

DeKalb History Center

Historic DeKalb Courthouse
101 East Court Square
Decatur GA 30030

Phone: 404-373-1088
Fax: 404-373-8287
www.dekalbhistory.org



DEKALB
HISTORY
CENTER

Business Supporters

Guardian

A.S. Turner & Sons, Inc.

GANT Systems

Fox Legal, LLC

Gotta Have It Catering

Historian

City of Decatur

McCurdy & Candler, LLC

Endive Fine Catering

Preservationist

Avalon Catering

Exquisite Delites Catering

Phenomenal Food by Chef Holly

Badda Bing Catering

Fox Bros. Catering

The Ramspeck

Bold Catering & Design

Gene Kansas Commercial

Simply Sated

Decatur Downtown Development

Real Estate

Sun in My Belly

Authority

Oakhurst Market

Talk of The Town Catering

District Catering

Party Execs

Zest Catering

Contributor

Decatur Package Store

Foxtail Coffee Decatur

New South Associates, Inc.

These business members support the History Center at the Contributor Level or above. For information call 404-373-1088, ext. 1003.

Times of DeKalb

Driving Tour Edition

Spring
2026

Southeast DeKalb Driving Tour

By Marissa Howard, Programs & Membership Coordinator

The Southeast DeKalb Driving Tour is a web-based tour that explores the layered history of communities across Southeast DeKalb County, including Lithonia, Redan, Rock Chapel, and Scottdale. Spanning the 19th and 20th centuries, the tour traces the region’s transformation from early railroads and agricultural communities into centers of industry, commerce, and civic life. From quarrying in Lithonia to textile production in Scottdale and mill activity along the South River, the tour follows the evolution from its beginning to the present day.

The DeKalb History Center has been collecting oral histories, archival material, and objects of Southeast DeKalb since our organization's founding in 1947. Over that time, DeKalb has changed significantly, from industries to demographics. This tour reflects those shifts by sharing stories of the

residents past and present. While the tour stops are geographically far apart, they are connected through shared themes that tell a broader history of DeKalb County. Equally important, the tour highlights the experiences of Black communities in Southeast DeKalb,

Inside
this
issue

Upcoming
Programs, pg. 3

Scenes from the
2026 Black History
Month
Celebration,
pg. 5



Panola Shoals Bridge, circa 1925.

documenting their resilience and contributions in the face of inequalities. From Reconstruction-era churches to community-built institutions like Bruce Street School, the tour addresses both the hardships and the achievements that shaped the region.



Article about Tobie Grant, from The Atlanta Journal, August 1926.

The tour uses archival material from the DeKalb History Center archives and is funded through a grant from Georgia Humanities. Additional partners and contributors to this project are the DeKalb Library System and the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance.

Scottdale Mill and Village

Scottdale was an unincorporated mill town. Scottdale Mills, a prime example of Southern industrial development, operated from 1901

Continued on page 2

to 1982. Typical for this industry, a “village” community was built for the workers by the mill owners to ensure their workforce was nearby.

The mill was constructed by George W. Scott Investment Company; Scott also founded Agnes Scott College. The site spanned 115 acres, fronting the Georgia Railway. The mill building was designed by Kramer & Co. from Charlotte, NC, an experienced mill architecture firm. When it opened, the factory would operate 10,000 spindles and 350 looms.

Like many Southern textile mills of the era, Scottdale Mills employed both men and women. Skilled positions were held predominantly by white workers, who rented the company-provided village houses. In addition to worker housing, there was a meeting space, daycare (419 Aldrich), and a health clinic (411 Aldrich). The company store and post office once stood on Ponce, directly in front of the mill.

Many of the homes in this area are single-story and built on piers. By the 1930s, many homes had enclosed their foundations, which improved heat retention in the winter. The homes were rented to employees for .25 cents per month. There were three, four, and six-room residences, all with 12-foot ceilings, picture molding, wainscoting, coal fireplaces and wood stoves. Homes were single-family residences or duplexes.

They were not built with indoor plumbing. Bathrooms



Scottdale Mill Store, circa 1920.

were added in the 1950s. You can see many of these bathroom additions on the backs of the homes today.

The entire village consisted of eight dirt roads and small lots. In addition to the community center, it also featured a green space, including a baseball field and Ingleside Presbyterian Church.

