



More than a River:
Decatur
MORGAN
COUNTY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID HIGGINBOTHAM

TEXT BY TIFFANY BRIGHTWELL

A publication of the Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce



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HPNbooks
A division of Lammert Incorporated
San Antonio, Texas



Above: *The Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce Building.*

Opposite: *Decatur Bridge.*

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF DAVID HIGGINBOTHAM.

Decatur-Morgan County
Chamber of Commerce



First Edition

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ISBN: 978-1-939300-06-5

Library of Congress Card Catalog Number: 2013932371

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Due in large part to our location on the Tennessee River, Decatur-Morgan County has a rich history and heritage that is still seen in today's landscape.

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Chapter 1



When land in Morgan County, originally called Cotaco County for its Cherokee roots, opened for settlement in the early 1800s, the Tennessee River delivered settlers to the area long inhabited by Native Americans. Decatur was originally settled as Rhodes Ferry in 1820, aptly named for Henry W. Rhodes who operated a ferry across the mighty Tennessee. It would later be named Decatur in honor of Commodore Stephen Decatur—a famous naval officer killed in a duel in 1820. The city shares its name with more than forty other communities in the United States, but its namesake never actually stepped foot in Decatur, Alabama.



The old Morgan County Courthouse in Somerville, Alabama, was built in 1837 and is still used by the community today.



Our Heritage



In 1830, the Alabama legislature passed a bill to establish a state banking system—a decision that would put Decatur on the map. The state chose locations near waterways for easy access, and again the Tennessee River played a pivotal role. There would be three branches built: one in Mobile near Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, one in Montgomery near the Alabama River, and one on the southern banks of the Tennessee River in Decatur.



*A view of the changing Autumn foliage
from atop Burningtree Mountain.*



When its doors opened in 1833, the Decatur Branch of the Bank of the State of Alabama created a sense of optimism and promoted growth and development. Though the state banking system failed and the franchise was revoked by 1845, the bank had breathed life into what was once just a village and elevated Decatur to a leading city in Alabama.

The city saw decades of growth but, like many of its Southern counterparts, Decatur's fate would change during the Civil War as it fell to the Union Army in 1862. Troops occupied the State Bank and a handful of homes; these were the only buildings left standing by the end of the war. Decatur natives could've easily called it quits and moved on but instead persevered through war and yellow fever epidemics and rebuilt their town.

The Tennessee River once again provided the community with an opportunity for growth and revitalization as the L&N Railroad expanded farther south, bringing with it wealthy land speculators from the northeast. Decatur had become a crossroads for rail and water transportation and these newest residents settled New Decatur, later to be called Albany. The two towns functioned as completely separate cities, divided by one main thoroughfare, from the late 1880s until 1927 when the two consolidated. Evidence of each town's commercial areas can still be seen in the Second Avenue and Bank Street historic commercial districts.



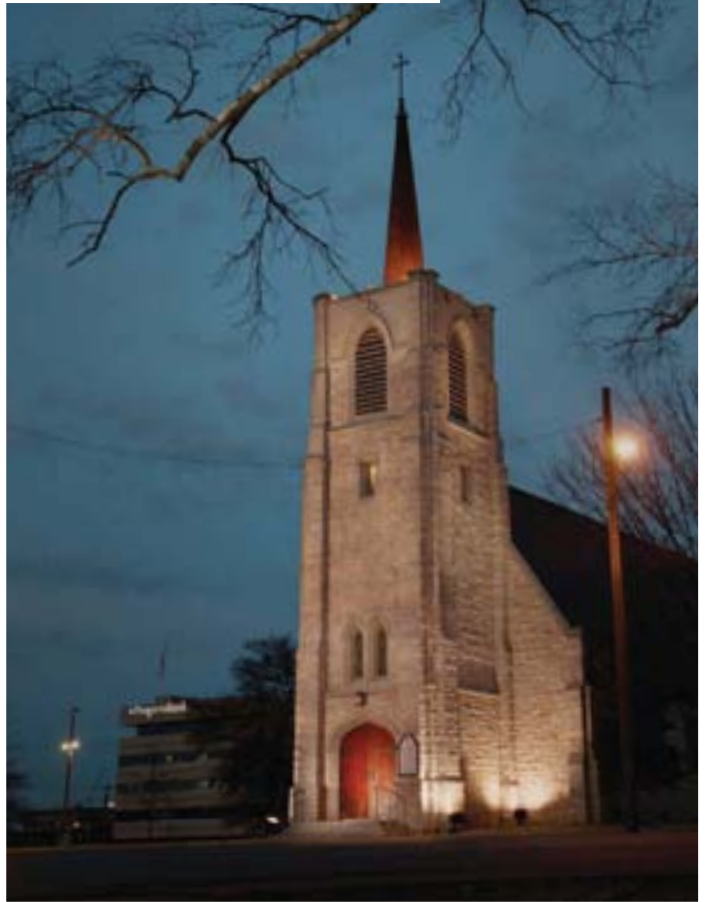
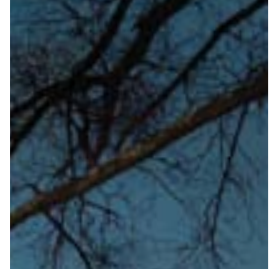
Opposite, top: The Old State Bank, built in 1833.

