

England, known for its steel production. Throughout the turn of the 20th century, Sheffield and nearby Tuscumbia and Florence (Tri-City) continued to thrive based on its rail connections and potential industrial production. To move all the workers needed for this industrial production, electric streetcars connected areas of the Tri-Cities from 1904-1933. World War I brought the U.S. Army to the Shoals to build two large nitrate plants and the Wilson Dam in 1918. One of the plants is located to the west of Sheffield and another to the east – now considered Muscle Shoals.

Although the present city of Sheffield is completely built out with houses, railroads, and commercial and industrial properties, it once was farmland. In the 19th century and into the early 20th century, the city of Sheffield had some farmland surrounding the town, however, by 1930, the entire area from the river's edge to the limits of adjacent Tuscumbia and Muscle Shoals, was completely developed. From 1900 to 1920, the total number of households in Sheffield dropped from 184 to 139 - probably the result of rezoning in the Tri-City area. The percentage of African American households similarly declined from about 68% of the total households in 1900 to 60% in

1920. While there was a total of 19 African American-owned farms in 1900 and 1910, only four of those farms were continually owned by the same person.

Much of the turnover in ownership may be due to fathers/heads of household passing away and leaving their farm to their widow and/or children. In 1900, there were four women who owned a farm – all widows. In 1910, there were two widows who owned farms. By 1920, there were 12 farms owned by African American households, half of which were headed by widowed women. Only one farmer owned his land from at least 1900 to 1920 – Fred Jones (born c. 1872). Sheffield also 'lost' some of its land to the development of the city of Muscle Shoals, which grew out of the industry that was spilling over from Sheffield. At present, it is difficult to know where Sheffield, Tuscumbia, and Muscles Shoals end and another begins.

(Below) Excerpt of Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Sheffield, Colbert County, Alabama. Sanborn Map Company, 1921. Showing "Colored Neighborhood."
(Right) Zoning Map for the City of Sheffield, 1942, with Historically African American Neighborhood Highlighted (University of Alabama, Historical Map Collection, Online)



Sheffield's "Colored" Neighborhood

The neighborhood to the southeast of Sheffield is labeled on the 1921 Sanborn Fire Insurance map as "Colored Neighborhood." The area is called Woodlawn Heights today and abuts the railroad and an industrial park. The neighborhood developed in the early 20th century, although the 1921 Sanborn map shows the streets laid out, but sparse buildings. The majority of the houses standing today are of two types: bungalows from the 1900s to the 1930s and small FHA houses from the 1940s and 1950s. The houses indicate two periods of growth within the neighborhood as well as a focus on economical home ownership.

Only a portion of the neighborhood is depicted on the 1921 map. Besides houses, there are several churches – many of which stand today. At 10th

Avenue and 18th Street is the "Central Methodist Church (Colored)," a small brick building. Now this is the home of Brown Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. On the southwest corner of Atlanta Avenue and Cohen Street is New Bethel AME Church, labeled as the "M.E. Church (Colored)." Across Atlanta Avenue at 19th Street is Gaston Chapel Primitive Baptist Church, simply labeled "Baptist Church (Colored)." Gaston Chapel was first organized in 1914 by Rev. W. M. Gaston. The church standing today was built in 1945. Behind Gaston Chapel, on 20th Street, is "1st Baptist Church (Colored)." This is now gone; an open field is all that remains. According to USGS topographic maps, the church was still present in 1957, but is no longer there by 1971.

A few other pieces of the neighborhood have been relegated to the past. No neighborhood is complete without homes, churches, and schools. A "Graded



* Indicates a Historical - Non-Extant Resource