

Houston Cobb bought a 1929 Chevrolet car, almost new. According to Butch Walker, “the 1929 car was purchased from Emmitt King of Leighton; Emmitt was the son of Claude King. Houston’s car was the only new car owned by a black family that people both black and white would seek for transportation within miles of the community. White and black folks would come to Houston’s house and get him to carry them to doctors, funerals, or even on dates for young men to see their girlfriends.” The Cobbs were also known to help transport Rev. Ashford from Courtland or Town Creek, probably using this vital asset.

Although Houston Cobb, Sr. worked for the TVA at Wheeler Dam in the early 1930s – making \$0.35/ hour as a jackhammer man – and later went to work at the Nitrate Plant No. 2, though he continued to farm in Bethel. Huston, Jr. attests that his father would borrow \$300 per year to make a crop and was made to mortgage his property, but that the family “really did not know [they] were poor, but [they] were better off than most black and white families. [His] family went to church every Sunday; many of the TVA workers would wear their badge to church to show that they had a job.”

Huston Cobb, Jr. still lives near the family farm. Also, nearby is the Houston Cobb Sr. Family Cemetery. Houston Cobb, Sr. (1902-1985) is buried there on the Cobb land. Also, buried with him are his wife, Nazareth (1902-1962), and his other children, Leo Mack (1927-2018), Ernest (1929-2000), and Carl Elbert (1931-2014). Mack Griffin is interred there as well. He was originally buried at Mount Pleasant Cemetery near Ford City but was reinterred in 2006 at the Cobb Family Cemetery near Bethel Church – a recognized and much appreciated member of the Cobb family.

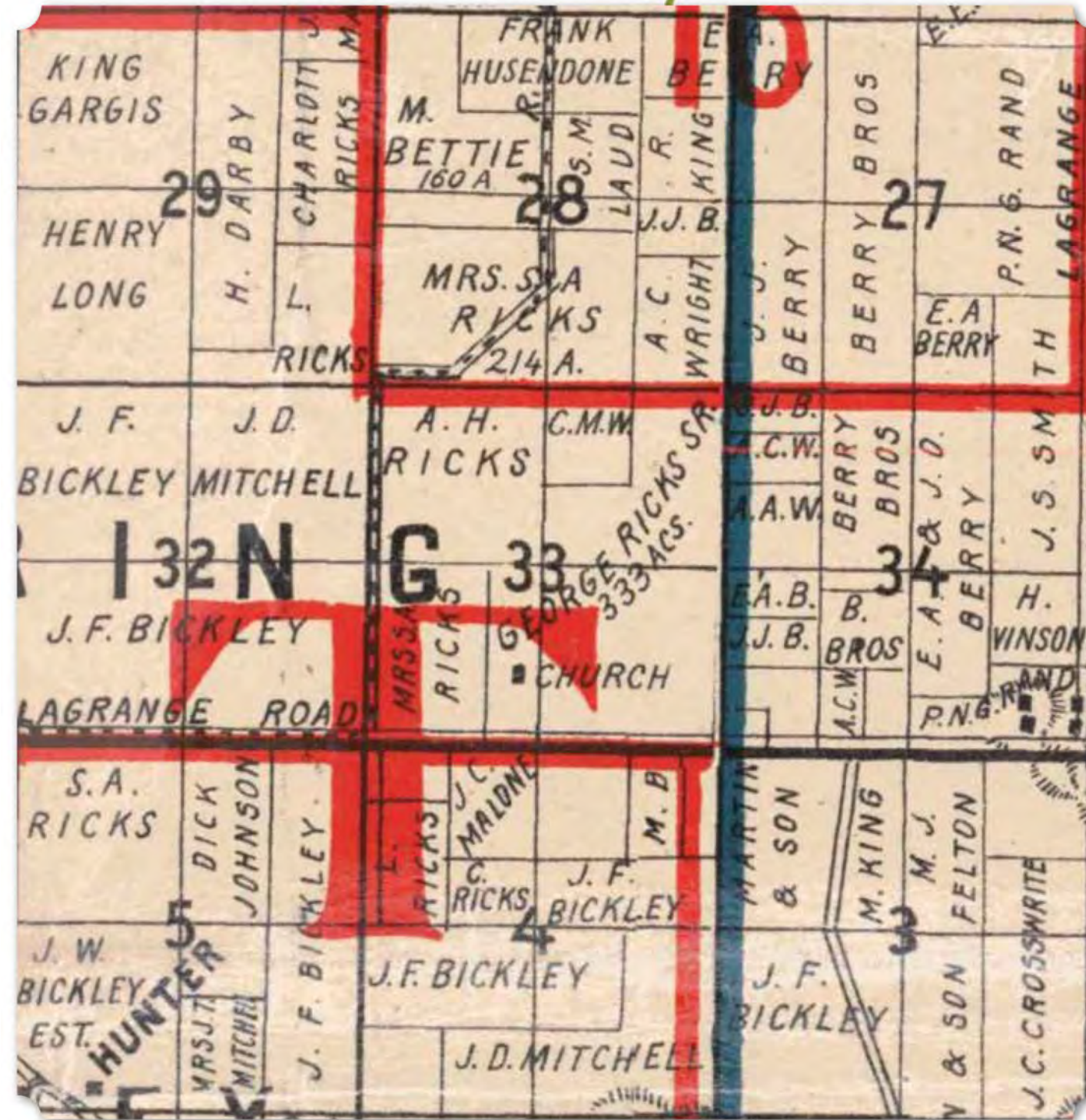
George Ricks (1838-1908)

