

**Auburn's Black Neighborhoods: Community Building and People with a Story to Tell**

by

Tori N. Buchanan

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Auburn University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama  
May 2, 2026

Keywords: enslavement, Black neighborhoods, university, community history, urban  
development, Black mascots

Copyright 2026 by Tori N. Buchanan

Approved by

Elijah Gaddis, Chair, Associate Professor of History

Kelly Kennington, Associate Professor of History

Keith Hebert, Professor of History

## Abstract

Enslavement had a lasting impact on both the town of Auburn, Alabama and Auburn University as seen in the treatment of local Black residents. This thesis explores Auburn's Black history with a focus on Black neighborhoods and their residents, jobs held by Black community members, and Black legacies tied to Auburn University beginning with this town's founding in 1836 through the 1960s. It examines these topics by utilizing genealogical sources such as newspapers, census data, and oral histories alongside other primary and secondary sources. This thesis also works to introduce Auburn as a lens, or case study, into the experiences of Black residents and how they were treated and impacted by urban development in the South; more specifically, from the viewpoint of a small southern town rather than a larger city with the inclusion of economics derived from 1930 and 1940 census records. This perspective demonstrates how a richer understanding of Black peoples' lived experiences in the segregated South can come from researching small towns. Additionally, through acknowledging Black legacies tied to Auburn University, which have been ignored, this thesis addresses those enslaved and/or hired out to the university, its Black mascots, and others who labored for it post-Emancipation. By tracing their legacies, this thesis serves as an example of and a starting point for the exploration of slavery's legacy at Auburn as well as addressing Black workers post-Emancipation.

## Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure

In the preparation of this thesis, no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used.

## Digital Accessibility Use Disclosure Statement

In the preparation of this thesis, the following digital accessibility tools were used to ensure this document complies with federal requirements: Alt text. The author acknowledges full responsibility for the intellectual content of this work and has made a good faith effort to comply with digital accessibility requirements in publishing, wherein the nature of the content does not significantly change in order to do so. Furthermore, all content has been reviewed and revised to meet these requirements prior to final publication.

## Acknowledgements

The list of people who I would like to thank is voluminous as I have met so many wonderful, supportive people over the years. Their unwavering support and encouragement will forever be cherished.

To the people who allowed me to ask questions about Auburn's Black neighborhoods, thank you. This thesis would not be the same without you. I cannot thank you enough for taking the time to share your stories, your memories.

To my friends, family, and bonus family who have been so incredibly supportive throughout the creation of my thesis project, and in life itself, thank you immensely. Haley F. (and your parents), Jesse PK., Reagan H., Gabby W., Anna C. (and your mom), Rhonni D., Maddison "Azy" A., Diane H., Bob H., Bert H., Sam H., Melissa G., Mark W., Maiben B., Valerie A., my parents, and any friend who I did not list (you know who you are). All of you played such a major role in my thesis project, in me being able to go on adventures and take a breather, and being such a wonderful support system. I am forever grateful for you all.

To the wonderful people I have gotten to know and befriend at Auburn University's Special Collections and Archives through working there as an undergrad and continued through grad school, thank you. Joanna, Jennifer, thank you for listening to my constant recounting of local history and always helping me find new sources of information. Greg, Tommy, thank you for always answering my questions and allowing me to upload archival documents to my website. Bev, thank you for listening to me talk about my research and for your guidance regarding my website.

To the professors who have been a major source of encouragement through both undergrad and grad school, thank you for guiding me to and through my research. To Dr. Christopher Ferguson, thank you for instilling in me a passion for history as an undergrad. Your class, *Private Lives and Public Places*, introduced how fascinating history is, especially when looking into communities. To Dr. Meghan Buchanan, thank you for helping my research grow from undergrad through grad school, listening to me talk about my findings, and introducing me to new ideas that I may not have thought about. To Dr. Adam Domby, thank you for the inspiration to start researching Auburn's Black history in your 2022 Civil War Memory class. To my master's thesis advisor Dr. Eliah Gaddis, thank you for believing in my idea to create a website for my research into Auburn's Black neighborhoods, and for your guidance with making my thesis project what it is today. To Dr. Keith Hebert, thank you for allowing me to take your grad level public history class as an undergrad. The experience I gained through conducting oral history interviews, as well as connections I made with some of Auburn's Black residents, helped make my thesis what it is today. To Dr. Kelly Kennington, thank you so much for listening to my research findings, all of your edits and places to look for more information, and being a great person to turn to for discussing history.

**“Looking backwards might be the only way to move forward”**

**- The Manuscript by Taylor Swift**

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure .....	3
Digital Accessibility Use Disclosure Statement .....	4
Acknowledgements .....	5
Table of Contents .....	7
List of Figures .....	8
Introduction .....	9
Local History.....	12
Historiography.....	14
Introducing the Census....	25
Auburn’s Black Neighborhoods .....	26
Community Stories .....	38
Census View of Black Neighborhoods .....	44
The Economics View of Black Neighborhoods .....	51
Jobs Held by Black Community Members .....	62
Bibliography .....	79

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Color coded map of Auburn’s Black neighborhoods .....	26
Figure 2: Holly Elizabeth Harriel’s Thesis Map of Four Black Neighborhoods .....	27
Figure 3: 1939 aerial image of the Northwestern portion of Auburn .....	29
Figure 4: 1939 aerial image of Drake Town .....	31
Figure 5: 1939 aerial image of Summer Hill .....	32
Figure 6: Cropped version of Holly Elizabeth Harriel’s thesis map .....	33
Figure 7: 1939 aerial image of Baptist Hill .....	35
Figure 8: 1939 aerial image of Wrights Mill Road .....	36
Figure 9: 2025 aerial image of Wrights Mill Road .....	36
Figure 10: Ca. 1900 photo of Wrights Mill .....	37
Figure 11: Dirt road in Drake Town .....	38
Figure 12: House in Drake Town .....	40
Figure 13: House near Spencer Line .....	41
Figure 14: Map of Black Owned Houses and Plantations in Auburn .....	44
Figure 15: 1930 Highest Rent and Home Ownership Values for Black people in Auburn .....	54
Figure 16: 1940 Highest Rent and Home Ownership Values for Black people in Auburn .....	54
Figure 17: 1939 Aerial Image of Downtown Auburn and API .....	55
Figure 18: 1930 Rent and Home Values for White Households near Black Neighborhoods .....	57
Figure 19: 1940 Rent and Home Values for White Households near Black Neighborhood .....	57
Figure 20: Woodfield Drive House Deed from 1946 .....	58
Figure 21: Rent for Specific Black Households in 1940 .....	61
Figure 22: Map of Black Neighborhoods and Plantations in Auburn .....	63
Figure 23: Enslaved People Documented in EAMC’s Executive Committee minutes ledger ....	67
Figure 24: Photograph of Robert Frazier, One of Auburn’s Black Mascots.....	70
Figure 25: Photograph of Hodge Drake, One of Auburn’s Black Mascots.....	71
Figure 26: 1939 Map of API’s Campus .....	74

## Introduction:

The town of Auburn, Alabama was established in 1836 by a family group of white Methodists who, according to a *Montgomery Advertiser* newspaper article from 1855, wanted to set up an education centered community. More specifically, “for the immediate object of having suitable schools in which to educate their children at home.”<sup>1</sup> Education was not the only reason they moved. Following the 1832 Treaty of Cusseta, many white enslavers flocked to Alabama for the prospect of settling on “public land” as Native Americans were pushed out.<sup>2</sup> The main leader of this group was a man named John J. Harper. He came with white families with the last names of Scott, Ogletree, and Wynn amongst others, most of whom were related to him biologically or by marriage.<sup>3</sup> These families brought with them enslaved individuals and families. These were the families that built early Auburn. One notable early resident was a man named Mose Harper who laid out Auburn’s railroad in fulfillment of his enslaver’s contract with Western Railway of Alabama. Mose discussed his involvement in his interview in a thesis from the 1910s titled “Negro Recollections of Slavery.”<sup>4</sup> No other names were included regarding the enslaved laborers who built the railroad, and no further sources mention this information. As a result,

---

<sup>1</sup> “Editorial Correspondence,” *Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), October 10, 1855, 1. According to this newspaper article, “A detailed history of Auburn was prepared, some time since, by Rev. James M. Watt, and published in the Auburn Gazette.” From how this article is written, much of its information came from that source; however, it gives no information on when that article was published.

<sup>2</sup> “Treaty of Cusseta (1832),” Encyclopedia of Alabama, <https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/treaty-of-cusseta-1832/>.

<sup>3</sup> Mary E. Reese, “History of Auburn” (Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University), 1900).; Leland Cooper, “The Early History of Auburn” (Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University), n.d.); Alicia Milton, “Early History of Auburn” (Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University), n.d.); Mary B. Reese Frazer, “Early History of Auburn” (Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University), 1920).

<sup>4</sup> James Jackson Lovelace et al., “Negro Recollections of Slavery,” ca. 1911-1914, 31, George Petrie Papers RG 192, Box 19, Folder 457, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives. Another example of enslaved individuals whose labor was used for construction in Auburn can be seen at the historical marker for the University Chapel, a church built by at least 1850. While their names are unknown, it is known that Edwin Reese enslaved them. This sign states that the bricks were made by these enslaved individuals; however, it would not be surprising if they also built the church. <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=39831>

Mose is the only enslaved individual who can be properly credited by name. The lack of recorded names does not equate to a lack of enslaved labor involved in constructing the town. In fact, enslavers used the labor of enslaved individuals to build the town; these enslaved people were the backbone of Auburn's economy.<sup>5</sup> They were the fabric of Auburn's physical landscape. While the physical records might no longer exist, the enslaved individuals in this town presumably "connected individual town households and businesses" by laboring where enslavers did not want to.<sup>6</sup> Community building also happened amongst enslaved individuals, which continued over the course of decades. Four decades after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863, and the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified on December 6, 1865, to abolish slavery, formerly enslaved people and their descendants fought to create a better future. They worked jobs, owned businesses, created communities in the form of neighborhoods, owned, rented, and built houses, and strived for their autonomy.<sup>7</sup>

Community histories are important for learning about places. We can learn about individual people, their lives, and what the community was like when they experienced it. This research can be done through the use of census records, newspapers, oral histories, and even maps and aerial images. On the surface, censuses can seemingly just state that someone lived

---

<sup>5</sup> An example of this can be seen with the University Chapel which was constructed by those enslaved to Edwin Reese using bricks made at his plantation.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 195-196. While these examples are from Middle Tennessee, it is highly likely this occurred in Auburn. In Middle Tennessee, enslaved individuals made bricks (see footnote 4 for an Auburn example of this), cleaned streets, worked in household kitchens, built buildings, delivered messages, worked with the wells, just to name a few examples. Much of this also occurred in Auburn.

<sup>7</sup> "The Emancipation Proclamation," National Archives, October 6, 2015, <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation>.; "13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery (1865)," National Archives, September 1, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/13th-amendment>.

here, when digging deeper more can come to light. My methodology involves using other sources alongside the census to learn more about the people listed as living in Auburn.

Connecting census records to newspaper articles and oral histories offers a clearer picture of Auburn's early history. Through searching through census records and connecting a select number of names to newspaper articles and oral histories, I have uncovered some intricate details within Auburn's Black history. These details include where Black people worked and their occupation, where they lived, occasionally personal stories about their whereabouts and activities, and much more. While this information is primarily gathered from the census, its data does not tell the whole story. Oral histories, when put in conversation with census data, give insight into the lives of some of the people listed in the data. We can also reveal more about these people and their lives when searching for them in newspapers. This thesis also works to observe these spaces by using maps and aerial images to gain a clearer understanding of where these neighborhoods were and what they looked like in the early twentieth century. When recreating the Black community in Auburn, what arises is a continual story of perseverance, assistance, and social growth. They had spaces for social outlets such as ball fields, cafes, and a variety of shops; they had educational spaces in private homes and public schools; they built houses; they had personal gardens at their homes; and they established neighborhoods. In these community spaces, neighbors helped each other any way that they could.<sup>8</sup> The values of some of the homes indicate impoverishment due to their low worth or rent; however, these neighborhoods were not impoverished socially. These neighborhoods, the houses and their values, and some of the people

---

<sup>8</sup> Doris Hutchinson in discussion with the author, October 2025; Reta Jackson, Carl Jackson, Ronnie Jackson, and Patricia (Jackson) Crowder in discussion with the author, December 2025; Johnnie Byrd, Curtis Williams, and Willie Butler in discussion with the author, February 2026.

within these neighborhoods will be discussed more thoroughly throughout this thesis. This methodology helps to uncover local community histories.

## **Local History:**

The early history of Auburn has predominantly been written with a focus on white locals. This topic arose in at least six unpublished theses written between 1900-1920; a book published in 1969; and three books published between 2012-2020. Five out of the six theses mention Black locals as more of an afterthought. For example, one of the unpublished theses is a compilation of oral history interviews with formerly enslaved people; however, it is the only one to solely discuss Auburn's African American population. The other unpublished theses sparsely mention them, and when they do, Black people are often infantilized.<sup>9</sup> The book from 1969, *Glimpses into the Past from My Grandfather's Trunk* written by John Peavy Wright, delves into genealogies and select records left behind by white people in early Auburn. The only time Black people are mentioned is in the form of stating how many were enslaved by various local enslavers.<sup>10</sup> The only books that truly dive deeper into Auburn's Black history are *Auburn: A History in Street Names* and *Lest We Forget: A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama*, both of which will be utilized. Auburn's Black community deserves to have their voices heard and stories told. While not all of these sources will be referenced in this thesis, mentioning them stands as an example of why researching Auburn's Black neighborhoods is

---

<sup>9</sup> Mary E. Reese, "History of Auburn" (Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University), 1900).; Leland Cooper, "The Early History of Auburn" (Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University), n.d.); Alicia Milton, "Early History of Auburn" (Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University), n.d.); Mary B. Reese Frazer, "Early History of Auburn" (Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University), 1920).; James Jackson Lovelace et al., "Negro Recollections of Slavery," ca. 1911-1914, 31, George Petrie Papers RG 192, Box 19, Folder 457, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives.

<sup>10</sup> John Peavy Wright, *Glimpses into the Past from My Grandfather's Trunk* (Outlook Publishing Company, 1969).

important. Without telling their stories, their history is stricken from the record. Archival silences result from people, narratives, and events being excluded, absent, or suppressed within historical and/or institutional records thus creating gaps in history. However, these archival silences, or what remains unexpressed, can still be interpreted when reading between the lines of even the most subtle presence in the archival records.<sup>11</sup>

Local, Auburn history is discussed often from the white perspective; however, the Black perspective does not get as much attention. Two of the best published sources for discussing Auburn's Black history were written by people who are not considered professional historians, but whose work is valuable for studying this history. These books provide ample insights into Auburn's Black neighborhoods that are crucial for writing this thesis. The first book is *Auburn: A History in Street Names*, published by Sam Hendrix in 2021. This book examines the histories behind the names of the streets in Auburn, Alabama from 1836-2019. Hendrix included extensive personal histories regarding African Americans, both enslaved and later generations, as well as white people. He argued examining the streets named after influential people and events in the town's history allows for valuable information on its development.<sup>12</sup> For this thesis, this source will be used for information on street names within Auburn's Black neighborhoods from a personal perspective. The second book is *Lest We Forget: A History of African Americans of*

---

<sup>11</sup> Tiya Miles, Vanessa M. Holden, James W. Loewen, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot present compelling evidence that even the most minute and seemingly inconsequential details within the archival record are essential for filling in gaps within historical literature. Their scholarship compels us to rethink our engagement with historical narratives, urging us to consider the broader implications of archival presence in representing marginalized voices. These sources enunciate how history is not a neutral source of information. Instead, it is an indication of who had power and who did not through the lens of what has been included and excluded, either purposefully or accidentally, from the archives. They also express how myths and misinformation have been disseminated and perpetuated due to the gaps caused by archival silences. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Beacon Press, 1995).; James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America*, Twentieth-Anniversary Edition Thoroughly Revised Second Edition (The New Press, 2019).; Tiya Miles, *Tales from the Haunted South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).; Vanessa M. Holden, *Surviving Southampton* (University of Illinois Press, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Sam Hendrix, *Auburn: A History in Street Names* (Donnell Group, 2021), 3.

*Auburn, Alabama*, published in 2011 by The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History. This example is the sole book entirely from the perspective of Auburn's Black history. It is a compilation of both oral histories conducted by The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History and written history compiled by said committee. Recorded within this volume is information on religion, education, families, neighborhoods, businesses, amongst other topics, within the larger Black community. This book is a crucial source for gaining insight into some of the residents of Auburn's Black neighborhoods.

### **Historiography:**

Urban development is an important topic of discussion in this thesis due to overlaps seen in both larger cities and smaller towns. In larger cities, Black people had restrictions placed upon them regarding where they could live and work. Researching Auburn's Black history has uncovered that this same thing has occurred in this smaller, college town. Thus, this town becomes a case study on how restrictions against where Black people could live and work occurred in more places than just large cities. Specific scholarly works have been chosen for this thesis to express the emphasis placed upon how urban development has impacted Black people in large cities. The focus on larger cities, while important, leaves out smaller, urban areas. The scholarly works included in this thesis that discuss larger cities consist of *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers* by David R. Goldfield, *New Men, New Cities, New South* by Don H. Doyle, *Sorting Out the New South City* by Thomas W. Hanchett, and *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis* edited by Henry Louis Taylor, Jr. and Walter Hill. A major resource that discusses urban development in

smaller towns is *Constructing Townscapes* by Lisa C. Tolbert. Her work is one of the few to discuss this topic. It serves as a launching point for filling in the gaps left by focusing on larger cities. Additionally, Tolbert's work is used in this thesis to further express the significance of using Auburn as a case study. While this whole thesis does not focus solely on restrictions placed upon Black people, it is still used to further Tolbert's argument that smaller urban towns should be researched further. Perhaps more importantly, Tolbert's work suggests that our focus should be on the process of urbanization or urban development. It is these insights into history unfolding, rather than settled and established places, on which this thesis focuses.

Ultimately, historians are not paying enough attention to smaller urban towns. Scholars are not looking closely enough at how restrictions against Black people happens in said towns and how they affect Black residents. This thesis views Auburn through the lens of history within the local Black community in order to fill a gap in the larger historiographical discussion on how Black people were impacted by urban development in the South. These sources inform this thesis, and the accompanying website,<sup>13</sup> by adding context from other places where needed. They further indicate that Auburn was not an enigma, Black people here experienced similar treatment to other locals.

