

DeKalb History Center

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**DEKALB
HISTORY
CENTER**

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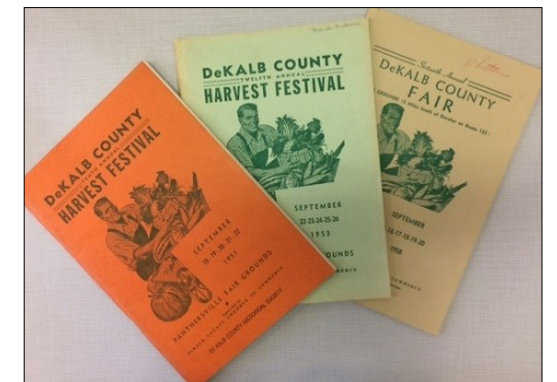
A Walk Through the Past: A History of DeKalb County's Native American Trails

By Maranda Perez, Archives Intern

Before white settlers occupied today's DeKalb County, two prominent Native American nations, the Creek and Cherokee, lived on and traveled through the area for thousands of years. Although these nations' tremendous effect on the development of Georgia largely goes unnoticed today, it is important to consider. Three main Native American trails ran through modern-day DeKalb County: the Hightower Trail, the Peachtree Trail, and the Sandtown Trail. The Creek and Cherokee people used them for travel and trade with each other and with other Native

American nations in the Southeast region. These trails traced the shortest distances between destinations and the

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1950s Harvest Festival Programs

FAQ: Archives Edition

When people hear the word "archives" they may think of old maps or maybe some ancient newspapers in a box, but there is much more to the term. Yes, archives typically contain old documents and records but "archives" can be anything from paper documents and photos, to electronic records and video recordings. The format of these documents does not matter; what matters is their uniqueness. Archival documents tend to be primary sources,

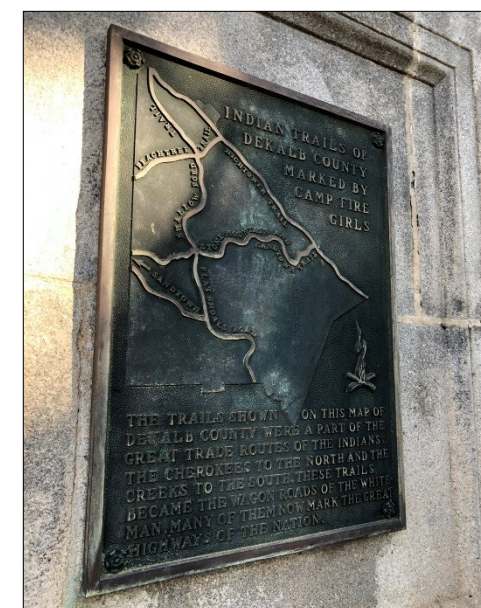
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Plaque located outside the courthouse showing the main Native American trails in DeKalb County.

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A Walk Through

least treacherous routes. Early white settlers found that these paths' features made them good wagon roads, and they have since evolved into parts of prominent roads, boundaries, and rail lines in DeKalb County.

Even though the Creek and Cherokee people have since been pushed out of the area, their most important trails, being ideal thoroughfares, have become essential roads and railways for the county today. Generally, the Native American trails followed the highest ridges. Developers of the Southern Railway sought out these high ridges for a railroad, following the same path as the Peachtree Trail. Peachtree Trail connected to Sandtown Trail in Stone Mountain and ran through today's Peachtree Road and Peachtree Street, two roads that are frequently traveled today. Moreover, Southern Railway followed the same path as the Peachtree Trail and was a railroad that connected much of the Southeast.

Sandtown Trail makes up the part of Georgia Railroad that runs from Stone Mountain through Decatur, following today's Decatur Street to Five Points in Atlanta. It is one of few Native American land sites in Georgia that has retained its original name given by the Creek nation, being a direct translation of the Creek Oktahasasi and named for the communities that the trail connected. The first community known as Sandtown was located in Alabama, and the trail ran from there to another Sandtown in Fulton County on either side of the Chattahoochee River. It can be inferred that the



A marker for Hightower (Etowah) Trail, considered to be the most marked and well-studied Native American Trail in DeKalb County.

trail was used for trade, travel, and communication between the Sandtown communities that the trail connected. Sandtown in Fulton County was known by white settlers as Buzzard Roost until 1821, when a map of the trail was drawn connecting Buzzard Roost with Sandtown in Alabama. Buzzard Roost during the time of western expansion in the nineteenth century was typical of communities portrayed in old Western films, where both white and Native people lived together and fought often. The trail was used frequently by white settlers traveling west to establish gold mines in parts of Georgia and Alabama where the ore was rumored to be found.

