

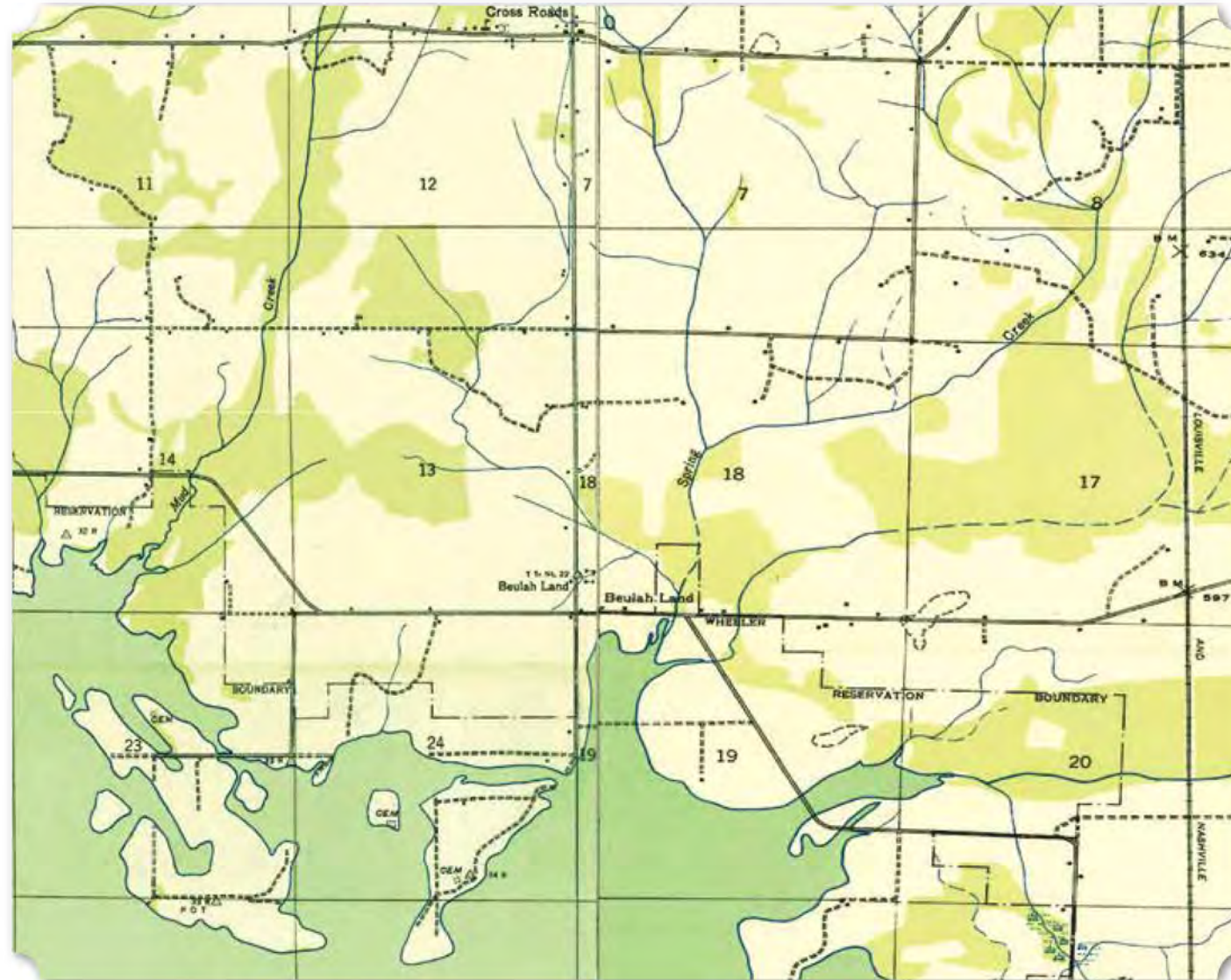


(Above) Aerial Photograph of Belle Mina School in 1940, the Plantation House is to the North and the School is the Smaller Building to the South (University of Alabama, Historical Map Collection, Online)

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Beulah Land

The story of Beulah Land, or Beulahland, is the story of the Bridgeforth family. George Ruffin Bridgeforth was the initiator of a community of African American landowners in Limestone County – Beulahland. At the turn of the 20th century, while George Ruffin attended the Massachusetts Agricultural College,



his family lived on the west side of the Elk River in southwestern Limestone County. In 1910, George Ruffin and several members of the community came together to form the Southern Small Farm Land Company, which then established the settlement of Beulah Land in south central Limestone County.

Beulahland thrived with a Rosenwald school, churches, and multiple landowners. In the 1930s, however, the construction of the Wheeler Dam by the TVA caused the displacement of many families along the Tennessee River. The Beulah Land community, led by the Bridgeforths, fought against relocation. Over time, the Bridgeforths became leaders in vocalizing the opinions and needs of

African American landowners to the local, state, and federal government – taking on issues such as voter registration and equal educational opportunities for African Americans. Many of the descendants of the original African American landowning families still reside and farm in the area.

Lakeview United Methodist Church

One of the essential community centers of Beulah Land is Lakeview United Methodist Church. Located north of the intersection of Bridgforth and Harris Station roads with Lucas Ferry Road, the church's congregation predates the Civil War. According to the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, people of color have been



(Left) 1936 USGS/TVA Topographic Map of Beulah Land, Tanner and Stewart Cross Roads, Alabama Quadrangles

members of the Methodist Connection in Limestone County since at least 1818.

Although a church in some form or another existed in the community for decades, in 1913, Beulah Land Methodist Episcopal Church was organized. Land for the first church was donated by George and Jennie Bridgeforth. The original church was destroyed in a tornado in 1974. After rebuilding in 1976, Beulah Land Methodist Episcopal joined with Johnson's Chapel to create Lakeview United Methodist Church. The church was destroyed again by a tornado in April, 2011, and was rebuilt by 2013. At this time there were about 65 members of the congregation, including members of the Bridgeforth family. The Rev. Dr. Wylheme H. Ragland was pastor.

The church is associated with the Lakeview United Methodist Church Cemetery, a community burial ground also known as Beulah Land. The earliest burial is Florida Coggar (1896-1917). Others include 35 members of the Bridgeforth family. George Bridgeforth (1838-1923), father of George Ruffin Bridgeforth, is buried here alongside his wife, Jennie Andrews Bridgeforth (1841-1922), and their children Sarah B. Lampkin (1866-1923), Parthenia B. Meals (1876-1920), Ike M. Bridgeforth (1879-1968), William Shirley Bridgeforth, Sr. (1882-1918), and Bascom Bridgeforth (1887-1974). George Ruffin Bridgeforth is the only sibling not buried here. His grave is in the Hine and Hobbs Street Cemetery in Athens.

Beulahland School (Rosenwald)*

Beulah Land also had a Rosenwald school. Beulahland School was also known by the name of George Ruffin Bridgeforth's land company, Southern Small Farms. The two-teacher school was first organized in 1908 and built in 1910 under the direction of the Tuskegee Institute, working on behalf of the Rosenwald Fund. The total cost was \$1,025, of which the African American community provided \$830 and the white community \$45. The Rosenwald Fund provided the balance of \$150.