

# DESIGNING DECATUR

200 YEARS OF BUILDING





# DESIGNING DECATUR: 200 YEARS OF BUILDING

*Designing Decatur* celebrates 200 years of Decatur's built environment. It introduces the city in a personal, interactive way. Decatur's buildings have a rich and varied architectural vocabulary. Our city is linked to the railroad and the Tennessee River. Our buildings show the beginning of state government in Old State Bank and the growth of industry with Connecticut Fabric Mills. You can trace the development of Decatur through the mosaic tiles at Frank's Hardware store and the flashing neon lights on the Princess Theatre. This city imagines, designs, and makes things. The delicate tracery of Victorian era houses and the heavy concrete of our Brutalist courthouse show the constant push to master trends and control our space. The pointed arches of our churches move our eyes to the heavens while the lush plantings at Delano Park keep us grounded in the present.

We are introducing a new generation to our city's history. This publication is for elementary school students to enjoy. It is geared towards fourth graders, who spend part of their year learning about Alabama history. These buildings matter. They are our legacy from the past and a link to the future. Pick up a pack of crayons – read, puzzle solve, and color your way through *Designing Decatur*. How have others imagined our city? What did these buildings mean to prior generations? What do they mean to you? What is your favorite building, and why?

## SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING ARTISTS, WHO GRACIOUSLY DONATED THEIR TIME TO CREATE OUR COLORING PAGES:

Hannah Clemmons (Cover Art, Alabama Farmer's Cooperative, and Delano Park)

Brian Keith (People's Bank, Chapel Hill Church)

Tracy McCann (Carnegie Visual Arts Center, Connecticut Fabric Mill)

DeAnn Meely (Austinville Elementary)

Frances Tate (First Missionary Baptist Church, Carver Elementary)

Bryson Thurston (Gibson's Bar-B-Q, Point Mallard Wave Pool)

Special thanks to Judge David Breland, Director of Events and Museums for the City of Decatur and John Allison, Morgan County Archivist, for all of their reviews, sites visits, and supplemental research, and to Shelby Selman, with NARCOG, for skillfully handling the project design and layout.

Partially funded by the Historic Preservation Fund, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior.

Additional funding and donations provided by: the City of Decatur, the Decatur Downtown Redevelopment Authority, and the North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments.

Photography by Patrick Hood

Booklet created by Caroline T. Swope, M.S.H.P., Ph.D., the Historic Preservation Specialist for Decatur, Alabama. Copyright City of Decatur, Alabama 2020



# FLASHBACK: 100 YEARS OF DOWNTOWN

Cities can change a lot in just 100 years! The first picture is Bank Street, taken around 1880-1910. The second image shows Second Avenue in Albany, around 1900-1920. **How are these streets the same today as they were 100 years ago? How have they changed?**







# OLD STATE BANK

925 Bank Street

1833



## Can You Draw A Line To These Features?

- 1 A low pitched roof with a **pediment** front (a pediment is a triangle)
- 2 A front porch supported by **columns**
- 3 A classical column  
(Columns have three major parts: a base, a shaft, and a capital. The capital can have different designs. The design on the capital for this building is called Doric. **Doric capitals** are simple. Some of the best known are visible at the Parthenon in Greece.)

## BUILDING HISTORY

Decatur's celebrated Old State Bank has been the backdrop to countless prom and wedding photos! Built in 1833, it is Alabama's oldest standing bank building. It originally housed the Decatur branch of the Alabama State Bank. Alabama's state banks were created by the Alabama legislature. They decided to end direct taxation to fund our government. Instead the state government would be funded with profits from state banks. A national depression in 1837 stopped those plans, but the building remained in use for other purposes. During the Civil War it served as a Union hospital. It is one of the few buildings in Decatur to survive the Civil War. The bank building was then used by the First National Bank of Decatur, and it later became a boarding house. In the 1930s it was donated to the American Legion, who later gave it to the city.





## GREEK REVIVAL STYLE

The designer of the bank is unknown. The style they used, Greek Revival, was very popular during the early 1800s. Architects and builders used pattern books, which were filled with detailed drawings, for help in designing houses and public buildings. The Greek Revival style was often selected for its association with stability and democratic government. Greek Revival architecture was common from 1820 until 1860.

### HOME... IN A BANK?!

To keep the deposits safe in the bank, the main cashier often lived in the building. The second floor of the bank had bedrooms and living space for his family.

**What do you think it was like living above a bank? What kind of business would you enjoy living above? Why?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

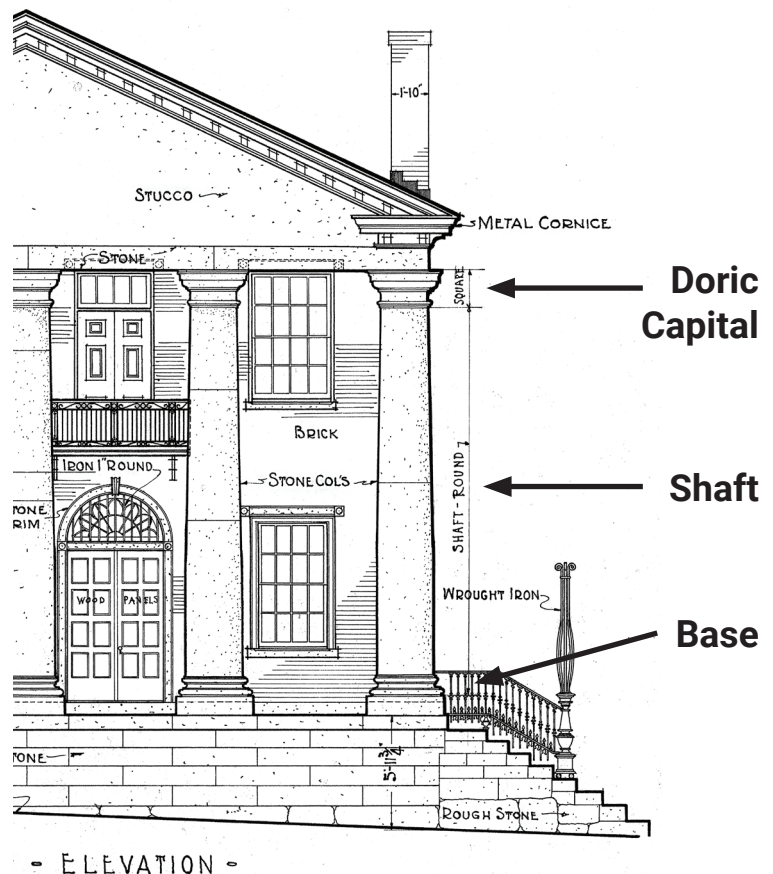
---

## ARCHITECTURAL TERM

### *Fanlight*



A fanlight is a semicircular window with radiating glass designs that make it look a lot like an open fan. The window is placed directly over a door and provides additional light inside the building.





# FIRST MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

233 Vine Street NW

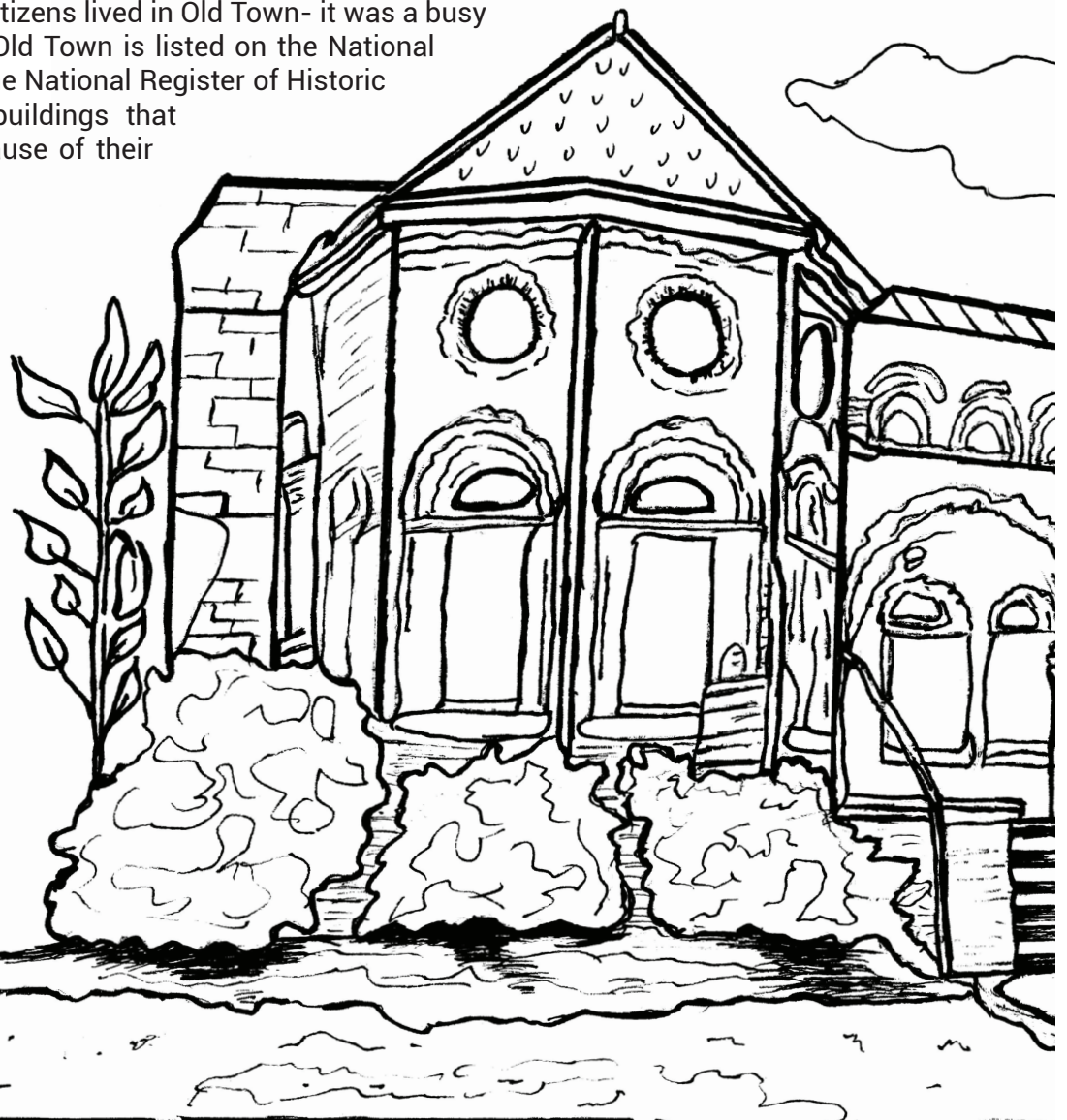
1921-1922

Architect: Wallace Augustus Rayfield

This church, with its massive red brick walls, has a special place in Decatur's history. The church was organized after the Civil War, by freed African Americans, in 1866. Early services were held in a private home, and later in a rented store. By 1873, the congregation had enough money to purchase a former Methodist church building on the corner of Market and Canal Streets. By 1910, the congregation had grown, and they needed a bigger building. Community leaders, including Dr. Willis E. Sterrs, S. S. Sykes, and G. F. Oliver, secured a loan to purchase the present site of the church.

