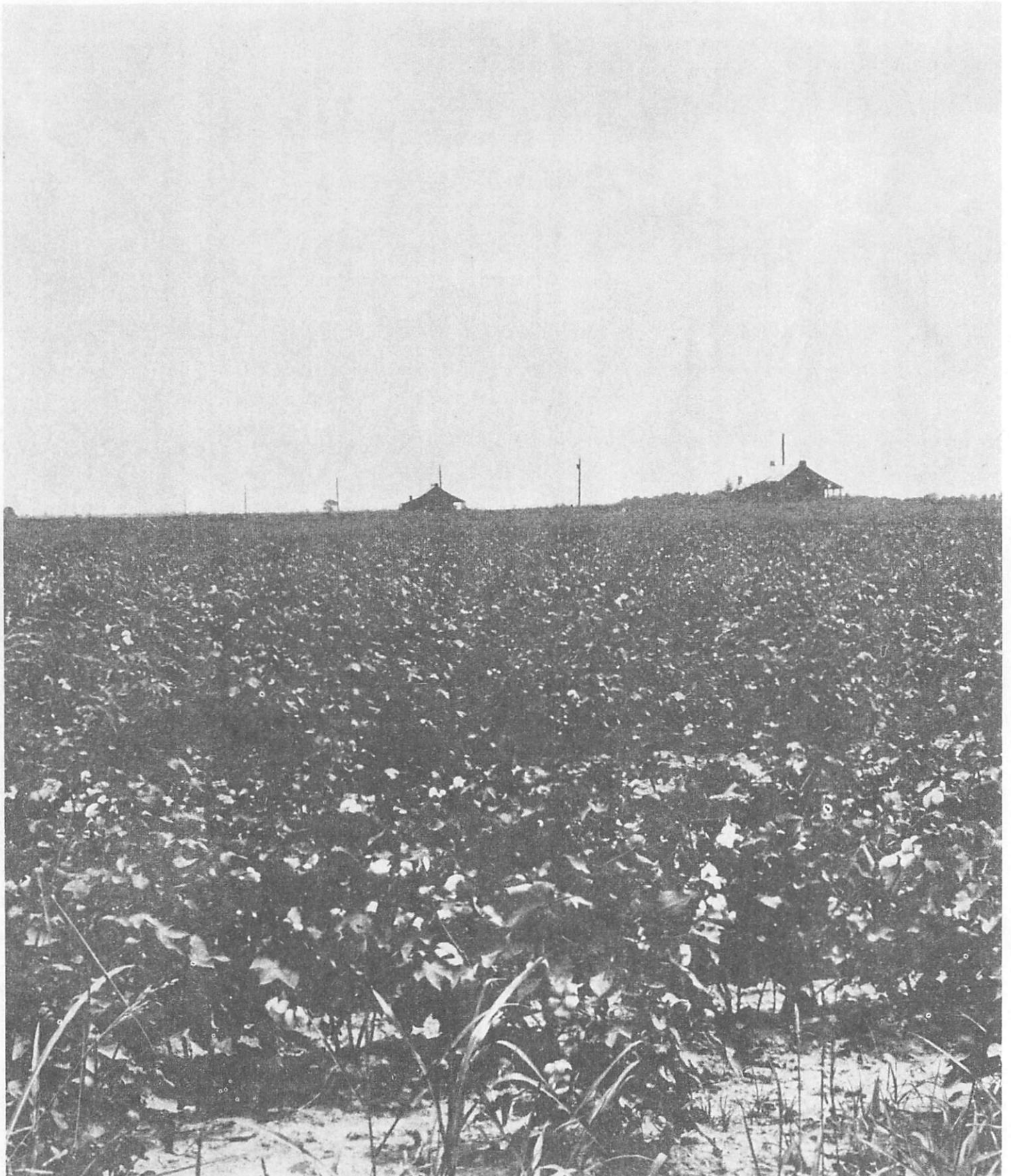


Through the long, hot summer . . .



. . . and the long cold winter. . .



1. To a total ministry

by Bishop Paul Moore, Jr.
Chairman
Commission on the Delta Ministry

The Delta Ministry came into being as a result of the events in the Civil Rights struggle in Mississippi in 1963 and 1964 and the growing concern of the Church in the whole area of Civil Rights and economic deprivation.

Many felt the need for the NCCC to stay on in Mississippi after the critical summer of 1964. Thus, a long-range ministry in depth, suggested even earlier, was implemented in the fall of 1964. The World Council shared in the endeavor which symbolized the worldwide importance of the struggle.

Initially, some of the planners envisaged the Delta Ministry as primarily a social service. Others felt it should be Civil Rights oriented. The longer the

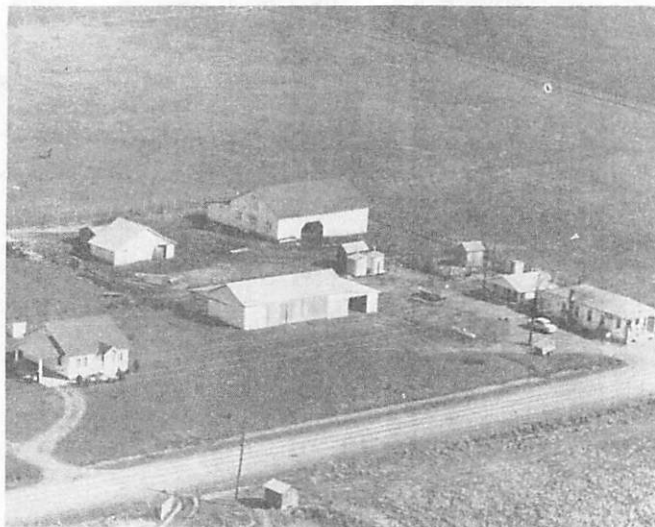


Ken Thompson Photo

got no other place else to go.”