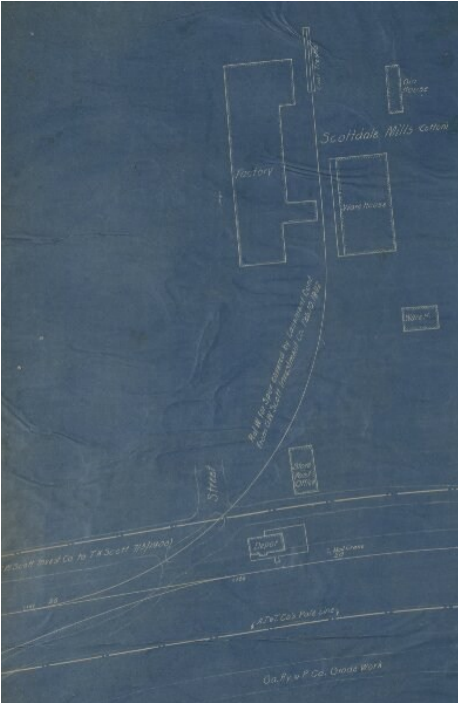
By the 1920s, the community was thriving, and Scottdale Elementary School (1924) was built on the corner of Laredo Drive and E. Ponce de Leon Avenue. This school was demolished in 1980. The mill provided sponsored activities with the Scottdale Mill Baseball team. The baseball team played from the 1930s until the 1940s. The Scottdale Mill team played against other mill teams in the area.

During World War II, the mill was contracted by the government to provide fabric for the war effort. In 1955, the mill houses were sold to employees. Many of the streets were renamed, eliminating names associated with the Scott family. In the decades that followed, a number of economic and international factors caused a general decline in domestic textile production, and this factory closed its doors in 1982. It remained abandoned until it was demolished in 1998.

Chapel First Baptist Church, Scottdale

While the Scottdale Mill Village housed white workers, the Black families located to the east of the tracks on the hillier, less desirable land. Although some Black residents found work at the mill, they were largely excluded from skilled positions. In response, the community developed its own economic and cultural identity.

Early Black churches were established: St Stephen’s AME (date unknown) and Chapel First Baptist (1887, rebuilt in 1948. Like



Plat map of Scottdale Mill and surrounding area, circa 1912.

Driving Tour continued

Chapel Methodist and the mountain behind it. The property included a smokehouse, wood shed, barn, and corn crib. While this area is rocky (literally a quarry in the backyard), they were subsistence farmers who made income in various other businesses, including a sawmill, general store, and photography studio. Eason Jackson Bond and his wife, Mary Evaline Nail Bond, built this home, on the same property as his father, Joseph Ballard Bond. ✦

This tour is funded by Georgia Humanities.



This Quarterly Journal features a small portion of the Southeast DeKalb Driving Tour. There are many more fascinating sites waiting to be explored.

To view the full tour, scan the QR code or visit dekalbhistory.org/public-programs-dekalb-history-center/



In Memoriam

Robert L. Brown Jr.

Paul Samuel Sharian

Join * Renew * Give

We hope you enjoyed the spring 2026 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.



Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____ Phone _____

Supporter Levels

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| ___ Guardian—\$2,500 | ___ Contributor—\$250 | ___ Household—\$65 |
| ___ Historian—\$1,000 | ___ Sustainer—\$135 | ___ Individual—\$35 |
| ___ Preservationist—\$500 | ___ Patron—\$85 | ___ Student/Teacher/Senior—\$30 |
| ___ One time donation | | |

Please mail this form with your contribution to: DeKalb History Center, 101 East Court Square, Decatur GA 30030 or call 404-373-1088 ext. 1003. Visit our website www.dekalbhistory.org to pay online.

last member of Congress to have enslaved people, and here at Panola Plantation, her family enslaved several people, too.

Felton’s family settled here in the 1820s and built a large house – and plantation farm – on a hill overlooking the shoals along what was then the “old Augusta Road.” She moved to Cartersville in the 1850s. In 1909, the house and 725 acres were divided into several farms and sold to multiple owners, including Robert M. Clark and Milton Candler. Attempts to restore the home were unsuccessful in 1933, and by 1948 it had burned.

Rock Chapel Methodist Church

Rock Chapel was an early community in DeKalb, established in or around 1825 when a log cabin Methodist meeting house was built. Joseph Ballenger Bond (1790-1863) donated land for the construction of a permanent church on this property. This sanctuary was built in 1887. Though difficult to see today, a very small granite outcrop, owned by the Bond and Chupp families, had been behind this church and cemetery. Though small, it was called Rock Mountain by the locals. Modest quarrying operations began here in the late 1890s. Production increased in 1904, when a railroad line was introduced. It is still quarried today. Many Rock Chapel residents later helped found the City of Lithonia and other local churches.

