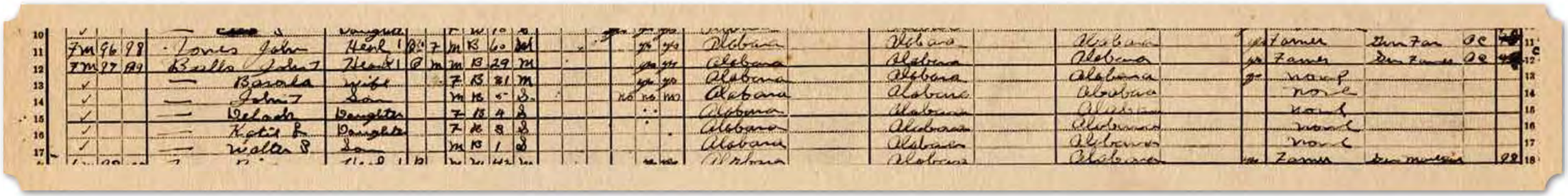
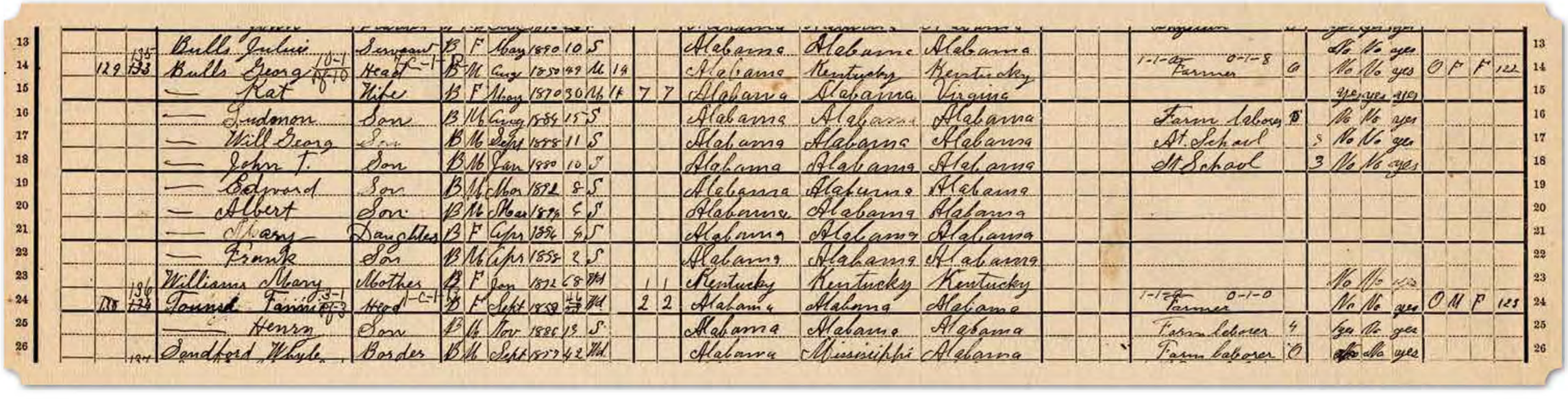
3.

HISTORICAL AFRICAN AMERICAN THEMES, PEOPLE, AND EVENTS

The Bulls Family

The history of the Bulls family is a prime example of the effect landownership can have on multiple generations. John Thomas Bulls, Jr. (1914-2002) is a celebrated figure in Florence and for good reason. Bulls, his wife (who was a Turnley), and their families were some of the most successful African American landowning farming families in Lauderdale County. From slavery to doctorates, the Bulls - and the Turnleys - used agriculture to build a better future for the next generation.

John, Jr.'s grandfather, George Bulls (c. 1850-1931), was most likely born the slave of Dempsey D. Bulls. D.D. Bulls owned nine slaves in 1860 including a woman about George's mother's age and two young boys who may have been George and his brother, Anthony. In 1870, George was living with his mother, Mary, and siblings in Center Star, a community in eastern Lauderdale County south of Bailey's Springs. By 1900, George was married to Kate (1870-1961) and owned a farm in Center Star, east of Florence, between Killen and Rogersville. One of their sons was John T. Bulls, Sr. (1891-1980). John, Sr. grew up on his parents' farm, which they owned from at least 1900 to 1930, probably 1931 when George Bulls passed away.

By 1920, John, Sr. was married to Bazola Brooks Bulls (1880-1978) and owned his own farm in Center Star. The following decade's census records show George Bulls and sons John and William all owning farms in Center Star. Perhaps George left his land to another son upon his death. By 1940, three Bulls brothers, John, William, and Earlie, were all living next door to one another and farming on their own land on Center Star Road in Lauderdale County.

(Below) Excerpt of 1900 Census of George Bulls **(Bottom)** Excerpt of 1920 Census of John T. Bulls, Jr. **(Opposite Page) (Top)** Excerpt of 1930 Census of George Bulls, William G. Bulls, and John T. Bulls, Sr. **(Bottom)** Excerpt of 1940 Census of John T. Bulls, Sr. W. G. Bulls, and Earlie Bulls on Center Star Road (all from National Archives and Records Administration via Ancestry.com)