital humanities initiatives to address those gaps. There are many free and low-cost options for both site hosting and digital humanities tools. Many academic libraries also have subscriptions to Omeka, which is an ideal platform for projects like this. **Such pro-active approaches to bringing these stories to light can add an exciting new dimension to our typical role as information mediators.**

ABSTRACT

Researched and maintained by the history librarian at Mississippi State University (MSU) Libraries, **“Against All Odds”** (<https://much-ado.net/legislators/>) is a digital humanities project that provides biographical information, photographs, excerpts from primary and secondary sources, and over 900 newspaper clippings documenting the lives and careers of the first African American men to serve in Mississippi’s legislature during and just after Reconstruction. Because information on most of these men is so difficult to find, the site is designed to facilitate research by historians, librarians, students, and family historians alike. It has resulted in a presentation for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, a mirror site on the MSU library’s digital exhibits page, inclusion in the Digital Black History directory, and a number of emails from descendants of some of the legislators documented. **“Against All Odds”** is an example of how librarians and archivists can launch digital humanities projects as a proactive way to address archival gaps that hinder research on African Americans and other historically silenced or overlooked groups.

ELEMENTS OF THE WEBSITE



Photographs from composite portraits of the Mississippi legislature, public domain books, and other sources

George Washington Albright (Marshall County)
State Senate: 1874-1879
Born: 1846 near Holly Springs, MS
Died: 1944

According to his *autobiography* given to the WPA and the Daily Worker, Albright was born in 1846 near Holly Springs to parents enslaved by different owners; when he was 11 years old, his father was sold to Texas. His father was later killed at Vicksburg after escaping to join the Union army.

Albright was taught to read by his mother, who worked in the kitchen, listened to the white children doing their lessons, and picked up what she could to teach herself and her son. When he was 15, he became a runner for Lincoln’s Legal Loyal League, an underground network to spread news to other slaves.

Besides his work in the legislature, Albright was a prominent figure in education, helping to bring in teachers from the north and serving as trustee of the State Normal School. He also helped to organize a volunteer militia, for which he was targeted by the Ku Klux Klan.

Biographical information

The selection of a nominee for Lieutenant Governor now being in order, Col. W. H. Parker, of Montgomery county, offered the name of **Hannibal C. Carter**, in an eloquent address, teeming with eulogistic sentiment in favor of that gentleman. This nomination was received with much enthusiasm. **Mr. Stewart**, of Noxubee, nominated **Hon. A. K. Davis**, of Noxubee, which received the endorsement of a great many. Mr. Werles, of Washington, placed in nomination the name of Hon. Finis H. Little. Mr. Settles nominated Hon. **Charles Caldwell**, of Hinds. Mr. Dixon placed in nomination, Hon. A. T. Morgan, of Yazoo. There was considerable discussion upon the merits of the candidates, pending which a motion was made to adjourn till to-day at 9 o’clock A.M., and carried.

Newspaper clippings and documents, all fully transcribed and cross-linked to the legislators mentioned

Links:
 - [Wikipedia Page](#)
 - [Mississippi Reconstruction and the Negro Leader Charles Caldwell](#)
 - [The Clinton Riot of 1875: From Riot to Massacre](#)
 - [The Clinton Riot: A True Statement, Showing Who Originated It](#) (biased white POV)
 - [Voices of the Clinton Riot](#) - dramatic reading performed at the 140th anniversary

Links to available online resources

“Robert Gleed, of Columbus, was a man of fair education, good character, and some financial ability, although he had been a slave until the close of the war. An excellent speaker, he was employed by the Democratic administration after the overthrow of the Republican regime to lecture to the Negroes of the state on educational and agricultural matters.”
 (Vernon Lane Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890*, 1965)

“Gleed was a man of unusual intelligence. Before the War Columbus officers had arrested him as a runaway slave. He refused to tell where he came from or the name of his master. According to law, the officers sold him to the highest bidder. He kept his identity a profound secret as long as he lived. He was prominent in politics during reconstruction.”
 (Thomas Battle Carroll, *Historical Sketches of Oktibbeha County*, 1931)

Excerpted passages from primary and secondary sources