Urban development when it comes to African Americans in the South is a topic that should be studied on an individual level. That much is evidenced by several scholars, some of whom are referenced in this thesis. *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980*, published by David R. Goldfield in 1982, covers a significant swath of time, roughly four centuries, when delving into understanding urbanization in the South. Goldfield posits his

---

<sup>13</sup> The accompanying website created by the author of this thesis is [auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://auburnblackneighborhoods.org).

approach to examining the South and its unique urban landscape by arguing that historians had previously analyzed Southern cities in the same manner they explored Northern ones.<sup>14</sup> He specifically notes that while previous historians successfully peeled back the cotton curtain, they failed to account for the nuances of the differences between the North's and the South's cities, especially when it comes to the South's plantations, which characterized its agrarian systems.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the biracial nature of urban societies and restrictions placed upon Black people, enslavement, and labor systems have influenced and thus shaped the urban South. Through the biracial lens, he further posits that burgeoning urban cities were explicitly split into two sectors, Black and white.<sup>16</sup> This duality within the urban landscape underlines how race relations were central to the formation of the urban South and affected African American's access to resources, political power, and employment. Furthermore, he illustrates that Southern urbanization involved adapting rural, plantation-era social structures to an industrialized urban context which inherently involved inflicting racial and economic inequalities against African Americans.<sup>17</sup> *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, published by Don H. Doyle in 1990, centers around southern post-Civil War cities and how their creators shaped the New South order following "war, emancipation, and Reconstruction." Doyle furthers his stance within the larger historiography on urbanization in the South by peering through the lens of those who developed its towns and cities. This study includes the enslaved, enslavers, other farmers,

---

<sup>14</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University, 1982), xi.

<sup>15</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 2-3. The cities in his study were Houston, Texas, Atlanta, Georgia, Charlotte, North Carolina, Mobile, Alabama, Nashville, Tennessee, Richmond, Virginia, New Orleans, Louisiana, Memphis, Tennessee, and Louisville, Kentucky. For this study, Goldfield specifically chose the larger southern cities in order to present nuances gained from treating Southern cities individually. This selection of cities reflects the intentionality of focusing on burgeoning urban centers that were heavily shaped by rural legacies and plantation economies. Thus, serving as examples for contextualizing urbanization in the South as being intertwined with both longstanding social and economic hierarchies rather than mimicking Northern industrialization.

<sup>16</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 5-7.

<sup>17</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 197-227.

merchants, entrepreneurs, and industrialists.<sup>18</sup> He asserts that the burgeoning business class did not displace the power of the planters.<sup>19</sup> Under this viewpoint, he posits that the business leaders, specifically the merchants, entrepreneurs, industrialists, etc., are the ones at the core of the urban landscape and thus aided in constructing the New South. Doyle also establishes arguments on how this shift impacted African Americans, specifically, how the new business class worked to shape racial lines and exert economic control through segregation, “a system that deliberately deprived blacks of dignity and equality.”<sup>20</sup> He challenges oversimplification when it comes to portraying Southern urbanization as solely racial oppression or based on economics. Instead, he demonstrates the interconnectedness of these two aspects and their inner workings as driving forces. Similarly to Goldfield, this scholarly work is beneficial for unpacking how economic control and restrictions against Black people shaped the urban South.

The next few scholarly works discuss urban development in the form of exploring Black neighborhoods. *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, published by Thomas W. Hanchett in 1998, covers a large swath of time as his focus spans 100 years of Charlotte, North Carolina’s history. Hanchett’s focus entails gleaning insights on the forces that shape a city, the neighborhoods, industries, and streets within it, the shifts within these forces over time, and the impacts of said forces.<sup>21</sup> He argues that there is a grey area when it comes to understanding how towns are laid out and constructed. More specifically, he argues that there have been inconsistencies when segregating Southern cities by

---

<sup>18</sup> Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), xi-xii.

<sup>19</sup> Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 262.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 1.

race and/or income as the urban landscape's arrangements appear to be in flux.<sup>22</sup> The emergence of new economic sectors and industries worked dually by reshaping the physical landscape and redefining social hierarchies and access to economic opportunities. This analysis underscores how the local urban development process worked to deepen inequalities between race and class lines. Hanchett also noted that unlike more industrialized Northern cities, Southern urbanization was deeply intertwined with its antebellum values, racial legacies, and agrarian roots<sup>23</sup>

*Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee*, published by Lisa C. Tolbert in 1999, argues that amongst the conversation on urbanization, small Southern towns remain obscure and their historical significance prior to Reconstruction has been underexplored.<sup>24</sup> Through this discussion on small towns, she takes the spotlight away from staple agriculture and larger southern cities by making them the focal point. Through highlighting the transformation of plantation landscapes into built environments organized around an urban grid, Tolbert opens the door to a reconsideration of the ways economic, social, and cultural forces intersected in shaping small towns. Tolbert's work on small Southern towns aids in explaining the significance behind this thesis examining Auburn's Black neighborhoods in this small southern town in the early twentieth century. Additionally, Hanchett's focus on neighborhoods and economics in Southern urbanization adds an extra perspective for this thesis' exploration of Auburn's Black history. Another aspect of significance when it comes to how Black people have experienced urban development stems from community building in segregated places. *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis: African Americans in the Industrial City, 1900-1950* is an edited volume of twelve essays published in 2000. Henry Louis Taylor, Jr. and

---

<sup>22</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 10-12.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 2.

Walter Hill edited this volume. These scholarly essays discuss the experience of Black people in urban, industrial areas on a wider scale, going beyond the South. They give insight into the effort Black people have put into community building and personal betterment despite the rapidly changing nature of urban societies coupled with racism and restrictions places against them.

Tolbert's approach of stepping away from prominent towns, minus Nashville, and instead examining smaller towns offers a fresh perspective to the larger literature on southern urbanization. Through this perspective, a comparison of how the presently more populous cities were constructed to the building of smaller towns can be drawn. Goldfield discusses small towns and cities to a certain degree, but his predominant focus on present-day larger southern cities fails to bridge the aforementioned gaps within the literature. Doyle and Hanchett do largely the same thing as Goldfield when it comes to viewing cities rather than small towns. On top of this, the essays in *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis* follow the same formula, a focus on larger cities. This thesis works to introduce another town, Auburn, as another lens into how Black residents were treated in and experienced urban development; more specifically, from the viewpoint of a smaller southern town rather than a larger city.

Another body of literature that this thesis engages is the history and legacy of slavery at universities. Scholarly works previously were not paying attention to their legacies and impacts on universities from enslavement, to working there while being barred from getting an education from said university, and to eventual integration. In recent years, there has been a change in this as historians have begun to dive into the history of Black people at universities. Enslavement and the university is a growing field with several new works, both published and in development. These scholarly works include books, theses, dissertations, and digital history projects. This

thesis works to build on that field by addressing select individuals who worked for the university, pre- and post-Emancipation, whose legacies have been ignored.

Universities all over the United States, largely in the Northeast, are acknowledging those they enslaved and Black legacies post-Emancipation. Examples of these universities include: Brown University; University of South Carolina; College of William and Mary; University of Virginia; Rice University; Clemson; University of Alabama; Harvard; Yale; Georgetown; Columbia; Rutgers; University of Georgia Athens; Goucher College; Furman University; Washington and Lee University; George Mason University; Hampden-Sydney College; Louisiana State University; Emory; University of Mississippi; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Elon; Amherst College; MIT; and University of Richmond.<sup>25</sup> Their foundations.

---

<sup>25</sup> These are several of the digital projects for Black history at various universities in the United States: **Clemson** - *Call My Name – At Clemson University*, <https://callmyname.org/>; **Elon University** - “Fall 2020 Report & Recommendations,” Elon University, <https://www.elon.edu/u/history-memory/fall-2020-report-recommendations/>; “Locating Slavery’s Legacies @ Elon University · Home · Testing,” <https://locatinglegacies.org/s/elon/page/home>; Brandon Inabinet, **Furman University** - “Seeking Abraham: A Report of Furman University’s Task Force on Slavery and Justice,” Furman University, 2019, <https://www.furman.edu/about/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/Seeking-Abraham-Second-Edition.pdf>; **Washington and Lee University** - “Report of The Commission on Institutional History and Community: Washington and Lee University,” <https://my.wlu.edu/presidents-office/response-to-the-report-of-the-commission-on-institutional-history-and-community/report-of-the-commission-on-institutional-history-and-community>; **Emory** - “The Watershed Project,” <https://www.emoryhenry.edu/appalachian-center-for-civic-life/civic-memory/the-watershed-project/>; **Rice University** - “Rice University Task Force on Slavery, Segregation, and Racial Injustice,” Task Force on Slavery, Segregation and Racial Injustice | Rice University, Rice University, 2023 2019, <https://taskforce.rice.edu/>; **University of Alabama** - “Overview · The History of Enslaved People at UA, 1828-1865 · The History of Enslaved People at UA,” <https://studyingsslavery.ua.edu/s/uastudyingsslavery/page/overview>; **University of Richmond** - “University of Richmond Race & Racism Project,” <https://memory.richmond.edu/#>; **Georgetown** - “Georgetown Reflects on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation,” *Georgetown University*, n.d., <https://www.georgetown.edu/slavery/>; “Georgetown Slavery Archive,” <https://slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/>; **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** - “University Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward,” <https://historyandrace.unc.edu/>; **Princeton** - “The Princeton and Slavery Project,” <https://slavery.princeton.edu/>; **William and Mary** - “The Lemon Project,” William & Mary, <https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/>; **University of Mississippi** - “Slavery Research Group | Ole Miss,” <https://olemiss.edu/departments/libarts/slavery-research-group/>; **Louisiana State University** - “Slavery in Baton Rouge,” Slavery in Baton Rouge, <https://slaverybr.org/>; **University of Georgia Athens** - “New Digital Resource on the History of Slavery at UGA | UGA Libraries,” <https://www.libs.uga.edu/news/new-digital-resource-history-slavery-uga>; “On These Grounds: Slavery and the University of Georgia · UGA,” <https://onthesegroundsuga.digilabuga.org/s/otg/page/about>; **University of Virginia** - *President’s Commission on Slavery and the University*, n.d., <https://slavery.virginia.edu/>; **Amherst College** - *A Racial History of Amherst College – Resources & Research*, n.d., <https://rhac.wordpress.amherst.edu/>; **MIT** - “Slavery and the Founding of MIT,” MIT & Slavery, <https://digital-exhibits.libraries.mit.edu/s/mit-and-slavery/page/slavery-and-the-founding-of-mit>; **Harvard** - “Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery Initiative,” Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery, October 23, 2024,

which were built on the backs of enslaved individuals, are being discussed in both digital history projects and publications. The above list of universities is not a comprehensive one as more than just these ones are working on making this history public rather than hiding it. Some of these institutions began this process as early as 2006, 2009, and 2011. These specific examples are Brown University, William and Mary's The Lemon Project, and Emory University's The Watershed Project.<sup>26</sup> These dates show that academics have been working on making information and records regarding enslavement at universities publicly accessible in the digital sense for upwards of twenty years. This initiative is not a brand-new concept. These projects have continued to the present day as records are continuously updated and more universities begin digging into their own history. This is where Auburn University, this thesis, and my website comes in. Auburn University does not have a dedicated website on or even memorials for those enslaved to this university. This thesis serves as an example of and a starting point for the exploration of slavery's legacy at Auburn.

Southern universities have begun to acknowledge their history of enslavement, and Black legacies, in a multitude of ways. Southern universities, such as the University of South Carolina, the University of Alabama, Clemon University, and the University of Georgia Athens, have

---

<https://legacyofslavery.harvard.edu/>; **Rutgers** - "Scarlet and Black Project, Rutgers University," Scarlet and Black Project, Rutgers University, <https://scarletandblack.rutgers.edu/>; **Yale** - "The Yale & Slavery Research Project," <https://yaleandslavery.yale.edu/>; **University of South Carolina** - Chris Horn, "History Unveiled," University of South Carolina, [https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/12/history\\_unveiled.php](https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/12/history_unveiled.php); **Brown University** - Jill Kimball, "Collaborative Project Yields New Digital Archive on Hidden History of Indigenous Enslavement | Brown University," May 7, 2025, <https://www.brown.edu/news/2025-05-07/stolen-relations>; **Columbia University** - "Columbia University & Slavery Project | Columbia University Libraries," <https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/about.html>;

<sup>26</sup> "The Watershed Project," <https://www.emoryhenry.edu/appalachian-center-for-civic-life/civic-memory/the-watershed-project/>; "The Lemon Project," William & Mary, <https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/>; Jill Kimball, "Collaborative Project Yields New Digital Archive on Hidden History of Indigenous Enslavement | Brown University," May 7, 2025, <https://www.brown.edu/news/2025-05-07/stolen-relations>.

uncovered the names of those enslaved on their campuses.<sup>27</sup> This thesis adds to the initiative of uncovering name as it addresses the eleven known names of those enslaved to Auburn University. Even though they are known, this university has yet to publicly acknowledge them. Louisiana State University students took their digital history projects a step further and explored both enslavement at this university and in Baton Rouge.<sup>28</sup> This process is similar to both this thesis and the accompanying website as both dive into Black history in Auburn and at Auburn University. Additionally, there are universities that are acknowledging both the known and unknown enslaved individuals. One example of this is William and Mary's The Lemon Project which delves into acknowledging both the known and unknown enslaved individuals who built their campus.<sup>29</sup> The records found from digging into Auburn University's history of enslavement uncovered both named and unknown enslaved individuals which indicates a similarity to William and Mary. Southern universities have also dived into focusing on a longer timeframe when discussing Black legacies tied to their campuses. The University of Richmond, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Furman University, Clemson University, and Rice University are some examples of Southern universities that do just that, they have traced their Black history from the founding to Civil Rights.<sup>30</sup> This thesis adds to that initiative as it acknowledges those enslaved to the university, and Black residents who continued to labor for AU post-

---

<sup>27</sup> Chris Horn, "History Unveiled," University of South Carolina, [https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/12/history\\_unveiled.php](https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/12/history_unveiled.php).; "Overview · The History of Enslaved People at UA, 1828-1865 · The History of Enslaved People at UA," <https://studyingsslavery.ua.edu/s/uastudyingsslavery/page/overview>.; *Call My Name – At Clemson University*, n.d., <https://callmyname.org/>.; "On These Grounds: Slavery and the University of Georgia · UGA," <https://onthesegroundsuga.digilabuga.org/s/otg/page/about>.

<sup>28</sup> "Slavery in Baton Rouge," Slavery in Baton Rouge, <https://slaverybr.org/>.

<sup>29</sup> "The Lemon Project," William & Mary, <https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/>

<sup>30</sup> "University of Richmond Race & Racism Project," <https://memory.richmond.edu/#>.; "University Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward," <https://historyandrace.unc.edu/>.; Nashieli Marciano, "Furman's Legacy of Slavery: A Digital Exhibition: James C. Furman's Legacy," <https://libguides.furman.edu/c.php?g=1325855&p=9911657>.; *Call My Name – At Clemson University*, n.d., <https://callmyname.org/>.; "Rice University Task Force on Slavery, Segregation, and Racial Injustice," Task Force on Slavery, Segregation and Racial Injustice | Rice University, Rice University, 2023 2019, <https://taskforce.rice.edu/>.

Emancipation. Various Southern universities have even taken the initiative of creating memorials, conducting walking tours, supporting community engagement, and truly striving to make their Black history known. Examples of these institutions are the University of Mississippi, the University of South Carolina, the University of Virginia, and Clemson University.<sup>31</sup> This thesis, and my website, adds to these initiatives by serving as an example of what can come out of conducting this public engagement work. What it could look like if AU contributed to publicly acknowledging its Black history, outside of solely Acknowledging its first Black student, Harold Franklin.<sup>32</sup>

Scholarship in recent years has appeared to increasingly discuss Black people and universities, more so regarding enslavement, both in published books and digital projects (as discussed above). Some notable works are *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* by Craig Steven Wilder published in 2013; *Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies* edited by Leslie M. Harris, James T. Campbell, and Alfred L. Brophy and published in 2019; and *Call My Name, Clemson: Documenting the Black Experience in an American University Community* published in 2020 by Rhondda Robinson Thomas.

Craig Steven Wilder in *Ebony and Ivy* explored the intricacies behind the intertwined nature of the history of enslavement and race within American universities. More specifically, enslaving people aided in funding colleges such as Harvard, the University of North Carolina, Williams College, Yale, Rutgers, and Princeton, amongst others. Wilder showcased how

---

<sup>31</sup> Chris Horn, "History Unveiled," University of South Carolina, [https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/12/history\\_unveiled.php](https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/12/history_unveiled.php); *President's Commission on Slavery and the University*, n.d., <https://slavery.virginia.edu/>; -"Slavery Research Group | Ole Miss," <https://olemiss.edu/departments/libarts/slavery-research-group/>; *Call My Name – At Clemson University*, n.d., <https://callmyname.org/>

<sup>32</sup> "Desegregation at Auburn Historical Marker," <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=90861>.

universities were built and shaped off the backs of enslaved individuals whilst adding to racist ideologies. He examined “how and why the earliest American academies became rooted in the slave economies of the colonial world.” This includes how the economic system of both universities and enslaved individuals became intertwined and grew together.<sup>33</sup> Wilder furthers this by discussing how enslaved individuals were used to “raise buildings, maintain campuses, and enhance their institutional wealth.” Through this, and the additional topic of scientific racism, he aimed to shed light on widely ignored histories of oppression at several well-known universities.<sup>34</sup> This source is beneficial for this thesis’ short discussion on the eleven people enslaved or hired out to Auburn University.

In *Call My Name, Clemson*, Rhondda Robinson Thomas traced Clemson University’s Black history. She specifically looked at how Black people there sustained the university and the land surrounding it; however, their history and contributions remained ignored. Thomas calls back to the land’s beginning as the plantation of a white enslaver named John C. Calhoun in 1825, then she goes through time to 1890-1915 where a mostly Black convict crew built Clemson University, and follows this thread to the integration of Clemson.<sup>35</sup> She expertly blends together communal history, the intricate aspects of said history, and her reflections while reckoning with Clemson’s past. As expressed earlier, she brings to light Clemson’s underexplored Black history which entails enslavement and how this university developed off the labor of Black people. While the focus of this scholarly work is centered around Clemson, it provides a great case study of what all can be ascertained when Black history is taken seriously.

---

<sup>33</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 10-11.

<sup>35</sup> Rhondda Robinson Thomas, *Call My Name, Clemson* (University of Iowa Press, 2020), 18-15, 60, 64, 67.

*Slavery and the University* is an edited volume of essays on the histories and legacies of enslavement at universities in the United States. In this, the individual scholars share a similar focus to the above historians, reckoning with the Black history of various universities and how enslavement influenced them. Each essay examines “some of the recent university explorations of slavery and its legacies,” which is crucial for gaining a wider understanding of how many institutions were built off the backs of Black people.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, they also aid in gaining insight into how the legacies of enslavement at specific universities have continued post-Emancipation through both memory and forgetting.. Some of the institutions focused on consist of the University of Alabama, Yale, Oberlin College, Emory University, William and Mary, Hampden-Sydney College, and the University of Virginia.<sup>37</sup> One of the significant reasons for bringing to light this history is because of “...the nation’s continuing failure to come to grips with slavery’s scope, scale, and historical significance.”<sup>38</sup> This history becomes forgotten, erased, if it is not discussed and researched.

### **Introducing the Census:**

Personal data is a useful tool for learning about any given town and the people who lived in it. The census is a legally mandated tool under the United States Constitution and is primarily used for figuring out the allotment of money and house seats; however, it also collects demographic and personal information about individuals residing in the U.S. that historians can

---

<sup>36</sup> Leslie M. Harris et al., eds., *Slavery and the University* (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Leslie M. Harris et al., eds., *Slavery and the University* (University of Georgia Press, 2019), v, vi, 84-85.