This church building has been an important anchor for the community. The neighborhood around it is where Decatur first developed and is called "Old Town." The first buildings in Old Town were almost all destroyed during the Civil War. Decatur residents quickly rebuilt their city. Many prominent African American citizens lived in Old Town- it was a busy commercial district. Most of Old Town is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places is a list of special buildings that deserve to be preserved because of their history.

The church sanctuary was designed by Wallace Augustus Rayfield. Rayfield was an African American architect from Georgia. He attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. He then earned a degree in architecture from Columbia University. Booker T. Washington, a famous African American educator, offered Rayfield a job at Tuskegee Institute.





Rayfield became the Director of the Architectural and Mechanical Drawing Department. After several years he left Tuskegee and moved to Birmingham to start his own business. He designed thousands of buildings, including churches, like the well-known 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham and Ebenezer Baptist Church in Chicago. Both of these churches share the same triple arched opening entry design that First Missionary Baptist has along its front. The three arched entry is a design detail that many churches have, and signifies the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**If you were going to build a church, what would it look like?**

---

---

---

---

---







# THE EDWARDS HOUSE

214 Canal Street NE

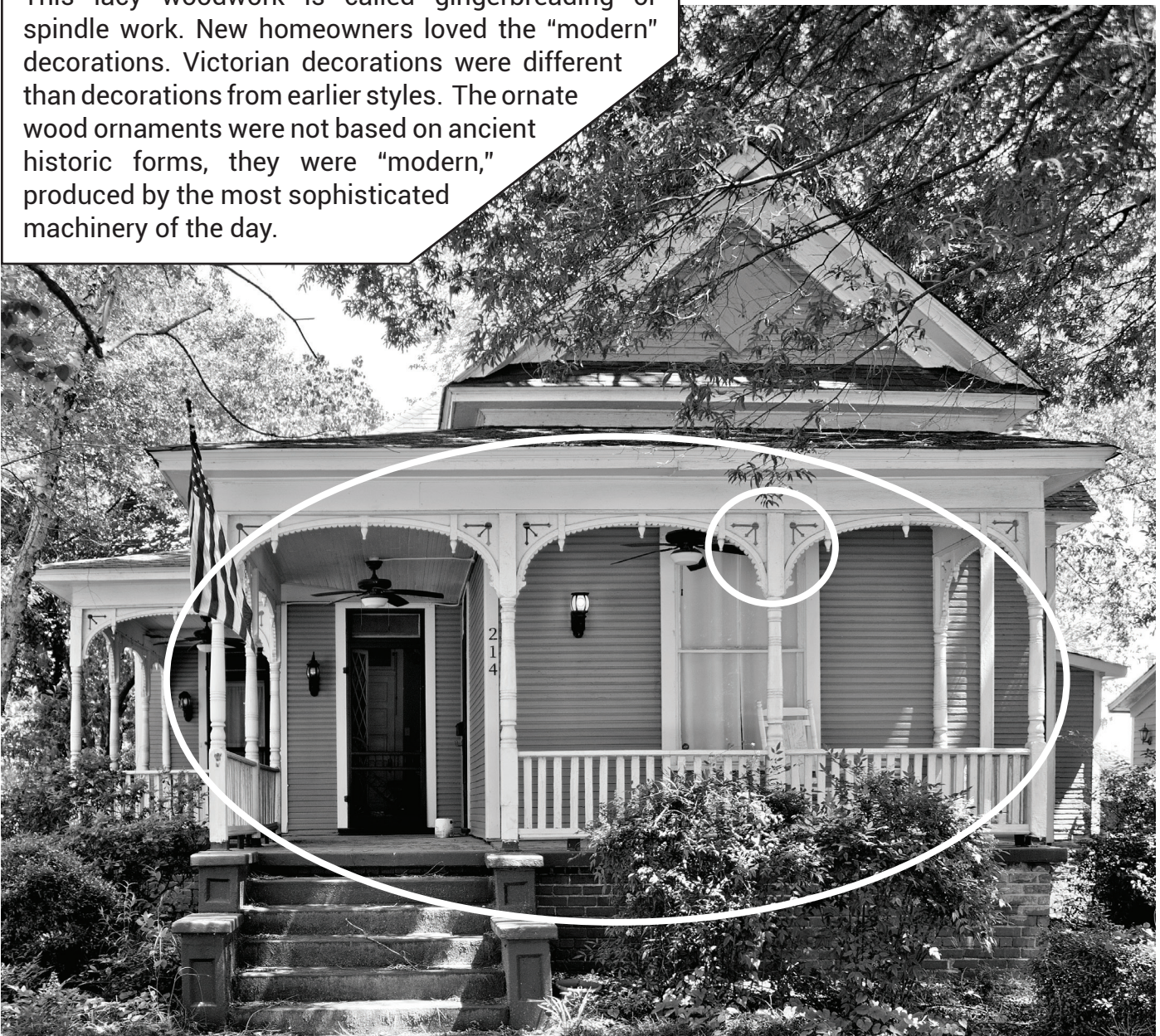
c1905

## QUEEN ANNE VICTORIAN STYLE

Decatur was once filled with hundreds of Victorian houses. This style was popular from the late 1800s through the early 1900s. The houses have steeply pitched roofs and irregular shapes created by porches that can wrap around the buildings. Victorian styled houses often have fancy decorative woodwork. This lacy woodwork is called gingerbreading or spindle work. New homeowners loved the "modern" decorations. Victorian decorations were different than decorations from earlier styles. The ornate wood ornaments were not based on ancient historic forms, they were "modern," produced by the most sophisticated machinery of the day.

Can You Draw A Line To These Features?

- 1 Partial or full-length **front porch**
- 2 **Gingerbreading**







.....

What kind of decorations for the outside of your house can you design?

.....

**EARLY RESIDENTS: THE EDWARDS**

William J. and Effie C. Edwards lived in this house from the early 1910s until the 1960s. William owned a tailor and dry cleaning business at 414 Bank Street, near Old State Bank. He could easily walk to work from the house, and even walk home for lunch in the middle of the day! The couple saw lots of changes in the neighborhood. They watched Decatur transition from horse and buggies, to streetcars, to the automobile age of the 1950s and 60s. By the 1960s, this neighborhood was considered old-fashioned. Many people wanted to live in a new modern home in the suburbs. Today people prize the neighborhood for its closeness to the businesses on Bank Street and the historic homes.

**FAMILY TREE**

Old Town, Old Decatur, Albany, Austinville, and the neighborhood around Moulton Street West still have dozens of Victorian era houses. Some Victorian houses are two stories tall, others are simply one story, like this house. But much like family members, they all have some shared features that indicate they are related. Sometimes the houses can change over time with new siding or even windows put in. But ... if you look carefully you can see the original house. There are other Victorian houses near this house. Look at the Victorian houses at 204 Canal Street NE, 111 Cain Street NE, and 213 Cain Street NE. **In what ways are these houses similar? How are they different?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# DELANO PARK

825 Gordon Drive SE

1887, named in 1934, dedicated in 1941

Landscape Architect: Nathan Franklin Barrett

Take time to stop and smell the roses! Historic Delano Park has places to play, relax, and explore. The beautiful rose garden provides space for graduation, wedding, and family photos. On hot summer days the park's splash pad is a cooling place for children to play. Delano Park has changed a lot during its 133-year history. In the park's early years there was a nine-hole golf course. By the 1930s a playground, wading pool, bandstand, dance pavilion, and picnic shelters were added. Carolyn Cortner Smith, the first female architect in Alabama, designed the stone structures built during the 1930s. The Delano Park rose garden was planted during this time and filled with roses and crepe myrtles. Trees were transplanted from Bankhead National Forest. In 1934, the park was named Delano, honoring President Franklin D. Roosevelt's mother, Sara Ann Delano. In 2000 the Delano Park Conservancy formed. The volunteer organization works with the city to promote and preserve the park. They have planted hundreds of trees, restored the historic stone structures, and provided new signage.

Delano Park was part of the "New Decatur" development. This is the neighborhood we now call Albany. This neighborhood was originally a separate city from Old Decatur. Construction started in 1887 by the Decatur Land Improvement and Furnace Company. The company was a group of southern and northern businessmen. They wanted to rebuild and expand manufacturing and transportation after the destruction of the Civil War. More than 7.5 million dollars was spent purchasing and developing 5,600 acres of land southeast of Decatur. Both New Decatur and Delano Park were designed by Nathan Franklin Barrett. Barrett was a famous landscape architect who also designed the company town of Pullman, Illinois.

