

## DeKalb History Center

Historic DeKalb Courthouse  
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# Times of DeKalb

A Quarterly Journal

Spring  
2022

## DeKalb's Muslim Community and Community Café

By Marissa Howard, Programs & Membership Coordinator

**As-Salaam-Alaikum** is a greeting you will hear constantly at Community Café. This phrase is more than "hello." The official Arabic translation is "peace be with you." But for Muhammad Jihad, it's a vibe, a feeling, a greeting. For a Thursday at 1 pm, this place was bustling. The door continually opened with customers. A group of middle school girls on a field trip, parents with strollers, an older couple in their finest. I am here for an oral history interview with Muhammad Jihad, owner of Springgreens, but his interview was just the beginning. Springgreens is a Soul Food restaurant that specializes in healthy, halal, and vegetarian food.

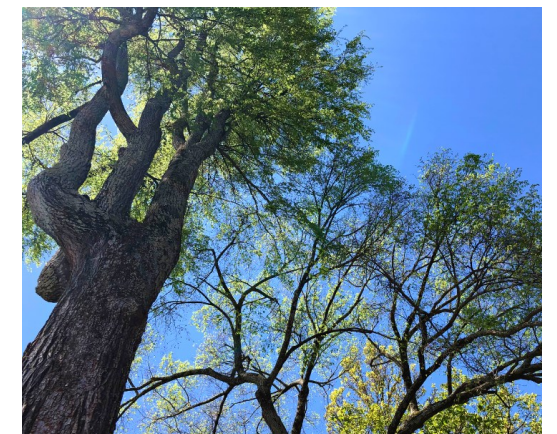
The hot bar is filled with steaming trays of bright yellow cabbage, crisp garlicky green beans, sweet potatoes, and the (we all know it's not a veggie but it's essentially one), mac and cheese. I grab a sampler plate of all the options and sit next to the tea shop located in the restaurant. I can't help but overhear a loud conversation of students directly behind me.

"Would you like a tea?" \*Sofia (name redacted), a teacher at an Atlanta area Muslim school, asks her class. Sofia is

*Continued on page 2*



Outside Community Café.



Part of the tree canopy overlooking the Decatur Square.

## Decatur's Long Time, Leafy Residents

This article was found in the archives, in our Environment, Trees subject file. We don't know the exact year it was written, most likely in the late 1970s, but thought it would be fun to reprint for our readers as a scavenger hunt. We realize that some of the geography, architecture, or topography may have changed since this was written. Happy hunting and Happy Spring!

*"DeKalb Historical Society volunteers have made a study of some of Decatur's long*

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# DeKalb's Muslim Community

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leading a field trip to this location, a historically Black Muslim community in Decatur, to celebrate Black History Month. "We have to support our people, " she declares with affection to Aleathia, the tea shop owner.

The students start to hover around the tea counter, excited at the opportunity to be away from school and have a glimmer of adulthood with their beverage. I find out later, that the teacher first brought her high schoolers and word spread like wildfire amongst the middle school. The girls behind me start to surround me, oblivious to their



surroundings in a way that's very natural to a group of middle schoolers. "Girls! Girls! Someone is sitting there! I am so sorry about that." I laughed off Sophia's apology to me. But I took this impromptu encounter to ask her a few questions.

I asked her what she meant by "supporting the community," and she explained she feels strongly about supporting the community, waving her hands to denote this shopping center and the Publix next door. "Eating here is like home, it's organic and delicious." The girls' tea orders are called, the majority get a lavender tea latte (maybe per suggestion by Aleathia for its calming properties) while Sofia gets an energizing afternoon caffeinated blend. This community is the oldest Muslim community in the Atlanta area, having been founded in the early 1960s. The mosque and school subsequently moved to Decatur in 1975. One of the founders was Iman Pleamons, retired Iman of the Atlanta Majid.