<sup>38</sup> Leslie M. Harris et al., eds., *Slavery and the University* (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 4.

use.<sup>39</sup> The data collection has not been consistent over time, as each one, dating back to 1790, has asked residents different questions. For example, the 1940 census asked where each person lived in 1935, whereas the 1930 census asked if they owned a radio. Both censuses requested information on the birthplace and parental birthplace of each person, their age, gender, race, whether they owned or rented their homes, the names of those living in the household, and the location of each house, amongst other inquiries. Given the number of detailed questions asked in censuses, they can provide insight into what information Census officials considered important enough to record at the time. Often this is not the same information that a historian might want. But taken together, the census can offer both individual and aggregate information that we might not otherwise have.

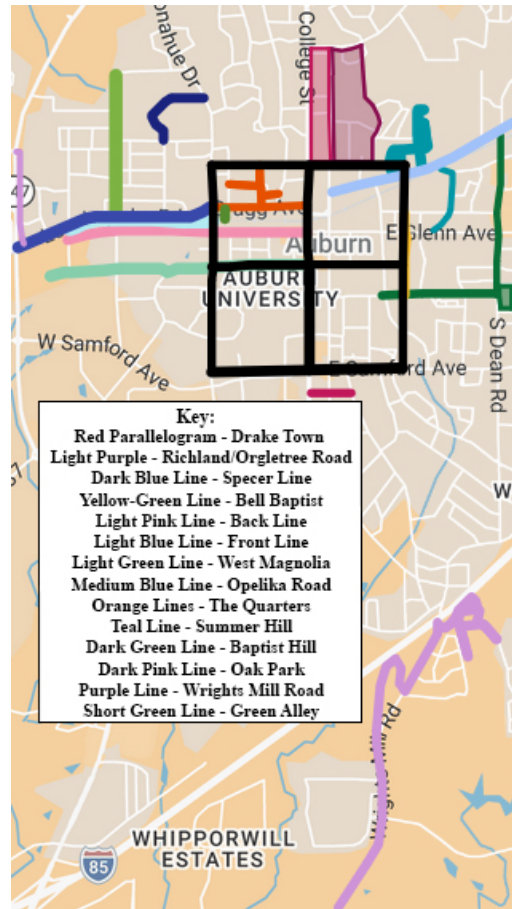
Information was gathered by enumerators going from house to house, asking and relying on whomever they spoke with to know the answers to the aforementioned questions. Despite the best efforts of enumerators, inaccuracies still occurred. People were missed, and information misrecorded. One common area for inaccuracies stems from the person who answered the Census taker's questions, sometimes they simply did not know the answers. The specific censuses that will be used here are the Fifteenth Census of the United States (1930) and the Sixteenth Census of the United States (1940). The census will be used here in this thesis to partially give an economic insight into Auburn's Black neighborhoods, such as home value and rent costs. The other purpose of using this source is to aid in discussing the lives of select Black residents. This includes topics such as noting their occupations, where they lived, and if they rented or owned. The 1930 and 1940 censuses were chosen since they were the first two that

---

<sup>39</sup> See Article I, Section 2 of the United States Constitution, and Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment, for more information on the mandate.

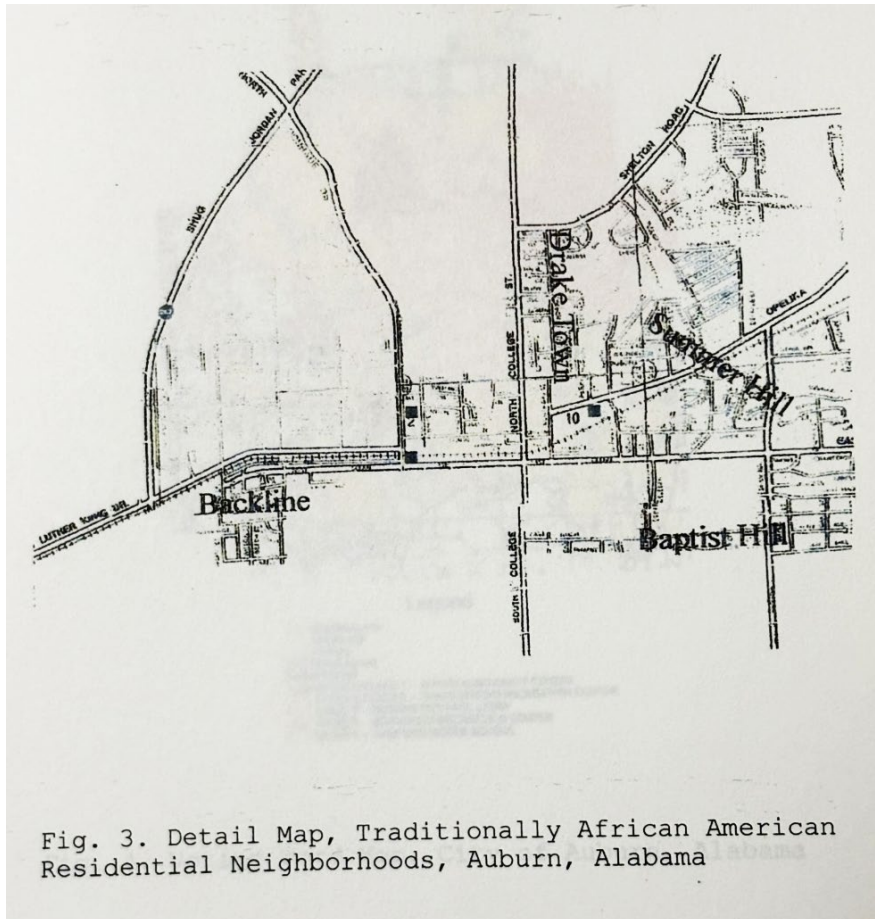
provided more detailed information on where Black residents lived in Auburn. This addition aids in ascertaining their neighborhoods when diving deeper into local history.

### **Auburn’s Black Neighborhoods:**



(Figure No. 1)<sup>40</sup> From left to right, the light green line represents the Bell Baptist neighborhood; dark blue represents Spicer Line; light pink represents Back Line; orange represents The Quarters; dark pink represents Oak Park; purple represents Wrights Mill Road; the light red polygon represents the confirmed boundaries of Drake Town and the neighboring orange polygon represents the area that was potentially also part of that neighborhood; dark green represents Baptist Hill; and teal blue represents both sections of Summer Hill.

<sup>40</sup> This map was created by the author using both deed and secondary source research. The map is housed on the author’s website, [auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://auburnblackneighborhoods.org) on the Black neighborhoods page.



(Figure No. 2)<sup>41</sup> This map gives a detailed layout of some of Auburn’s Black neighborhoods. The purpose of using it here is to point out the fact that it includes a detailed version of the boundary of Drake Town, and it aids in laying out a few of the other Black neighborhoods.

Dirt roads, gardens, small houses, and ball fields were just some defining characteristics of Auburn’s Black neighborhoods in the first half of the twentieth century. Peering behind the curtains into the 1930s and 1940s reveals life in the Jim Crow South. How were neighborhoods

---

<sup>41</sup> Holly Elizabeth Harriel, “Change Within Traditionally African American Residential Neighborhoods in Auburn, Alabama” (Master’s, Auburn University, 1999), 67. This map corroborates the fact that my uncertain and certain boundaries of Drake Town are likely accurate. As in, both polygons identified in my map above this one are likely the entire boundary of this neighborhood.

arranged? When examining these neighborhoods, it is imperative to understand where they were at the time and some of them still exist. The above map of Auburn's Black neighborhoods serves as a starting point for laying out these spaces. It serves as a visual representation of where these neighborhoods were; however, it is not enough to simply show them on a map. Maps show you the location of roads, sometimes neighborhoods and buildings, and often give names of streets, but they cannot tell you everything. There is typically not enough room on a map to provide the history behind the street names and other community stories. By going beyond maps or other visuals and digging into local history, one is able to understand the significance of these places and words on a map.



(Figure No. 3)<sup>42</sup> This aerial image depicts how rural the Northwestern portion of Auburn looked in 1939 in comparison to other sections of town. The street names were imposed onto the map by the author in an attempt to contextualize the space.

The above aerial image depicts how the Northwest side of Auburn was mostly rural but was in the process of becoming suburban in 1939. Roads were being created, houses built closer together, and older houses were still further apart. Eventually, more people moved into these neighborhoods and thus more houses needed to be built. Since this area of town is the predominantly Black side of town in the present-day, this is where the exploration into the history of Auburn's Black neighborhoods will begin.

On the Northwest side of town, the named neighborhoods were called Bell Baptist, Spencer Line, Back Line, and The Quarters. The Bell Baptist neighborhood consisted of Foster Street, Spencer Line consisted of Spencer Avenue, Back Line was located on West Glenn Avenue, and The Quarters consisted of Canton Avenue, Frazier Street, Grant Avenue, and Bragg Avenue. However, there were some neighborhoods that still existed but were not given the same treatment. According to Doris Hutchinson, a longtime member of the Spencer Line neighborhood, the unnamed neighborhoods on the Northwest side of town never got a name and were solely known by their street names.<sup>43</sup> Several of these streets were known by the names of the people who lived there, raised their families there, helped take care of their neighbors, farmed the land, and owned businesses nearby. As time went on, these streets were officially given these names and street signs were erected bearing said names.

---

<sup>42</sup> "Special Topics: Viewing Aerials/Lee/Lee Auburn NW 1939.Jp2," November 6, 1939, University of Alabama, [http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NW%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item\(Name,Description\),cat\(Name,Description\)&style=default/view.xsl&plugin=true](http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NW%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item(Name,Description),cat(Name,Description)&style=default/view.xsl&plugin=true).

<sup>43</sup> Doris Hutchinson in discussion with the author, October 2025.



(Figure No. 4)<sup>44</sup> This aerial photograph of Northeast Auburn shows roughly the area of Drake Town in 1939. This small segment is being used to emphasize how one section of the same neighborhood could appear both suburban and rural. Transposed on top of the aerial are street names to aid in understanding the boundaries of Drake Town.

<sup>44</sup> “Special Topics: Viewing Aerials/Lee/Lee Auburn NE 1939.Jp2,” November 6, 1939, University of Alabama, [http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item\(Name,Description\),cat\(Name,Description\)&style=default/vi ew.xsl&plugin=true](http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item(Name,Description),cat(Name,Description)&style=default/vi ew.xsl&plugin=true).



(Figure No. 5)<sup>45</sup> This aerial photograph of Northeast Auburn shows roughly the area of Summer Hill in 1939. This neighborhood was split in two across the railroad tracks and Opelika Road. Not all of the road names that were in this neighborhood are transposed on top of this aerial due to them not yet existing in 1939.

---

<sup>45</sup> “Special Topics: Viewing Aerials/Lee/Lee Auburn NE 1939.Jp2,” November 6, 1939, University of Alabama, [http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item\(Name,Description\),cat\(Name,Description\)&style=default/vi ew.xsl&plugin=true](http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item(Name,Description),cat(Name,Description)&style=default/vi ew.xsl&plugin=true).



(Figure No. 6)<sup>46</sup> This portion of the Holly Elizabeth Harriel thesis map gives a detailed layout of the Drake Town, Summer Hill, and Baptist Hill neighborhoods. The purpose of using it here is to further demonstrate the boundary of Drake Town.

On the Northeast side of town were the neighborhoods called Drake Town and Summer Hill.<sup>47</sup> The confirmed boundary of Drake Town was roughly bounded on the North by Shelton Mill Road, on the South by East Drake Avenue, on the East by North Gay Street, and on the West by North College Street, creating a rectangle. College Street, originally called Main Street until 1924, was presumably named as such due to Auburn University being located along this stretch of road. The presumed boundary ran the length of North Ross Street ending at Shelton Mill Road on the North and at East Drake Avenue on the South. The streets within Drake Town consisted of

---

<sup>46</sup> Holly Elizabeth Harriel, "Change Within Traditionally African American Residential Neighborhoods in Auburn, Alabama" (Master's, Auburn University, 1999), 67.

<sup>47</sup> Sam Hendrix, *Auburn: A History in Street Names* (Donnell Group, 2021), 542-543. According to *Auburn: A History in Street Names*, Ross Street used to end when it intersected with Drake Avenue, and this area was considered Drake Town.

Pitts Circle, Wynn Avenue, North Avenue, and potentially both Hudson Terrace and Perry Street.<sup>48</sup> A short distance down the road from Drake Town was the neighborhood called Summer Hill.

Summer Hill was a neighborhood split into two segments by the railroad tracks and Opelika Road. The north side consisted of one segment of Summer Hill Road, Pitts Street, Martin Avenue, Lincoln Street, and Washington Court, while the south side was solely the other segment of Summer Hill Road. Looking at old aerial images provides snapshots of what these neighborhoods looked like. This thesis will be relying primarily on the 1939 aerial images due to the use of the 1930 and 1940 censuses. These images reveal exactly what these spaces looked like in a way that censuses cannot. Censuses tell you who neighbors were, but they do not give distance between households. Without using aerial images in conjuncture with censuses, the information regarding what the lots looked like, for example, becomes lost.

The above 1939 aerial images show Drake Town and Summer Hill neighborhoods. Figure four encompasses both the aforementioned confirmed and unconfirmed boundaries of Drake Town. From this view one can see that this neighborhood had houses that were both close together and spread out. Summer Hill, as seen in figure five, had a similar situation to Drake Town as the southern half was more spread out than the northern half. These aerial images serve the purpose of showcasing progress and growth within these neighborhoods. Moving South from here leads to the Black neighborhoods on the Southeast side of Auburn.

---

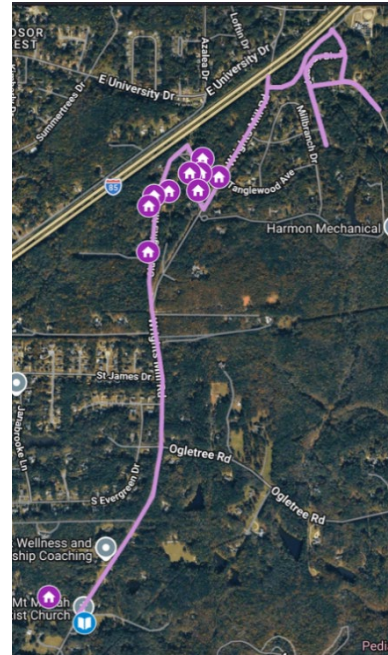
<sup>48</sup> Sam Hendrix, *Auburn: A History in Street Names* (Donnell Group, 2021), 237.



(Figure No. 7)<sup>49</sup> This aerial image covers the Southeast side of Auburn in 1939. On this side of town, the known Black communities were spread out from each other. Notably, Reese Avenue is to the Southwest of what was once the segregated white only school; Baptist Hill is where the historic Black cemetery is located; and East Thach is where Ebenezer Baptist Church, a historic Black church built by formerly enslaved people in 1870, was located.

---

<sup>49</sup> “Special Topics: Viewing Aerials/Lee/Lee Auburn SE 1939.Jp2,” November 6, 1939, University of Alabama, [http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20SE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item\(Name,Description\),cat\(Name,Description\)&style=default/view.xsl&plugin=true](http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20SE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item(Name,Description),cat(Name,Description)&style=default/view.xsl&plugin=true).



(Figure No. 8 and No. 9)<sup>50</sup> The aerial, figure three, depicts the Wrights Mill Road neighborhood in 1939. Along this road were several Black owned and/or rented houses. The purple outline transposed on a 2025 map, figure four, also depicts the Wrights Mill Road neighborhood. This image comes from a map created by the author of this thesis.

On the Southeast side of town were the neighborhoods known as Baptist Hill, Oak Park, and Wrights Mill Road. Baptist Hill consisted of Dean Road (originally Baptist Hill Road) and East Thach Avenue. Oak Park was located at Reese Avenue. Dean Road’s original name, Baptist Hill Road, originated from Auburn’s historic Black cemetery being located here, Baptist Hill Cemetery. Going further along the outskirts of Auburn was the Wrights Mill Road community.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Special Topics: Viewing Aerials/Lee/Lee Auburn SE 1939.Jp2,” November 6, 1939, University of Alabama, [http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20SE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item\(Name,Description\),cat\(Name,Description\)&style=default/view.xml&plugin=true](http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20SE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item(Name,Description),cat(Name,Description)&style=default/view.xml&plugin=true). The Figure No. 7 map was created by the author using both deed and secondary source research. The map is housed on the author’s website, [auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://auburnblackneighborhoods.org) on the Black neighborhoods page.

<sup>51</sup> Along the outskirts of Auburn in the Northwestern side of town is the Ridge Grove Road community. This neighborhood is excluded from this discussion due to the residents considering themselves as part of Waverly rather than Auburn. This information was provided by Doris Hutchinson October 2025. Wrights Mill Road was named for the mill that used to be where Chewacla State Park has been located since 1935, at the south end of Wrights Mill Road, and one of its early owners. William Wilmot Wright and his family owned this mill starting in 1873.

The houses along Wrights Mill Road, one of the long roads headed out of town, made up the Wrights Mill Road community.<sup>52</sup>



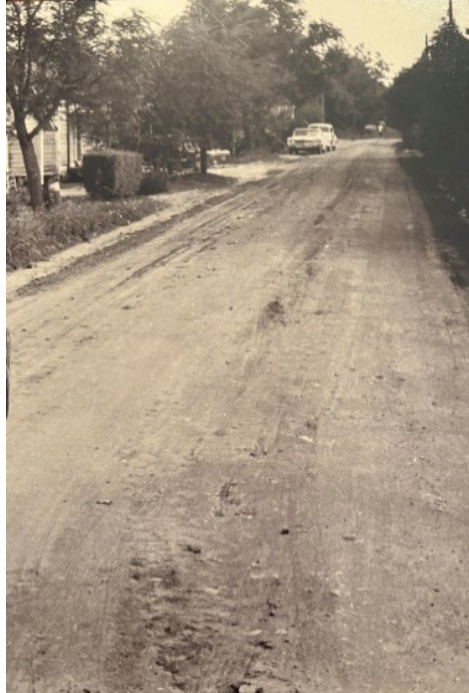
(Figure No. 10)<sup>53</sup> Pictured here is Wright's Mill in ca. 1900 which is no longer standing.

---

Chewacla State Park was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as part of the New Deal legislation and was created as a CCC work camp. By 1939, the state gained control over this property and turned it into a state park. Despite its location in a Black neighborhood, this park was segregated and thus not publicly open to Black people.

<sup>52</sup> Sam Hendrix, text message to author, July 29, 2025. Sam Hendrix received this information from Doris Hutchinson, who grew up in Auburn, and then passed along this information to me. Information on the history of the street names for this neighborhood, and the others above, can be found on the author's website: [auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://auburnblackneighborhoods.org).

<sup>53</sup> Wright's Mill Built 1870s, ca. 1900, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives, Numbered Photographs Collection RG 705, IV.A.693a.



(Figure No. 11)<sup>54</sup> A picture taken by Bill Wright around May 23, 1966 of a dirt road in Drake Town, possibly N. Gay Street.

### **Community Stories:**

Now that the history of these street names and geographic boundaries have been established, it is time to further explore the characteristics of Black neighborhoods: what they looked like, what the home values were, who some of the people who lived here were and how they lived, and more personal details. These spaces were more than just neighborhoods; they were communities. They were spaces for socializing, raising families, making a living, and aiding one another when needed. Community was important within Black neighborhoods and several people who grew up in Auburn remembered their neighborhoods as joyous places.

