

**Tracking Success of African American Landowners in Wabaunsee County,
Kansas circa 1900:**

A Case Study of African American Farmers at the Turn of the Century

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This case study highlights four African American farmers: Franklin Glass, Daniel Swagerty, W. B. Officer and George Rodman. In using various census data (including state and federal) and three plat maps from 1885, 1902 and 1919, this study tells the story of four families and their efforts to survive in Wabaunsee County, Kansas during this time period. The study also explores the broader African American community in rural Kansas including how these farmers came to Kansas and what they did to succeed once they arrived.

Close your eyes and wander back in time to the early twentieth century, 1905 to be exact. You are standing on one of the numerous hills that make up the Flint Hills of northeast Kansas, looking out over the vast rolling landscape and tall grass prairie. It is early January and there is a faint snow falling, covering the yellowed dead grasses. From your ridge located in southwestern Wabaunsee County, specifically a few miles to the north of the town of Eskridge, you see that the snowfall has begun to increase, covering the ground with an inch or so. In the distance lies Eskridge, and in the surrounding area many small farms stand out in the snowy atmosphere. From your vantage point a small section of Wabaunsee County is visible, heavily settled by 1885. Figure 1 below is an overview map of the county, 1885, with all eleven townships and the two major creek systems, Mill and Mission, outlined. This map demonstrates the rapid settlement of this Flint Hills county across just thirty years.

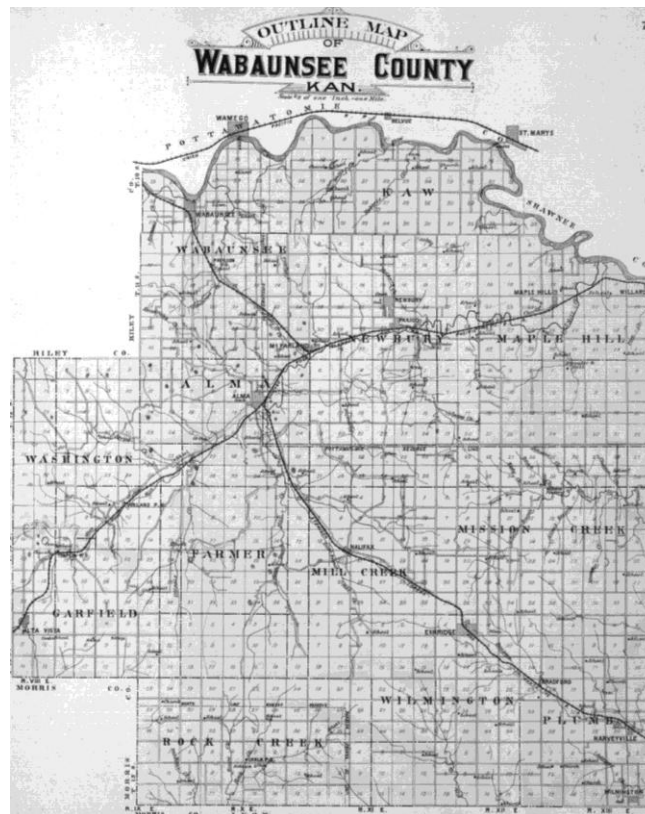


Figure 1: Map of Wabaunsee County, Kansas showing townships and creeks.
SOURCE: Historical Atlas of Wabaunsee County, 1885

As you travel down the hill and start talking to people out clearing snow, you find a mix of diverse settlers from many areas of the world: African Americans from the southern United States, Germans, Swedes, and people of Eastern Europe, who all came to Kansas to escape persecution, start a new life in the United States, or attempt to successfully farm on the fertile prairie. Before you came to Kansas, you may have heard that the only African American farmers you would encounter would be poor, uneducated and struggling to get by. One of the first such men you come across is almost the exact opposite of that description. His name is Franklin Glass and he tells you that he arrived in the area in 1883 and has been farming on his own property since 1885.¹ In fact he tells you he has been so successful that he has been able to buy 160 acres of Mr. D. W. Dill's land to expand his farming and stock raising operations.²

The stereotype of the post- Civil War poor African American farmer has persisted over 100 years. However, the reality is that in Wabaunsee County, African American farmers had ample opportunity to succeed and fail on their own merits. Other historians have explored this as well, especially in Oklahoma.³ Despite clear historical evidence, there has been little effort to explore the African American farming experience in Kansas, with only two easily found published works: an article, "Hoing Their Own Row: Black Agriculture and the Agrarian Ideal in Kansas, 1880-1920," by Anne P. W. Hawkins and a book, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* by Nell Irvin Painter.⁴ This paper will profile four African

¹ *Mission Creek 13 South Range 12 East of 6th Principal Meridian. 2 inches to a mile. In: Atlas of Wabaunsee County Kansas. Edition N/A. Chicago, Illinois: Gillen & Davy, 1885. Page 35.*

² *Map of Mission Creek Township. Scale not given. In: Standard Atlas of Wabaunsee County Kansas. Edition N/A. Chicago, Il. Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1902. Page 14-15; Wabaunsee County Deeds Records, Wabaunsee County Courthouse, Alma, Kansas.*

³ See Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

⁴ Much published work also exists discussing the Nicodemus Colony in Graham County, Kansas. See as well an article by William Lienberger titled "African-American Life in Clay County, Kansas" found in the Chapman Center Archive Kansas History & Life, Kansas State University www.ksu.edu/history/chapman.

American farmers in Wabaunsee County: Franklin Glass, Daniel Swagerty, W. B. Officer, and George Rodman. In doing so it will show that it is a disservice to the farmers of Wabaunsee County during this period to assume that all African American farmers struggled and failed. In using these stories to explore African American migration into Kansas the paper will bring to light an almost forgotten history.

Story of the Exodusters

The famous words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty are familiar to many: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” Many oppressed people saw the United States as a place where even the poorest could have a chance at success. In many ways these same words could describe how the Exodusters, former slaves in the American South, saw Kansas in 1879. They were trying to escape the horrors of the post Reconstruction South and imagined Kansas as a land where they could own land and succeed or fail on their own merits and not the color of their skin.