COVID impacted the Muslim Community, especially

during Ramadan. Sofia hopes 2022 Ramadan will be different. But in the meantime, she is bringing her students together over lavender London fogs and for her, a high caffeine energy tea. I walk over to the tea counter, interested to try some myself. Before I could order, Aleathia, the shop owner, asked, "What do you want your tea to do for you today?" Aleathia Shakir Saleem and Mariah Shakir Mitchell are the owners of Jaydia Ché Tea Shop located in Community Cafe. The shop features a wall of jars filled with whole leaf teas and every type of blend imaginable. They began Jaydia Ché as a place for the community and to connect with their ancestors.



Rooibos Vanilla Chai blend loose leaf tea from Jayida Ché.

To Aleathia and Mariah, making tea is a process.

A process that starts in the earth with the farmers harvesting their high quality, organic, loose leaf tea. The tea is then hand mixed and blended, not machine ground. She tells me about a popular fall blend; a pumpkin chai that was made up of local pumpkin they cut up and dehydrated at their workshop. Another blend they created for Black History Month is "Sweets and Roots," named after sweet potatoes and family roots, which is made from locally farmed sweet potatoes that they also dehydrated themselves. I finally decided on a rooibos chai blend. She explains that rooibos is native to South Africa and that instead of the typical clove, they used star anise to tell a different story. She encourages me to use all of my senses to experience the tea. Feel the warmth of the cup, smell the leaves, look at the colors of the leaves, breathe a little slower...slow down a little. Good tea is about the ingredients as much as it is about the process and relaxation of making it. After all, Jayida Ché is Arabic for "good tea".

The 2:00 pm lunch rush finally dies down and Muhammad joins me at the table near the tea shop. Muhammad Jihad, owner of Springgreens, is a young restaurateur with a large smile.

and the flow of work. Many of her plans had features said to reduce housework, such as removing awkward corners, and providing built-ins for storage which also eliminated the hard-to-clean spaces from underneath cabinets. The jury's still out on whether these features were actual time savers, but she nevertheless specified her knowledge as a woman to sell these features. Her designs enhanced a hostesses party by using pocket doors that could be easily opened to create large interior spaces for entertaining.

The MAK neighborhood is unique in that Wilburn lived there for her entire adult life, and over 20 of her first home designs are there. Learn more about Leila Ross Wilburn and her early design work on our Leila Ross Wilburn tour, happening monthly. Ticket required.

## Upcoming Tour Dates:

MAY 19 6:00—7:30 PM

JUNE 16 9:00—10:30 AM, 7:00—8:30 PM

JULY 13 9:00—10:30 AM, 7:00—8:30 PM ↗

## In Memoriam

Robert "Bob" W. Kelley

J. Philip Noble

## Join \* Renew \* Give

We hope you enjoyed the spring 2022 issue of Times of DeKalb. Please consider making a financial contribution through joining, rejoining, or a one time donation. Your generous contribution to the DeKalb History Center will provide you with a year-long membership that includes our quarterly journal 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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or call 404-373-1088 ext. 1003. Visit our website [www.dekalbhistory.org](http://www.dekalbhistory.org) to pay online.



# Upcoming Events



## Decatur Architecture Tour

Take a tour and explore the dynamic floor plans, house types, and architectural styles of some of Decatur’s historic gems and hidden treasures spanning 1830 to 1965. Ticket required.

**MAY 10** 6:00—7:30 PM

**JUNE 7** 7:00—8:30 PM

**JULY 12** 7:00—8:30 PM



## Archives Tour

Join us for a behind the scenes tour of the DHC’s archival collection areas, and view some fascinating archival material up close. Ticket required for non DHC members.

**MAY 17** 1:00—2:00 PM

5:00—6:00 PM

For more information on these events and how to attend, please visit [dekalbhistory.org](https://dekalbhistory.org) or scan here:



## Leila Ross Wilburn and the MAK Historic District

In 1911, a little-known Decatur architect was hired by developers Mason and Weekes to design and build speculative houses in what locals now know as the MAK neighborhood (McDonough, Adams, and Kings Highway).