**If you designed a park, what features would you add to it?**

---

---

---

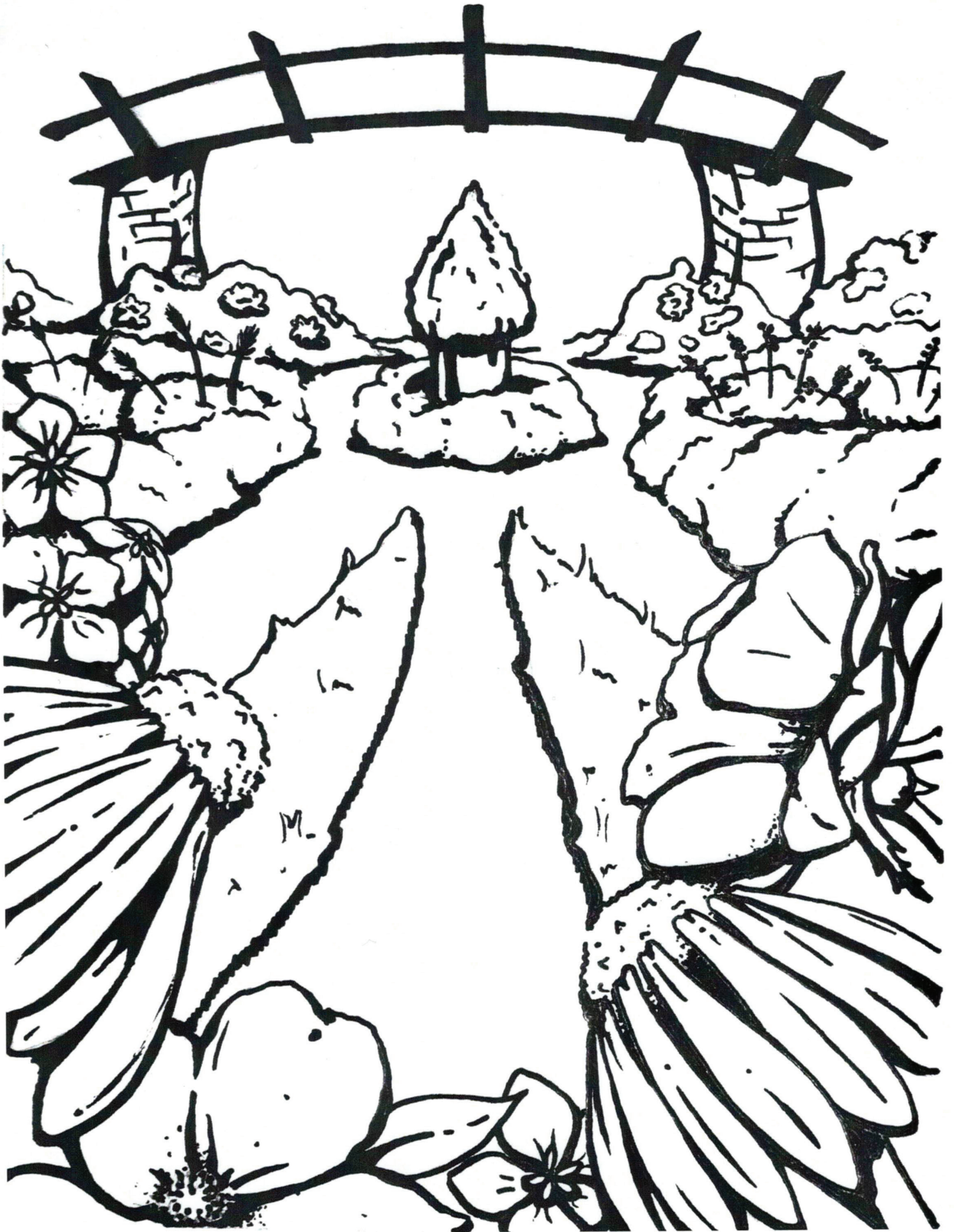
---

---

---

---





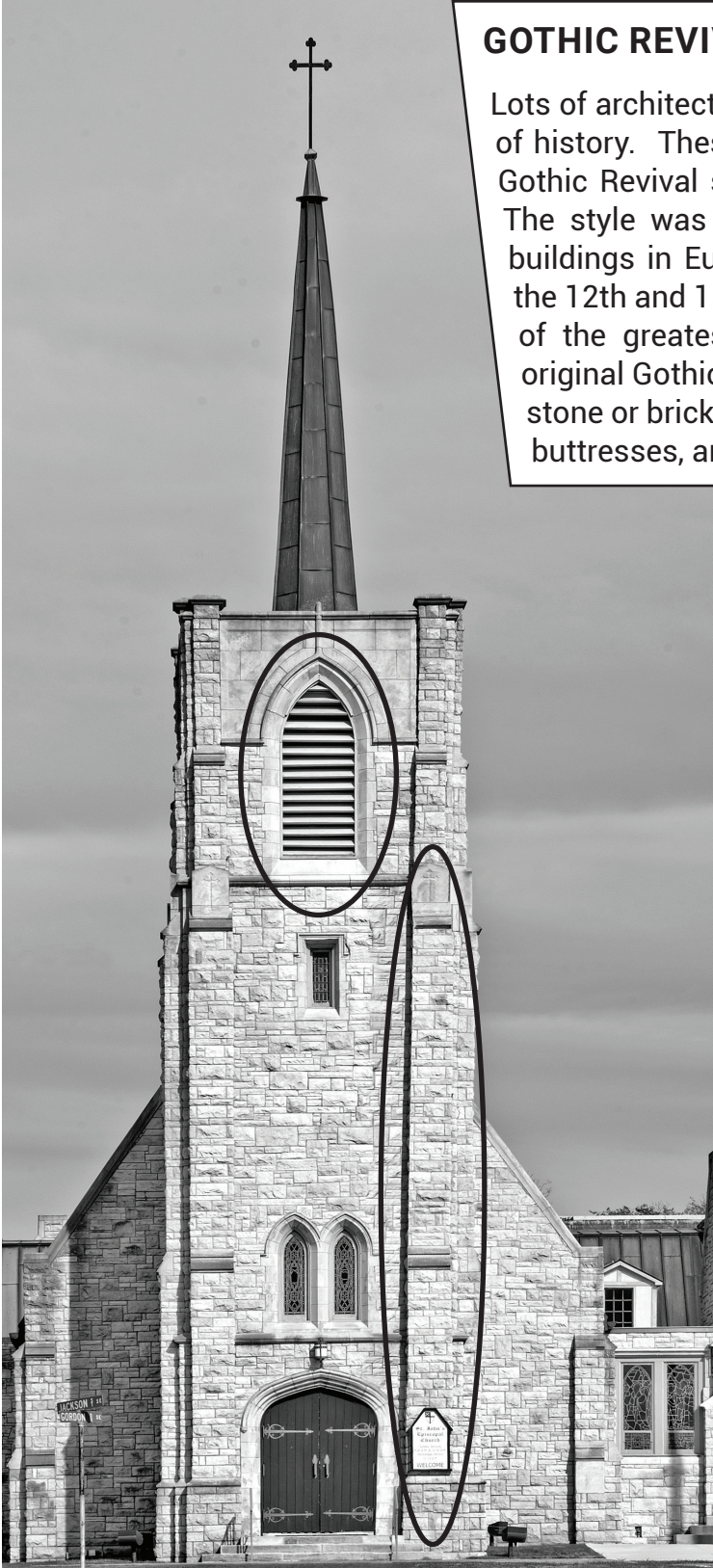




# ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

202 Gordon Drive SE

1892



## GOTHIC REVIVAL STYLE

Lots of architectural styles copy designs from older periods of history. These styles are usually called "revivals." The Gothic Revival style was popular during the 19th century. The style was based on the much older original Gothic buildings in Europe. These buildings were built between the 12th and 15th centuries, hundreds of years ago. Some of the greatest cathedrals in Europe were built in the original Gothic style. Certain design details are common—stone or brick walls, large pointed stained glass windows, buttresses, and bell towers.

### Can You Draw A Line To These Features?

- 1 Lancet arches** are used for both window and door openings. These are sometimes called pointed arches.
- 2 Engaged buttresses** add strength to exterior walls that are weakened when lots of holes are cut for doors and stained-glass windows.

Many of the design details for Gothic and Gothic Revival churches (lancet arches, buttresses, towers, steep roofs) point up towards the sky. Why do you think this is important for church design?

---

---

---

---



## BUILDING HISTORY

St. John's soaring stone tower is a familiar sight in the Albany district. The congregation formed in 1867 and the first church building was on Bank Street. In 1892 a small church building was constructed at the corner of Gordon Drive and Jackson Street. In 1940 the building changed quite a bit. They turned the church on the lot to face Second Avenue, and made it bigger. A tower was added, and the church was covered with limestone masonry as well.

### How Many Of These Can You Find On The Building?



Lancet Arches



Engaged Buttress

### BONUS BUILDING!

Decatur has other Gothic Revival Churches. See how many you can find.

- First Baptist (123 Church Street NE)
- St. Andrew Church of Grace (109 Memorial Drive NW)
- Westminster Presbyterian Church (801 Jackson Street SE)
- Central United Methodist (616 Jackson Street SE)
- Grant Street Church of Christ (240 Grant Street SE)

**How are these churches similar to St. John's Episcopal?**

---

**How are they different?**

---





# FRANK'S HARDWARE STORE

816 Bank Street  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

## LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Ever wish you could live downtown? During the late 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings had stores on the first floor. Offices or apartments were on the second floor. Large glass windows allowed people walking down the sidewalk to easily see items the store sold. Recessed

doors provided more display area and protection from the weather. Transom windows, above the front display windows, let daylight deep into the building. Brick corbels project beyond the wall and provide inexpensive decorative accents.