---

<sup>54</sup> This is a picture taken in taken by Bill Wright around May 23, 1966 of a dirt road in Drake Town, possibly North Gay Street. This is one of a set of photographs housed at Auburn University's Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities. I am including it here to demonstrate one of the dirt roads in one of Auburn's Black Neighborhoods. This photo has been purposefully cropped in order to place more emphasis onto the dirt road.

Families looked out for each other. Adults looked out for each other's children. For example, Lula Oliver remembered Drake Town as a great place to live: "It was fun growing up in Drake Town, it was so much fun." Additionally, Lula also stated, "Drake Town is family." This memory emphasizes that the residents of the neighborhood took care of each other in the tight-knit community. Doris Hutchinson recalled the ball field on Spencer Line and the individual baseball teams within each community. She mentioned how "after church everybody gathered up on the ballfield and played a ball game."<sup>55</sup> A resident of the West Auburn area, Mary Moore, recalled that "there was a baseball team behind the Lee County Training School," and the team there was called "the Auburn Clouds."<sup>56</sup> Additionally, a resident of the Back Line community said that the houses were often spaces for social gatherings.<sup>57</sup> Willie Butler, a longtime resident of the Back Line, confirmed this notion of the Back Line being a social hub. He mentioned how "The Back Line was the first [Black neighborhood] to get electricity and running water." Because of this, "kids played under the streetlights along the Back Line at night." He also addressed that there were "neighborhood mamas and daddies who looked after the kids, and so if they saw the kids do something, their parents knew about it before they got home."<sup>58</sup> The Wrights Mill Road neighborhood had similar qualities. Children here would often play with each other, much like the other Black neighborhoods. They also had their own baseball field where Mt. Moriah Church is today, approximately .3 miles away from Chewacla State Park. When women had their babies, "the neighborhood would chip in and take care of the other children that were left at home." In general, everybody in this neighborhood took care of each other. As expressed by Ronnie

---

<sup>55</sup> "Lula Oliver oral history interview conducted by Mark Wilson in Auburn, Alabama, 2021-06-10." From Mark Wilson's Drake Town Photographs Identification Project. Audio File.

<https://auburn.app.box.com/file/820642059423>; Doris Hutchinson in discussion with the author, October 2025.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Moore in discussion with the author, February 2026.

<sup>57</sup> Holly Elizabeth Harriel, "Change Within Traditionally African American Residential Neighborhoods in Auburn, Alabama" (Master's, Auburn University, 1999), 36.

<sup>58</sup> Willie Butler in conversation with the author, February 2026.

Jackson, Carl Jackson, Reta Jackson, and Patricia (Jackson) Crowder, longtime Wrights Mill Road residents, “The neighbors watched out for everybody’s kids. Everybody in the neighborhood belonged to each other.”<sup>59</sup> Summer Hill, for example, was another neighborhood where the residents were considerably close to one another socially. They went to school together, played together, went to church together, and ultimately did everything together as a community. One of the activities they did for fun was hold street dances at the bottom portion of Pitts Street.<sup>60</sup>



(Figure No. 12)<sup>61</sup> A picture taken by Bill Wright around May 23, 1966 of a house in Drake Town. This shows the size of one of the African American houses in Auburn.

---

<sup>59</sup> Ronnie Jackson, Carl Jackson, Reta Jackson, and Patricia (Jackson) Crowder in conversation with the author, December 2025.

<sup>60</sup> Longtime Summer Hill resident in conversation with the author, June 2025.

<sup>61</sup> This is a picture taken by Bill Wright around May 23, 1966 of a house in Drake Town. This is one of a set of photographs housed at Auburn University’s Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities. I am including it here to demonstrate the size of at least one Black owned house in Auburn.



(Figure No. 13)<sup>62</sup> A picture taken of a house located at 609 Westview Drive which is one street to the West of Spencer Line. Doris Hutchinson was born in this house in 1949 and grew up here. This shows an example of the typical size of African American houses on the Northwest side of Auburn, and in general amongst other Black neighborhoods.

These community spaces were filled with families from different walks of life. According to Doris Hutchinson, houses in these neighborhoods were often small, four-room dwellings, two bedrooms with a kitchen and living room.<sup>63</sup> Curtis Williams, a longtime resident in the West Auburn area, corroborated this by stating, “Some Black families had large homes. Most common families had smaller dwellings. The houses were kind of mixed and max three bedrooms.”<sup>64</sup> Several two-room houses also existed, such as one house on Wrights Mill Road owned by a formerly enslaved woman named Sally Mosley.<sup>65</sup> Another example is a two-room shotgun house

---

<sup>62</sup> Doris Hutchinson in conversation with the author, November 2025. Picture taken by Doris Hutchinson. She was born in this house in 1949.

<sup>63</sup> Doris Hutchinson in conversation with the author, October 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Curtis Williams in conversation with the author, February 2026.

<sup>65</sup> The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn’s African American History, *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama* (The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn’s African American History, 2011), 123.; 1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-14, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 17A for

on Wrights Mill Road, specifically on the portion now known as Old Wrights Mill Road. Ronnie Jackson and Patricia (Jackson) Crowder stated that this house, where they grew up in the 1950s, consisted of just a kitchen and a big bedroom. There were also some houses that were a little bit bigger with three rooms, and more rarely, four rooms.<sup>66</sup> According to Sam Hendrix in *Auburn: A History in Street Names*, there were also two-room houses on Frazier Street that had no running water or electricity.<sup>67</sup> Pictured above is an example of a house in Drake Town and a house on Spencer Line.<sup>68</sup> According to Doris Hutchinson, houses were consistently small within each neighborhood. They sat on lots of land and were spread out rather than situated close together. In fact, there was enough space on these lots that two more houses could have been fit in the space between them!<sup>69</sup> The further you go out of town, the more spread out these houses were and the landscape became increasingly rural. Aerial images from 1939 showcase how wide open this landscape truly was, especially in conjunction with the more built-up, predominantly white, areas.<sup>70</sup>

---

more information on Sally Mosley. 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-21, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 13A for more information.

<sup>66</sup> Ronnie Jackson and Patricia (Jackson) Crowder in conversation with the author, December 2025.

<sup>67</sup> Sam Hendrix, *Auburn: A History in Street Names* (Donnell Group, 2021), 276.

<sup>68</sup> A white man named Edward Lee Spencer established a lumber company in Auburn in 1929 called the Spencer Lumber Company. There people could buy building materials and, as the business name suggests, lumber. In addition to that, he also had an icehouse where he sold coal. He used to extend credit for Black people to help them out. Spencer was notably the main contractor in the area of Spencer Line with his business being located on Bragg Avenue. He also built several houses in the 1940s and 1950s in this area of town, mostly on Spencer Line, so Black people could have places to live. Spencer was instrumental in making sure Black people were taken care of. This information comes from *Auburn: A History in Street Names* page 581 and Curtis Williams in conversation with the author, February 2026.

<sup>69</sup> Doris Hutchinson in conversation with the author, October 2025.

<sup>70</sup> “Special Topics: Viewing Aerials/Lee/Lee Auburn NW 1939.Jp2,” November 6, 1939, University of Alabama, [http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NW%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item\(Name,Description\),cat\(Name,Description\)&style=default/view.xsl&plugin=true](http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NW%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item(Name,Description),cat(Name,Description)&style=default/view.xsl&plugin=true).

Auburn's Black neighborhoods, located on the fringes of town, remained mostly rural while the predominantly white, inner portions were becoming increasingly suburban.<sup>71</sup> Rural is being used to describe the area as having more land between houses whereas suburban is being used to note that houses were closer together. They were set side by side. As time went on, Black neighborhoods too became more suburban. Black households often lacked amenities that one might expect when living closer to town such as electricity. According to Juanita Hughes in *Lest We Forget*, the closer your house was to town, the more likely it was for you to have lights.<sup>72</sup> The Back Line, which was relatively close to Auburn University, was the first Black neighborhood to get electricity.<sup>73</sup> A similar dynamic likely applied to monthly rent cost and higher home value: the closer you were to town, the more you paid. However, this was of course not the only factor that went into Auburn's Black neighborhoods.

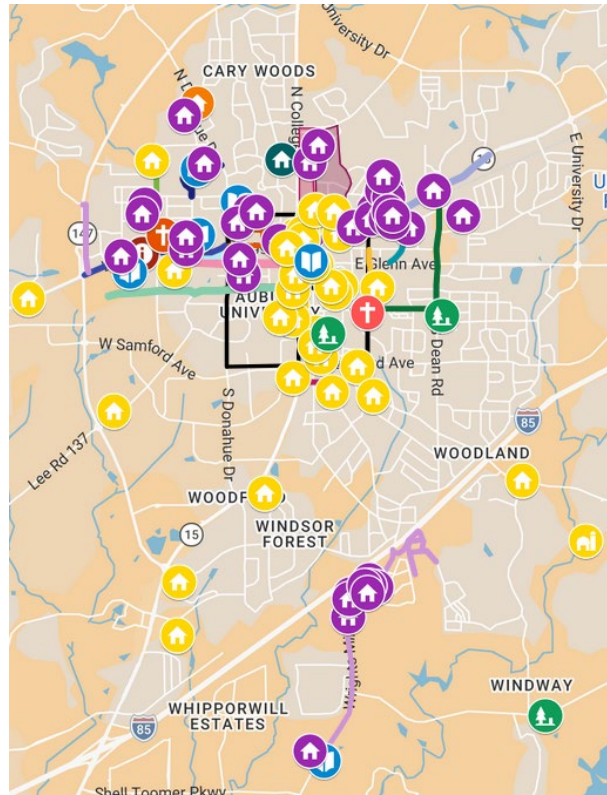
---

<sup>71</sup> The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History, *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama* (The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History, 2011), 78. This page specifically mentions that white people were mostly who lived in the downtown area while "the outer areas were Black,".

<sup>72</sup> The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History, *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama*, 85.

<sup>73</sup> Willie Butler in conversation with the author, February 2026.

## Census View of Black Neighborhoods:



(Figure No. 14)<sup>74</sup> This map, created by the author of this thesis, showcases both Black neighborhoods and plantations and/or enslaver town houses in Auburn. The yellow house symbols indicate plantation houses and/or enslaver town houses. The purple house symbols indicate Black owned houses.

Census data, visuals, and oral histories aid in showing how Black and white neighborhoods never overlapped, outside of rare instances of Black people being live-in workers in white households, at least in the early-to-mid twentieth century. From creating a visual of Black neighborhoods, one thing became abundantly clear: All Black neighborhoods were

---

<sup>74</sup> Figure No. 14 is a map created by the author of this thesis. This map is housed on the author's website, [auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://auburnblackneighborhoods.org) on the plantations page.

separated from white neighborhoods.<sup>75</sup> This is further corroborated by *Lest We Forget: A History of African Americans in Auburn, Alabama*, which says “Most Whites lived in the downtown area. All the outer areas were Black, like Oak Park Community, Summer Hill, Wright’s Mill Road, West Magnolia, and Drake Town.”<sup>76</sup> Some areas with Black residents neighbored white ones, but they rarely overlapped, such as Spencer Line, The Quarters, and Drake Town neighboring Cary Woods.<sup>77</sup> In fact, there are only two African Americans listed as living in a white neighborhood in the 1940 census, Maggie B. P. Greene and Willie J. Griggs. They rented a space to the rear of 434 East Magnolia Avenue, better known as the Greystone Mansion, located a mere 150 feet away from Pebble Hill, an old plantation house. While living here, Maggie Greene was listed as a cook and Willie Griggs as a chauffeur, both for a private family. Therefore, it is probable that they were the cook and chauffeur for the white family that lived here. This suggests that Black people could only live with, or near, white in Auburn people if they worked for them. The household they lived in was the James L. Lawson family, which included his wife Mabel, their two daughters, and one son. The census also noted that the Lawson family, Griggs, and Greene, all lived in Greensboro, Alabama in 1935, thus indicating that they moved to Auburn together.<sup>78</sup> In fact, multiple Black lodgers moved to Auburn from other locales, both in and surrounding

---

<sup>75</sup> Baptist Hill consisted of E. Thach Avenue and Dean Road and Oak Park was located on Reese Avenue. The location of Oak Park came from The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn’s African American History, *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn’s African American History, *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama*, 78.

<sup>77</sup> Doris Hutchinson in conversation with the author, October 2025; Map of Black neighborhoods in Auburn created by the author, Tori Buchanan, [https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1tMotRB\\_J4-MAP\\_XwrLpy0bVRMlb6SvY&usp=sharing](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1tMotRB_J4-MAP_XwrLpy0bVRMlb6SvY&usp=sharing); Cary Woods, originally called Cary Park, is a white subdivision in Auburn that was created around the 1940s-1950s.

<sup>78</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-18, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama, Page 1A.

Alabama.<sup>79</sup> When they got to Auburn, they experienced disparity in living conditions from white locals.

Black neighborhoods were neglected by city funds as compared to white neighborhoods. Unpaved roads were common in Auburn's Black neighborhoods due to the city's requirement that Black residents pay for the roads to be paved.<sup>80</sup> For example, dusty dirt roads marked a clear separation between Black and white neighborhoods. The paved streets were "lined with middle class homes occupied by White residents..." while the dirt roads were "lined with a mixture of neat and well-kept frame houses, and other houses that probably should have been condemned but served as the only shelter that many of Auburn's Black residents could afford."<sup>81</sup> Auburn, of course, was not the only town to have Black neighborhoods that looked like this. According to David R. Goldfield, "cities like Atlanta, Richmond, and Durham," had similar looking Black neighborhoods. He stated that those on the outskirts of these cities "presented the same rural appearance as they had in the 1850s: dirt roads, outdoor facilities, poor drainage, and frame 'double-pen' houses or 'shotgun shacks...'"<sup>82</sup> Throughout this thesis are examples of just that in

---

<sup>79</sup> According to the 1940 census, the majority of African American lodgers who lived in Auburn in 1940 moved there from a different town after 1935. For example, Henrietta McSpadden, who lived on Bragg Avenue with three other lodgers, was from Bessemer, Alabama. The women who lodged with her were Henrietta Beasley, Lena Maye Gordon, and Maurice Avery. Beasley and Gordon were both from Montgomery, Alabama and Avery was from Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>79</sup> In total there were two lodgers living in Auburn who were from Montgomery and two who were from Birmingham in 1940. Forty-three lodgers total, including the aforementioned ones, came to Auburn from Alabama towns such as Loachapoka, Wetumpka, Salem, Tallassee, Notasulga, Waverly, Society Hill, Green Chapel, Camp Hill, Opelika, Ridge Grove, Tuskegee, Talladega, and Greensboro. One lodger came from Chattanooga, Tennessee, one came from West Point, Georgia, and one came from Washington, Georgia. There were twenty-nine lodgers who lived in Auburn in 1935. This indicates that more lodgers came from different places. While it is unknown exactly why they left the towns they came from, one can speculate that the reasoning could have been for job opportunities, family, or just the decision to go somewhere else.

<sup>80</sup> "Melvin Hunt oral history interview conducted by Mark Wilson in Auburn, Alabama, 2021-05-22." From Mark Wilson's Drake Town Photographs Identification Project. Audio File. Housed at Auburn University's Center for the Arts and Humanities as of 2026.

<https://auburn.app.box.com/folder/137948036968?s=df0w9kt4r4d8mpd132yldkd25bfuc5ul>

<sup>81</sup> The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History, *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama* (The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History, 2011), 110.

<sup>82</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers* (Louisiana State University, 1982), 112.

Auburn's Black neighborhoods. Local Black people made their communities tightknit and took care of each other because white officials were not going to treat them fairly and support them.

By the mid-twentieth century, Auburn was a place that offered opportunities for employment, so people moved in; however, they did not offer Black people places to live.<sup>83</sup> According to Johnnie Byrd, a longtime resident of the West Auburn area, Auburn also had regulations for where Black people could live. The West Auburn area was a designated place for Black people to live and build, even though they also lived elsewhere.<sup>84</sup> Restrictions placed upon Black people and their neighborhoods were not unique to Auburn. Racial zoning was used frequently in the South to "...order the urban environment," and ensure that neighborhoods remained segregated.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, "In some Southern cities, leaders went so far as to write racial zoning into law in the years after 1900."<sup>86</sup>

Restrictions against where Black people could live and build were not unique to Auburn. Some Southern cities even had maps that defined and graded Black neighborhoods. Multiple cities across the South had redlining maps created by the Home Owners Loan Corporation around the 1930s and 1940s. These maps were created to aid racial zoning, specifying where Black people could live and build.<sup>87</sup> While there are presently no known examples of this map being created for Auburn, the memories of similar segregation restrictions remain in the Black community amongst the older population. These instances were not the sole restrictions placed

---

<sup>83</sup> Curtis Williams in conversation with the author, February 2026.

<sup>84</sup> Johnnie Byrd in conversation with the author, February 2026; See Walter Hill and Henry Louis Jr. Taylor, eds., *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis* (Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000) for more examples on how urban towns placed restrictions on where Black people could live.

<sup>85</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers* (Louisiana State University, 1982), 167.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 116.

<sup>87</sup> N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, *Historical Studies of Urban America* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 134.

upon Black people locally. In fact, town officials within Auburn took land from the residents of the Wrights Mill Road community.

Interstates in the mid-1900s were created with two predominant objectives, to disenfranchise Black people and contribute to segregation. The interstate (I-85) cut through the Southwest portion of Auburn around the mid-to-late 1950s which meant that land would be needed to construct the road. The need for land came with a cost to the residents of the Black neighborhood impacted by this development, Wrights Mill Road. According to Ronnie Jackson, Carl Jackson, and Patricia (Jackson) Crowder, when the interstate and bypass came through Auburn, it cut through a segment of this neighborhood. This development brought a heavy cost: It took a lot of land from the Black residents and changed/alterd the layout of the road and by proxy, the neighborhood itself. For example, the original Wrights Mill Road used to include what is now known as Old Wrights Mill Road. Due to the interstate, these roads became two separate entities. Black people in the Wrights Mill Road neighborhood quickly learned that they had no choice but to accept the change because the city and other officials cut the interstate through WMR without caring about land ownership. Additionally, according to the Jacksons, they did not offer any money for said land owned by Black residents. Power lines were also put in, which left Black residents unable to use portions of their land.<sup>88</sup> Auburn was not the only place where something like this occurred. For example, according to N. D. B. Connolly in *A World More Concrete*, “Between the 1940s and 1970s, local and federal agents destroyed some sixteen hundred black neighborhoods through various slum clearance, urban renewal, and interstate highway projects.” Connolly further noted that these destructions, which were in Florida, were

---

<sup>88</sup> Ronnie Jackson, Carl Jackson, and Patricia (Jackson) Crowder in conversation with the author, December 2025.

intentional with the objective of containing Black people and controlling regional economies.<sup>89</sup> While the WMR neighborhood may not have been destroyed, the aforementioned bridge built to go over the interstate served as a marker for segregation. The Black side of Wrights Mill Road was cut off from the white side which worked to try and keep more Black people out of Auburn's city limits. Furthermore, Ronnie Jackson noted that kids in this neighborhood, prior to integration, were warned by adult residents to not cross the bridge over the interstate due to concerns about how they would be treated by white residents on the other side of the bridge, the white side of WMR.<sup>90</sup> Another example of spaces occupied by Black people that was cut off by I-85 was "the historically Black Alabama State College (ASC, now Alabama State University)" which separated it from "its historic residential neighborhood of distinguished African American merchants, doctors, faculty, and civil rights intelligentsia."<sup>91</sup> Sam Engelhardt, a highway director, was the one in charge of this decision and reportedly also worked to disenfranchise Black voters in Tuskegee, Alabama. Outside of disenfranchising Black voters, Engelhardt also worked to keep Black children out of white schools. Because this was happening around the same time that the interstate cut through Auburn, the mid-to-late 1950s through the 1960s, Engelhardt likely used his power and influence in changing the WMR neighborhood.<sup>92</sup>

Census information, while incomplete, offers a clearer portrait of how communities organized along social, economic, and demographic lines. Black communities were not as wealthy as white ones in several instances. Using a small snapshot of the 1930 Auburn census

---

<sup>89</sup> N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, Historical Studies of Urban America (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 8.

