

In the early 20th century, the town of Flint had an average of 200 households. Census records of 1900 show that about 50% of families were African American. The number of African American households began a slow decline in the 1910s. By 1940, the number of African American households had dropped by 30%. Two-thirds of Flint's African American families left in the 1930s.

Farm ownership followed a similar pattern. In 1910, there were 75 farms that were owned by African Americans. By 1930, there were only 40, the majority of which were concentrated among five families. In a time where few families had more than one member who owned a farm, the Garth family owned four, the Malones had three, and the Rathers, Pryors, and Edmonds had two each.

The history of the African American community and its landownership in Flint deserves more study. How did the African American population of Flint in 1900 comprise half of the households and a quarter of the farmers, but by 1940 only have 22% of the

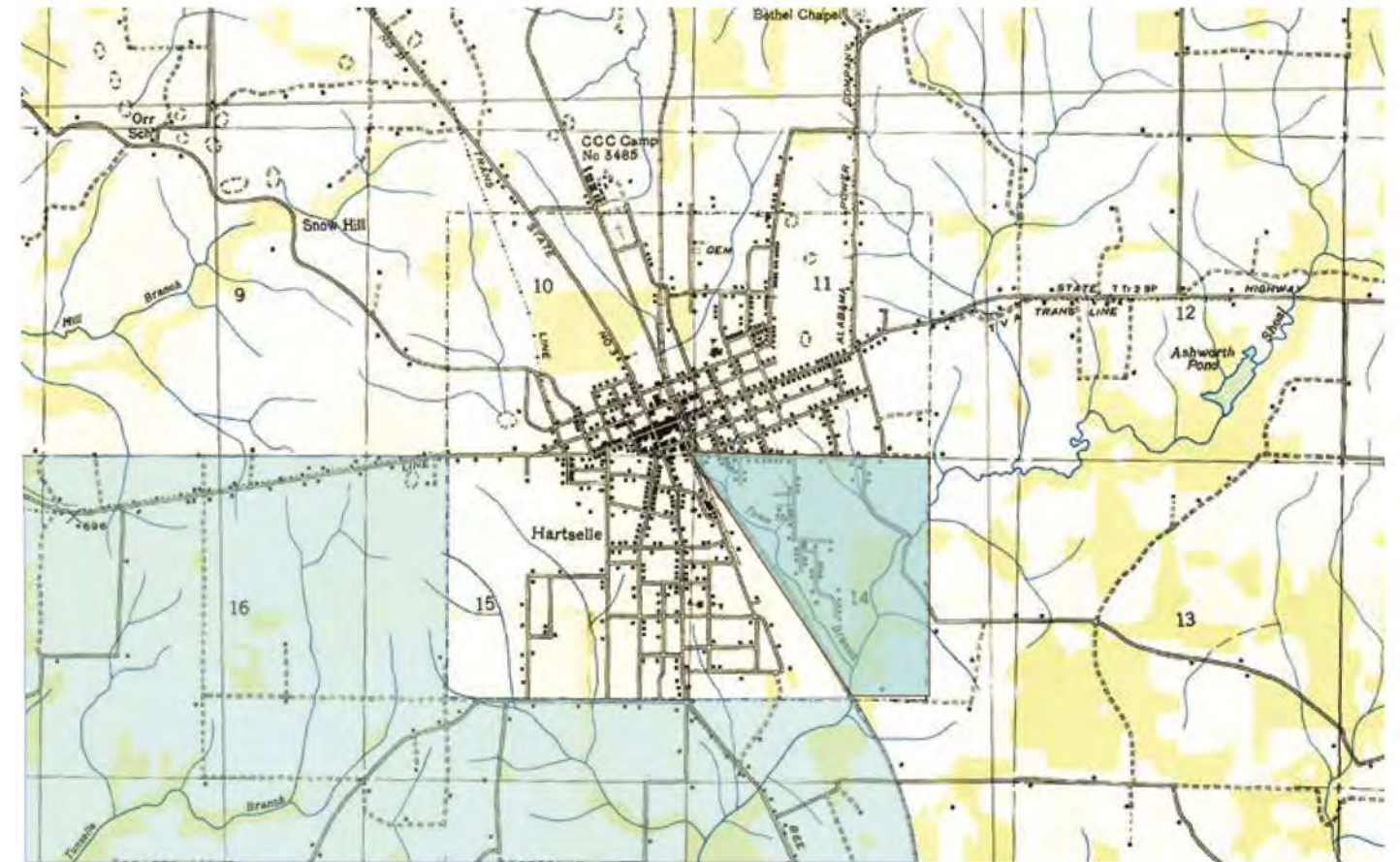
households and 10 farmers total? During the first three decades of the 20th century, the total number of African American households held steady at about 77. However, the number of land owning farmers peaked in 1930 with over 50% of African American households owning a farm. Something drastically affected the African American community in Flint in the 1930s. Whether it was the Great Migration, changes made by the TVA to the area and the Flint River, the Great Depression, a false sense of change due to census redistricting, or any of the above, by 1940, less than half the African American households were left in Flint and only a fraction of their farms.

16 ■ Forest Home Plantation

The mansion at Forest Home, also known as the Absalom L. Davis House, was built in 1856 after 300 acres were deeded by Mrs. Mary Curtis King Fennel of Walnut Grove to her daughter and son-in-law, Ann and Absalom L. Davis. Davis, the leader of the Grange Movement, was a teacher at LaGrange College and a planter. According to the 1860 slave schedules, Absalom L. Davis and wife, Ann Fennell Davis, owned 19 slaves. On the same page is "A. Davis," which might be his father, who owned another nine slaves. Absalom's brother, Francis M. Davis also lived in the area and owned 19 slaves.



(Above) A Sketch of Forest Home Done by Ann and Absalom Davis' Daughter



(Above) 1936 USGS Topographic Map of the City Hartselle Showing African American Landownership Areas Highlighted in Blue

The house, several surrounding acres, its numerous outbuildings, and formal gardens continued to be owned by the Davis family and operated as a cotton farm until 1973. The house sat vacant and deteriorating when it was listed on the National Register in 1980 (#80000733). In 1991, the house burned and a subdivision named Forest Home Estates was built in its place.

17 ■ Hartselle

Hartselle is one of the more densely populated areas in Morgan County. Despite this, in the early 20th century, never more than 20% of the households were African American. In 1900, while less than 10% of the households were African American, 23 owned farms, five of which were owned by the Orr family. By 1940, the number of African American-owned farms dropped to 11. Despite this decline, many Hartselle

area farms have been owned by the same families through the decades.

By 1940, within the city, the majority of African American households live on the east side of the railroad, particularly in what is labeled the "South Side," which is said to have "no streets." Even though this is within the city, the Fennoy, McDonald, and Bledsoe families had farms in this area. Conversely, the west side of town only had one African American family, indicating a sharp segregation line in the city.

Outside of town, the statistics are flipped. There are only six African American households in the rural areas on the east side of town; the only farming landowners are the Bibbs. On the west side of rural Hartselle, there are 18 African American households, with the McGinnis, Sharpley, Madden, and Orr families owning farms.

(Below) 1936 USGS/TVA Topographic Map, Decatur Quadrangle, of the Community of Flint