### Can You Draw A Line To These Features?

- 1 Recessed front door** and large glass display windows
- 2 Vertical transom windows** above the main display windows
- 3 Brick corbels** that project beyond the front wall





**If you were going to design a building for a store, what would it look like?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## EARLY DECATUR STORES

This building first housed the Lide Hardware store. In 1919, the building was purchased by Sam Frank. He remodeled the front and added the mosaic entry with his name. Mr. Frank was a Jewish immigrant from Russia. He lived in Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee before moving to Decatur in 1911. He lived with his wife in the second floor apartment above their store. The Franks were members of the Jewish merchant community in Decatur, drawn to the city by its economic success. Jews immigrated to the United States so they could practice their faith more freely. A number of Jewish families owned dry good stores. Dry good stores typically sold a variety of non-food items for households – particularly fabrics and sewing supplies. Almost half of the early 20th century dry good stores in Decatur were owned by Jews. Most of these stores were located on Bank Street.



**How many other buildings on this block have corbels?**

---

---

---

---

**How many different corbel designs can you find? Can you find different corbel designs in the 2nd Avenue business district?**

---

---

---

---

---



# CARNEGIE VISUAL ARTS CENTER

207 Church Street NE  
1904

Decatur's magical arts center has beautiful starburst windows. The building originally housed Decatur's public library. The Carnegie Foundation, which was created by American businessman Andrew Carnegie, paid for the building. In 1901 Andrew Carnegie was the richest man in the world, but he did not want to keep his fortune. He believed that "the man who dies rich, dies disgraced." So what did he do? He gave away 90% of his fortune. That money would be equivalent to billions of dollars today. A lot of his money funded libraries. By 1919, almost half the public libraries in the United States were funded by Carnegie.

The Carnegie Foundation helped build more than 1,600 libraries in the United States between 1883 and 1929. Any city or town could apply for building funds, if they agreed to provide land for the building and pay staff. Alabama originally had fourteen Carnegie libraries, but only eight are still standing. Although each city provided their own library design, the Carnegie Foundation did have specific requirements for the inside. Open space on the main level provided area for the book stacks, and lots of windows were required to provide light for the interior. A two level layout provided space on the ground floor for a public lecture room, bathrooms and staff/service areas.

This building is Neoclassical Revival in style. This style was popular for a long time, from 1895 until the 1950s. It has symmetrical designs with classical columns and details. The style was often used for public buildings, banks, and churches. These organizations were expected to have traditional and stable public images. Decatur used the Carnegie as their public library for more than 70 years, and it continued to house the children's library until 1976. For the next twenty years, neighboring First Baptist Church used the building for their youth center. In 1997, the Decatur Arts Council leased the Carnegie Library from the city. It has served as an inspiring gallery space and arts center since 2003.

**This building has served as a library, a church youth center, and a fine arts center. What could be some other uses for the building?**

---

---

---

---

---







# CARVER SCHOOL

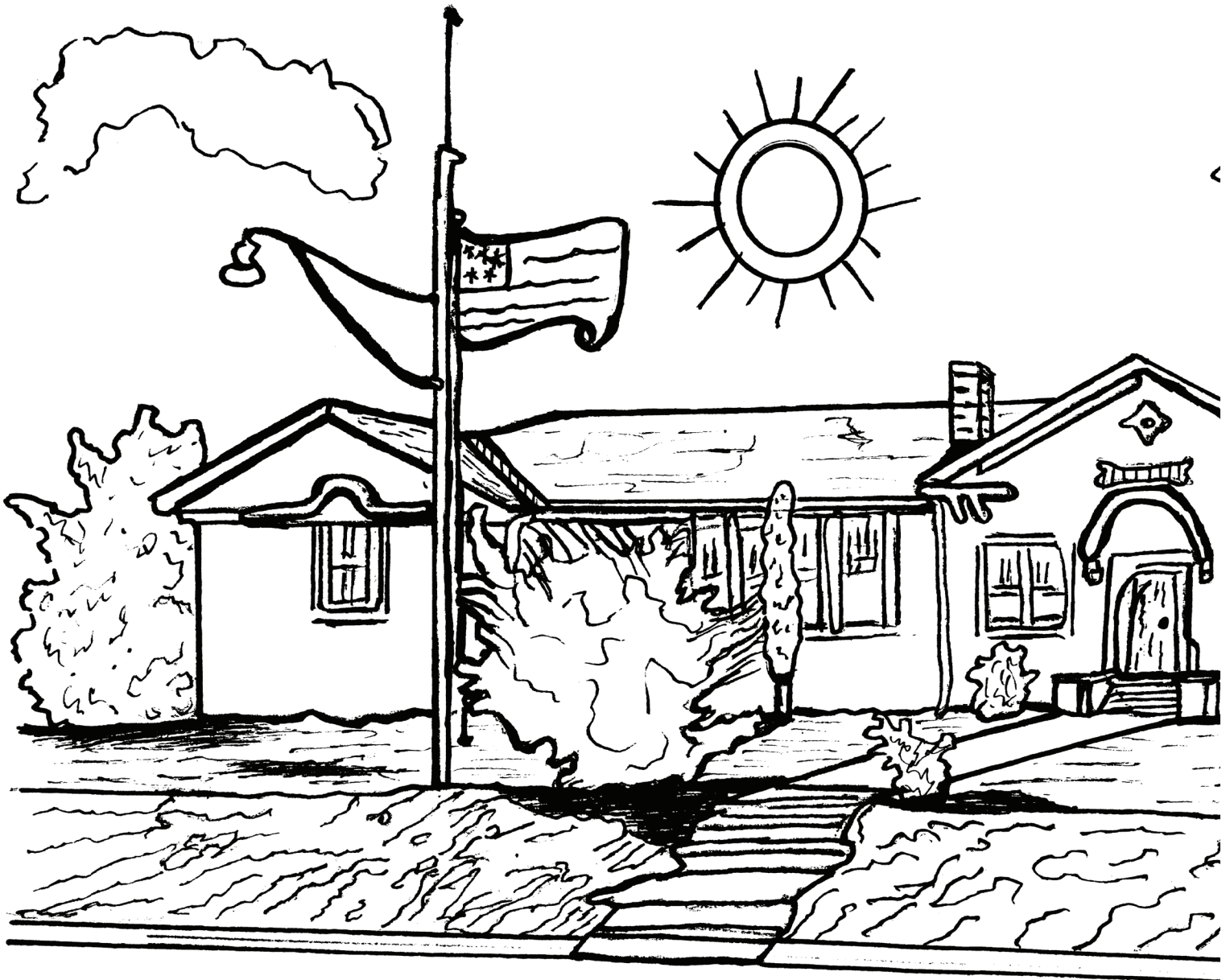
809 Church Street NE

1927-1928

Architect: Horace C. Abshire

This school, with its large windows and solid brick walls, is the oldest remaining African American school in Decatur. Generations of students have passed through Carver's doors. The school was originally named Albany Negro School. This school was the only one that provided public education to African American students on the east side of Decatur. It was a replacement for an older African American school, located nearby on Gibbs Street, known as the East End Colored School.

In 1935, the Decatur Board of Education approved a request to change the name of the school. The new name would honor Professor George Washington Carver. This school was the first school in the state named in honor of Dr. Carver. Professor Carver was an African American scientist and professor at Tuskegee College. His research focused on how to prevent soil depletion, but he is famous for his work with peanuts and sweet potatoes. He found uses for them in everything from medicine and cosmetics, to glue and paint.





A marble slab with the words "Carver School" was purchased by the school's principal, Professor Wilson, and the Parent Teacher Association and proudly placed over the front entrance. Carver visited Decatur in June of 1935, when the school was dedicated in his honor. During his visit, he delivered a sermon for the Decatur Negro High School graduating class of 1935. Because many people wanted to hear Dr. Carver speak, the event was held at the Princess Theatre. More than a thousand people, black and white, packed the theatre.

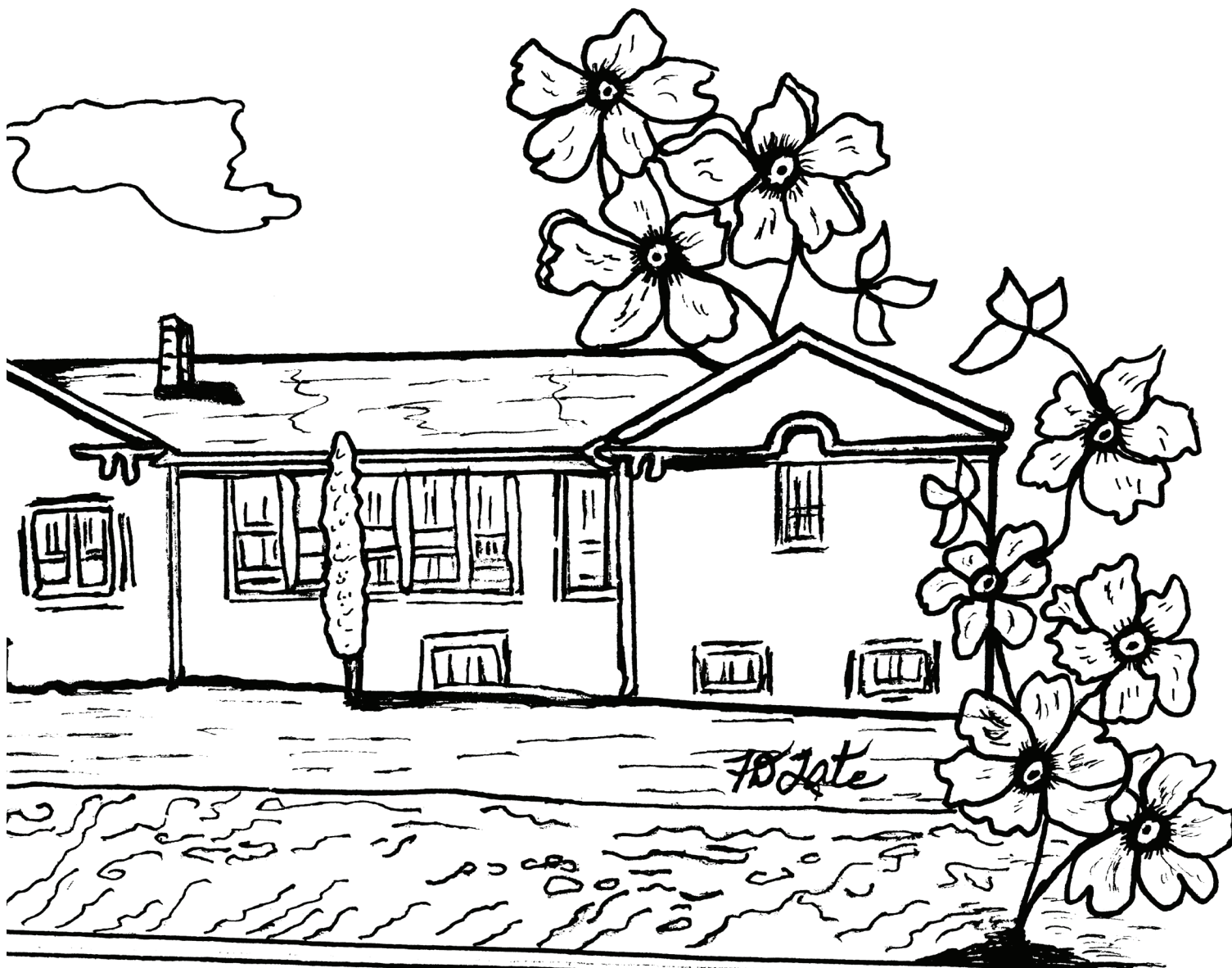
Carver School closed in 1966, when Decatur integrated their school system. Integration finally allowed black and white students to attend school together. Carver School was then used as a storage building. In 1974 the school district reopened the building for use as a developmental center. Today, the building continues to serve the Decatur School District. Historic buildings are often designed for changes in use or even additions. Carver School was designed in the shape of an "E." The "E" shape was selected because it would be simple to add additions onto the building if a larger building was needed.

