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# ALBANY

HISTORIC  DISTRICT

FLOURISHING WITH RICH HISTORY & ENCHANTED ARCHITECTURE,  
DECATUR, ALABAMA, IS HOME TO TWO UNIQUE HISTORIC DISTRICTS  
THAT DATE FROM THE 1880'S TO EARLY 20TH CENTURY.

CITY OF  
**DECATUR**

Tour begins at  
Delano Park  
and ends at the  
Princess Theatre

**ALBANY**  
HISTORIC DISTRICT



# ALBANY

HISTORIC DISTRICT

In the last half of the 1880's after the ravages of the Civil War, Decatur began to grow again and the railroad gained in importance. The prospect of new opportunities drew carpetbaggers – wealthy businessmen from the North – to settle in the area. In 1887, Decatur Land and Development Company began promoting a sister city southeast of Decatur called “New Decatur.” The political, economical and social rivalry was so intense between the two communities that the people in New Decatur decided to change their name, and in 1916, voted to rename themselves “Albany,” after Albany, NY, the hometown of many of the residents.

The “Yankee” industrialists brought industry and prosperity back to Decatur. They built large, modern homes and symbolized the town's new heritage by naming streets alternately for Union and Confederate generals. They also wanted to bring culture to Albany. Still standing as testimony to that era is the Cotaco Opera House at 115 Johnston Street. Some of the country's top touring vaudeville acts graced the stage of the venue that was built in 1890. Today, that building houses retail and restaurant establishments.

**NOTE: UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, THE BUILDINGS ARE PRIVATELY OWNED AND CAN ONLY BE VIEWED FROM THE STREET OR SIDEWALK.**



The Louisville and Nashville (L&N) Railroad played a significant role in both Decatur

and Albany in the late 1890's and early 1900's, with the completion of tracks that connected Montgomery and Louisville.

Decatur was so highly thought of by the L&N officials that the city became the home base for the railroad's repair shops, with 13 total shops in Decatur, making L&N one of the city's largest employers for the next 40 years. In 1900, the railroad employed 1,400 people and had a monthly payroll of \$60,000. By 1915, that figure had risen to \$150,000 per month.

Decatur and Albany were separated by Lee Street and remained separate towns until 1927 when an act of the state legislature merged the two. The united city of Decatur had a population of between 7,000 and 8,000. For that time, it was a major Alabama city and prosperous.

The downtown of Albany featured churches built by the northern newcomers: a Northern Baptist church, an Episcopal church, a Catholic church, a Methodist church and a Northern Presbyterian church. Second Avenue, Albany's downtown, remains a retail area featuring specialty shops and restaurants. The Downtown Revitalization Authority continues the revitalization of downtown.





**STOP 1.  
DELANO PARK & ROSE GARDEN  
GORDON DRIVE & 8TH AVENUE**

The Decatur Land Improvement and Furnace Company employed pioneering landscape architect Nathan Franklin Barrett to design a whole new city - New Decatur. The park was created in 1887 as the focal point of the master plan. Delano Park had two distinct early phases: the initial park created in 1887 and the stone structures built as part of the New Deal Works Progress Administration program of the 1930's. Interestingly, the stone structures from that era were designed by pioneering female landscape architect Carolyn Cortner-Smith. The park, named after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was dedicated in the 1930's by Roosevelt himself. For decades, the garden was in disrepair and the structures all-but lost. It was rebuilt as a public-private venture and has revitalized the park. Today's Rose Garden reopened in 2005 and was designed to be reminiscent of the rose garden of the 30's. The Splash Pad is a fun place to cool off during the summer months. This zero-depth water play place was built on the footprint of a 1930's WPA wading pool. The Playground and Garden for All Children beside the Splash Pad opened in 2009 to welcome children of all abilities. In addition, there is an interpretive history trail that winds through the park.



**STOP 2. THE DAVIDSON HOUSE  
608 GORDON DRIVE**

This late-Victorian cottage was built in 1902 and remained in the Davidson family for about 100 years. The late

Lawson Davidson told us he once delivered milk to many Albany residents. His cow could be seen grazing in the nine-hole golf course that faced his home. The golf course itself is long gone; today it is green space at the park that is used by neighborhood children and visitors for play and relaxation.