An important first step when discussing the Exodusters is to understand the how and why of these people coming to Kansas. This can be seen in the story of John Solomon Lewis’s journey from Tensas Parish, Louisiana, to Kansas. His story is a classic example of tenant farming and share-cropping implemented throughout the South after the Civil War. John Solomon Lewis summons up why so many former slaves left for Kansas when he writes, “I was in debt, and the man I rented land from said every year I must rent again to pay the other year, and so I rents and rents, and each year I get deeper and deeper in debt.”⁵ John Lewis’s story is

⁵ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 3.

common for thousands of African Americans escaping the South in what is known as the Kansas Fever Exodus; this began in 1878 with Pap Singleton and the Edgefield Real Estate and Homestead Association in Tennessee helping blacks relocate to Kansas.⁶ A year later Kansas fever had reached a peak with roughly six thousand freedmen from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas migrating to Kansas in only a few months.⁷ John Lewis describes his experience in the Kansas Fever exodus from Louisiana: “Well, we took [to] the woods, my wife and four children, and we was three weeks living in the woods waiting for a boat. Then a great many more black people came and we was all together at the landing. Boats came along, but they would not stop, but before long the *Grand Tower* hove up and we got on board. Says the captain, ‘Where’s you going?’ Says I, ‘Kansas.’”⁸

From 1860 to 1880 the black migration to Kansas dramatically increased with some 43,000 African Americans coming to Kansas.⁹ The popularity of farming in the African American community was so great that by 1900, there were 1,782 Kansas farms owned by African Americans valued at almost 3.8 million dollars. In contrast to the popular view that these people were not successful, by 1910, the value of farms owned by African-Americans had risen to almost 8.5 million dollars, and the number of acres farmed had increased from 173,614 in 1900 to 183,453 in 1910. The average acres farmed rose 24 percent in the same time period.¹⁰ An important note when discussing the dollar values is the inflation between then and now.

⁶ Painter, p. 116.

⁷ Painter, p. 184.

⁸ Painter, p. 3.

⁹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population 1790–1915* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918). This information in Anne P. W. Hawkins, “Hoeing Their Own Row: Black Agriculture and the Agrarian Ideal in Kansas, 1880-1920.” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*. Autumn 1999 (Vol. 22, No. 3).

¹⁰ Department of Commerce, *Negro Population*, 514, 588-89, 592-93.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, one dollar in 2014 would have been worth 23 dollars in 1913 (the earliest year available).¹¹

The rise in farming in the African American population can be attributed to two different factors, one being belief that farming was a way to even out the inequalities of race. Junius Groves, a highly successful black farmer, stated, “A bushel of corn raised by a negro is worth just as much as a bushel of the same grade raised by a white man.” The second factor, as shown by Anne Hawkins, was an attempt to disassociate from the temptations of a big city.¹² Figure 2 below shows the number of African American farmers who owned land in 1885 in six townships of Wabaunsee County. The information is reflective of research in the deed records at the Wabaunsee County Courthouse in Alma, Kansas. In addition, Appendix 1 provides three maps of Alma, Mill Creek, and Wilmington Townships that highlight all African American landowners in this single Kansas County by 1885.

Alma	6
Mill Creek	2
Mission Creek	7
Wilmington	7
Newbury	3
Wabaunsee	1

Figure 2: Table showing the number of African American landowners in six Wabaunsee County, Kansas townships, 1885. SOURCE: Deed Records, Wabaunsee County Courthouse, Alma, Kansas.

¹¹ United States Bureau of Labor Statistics
http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm (accessed 1/15/2015).

¹² See Anne P.W. Hawkins, “Hoeing Their Own Row: Black Agriculture and the Agrarian Ideal in Kansas, 1880-1920.” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*. Autumn 1999 (Vol. 22, No. 3).

Geography of Wabaunsee County

Understanding the geography of Wabaunsee County is a crucial first step when discussing the farmers of the county and why many are found in the six townships in Figure 2. Wabaunsee County is home to two main stream systems, Mill and Mission Creeks, which when combined with their tributary creeks, provided water for the majority of the county.¹³ The main flowing water from the Middle Kansas River Watershed system is as follows: the Kansas River forming the northern boundary, Mill Creek and its tributaries in the northwest section, Mission Creek and its tributaries in the east central section, and finally, Dagoon, Rock, and Soldier Creek and tributaries in the southern section.¹⁴ After the distribution of water, the next most important feature to understand is the distribution of rocky soil common to the Flint Hills.

A map of limestone outcropping (limestone above ground) shows that the county is rich with limestone and the rocky topsoil that accompanies such outcrops.¹⁵ The areas with the most deposits are the townships in the central and southwestern area with the townships in the north and east of the county having significantly less limestone deposits than the rest of the county.¹⁶ The final key to understanding the geology of Wabaunsee County is the topography. With the county being part of the Flint Hills, it is clear that it is a series of steep hills and narrow valleys with little flat land. In many cases these hills can have as much as a 40 percent incline.¹⁷ These topographical features shaped the stories of success or failure for the farms of the African

¹³ *Outline Map of Wabaunsee County Kan. Scale not given. In: Standard Atlas of Wabaunsee County Kansas. Edition N/A. Chicago, IL. Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1902. Page 7.*

¹⁴ Melville R. Mudge and Robert H. Burton, *Geology of Wabaunsee County Kansas Geological Survey Bulletin 1068*, 14.

¹⁵ *Geology of Wabaunsee County Plate 1.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Steven P. Graber, Howard V. Campbell, and Bobby D. Tricks, *Soil Survey of Wabaunsee County, Kansas*, 15, http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_MANUSCRIPTS/kansas/KS197/0/Wabaunsee.pdf (accessed May 10, 2014).

American families between 1870 and 1930. The four case studies that follow illustrate the diversity of black farming experience in Wabaunsee County.

Franklin Glass

Franklin Glass was born into slavery in approximately 1842 on an unknown farm in Tennessee. By the time he was 18, he was living with the Bond family in Missouri in Boone or Greene County (the 1860 census lists both).¹⁸ Little is known about either the place he was born or the family that he was living with at the time of the 1860 census. What is known about his early years in Kansas is that by 1880, he was living with his wife, Julia, and their six children near Topeka, Kansas.¹⁹ Franklin was likely saving to buy his own land.²⁰ The Glass family was living in rural Shawnee County and Franklin was working on a farm outside of Topeka as a hired laborer. He was ultimately successful, because in the next five years, the Glass family was able to move to their own farm in Mission Creek Township in Wabaunsee County.²¹

There, they presumably bought the land they owned by the time the 1885 plat map was drawn.²² Figure 3 on the page below is a present day photograph of Franklin Glass's property. It is important to note that this picture captures only a small part of his property, but it is what someone sees while driving north along Bradford Road in Mission Creek Township, Wabaunsee County.

¹⁸ United States Federal Census of 1860.

¹⁹ United States Federal Census of 1880.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kansas History and Heritage Project-Wabaunsee County." Kansas History and Heritage Project-Wabaunsee County. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kswabahp/directories/1885patronsdir.html> (accessed May 10, 2014).

²² 1885 Atlas of Wabaunsee County, Mission Creek Township.



Figure 3: The land in this photograph shows that while there were some flat areas on the Glass farm, there was also difficult terrain at the forefront with a cut in the hillside. Of note are the cedar trees that have invaded but would not have been present during Franklin's time due to animal grazing. SOURCE: Photo taken by Dr. M. J. Morgan, January 15, 2015.