<sup>90</sup> Ronnie Jackson in conversation with the author, December 2025.

<sup>91</sup> Rebecca C. Retzlaff and Jocelyn Zanzot, "The Interstates, Racism, and the Need for Truth and Reconciliation: The Case of Highway Routing in Alabama," in *Justice and the Interstates* (Island Press, 2023), 40.

<sup>92</sup> Rebecca C. Retzlaff and Jocelyn Zanzot, "The Interstates, Racism, and the Need for Truth and Reconciliation: The Case of Highway Routing in Alabama," in *Justice and the Interstates* (Island Press, 2023), 38, 40.

allows us to look at multiple local Black neighborhoods, including Drake Town. This neighborhood was established in 1914 on land that was once owned by a mixed-race man named Isaac Drake. According to *Auburn: A History in Street Names*, Drake was the son of Francis Drake, an enslaver, and an enslaved woman whose name is unknown. Drake often built small houses for local Black families.<sup>93</sup> This legacy of building small houses for these families likely led local African Americans to name this neighborhood for Drake. However, those searching this census for this neighborhood would be out of luck due to it referencing this neighborhood by one moniker, “Dark Town”, rather than listing individual street names.<sup>94</sup> Not calling this neighborhood by its true name, Drake Town, effectively strips Drake’s significance within local Black history. While those living here still had their employment statuses, occupations, home data, and personal descriptions documented like everyone else, the use of the name “Dark Town” indicates the racial segregation of neighborhoods. According to this census, twenty-one households rented their homes, and twenty-three households owned their homes in this community. There were not just families living in these houses; several houses had lodgers rooming with them. As the name imposed upon Drake Town implies, the majority of the people living here were Black; however, one white family resided there. This family consisted of a widowed woman, her two sons, and her two daughters.<sup>95</sup> Diving in deeper into census records gives further insight into race.

Race in the 1930 census played a role within the personal description column and presumably impacted other questions as well. According to the National Archives, the

---

<sup>93</sup> Committee for the Preservation of Auburn’s African American History, *Lest We Forget: A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama* (Auburn, Alabama, 2011), 85.; Sam Hendrix, *Auburn: A History in Street Names* (Donnell Group, 2021), 237.

<sup>94</sup> 1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See pages 25A-27A for where it states, “Dark Town”.

<sup>95</sup> 1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama, “Minnie S. Long”.

enumerators for the 1930 census were instructed to note any mixed-race individual, or any person with any Black ancestry whatsoever, as Black.<sup>96</sup> The reference to a majority Black neighborhood as ‘Dark Town’ was not likely to be accidental. No other Black neighborhoods were listed with racialized versions of their names. The purpose of creating this census for governmental use suggests that it reflected the prevailing notion on how to classify and treat race during this time. That notion plays a role in noting the racialized perceptions against African Americans in Auburn in 1930.

### **The Economics of Black Neighborhoods:**

The 1930 and 1940 censuses contained valuable information on economics and how family structures looked within Auburn’s Black neighborhoods, as well as their location within the town.<sup>97</sup> In theory, these records should contain honest and thorough information; however, like any other source, it is not perfect and is inherently interwoven with biases. Black neighborhoods were not always well documented, as evidenced by the lack of street names or the existence of poorly documented farms. Even so, a good bit of data can be gathered that is pertinent for understanding these communities. Questions such as which neighborhoods were considered more affluent or poorer, how many people lived in one neighborhood versus another, how many people rented versus owned their homes, and how many people lived in each household can be reasonably answered by using and comparing census data.

---

<sup>96</sup> “The 1930 Census in Perspective,” National Archives, August 15, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/summer/1930-census-perspective.html>.

<sup>97</sup> These two censuses are not the only ones that contained valuable information on economics and family structure within Auburn’s Black neighborhoods. However, for the purpose of this section, they are the ones utilized.

Mining the census for economic data is crucial for gaining insight into the financial aspects of a neighborhood. Data from the census indicates how housing costs varied between Black neighborhoods and even houses on the same street. Using this data also aids in exploring the monetary ways in which Auburn's Black residents were segregated from white neighborhoods. Through this lens, we can see how the cost of rent and home ownership in white neighborhoods often, but not always, outpriced the Black ones. However, housing costs were not the only thing restricting Black residents from residing in white neighborhoods. Later on in this section there is discussion about deeds to houses in white neighborhoods barring Black residents from residing there. This ensured that Auburn's Black residents were kept out of white neighborhoods, even if they could afford to live there. At the end of this section there is discussion on the complexity surrounding combining education and occupation data with economics. This is important for understanding that educational and occupational background did not necessarily determine how much their house would be worth or the amount they paid in rent per month.

In the 1930s and 1940s, economic differences between Auburn's Black households were particularly evident.<sup>98</sup> For example, two people on the same street could pay radically different amounts in rent or their homes could be worth disproportionate amounts comparatively to each other. This variation occurred regardless of their education levels or job titles. Such disparities allows for interpretations about Auburn during the early-to-mid twentieth century. For example, economic or education status did not necessarily dictate where Black people lived locally. Auburn officials dictated where Black people lived and could build too due to their regulations.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately, the 1930 and 1940 censuses are the only ones that records home and rent value for Auburn. Therefore, I am unable to note previous and subsequent decades.

<sup>99</sup> Johnnie Byrd in conversation with the author, February 2026.

Through this lens, one might interpret Auburn's uniqueness as being derived from economic and societal outliers in its Black neighborhoods.

Between 1930 and 1940, the economic outliers within Auburn's Black neighborhoods shifted geographically. In 1930, the African Americans who paid the most in rent (between \$12-\$42 a month) lived on Summer Hill Road and on Old Tuskegee Road, now known as Wire Road. The highest home values ranged from \$3,000 - \$8,000 on Summer Hill Road, Loachapoka Road (now known as Martin Luther King Drive), West Glenn Avenue, East Thach Avenue, Drake Avenue, and in Drake Town.<sup>100</sup> These areas were closer to the main part of town, especially East Thach Avenue and Summer Hill Road where one house was valued at \$8,000.<sup>101</sup> The main portion of Auburn was denoted by the more built up, suburban downtown area along North College Street and West Magnolia Avenue and nearby spaces, such as downtown Auburn and Alabama Polytechnic Institute. Pictured below is a segment of a 1939 aerial image depicting the downtown Auburn and Alabama Polytechnic Institute area. This image gives a visual of the aforementioned suburban landscape in the center of town. Here the center of town is referred to as the area of Magnolia Avenue and College Street since Auburn was built out from this starting point.<sup>102</sup> By 1940, the highest rent went down to \$12 - \$20 a month on Bragg Avenue and Loachapoka Road. The highest home values for owned houses ranged from \$3,000 - \$4,500 on Grant Street, Bragg Avenue, and West Glenn Avenue, which are in the West Auburn area.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> 1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See pages 6A, 7A, 8B, 17A, 18A, 22A, 24A, 25B, 26B-27A, and 29B-31A.

<sup>101</sup> 1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See James Whitaker on page 18A for more information on this household.

<sup>102</sup> Sam Hendrix, *Auburn: A History in Street Names* (Donnell Group, 2021), 520.

<sup>103</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-18, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 12B; 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-17, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See pages 14B, 16A, 18B, and 67B.

**(Figure No. 15) 1930 Highest Rent and Home Ownership Values for Black People in Auburn, Alabama**

<b>Street Names</b>	<b>Rent Per Month</b>	<b>Home Value Range</b>
Summer Hill Road	\$12 - \$42	\$3,000 - \$8,000
Wire Road	\$12 - \$42	
Loachapoka Road	N/A	\$3,000 - \$8,000
West Glenn Avenue	N/A	\$3,000 - \$8,000
East Thach Avenue	N/A	\$3,000 - \$8,000
Drake Avenue	N/A	\$3,000 - \$8,000

**(Figure No. 16) 1940 Highest Rent and Home Ownership Values for Black People in Auburn, Alabama**

<b>Street Names</b>	<b>Rent Per Month</b>	<b>Home Value Range</b>
Bragg Avenue	\$12 - \$20	\$3,000 - \$4,500
Loachapoka Road	\$12 - \$20	
Grant Street	N/A	\$3,000 - \$4,500
West Glenn Avenue	N/A	\$3,000 - \$4,500



(Figure No. 17)<sup>104</sup> This aerial image depicts downtown Auburn, Alabama and a small portion of API's campus in 1939.

While the decrease in home value was at least partially a reflection of the Great Depression, it also reflected an attempt to keep African Americans out of white neighborhoods. Especially when it came to devaluing the homes owned or lived in by Black people.<sup>105</sup> By doing this, they kept Black people out of affording the price range for homes in white neighborhoods.

---

<sup>104</sup> "Special Topics: Viewing Aerials/Lee/Lee Auburn NE 1939.Jp2," November 6, 1939, University of Alabama, [http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item\(Name,Description\),cat\(Name,Description\)&style=default/vi ew.xsl&plugin=true](http://cartweb.geography.ua.edu/lizardtech/iserv/calcrn?cat=Special%20Topics&item=Aerials/Lee/Lee%20Auburn%20NE%201939.jp2&wid=1000&hei=900&rops=item(Name,Description),cat(Name,Description)&style=default/vi ew.xsl&plugin=true).

<sup>105</sup> Walter Hill and Henry Louis Jr. Taylor, eds., *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis* (Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 10.

Residential patterns such as this were not exclusive to Auburn as this happened in other places in the South. Low economic status for Black people persisted while “racial residential segregation from the white residential areas increased...”<sup>106</sup> Additionally, white people likely saw Black people living in white neighborhoods as a threat that would devalue the homes in their neighborhoods. For example, the cost of rent in 1940 for white families on North College Street, which connects to the eastern end of Bragg Avenue, ranged between \$15 - \$70 a month. The lowest rent amount was connected to white couples who had no occupations listed and blue-collar jobs. Some of the home values on this same street ranged from \$5,000 - \$12,000. The lowest valued home was owned by a white couple who did not have listed occupations. Whereas on the portion of North Gay Street just south of Drake Town, some white owned houses were valued between \$4,000 - \$40,000. Rent on this same street for white families ranged from \$9 - \$50 with the lowest amount being for a white couple, with no listed occupations, who lived in the rear of a rented house.<sup>107</sup> In 1930, rent for white people who lived on North College Street in 1930 ranged from \$5 - \$150 a month, most of which was between \$15 - \$50 with only one paying \$5 a month. Home values for houses owned by white people on this same street ranged from \$5,000 - \$20,000 in 1930. Home values for houses owned by white people on North Gay Street, just south of Drake Town, in 1930 ranged from \$3,500 - \$10,000. On this same street, rent for white couples ranged from \$10 - \$80.<sup>108</sup> Another example of how African Americans were kept out of white neighborhoods was recorded on deeds to houses. For example, stipulated in a deed from 1946 was a house on Woodfield Drive in Auburn could not be sold, rented, or leased

---

<sup>106</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers* (Louisiana State University, 1982), 167.

<sup>107</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-17, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See pages 1B, 2A, 3B, 4A, 7A, 8A, 8B and 9A.

<sup>108</sup> 1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See pages 1B, 2A, 5B, 27A, 27B, 28A, 28B, 29A, 32A, 32B, 33A, and 34B.

to “... any negro or person of African Descent; ...”<sup>109</sup> Although this is just one example of Black people being barred from specific houses in town, this exclusion likely occurred in more instances. Thomas W. Hanchett makes the point, “White property owners subtly forged the patterns of hard-edge black districts by closing off opportunities in certain areas while opening possibilities in others.”<sup>110</sup> While this specific quote is referencing home ownership in Charlotte, North Carolina, it still relates to Auburn with the abovementioned deed that barred Black people from owning or renting a home in a white neighborhood. These were systems put in place to keep Black people out of white neighborhoods. On paper some white-owned and rented houses were the same cost as Black-owned and rented houses. However, the stipulations found in deeds worked to ensure that Black people could not occupy houses in white neighborhoods, even if they could afford them.

**(Figure No. 18) 1930 Rent and Home Ownership Values in Auburn, Alabama for White Households Near Black Neighborhoods**

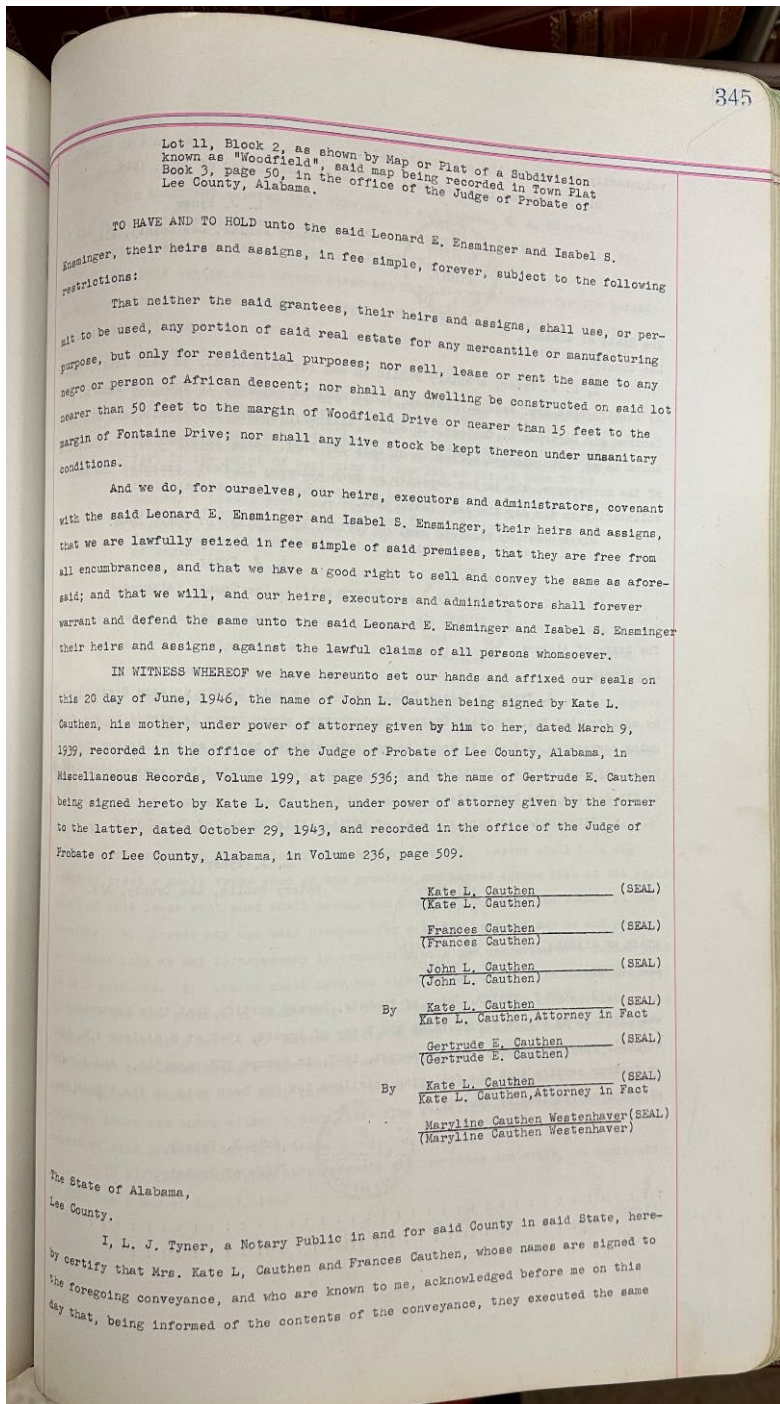
<b>Street Names</b>	<b>White Rent Per Month</b>	<b>White Home Ownership Values</b>
North College Street	\$5 - \$150, most being \$15 - \$50	\$5,000 - \$20,000
North Gay Street	\$10 - \$80	\$3,500 - \$10,000

**(Figure No. 19) 1940 Rent and Home Ownership Values in Auburn, Alabama for White Households Near Black Neighborhoods**

<b>Street Names</b>	<b>White Rent Per Month</b>	<b>White Home Ownership Values</b>
North College Street	\$15 - \$70	\$5,000 - \$12,000
North Gay Street	\$9 - \$50	\$4,000 - \$40,000

<sup>109</sup> Deed of Sale Deed from the Office of the Judge of Probate in Lee County, June 20, 1946, Lee County, Alabama Deed Book, Lee County Courthouse, Opelika, Alabama. Deed transferred from Kate L. Cauthen and Frances Cauthen to Leonard E. Ensminger and Isabel S. Ensminger. This deed also adds to what Johnnie Byrd stated about regulations in Auburn stipulating where Black people could live and build their houses.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 143.



(Figure No. 20)<sup>111</sup> Pictured here is a deed of sale from 1946 stipulating that this house in Auburn, Alabama could not be sold, leased, or rented to Black people in Auburn.

<sup>111</sup> Deed of Sale Deed from the Office of the Judge of Probate in Lee County, June 20, 1946, Lee County, Alabama Deed Book, Lee County Courthouse, Opelika, Alabama. Deed transferred from Kate L. Cauthen and Frances Cauthen to Leonard E. Ensminger and Isabel S. Ensminger,

The rest of this thesis will further discuss the economic and personal factors of Black neighborhoods. It will also highlight what can come from digging into the lives of Auburn's Black residents. The objective here is to further emphasize and explore what can be gleaned when applying oral histories, newspaper articles, and university records to census data. Digging deeper into a community, or someone's life, frequently leads to uncovering history that has been covered up, forgotten, and/or erased. Therefore, it is imperative that individuals are focused on too as they make up the larger Black communities.

In 1940 Auburn, a man named Frank Lewis and his four lodgers lived in a house located at 411 Bragg Avenue.<sup>112</sup> All five of these men had college educations and worked for Alabama Polytechnic Institute, now Auburn University, as cooks. Each man had an income of \$120 a year, which equates to \$10 a month. Their rent was \$20 a month so each of them could have chipped in \$4 each; however, that was still nearly half of their monthly income.<sup>113</sup> Three houses down the road from Frank Lewis and his lodgers lived Henrietta McSpadden and her three lodgers, who also had college educations. These women were all teachers at Lee County Training School, a Rosenwald school located at 190 Byrd Street.<sup>114</sup> Two of the women had an income of \$385 a

---

<sup>112</sup> "U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947", digital image, Ancestry.com, Draft Registration Card for Garfield M. Grimmatt, Birth Date: 30 April 1917; Serial Number 238.

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2238/records/11043778>. Garfield M. Grimmatt was one of the men who lodged with Frank Lewis. This information in combination with the 1940 census confirms their home address and these men working for Alabama Polytechnic Institute.

