

(Right) Newspaper Clipping,
"Cedar Lake Negroes
– Speeches Made by
Prominent Members of the
Race," *The Montgomery
Advertiser*, Montgomery,
Alabama, February 5, 1905
(Newspapers.com)

CEDAR LAKE NEGROES.

**Speeches Made by Prominent Members
of the Race.**

Decatur, Feb. 4.—(Special.)—For some time past there has been considerable talk among the better class of negroes of the Decatur and surrounding country, relative to the organization of the negroes for political, educational and industrial purposes.

The talk crystallized in a mass meeting held at Cedar Lake a few nights ago. Cedar Lake is an exclusively negro town about two miles south of here on the main line of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. This town was started about nine years ago and now has a postoffice, cotton gin, brick yard, etc.

Many prominent negroes were present at the meeting from New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta and other places who addressed the meeting. It was presided over by Charlie Sykes of Decatur, who made a forcible talk before the meeting upon taking the chair. Among other things he said: "Get away from the idea that a colored man has no rights in the South. The South is the only place where a colored man has any rights. If he will get down to work and acquire property and live a decent, honest life, the white people will respect him for what he has done for himself, not what people that did not know you would say." He gave several examples of negroes who had been brought up in slavery near the Decatur and showed what these negroes had accumulated and what they had made of themselves. He said that what had been done by these negroes could be done by others.

It was decided that an industrial company would be organized for the purpose of buying land and building homes and factories. They will soon publish a book, giving the history of Cedar Lake, for the purpose of attracting the attention of negroes from other places. They are making arrangements to build a training school at Cedar Lake for negroes. In May they will hold a farmers' congress and sometime in October they will hold a fair.

Later on the negroes of this section expect to organize a political party of their own, it is said, similar to the one which has been organized in some of the States North.

Some of the wealthiest negroes in the country are now interested in Cedar Lake and they say that they expect to make of it a model negro town, build cotton factories and tobacco factories, etc. Cedar Lake is in the heart of the cotton section of North Alabama and it has been demonstrated also that a good grade of tobacco can be grown here.

York, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. Charles Sykes led the proceedings. In his speech he declared that everyone should "get away from the idea that a colored man has no rights in the South. The South is the only place where a colored man has any rights. If he will get down to work and acquire property and live a decent, honest life, the white people will respect him for what he had done for himself." Plans made at the meeting included a book on the history of Cedar Lake, arrangements for a farmers' congress, a fair, and the organization of a political party. The plans for cotton and tobacco factories were still in the works.

While corn was the predominate crop in the area, cotton was the foremost crop of Cedar Lake – particularly a variety known as "Manly's Full Fruit" with large full stalks of bulky bolls. A cotton factory and gin were said to be built on the east side of the railroad at the northeast corner of Cedar Lake proper – although little evidence of any exact details exist. However, as war was destroying much of Europe, Mrs. Ray announced her idea to bring skilled lace workers from Brussels to Alabama to teach the locals of Cedar Lake to make lace from the staple cotton of North Alabama. In order for this to happen, \$2 million would have to be raised by the African American community itself. Ray estimated that there were 400,000 "higher class" people of color in the South and that if each contributed \$5 then the goal would quickly be reached. If it were reached, the ideal placement of the factory would be along the Alabama Power Company line that ran just north of Cedar Lake proper to supply cheap and easy power to the factory and its special gin which would produce the finest fibers. There is no evidence this idea came to fruition.

One of the pivotal public services that was established in Cedar Lake was the post office. The community received a post office that functioned until 1915. The first postmaster of Cedar Lake was Wiley A. Wilhite, who started on April 28, 1898. He would later serve as the minister of the Baptist Church. After Wilhite came Charles C. Mathes (or Matthews) starting on May 31, 1899; Nona Ware (Feb. 12), Charley Moseley (Aug. 31), and Ida Hunt (Oct. 21) in 1903; Samuel Kelley started September 12, 1904; and the last postmaster, Hillard Tate, Jr. on November 2, 1911. According to the postmaster records, the Cedar Lake post office was discontinued on September 30, 1915.

A short piece in the *Decatur Daily* on Monday, October 4, 1915 announced the federal government's denial for the request that the post office be restored. Apparently, there was not enough business to justify the town's own post office and it would continue to be served by the New Decatur post office and a rural post route. Seeing as there might not have been a railroad station and definitely not an electric car line, this would mean that citizens of Cedar Lake would have to travel quite far to post mail.

Around the time of the closing, it was rumored that Postmaster Tate had stolen funds from his office and had subsequently been arrested. However, in the *New Decatur Advertiser* on Thursday, August 5, 1915, Tate wrote to refute this claim saying he "has not been short in his accounts and he had never been arrested." More likely, the reason given by the federal government was genuine, accurate, and nondiscriminatory. The postmaster records at the turn of the century show that there were 63 post offices in Morgan County from about 1890-1920. During that time, 45 post offices were discontinued or consolidated with others. From the 1920s to the 1950s, there were only 12 post offices operating in the