Even though all three of these Native American trails are important, the archives here at DeKalb History Center have more information about the Hightower Trail than the others. The name Hightower itself is an anglicized version of "Etowah," which is the name given to the trail by Native American people. Dr. John H. Goff believed that Hightower was a corrupted version of the name resulting from the language barrier between Native

Give Five for the Archives End-of-Year Fundraising Campaign

For this year's End-of-Year Campaign, we are focusing on the archives! Our goal is to raise \$10,000, and we need your help to get there. Whether its \$5 or \$500, anything helps, so please consider donating!

The money we raise for this year's campaign will go straight into buying archival supplies so that we may continue to protect our collection and to provide access to future generations.

You can donate online by going to dekalb-history-center.square.site or by mailing a check to **DeKalb History Center, 101 East Court Square, Decatur GA 30030.** ✦



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All funds received through memberships directly support the preservation of DeKalb County history and are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Your generous contribution to the DeKalb History Center will provide you with a year-long membership that includes our quarterly newsletter to keep you informed on all our activities. We hope that you will join our team by either renewing your membership or joining as a first-time supporter.

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Please mail this form with your contribution to: DeKalb History Center, 101 East Court Square, Decatur GA 30030

Upcoming Events

DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY
<p>Lunch & Learn: <i>Refuge or Refusal, A Conversation</i></p> <p>December 4</p> <p>Bring your lunch and learn about the turning points in U.S. immigration policy and its impact on the economic, cultural, and social conditions of our world today.</p> <p>12:00—1:00 pm</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p>	<p>Historic Courthouse Tour</p> <p>January 14</p> <p>12:00—1:00 pm</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p>	<p>Genealogy Workshop</p> <p>February 1</p> <p>An Introduction to African American Genealogy in DeKalb County</p> <p>10:00—11:00 am</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p>
<p>Hops: <i>Residents of Oakland Cemetery</i> with Janice McDonald</p> <p>December 10</p> <p>Meet some of Oakland Cemetery’s most notable residents with author Janice McDonald’s new book, <i>Residents of Oakland Cemetery</i>.</p> <p>6:00—7:00 pm</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p>	<p>Genealogy Workshop</p> <p>January 25</p> <p>Researching Your Historic House/Property in the Metro Atlanta Area</p> <p>10:00—11:00 am</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p>	<p>Historic Courthouse Tour</p> <p>February 11</p> <p>12:00—1:00 pm</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p>
<p>Historic Courthouse Tour</p> <p>December 10</p> <p>Discover the story of the courthouse and the history hidden within.</p> <p>12:00—1:00 pm</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p>	<div style="background-color: #ADD8E6; border-radius: 15px; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>Keep in mind...</p> <p>Your membership contributions make these programs a reality.</p> <p>We work hard to provide a variety of learning opportunities. If you enjoy these programs we encourage you to be a part of our community by becoming a member!</p> </div>	<p>12th Annual Black History Month Celebration</p> <p>February 13</p> <p>Join us as we learn about <i>The Jazz Age in the South, an African American Perspective</i>.</p> <p>11:00 am—1:00 pm</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p> <p><i>*Sponsorships available</i></p>
<p>Dance Hall Decatur</p> <p>December 31</p> <p>Ring in 2020 with the most roaring New Year’s Eve party in town. The theme is 1920s, so dress to impress!</p> <p>9:00 pm—1:00 am</p> <p>Historic DeKalb Courthouse</p>		

the Past (continued)

Americans and English settlers. The importance of this trail was abundantly clear to residents and surveyors in 1958 of both DeKalb and Gwinnett County when they lost the boundary between the two. The Hightower Trail determined part of the original boundary between Gwinnett County and DeKalb County. Surveyors could



Decatur Station, part of the Georgia Railroad, where Sandtown Trail ran through Decatur, Georgia.

not definitively mark the location of some portions of the trail, leaving some residents and business owners unsure of which county they actually resided or did business in. Surveyors had to go into the archives to review the J.T. Cunningham survey of 1819, which marked the boundary between Georgia and Creek territory during that time. This example is evidence not only of the importance of the Hightower Trail in DeKalb County but also of issues that arise with a lack of documentation. There are not many sources from pre-colonial Native American nations preserved today for research, creating an information gap that complicates something as simple as finding a county line.