**STOP 3. THE MAWRY HOUSE  
620 GORDON DRIVE**

The Mawry House was built in 1888 and is a good example of a Victorian-style home with a cozy porch. Mr. R.L. Mawry followed a path across the park every day to work at the L & N rail shops at which he was a business manager.



**STOP 4. THE POER HOUSE  
626 GORDON DRIVE**

The Poer house was heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and principles of Frank Lloyd Wright, especially the interior. The house includes a sleeping porch, considered a necessity for healthful sleeping. Built in 1910, it was one of the most expensive homes in all of Decatur!



**STOP 5. THE WOLCOTT-BAILEY HOME - 1012 GORDON DRIVE**

Built around 1919 by R.H. and Dora Cain Wolcott, the Wolcott-Bailey brick bungalow presents an excellent example of the California “shed roof” bungalow and the accompanying Arts and Craft style of the early 20th century. As is typical of the bungalow style, the home features beamed ceilings, beveled glass, leaded glass, a brick fireplace and French doors. The use of natural materials and a casual floor plan made the bungalow style a popular alternative to the formal Victorian homes of the day.

This home is rumored to be earthquake proof with the exterior brick walls said to be freestanding from the interior walls. The exterior features a Flemish bond brick pattern and a large front porch with its original tongue and groove ceiling. The west end of the porch features a higher step, making it easy for the owners to step onto the floorboard of a Ford Model-A.



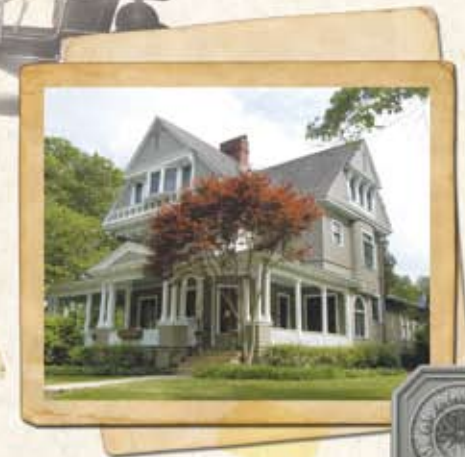
**STOP 6. THE PROPST HOUSE  
824 SHERMAN STREET**

This two-story English Cottage was built in 1939 for Samuel Noland Propst by his father, Joseph Wiley Propst, who was a partner in Propst & Howell Lumber Company of Cullman, Alabama. The house was built on four lots developed by Decatur Land & Furnace Company. A unique feature of the house is the quarter sawn oak trim milled by Propst & Howell Lumber Company. The exterior of the house is Decatur brick.



**STOP 7. THE PEBBLES HOUSE  
502 8TH AVENUE**

This one-story white house originally had a Sherman Street address, but a lady in her 80's bought the house in the 1970's and made a front door on 8th Avenue. According to legend, she said, “I like the house, but I'll be damned if my address will be named after Sherman!” Now the house has an 8th Avenue address.



**STOP 8. THE PAYNE HOUSE  
651 SHERMAN STREET**

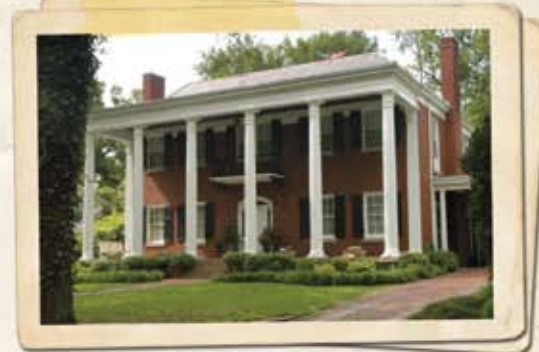
The Payne House was built in 1890 and illustrates characteristics of a late-Victorian house. The clapboard first story contrasts with the decorative shingles of the second story and the pebbled stucco of the projecting gables. The encircling veranda's columns reveal the influence of the Colonial Revival style. E.C. Payne, a New Yorker, owned a lumber company and was the first mayor of New Decatur and served again as mayor when the town changed its name to Albany. He also owned the first electric car in Decatur.





