

major towns and cities of Morgan County. In fact, it appears that Cedar Lake could be the last surviving rural post office in the county during that time.

Tate's efforts to dispel rumors would not be the first time Cedar Lake had been slandered, libeled, and subsequently defended by its postmaster. In the last months of 1904, a rumor spread in Decatur about the little settlement of Cedar Lake. Perhaps not the first effort to discredit the people of Cedar Lake, the local papers had falsely reported on November 14 and 15 that a dozen people were poisoned by ice cream at a church rally. Charles C. Mathes (Matthews) wrote in the *New Decatur Advertiser* on November 21 to correct the record. He wrote that "the people of this little town, who are living quietly and religiously in their own homes," do not deserve the disgrace of the false story. Mathes reiterated that he lives in Cedar Lake and served as its postmaster. He stated that there is only the Missionary Baptist Church, which does not hold rallies, and that everyone in town was in very good health.

Another important community center was the school. Cedar Lake received one of two Rosenwald schools in Morgan County. It was built just south of Cedar Avenue in 1921-1922. In early 1920, a rather large headline read "Cedar Lake Negroes Raise School Fund – Mail Order King Will Contribute \$500 to Match Other Contributions." This was the beginning of the Rosenwald school at Cedar Lake after a meeting in town where the locals raised the necessary funds. Although the land records from 1916-1919 are difficult to read, it appears that the southwest quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 5 – where the southern half of Cedar Lake proper was located – was owned by African Americans. The names Eliza Brown, John Henry Williams, and George Stover are legible. While it is difficult to decipher which person owned the land on which the school was built, the required two acres were most certainly donated by the African American community and not the Nelsons.

The official Rosenwald Fund records put the total cost of the Cedar Lake School at \$2,700 – approximately \$40,500 in today's money. A total of \$1,000 came from the African American community, another \$900 came from the "public," which might include the Nelsons, and \$800 was



(Above) Cedar Lake Rosenwald School

supplied by the Fund. This school was a two-room schoolhouse, which elevated the costs, but also reflected the size of the community.

While the original designs of the colony included a school, a count of the children on the 1930 census quickly shows how essential the school was to the community. Half of the population (100 of 202 people) were children aged 18 or under. Fifteen of these children were already working, mostly young boys helping out on a farm – but one 15-year-old girl was a cook in a private home. However, that left 85 children that most likely did attend the school. The Rosenwald school was a two-teacher schoolhouse. In 1930, those teachers were Carrie Cumming and Mildred Wise. Mrs. Cumming was a 23-year-old woman living with her husband, Jett (29), who worked as a truck driver. Ms. Wise was the stepdaughter of Charles Adkins, a farm laborer. She was 20 years old at the time. Both teachers lived in rented homes near either Ray or Railroad streets judging by their neighbors.

The majority of Rosenwald schools in North Alabama served children to the 8th grade. This is most likely the case for the Cedar Lake School. Although basic education for African American children was supported by much of the local white community as evidenced by donations to the Rosenwald school funding, support for higher education was not as wide spread. An elementary education was considered ample enough for a child to become a self-sufficient and self-supporting adult. In the early 20th century, many rural schools for white children did not include instruction beyond the 8th grade and the vast majority of those rural-raised children did not attend colleges or technical schools either.

Mrs. Ray's segregationist philosophy allowed for a strict definition of higher education in the form of technical and mechanical training for industrial tasks related to farming and the production of materials for sale. Ray often spoke of bringing experts in particular trades to Cedar Lake to teach the adult population skills such as brick making or lac making, but there is no evidence that she supported academic higher education for African Americans. It appears that most of the Nelsons'

(Below) Plat Map Paragraph "Signed" by Jake Johnson