**If you were going to name your school after someone famous, who would you name it after, and why?**

---

---

---





# CONNECTICUT FABRIC MILLS

500 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE  
1926

Architect: Charles T. Main, Inc.

The low-slung red brick factory building might look simple, but it represents the power of cotton in our state. Decatur has been a manufacturing center since its earliest days. The city's location on the Tennessee River, with the railroad crossing through, provided easy transportation. The location was perfect for farmers sending crops to market, and for factories to ship products around the country. Cotton lint is used for textiles, and the oil extracted from cotton seeds is used for cooking, cosmetics and soap. Other parts of the plant are used for fertilizer and animal feed. In the 1920s, the U.S. textile industry wasn't doing very well. Some northern companies decided to move to the South, where labor was cheaper and the raw materials, like cotton, were close by. The companies built new factories filled with modern machines.

Many southern cities wanted to have the new factories. Citizens of Decatur raised almost \$600,000 to bring Connecticut Fabric Mills of Danielson, Connecticut to the city. This paid for the new factory building and the land it sat on. Houses were built for the mill manager and assistant manager in the 1000 block of Jackson Street. When the new plant manager arrived with his wife and three children, the city warmly welcomed them. Connecticut Mills did not keep their Decatur plant for very long; it was sold to Goodyear in 1933. Goodyear made cotton fabric for tire lining. Goodyear sold the plant to Hyosung in late 2006. Hyosung still makes tire fabric, almost a hundred years after the plant was constructed.

**If you were going to build a new factory in Decatur, what would your factory make? What would it look like?**

---

---

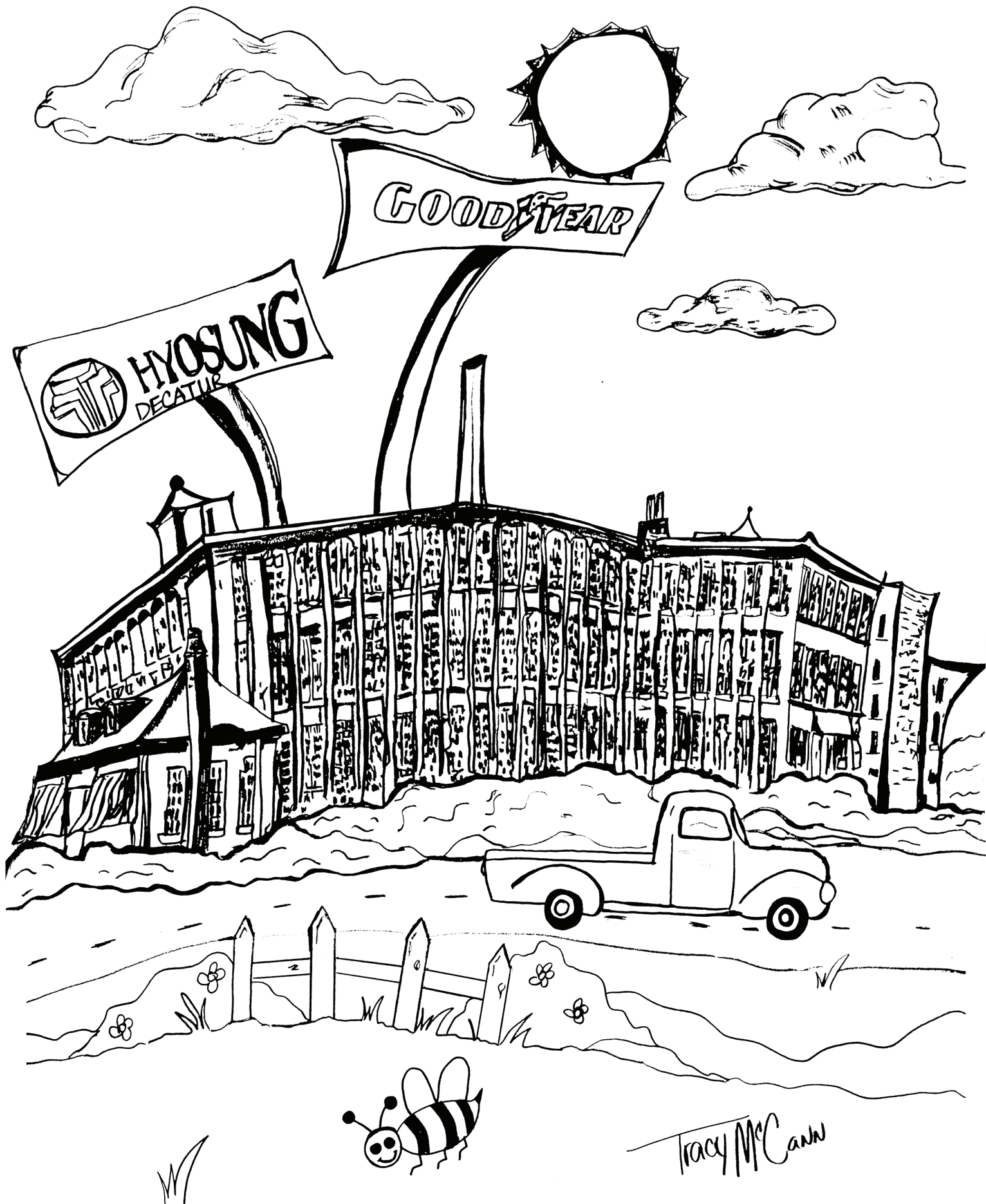
---

---

---

---

---







# THE GILL HOUSE

804 Jackson Street SE

## Can You Draw A Line To These Features?

- 1 Decorative **beams** or **brackets**
- 2 Exposed **rafter** **tails**
- 3 Square or tapered **porch** **columns**

### CRAFTSMAN STYLE

By the early 20th Century, people decided the Victorian era styles were old, boring, and outdated. A new style was "in," the Craftsman style. This style showed up frequently between 1905 and 1930. Craftsman architecture was very popular. Building plans were published in magazines, including *House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Some companies, like Sears, even offered pre-cut kit houses. You could order an entire Craftsman house from Sears, with everything you needed to put it together from lumber to nails, doorknobs to cabinets. They would ship all the pieces to you by train. Craftsman houses were celebrated for being "populist." This means "of the ordinary person." Gone were the stuffy foyers and ornate furnishings of the Victorian era. The front door usually opened directly into a large living room. Lots of built-in furniture was added;

bookcases, china cupboards, sometimes even dressers. This helped keep cleaning to a minimum (you don't have to clean under the bookcase if it is built into the wall!) and was touted as labor saving for housewives.





## EARLY RESIDENTS: THE GILLS

This house is in the Albany Historic District. Harry T. and Mary J. Gill were some of the earliest residents and lived here until the mid 1930s. Mr. Gill was a traveling salesman for hardware companies. Later he worked for the North Alabama division of the Works Progress Administration (called WPA). The WPA was a federal government program that started in the 1930s. It employed men for public work projects, including roads and public buildings. Delano Park, Fort Decatur, and Old State Bank all used WPA labor for construction and restoration projects.



## FAMILY TREE

There are lots of Craftsman houses in this district, as well as a few in Old Town, Old Decatur, and scattered in other neighborhoods ranging from Austinville to out past the Beltline. Most Craftsman house are one story, like this house, or possibly one and a half stories, with a few bedrooms in the attic area. They all have some shared features that indicate they are related. Sometimes the houses can change over time with new siding or even windows put in. But if you look carefully you can see the original house. There are other Craftsman houses near this house. Look at the ones at 812 Jackson Street SE, 815 Jackson Street SE, and 826 Jackson Street SE. **How are these houses similar? In what ways are they different?**

---

---

---

---

## ARCHITECTURAL TERM

### *Knee Bracket*



Craftsman houses often use knee brackets to “hold up” the large extended roofline. But looks can be deceptive. Usually the brackets are decorative and don’t serve a structural purpose. Sometimes knee brackets have extra decorative pieces, like in the Gill house. There is an additional diagonal piece that creates two smaller triangles.



# FIND A WORD!

Look across, up, and down to find the architectural terms below that are hidden in the word box.

