

found an interest in the land, particularly farming and mineral research; Lilian looked toward philanthropic endeavors.

Together they lived in a stately home in Moulton Heights near the Beltline – another location with a significant African American community in the early 20th century. Their home was known as Tanglewood, complete with a private deer park enclosed by a high woven wire fence and roaming peacocks that reminded Mrs. Ray of her homeland. The Nelsons formed the Moulton Heights Land Improvement & Industrial Company and bought substantial land holdings south of Decatur where the future Cedar Lake would be developed. Their other notable achievement is the role they played in the extension of the street car line to the suburb of Moulton Heights from Decatur. The Nelsons were longtime members of the Moulton Heights Baptist Church, just one more means of their deep-rooted community involvement. George Nelson passed away at the age of 75 after losing a battle with a bout of blood poisoning that led to both of his legs being amputated in a fruitless effort to stave off the infection. Lilian lived another 11 years, passing away at 85 years old. The couple was laid to rest in Decatur City Cemetery in the Cantwell addition on the south end.

The Johnsons

Jake Johnson was married to Ada Ferguson on November 18, 1896 in St. Peter's Church by the Reverend H.L. Ellis. Jake was born sometime between 1860 and 1865, Ada sometime in the 1870s. They had at least nine children together – Mahala, Addie, Wood, Hermie, Lelia, Henry, Allen, Nemahiah, and Essie. In 1920, they lived in Cedar Lake and continued to own the 20-plus acres noted on the original city plat, in addition to another 1.5 acres to the west of the platted center. In 1930, Jake and Ada were still farming even though Jake was then 70 years old – but then again, he is said to have lived to be at least 100 years of age. Living with them were three sons that helped on the farm and two grandchildren, 13 and 10 years old. John B. Johnson, another African American landowner and farmer in Cedar Lake, was most likely Jake's brother, but very little family history is known about the Johnson family. John B. Johnson, about 55 years old in 1920, was widowed, but still taking

care of three daughters, and farming his own land – which he owned free of mortgage. In 1930, he was retired and listed no occupation; however, he still owned nearly 80 acres of arable land.

Mahala Johnson married fellow Cedar Lake resident Haygood Matthews (sometimes referred to as Mathies or Mathes). Haygood (b. 1883) and his brother, "Railroad" Dan (b. 1887), owned four lots within Cedar Lake proper off Ray Avenue. In 1908, the two made the newspapers when they began to build a new store. Eventually they owned and operated two stores in Cedar Lake.

Haygood and Daniel's father, Charles C. Mathes (b. 1844), who served as postmaster to Cedar Lake at the turn of the century, was also a farmer who by 1900 owned his own land in the area of Flint. Haygood married one of Jake Johnson's elder daughters, Mahala. Their son, Chester Matthews continued to live in Cedar Lake, with his wife Euniceteen and son Newlyn. Chester and Newlyn lived side-by-side on land handed down from Jake Johnson in Cedar Lake proper through to the 1980s.

Communities Beyond Morgan County

The Cedar Lake Colony was a unique experiment that brought together American and English philanthropists and a former slave to help provide opportunities for African American farming and landownership. Although the colony was not a complete success in that many of the planned amenities and industries were never fully realized, the founders succeeded in creating a community with a lasting sense of place and culture. Over 100 years later, there remains the recognizable form of the original Cedar Lake platting. The community's three churches still stand and homes and land have been passed down through the generations. Despite some of the modern scenery, much about Cedar Lake's past remains visible.

While Cedar Lake was a planned and platted community, there are numerous deeply rooted and historic communities of predominately

African American or people of color across North Alabama – though few have been labeled directly as towns or settlements established for and by communities of color. Certainly, there are even fewer that resemble the forethought and philanthropy that was involved in the creation of Cedar Lake. However, there are a few references of communities that either once upon a time were considered to be such communities or have been retrospectively considered such.

One of the earliest African American communities in Morgan County was the Nebo Community. It was once located along the Tennessee River, northwest of Decatur. The community is known for the earliest African American cemetery in Morgan County. It also had a church and a school. The majority of the land was owned and farmed by African Americans for generations until the community moved in the 1950s when a large 3M plant was built in its place.



(Right) "Morgan County Agricultural Extension Agent with Farmers (Morgan County Archives, Decatur, Alabama)