Like the Israelites, these 150 people desperately needed land, food and jobs. They had been forced off the plantations, either directly or indirectly, by the cutbacks in cotton allotments and increased mechanization.

The 400 Acres



Most of the people left with nothing more than the clothes on their backs, a pile of ancient bills and a housefull of shirtless children.

Some of the families had attended the January 28 Poor Peoples Conference which launched plans to do something about the widespread hunger and evictions on the plantations.

Other families were among the 100 people who moved into the abandoned building on the deactivated Greenville Air Force base on January 31. When the Air Force troopers evicted them, they had moved into tents on land belonging to the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union, at Strike City.

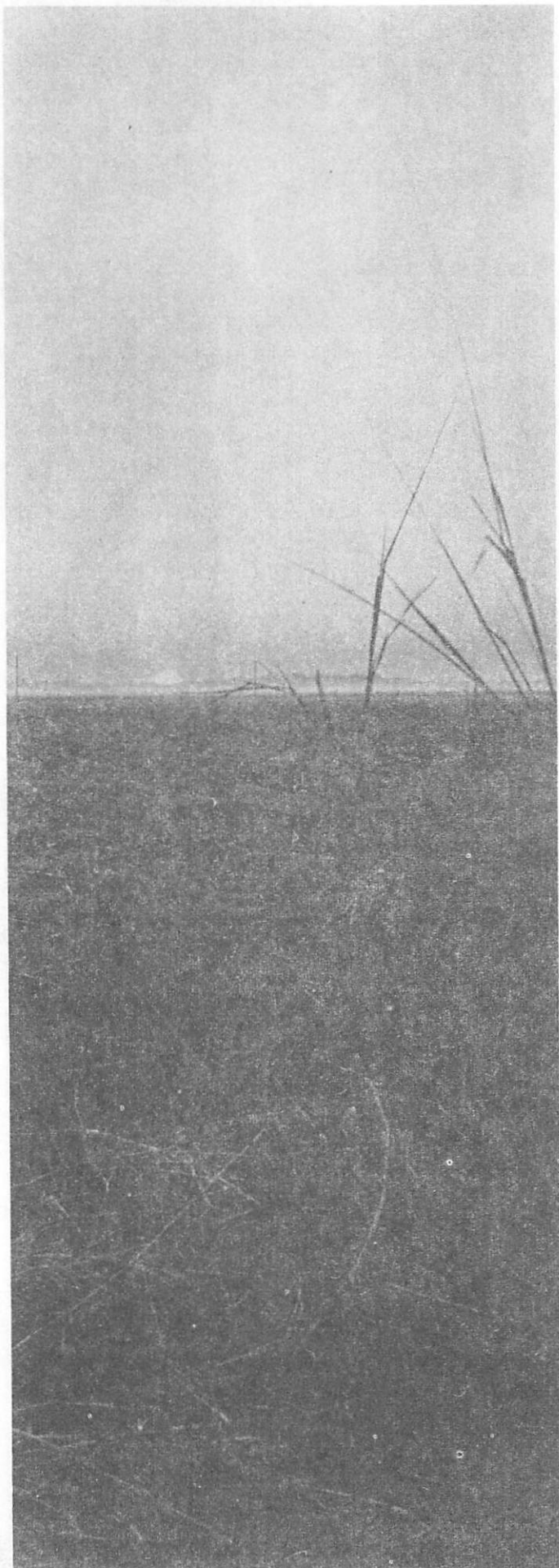
The move to Strike City was only temporary. Because of overcrowded conditions, aggravated by cold and rain, they moved again -- this time to land owned by a Negro farmer in Issaquena County, about 45 miles southwest.

Of the approximately 70 people at the new site, nearly half suffered from illnesses caused by the freezing winds and rain. The mud around the tents was so deep, one man said, “the pigs wouldn’t mess with it.”

The men kept watch at night so that white hoodlums would not shoot into the tents.

So, after almost a week of fighting to survive, the people moved again -- to Mount Beulah. Negotiations to buy the land had fallen through because of pressure from powerful whites.

The DM offered the use of Mount Beulah’s campus until the people, now officially organized under the



name of the Poor Peoples Conference, could find land and sustain themselves.

The Land

That opportunity came in April when a 400-acre farm near Greenville became available, and a northern friend agreed to lend the poor people \$70,000 to make a down payment.

By the end of May, the land had been planted in soybeans -- after hours of discussion by all the poor people as to what crop would be best.

Until temporary housing could be arranged, the men of the group crowded into cars and buses at 7 each morning to make the two-hour trip from Beulah to the land.

While waiting to settle on their land, the people held "town meetings" each Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening to discuss the future.

For the first time in their lives, many of the plantation people were learning to speak for themselves. It took a few weeks before some stopped calling DM workers "Yes sir" and "No sir."

To help them prepare for their own "independence day," classes in literacy, citizenship, Negro history and cooperative business were set up each week-day morning.

In every case, the people themselves made the decisions on what to do. The choice was not always what a DM staffer would have done -- but part of learning to make responsible decisions is taking the risk of making mistakes.

Task forces, made up of DM staffers and poor people have made contacts with architects, planners, businessmen, industrialists and others who can help make the dream a hard-headed reality.

Meanwhile, people in other counties are considering the new community approach. Some will help the Mount Beulah group as it gets established on its 400 acres -- and learn from the group as they help.

Others will take new courage in their own fight against injustice and economic slavery. And the word "freedom" will have become more real to Delta people.

"It is now apparent that the task of designing whole new cities on formerly unoccupied land will be one of our great challenges in the next decades."

--David S. Schuller
Concepts for Action

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