The original church and school were built on the location of the current cemetery. After the building burned in 1870, a new church was built – the one you see today. The school was relocated, just off the property. A Methodist church camp was built across Rock Chapel Road, where the EMBARC Community



Rock Chapel Methodist Church, circa 1940.

Southeast DeKalb

Youth Farm is presently. It is believed that the first camp meeting was held in the 1840s, and by the 1880s, large-scale meetings were being held under a semi-permanent structure. According to newspaper reports, 5,000 visitors would attend these meetings. Railroads normally used for Rock Chapel Quarry operations would bring thousands of visitors from Lithonia, and beyond, to these meetings.

One of the most significant surviving records in the collection of the DeKalb History Center is the Attendance Roll for Rock Chapel Methodist Church. This book recorded the names of all who attended, beginning in 1848. This important primary source not only features early landowners of the area, but also those who were enslaved. Listed only by first name and their enslaver, the book documents the lives of the enslaved, as well as the complicated intertwined history between slavery and the church. In 1854, 44 enslaved women and men were listed. Among a few of the names are: “Marbut’s Jane, Johnson’s Mariah, and Lee’s Hannah.”

From the church attendance roll, we know Hannah was first recorded in October 1854. While it mentions Lee, we can’t verify his first name since there are multiple Lee’s attending Rock Chapel at the time. After the Civil War, Hannah continued to attend church here. She was again listed in 1866 on the church roll, but now as Hannah Weaver. We know she was married to Olliver Weaver, but we don’t know that date and he isn’t listed on the roll.

By the 1880s, the Weavers were farmers, who owned 30 acres of land in Rock Chapel. Hannah remained a member at Rock Chapel Methodist until she died in 1903 and is buried, along with Olliver, in the segregated wooded area beside the church.

Architecturally, the oldest part of the church dates to 1887 Church records detail that the wood used was local pine, hand-cut and milled by congregants. Rock Chapel Cemetery is among the oldest in DeKalb County, with some graves dating to the 1840s.

The Bond Family home is located on Rock Chapel Road. It was built in 1872 and is a two-story plantation plain type house, defined by its floor plan. This type is one-room deep and two stories high at the front and often has a full-width one-story front porch, while the back of the house is always only one story. The Bond property once extended all the way to Rock

Driving Tour continued

other Black communities in DeKalb in the early nineteenth century, education was provided by churches. A Rosenwald school, called the Avondale Colored School, was built for Black children in 1924, the same year the white Scottsdale Elementary School was built. It opened with 62 pupils and five faculty members; by 1940 it extended to the eleventh grade.

In 1944, DeKalb County operated 17 schools for Black students. Despite the court ruling of "separate but equal" in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Black schools in the county often lacked basic necessities compared to their white counterparts. Beginning in 1950, DeKalb attempted to modernize and consolidate Black schools while maintaining segregation; The county constructed six new modern and up-to-date schools.

In 1955, Hamilton High School opened and replaced the Avondale Colored School. It was



Avondale Colored School, circa 1940.

Continued on page 4

Upcoming Programs



May 6, May 12, May 27, June 2

Decatur Architecture Walking Tour 2026

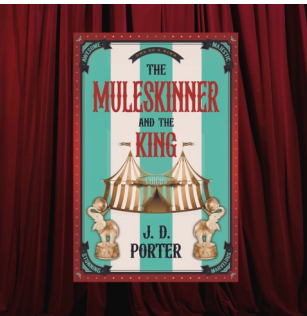
Attendees will see a variety of building styles, from classical to modern, spanning both commercial and residential architecture. Each tour highlights distinct architectural themes and topics. This is a ticketed tour.

May 6, 6:00 pm - Historical and Revival Architecture

May 12, 6:00 pm - Decatur Square (.4 miles, leisure pace, accessible to benches)

May 27, 7:00 pm - Residential

June 2, 7:00 pm - Mid Century Decatur



May 20

Hops at the History Center: The Muleskinner & the King

6:00—7:00 pm

Join author J.D. Porter as he discusses his book, *The Muleskinner & the King*.