Franklin's property in Mission Creek Township was 200 acres, had an orchard near the house and most important to his success, was crossed by two unnamed small branches of Mission Creek. Along with these physical features District School 21 was also on the edge of his land, making it very easy for his children to walk to school.²³ By 1902, the farm had been a success for the Glass family, and they were able to buy 160 more acres of D. W. Dill's property, increasing the size of the farm to 360 acres to the south. Also of note is that by 1902, the orchard near the house was gone, and in fact, there were two houses shown to be on the property (one on the northern part and one on the southern part).²⁴ An explanation for the second house is that the Glass family had two members of their extended family living with them, Ellen Boon (an aunt of Franklin) and Franklin Shelldon (a nephew of Franklin). With the addition of Franklin

²³ 1885 Plat Map of Wabaunsee County, Mission Creek Township.

²⁴ 1902 Plat Map of Wabaunsee County, Mission Creek Township.

Sheldon, Franklin Glass had four young men to work his fields.²⁵ Figure 4 below shows Franklin Glass's property as seen on the 1902 Plat Map.

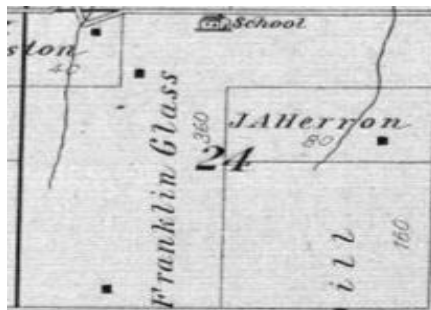


Figure 4: 1902 Plat Map of Franklin Glass's property showing the two creeks and the two houses.
SOURCE: 1902 Historical Atlas of Wabaunsee County.

By 1895, Franklin Glass's farm was a total of 360 acres of land, valued at \$4,000. He had 150 acres of corn under cultivation and eight acres of oats. In addition, Franklin owned four horses, three milk cows, 10 other cattle and 10 swine. The 1895 Agricultural Census also valued slaughtered and butchered animals at \$400.²⁶ There is no further information about the success of the Glass farm while it was still owned by Franklin, but the data shown above points to a thriving, self-sufficient farm operation. In the years between 1902 and 1905, Franklin and his wife moved to Eskridge, Kansas, in Wilmington Township, Wabaunsee County and gave the farm to their son, Samuel Glass.²⁷

In retirement, Franklin and Julia built a house in Eskridge and were well respected within the community. His obituary provides several statements about the respect that the community had for him. One that stands out is a description of Franklin: "Mr. Glass was an industrious, hard-working farmer, strictly upright and honest. A kind and indulgent father, a good neighbor

²⁵ United States Federal Census of 1900.

²⁶ *1895 Kansas State Agricultural Census*. Kansas State Historical Society.

²⁷ **Map of Mission Creek Township**. Scale not given. In: *Standard Atlas of Wabaunsee County Kansas*. Edition N/A. Chicago, IL. Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1919. Page 12-13.

and a loyal friend.” The obituary also adds an interesting piece of information on Franklin’s life; it says that the Masonic lodge of Topeka held a service along with the C. M. E. church.²⁸

Franklin was therefore a Mason as well as a church member. The obituary provides an example of how respected Franklin Glass was within his community as well as giving a window into who he was as a person.

The success of Franklin Glass shows one of the best examples of how with the right combination of access to water and favorable terrain, it was very possible for African American farmers to thrive. Franklin’s ability to succeed after reaching Kansas is also a credit to his work ethic when it would have been easy to just give up, especially through the severe drought of the 1890s. His growth also serves to validate the Exoduster movement and the image of Kansas as a place to escape the extreme limitations and debt peonage of the South.

Daniel Swagerty

Between 1885 and 1895, Daniel Swagerty came to Mission Creek Township with his wife Julia and their three daughters Addie, Trevia and Maude.²⁹ By the year 1902, Daniel appeared on the Plat Map of Mission Creek Township as owning 80 acres of land in the far southeast section. While he did not have any creek or stream water on the land, it likely that the farm had access to a full water table for irrigation and other uses, from the south branch of Mission Creek located two miles to the east.³⁰ The photograph below, in Figure 5, shows the

²⁸ Obituary of Franklin Glass, March 9, 1916, *Eskridge Tribune Star*, Eskridge, Kansas.

²⁹ *Kansas State Census, 1895*.

³⁰ 1902 Plat Map of Wabaunsee County, Mission Creek Township.

land the Swagerty family lived and thrived on. It can be found today along Copps Station Road in Wabaunsee County, facing north.



Figure 5: The photo above shows the land that Daniel Swagerty and his family lived on. It is important to note the relatively flat land that would have been ideal for farming and provides a clue to the Swagerties' longevity as landowners. SOURCE: Photo taken by Dr. M. J. Morgan January 15, 2015.

Though he owned a small plot of land, based on information from the 1905 Kansas State Agriculture Census, Daniel Swagerty was productive on it. The census assesses the total value of the farm at \$1,000. Based on the value per acre of \$17 for Wabaunsee County provided by Bulletin 611 of the Agricultural Experiment Station for Kansas State University, the value of the Swagerty farm for forty acres of improved land would have been \$680, with the total value for the farm including another forty acres of unimproved land being \$1,000.³¹ To account for some value, the 1905 Agriculture Census itemizes the remainder of the Swagerty assets as of March 1, 1905: twenty bushels of corn (valued between 30 and 43 cents based on Bulletin 611), milk and other dairy products sold at \$40, three horses, seven milk cows, seven cattle, 16 swine and two

³¹ Floyd W. Smith, "100 Years of Farmland Values in Kansas." ksre.ksu.edu. <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/historicpublications/pubs/SB611.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2014).

dogs. What these numbers show is that because the farm was small, and the family only farmed on half the land (35 acres of corn sown in the fall of 1904 and one acre of Irish potatoes), most of the income would have come from a successful dairy and swine farm on the 40 acres of unimproved land. It is clear that Daniel understood the grazing potential of the Flint Hills.³²

In a rare family photograph, Daniel is shown with three other family members. Figure 6 on the following page depicts the Swagerty family. Daniel sits with his wife, Julia, and two of their three daughters, Addie and Trevia.³³ The photograph shows the success of the Swagerty farm, based on the clothes that he and the others are wearing: it is noticeable how formal and well made their clothes are, suggesting that some of them, like Daniel's suit, may have been store bought. Regardless, a formal studio photograph was costly and therefore, a clear indication of the Swagerty family's success. Of note also is that two daughters were able to go on to college: Maude Swagerty Carson and Trevia Swagerty Shelton. Trevia became a school teacher in Oklahoma. Maude attended Emporia Teacher's College in Emporia, Kansas. Their achievements serve as another indicator of Daniel's success.³⁴

³² Kansas State Census of 1905.