<sup>113</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-18, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 12B for more information on this household.

<sup>114</sup> Taylor McGaughy, "Lee County Training School," with Taylor McGaughy, Image Source:

[Http://Rosenwald.Fisk.Edu/?Module=search.details&set\\_v=aWQ9MzEy&school\\_county=lee&school\\_state=AL&button=Search&o=0](http://Rosenwald.Fisk.Edu/?Module=search.details&set_v=aWQ9MzEy&school_county=lee&school_state=AL&button=Search&o=0) Text Sources: "County Training School," Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card Database, [Http://Rosenwald.Fisk.Edu/?Module=search.details&set\\_v=aWQ9MzEy&school\\_county=Lee&school\\_state=AL&button=Search&o=0](http://Rosenwald.Fisk.Edu/?Module=search.details&set_v=aWQ9MzEy&school_county=Lee&school_state=AL&button=Search&o=0) Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History, Lest We Forget: A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama (Auburn, AL.; Alabama Cultural Resource Survey, November 26, 2014, <https://omeka.lib.auburn.edu/items/show/31>. Rosenwald schools were created for the specific purpose of educating Black children, predominantly those in rural Southern areas. This initiative began in 1912 by Julius Rosenwald, a Jewish American philanthropist and a member of Tuskegee University's Board of Trustees. He began this initiative in collaboration with Tuskegee's president Booker T. Washington. They were funded by both Rosenwald's foundation and the local communities where the schools would be located. Between 1913-1932,

year, one earned \$480 a year, and the last one did not have an income reported. The respective women with reported income earned \$38 and \$40 a month while they paid \$12 a month for rent.<sup>115</sup> These women would have spent approximately \$3 each out of their paycheck which was less than a fourth of their month income. While these households were similar in terms of education levels and having the highest rent, there were college educated people who spent significantly less money on rent despite earning more. For example, Sussie Hardy Gholston and her lodger were college educated teachers who made \$720 in yearly income each, \$60 a month, and paid \$4 a month for rent. They lived near Frank Lewis, or at least they were recorded directly before that household in the 1940 census.<sup>116</sup> Despite their similar jobs, college education, and living within close proximity to each other, these households had dramatic differences in how much they were charged for rent.<sup>117</sup> It is possible that one house was newer, bigger, or had better amenities than the other; however, this information is presently unknown. The next stop will lead us to some individuals with a different educational background who owned their homes instead of renting.

High levels of formal education were not required for home ownership. Black people in Auburn who had little to no formal education still owned houses, even some of the highest valued within their neighborhoods. The house with the highest value within the Black community in 1940 was located at 238 West Glenn Avenue and was valued at \$4,500. It was owned by a brick mason and one of the leaders within the Black community named Joe Nesbitt

---

approximately 5,000 Rosenwald Schools were constructed across fifteen Southern states, the first six being in Alabama.

<sup>115</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-17, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 12B for more information on this household.

<sup>116</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-18, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 12B for more information on this household. Census takers went door to door when gathering information for the census.

<sup>117</sup> Another reason for this difference could be house size. The information on how large these houses were is currently unknown to me, so I am unable to prove this beyond speculation.

who was not noted as having any formal education. His yearly income was listed as \$910 which indicates how much work he did, and his proficiency in, being a brick mason.<sup>118</sup> Located at 412 Bragg Avenue was Henry White his wife, Fannie, who were both remembered as “well known” in Auburn in their obituaries. More specifically, Henry White was noted as “a well known citizen of Auburn,” and Fannie White was “well known throughout the community.”<sup>119</sup> They owned this house, which was valued at \$3,000, and they both had an elementary school education. Henry was a painter who had a recorded income of \$260 a year while Fannie was a maid at Alabama Polytechnic Institute whose salary was not recorded.<sup>120</sup> Nuances between education, home ownership versus rented, occupation, and more insinuate the complexity that was Auburn’s Black neighborhoods.

(Figure No. 21) **Rent for Specific Black Households in 1940**

<b>Street Name/Address</b>	<b>Head of Household</b>	<b>Rent Per Month</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Home Ownership Value</b>
411 Bragg Avenue	Frank Lewis	\$20 (approximately \$4 each)	\$120/yr, \$10/month (all five lodgers each)	N/A
Bragg Avenue	Henrietta McSpadden	\$12 (approximately \$3 each)	\$385/yr, \$38/month (two lodgers), \$480/yr, \$40/month (one lodger)	N/A
Bragg Avenue	Sussie Hardy Gholston	\$4	\$720/yr (both lodgers each), \$60/month	N/A
238 West Glenn Avenue	Joe Nesbitt	N/A	\$910/yr	\$4,500
412 Bragg Avenue	Henry and Fannie White	N/A	\$260/yr (Henry)	\$3,000

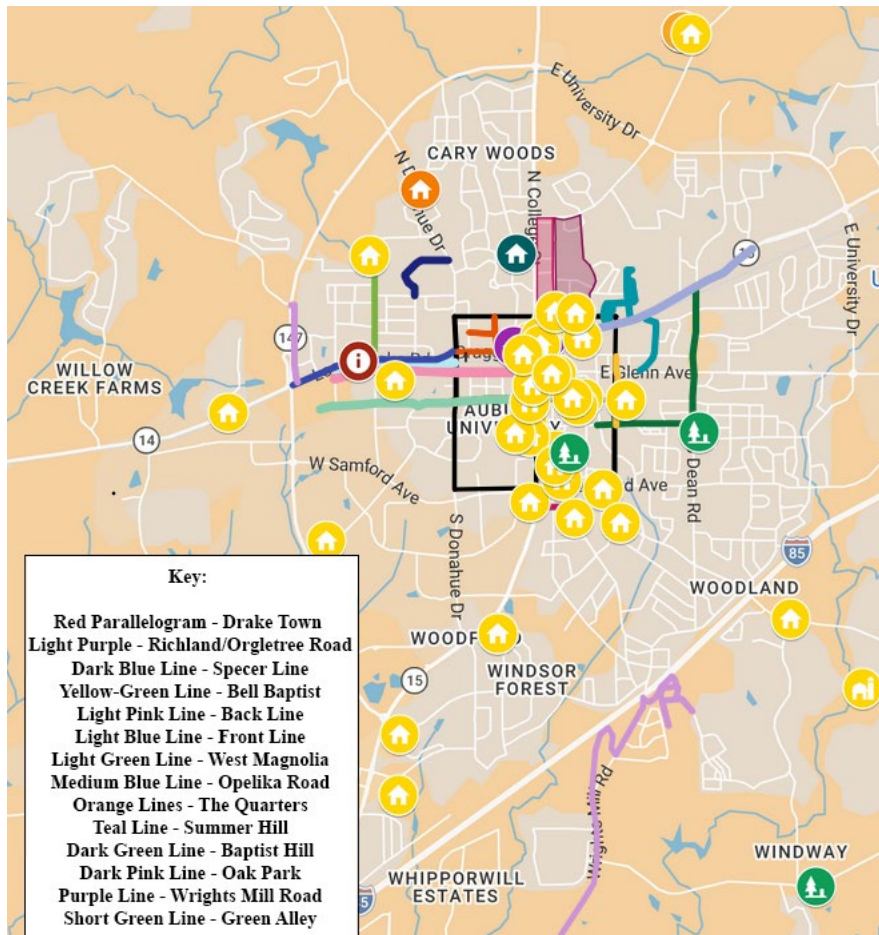
<sup>118</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-17, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 18B.; “Excerpts from ‘Reflections About Lee County Training School’ History compiled by the late Susie Hughes Giddens, a member of the school’s first graduating class,” *Opelika-Auburn News*, July 4, 2004, 2D.

<sup>119</sup> “Colored Deaths Henry White,” *Opelika Daily News*, July 19, 1952, 4.; “Colored Deaths Mrs. Fannie Lou White,” *Opelika Daily News*, March 29, 1965, 7.

<sup>120</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-17, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 16A.

## **Jobs Held by Black Community Members:**

The ever-changing landscape itself adds another layer to the story. People and spaces change over time, and people adapt to their surroundings. The landscape is rarely stagnant for long; people move away; developers come in to redevelop neighborhoods, which often results in forcing, or persuading, some lower income residents to move out. Others may remain firmly in their homes as new developments expand around them. Others may remain firmly in their homes as new developments expand around their homes. The ever changing landscape often seemed to be the case in Auburn, Alabama. In Auburn, this boundary was, and still is, noticeable as one travels from the manicured, built-up spaces surrounding Auburn University going towards the predominantly Black spaces near the fringes of town; one instance is the Northwestern side of town. Through this lens, the neighborhoods were likely perceived as impoverished and solely farmland rather than communal spaces full of people with varying occupational backgrounds. Auburn's Black communities held more significance than just a poor, dreary, underdeveloped borderland.



(Figure No. 22)<sup>121</sup> . This map represents both the plantation houses with the Black neighborhoods juxtaposes where Auburn’s African Americans began gradually migrating to locally post-Emancipation.

Auburn was not built in a day, it grew over time and construction began with enslaved labor. Gradually, post-Emancipation, this former plantation town shifted as formerly enslaved African Americans began setting up their own spaces. Joe Nesbitt, Naomi (Frazier) Nesbitt, Pomp Foster, and Anderson W. “Uncle Buck” Wynn are just a few people who knew this well

<sup>121</sup> This map was created by the author using both deed and secondary source research. This map is housed on the author’s website, [auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://auburnblackneighborhoods.org) on the plantations page.

through experience.<sup>122</sup> All four of them were born on plantations; Pomp Foster in approximately 1851, Buck Wynn in approximately 1852, and Joe and Naomi Nesbitt in the 1860s.<sup>123</sup> They, as well as many other formerly enslaved individuals who laid the groundwork and worked jobs that aided the Black community. Some of these jobs include: constructing houses, education, building and supporting community spaces such as churches, owning and operating businesses, and farming.

Beneath the gilded streets are stifled scars of a community of people that are often underrepresented and overlooked in Auburn. Digging deeper into the histories of local Black neighborhoods expresses stories of those who were barred from an education at API (Auburn University's name between 1899-1960), for example, but could work jobs there instead. There were even several Black people enslaved to Auburn University.<sup>124</sup> Auburn University enslaved Black people from its inception in 1856 until around the time the Civil War ended in 1865 whose legacies will stay unknown if not researched further. Their labor was a crucial factor in the founding of this university. At least eleven Black people were either enslaved or hired out to Auburn University, known between 1856-1872 as the East Alabama Male College.<sup>125</sup> Their names were Jiles, Wils, Man, Alf, Luce, Bill, Aron, Oren, Mar, and Sam. The first ten names are

---

<sup>122</sup> Pompey "Pomp" Foster in his early years, post-Emancipation, worked as a farmer, and by 1880 he became a barber with a shop on East Magnolia Avenue, downtown Auburn. Anderson W. "Uncle Buck" Wynn who was a carpenter and helped found a local Black church called AME Zion Church. This information comes from *Auburn: A History in Street Names* pages 260 and 703-704. More information on Naomi and Joe Nesbitt is included later on in this thesis.

<sup>123</sup> 1910 United States Federal Census, Enumeration District 168, Auburn, Lee, Alabama, *Ancestry.com*. See page 10B For Joe and Naomi Nesbitt.

<sup>124</sup> *What's in a Name? – History of Auburn University Names – On The Lawn*, June 17, 2022, <https://onthelawn.auburn.edu/2022/06/17/whats-in-a-name-history-of-auburn-university-names/>.

<sup>125</sup> *What's in a Name? – History of Auburn University Names – On The Lawn*, June 17, 2022, <https://onthelawn.auburn.edu/2022/06/17/whats-in-a-name-history-of-auburn-university-names/>. Auburn University has undergone four name changes since its inception. It was the East Alabama Male College from 1856-1872, the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama from 1872-1899, Alabama Polytechnic Institute from 1899-1960, and Auburn University from 1960-present day.

included in the university's Executive Committee minutes ledger from 1856-1869 while the eleventh is included in a list of notes due/payable ledger.<sup>126</sup> The person who enslaved or hired out the first ten people was presumably an enslaver named R. N. R. Bardwell. EAMC's first Executive Committee hired this enslaver along with five enslaved carpenters for a total of one year.<sup>127</sup> Those five enslaved individuals, some of whom may have been included in the aforementioned list of ten names, were amongst those who built Old Man, the predecessor of Samford Hall.<sup>128</sup> The eleventh person was enslaved by a man named Nathaniel J. Scott, the original owner of Pebble Hill and the half-brother of John J. Harper.<sup>129</sup> It is known that he was hired out to the university by Scott.<sup>130</sup> Auburn University's first president, William J. Sasnett, enslaved twelve people. Several early board members also enslaved people.<sup>131</sup> By early 1857, William J. Robinson, the treasurer of EAMC's Board of Trustees, furnished the university with \$1,000 to "pay hire" for enslaved individuals. Around that same time, J. W. W. "Wallace" Drake,

---

<sup>126</sup> Board of Trustees Records, RG 521, original accession, box 9a, and folder 275, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the East Alabama Male College, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives. This ledger is digitized and included on The Enslaved page of the author's website, [auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://auburnblackneighborhoods.org).

<sup>127</sup> It is presently unknown whether the university as an entity enslaved these individuals or if they were hired out. It is likely that at least one, Sam, was hired out by his enslaver, Nathaniel J. Scott. To see the Executive Committee minutes ledger, visit the author's website [auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://auburnblackneighborhoods.org) on The Enslaved page. Additionally, reference to Sam in the list of payments due ledger was made by Kyle Munroe in his master's thesis titled "Southern Progress and Southern Honor: Slavery and Jim Crow at Auburn University"

<https://etd.auburn.edu/bitstream/handle/10415/8136/Dissertation.pdf?sequence=2>

<sup>128</sup> Board of Trustees Records, RG 521, original accession, box 9a, and folder 275, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the East Alabama Male College, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives.; Kyle R. Munroe, "Southern Progress and Southern Honor: Slavery and Jim Crow at Auburn University" (Auburn University, 2022).

<sup>129</sup> As a reminder, John J. Harper was coined the founder of Auburn, Alabama.

<sup>130</sup> List of Notes Due/Payable East Alabama Male College 1856 – 1863, Records of the Office of the Vice President for Business and Finance at Auburn University, Auburn University Department of Archives and Special Collections, Auburn University.

<sup>131</sup> 1860 United States Census – Slave Schedule, Northern District, Macon County, Alabama. According to this slave schedule, William J. Sasnett enslaved twelve people. Two forty-eight year olds, two forty-four year olds, two twenty-one year olds, two fifteen year olds, one six year old, and two two year olds. Some of the early board members who enslaved people were Samuel Nunn, Joshua W. Willis, Frank W. Dillard, Addison Frazer, Nathaniel J. Scott, John B. Glenn, John Darby, Dickerson T. Halliday, A. Lipscomb, Isaac Hill, James B. Ogletree, Edwin Reese, and James F. White. This list is not extensive for the known enslavers amongst early board members. These are some of the ones who were board members starting pre-Emancipation.

another EAMC board member and local enslaver, was paid \$145.50 by the university for an enslaved person.<sup>132</sup> Unfortunately, the names of these enslaved people are unknown at this time. While there is a lack of information on these individuals, we know more about enslaved people at other universities.

Unraveling and digging into the past is messy work, especially when it comes to enslavement as the foundation of many universities in the United States. For decades, this topic had been ignored, covered up as if it never happened; however, scholarship on this subject has burgeoned within recent years. Historians, and others in academia, in recent years have created publications and digital history projects to truly acknowledge Black legacies in universities. These publications and projects are continuously in production as more comes to light. For example, at “William and Mary, Hampden-Sydney, the University of Virginia, and other universities” students “felt entitled to employ college-owned slaves but had no real interest in their welfare.”<sup>133</sup> Another notable mention is how at the University of Alabama, enslaved people “were owned by the university and granted to individual professors...”<sup>134</sup> While it is presently not known if these same instances happened to those enslaved to the East Alabama Male College, they do serve as case studies for why it is pertinent to dig into their history. It is also important to note that the men enslaved to this institution built the original buildings, such as Old Main which was the predecessor to Samford Hall. Rhondda Robinson Thomas noted, “...the

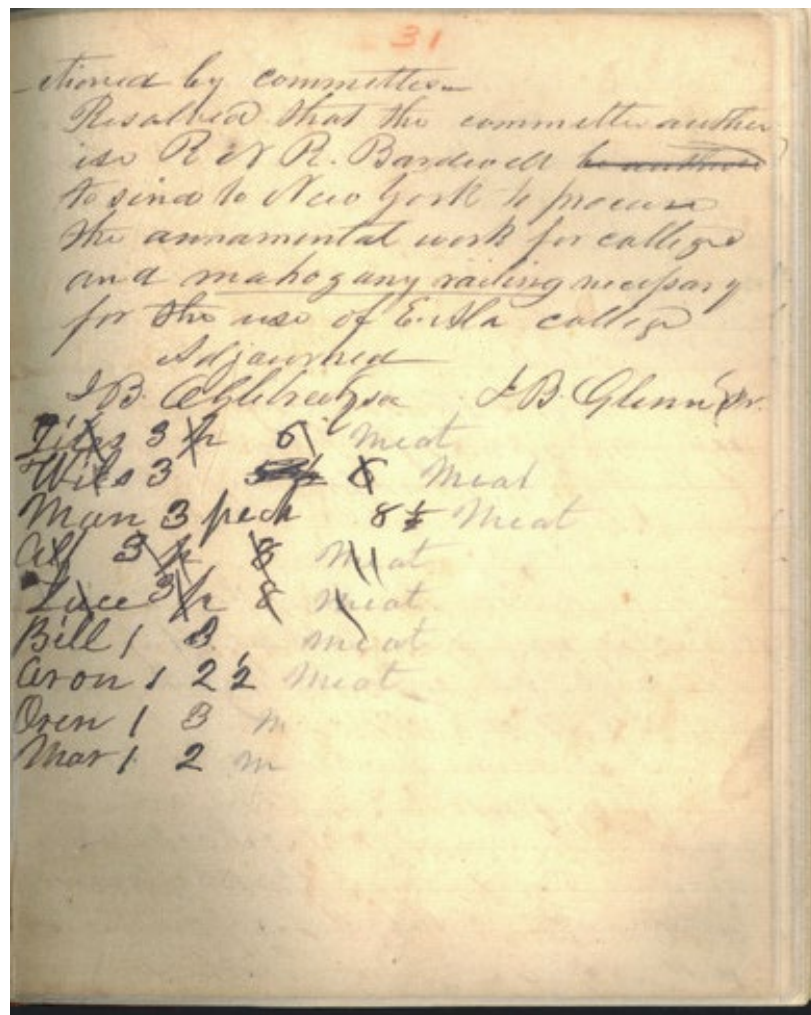
---

<sup>132</sup> Treasurer’s Ledger Book 1857-1876, Records of the Office of the Vice President for Business and Finance at Auburn University, Auburn University Department of Archives and Special Collections, Auburn University.; Board of Trustees Records, RG 521, original accession, box 9a, and folder 275, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the East Alabama Male College, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives.; Kyle R. Munroe, “Southern Progress and Southern Honor: Slavery and Jim Crow at Auburn University” (Auburn University, 2022).