**STOP 9. THE JERVIS-McWHORTER HOUSE - 652 SHERMAN STREET**

The Jervis brothers, who were born in Wales, moved here in 1887 from Ohio. The two owned Jervis Planing Mill and built houses across from each other. This house, built in 1893, is perhaps the most intact late-Victorian structure in the neighborhood. Note the transitional phase into the Colonial Revival style. The Palladian double portico is incorporated into the typical Victorian encircling veranda.



**STOP 10. THE JERVIS-BARRAN HOUSE  
646 SHERMAN STREET**

The similarities between the two houses can be noted in the style of the columns, the projecting gables, and combination of materials. Of particular interest is the elaborate bargeboard on the front gable. This home was built around 1890.



**STOP 11.  
THE HOFF-HAGOOD HOUSE  
636 SHERMAN STREET**

The Hoff House was built in 1883 and is a late-Victorian structure with Colonial revival elements. George Hoff came to Decatur from Philadelphia in 1870 and was later president of the Morgan County National Bank. The home was remodeled in 1902 and 1930, at which time some of the Colonial Revival elements may have been added. An unusual feature of the house is the extensive use of red gum wood, once native to Alabama, for interior woodwork and wainscoting. Mrs. Atlee Hoff developed the elaborate plantation-style gardens from plants on the Wheeler Plantation and Bankhead Forest.



**STOP 12. THE EYSTER HOUSE - 626 SHERMAN STREET**  
Built in 1888 by the Allen family, it was originally a frame Victorian house. Purchased in 1917 by the Eyster family, the house was remodeled and the brick facade added in the 1930's in the midst of the response to the great demand for the Colonial Revival style so much in vogue at the time.



**STOP 13.  
THE HAMILTON HOUSE  
601 JACKSON STREET**

The Hamilton House was built in 1912 and is another good example of the Colonial Revival style, which was particularly prominent in Albany.



**STOP 14. THE BIBB HOUSE - 629 JACKSON STREET**

The Bibb House was built in the Victorian style with Queen Anne influences as evidenced by the corner turret. Note the details of the side porch. In 1895, William Bibb bought the house for \$2,500 at an auction to pay back taxes. Bibb was a grandson of Alabama's first governor.

**STOP 15. THE WILEY HOME  
646 JACKSON STREET**

Built in 1910, the Wiley Home is a good example of Colonial Revival architecture. Note the giant order of the central portico, the boxed cornice, and wide frieze.



**STOP 16. THE CHENAULT HOUSE  
650 JACKSON STREET**

Built in 1906, the Chenault House is one of the finest examples of the late Victorian house with both Queen Anne and Colonial Revival Influences. The home has a corner turret and large encircling porches combined with classical festoons and garlands over the windows and square classical columns. Several leaded and stained glass windows and four ornately carved mantles are other outstanding features of this house. Interestingly, the magnificent staircase was ordered as a kit from Sears & Roebuck.



**STOP 17. THE BRAGG HOUSE  
651 JACKSON**

Built in 1911 by Dr. and Mrs. Simpson, the Bragg House is an example of Georgian Revival architecture that was so popular early in the 20th century.



**STOP 18.**

**WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
801 JACKSON STREET**

Westminster began when a group of sixteen men and women met in 1888 with the Reverend John Davis, who had been sent to New Decatur by the Presbyterian Home Mission Board. In April of that year, the Reverend Davis went back to the Board to train as a full-time pastor for Westminster; however, upon his return to New Decatur seven months later, he was not allowed to leave the train because of the yellow fever epidemic. The following spring, the Reverend E. Horace Porter was sent to New Decatur as Westminster's first pastor. When he arrived, he found no church building, only a lot on Eighth and Jackson. In 2009, Westminster celebrated its 120th birthday; it has been registered as an American Presbyterian and Reformed historical Site by the Presbyterian Historical Association.

