

**(Right)** "United We Win." Photograph by Alexander Liberman, 1942, Printed by the Government Printing Office for the War Manpower Commission. (National Archives and Records Administration)

It's difficult to know the particular state of race relations in the Shoals during World War II without more personal anecdotes, memoirs, or oral histories. There is no evidence that there were people of color who worked at Nitrate Plant No. 1. The worker's village for Plant No. 1 is still intact and has been annexed into the city of Sheffield, however, the village for Plant No. 2, which definitively housed some workers of color and their families is no longer extant. Documentary photographs indicate that part of the construction crew for the Wilson Dam was African American and that there were teams of African American men who worked at Reynolds Metal as well. A local resident of Hatton in northeast Colbert County recalled those who worked for Reynolds or the TVA – his father among them – would wear their work badges to church and other public outings as a symbol of their employment and no doubt their contribution to the country.

Colbert County lacks an official county archives but still has an abundance of historical resources. The old cities of Sheffield and Tuscumbia both offer wonderful public libraries with rooms set aside for local heritage research. In Tuscumbia, the Helen Keller Public Library is the oldest chartered library in the state of Alabama that has provided continuous service. Chartered in October of 1893, the library was named in honor of Tuscumbia's famous citizen and currently located about a block from Ivy Green, the plantation of Arthur H. Keller and the birthplace of Helen Keller. The library began as a small association of readers including Helen Keller's mother and aunt. Books and bookcases were donated from all over Alabama and the United



States, and the members volunteered as librarians. Now the library is a member of the public library system and offers a home to thousands of volumes on local, county, and state history.

Colbert County is also within the Muscle Shoals Heritage Area (MSHA). Designated by Congress and advised by the National Park Service, a National Heritage Area is a place "where historic, cultural, and natural resources combine to form cohesive, nationally important landscapes." In contrast to the largely uninhabited national parks most citizens are familiar with, National Heritage Areas are lived-in parts of the country that possess special historic and cultural significance to their communities. The communities within the heritage areas help to conserve and develop these national treasures. The goal of a National Heritage Area is to combine heritage conservation, recreation, education, and economic development. The MSHA is the only one in Alabama and covers Colbert, Franklin, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, and Morgan counties. The University of North Alabama (UNA) in neighboring Lauderdale County hosts the MSHA since it was approved by Congress in 2009. The Heritage Area focuses on three main themes deemed important to the region: music, Native American heritage, and the Tennessee River. Within these themes, there are several categories of heritage that are explored and promoted by the MSHA including African American, architectural, Civil War, cultural, Natchez Trace, natural, and transportation heritages.