

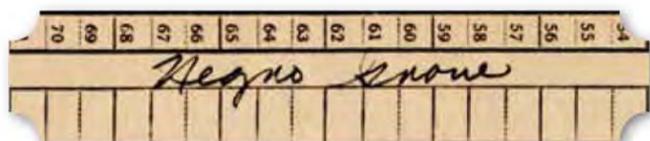
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Leighton

Leighton and its census district in the early 20th century was densely populated with over 500 households in 1900 and 761 total households in 1940. From 1900 to 1920, as the overall population grew, so too did the African American community. But by 1930, the African American population had plateaued. The overall population of Leighton and the surrounding area in the 20th century into the 21st century has been about half African American. In 1900, 44% of all households were African American. This percentage peaked in 1920 at 62% before dropping back down to 44% in 1940. According to the census information, it appears that the majority of people of color in Leighton lived south of the railroad, on the west side of town. This is where a large Rosenwald school would later be located. The 1940 census dubbed this area “Negro Grove.” As of the latest census in 2010, Leighton had a total of 53.2% African American population.

African American farm ownership followed the same pattern of growth and plateau as the overall African American population with the exception of the year 1900. In that year, there were 38 African American-owned farms in the Leighton district, which accounted for 13% of the total households. While the number of farms dropped in 1910, it peaked in 1920 when 50 African American households owned a farm. But due to population growth, the 50 farms still accounted for only 14% of the total households. Between 1920 and 1930 there was a drastic downturn in the number of African American-owned farm. While there had been 50 farms in 1920, there were only 18 farms in 1930 –

(Below) Excerpt from 1940 Federal Census Labeling the African American Area of Leighton as “Negro Grove” (National Archives and Records Administration via Ancestry.com)



(Above) 1936 USGS/TVA Topographic Map of Leighton, Leighton, Alabama Quadrangle (Leighton School in Red and Old Highway 20 in Blue)

a low of 5% of all the households of Leighton. These numbers did not rebound in 1940.

Starting in 1920, the census divided the Leighton district into north and south of Old Highway 20. While the majority of African American households lived on the north side of town, the majority of African American-owned farms were located on the south side. The year 1920 had the most farms owned by African American households (50) and many of them appear to be neighboring farms owned by family members. With such a high rate of African American farm ownership, there are several families with more than one member who owns a farm. Based on ages, many farms were owned by a father and son, brothers, a widowed mother and son, or a father and widowed daughter-in-law.

The Preuit family had three members that owned a farm from at least 1900 to 1920. The Jackson, Ricks, and Vinson families all owned more than one farm in 1900 and 1910. By 1920, when 50 African American households owned farms in Leighton, the Ricks and

Abernathy families each owned four farms. The King and Jackson families owned three each as well. Between 1920 and 1930, 32 African American-owned farms were either lost or families moved from the Leighton area. There were no families that had more than one member owning a farm in 1930.



Leighton School

Leighton School, also referred to as Leighton Training School or (Colbert) County Training School, was one of the seven Rosenwald schools built in Colbert County. Only two acres of land were required to apply for the Rosenwald Fund, but the African American community of Leighton acquired five acres for the school. The school was the largest in the county, a five-teacher/ five-room school – rare in North Alabama. The school was funded for the 1928-1929 year and cost a total of \$10,950. A sum of \$6,500 was donated by the African American community, \$1,000 from the local white community, \$2,000 additional dollars in public funds from the county, and \$1,450 from the Rosenwald Fund. The school was insured for \$8,000.

The County Training School was unique for having been made of brick instead of the usual wood frame and weatherboard. The school had a U-shaped plan and Colonial Revival elements to its architecture. True to the Nashville Plan drawn up by the Rosenwald Fund, the school faced east for the best lighting.

(Below) Aerial Photograph of Leighton School in 1949 (University of Alabama, Historical Map Collection, Online)