**STOP 19. CONNECTICUT MILLS COMPANY HOUSE  
1038 JACKSON STREET**

In the 1920's, R.E. Spraggins, Shelby Fletch, H.B. Beard and John W. Knight were recruiting the Connecticut Mills Company to construct a cotton mill in Decatur at the site now occupied by Goodyear Mills. As an incentive, in 1927 they built two residences for officials of the mill. Roland Gray was the first resident in this home. Three years later, Connecticut Mills Company failed and the plant closed. Mr. Gray stayed in Decatur for several years and was the first executive director of the newly formed Chamber of Commerce.





**STOP 20. CORTNER-SMITH HOUSE - 623 GRANT STREET**

This large stone house was designed in the early 1900's by pioneering female architect Carolyn Cortner-Smith for her mother. She was known for her use of native materials such as the stone used in this house; it was quarried near Russellville, Alabama. The house is only one room deep with a hall that runs the length of the back. Carolyn Cortner-Smith also was responsible for the design of the stone structures and 1930's rose garden at Delano Park.

**400 BLOCK OF JACKSON STREET**

The south side of the 400 block of Jackson Street has the most intact set of late-Victorian houses in the Albany Historic District, built between 1888 and 1906. Many feature pebble and stucco gables.



**STOP 21. THE BOWLES HOUSE - 445 JACKSON STREET**

Built in 1906 by Tom and Argentina Bowles, this home was originally located on the south side of the street in the 600 block of Jackson Street and was moved to its present location in the 1920's. It was moved by a mule team and left out in the street overnight before being placed on its current foundation. An older neighbor remembered it looked like a "bride left at the altar" - all white, screened porches slightly listing and forlorn. After its move, the double parlors were opened into a single large living room and large fireplace and mantel added. Formerly it had twin, screened porches as well



as a second floor back sleeping porch that is now enclosed. The Bowles House is a Free Classic Queen Anne style with a hipped roof with lower cross gables. It has the Queen Anne common characteristic of a prominent front gable and wrapping porches.

In the late 1960's, this house had fallen into disrepair and was scheduled for demolition. The Franklin family purchased it for \$10,000 and saved it from destruction and made major repairs. Since 1979, the Hammonds, the third family to own the home, have continued the restoration by renovating and refinishing the home. After agreeing to purchase the house, the Hammonds were told the house was haunted. So far, they report happy coexistence and no complaints by any spirits.



**STOP 22. THE WYATT HOUSE  
425 JACKSON STREET**

In 1887 three well-to-do Wyatt brothers from Covington, Kentucky, stopped at Rhodes Ferry on their way to Birmingham. Mr. L.B. Wyatt was so impressed with the L&N Railroad shops and the ship building facilities in Decatur that he and his brothers determined Decatur was the "hub of the South" and settled their families here on the 400 block of Jackson in 1889.



**STOP 23. CHRIST'S MISSION**  
**413 SHERMAN STREET**

In 1898 the Mission Organization of New York State of the Congregational Church built Christ's Mission, but the congregation never caught on in Decatur. In 1901, St. Paul's Lutheran Church bought the building and made it home for 67 years. In 1951, to increase the size of the sanctuary, the church

turned the building. The mover assured the anxious pastor that if he so much as rang the bell during the move, the mover would pay the preacher \$50. The bell did not ring.

Immediately beside the church is a small house that was built in 1901 as a school by the St. Paul's congregation. The original building was one room wide and three rooms deep and used potbellied stoves for heating. Church records show that besides the three R's, English was taught in this mainly German-speaking community. The building functioned as a school for about five years. Sometime after that, the rooms on the left side and back of the house were added and it served as the parsonage for St. Paul's for about 50 years.