³³ Thank you to Erica D. Carlis for providing the correct identification of the Swagerty family members.

³⁴ See "Swagerty-Shelton Marriage," Oct. 19, 1919, *Eskridge Tribune-Star*; personal communication to author by Erica D. Carlis, descendent of Daniel Swagerty.



Figure 6: A studio photograph showing Daniel Swagerty with his wife Julia and daughters Addie and Trevia. SOURCE: Personal collection of Erica D. Carlis, direct descendent of the Swagerty family.

Daniel Swagerty's third daughter, Addie, learned midwifery and became a respected and long-practicing midwife in the Eskridge, Kansas area.³⁵ Since the Swagerty family had no sons, it is a mystery as to how he was able to have such a productive farm. Taking a closer look at the federal census of 1900 reveals an answer to this mystery and tells a unique story. In addition to Daniel, Julia and their three daughters, the 1900 census lists three young men living with them: George Moore (age 21), Clark Joseph (age 15) and Gibbs George (age 24). This in and of itself was not uncommon for that time, as many farmers employed day laborers and live-in farm hands. What makes it unique is that while Clark Joseph and Gibbs George are both white men and listed as boarders, only George Moore is black; he is listed as a servant in the Swagerty household.³⁶ This information implies that these young men worked in exchange for room and board. George Moore is listed as servant/laborer which means that he would have helped Julia

³⁵ Personal communications from Erica D. Carlis and Benetta Foster, Eskridge resident.

³⁶ United States Federal Census of 1900.

around the house when Addie, Trevia and Maude most likely would have attended District School Number 50.

By 1905, all three farm hands had moved out, leaving Daniel to presumably work the farm by himself; there is no information on the census to suggest that he had any help. However, he may have hired day laborers during the harvest or shared farm labor with other landowners, a common practice. His farm lay between two other African-American farms, those of George Williams and Hezekian Garley. The smaller Swagerty farm continued to be successful, even allowing Daniel to buy about 80 more acres of land between 1902 and 1919.³⁷ From the census data available, Daniel and Julia lived on the farm with their daughter Addie until their deaths between 1930 and 1940; Addie then moved to Eskridge. On the 1930 federal census, Daniel is listed as 78 and Julia as 62, but they are not found on the 1940 census.³⁸

Daniel Swagerty's story is one of farming success on 80 acres of land despite a lack of family labor; he also gained much community respect. In an article reporting Julia Swagerty's death, the Eskridge *Independent* stated, "She was the wife of D. L Swagerty, for many years a highly respected famer in this community."³⁹ What sets Daniel apart from the others is his initiative to employ white farm hands who actually boarded with the family. This finding is dramatically different from other stories of discrimination and hazing that have been reported elsewhere on Exoduster farms in Kansas.⁴⁰ Figure 7 on the following page is a map showing Mission Creek Township with all seven African American farms highlighted, including Franklin

³⁷ 1919 Plat Map of Wabaunsee County, Mission Creek Township.

³⁸ United States Federal Census of 1930. Information on Addie Swagerty courtesy of Mrs. Benetta Foster, personal communication, March, 2015.

³⁹ "Mrs. D. L. Swagerty is dead," obituary, April 14, 1932, *The Independent*, Eskridge, Kansas.

⁴⁰ Oral history accounts from the black community above Dunlap, Morris County, for instance, suggest much tension between the white and black residents.

Glass and Daniel Swagerty (shown as Louis Palmer, the farmer who originally owned Swagerty's land).

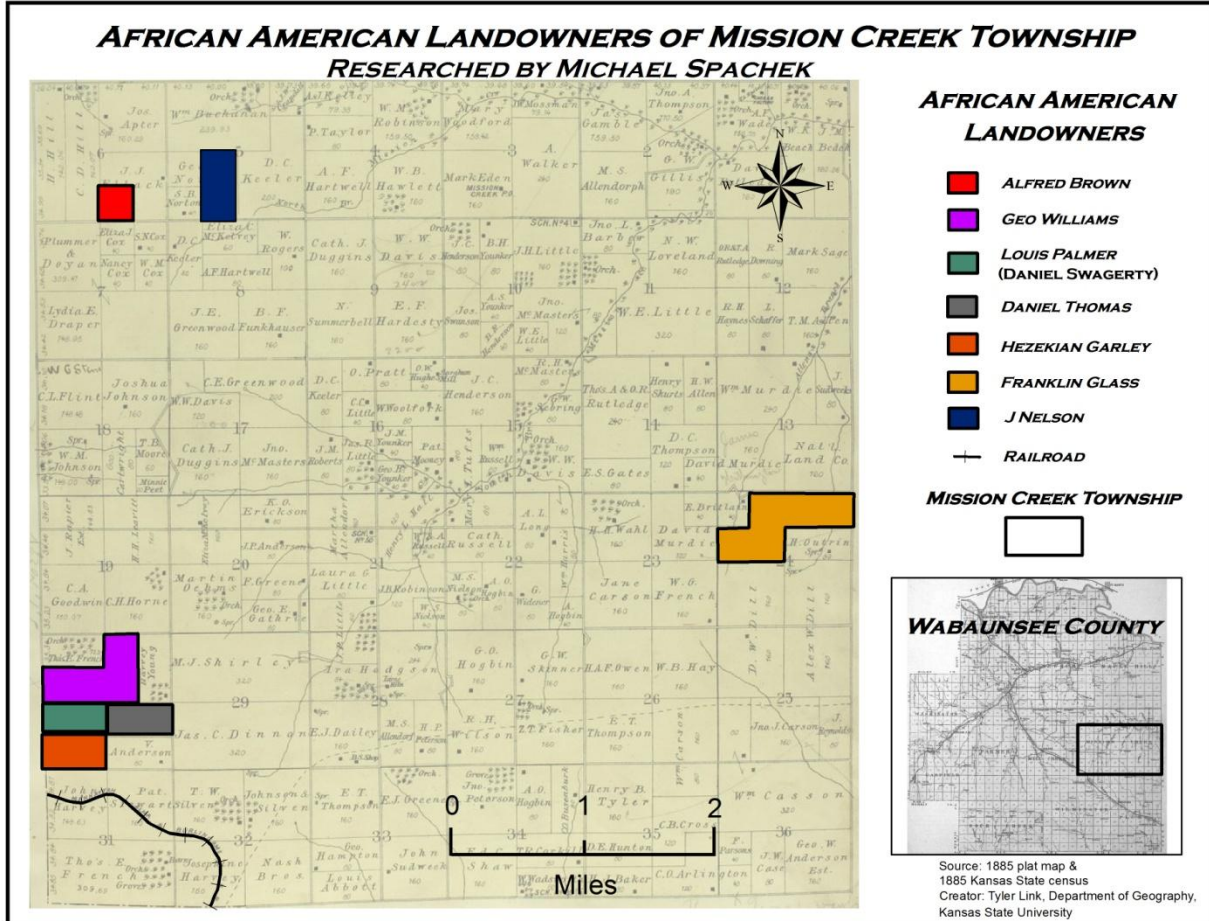


Figure 7: Map showing all seven African American farmers found in the study. Of special note is the Franklin Glass property seen at the east side and Daniel Swagerty's land on the west side between Geo Williams and Hezekian Garley. SOURCE: Kansas State Census of 1885, 1885 Atlas of Wabaunsee County, and Wabaunsee County Deed Records, Wabaunsee County Courthouse, Alma, Kansas.

