

Oldest Churches



King's Memorial United Methodist Church
702 McCartney St NW

The Rev. Richard "Dick" Rather, Pastor - 1854
Bi-racial members met at First Methodist Episcopal Church, South in wooden building in 1850.



First Missionary Baptist Church
Vine St NW

The Rev. Alfred Peters, Pastor - 1866
Designed by prominent African American architect W.A. Rayfield in 1921 and constructed for \$1250.



St. Stephen Primitive Baptist Church
210 7th Ave SW

The Rev. George Franklin, Pastor - 1875

Wayman Chapel African Methodist Episcopal

The Rev. T.W. Coffee was assigned to Decatur Mission in 1877. The mission had six members.



Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church
524 Lafayette St NE

Elder Elijah J. Lincoln - 1878



Medical & Dental

Reconstruction to early 1900's

Willis E. Sterrs, M.D., State Board 1888 - *Noted surgeon, founder of Cottage Home Infirmary School of Nursing*

J.W. Aldridge, M.D., State Board 1902

Newlyn E. Cashin, M.D., State Board 1908

Deo V. Darden, M.D., State Board 1914

L.P. Jacobs, D.D.S., 1905 City Directory

Willis J. Wood, D.D.S., 1920 Census

Attorneys

Hershel V. Cashin, State Bar 1878

John A. Fountain, 1895

Journalism

Mrs. Eva Adalaide Sterrs
Guardian Newspaper,
Founder & Editor, 1910-1917
Eva Sterrs Boys Club Benefactor



Education

The first private school set up in the Primitive Baptist Church in 1875. After a fire, the school moved to King's Memorial United Methodist Church (formerly St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church.)

Schools

Cherry Street School

Lakeside High School

Westlawn Elementary School

East End (later named Carver

Decatur Negro High School

Elementary School)

Additional Info

Decatur-Morgan County Convention & Visitors Bureau
719 6th Ave SE, Decatur, AL 35601

(800) 232-5449 or (256) 350-2028; www.DecaturCVB.org

Morgan County Archives

624 Bank St NE, Decatur, AL 35601-1608; (256) 351-4726

State Black Archives Research Center & Museum

Alabama A&M University, Huntsville, AL 35810; (256) 372-5846

Information researched by Peggy Allen Towns & Wylheme H. Ragland

DECATUR, ALABAMA'S African-American Pioneers





Early Business



Photo courtesy NY digital library. Circa 1895.

Burrell W. Lemmons, Blacksmith and Grocer
 Samuel Schaudies, Boot and Shoemaker
 Robert Chardavayne, Boot and Shoemaker
 Solomon "SS" Sykes, Furniture, 225 Bank Street
 James J. Sykes, Grocer, Coal, Saloon, Tailor, Bank Street
 Lafayette Garth, Coal, 303 Bank Street
 J. W. Coleman, Grocer, Madison
 A.G. Garth, Grocer, 602 Vine Street
 Charles Grizzard, Grocer, 401 Wells Street
 H.L. Murphy, Grocer, 505 Madison
 Charles Ross, Barber, 307 Bank Street
 L.D. Miller, Barber, 602 Bank Street
 S.D. Elliott, Cleaning and Dyeing, 124 Lafayette Street
 Sol Martin, Grocer, 426 W. Lafayette Street
 Robert Bridgeforth, Restaurant, 219 Bank Street; Livery Stable, 120 Market Street
 Willis E. Sterrs, M.D., Cottage Home Infirmary, Vine Street; Magnolia Drug Store and the People's Dry Goods Store, Bank Street
 Matilda Hall, Druggist and Notary Public

Schaudies-Banks Cottage



Five room cottage dates back to 1881 and was the home of Athelyne Celest Banks, who lived here for 98 years. She was a tireless church worker, educator, and philanthropist. An Academy, city park, and elementary school were named in her honor.

Rise from Slavery

Hidden in the pages of Decatur, Alabama's history are the unmentioned and noteworthy African Americans, who made countless contributions to our city.

The River City was built on the backs of slaves and their descendants. The Old State Bank, which opened its doors July 29, 1833; is an example of their labor and craftsmanship. James Fennell, first Bank president, used slaves in the erection of the building. The slaves cut large stone pillars and hauled them to Decatur on ox drawn wagons.

Many slaves worked on plantations, while others were hired out as blacksmiths, plasterers and laborers. After the Civil War and during reconstruction, freedmen worked as maids, railroad and riverboat employees, seamstresses, barbers, teachers and entrepreneurs.

The spirit and work of these pioneers continue to enrich and inspire past and future generations.

Civil War Soldiers

African Americans served both Union and Confederate Armies during the Civil War. The 14th USCT saw its first combat on August 14th and 15th, 1864, when it engaged in heavy skirmishing with raiding parties from General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry at Dalton, Georgia. The regiment again saw combat on October 28, 1864



in Decatur. In August, 2009, a military grave marker was dedicated for Union Civil War Soldier Amos McKinney, who is buried at Magnolia-Sykes Cemetery in Decatur. Reenactors of the 13th US Colored Troop and the 1st Alabama Cavalry (pictured at grave) took part in the ceremonies. McKinney, who died Aug. 24, 1910 in Moulton, had been in an unmarked grave since his death. J.J. Sykes purchased land for Sykes Cemetery in 1901.



Photo taken at Decatur Negro High School

Decatur Negro High - June 2, 1935

Dr. George Washington Carver, Tuskegee, Alabama, delivered Baccalaureate address to graduating class at the Princess Theatre. An integrated audience of over 1,000 people attended. The Principal was Clifford Joel Hurston (brother of writer Zora Neal Hurston). Carver School Principal was William J. Wilson.

Politics



Jeremiah Harrison,
 Republican Congressman - 1875-1877
 Unsuccessful Candidate for Alabama's
 4th Congressional District in 1876.

Constable

John Mills - 1877

Judge

Justice Charles P. Sykes - 1895

Decatur City Council

Charles P. Sykes - Councilman from 1888 - 1894 (*Source Document: The Story of Decatur, Alabama by John Knox & William Jenkins; City of Decatur Minutes notes him in 1888 - 1890.*)

Burrell Lemons - On May 31, 1880, former slave was sworn in as Decatur's first black Alderman

Matthew Hewlett Banks - 1884-1886, elected Alderman and Mayor Pro Tem

Russell Priest - July 1886, appointed to Decatur City Council

Collis Stevenson - 1888-1892, elected to Decatur City Council

William Butch Matthews - 1991-1996, elected to Decatur City Council

Billy Jackson - 1996 to present, elected to Decatur City Council. Served as Decatur City Council President 2004-2008

Decatur City School Board

Collis Stevenson, Tommy Sykes

Michelle Gray King

Aeronautics

Mae Jemison, First Black Female Astronaut

Mae Carol Jemison (born in Decatur on Oct. 17, 1956) is an African American physician and NASA astronaut. She became the first woman of recent African ancestry to travel in space when she went into orbit aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour on Sept. 12, 1992. In 2002, scholar Molefi Kete Asante listed Mae Jemison on his list of 100 Greatest African Americans.