Opposite, center: The view down Bank Street shows the architecture of the storefronts.

Opposite, bottom: The historic train depot in Hartselle is now home to the Hartselle Area Chamber of Commerce.

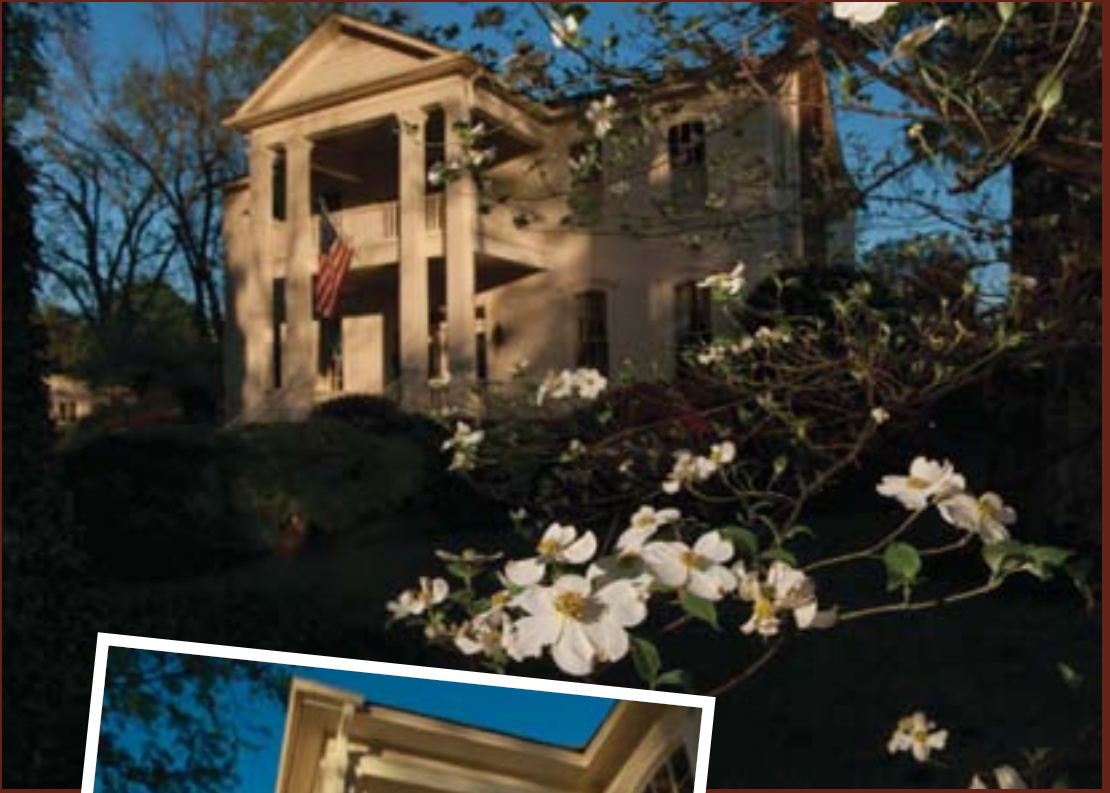
Above: Housed in a historic Carnegie Library building the Carnegie Visual Arts Center presents local, regional and national exhibits featuring all mediums of visual art throughout the year.

Right: St. John's Episcopal Church, established in 1890, is one of many beautiful churches in the Decatur area.



Hartselle, Alabama





Opposite, above, and left: Homes in Decatur's two historic districts are storied and beautiful.



Above: A duck glides into the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge on a winter afternoon.

Below: Waterfowl take off in the early morning light at the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge.



Wheeler National
Wildlife Refuge



Right: Sandhill Cranes glide over the public viewing area at the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge.

Below: A hen and drake Mallard take off from waters of the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge just after sunset.



The waters of the Tennessee were untamed and would often overflow their banks and flood the city. In the early 1930s, the Tennessee Valley Authority began working on a series of dams that would control the Tennessee, bring jobs to the area and provide hydroelectric power to residents all along her banks.

Though its rich history and promising future will forever wind along the banks of the Tennessee River, Decatur-Morgan County is a community that is so much more than just a river. And while it doesn't define this thriving city's success, it has certainly given life to the area's strong industrial base and rich recreational and cultural opportunities.