I K G J C O R B E L Z E J M Z C U U C F  
 N F V M M U W H B A S E L F C A Q C L A  
 Q B S P V Z T U D O R E K Z F Z U R W N  
 K D S U K E H E N G F V P R K N O A L L  
 I O N I C P S O W F C I D W P U I N F I  
 J F F K R A P C E S J C I Y B Z N C Z G  
 U U H W A T E Q O B U T T R E S S H E H  
 W Z B F F H D Z X G S O T G C L W U J T  
 Y B W G T J I Z S J V R R Z L A X P M Q  
 A U Y A S D M N F G O I A E A C R L X U  
 K U Z L M A E G J K L A N P S U D B P B  
 R T I D A E N R D D E N S L S J Q Y D F  
 T G D W N T T A H C S Q O C I K W W V P  
 M Y M C K I A X Y O D J M L C P X V M B  
 W L V V F N C V Z L G U T M A R H G Z O  
 P P E P Q Y U F M U K Z Y P L T L O K R  
 C A P I T A L P D M J E C Q E E I T D Q  
 S A D K N K E S L N D K O N I P M H R P  
 B X G Y P B R U T A L I S M E O W I B O  
 W H B N Y D L A N C E T U H R G G C R X

BASE

BRUTALISM

BUTTRESS

CAPITAL

CLASSICAL

COLUMN

CORBEL

CRAFTSMAN

FANLIGHT

GOTHIC

IONIC

LANCET

PEDIMENT

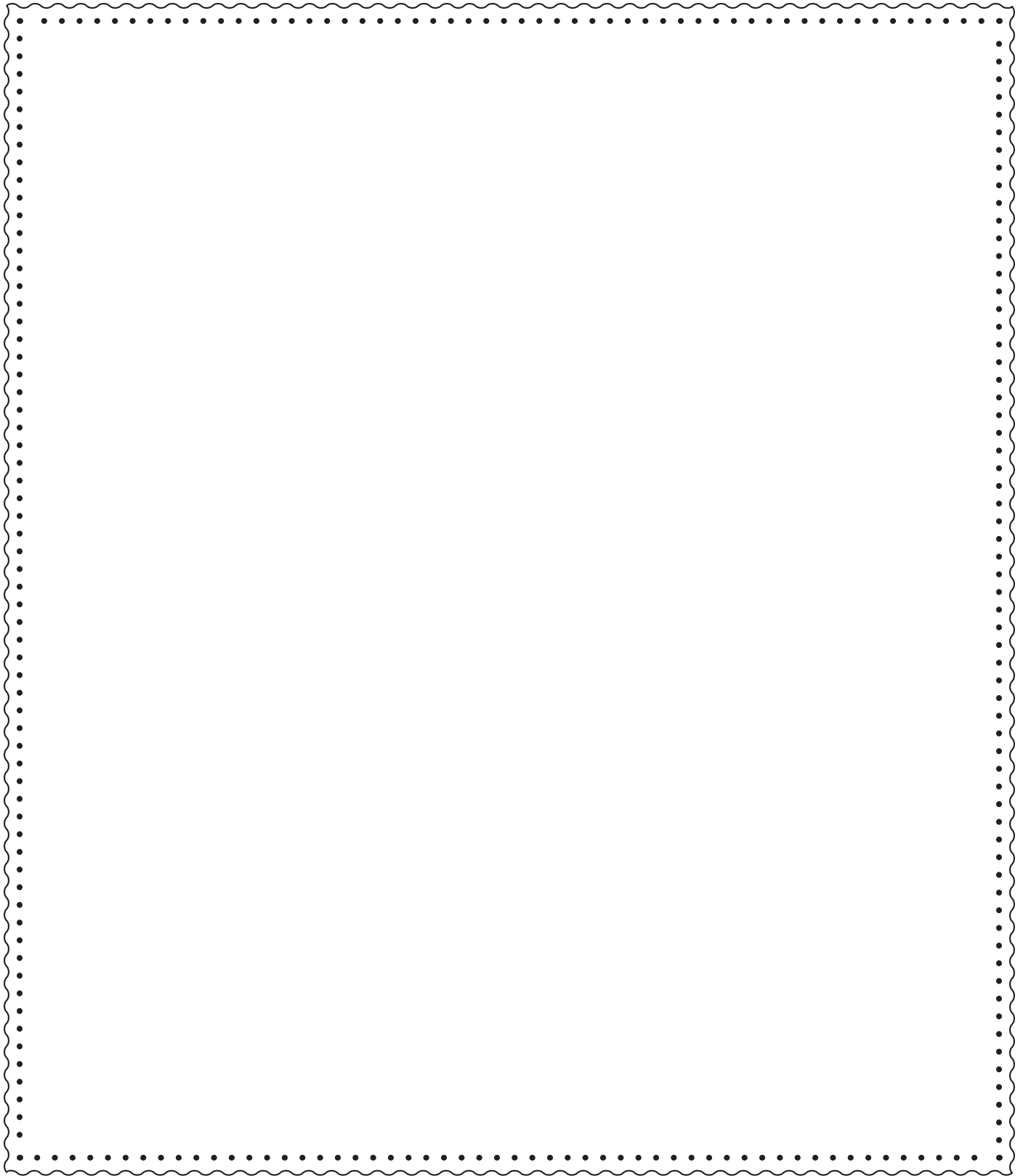
QUOIN

RANCH

TRANSOM

TUDOR

VICTORIAN



**Designing Decatur:** If you were going to design a new building for Decatur, what would it look like? Where would the building be located? What would the building be used for?

---

---

---



# ALABAMA FARMERS COOPERATIVE

121 Somerville Road NE  
1936

Farming has historically been very important to Alabama families. Some farmed to gain wealth from cotton, other families survived from the food they grew for themselves. Many early farming techniques depleted the soil, and required fertilizers for large harvests. To help supply the growing need for fertilizer, the Tennessee Valley Fertilizer Cooperative organized in 1936. A number of local county co-ops pooled their money together to receive a price break on a large order of fertilizer. The co-op later built a small factory to make fairly priced fertilizer. The co-op grew, and by the 1940s they made cattle and hog feed. In the 1950s they started selling tires, tools, and mechanical lubricants. They also expanded and began to market grain directly for farmers. By the 1960s, the co-op expanded again and started to sell garden, hardware, and automobile supplies. More than eighty stores form the co-op. They provide goods and services to farmers, gardeners, and homeowners through out the state. The co-op is owned by the community members it serves. It formed to meet common economic needs. All members share in the profits and benefit from the research and marketing of the entire organization. The Alabama Farmers Co-Op is one of the largest in the southeast. Most of the stores are in Alabama, but the co-op has stores in Florida and Tennessee as well.

Ardent Mills is another agricultural business on the Tennessee River. Its original name was Nebraska Consolidated Mills. The Decatur mill, built in 1941, was their first flour mill outside the state of Nebraska. It is one of the first fully mechanical mills in the United States. It is also one of the first to use a river to transport grain to the mill. Wheat is shipped from Alabama, Tennessee, Kansas, Minnesota, North Dakota and Oklahoma to Decatur on barges.

