



**(Left)** An Image of African American Men (Possibly of the 14th USCI) Digging Embankments in Decatur prior to the Battle of Decatur – the Old State Bank Can be Identified in the Background (Morgan County Archives, Decatur, Alabama)

While the economics of Decatur and its surrounding area may have shifted in the early 20th century, it has long been home to a vibrant and strong community of African Americans. Decatur is still the most populous town or city in the county. As of 2010, there were 55,683 people living in 22,576 households in Decatur, with 21.7% identifying as African American.

The communities of Moulton Heights, Nebo, and West Decatur are within the vicinity of Decatur and have contributed to its history. Also, see the sections on the Decatur City Cemetery, Magnolia-Sykes Cemetery, Sykes-Garth Plantation, and Wilder Place, as well as the biographies of significant individuals and families of Morgan County, many of whom have ties with Decatur and the essays on the Scottsboro Boys and Cedar Lake Colony.

“Decatur actually is divided into three small towns. But during the segregated South, Old Town, which is the oldest area, oldest community in Decatur, it was a town where blacks lived primarily and it was contained. They had their own grocery stores, their own restaurants, their own pool halls, beauty shops. The Vine Street area actually was a commercial hub in Decatur. And keep in mind, it’s the segregated South. This is where blacks primarily lived and shopped. They did everything there.”

- Ms. Peggy Allen Towns

## 11 ■ Decatur City Cemetery

This city cemetery is the final resting place of nearly 35,000 individuals. Located across from Old Town on the other side of Dry Branch, it is bound by ALT 72/ Joe Wheeler Highway on the north, 12th Avenue on the west, the Southern Norfolk Railroad on the south, and the banks of Dry Branch on the east. The need for a city cemetery was realized fairly early, as the small, urban Lafayette Street Cemetery was already crowded by 1853. Calvin Brown was the first to bury someone on the low, rolling land next to the river. The earliest known burial is Maria Ford, interred on July 2, 1855, although there might have been some burials as early as 1851.

The cemetery grew over the decades to include 50 acres with seven sections – the Original, Brown, Cantwell, Cowan, Decatur Land Co., Humes, and Sterrs additions. A plat map from



Decatur City Cemetery  
Decatur, Alabama  
Sterrs's Addition Not Shown

**(Above)** 2012 Drawing of Decatur Cemetery (Phil Wirey of the Morgan County Historical Society)

### KEY

- COMMUNITIES
- CEMETERIES
- CHURCHES
- PLANTATIONS
- SCHOOLS