This architect was Leila Ross Wilburn. With only a few years of drafting experience, she went out on her own and formed her own architectural practice. Wilburn designed hundreds of house plans, which she published in plan books. In practice for nearly 50 years, her designs and work can be found in houses, apartment buildings, and institutional structures.

Wilburn could have easily hid her gender from the public, as architecture was a man’s world...right? We often think of the 1950s as the time when a woman's influence over choices in the home became strong and influential, however women have long been the dominating force in designing the home.

I can’t help but be reminded of the recent popular TV show, *The Gilded Age*, where the 1870s railroad tycoon family, the Russells, built a mansion on Fifth Avenue in New York City. The wife, Bertha Russell, was in charge of everything in the home; from decorating to designing, and every small architectural detail in between. And of course, she was the real power behind the Russell family.

In the early 20th century, Wilburn designed for the burgeoning Southern middle class. Young women with families were becoming “domestic executives” by running the household and joining social clubs.

Wilburn’s designs featured specifics that catered toward women and addressed problems with entertaining, chores,



# and Community Café continued

He started Springreens in 2018 as a salad utopia, but altered course when a customer came in and commented “You know your mother cooks really, really good. You should see if she could come and cook hot food...So we got a steam table, she started cooking the hot food, and after that it just--it blew up.” Springreens is determined to offer a different type of soul food, one that is organic, fresh, and homemade. Food that heals from within. I ask him what soul food is to him; he starts, then pauses. “I can tell you what I envision....Soul food is a sunny day, people around, everyone happy...it tells a story of people, the people that cook it, the people that eat it. It's love.” Muhammad grew up in this community, attending the Muhammad School that is adjacent to the shopping center. At first many in the community were not sure about his concept, it was new but took over a space that had become occupied for a longtime by another restaurant. The previous restaurant wasn’t always as welcoming to others from different faiths or backgrounds. But things have changed. Muhammad explains that now, older Muslims have come up to him praising him, expressing what a good job he is doing by bringing everyone through the doors.



Springreens founders Muhammad Jihad and mother and chef, Jamella Jihad.



parking lot, doggie bags in hand, laughing as they finish up their lingering conversations. Seems like the good vibes lingering from Springreens is also in their doggie bags. ✦

A special thank you to Aleathia Shakir Saleem, Mariah Shakir Mitchell, Muhammad Jihad, Jamilah Jihad, Quran Shakir, Imam Emeritus Plemon El-Amin, Adilah Muhammad, and Safiyyah Shahid for contributing their oral histories to the DHC Archives. You can find the full interviews at <https://dekalbhistory.org/dekalb-county-archives-research/dekalb-history-center-collections-oral-history-b/>.

Please visit <https://dekalbhistory.org/dekalb-history-center-blog/> to view the full articles featured in this journal.

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## Decatur's Long Time, Leafy Residents continued

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time 'residents' who truly have their 'roots' in the city - its trees. For Decatur is a city of trees, especially when viewed from the top of any of the new multi-storied downtown buildings. Builders today are doing much to save and add trees. With the help of tree lovers Ruby Zumbrook and Deborah Gaudier, of the Historical Society, and Newton Hogg, of the DeKalb Extension Service, information on both historic and unusual trees has been compiled. This list will be an excellent guide for a walking tour for Vacation Bible Schools, Scouts, Day Care Centers, or out-of-town visitors.

### HISTORIC TREES:

(1) The big **Oak** surrounded by a retaining wall on the grounds of the Callaway Building on Trinity Place (opposite the new courthouse) has shaded many a church picnic in its day. It was saved when the new county building was built. It is an enduring landmark from the old Antioch AME Methodist Church, which played a significant role in the early life of Decatur. The church was organized in 1868 and met in a home. The first one-room structure was built six years later. The church grew to the extent that members would have to have tickets to get a place at the communion table or a seat in the building. (A history of this church is in the library of the DeKalb Historical Society.)