W. B. Officer

Before the narrative of W. B. Officer begins, it is important to note that W. B.'s race is recorded as both white and black in the census data used for this narrative. To prevent any confusion, he will be referred to as African-American because he is documented as black on the 1885 Kansas State Census. The first mention of W. B. is on the 1870 Federal Census, showing him being ten years old and living in Tennessee. His parents were John and Mary S. Officer and he had four brothers and sisters. There is no official documentation, but it is safe to assume that his parents had been slaves before the Civil War and that W.B. was born into slavery in approximately 1860.⁴¹

By the time he was 17, W. B. had migrated to Wabaunsee County, Kansas, living in Alma (either the town or the township) with Emalina Officer. No direct links between Emalina and John or Mary Officer have been found, but due to the same last name, and Emalina being born in Tennessee, the two were likely related somehow. Between 1870 and 1875, W. B. moved to Kansas to help his relative.⁴² Further evidence for this theory comes from the census information on Emalina Officer. She was married to King Officer in 1866, according to Tennessee state marriage records but King does not appear to be living in the household in 1875.⁴³ He later reappears on the federal census of 1880, leading to the possibility that King left for an unknown reason and W. B. moved in with his relative to help during King's absence.

By 1880 W. B. can be found living in Alma working for a local farmer. At the age of twenty-two, he was boarding in the home of Spencer and Ursula Sempson, likely working on

⁴¹ United States Federal Census of 1870.

⁴² Kansas State Census of 1875.

⁴³ *Tennessee State Marriages, 1780-2002*. Nashville, TN, USA: Tennessee State Library and Archives. Microfilm; Kansas State Census of 1875.

their farm.⁴⁴ Then between 1880 and 1885, W. B. married Emma Officer (21 years old) and they had two children, as listed on the 1885 Kansas census: Mary (age 3) and Jimmie (age 2). W.B. was recorded as working in agriculture with Emma working in agricultural as well.⁴⁵ He had a fair amount of land, owning 74 acres in Newbury Township, where his land bordered that of King Officer. Figure 8 below shows W. B.’s land along with the other African American landowners found in Newbury Township.

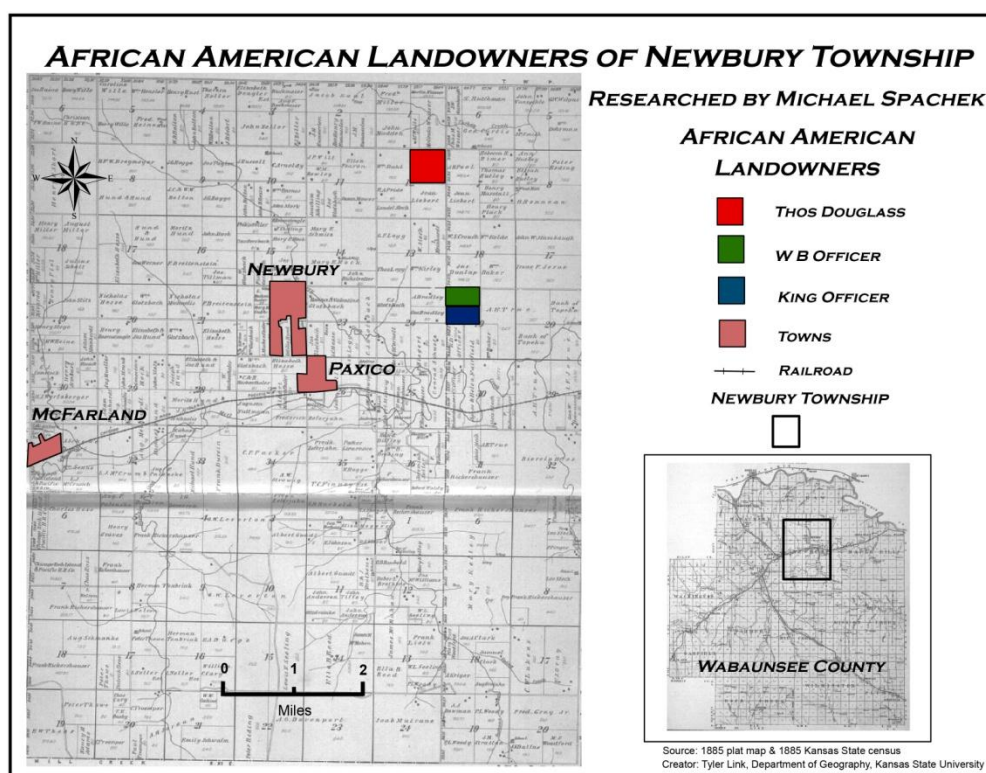


Figure 8: Map showing W. B. Officer’s property to the north of King Officer’s land. SOURCE: Kansas State Census of 1885, 1885 Atlas of Wabaunsee County and Wabaunsee County Deed Records, Wabaunsee County Courthouse, Alma, Kansas.

⁴⁴ United States Federal Census of 1880.

⁴⁵ Kansas State Census of 1885.

The Plat Map of 1885 does not show any buildings on the property suggesting that the W.B. Officer family did not live on the land; probably they were living with King Officer.⁴⁶ Figure 9 below shows the land that W.B. and his family farmed at the corner of Bluebird and Mastodon roads in Newbury Township, Wabaunsee County.