Over the years the people of DeKalb County have found ways to commemorate contributions made by Creek and Cherokee people, mostly by placing historical markers where the trails were located; and the Georgia Department of Travel has placed numerous such markers along the highways that grew out of them. In 1997, a plaque was placed at the original 1822 county boundary between DeKalb and Gwinnett County to commemorate the importance of the Hightower Trail. There are innumerable ways, beyond the Native American trails, that the Creek and Cherokee nations affected DeKalb County. The next time you drive down Peachtree Road or hear the train passing by your home or place of work, perhaps you’ll remember the Native American people who lived on and used this land long before we did and think about how their lives here continue to affect daily life here in DeKalb County. ✦



Peachtree Station located on land that once was part of Peachtree Trail.

FAQ: Archives Edition (continued)

often created at the time of the events they describe.

Why do we collect things?

For the past 72 years, we have been collecting DeKalb County history in the form of documents, objects, oral history interviews, yearbooks, tintypes, diaries, and more. We have gathered thousands of records, many of which are one of a kind, for the purpose of providing as complete a picture of DeKalb County's history as possible. These resources are made available to researchers who are doing all types of research. They may wish to document a historic house, add historic background for a novel they are writing, or work on their family's genealogy.

Why don't these items last forever?

Some archival records are made with materials that have a high pH and are at risk of reacting with water, or humidity, that may cause them to become permanently damaged. The proper storage of historical records is imperative because it is very



Records located in our archives.

easy for these fragile materials to become damaged or destroyed. Even if an item has a low pH, it must be stored carefully as acid can migrate from other materials or pollution. Some materials are inherently unstable – like newspapers and movies made on cellulose acetate film. The items may be copied to preserve the content, while reducing damage to surrounding archival materials.

What does an archivist do?

The archivist is in charge of assessing, collecting, organizing, preserving and providing access to the archival items in a collection.

Where do these items go?

Properly housing all these records is no easy task. For instance, paper materials require a sleeve, a folder, and a box to be suitably stored. These items help to alleviate exposure to harmful, outside conditions such as dust, humidity, and light. The folders and boxes also protect records from mechanical damage and make items easier to locate and move. Folders and boxes are typically acid-free, with a pH of 8 or 9, so there is no reaction with the material being stored. If stored correctly, items will age slower and therefore last longer. If placed in an unsafe environment, exposure to acidity or other factors could cause irreversible damage to the object or document.

How do I use the archives?

There are a few ways to do this! Please keep in mind – you need to make an appointment with our archivist in order to come do research. You may contact our archivist with your research topic, family name, or neighborhood address to see if we have anything relevant in our collection. Check our finding aids and other resources on the “Your Archives” page of the DeKalb History Website. †

History Quest 2019

How surreal would it be to hear your favorite historical figure tell you their life story? During History Quest, that's exactly what happens!

History Quest is a program designed to give students an interactive out-of-the-classroom experience while learning about important historical events and figures in American history. The program is hosted at the Adair Park Complex each year. Students split their time between four historic structures on the property: the Biffle Cabin, the Swanton House, the Thomas-Barber Cabin, and the Mary Gay House.

A performer playing Mrs. Swanton greets visitors on the steps of her 1820s home, which is built in the traditional dog-trot pattern. Mrs. Swanton entertains guests in the parlor while sharing her family's history and their importance to DeKalb. Moving through time and across the properties, Fiddlin' Dan the Mountain Man welcomes students next to a warm hearth in the Biffle Cabin. He teaches younger students about Georgia symbols and shares the history of our state



The performers at this year's History Quest.

with older students. Meanwhile, a performer reenacting baseball legend Hank Aaron shares the secret to hitting a home run while discussing the Civil Rights era in Atlanta. Famous Georgians such as Alonzo Herndon, the first African-American millionaire, and national icon Booker T. Washington share their role in our local history.

As students continue to travel throughout history on a quest to meet other famous American figures they come across Harriet Tubman, Herbert Hoover, and Paul Revere. Each of the eleven different reenactors captivates students with interactive storytelling and engaging performances, while meeting the public school's curriculum of Georgia Performance Standards for social studies education across multiple grades.

This year, over the course of four days, we presented history to over 1,180 students from second grade through eighth grade. First time visitors and returning students enjoyed reliving the tales by our local and national residents and heroes. †

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