(2) The giant **Magnolias** in front of the Decatur Recreation Center, Sycamore Street, may well date back to the first residents of the 1830 home which occupied that block before the Center. Known as the Murphey-Scott-Cooper home, it was long a showplace with a collection of exotic plants and trees



Magnolia trees in front of the Decatur Recreation Center.

from around the world.

(3) On the north Candler Road corner of this plot is the **Horse Chestnut**, with fragrant cream-colored blossoms. It is the same species that lines the streets in Paris.

(4) The two **Maples** on adjoining lawns of the Swanton and Mary Gay Houses in the DeKalb Historic Complex on Trinity Place are gifts of MARTA, planted when the original Swanton maples were cut down. Benjamin Swanton brought the seeds for the first trees from Maine, wrapped in a pocket handkerchief, when he emigrated to Georgia with the gold rush of 1829.



Leaves from one of the Maple trees near the Swanton House.

(5) A large **Water Oak**, 150 years old, on the parking lot of the Old Depot was spared because of the intervention of the Historical Society. The venerable oak was about to be taken down for fear branches would fall and damage parked cars. An inspection by the state forestry department gave it a clean bill of health and it was saved.

(6) Another handsome tree saved by human compassion is the **Black Walnut** with the sidewalk built around it on Sycamore Street in front of the First Presbyterian Church.

(7) The **Bradford Pears** (with masses of spring blossoms) made recent history when Church Street was widened in the vicinity of Glenlake Pool. Four of the full-grown trees were moved to the Agnes Scott College campus. Not only have they survived Georgia's driest summer ever, but three of them have also survived a second move for building changes on campus. They are located near Rebekah Hall. Enter the first drive way from South McDonough Street south of College Avenue.

(8) The huge **Elm** at the First Atlanta Bank building on East Ponce de Leon Ave. stood its ground. It was saved by terms of the property sale.

(9) **Elms and other trees** on the lawn of the Old Courthouse were spared when citizens brought an injunction on their behalf.

(10) A very large **Dogwood** on the Agnes Scott campus necessitated the redesigning of the music building and was dubbed "The \$60,000 tree."

(11) The big **Water Oak** near the Decatur High School library is a living memorial to the late E.E. Treadwell who organized the first public school in Decatur in 1902. He said when grading was done for the old South building he noticed a small sprig of a tree had been spared. He put sticks around it and it continued to grow. He said he always thought of it as 'my tree.'

### UNUSUAL TREES:

(1) The **American Hornbeam** on the lawn of the Old Courthouse is a 'Georgia Champion Tree.' In 1977, the Georgia Forestry Commission issued a certificate so naming it as the largest species in the state. It spreads over much of the northwest lawn. An ironwood, it is a member of the birch family. It is sometimes called the 'muscle tree' because of the rippled effect of the bark. Its very hard wood was used by the pioneers to make ox yokes.

(2) A **Dawn Redwood** is the cone shaped evergreen at the corner of the Decatur City Hall on Trinity Place. There are five others at the First Atlanta Bank building on Ponce de Leon Avenue.



American Hornbeam on the lawn of the Historic DeKalb Courthouse.

(3) The **Incense Cedar** on the Candler Street bank of the Agnes Scott College campus is a native of Oregon, California, and Nevada.

(4) **Florida Palms** at the end of Ponce de Leon Court, off Ponce de Leon near Glennwood School, are rare this far north as are the Live Oaks on the Agnes Scott campus.

(5) The **Ginkgo Tree**, a native of China, is becoming increasingly popular for its distinctive bright yellow fall color. There is a marked one on the west lawn of the Old Courthouse and others in front of DeKalb Federal on Clairmont Avenue. This species is reputed to be 15 million years old and is referred to as a living fossil, as it is one of few surviving plants from prehistoric times." ✦



Dawn Redwood located next to Decatur City Hall.



Ginkgo tree located in front of One West Court Square.

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