Figure 9: The photograph captures the rolling prairie land that would have been ideal for farming. It also shows just how depopulated the area is today. During W.B.'s time it would have appeared more settled with many farm structures visible. The stock pond visible in the photograph was likely created during the 1930s.
SOURCE: Photograph taken by author January 15, 2015

The agricultural portion of the Kansas State census provides some information on W. B.'s farm. In total, his farm was valued at \$1,000 with \$150 worth of tools and machinery. He also earned \$25 in wages from March 1, 1884 to March 1, 1885. Further evidence of this young farmer's energy can be found in the agriculture census for 1885 where it is documented that he had twenty tons of hay on hand, produced fifty pounds of butter, and owned five horses, four milk cows as well as fifteen other cattle. It also seems likely that W.B. joined the craze for

⁴⁶ **Newbury & Maple Hill 11 South, Range 12 East of 6th Principal Meridian.** 2 inches to a mile. In *Atlas of Wabaunsee County Kansas*. Chicago, Illinois: Gillen & Davy, 1885.

orchards in the 1880s that is seen throughout the agricultural census, including George Rodman in the next case study. W.B. had planted sixty apple, fifty peach, and three cherry trees, although they were not yet producing fruit. The last note of interest is that W.B. was interested in bee-keeping, having one stand of bees as of March 1, 1885. Of all the case studies analyzed here, the Officer farm was the most diverse. Family labor on 74 acres of land produced various crops, including 25 acres of wheat and 13 acres of corn in addition to the animals and the orchard.⁴⁷

The data available for the Officer farm paints a clear picture of a family that could afford to experiment with bee-keeping and the orchard. With the bee hive near the orchard, it suggests W. B. understood the relationship between bees as pollinators for flowering plants. In addition to the hive and orchard, there were the typical crops in corn and wheat along with production of butter. If W. B Officer could have been able to continue farming his property, he would have provided a unique look at the crop choices for the farmers in the area, what could be viable long term, especially on a small farm. It is likely that the experiment would have failed with the drought of the 1890s; however, it will never be known for sure. Unfortunately, W.B Officer died in 1888 (cause of death unknown), leaving behind his wife and two children. Figure 10 on the page below is a photograph of his tombstone in the Newbury Cemetery. The tombstone being large and ornate suggests some affluence in the extended Officer family.

⁴⁷ Kansas State Census of 1885.



Figure 10: A photograph of W.B.'s tombstone. The base reads: "W.m B. Officer Born Sept 11 1858 Died Sept 16. 1888." SOURCE: Photo taken by author, January 15, 2015.

George Rodman

George Rodman is found in the census data under both Geo Roadman and George Rodman. In this narrative he will be referred to as George Rodman. George was born into slavery in Tennessee about the year 1840. When the Civil War broke out, he was twenty one years old and ready and willing to fight for the Union. In a document titled, "Enrollment of Ex-Soldiers and Sailors, Their Widows and Orphans, Of the late Armies of the United States, Residing in the State of Kansas," George is listed as a private with the 1st infantry regiment of Tennessee at the end of the war; he was a volunteer. The document indicates that George

Rodman did not receive a pension for his time in the service; however, it provides an interesting fact about him. The document simply states that he was held by the Confederate States of America as a prisoner of war at Greenville, South Carolina, for six months.⁴⁸

By the year 1870, George had married Edi Rodman, 25, and they had three children: Margaret, Joseph and Hattie. Though no official documents show where the family lived prior to 1870, the census does show that George, Edi, and Margaret were born in Tennessee and that Joseph and Hattie were born in Missouri. This supports George and Edi being married in Tennessee, and then moving first to Missouri, finally settling in Kansas. It is probable that they moved right after the Civil War ended to escape persecution in Tennessee due to George serving with the Union. In 1870, he was listed in Wabaunsee Township in the far northwestern part of Wabaunsee County. There is no record of where the Rodman family was specifically living at this time, but based on George working as a laborer it is possible to assume that they were living in the town of Wabaunsee.⁴⁹ They were eventually able to buy their own land to the southwest of the town. The photograph on the following page shows George Rodman's property as seen today and also, a possible location for the Rodman farmhouse.

⁴⁸ Enrollment of Ex-Soldiers and Sailors, their Widows and Orphans, 1889. Unit ID #190462, 69 volumes. Records of the Adjutant General's Office. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

⁴⁹ United States Federal Census of 1870.



Figure 11: The photo above was taken at the corner of Tallgrass Road and Emmons Creek facing northeast. The tree in the distance provides a clue to where the Rodman household might have been. It was a typical practice to plant trees near the front of farmhouses to provide shade. The 1885 plat map shows the house being next to the eastern border of the property on what is now Tallgrass Road. The tree is located at the approximate position of the Rodman home. SOURCE: Photo taken by author, January 19, 2015.

The next time George Rodman appears on a census is 1885, the Kansas State Census. In the 15 year interval, his family had grown from just three children to eight, with three sons: Hattie, George H, Hetshen, Willie, Spencer, Adaline, Susie and Eddie. The Rodmans had a modest 40 acres only a mile from Wabaunsee, on the northwest corner of section 36. The only notable geographical feature of the property is Emmons Creek flowing between a quarter and half mile from the property. This water source would have been extremely important for the Rodmans, providing water for stock and gardens.⁵⁰

The 1885 agriculture census provides some information on the success of George's farm. For instance, it shows what is common for farmers in the Flint Hills: operating more as ranchers than as farmers due to the limited top soil. This is proven to be true for the Rodman farm, since Geroge had only three acres of wheat, five acres of corn and one acre each of Irish and sweet

⁵⁰ **Wabaunsee 13 South Range 9 & 10 East of 6th Principal Meridian.** 2 inches to a mile. In: Atlas of Wabaunsee County Kansas. Chicago, Illinois: Gillen & Davy, 1885.

potatoes as compared to nine acres of prairie and nine tons of hay cut in the fall of 1885. The Rodmans had one horse, two milk cows and one hog. With those two cows the family was able to produce fifty pounds of butter along with \$30 worth of animals sold or slaughtered during the year. In addition to the grain, milk, and animals slaughtered, the Rodmans also had a small orchard on their property although it is not shown on the plat map. The orchard consisted of three apple trees, two pear trees, twenty peach trees and two cherry trees. These were not yet producing fruit, but out of thirty-two farmers listed on the same census page as George Rodman, only four had trees producing any fruit that year. This suggests that the various fruit trees had only recently been introduced into that area of Wabaunsee County and that the Rodmans had the income to join in the plans for orchards.⁵¹ The planting of peach trees by African American farmers from the South was common in Wabaunsee County, and it is still possible to find these trees today. They remain as a few old but bearing trees, signaling the presence of more extensive orchards once visible.⁵² Figure 12 on the page below is a map that shows George Rodman's property.

⁵¹ Kansas State Census of 1885.

⁵² Personal communication, Benetta Foster, February, 2015. Peach trees are still bearing on a portion of land near the ghost town of Bradford, an African American settlement.