**Have you ever been into a farmer's coop? What types of things do you think you might find there?**

---

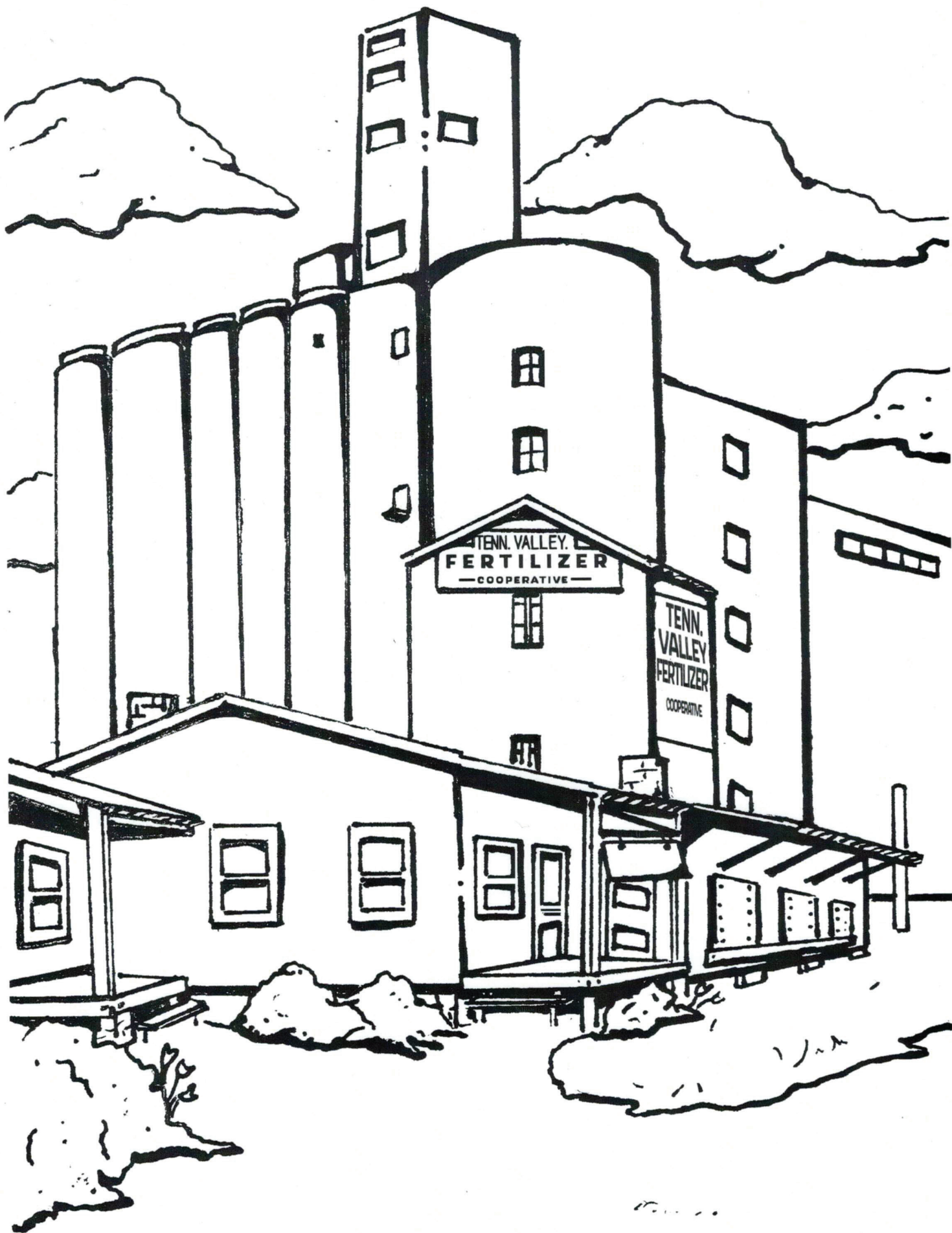
---

---

---

---

---





# AUSTINVILLE ELEMENTARY

2320 Clara Avenue SW  
1937

Thousands of Decatur children have walked through the doors of Austinville Elementary School. The school is a reminder that Decatur has merged with several independent cities over the years. Austinville was founded in 1907, and was named for Charles H. Austin, who owned most of the land in the area. Austinville had its own post office, schools, and shopping areas. It grew quickly in the early 20th century when a number of L & N Railroad workers built houses in the new community. The school building was a result from all that growth. It was constructed in 1937 to serve as Austinville High School. Decatur annexed Austinville in 1956. A new high school was built in the 1960s, and this building was remodeled into an elementary school.

The original school is in the center of the building, and is a style known as "French Eclectic." French Eclectic is an uncommon architectural style. It gained popularity after World War I, when American soldiers who had served in France returned home with an appreciation, and nostalgia, for European architecture. Selecting the French Eclectic style for one of the most visible buildings in the community shows the importance of the new school. French Eclectic buildings are often one or one and a half stories high and are symmetrical. The decorative stone blocks on the corners and around the original front door are called "quoins." Quoins are a fun design detail. They emphasize the building corners - making them look strong and expensive, and give the building an imposing nature.

**What is your favorite part of your elementary school building? What would you change about the building?**

---

---

---

---

---

---







# THE DODD HOUSE

502 Moulton West

c1940

## TUDOR REVIVAL STYLE

Tudor Revival style houses, some with round Hobbit-like front doors, are scattered around Decatur. The style is actually based on English Medieval architecture. It became popular in the late 1800s with large fancy estates. By the early 1900s smaller, more affordable versions of the style developed. They were so popular with new subdivisions for office workers that the style is sometimes given the nickname of "Stockbroker" or "Banker" Tudor. Style details can vary greatly

by location. In some communities they are mostly wood clad or built with stucco. Decatur's examples are mostly brick. The roof angle (called pitch) on a Tudor is very steep. Sometimes design details can include pieces of timber beams on the gable ends or fancy brick work designs. Decorated chimneys are often on the front of the house, or very prominently designed on the sides. The house uses a design trick to look larger and even more important, quoins. Quoins are the rectangular blocks of masonry that line the front entryway. Sometimes they are used on the corners of the house as well. Quoins are a very old architectural detail. The ancient Romans and medieval French used the detail in some of their buildings.

### Can You Draw A Line To These Features?

- 1 Steeply angled roof
- 2 Rounded front door or front entry
- 3 Massive chimney





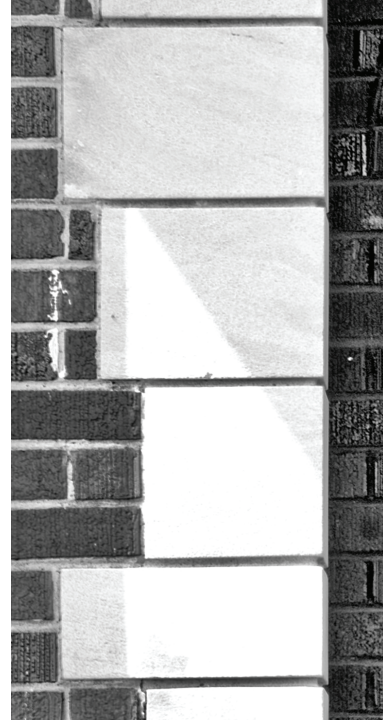
## EARLY RESIDENTS: THE DODDS

This house served as the residence for Murray and Lucille B. Dodd. Murray worked for Decatur Foundry, and later moved into real estate. He also served as a mayor of Decatur from 1956 through 1962. During his leadership the city rapidly expanded its boundaries to encompass more than 20 square miles, a large increase from the 7 square miles that were part of the city when he started office. Mayor Dodd was interested in establishing year round recreational facilities in Delano Park and Northeast Decatur, establishing a civic center, and enlarging the boat harbor. The Dodds remained in this house until the mid 1980s.

## ARCHITECTURAL TERM

### Quoin

The house uses a design trick to look larger and even more important, quoins. Quoins are rectangular blocks of masonry that accent the front entryway or corners of a house. They are larger than the bricks and make the building wall look strong. The ancient Romans and medieval French used the detail in some of their buildings.



## FAMILY TREE

The Tudor Revival style was popular for a long period of time, 1880 through about 1940. Most of Decatur's examples are from the 1920s, but some, like the Dodd house, were constructed in the 1940s. All of the Tudor Revival houses share some common details. It could be a rounded doorway, a steep roof, or even a fancy chimney. Look at the houses at 402 Moulton Street W, 105 4th Ave NW, 422 Oak Street NE, 515 Oak Street NE, 1718 14th Avenue SE and 1715 Loring Avenue SE. **How are these houses similar? In what ways are they different?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# CHAPEL HILL METHODIST CHURCH

2644 Chapel Hill Road SW  
1922

Do you like driving out into the country? When you visit Chapel Hill Methodist Church, it is easy to forget that you are in the city of Decatur. Houses are tucked in between rolling farm fields, and green woods. When the church formed in 1870, most of the land around it was used for farming. The church's first building was located on George Russell Road, next to the Chapel Hill Cemetery. In 1922 the congregation decided they wanted the church to be in a more convenient location. So, they moved to the current site. As Decatur grew and became more urban, some people began to work for the Alabama Hosiery Mill, Monsanto, even NASA. Children returned home to live near their parents and built houses on land that had once been used by farms. By the 1970s, Decatur continued to expand, and this area of the county became a part of our city.

By 1948 members of the church decided the church building needed an update. They wanted something more modern, so they added brick siding to the outside of the church. When they were finished with the remodel, the church looked very similar in style to a type of house that was built after World War II, a style that is called "Minimal Traditional." The name comes from the simple lines of the building that show the most basic forms of a house, a triangle shaped roof (called a gable), which used as few building materials as possible. This is why the roof overhang is so shallow, no wasted material! Minimal Traditional houses were very popular with soldiers returning from World War II because they were inexpensive, quick to build, and still had the traditional feel of home. Although Minimal Traditional is an unusual style for a church, it is a very common house style. You can find Minimal Traditional houses in many of Decatur's neighborhoods.

**If you were going to design a church, what would you want it to look like?**

---

---

---

---

---

---





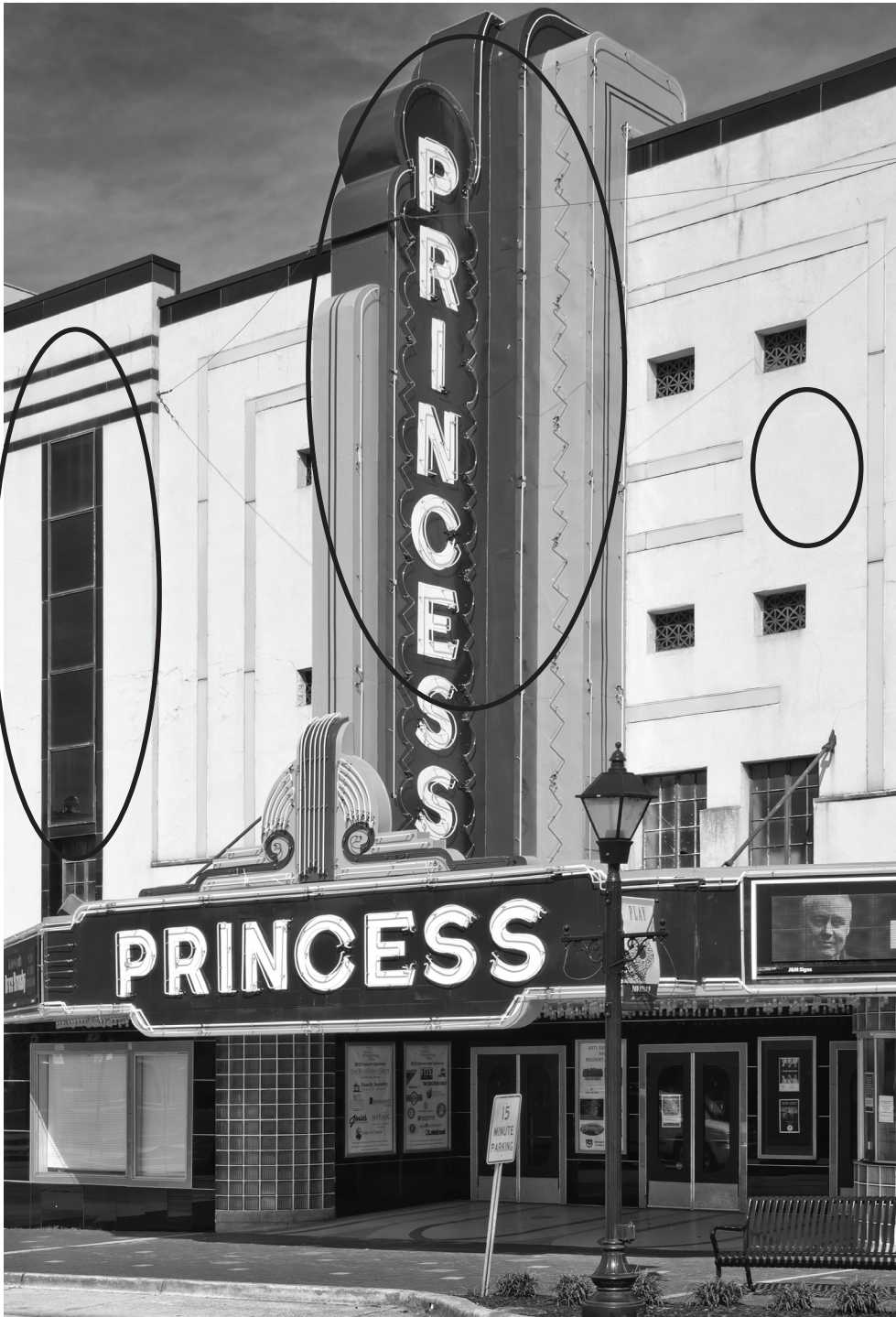


# PRINCESS THEATER

112 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NE

1887  
(1941 Remodel)