<sup>133</sup> Jennifer Bridges Oast, “Negotiating the Honor Culture: Students and Slaves at Three Virginia Colleges,” in *Slavery and the University* (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 93.

<sup>134</sup> James C. Hall and Ellen Griffith Spears, “Engaging the Racial Landscape at the University of Alabama,” in *Slavery and the University* (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 298.

trustee task force recommended the installation of markers that identified historical buildings on campus, the oldest of which were constructed by convict laborers.”<sup>135</sup> With more research, Auburn University could, and should, do similarly to acknowledge the enslaved laborers. As one book on the topic reminds us, “Human slavery was the precondition for the ride of higher education in the Americas.”<sup>136</sup> They deserve to have their legacies recognized.



<sup>135</sup> Rhonda Robinson Thomas, *Call My Name, Clemson* (University of Iowa Press, 2020), 200.

<sup>136</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 114.

(Figure No. 23)<sup>137</sup> Depicted here is page thirty-one from East Alabama Male College's Executive Committee minutes ledger, 1856-1859. This page lists ten of the known names of Black people enslaved to the university.

Auburn University continued to employ Black labor in different capacities post-Emancipation while barring them from getting an education there. Some examples of Black residents employed by this university are Robert "Bob" Frazier, pictured above, Willie "Sam" Harper, and Hodge Freeman "Doc Hodge" Drake. Willie Harper, according to an *Opelika-Auburn News* article, began working for Alabama Polytechnic Institute in their School of Agriculture and Agricultural Experimentation Station at the age of fourteen. During World War I, his job was carrying milk for soldiers housed in barracks on the university's campus and he plowed fields on campus with a team of mules. According to the same article, he labored for the agriculture department for fifty-three years.<sup>138</sup> Robert Frazier was poorly treated by those who hired him and was used by API primarily as a source of pre-game entertainment for white crowds before football games following being made the mascot in 1892.<sup>139</sup> He remained the mascot for API for twenty-nine years until his death in 1921 at the age of forty-eight.<sup>140</sup> He was also saddled

---

<sup>137</sup> Board of Trustees Records, RG 521, original accession, box 9a, and folder 275, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the East Alabama Male College, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives. Permission from the head archivist, Tommy Brown, was granted to use this ledger as it is housed in a closed collection.

<sup>138</sup> "Harper Greets 53<sup>rd</sup> AU Class," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, October 4, 1970, B-8.

<sup>139</sup> "Shoot the Billy Goat!," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 21, 1892, 21.; "Auburn's Negro Mascot Shipped Back to School," *Tuscaloosa News*, December 8, 1912, 7. Robert Frazier was shipped back to Auburn via train after he was abandoned by the football team in Athens, Georgia.; Tori Buchanan, "The Story of Robert 'Bob' Frazier, Auburn University's First Mascot," *Tap Roots* (Opelika, Alabama) 62, no. 2 (2024): 77-79.

<sup>140</sup> *Find a Grave*, database and images (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/19638762/robert-frazier>): memorial page for Robert Frazier (10 Apr 1873-19 Jun 1921), Find a Grave Memorial ID 19638762, citing Baptist Hill Cemetery, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama, USA.; "Auburn Football Sponsor is Dead - Bob Frazier, Better Known as Bob Sponsor, Called by Death," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, June 20, 1921, 3.; Tori Buchanan, "The Story of Robert 'Bob' Frazier, Auburn University's First Mascot," *Tap Roots* (Opelika, Alabama) 62, no. 2 (2024): 77-79.

with tending to the injuries of players amongst other responsibilities.<sup>141</sup> As the mascot, he was made to wear bright orange pants, a blue spike-tail coat, and a white sash, he was turned into a spectacle.<sup>142</sup> Robert Frazier may have been Auburn University's first Black mascot, but he was not the only one. The other known Black mascot was a man named Hodge Freeman "Doc Hodge" Drake. He was born on December 11, 1901 and died on August 29, 1961 at the age of fifty-nine.<sup>143</sup> Outside of being the mascot, he also shined shoes at The Varsity Barber Shop near Toomer's Corner on North College Street.<sup>144</sup> In 1931, he was hit by a car driven by a white man at Toomer's Corner which resulted in him losing his leg in 1932.<sup>145</sup> According to Willie Butler, the white man who hit him was an API student which was reportedly why Drake could go anywhere the football team went. The university promised they would take care of him and they did just that.<sup>146</sup> While being the university's mascot, he was reported by newspaper articles as leading the fans in chants and was "attired in white tie and tails."<sup>147</sup> Hodge Drake remained photographed in connection with the football team until at least 1957, and it is likely that he

---

<sup>141</sup> "Bob Sponsor Expresses Appreciation to Mr. Dorsey," *The Atlanta Journal*, November 7, 1915.; Tori Buchanan, "The Story of Robert 'Bob' Frazier, Auburn University's First Mascot," *Tap Roots* (Opelika, Alabama) 62, no. 2 (2024): 77–79.

<sup>142</sup> "Shoot the Billy Goat!," *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 21, 1892, 21.; Tori Buchanan, "The Story of Robert 'Bob' Frazier, Auburn University's First Mascot," *Tap Roots* (Opelika, Alabama) 62, no. 2 (2024): 77–79.

<sup>143</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/17697669/hodge-drake>; [https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/201845391/person/152654466133/facts?\\_phsrc=uQQ17379&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/201845391/person/152654466133/facts?_phsrc=uQQ17379&_phstart=successSource)

<sup>144</sup> Curtis Willims in conversation with the author, February 2026.

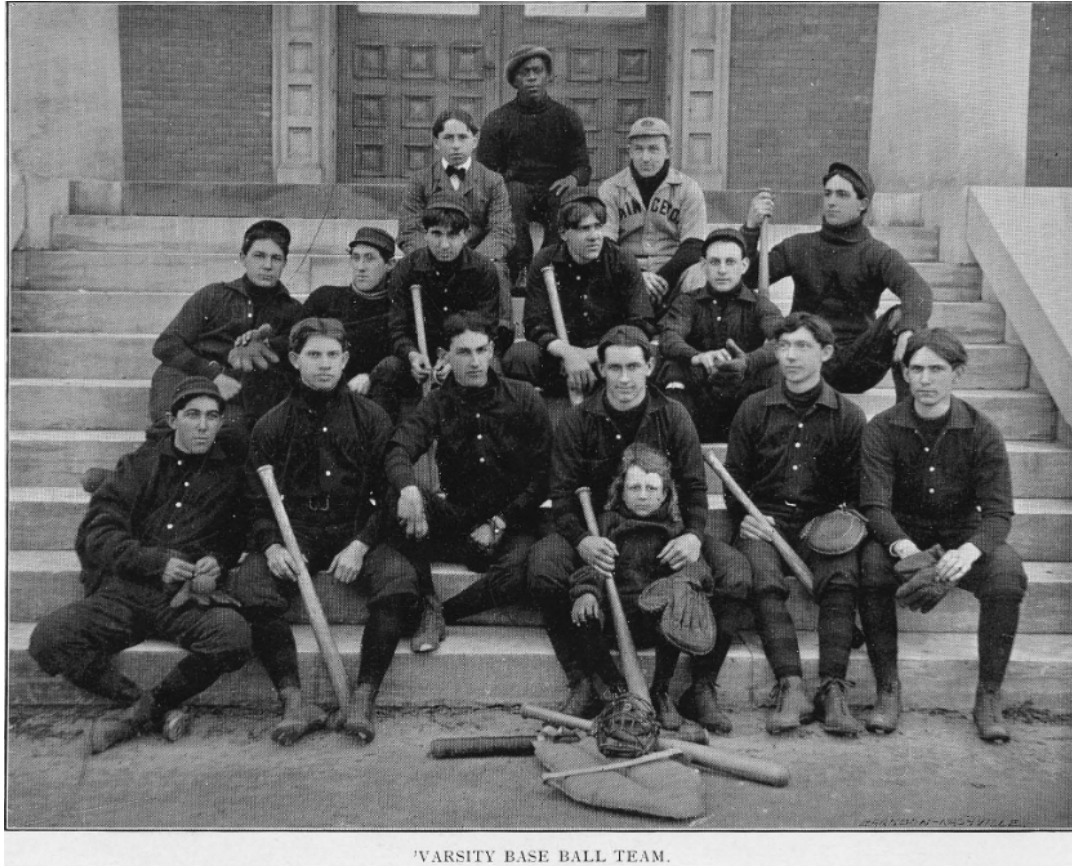
<sup>145</sup> Willie G. Carter, "Auburn, Ala., News," *The Birmingham Reporter* (Birmingham, Alabama), May 23, 1931, 8.;

Lula C. Carter, "Auburn, Ala., News," *The Birmingham Reporter* (Birmingham, Alabama), March 12, 1932, 3.

<sup>146</sup> Willie Butler in conversation with the author, February 2026.

<sup>147</sup> Robert J. Bedwell, Jr., "Plain Talk," *The Cherokee County Herald* (Centre, Alabama), May 7, 1947, 8.

remained the mascot until his death in 1961.<sup>148</sup> Much like other universities, such as Clemson for example, Black history has been largely ignored and underexplored.<sup>149</sup>



(Figure No. 24)<sup>150</sup> Pictured here is Robert “Bob” Frazier, Auburn University’s first mascot, with Auburn’s 1901 baseball team.

---

<sup>148</sup> For more information on Hodge Freeman “Doc Hodge” Drake, and Robert Frazier, see the author’s website, [auburnblackmascots.org](http://auburnblackmascots.org) on the Black Mascots page. While it is presently unknown where Robert Frazier lived in Auburn, it is known that Hodge Drake lived at approximately 459 Opelika Road.

<sup>149</sup> Rhondra Robinson Thomas, *Call My Name, Clemson* (University of Iowa Press, 2020).; Leslie M. Harris et al., eds., *Slavery and the University* (University of Georgia Press, 2019).; Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

<sup>150</sup> This image comes from the 1901 Glomerata on page 132.  
<https://content.lib.auburn.edu/digital/collection/gloms1897/id/24044/rec/5>



(Figure No. 25)<sup>151</sup> Pictured here is Hodge Freeman “Doc Hodge” Drake. This photo was taken in 1950 at an Auburn Football game.

Not every job was backbreaking and required travel. An example of this comes from people who ran private schools out of their homes. Naomi Nesbitt was an educator who ran a private school out of her home with Joe Nesbitt on Phillips Avenue. Running a school out of her home meant that she did not have to travel in order to get to her job. She began this school as a result of her believing that a public one-room school on Bragg Avenue could not accommodate all of the Black students.<sup>152</sup> This Black-only school on Bragg Avenue was a Rosenwald school

---

<sup>151</sup> This picture is housed in the Auburn University Libraries digital collection. It originated in the C. Harry Knowles Photographs Collection. <https://content.lib.auburn.edu/digital/collection/chk01/id/6/>. More images of Auburn’s Black mascots can be found on my website, [www.auburnblackneighborhoods.org](http://www.auburnblackneighborhoods.org).

<sup>152</sup> The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn’s African American History, *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama*, 77.; 1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 6A for more on the Nesbitt’s. Susie Giddens, in her interview found on page 77 of *Lest We Forget*, states that Naomi Nesbitt’s private school was located on Phillips Avenue; however, both the 1930 and 1940

that was in operation from 1917-1929 when the Lee County Training School (LCTS) was opened.<sup>153</sup> Naomi Nesbitt was also a member of the Order of the Eastern Star, which was a male and female fraternal, masonic organization that boasted about its roles doing charitable works and promoting friendship.<sup>154</sup> Some educators taught at local segregated schools, such as the aforementioned LCTS on Byrd Street, instead of in their own homes. LCTS opened its doors in 1928 and served the first through twelfth grades until 1957 when a larger school, J. F. Drake High School (now middle school), was opened to better accommodate the population of school-age children.<sup>155</sup> Henrietta McSpadden and the three women who lodged with her, Henrietta Beasley, Lena Maye Gordon, and Maurice Avery, were some of those teachers.<sup>156</sup> These educators were required to travel to their jobs; however, they did not have far to go. The distance from their home to LCTS was approximately one mile; however, some people had further to travel for their jobs.

For many Black domestic laborers, travel was required to get to work. Commuting on foot in poor weather and physical conditions was a reality for many people. Pelted by hail, poured on by rain, trudging through the mud, a horrendous walk with putrid heat and humidity or the occasional bitter coldness, soldiering on when sick or potentially in pain. The scent of petrichor on a gloomy, grey, damp day, or perhaps catching a whiff of manure along the way to work or school. Johnnie Byrd and Willie Butler recalled how Black people in Auburn during the

---

Auburn censuses state that Naomi and Joe lived on West Glenn Avenue. There were no other Black Nesbitt's listed in either census.

<sup>153</sup> Ralph B. Draughon Jr. et al., *Lost Auburn: A Village Remembered in Period Photographs* (NewSouth Books, 2012), 54-55.; "Race Problems in America Will Be Worked Out in South," *The Birmingham Reporter*, November 10, 1917, 1. The newspaper article mentions this school being built.

<sup>154</sup> "News of Auburn, ALA.," *The Birmingham Reporter*, August 24, 1918, 3.; *About OES – Order of the Eastern Star*, <https://easternstar.org/about/about-ggc/>.

<sup>155</sup> McGaughy, "Lee County Training School."

<sup>156</sup> "Lee Training School Opens September 9th," *Opelika Daily News*, September 2, 1940, 6.

early to mid-1900s walked everywhere, including to work and school. They did not have the luxury of cars to get to work.<sup>157</sup> Occasionally, walking the streets, whether to get to work or for leisure, was dangerous. For example, in 1939 a Black person named Glennie B. Gullate was struck by a vehicle driven by a white man who was reportedly trying to scare his female passengers. The white man fled the scene but was later arrested, and Gullate suffered an injury to his shoulder from the collision.<sup>158</sup> Despite the risks, walking was the way of life for Black people and many of them did not have a choice: they did not have an automobile or access to other forms of transportation. Those people who did have the means of transportation sometimes aided their community members; however, it is likely that not everyone could afford to own a vehicle. However, this is where communal assistance came into play as neighbors helped neighbors. There was also a cab service, at least on the West side of Auburn, which would take Black people to work.<sup>159</sup> Additionally, sometimes white employers would go and pick up their Black employees so they could get to work. When this happened prior to integration, Black people had to sit in the back of the car, especially when it was a white woman driving.<sup>160</sup> A couple of final

---

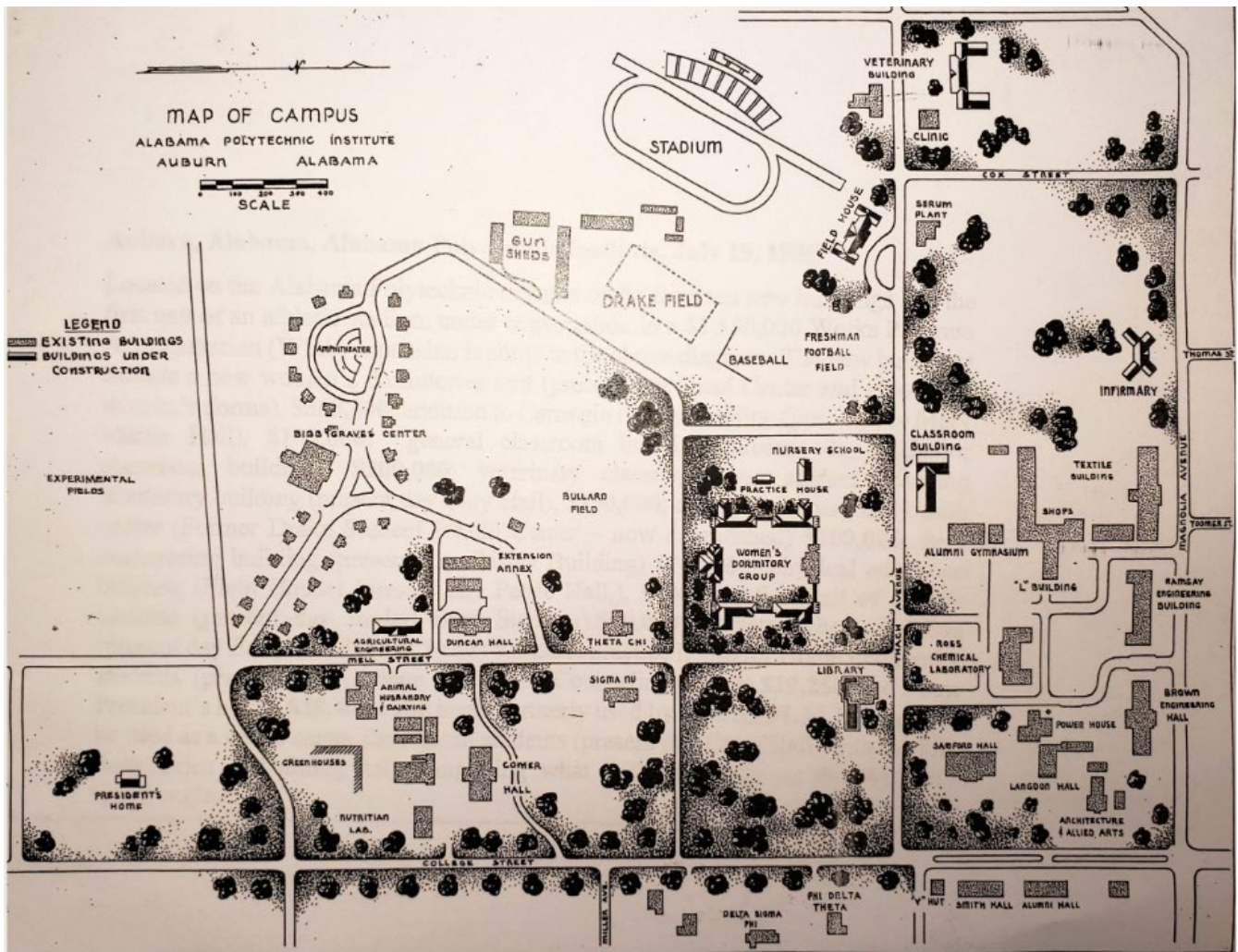
<sup>157</sup> Johnnie Byrd and Willie Butler in discussion with the author, February 2026.

<sup>158</sup> “Negro Injured in Hit-Run Accident, White Man Is Held,” *Opelika Daily News*, June 13, 1939, 1.

<sup>159</sup> Mary Moore in discussion with the author, February 2026.

<sup>160</sup> Carl Jackson in conversation with the author, December 2025;

examples for workplaces Black residents commuted to were API's fraternity houses and boarding houses that were often occupied by API students.



(Figure No. 26)<sup>161</sup> This included map of API's campus in 1939 includes the location of the fraternity houses. While it is not known if members of the Black community worked in all of frat houses, it is known from the 1930 and 1940 censuses that they worked in at least some of them.