George Ricks was the earliest known African American landowner in North Alabama and Colbert County. Ricks was born a slave in about 1838 (per his headstone) or possibly 1847 (per a plaque at this grave). Some accounts say he was born in Liberia.

He was a slave on The Oaks Plantation, owned by Abraham Ricks and his son, Abraham, Jr. Abraham Sr. and his wife, Charlotte Ricks, were members of the Church of Christ and allowed their slaves to learn to read in order to better learn the Bible. Charlotte Ricks taught some of the slave children, including George Ricks, to read and write in a small school. By about



(Below) Excerpt of 1908 Map of Colbert and Franklin Counties, Alabama Showing George Ricks Sr. Owning 333 Acres of Land in Section 33 (University of Alabama, Historical Map Collection, Online via Geological Survey of Alabama)



1867, George Ricks began preaching and traveled North Alabama extensively, visiting various churches. As of 1885, Ricks Church, or the Christian Home, had about 100 members and George Ricks was one of the parsons there, known as Elder Ricks.

Elder George Ricks rose from a slave to become one of the earliest African American landowners in North Alabama. Abraham Ricks, Jr. is said to have given his slaves land to farm after the Civil War – whether as tenants or sharecroppers or owners is unclear. However, Elder Ricks grew cotton and amassed enough money to purchase 320 acres of land near The Oaks Plantation and Ricks Church. Sometime, likely in the late 19th century, Elder Ricks deeded half an acre of his land for the use of a cemetery, now the George Ricks Cemetery.

The cemetery’s first marked interment is that of Eliza Ricks (1831-1899), the wife of Elder George Ricks. Although, the cemetery was likely in use before 1899, as it is labeled on an 1896 map of Colbert County. The George Ricks Cemetery is located at the end of Ricks Cemetery Road, south of Ricks Lane. Besides George Ricks and his family, many other former slaves of The Oaks and their descendants are buried there. Rick’s headstone is a large stone column, which stands out from the rest of the cemetery. It is accompanied by a plaque describing his achievements. It reads: “George Ricks was brought in 1846 from Liberia to Jamestown, Virginia and sold as a slave to Abraham Ricks. He became the first black landowner in North Alabama by planting cotton on Saturday evenings and picking it by the moon light. Of his first 53 acres purchased he gave three acres to bury black slaves of this community.”

The Ricks Church and “Geo.” Ricks’ land are marked on an 1896 map of Colbert County. Although present since at least the last 19th century, Ricks Cemetery is first mapped on the 1971 USGS topographic map. The church and its accompanying cemetery were listed on the Alabama Register in 1988. The Ricks Church and cemetery remain as a testament to this well-beloved and respected former slave that was able to give to his community and ensure their needs and souls were well cared for.