

African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter

Volume 12
Issue 1 March 2009

Article 23

3-1-2009

No Roads Lead to Buxton

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Recommended Citation

(2009) "No Roads Lead to Buxton," *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 23.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan/vol12/iss1/23>

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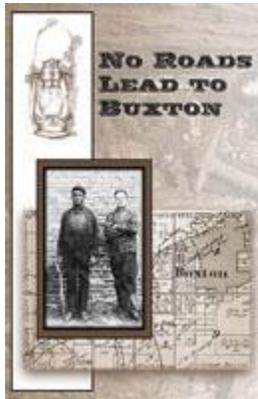
New Exhibit

No Roads Lead to Buxton

African American Museum of Iowa, through December, 2009

55 12th Ave. S.E., Cedar Rapids Iowa 52401, 877-526-1863, <http://www.blackiowa.org/>

Description from the Museum:



This exhibit chronicles the history of a small Iowa coal town that was touted as a "Black man's utopia" because of its integration and opportunity for African Americans in the early twentieth century. Buxton, Iowa was founded in 1900, and at its peak had as many as 6,000 residents, the majority of whom were African American. The Consolidation Coal Company, a subsidiary of the Chicago and North Western Railroad (CNW was purchased by Union Pacific in 1995), in Monroe County north of Albia used the town as a base of operations for its pit mines.

The story of Buxton diverges from what one might expect of a small town with a high population of African Americans in the early 1900's. Rather than segregation, integration and opportunity mark the history of this remarkable town. One historian noted, "In Buxton, there were African American doctors, dentists, druggists, lawyers, mine engineers, music teachers, school teachers, school principals, merchants, farm owners, newspaper editors, and ministers, in addition to railroad workers, coal miners, midwives, cooks, seamstresses, farmers, hair dressers, teamsters, and blacksmiths. African Americans were active members of the United Mine Workers of America union Among Buxton's African American population were veterans of the U.S. Army."

The union insisted that African American members be paid the same rate as whites, which contributed to the prosperity of the town. Life was so much better for African Americans in Buxton than, by comparison, most places in the United States, that the *Southern Workman*, a journal published by the Hampton Institute of Virginia, called it "The Black Man's Utopia." The Consolidation Coal Company abandoned the town in the early 1920's. Many of the African Americans who lived in Buxton moved to cities across Iowa, such as Des Moines, Waterloo, Davenport, and Cedar Rapids. These people had become accustomed to decent wages, opportunity, and integration, and they became an important part of Iowa's African American middle class, taking pro-union sentiments into new industries and spreading organized labor. Many also became prominent in social circles, business, and civil rights organizations.

The exhibit presents results from archaeological investigations undertaken by Iowa State

University at the Buxton townsite in 1980-1982. That research project also provided information for the townsite to be successfully nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, and resulted in the book *Exploring Buried Buxton: Archaeology of an Abandoned Iowa Coal Mining Town with a Large Black Population*, by David M. Gradwohl and Nancy M. Osborn (Iowa State University Press 1984; paperback edition 1990).

The
African American Museum of Iowa

presents

No Roads Lead to Buxton

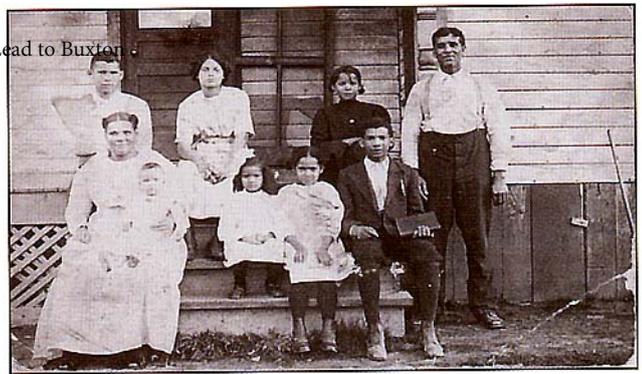


Postcard picturing the town of Buxton, Iowa, circa 1915
Courtesy John Watertor

Buxton, Iowa was considered a “Black Utopia” during the early 1900’s because the majority of this mining town’s population was African American. And because most of the remaining citizens were immigrants working in the coal mines, there was virtually no racism. Today, many of Buxton’s descendants still reside in communities across Iowa. Come and experience this unique piece of Iowa’s history.

No Roads Lead to Buxton is the first exhibition to open at the African American Museum of Iowa after the floods of 2008 ravaged downtown Cedar Rapids. We thank all of our supporters for your encouragement and generosity in helping us recover from this tragedy.

Published by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst, 2009



William Chatman family in Buxton, 1905
Photo courtesy Mary Graves

Buxton was one of the most unique towns in Iowa’s history. Located in south-central Iowa, this coal mining town was established in 1900 by Consolidation Coal Company and named for mining superintendent Ben Buxton. Only 23 years later, the town was virtually abandoned.

In the 1980’s, Iowa State University scholars researched Buxton. Historians collected oral histories from the town’s former residents while archaeologists surveyed and excavated the Buxton site for clues about its past. *No Roads Lead to Buxton* showcases the interviews, artifacts and photographs collected there.

While discrimination was very common in most Iowa towns at the time, little discrimination was noted in Buxton, leading former residents to refer to it as a “black man’s utopia”. As the town began declining, African American families from Buxton moved to other communities across Iowa and beyond, but have retained their Buxton community pride.

No Roads Lead to Buxton opens on January 17, 2009. The exhibit is full of photographs, stories, and interactives for all ages to enjoy. For more information on this exhibit, related events and tours, or other AAMI programs, please contact us!

Special thanks to these sponsors for making this exhibit possible...
Iowa Historical Society, Inc., Union Pacific Railway, Tom and Nan Riley, Misty and Jeff Elliff, Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation’s Community Fund, James Graham, Document Section of the Historical Resource Development Program of the State Historical Society of Iowa

African American Museum of Iowa
55 12th Avenue SE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52401
319-862-2101 • www.blackiowa.org

