

landmarks on the south side of the Rogersville area, including the Southside Church of Christ & Cemetery, Fuqua Place, a former plantation, and the Fuqua and Watkins cemeteries.

In 1900, there were a dozen African American landowning farmers in the Rogersville district, a number that remained steady through the 1930s. The highest rate of land ownership was in 1940 when 20 of the 80 families of color owned a farm. Common family names of African American landowners in Rogersville are Fuqua, Watkins, Patrick, and Simmons. Columbus Simmons owned a farm in 1900, and by 1930 the Simmons family had four members who owned farms, including two different men named Frank Simmons whose relation is unclear. The 1920 census records both of these men as being born about 1880 to 1883. One of them is mixed, or “mulatto,” the other is noted as “black.” The former is married to a woman named Josie, the latter to a woman named Selma. Frank and Josie rented a farm with his mother in 1910, but Frank and Selma owned a farm from at least 1910 to 1940. This second Frank Simmons is buried at the Little Zion Cemetery in Rogersville.

Other landowning families of note are the Fuqua, Patrick, and Watkins families. The Fuqua family owned two farms in 1900, at least one in 1910 and 1920, three in 1930, and two in 1940. The Patrick family owned two farms from 1900-1930 and one in 1940. The Watkins family owned several farms in the early 20th century: Henderson Watkins from at least 1900 to 1920, Allen Watkins in 1920, Points Watkins in 1930, and Curtis and George Watkins in 1940.

The Little Zion School was one of several rural schools for African American children in Lauderdale County. It first appears on the 1936 USGS topographic map alongside a church at about the present location of Little Zion Cemetery at the corner of a 90-degree bend in County Road 605. It appears that the school, church, and cemetery all developed at the same spot sometime in the early 20th century, which is not uncommon. Like many of the rural schools, Little Zion had closed by 1952. The topographic map shows only the Little Zion Church and the cemetery. By the 1970s, the church is gone as well, leaving only the cemetery.

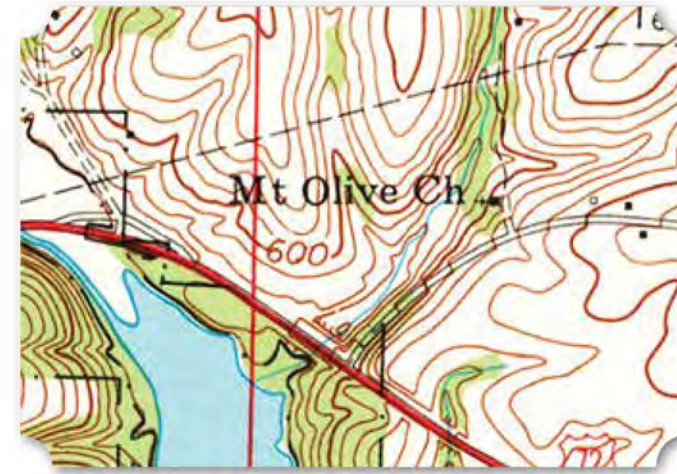
The school and church were located north of the cemetery, but that corner is still empty today.

The Little Zion Cemetery has about 230 graves. Common surnames include Bowens, Fuqua, Howard, Ingram, Nance, and Watkins. The earliest known interment is that of Alfred Bowens (1830-1913), who happened to own a farm from at least 1900 to 1910 and most likely until his death. There are several other local African American landowners, including Arnettha King (1898-1986), who owned a farm in 1940; Frank Simmons (1880-1973), who owned a farm from at least 1910 to 1940; Ernest Simmons (1879-1965), who owned a farm in 1920; and Denver Watkins (1907-1993) who owned a farm in 1940.

21 ■ Mt. Olive School (Rosenwald)*

The Mt. Olive School was one of seven Rosenwald schools in Lauderdale County. It was a two-teacher, two-room schoolhouse built in the early days of the project under the direction of the Tuskegee Institute - about 1913 to 1915. The school cost a total of \$1,500 to build with \$500 each from the African American community, public county funds, and the Rosenwald Foundation. It was located west of Rogersville along present-day Lee Highway where it crosses with the northern end of Joe Wheeler State Park. The 1916

(Below) 1936 USGS Topographic Map of Mt. Olive School, Thorntontown, Alabama Quadrangle



(Above) 1952 USGS Topographic Map of Mt. Olive School, Thorntontown, Alabama Quadrangle

USGS topographic map labels the area as Mt. Olive, but no school is indicated even though it was likely built by that time. The first map depicting the school is the 1936 topographic map. The school is shown in a dip in the road at First Creek with the Mt. Olive Church nearby to the east. By the 1950s, the school is gone, a common occurrence for rural African American schools.

(Below) Aerial Photograph of Mt. Olive School, 1958 (University of Alabama, Historical Map Collection, Online)



22 ■ Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, School (Rosenwald),* and Cemetery

Mt. Zion AME Church is located within the census district of Gravelly Springs and is located on the western side of the “Bend in the River,” west and slightly north of Oakland. The church is situated where Oakland, Smithsonia, and Rhodesville come together, and members of the church and its community may have been residents of any of one of these. In the early 20th century, the community surrounding Rhodesville remained about one-third African American, while farm ownership fluctuated. While there were some landowning farmers in this area, there were never more than 10. In 1900, only five African Americans owned a farm: Paris Beckwith, Silas Chandler, James H. Boseine, and John and Luke Reeder. By 1910, the number of landowning farmers of color doubled. Beckwith and Chandler retained their farms and were joined by James G. Simpson, Robert and Robert G. Summerhill, Boson and William Irons, Angeline and Garrett L. Reeder, and Jacob Russell. By 1920, the number of landowners