

Douglass

A Historical Black Community in Rural West Tennessee

In the 1930's the Federal government acquired land from the J.E. Douglass plantation. Out of this massive plantation small farms for Black families were developed. However, these farmers were not the first Black farmers to purchase land from the Douglass family.

Starting in the late 1880's and early 1890's at least five Black families purchased farms from the Douglass plantation family. These farms are located in an area know as "the Bottom". The area is north of Stanton/Koko Road (Route I, Hwy 179). The entrance to the Botton begins in the 3800 block of Stanton/Koko Road at Frank Sweet Road and continues left onto Joe Sanderlin Road, then left again onto Charlie Scott Road. Continue Charlie Scott Road back to Stanton/Koko Road and this completed a circle. Within that circle, the following families purchased farms: Robert and Louisa Taylor, Richard and Candace Rives, Ed and Annette Jackson, Burl and Susan Greer and Cato, and (unknown name) Walker. These were small farms ranging from 60-100 acres.

These farms remained in the ownership of each family's descendants through the years until the 1940's when several of the farms were lost or sold. Only two of the farms remain in the families of the original owners. The Rives farm is now owned by a Great Grandson and the Jackson farm is now owned by a Great Nephew's family.

Beginning in the late 1930's the Federal government started to prepare the small farms to be sold specifically to other Black farmers after it acquired the remainder of the Douglass plantation. This development was locally referred to as "The Project". Local families rented the properties with option to buy after allotted years. Each farm consisted of various amounts of land ranging from 80 to over 100 acres. They also included a three bedroom house, a barn, hen house, outdoor toilet, water pump, smokehouse, and a wooded area. The wooded area was very important because wood was the primary source of energy for heating and cooking. By the end of the development, 38 farms had been purchased. An Elementary/Jr. High School and a church were also part of the new Douglass Community.

Each family made their homes and surroundings beautiful by planting trees, flowers, and other esthetics to make the community a welcoming and pleasant place for themselves and all visitors. They also started community organizations to have togetherness among the families. Mrs. Fannie Mathis coordinated the first community picnic in the early 1940's, the Eighth of August Picnic. It continues today as the August Fest: Homecoming and Heritage Festival, held the second weekend in August.

Many of the families in the Douglass community put their lives on the line fighting for Civil Rights during the 1950's and 1960's. Full citizenship meant having the right to vote, and having the same opportunities of life, liberty and happiness that other citizens enjoyed.

Some families sold their farms and moved north for better jobs after the manufacturing sector of the economy opened up in the mid-west and northeast. This era was known as the great migration which began in the early 1900's and continued through the 1970's. However, the 1940's, 50's and 60's saw the greatest number of families generally leave the south; and some Douglass Community residents were part of that migration.

When Haywood County made the decision to close the rural school after the 1986-87 school year, citizens of Douglass Community petitioned to have the school and the grounds sold back to the Community to develop a Community Center for gatherings, and the community's educational and recreational use. The citizens formed as a 501(c)(3) and are now the Concerned Citizens of Douglass Community Organization.

The Douglass Community continues to thrive and grown into a more diverse and welcoming community with love and caring hearts for everyone. Truly "A Great Place to Live and Raise a Family".