\$5 for Members / \$10 for Non-members

Executive Committee

President: Angela Turk
President Elect: Charlene Bowden
Past President: Scott Candler, IV
Treasurer: Jack Regan
Secretary: Valerie Biggerstaff
At Large: Jacqui Steele

Board of Directors

Ebony A. Anderson
Valerie R. Ayer
Monique C. Brown
Scott Drake
Carroll Knabe
Jackson McQuigg
Stacy Rieke
D. E. Smith
Michael Strong
Bob Stubbs
Lynn Watson-Powers
Demetrice M. Williams
Kathryn E. Wilson

Trustees

Mary K. Jarboe
Cathy Mullins
Claudia Stucke
Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr.
Betty Willis

Staff

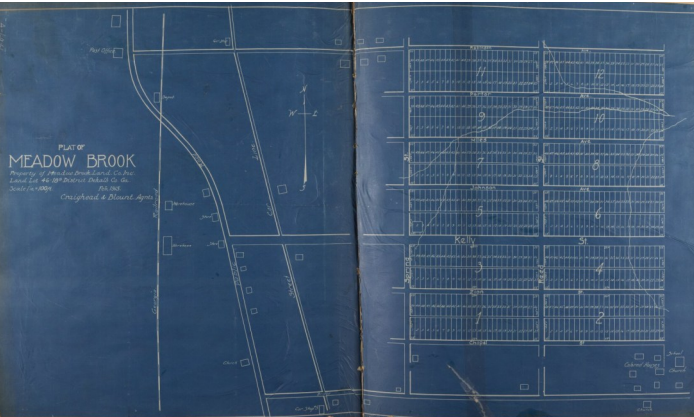
Executive Director:
Melissa Carlson
Archivist & Volunteer Coordinator:
Jennifer Blomqvist
Rental & Preservation
Coordinator:
Mallory Donaldson
African American History
Coordinator:
Monica El-Amin
Programs & Membership
Coordinator:
Marissa Howard
Exhibits & Communications
Coordinator:
Rebecca Selem Martin
Building Attendant:
DeSean Skeete

Southeast DeKalb Driving Tour continued

named after Mrs. Maude Hamilton-Dawson, the school’s first principal. It was the first school in DeKalb County to be named in honor of an African American citizen.

Across the street, Robert Shaw Elementary also opened in 1955. Robert Shaw was a local farmer in Scottdale who donated his land for the school. In an area once described as lacking recreational opportunities, these schools became centers for student and community life.

Both schools closed in 1969, as part of court-ordered desegregation of the DeKalb County School System. The closure of only the Black schools in DeKalb County was part of a larger strategy, and according to historian Charles C. Bolton, “School desegregation plans often called for the closing of



Plat map of Meadow Brook, 1915.

Black schools or the alteration of their identities as Black schools in order to allay White fears about their children going to schools in Black neighborhoods.”

Scottdale would never be the same without the schools.

Many places in Scottdale are named after Tobie Grant (1887-1968). Born in Atlanta, she and her husband, Julian Grant, purchased land in what was then called Meadow Brook. That development was marketed exclusively to Black buyers in the late 1910s and lots sold quickly. The Grants purchased dozens of lots and established a farm, as did other buyers. Farming was not their only business. Tobie's claim to fame was fortune-telling. From the second floor of her home in Scottdale, she advised businessmen and women on love and marriage, and was even consulted by the police in missing persons cases. Her business thrived, and at one point she saw 40-50 visitors a day

– these clients were usually white. She was featured in 1926 with a full-page spread in the *Atlanta Journal*: “Tobie Solves all Atlanta Mysteries.” It shouldn’t be a surprise, then, that Tobie Grant Lane appeared as a street name in a 1925 plat map for Eskimo Heights (the next large-scale property development in Scottdale after Meadow Brook). In 1960, Tobie donated 40 acres to the Scottdale community for a recreation center and library.

Panola Shoals

Dotting the landscape all over South DeKalb were mills that utilized the many rivers flowing through this area. Here, along the shoals of the South River, at what was called Flat Rock, there were two. In 1871, investors from Patterson, New Jersey, approached Robert M. Clark, who was operating a small sawmill here. With new investments, the mill, now called Oglethorpe Manufacturing, expanded to include cotton textiles.

Clark made a good amount of money on the factory deal and received 183 shares of Oglethorpe Manufacturing. Just a few years later, Clark purchased the majority of the stock and began constructing an additional mill across the river, called Panola. Panola comes from Choctaw, a Native American word meaning “cotton” or “thread.”

