

Cemeteries provide a unique record of a community's past especially in a time when people did not travel far from their birthplace and were usually buried in the town where they passed away. Farmers and landowners are arguably more invested and attached to the land. Landowners were also known to provide the property needed for cemeteries, particularly during segregation.

**CHURCHES:** Booker T. Washington described the church as "the only distinctively Negro institution that existed" in the 19th century. Communities of color grew up around small churches, which served as the heart of social and political, as well as religious life. Other markers of a community such as cemeteries can be abandoned or left unkept schools were institutionalized and incorporated into the county system. Conversely, churches are rarely abandoned and more often the building is proudly preserved or reconstructed when necessary. Even if

a community has moved from the area or the community surrounding the church is no longer predominately African American, the church may remain active. Therefore, a church is one of the most resilient cultural landmarks of a community.

**PLANTATIONS:** Following Emancipation the large plantations once tended to by the enslaved were left without the labor needed to manage the tens or hundreds of acres. Likewise, agriculture was the only

skill known to the majority of former slaves. Thus, former plantations were divided into plots for tenant farmers and sharecroppers. African American farmers often remained on or returned to the plantation where they were enslaved to tend the earth. Several landowners of color in North Alabama eventually owned land and established communities on the site of former plantations.

**SCHOOLS:** Around the turn of the 20th century, the school took the place of the church as the center of a community. This may have been partially due to the communal nature of the school, which brought together the two common denominations of the South – Baptist and Methodists. In the 19th century, it was common for religious charity organizations such as the American Methodist Association (AMA) or the Seventh-Day Adventist Church to establish schools and colleges. After Emancipation, these organizations took to founding institutions for people of color.

By the 20th century, states and counties controlled public education for grade schools, but most rural areas were difficult to reach and left to their own devices. Furthermore, the prosperity of a school was determined by the community, which resulted in a lack of schools, teachers, and supplies for children of color across the South. Recognizing the importance of education, the African American community habitually took it upon themselves to provide teachers, books, and a building for their children. Thousands of rural African American communities also benefited from the philanthropy of Julius Rosenwald, whose school building fund contributed more than \$4 million to help create over 5,000 schools, facilities, and teachers' homes across 14 southern states.

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

People with African descent have been referred to by several names over the centuries and decades. While the intent and connotation behind these words have changed with time, there are terms that were official and culturally accepted in their era. Currently, the term "people of color" is most acceptable. While this term has come to include all non-white people and those of mixed race, it can be preferred for its

policies – collectively known as Jim Crow laws. In regards to cemeteries, between 1901 and the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 it was illegal in Alabama to bury white people and people of color in the same cemetery. Whereas, the majority of community cemeteries established in the 19th century were mixed, the practice of segregated sections or separate cemeteries for the African American community were customary in this period.