Chapter

2





Our Economy



Named the No. 1 city in America for business development by *Site Selection* magazine. Ranked No. 2 in the state of Alabama for expanding industry investment. Ranked the No. 2 small market of the decade from *Southern Business and Development* magazine.

What do all these things have in common? They are all titles that belong to Decatur-Morgan County.

Home to 157 diverse industries, 17 *Fortune 500* companies, and nine *Global 500* companies, Decatur-Morgan County is supported by a strong industrial base, while growing in areas like tourism, ensuring our economic success for the future.



Opposite: Jared Darnell drives a cotton harvester in Morgan County.

Above: Tugboat pilot Tim Archer looks out over the Tennessee River while behind the wheel of the Bo Huffman. He and his crew were working barges in Decatur's port.



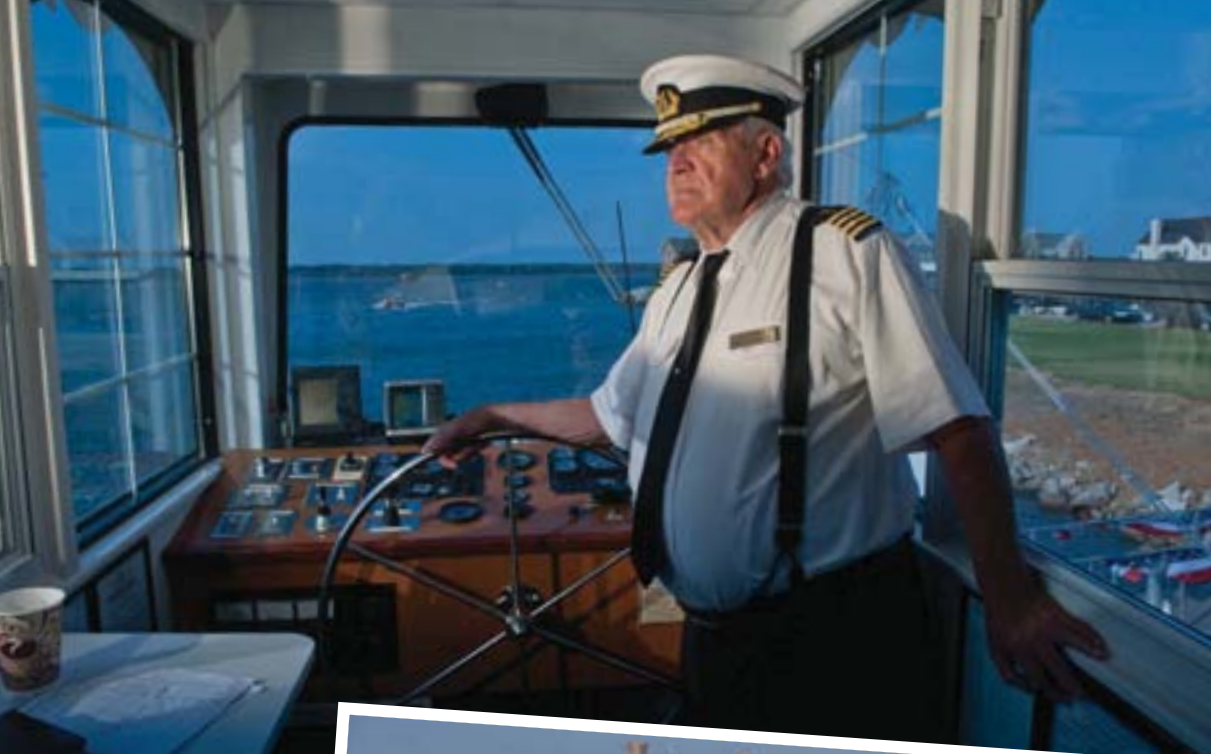
Port of Decatur



Above: Tugboat crews work to manage barge traffic on the Tennessee River just after sunset.

Left: Ken Winfree pilots his boat during the Decatur Parade of Lights.

Decatur was a natural fit for budding industry following TVA's construction of Wheeler Dam on the Tennessee River. Companies used the system of controlled reservoirs for convenient and inexpensive barge transportation for supplies and finished products. Today, Mallard-Fox Creek Industrial Park is the primary location for heavy industrial development in Morgan County and houses thirteen industries within the 1,000-acre site.



Top: Captain David Cummings in the wheel house of the Pickwick Belle.

Above: A boater heads past the Pickwick Belle paddleboat just before it embarks on a dinner cruise.

Left: Jimmy Kennedy, Pickwick Belle hospitality director awaits the arrival of passengers for a late afternoon cruise.





◆
A fisherman is silhouetted against the pre-dawn water as other boats are backed down the ramp at Ingalls Harbor prior to the start of a Collegiate Bass Tournament.



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