



The children are then listed from the first born, or oldest, first. Information collected on the children comprises of their name, where they will attend school the following year, the distance to that school, birth date, grade, literacy, sex, defects, and age. The so-called “defects” are listed as blind, crippled, deaf, dumb, and a write-in space. While the forms were not always filled out completely, they provide an overall view of the schools available to African American families.

The records indicate that the highest number of schools was in 1930, and that by the 1950s, many of the schools had closed and consolidated with others. The exact location of all the schools is not known, but most are known. While there are USGS topographic maps from 1936, few of the schools noted indicate whether they are for African American children. In

(Left) The Names of Lawrence County African American Schools as Written on School Census Cards 1930-1958 (Lawrence County Archives, Moulton, Alabama)

fact, Rosenwald is the only name that indicates the school was African American. Other complications in the records include that schools sometimes changed names or were simply referred to by the town. With further research, these records can be used to understand what schools were open during what years and how many children went to each school.

In 1930, there were at least 19 schools. While names might change and schools closed, this should be a nearly complete list of African American schools in Lawrence County at the time:

<i>Canaan</i>	<i>Moulton (Rosenwald)</i>
<i>Cave Springs</i>	<i>Mt. Hope</i>
<i>Courtland</i>	<i>Mt. Zion</i>
<i>Davis (David) Temple</i>	<i>Oakville</i>
<i>Ebenezer</i>	<i>Pinhook</i>
<i>Flower Hill</i>	<i>Red Bank</i>
<i>Hillsboro (Rosenwald)</i>	<i>Rocky Hill</i>
<i>Kimo</i>	<i>Spring Creek</i>
<i>Landersville</i>	<i>Tennessee Valley Junior (T.V.J.)</i>
<i>Little Sam</i>	<i>Town Creek</i>
<i>Macedonia</i>	<i>Wheeler</i>

Jesse Owens

Jesse Owens (1913-1980) is famous for his athletic performance at the 1936 Summer Olympics in Nazi Germany. Some accounts say he was born in Danville, over the county line in Morgan County. However, the official Jesse Owens Memorial Park and Museum are located in Oakville in southeast Lawrence County. Jesse was born to Henry Cleveland (1881-1942) and Emma Fitzgerald (1876-1940) Owens. They lived in Decatur, Morgan County in 1900, and by 1910, they were farming in Oakville. The family moved to Cleveland, Ohio in 1922 when Jesse was nine years old. The Owens were part of the Great Migration, a time when many families of color left the South for better opportunities in the North.

Jesse attended Ohio State University where he was a member of the track team and trained for the upcoming Olympic Games. Jesse met a fellow team member at OSU by the name of David Donald

Albritton. Born just a few miles east of Oakville in neighboring Danville, Morgan County, Alabama, Albritton was the son of a landowning farmer. Owens and Albritton were two of 18 African American athletes sent to Nazi Germany in 1936 to compete. Owens won four gold medals, and Albritton won the silver medal in the high jump. Together, they represented not only Alabama, but African American people and their resilience, perseverance, and determination.

After returning home, Owens married Minnie Ruth Solomon (1915-2001) in Cleveland in 1935. Over the decades, Owens has been honored many times over. In 1996, the Jesse Owens Memorial Park and Museum opened in Oakville.

(Below) Jesse Owens, 1936 (ACME News Photos, Public Domain)



Wheeler Dam

Named for General Joe Wheeler, Wheeler Dam was built in the 1930s, completed in 1936. It was one of the two dams built by the TVA in North Alabama. After the TVA took ownership of Wilson Dam, it constructed Wheeler and Guntersville dams to control the Tennessee River and produce hydroelectric power for the valley. During construction, there was a construction village, like those at Wilson Dam, north of Red Bank. Although the majority of the community of Red Bank was African American, there is no evidence that any people of color worked on the dam. Nonetheless, the African American community of North Lawrence County was greatly impacted by the TVA and the changes to the river.

Photographs taken by the TVA in the 1930s and 1940s illustrate the types of houses that were common in the area, a recreational “beach” for people of color, a Boy Scouts camp, men fishing, and Decatur Negro High School and other community resources along the river. What the TVA called the “Negro Recreation Area on Gold Field Branch” was a sparse bit of coastline located north of Pond Spring and Bride’s Hill. Across the river from the confluence of Elk River is the Goldfield Branch of the Tennessee River. It may have become part of present-day Lawrence County Park. The location of the “Colored Boy Scouts’ Camp” is unknown, although photographs in the TVA collection are attributed to the Wheeler Dam Reservoir.