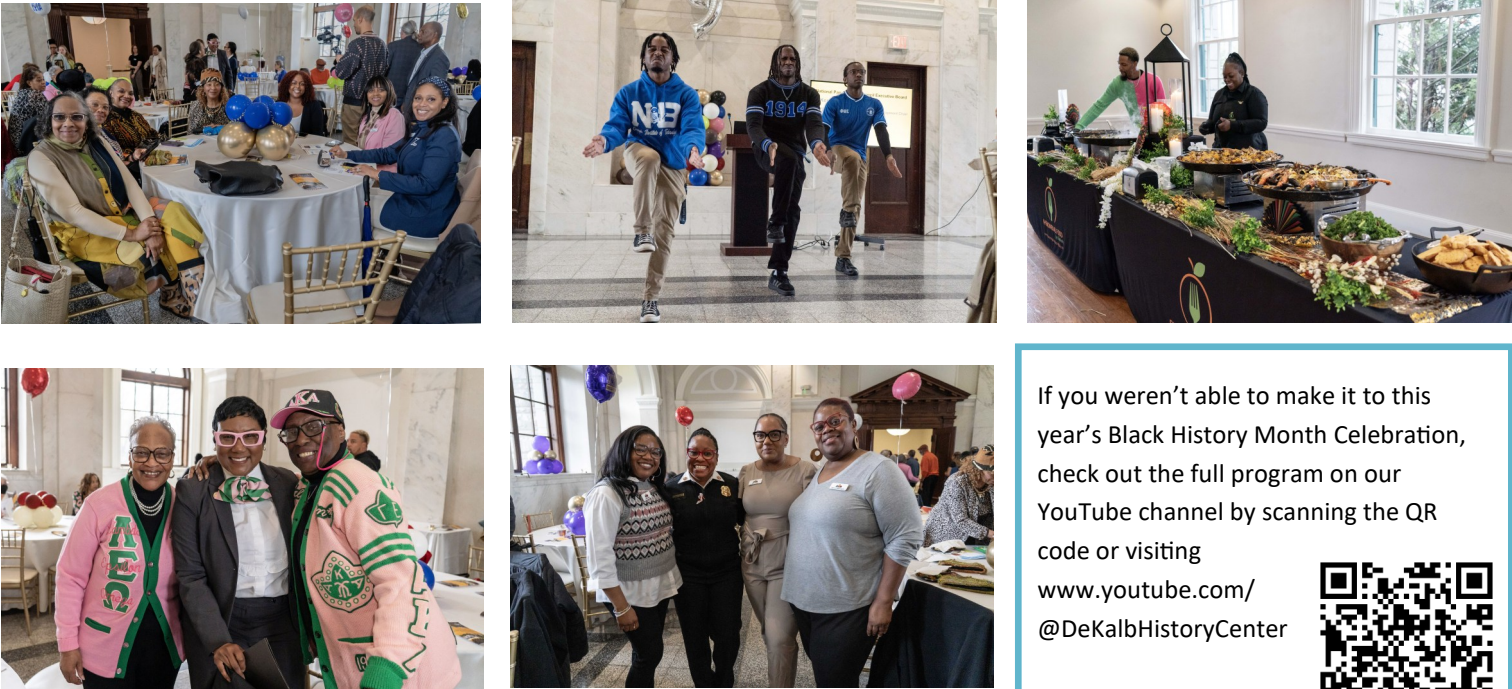
The bridge over the South River was DeKalb County’s last remaining covered bridge, built in 1872 by Robert Clark. In 1937, a modern replacement bridge was constructed with funding from the WPA.

Over the next few decades, both factories suffered floods and fire, but only Panola was rebuilt into a power station called Panola Light and Power. This power station brought electricity to Lithonia and Conyers from 1905 until 1925, when it was sold to the Georgia Railway and Power Company.

Across the shoals was the childhood home of Rebecca Latimer Felton (1835-1930). Her life, career, and legacy are complicated. Felton was the first woman to serve in the United States Senate. She was appointed to fill a vacancy and took the oath on November 21, 1922. Her appointment was largely symbolic, as she was 87 and served only 24 hours. She advocated for women’s suffrage and strongly supported gender equality. At the same time, she was also an outspoken white supremacist and advocate of segregation. She was the

Continued on page 6

Scenes from the 2026 Black History Month Celebration



If you weren’t able to make it to this year’s Black History Month Celebration, check out the full program on our YouTube channel by scanning the QR code or visiting www.youtube.com/@DeKalbHistoryCenter



Special thanks to our Sponsors



Catherine Mullins



Deborah & Harold Van Broekhoven

Judge Gregory A. Adams
American Baptist Historical Society
Brave + Kind Bookshop
Caroline Freeman

Councilman John J. Funny, Brookhaven District 4
Kelly Jordan
Michael Lehman
Martha Pacini

Pete & Charlotte Pfeiffer
Lawrence Sharp Realtors, LLC
Claudia & Carl Stucke
Commissioner Ted Terry, DeKalb District 6