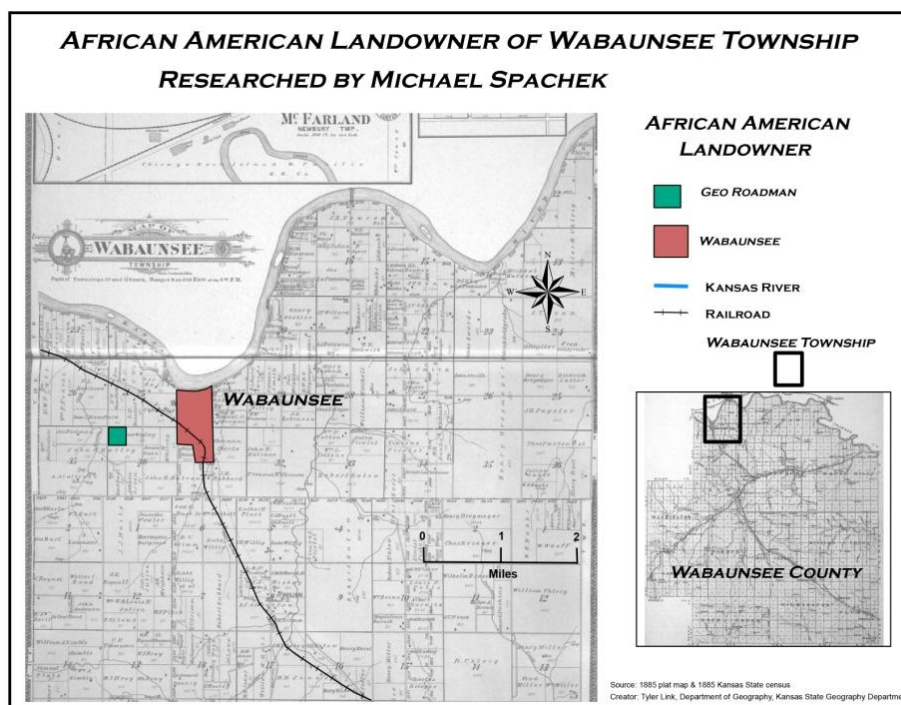


Figure 12: Map showing George Rodman's property to the west of the town of Wabaunsee. The Rodman family persevered on this small farm for many years. SOURCE: Kansas State Census of 1885; 1885 Historical Atlas of Wabaunsee County and Wabaunsee County Deeds Records, Wabaunsee County Courthouse, Alma, Kansas.

The next place information available for George is the 1905 Kansas State Census. At that time he was 70 and his wife Edith, 64. George and Edith also had four relatives living on the farm with them: Cora (20), William (30), Minnie (19) and Lee (3).⁵³ William is likely the Willie listed as George's son. Since George was seventy in 1905, it is safe to assume that William was running the day to day operations of the farm. At this point they had abandoned the orchard, most likely because many trees had died during the drought of the 1890s.

This is the last time George appears on the census records due to his death sometime between 1905 and 1910, when Edith is shown as a widow.⁵⁴ The farm he had worked tirelessly to build was last valued in 1905 as being worth **\$15,000**.⁵⁵ The leap in value is remarkable when only twenty years earlier, in 1885, his farm was valued at \$725 total! This demonstrates once

⁵³ Kansas State Census of 1905.

⁵⁴ United States Federal Census of 1910.

⁵⁵ Kansas State Census of 1905.

again that with just a small 40 acre farm, it was possible for African Americans in rural Kansas to earn a living and build personal value. The story of George Rodman is a perfect example of what those who migrated to Kansas after serving the Union hoped to find: a place to make an honest living with hard work, land ownership, and relative safety for themselves and their families.

Conclusion

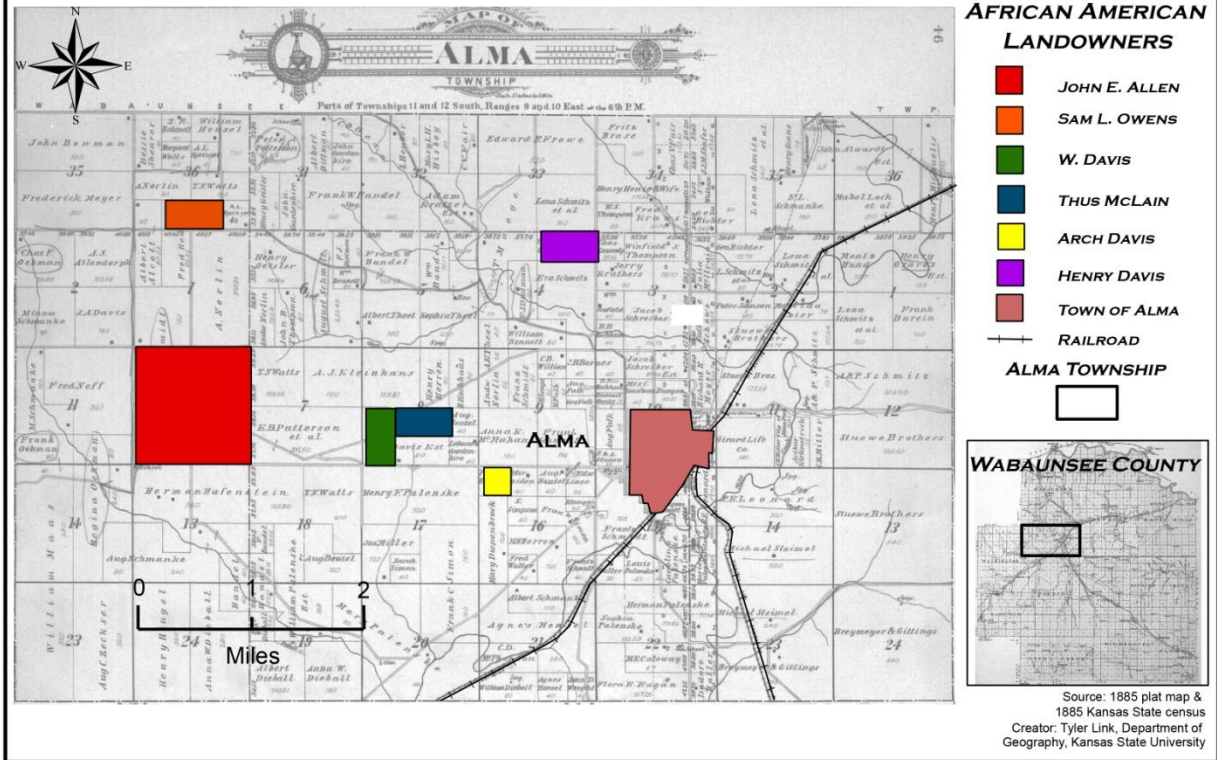
As a visitor drives west on Interstate 70 between Topeka and the exit for Manhattan, he may see the open landscape of the Flint Hills tallgrass prairie stretching for miles to the north and south. Gone from that scene are the bustling farm communities that would have existed prior to the Dust Bowl. These rural communities were vibrant with both African American farmers and white farmers helping each other during harvest. The scene is described by Edward Leonard III, an African American resident who grew up near the northern community of Wabaunsee before 1930: "As Uncle Leon worked his way from farm to farm, so did the team and bundle wagons, colored and whites alike."⁵⁶ With the stories of Franklin Glass, Daniel Swagerty, W.B. Officer, and George Rodman, the landscape starts to come alive: it is possible to visualize not only their farms but the hundreds of others that would have dotted the landscape. The stories of these Wabaunsee County land owners and their families are only the beginning of discovering the history of the black farmers of Kansas, how they arrived seeking opportunity and what they were able to accomplish once they arrived. The four narratives in this paper help to ensure that the stories of these men and women are not lost to history.

