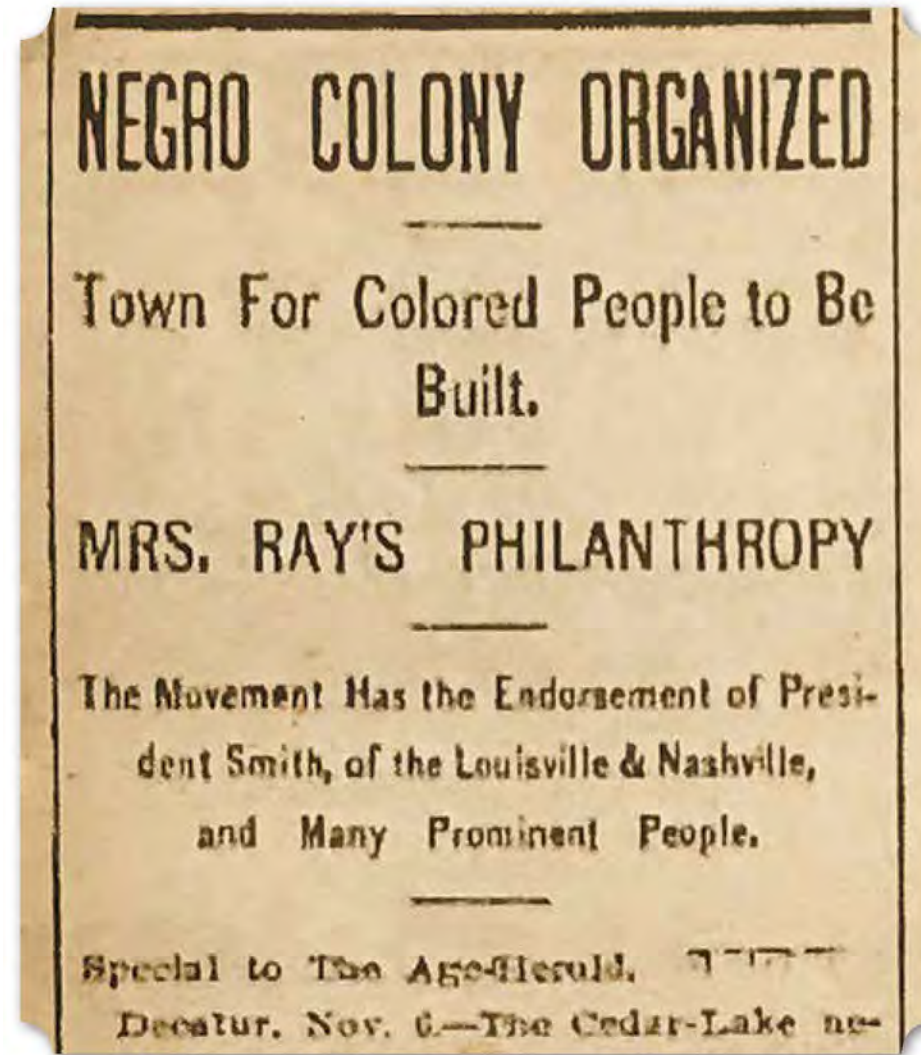


*and a fair education in the common school under good teachers, is more beneficial to the masses... At all events Cedar Lake is only open to colored men who are industrious and self supporting, and who wish to work and keep their families in comfort. I am making no offers to the colored people of any great gifts that will create the impression that they can ever live and enjoy what they have not earned by honest work. I make them no promise that I do not keep, and I strive to give them good sensible advice, and lastly, as the place is mine, I do not permit any outside interference with the plans I have formed."*

By 1915, Mrs. Ray was described as the founder of Cedar Lake and credited with introducing the concept of segregation to the area. "She [believed] that the negro race should preserve its identity, working for its industrial development and *relinquishing all ideas of social equality.*" Though she undoubtedly provided much needed assistance in the way of donating and matching funds and selling and renting land to disadvantaged members of Morgan County, many who had been former slaves or the children of former slaves, her public messages often emphasized that her altruistic endeavors were to ensure that no people of color go "begging amongst the white people" for anything they did not earn themselves.

Despite Mrs. Ray's philanthropy being solidly founded in segregationist beliefs, news of the Cedar Lake Colony and Ray's plans were ill-received in the far southern reaches of Alabama, along the Georgia border, in Columbia. In an obvious rebuke to Ray, an unknown *Columbia Breeze* author wrote that "it is very strange that in these latter days persons can be found who are willing to spend their money in experiments that for the past thirty years have planted gaunt pillars of failure in every decade all over this southern country, notwithstanding the power of capital and, for a time, the power of the government behind them." Along with other vile insults and views about who should do what about the "problems" of the South, the short November 25, 1897 article made it clear that North Alabama and the Tennessee River Valley stood apart



(Above) "Negro Colony Organized," (Cedar Lake File at Morgan County Archives, Decatur, Alabama)

from the rest of Alabama, and most particularly the southern portions and the "Black Belt." While Cedar Lake may have never become all that was planned and hoped for, it surely stands to reason that there was not a better place in Alabama to attempt such an "experiment."

The area had long been referred to as Cedar Lake for the impressive cedar trees and the small body of water known first as Cedar Lake and later as Johnson Pond. The land books for the years 1916-1919 document George and Lilian Nelson owning the southeast quarter of Section 6, Cedar Lake itself. While the community is labeled on the 1936 USGS topographic map, the pond is not labeled until the 1950 map, which names it Cedar Lake. However, the next available topographic

map for the area is in 1963, on which the pond is labeled Johnson Pond, apparently after Jake Johnson, who passed away in the 1950s.

While Cedar Lake never became the city it was intended to be, a community grew out of the initial project. From a town center of approximately 100 acres to about 1,200 acres of a farming community, Cedar Lake was eventually annexed into the city of Decatur in the year 1967.

## Cedar Lake Colony Plat Map

An 1898 plat map found at the Morgan County archives records a 25-acre addition to the original plan on the west side of the community. While the entire community included at least 360 acres of farmland (and later grew to about 1,200 acres), the platted city proper included

(Below) 1936 USGS Topographic Map Showing Cedar Lake