**STOP 24. PAPENBURG - 425 SHERMAN STREET**

Built in 1922 for Henry Papenburg, a migrant from Prussia, this home reflects the features of American Foursquare architecture. Also called Prairie Box, this post-Victorian style shared many features with the Prairie architecture pioneered by Frank Lloyd Wright. The boxy foursquare shape provided roomy interiors for homes on small city lots. Typical of the style is

the two-and-a-half stories, four-room floor plan, low-hipped roof with deep overhang, large central dormer, and full-width porch with wide stairs. A small studio photograph of Henry Papenburg's wife, Mary, and three boys remains in the house. Each subsequent owner has left it with the house to carry on a piece of the original inhabitants' history.

**STOP 25. FORT DECATUR - 610 4TH AVENUE**

Construction on the Decatur Armory, now known as Fort Decatur, began in the 1930's as part of the New Deal programs and improvements to Delano Park. It is said that some of the stone veneer used on this structure and throughout the stone structures in the park was quarried here in Morgan County by teams of WPA/CCC workers. It is interesting to know that



the park once extended west of this building to the property beyond the elementary school seen from the front of Fort Decatur and crossing the railroad tracks into northwest Decatur. Remnants of these smaller, pocket type parks still can be found in these neighborhoods.

You will see from here that you are just west of the 6th Avenue entrance of Delano Park and the Rose Garden. The second part of the interpretive history walking trail markers that began by the Rose Garden continue along the path here at Fort Decatur. Each marker captures photos and stories of Albany and Old Decatur in the late 1800's and turn of the century.

## STOP 26. ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH - 202 GORDON DRIVE

After the Episcopal Church in Old Decatur burned in 1889, newer members of the parish wanted to rebuild nearer their homes and received permission to organize another parish in "New Decatur." Thus, St. John's was established in 1890 and became a parish in 1891. The church building, comprising the present nave and chancel area, was dedicated in 1893.

Originally facing north, the building was physically turned in 1948 to face west.

At that time the present entrance and tower were built, and the building was stone veneered. St. John's interior is modeled after Gothic English parish churches.



The final stop on the tour - the Princess Theatre - is on 2nd Avenue. You'll notice the specialty shops and restaurants as you go. Many of the original buildings from the turn of the century housed hotels and mercantile stores with living quarters above. The Cotaco Opera House we mentioned earlier on the tour is just west of 2nd Avenue on Johnston Street.



ALBANY  
HISTORIC DISTRICT



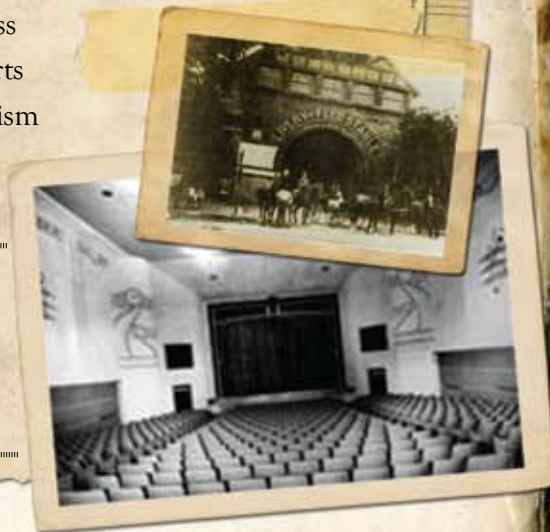
## PLAYBILL

### STOP 27. THE PRINCESS THEATRE

In another nod to the arts, the Princess Theatre on Second Avenue has been a North Alabama landmark for more than a century. Built as a livery stable for the

Casa Grande Hotel in 1887, it was transformed into a silent film and vaudeville playhouse in 1919. The theatre presented high-class road shows, pictures and vaudeville. After a facelift in 1941, the Princess emerged with the art deco style that remains today and features a brilliantly lit marquee containing more than 3,000 feet of neon tubing. In 1978 the City of Decatur purchased the Princess Theatre when it closed as a movie house. After a \$750,000 renovation, the Princess reopened in 1983 as a 677-seat performing arts center. The Princess Theatre was named a "Must See Arts Destination" by the Alabama Tourism Department during Alabama's Year of Arts Celebration.

For more information on Decatur, please visit the Convention & Visitors Bureau at 719 6th Avenue.



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