One of the ways African Americans in 1930 and 1940 made money in Auburn was laboring at some of the same places some of their ancestors labored as enslaved individuals, old

<sup>161</sup> Sam Hendrix, "Vet Fest 2024," History with Hendrix, 2024, <https://www.vetmed.auburn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/History-with-Hendrix.pdf>.

plantation houses. Some of these plantation houses were turned into boarding houses; however, not all of these dwelling were old Greek Revival houses.<sup>162</sup> Another way they made money was by laboring at API's fraternity houses. Boarding houses were scattered around Auburn while the fraternity houses were located on College Street across from what was Alabama Polytechnic Institute's library and on Mell Street to the West of the library and API's women's dorms.<sup>163</sup> Similarly to the fraternity houses, local boarding houses served the purpose of housing API students. The White-Harris house (also known as the Newton house) and Pebble Hill (also known as the Scott-Yarbrough house) are two examples of former plantation homes that served as boarding houses.<sup>164</sup> White-Harris was used as a boarding house between at least the 1940s-1950s, portions of Pebble Hill were rented out to students for much of the time between 1912-1974.<sup>165</sup> Perhaps with some digging, these workers' enslaved ancestors could be tied to the plantations turned boarding houses, or to the land upon which the fraternity houses stood. An absence of their stories certifies erasure of people who were such a large part of the development of individual neighborhoods and the town more broadly.

Digging deeper into local Black history also reveals both the personal and professional lives of people in other sectors within town. The memories within these streets, this landscape,

---

<sup>162</sup> Greek Revival is the architectural style of the plantation houses in Auburn.

<sup>163</sup> "Mary E. Martin Hall," Auburn University Events Calendar, [https://calendar.auburn.edu/mary\\_e\\_martin\\_hall\\_819](https://calendar.auburn.edu/mary_e_martin_hall_819). Alabama Polytechnic Institute, now Auburn University, housed its library in what is now Mary Martin Hall.; Sam Hendrix, "Vet Fest 2024," History with Hendrix, 2024, <https://www.vetmed.auburn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/History-with-Hendrix.pdf>.

<sup>164</sup> Bert Harris in conversation with the author, November 2024. The White-Harris house was located at 311 Warrior Court until it was moved in 2001 to a local farm on the North side of Opelika. Pebble Hill is located at 101 N. Debardeleben Street in Auburn.

<sup>165</sup> "Lee County Births," *Opelika Daily News*, December 27, 1954, 2.; "Auburn News, Personals," *Opelika Daily News*, April 10, 1946, 5.; "Auburn Subscribers For Efficient Carrier Delivery Of Your Opelika Daily News," *Opelika Daily News*, January 24, 1949, 2.; "Lee County Births," *Opelika Daily News*, June 18, 1956, 4.; 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-17, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See pages 17A-17B, for more information.; *The Scott-Yarbrough House Pebble Hill*, n.d, <https://cla.auburn.edu/media/cmwck3ok/pebble-hill-brochure.pdf>.; "History of Pebble Hill," <https://cla.auburn.edu/cah/pebble-hill/history-of-pebble-hill/>. The newspapers show the names of some of the people who boarded at 311 Warrior Court which was also known as College Court from 1932-1960 (*Auburn: A History in Street Names*, 652).

hold significance for understanding that Auburn's Black community members were crucial for the betterment of this town, far surpassing the appearance of an underdeveloped borderland. The residents of these neighborhoods worked tirelessly in a multitude of occupations, some more rigorous than others, in order to survive. Backbreaking, grueling work under the sun in spacious pastures where some of the noises one might hear are cows, roosters, other farm animals, the rustling of trees, neighbors conversing, and occasionally cars bustling by. Rurality and suburbia were two components of this space; however, that does not define those that lived here. While there were some farmers, that was not the only job held by Auburn's Black residents. Black people who lived on these roads maintained a variety of jobs, such as working for boarding houses, fraternity houses, and private homes in the capacity of cooks, maids, janitors, and as a child's nurse. Some worked for lumber companies, sawmills, planing mills, pool rooms, meat markets, grocery and retail stores, the Works Progress Administration, electric companies, churches, schools as teachers, cooks, and janitors.<sup>166</sup> Many of these jobs would have been considered domestic or unskilled labor, which were typical occupations for Black people in urban areas.<sup>167</sup> Don H. Doyle furthered this point, "At the lower levels of the urban work force, blacks dominated the poorest-paid jobs in domestic and personal service and unskilled labor." He also noted how there was not much competition from white people for these jobs.<sup>168</sup> Others built houses, educated others, owned businesses, and generally aided the Black community. Local Black people also partook in grueling trades such as carpentry, bricklaying, masonry, farming, and well digging. Joe Nesbitt, for example, worked as a bricklayer for constructing houses and

---

<sup>166</sup> 1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See pages 9B, 13B-17B, and 32A-33A for more information.

<sup>167</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers* (Louisiana State University, 1982), 109.

<sup>168</sup> Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 264.

he was a deacon at Ebenezer Baptist Church.<sup>169</sup> According to *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis*, Black citizens of industrialized urban cities faced restrictions regarding what services they could use, job opportunities, and places to live. As a result, they focused on building their own communities and producing goods and services themselves that white people could, and would not, provide.<sup>170</sup> Auburn's Black communities did the same, providing for themselves and their communities. Black people had been constructing buildings, and laboring in other arduous jobs, since pre-Emancipation.<sup>171</sup> In order to work these jobs, one first had to travel there after getting said job which was just part of the battle of survival.

A multi-faceted approach to histories that have been purposefully erased or kept hidden from the broader story of Auburn is crucial for uncovering these memories and giving them a voice. Looking at local history from multiple angles leads to discovering seemingly long forgotten stories across a multitude of topics. Traditional sources, such as scholarly works, do not have to be the sole source of information on communities. In fact, many smaller communities either do not have traditional sources written about them or have a sparse amount. As presented throughout this thesis, when newspaper articles, oral histories, maps, and aerial images are applied to census data, we find a richer understanding of a community. Seemingly mundane details are transformed into a richer understanding of what Auburn, and the larger Black community, was like. How local Black residents experienced this town. Combing through newspapers for the Black residents of Auburn, the streets they lived on, and their neighborhoods

---

<sup>169</sup> The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History, *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama*, 183.; Charlsie E. Roberts et al., *The First Black Church in Auburn Ebenezer Baptist* (Auburn Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship, 1993), 4.; 1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama. See page 6A.

<sup>170</sup> Walter Hill and Henry Louis Jr. Taylor, eds., *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis* (Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 10.

<sup>171</sup> Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 119, 195-196.

more broadly, one can then pair the findings with existing census records. Oral histories also contribute to the deeper connection and understandings as they are personal memories, personal accounts, of those who inhabited these spaces and/or their loved ones who lived here. Maps and aerial images aid in giving a tangible visual of the past, how these people would have witnessed Auburn. Without community histories, knowledge about places on a local level becomes erased. Auburn, for example, could appear to be a place with little to no Black history. This perspective comes into play because of the focus on Auburn University and the white perspective of local history. This thesis serves as a jumping off point for more research into Auburn's Black history as there is much more still waiting to be uncovered. There are more names and topics to look for in newspaper articles, more people to interview, and more questions that still need answers. The census serves as a place to start looking for names of people and streets, for diving deeper into Auburn's Black neighborhoods.

## Bibliography

1860 United States Census – Slave Schedule, Northern District, Macon County, Alabama

1910 United States Census, Enumeration District 168, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama

1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-12, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama

1930 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-14, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama

1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-17, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama

1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-18, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama

1940 United States Census, Enumeration District 41-21, Auburn, Lee County, Alabama

*About OES – Order of the Eastern Star*. n.d. <https://easternstar.org/about/about-ggc/>.

Auburn University Events Calendar. “Mary E. Martin Hall.”  
[https://calendar.auburn.edu/mary\\_e\\_martin\\_hall\\_819](https://calendar.auburn.edu/mary_e_martin_hall_819).

Auburn University Special Collections and Archives, Numbered Photographs Collection RG 705, IV.A.693a. Wright’s Mill Built 1870s, ca. 1900.

Bedwell, Jr., Robert J. “Plain Talk.” *The Cherokee County Herald* (Centre, Alabama), May 7, 1947.

Board of Trustees Records, RG 521, original accession, box 9a, and folder 275, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the East Alabama Male College, Auburn University Special Collections and Archives.

Buchanan, Tori. “The Story of Robert ‘Bob’ Frazier, Auburn University’s First Mascot.” *Tap Roots* (Opelika, Alabama) 62, no. 2 (2024): 77–79.

*Call My Name – At Clemson University*. n.d. <https://callmyname.org/>.

Carl Jackson in conversation with the author, December 2025.

Carter, Lula C. “Auburn, Ala., News.” *The Birmingham Reporter* (Birmingham, Alabama), March 12, 1932.

Carter, Willie G. “Auburn, Ala., News.” *The Birmingham Reporter* (Birmingham, Alabama), May 23, 1931.

“Columbia University & Slavery Project | Columbia University Libraries.”  
<https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu/about.html>.

Connolly, N. D. B. *A World More Concrete*. Historical Studies of Urban America. University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Curtis Williams in conversation with the author, February 2026.

De Lucas, Amanda K. Phillips, Ryan Reft, and Rebecca C. Retzlaff, eds. *Justice and the Interstates*. Island Press, 2023.

- “Desegregation at Auburn Historical Marker.” Accessed April 17, 2026.  
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=90861>.
- Doris Hutchinson in conversation with the author, November 2025.
- Doyle, Don H. *New Men, New Cities, New South*. University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
- Elon University. “Fall 2020 Report & Recommendations.” <https://www.elon.edu/u/history-memory/fall-2020-report-recommendations/>.
- Encyclopedia of Alabama. “Treaty of Cusseta (1832).”  
<https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/treaty-of-cusseta-1832/>.
- “Georgetown Reflects on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation.” *Georgetown University*, n.d.  
<https://www.georgetown.edu/slavery/>.
- “Georgetown Slavery Archive.” <https://slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/>.
- Goldfield, David R. *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*. Louisiana State University, 1982.
- Hall, James C., and Ellen Griffith Spears. “Engaging the Racial Landscape at the University of Alabama.” In *Slavery and the University*. University of Georgia Press, 2019.
- Hanchett, Thomas W. *Sorting Out the New South City*. University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Harriel, Holly Elizabeth. “Change Within Traditionally African American Residential Neighborhoods in Auburn, Alabama.” Master’s, Auburn University, 1999.
- Harris, Leslie M., James T. Campbell, and Alfred L. Brophy, eds. *Slavery and the University*. University of Georgia Press, 2019.
- Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery. “Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery Initiative.” October 23, 2024. <https://legacyofslavery.harvard.edu/>.
- Hendrix, Sam. *Auburn: A History in Street Names*. Donnell Group, 2021.
- Hendrix, Sam. “Vet Fest 2024.” History with Hendrix, 2024.  
<https://www.vetmed.auburn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/History-with-Hendrix.pdf>.
- Hill, Walter, and Henry Louis Jr. Taylor, eds. *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis*. Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000.
- “History of Pebble Hill.” <https://cla.auburn.edu/cah/pebble-hill/history-of-pebble-hill/>.
- Horn, Chris. “History Unveiled.” University of South Carolina.  
[https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/12/history\\_unveiled.php](https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2017/12/history_unveiled.php).
- Holden, Vanessa M. *Surviving Southampton*. University of Illinois Press, 2023.
- Inabinet, Brandon. “Seeking Abrham: A Report of Furman University’s Task Force on Slavery and Justice.” Furman University, 2019. <https://www.furman.edu/about/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/Seeking-Abraham-Second-Edition.pdf>.
- Johnnie Byrd in conversation with the author, February 2026.

- Kimball, Jill. "Collaborative Project Yields New Digital Archive on Hidden History of Indigenous Enslavement | Brown University." May 7, 2025. <https://www.brown.edu/news/2025-05-07/stolen-relations>.
- Legacies of American Slavery. "On Hallowed Ground at Goucher College." August 8, 2024. <https://legaciesofslavery.net/2024/08/08/on-hallowed-ground-at-goucher-college/>.
- List of Notes Due/Payable East Alabama Male College 1856 – 1863, Records of the Office of the Vice President for Business and Finance at Auburn University, Auburn University Department of Archives and Special Collections, Auburn University.
- "Locating Slavery's Legacies @ Elon University · Home · Testing." <https://locatinglegacies.org/s/elon/page/home>.
- Lovelace, James Jackson, Harry Henderson Rabb, and Derwood Lee Taylor. "Negro Recollections of Slavery." ca. -1914 1911. George Petrie Papers RG 192, Box 19, Folder 457.
- Lowen, James W. *Lies Across America*. Twentieth-Anniversary Edition Thoroughly Revised Second Edition. The New Press, 2019.
- "Lula Oliver oral history interview conducted by Mark Wilson in Auburn, Alabama, 2021-06-10." From Mark Wilson's Drake Town Photographs Identification Project. Audio File. Auburn University's Center for the Arts and Humanities.
- Mary Moore in conversation with the author, February 2026.
- McGaughy, Taylor. "Lee County Training School." With Taylor McGaughy. Image Source: [Http://Rosenwald.Fisk.Edu/?Module=search.details&set\\_v=aWQ9MzEy&school\\_county=lee&school\\_state=AL&button=Search&o=0](http://Rosenwald.Fisk.Edu/?Module=search.details&set_v=aWQ9MzEy&school_county=lee&school_state=AL&button=Search&o=0) Text Sources: "County Training School," Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card Database, [Http://Rosenwald.Fisk.Edu/?Module=search.details&set\\_v=aWQ9MzEy&school\\_county=Lee&school\\_state=AL&button=Search&o=0](http://Rosenwald.Fisk.Edu/?Module=search.details&set_v=aWQ9MzEy&school_county=Lee&school_state=AL&button=Search&o=0) Committee for the Preservation of Auburn's African American History, *Lest We Forget: A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama* (Auburn, AL: ..., Alabama Cultural Resource Survey, November 26, 2014. <https://omeka.lib.auburn.edu/items/show/31>.
- "Melvin Hunt oral history interview conducted by Mark Wilson in Auburn, Alabama, 2021-05-22." From Mark Wilson's Drake Town Photographs Identification Project. Audio File. Auburn University's Center for the Arts and Humanities.
- Miles, Tiya. *Tales from the Haunted South*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Marcano, Nashieli. "LibGuides: Furman's Legacy of Slavery: A Digital Exhibition: James C. Furman's Legacy." <https://libguides.furman.edu/c.php?g=1325855&p=9911657>.
- MIT & Slavery. "Slavery and the Founding of MIT." <https://digital-exhibits.libraries.mit.edu/s/mit-and-slavery/page/slavery-and-the-founding-of-mit>.
- Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama). "Editorial Correspondence." October 10, 1855.

- Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama). “Auburn Football Sponsor Is Dead.” June 21, 1921.
- Munroe, Kyle R. “Southern Progress and Southern Honor: Slavery and Jim Crow at Auburn University.” Auburn University, 2022.
- National Archives. “The Emancipation Proclamation.” October 6, 2015.  
<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation>.
- National Archives. “13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery (1865).” September 1, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/13th-amendment>.
- “New Digital Resource on the History of Slavery at UGA | UGA Libraries.”  
<https://www.libs.uga.edu/news/new-digital-resource-history-slavery-uga>.
- Oast, Jennifer Bridges. “Negotiating the Honor Culture: Students and Slaves at Three Virginia Colleges.” In *Slavery and the University*. University of Georgia Press, 2019.
- “On These Grounds: Slavery and the University of Georgia · UGA.”  
<https://onthesegroundsuga.digilabuga.org/s/otg/page/about>.
- “Overview · The History of Enslaved People at UA, 1828-1865 · The History of Enslaved People at UA.” <https://studyingsslavery.ua.edu/s/uastudyingsslavery/page/overview>.
- Patrica (Jackson) Crowder in conversation with the author, December 2025.
- President’s Commission on Slavery and the University*. n.d. <https://slavery.virginia.edu/>.
- “Report of The Commission on Institutional History and Community: Washington and Lee University.” <https://my.wlu.edu/presidents-office/response-to-the-report-of-the-commission-on-institutional-history-and-community/report-of-the-commission-on-institutional-history-and-community>.
- Ress, Thomas V. “Chewacla State Park.” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, April 20, 2010.  
<https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/chewacla-state-park/>.
- Reta Jackson in conversation with the author, December 2025.
- Retzlaff, Rebecca C., and Jocelyn Zanzot. “The Interstates, Racism, and the Need for Truth and Reconciliation: The Case of Highway Routing in Alabama.” In *Justice and the Interstates*. Island Press, 2023.
- Rice University. “Rice University Task Force on Slavery, Segregation, and Racial Injustice.” Task Force on Slavery, Segregation and Racial Injustice | Rice University, 2023 2019.  
<https://taskforce.rice.edu/>.
- “Robert Frazier (1873-1921) - Find a Grave...”  
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/19638762/robert-frazier>.
- Roberts, Charlise E., Connie J. Frazier, and Faye Elaine Cruz. *The First Black Church in Auburn Ebenezer Baptist*. Auburn Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship, 1993.
- Ronnie Jackson in conversation with the author, December 2025.

Scarlet and Black Project, Rutgers University. “Scarlet and Black Project, Rutgers University.” <https://scarletandblack.rutgers.edu/>.

Slavery in Baton Rouge. “Slavery in Baton Rouge.” <https://slaverybr.org/>.

“Slavery Research Group | Ole Miss.” <https://olemiss.edu/departments/libarts/slavery-research-group/>.

*The Atlanta Constitution*. “Shoot the Billy Goat!” February 21, 1892.

*The Atlanta Journal*. “Bob Sponsor Expresses Appreciation to Mr. Dorsey.” November 7, 1915.

*The Opelika-Auburn News*, “Harper Greets 53<sup>rd</sup> AU Class,” October 4, 1970

The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn’s African American History. *Lest We Forget A History of African Americans of Auburn, Alabama*. The Committee for the Preservation of Auburn’s African American History, 2011.

“The Princeton and Slavery Project.” <https://slavery.princeton.edu/>.

“The Watershed Project.” <https://www.emoryhenry.edu/appalachian-center-for-civic-life/civic-memory/the-watershed-project/>.

“The Yale & Slavery Research Project.” <https://yaleandslavery.yale.edu/>.

Thomas, Rhondda Robinson. *Call My Name, Clemson*. University of Iowa Press, 2020.

Tolbert, Lisa C. *Constructing Townscapes*. University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past*. Beacon Press, 1995.

Treasurer’s Ledger Book 1857-1876, Records of the Office of the Vice President for Business and Finance at Auburn University, Auburn University Department of Archives and Special Collections, Auburn University.

*Tuscaloosa News* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama). “Auburn’s Negro Mascot Shipped Back to School.” December 8, 1912.

“University Commission on History, Race, and a Way Forward.” <https://historyandrace.unc.edu/>.

“University of Richmond Race & Racism Project.” <https://memory.richmond.edu/#>.

*What’s in a Name? – History of Auburn University Names – On The Lawn*. June 17, 2022. <https://onthelawn.auburn.edu/2022/06/17/whats-in-a-name-history-of-auburn-university-names/>.

Wilder, Craig Steven. *Ebony and Ivy*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.

William & Mary. “The Lemon Project.” <https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/>.

Willie Butler in conversation with the author, February 2026.

Wright, Bill Drake Town Pictures, ca. May 23, 1966. Housed at Auburn University’s Center for the Arts and Humanities.

Zeno, Michaela. "Elon's Collaboration on Locating Slavery's Legacies Project Aimed at Education, Empowerment." Today at Elon, February 5, 2024.  
<https://www.elon.edu/u/news/2024/02/05/elons-collaboration-on-locating-slaverys-legacies-project-aimed-at-education-empowerment/>.