⁵⁶ Edward Leonard III, personal memoir, "Wabaunsee County as Remembered by Edward Leonard," n.d. Copy at Wabaunsee County Historical Society, Alma, Kansas.

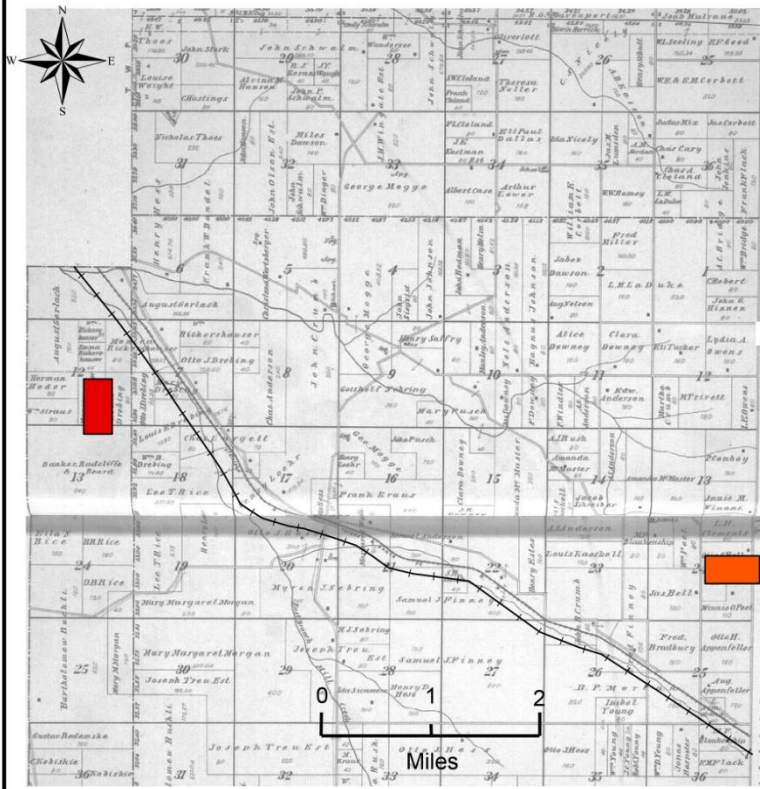
Appendix 1

AFRICAN AMERICAN LANDOWNERS OF ALMA TOWNSHIP

RESEARCHED BY MICHAEL SPACHEK

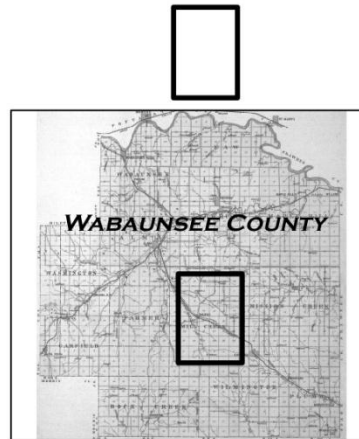


AFRICAN AMERICAN LANDOWNERS OF MILL CREEK TOWNSHIP RESEARCHED BY MICHAEL SPACHEK



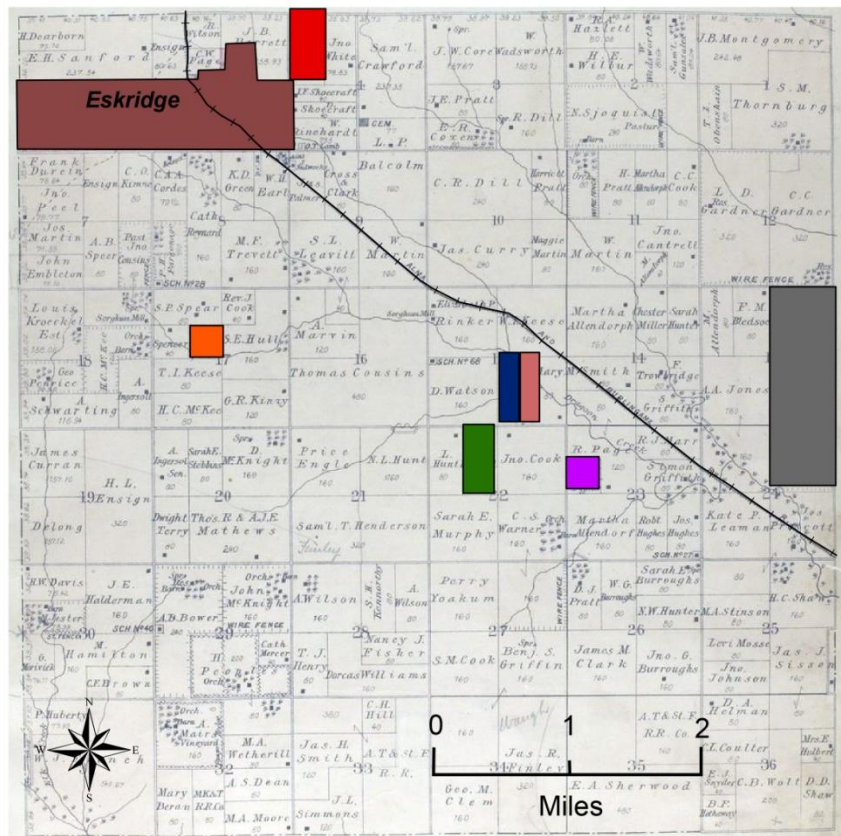
AFRICAN AMERICAN LANDOWNERS

- H. HUNTER
- JAMES DEPRIEST
- RAILROAD
- MILL CREEK TOWNSHIP



Source: 1885 plat map & 1885 Kansas State census
Creator: Tyler Link, Department of Geography, Kansas State University

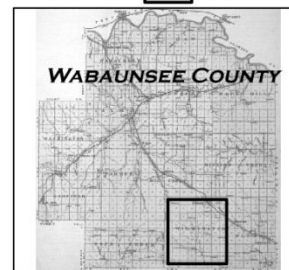
AFRICAN AMERICAN LANDOWNERS OF WILMINGTON TOWNSHIP RESEARCHED BY MICHAEL SPACHEK



AFRICAN AMERICAN LANDOWNERS

- LEWIS ABBOTT
- ALBERT RICHARDSON
- JACOB BAGWELL
- W. MALLARY
- JOHN SULLIVAN
- SMITH LACY
- H. W. FREEMAN
- TOWN OF ESKRIDGE
- RAILROAD

WILMINGTON TOWNSHIP



Source: 1885 plat map & 1885 Kansas State census
Creator: Tyler Link, Department of Geography, Kansas State University

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