Architect: Albert Frahn (remodel)



## ART DECO STYLE

Art Deco was a short-lived style that started in France. The style has bright colors and bold geometric forms. Most Art Deco movie theatres have neon signs. The Princess has a mile of glass tubing, with more than 400 bulbs lighting up the entrance. The style was international, and in the United States it was commonly used for movie theatres, train stations and airport terminals. One of the most famous examples in the United States is the Empire State Building in New York.

## Can You Draw A Line To These Features?

- 1 **Vertical projections** that emphasize height
- 2 Smooth **stucco** wall surface
- 3 **Geometric designs**

## REMODELING

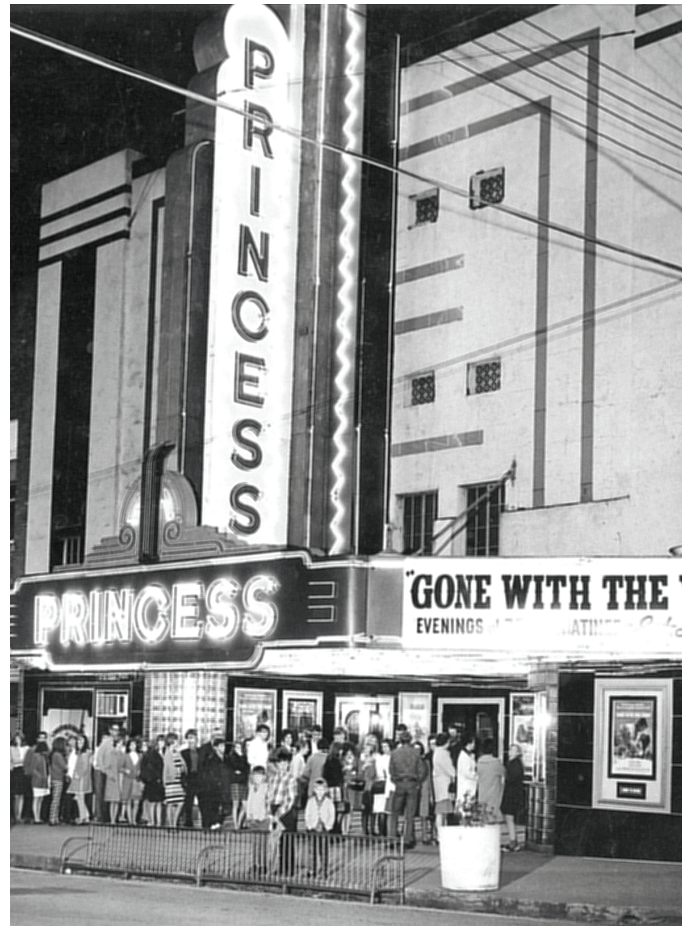
Sometimes buildings are remodeled so much that you can't recognize the original building! That is what happened to the Princess. In 1887 the building was constructed as a livery stable for horses. In 1919, the building was repurposed into a silent film and vaudeville playhouse. The building's current Art Deco facade is from 1941. Local architect Albert Frahn designed the new façade, which shimmers from more than 3,000 feet of neon tubing. The movie house closed in 1978 and was rescued from demolition when private citizens advocated for the City of Decatur to purchase the building.

**Do you know a building that has been remodeled?  
How did it change?**

---

---

---



## THE SCIENCE OF COLORED LIGHT

Neon lights are made from hollow glass tubes. The tubes are heated to shape the glass, and then filled with gas. The color of the neon light depends on the gas and the chemical coating inside the tube. Although the coating often looks white to our eyes, it looks very different when the gas light is turned on. Mixing colors with light isn't quite like mixing paints in a paint box. Neon gas gives a red light and Argon gas gives a blue light, but if you put red Neon gas into a green coated tube, you get an orange light, and blue Argon gas in a gold coated tube gives off a yellow light!



## PROTECTING HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Some buildings are so special, that they deserve extra protection. Façade easements can provide this protection. A façade easement is a legal agreement between the owner of a historic building and preservation organization. The owner gives up the right to demolish or make certain alterations to the outside of the building. In return, the owner can acquire tax deductions and access to grant monies. The Princess Theatre is under an easement with the State of Alabama. The agreement guarantees the city will maintain the exterior and meet historic preservation standards.



# GIBSON'S BAR-B-Q

1715 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE  
1950s

Alabamians love Bar-B-Q! Our state is known for a special Bar-B-Q creation ... white sauce. White sauce was created by Bob Gibson. The tangy sauce is made from mayonnaise, vinegar, lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Bob Gibson's Bar-B-Q business started in 1925, in his back yard. Gibson worked for L&N Railroad and cooked Bar-B-Q for his friends on weekends. He specialized in hickory smoked pork and chicken. The restaurant has had multiple locations over the years. Each time he moved he found a larger store, ready to accommodate the crowds of people that loved his Bar-B-Q. A 6th Avenue location first opened in 1952. The current store was built by his son in 1987. Bob Gibson has won the World Championship Barbecue's Grand Champion title five times. If you manage to have any room left after eating Bar-B-Q, they are also known for their homemade pies.

When Gibson's moved to 6th Avenue during the 1950s, America was starting its love affair with cars. For businesses located on major automotive roads, like 6th Avenue, signage needed to be bright, clear, and easily catch the attention of cars driving by. The flashing neon pig complete with a chef's hat is iconic and would easily capture the attention of passing motorists. Most of the 1950s era neon signs are now long gone, but just down the street, on the other side of 6th is Simpson's Florist, which has both its original 1950s building and eye-catching sign.

**If you were going to design a sign that would catch people's attention when driving by, what would it look like?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---







# THE WHITMIRE HOUSE

1710 Sandra Street

1964

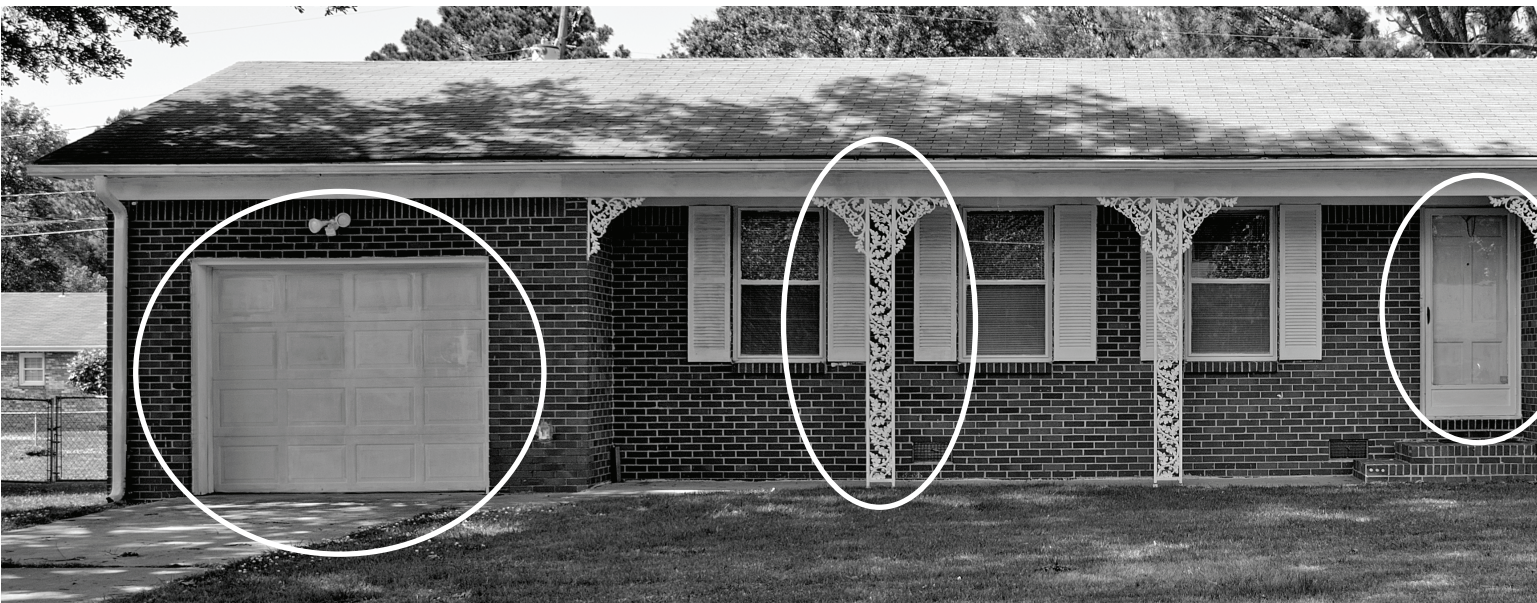
## RANCH STYLE

Decatur's suburbs are filled with Ranch houses on large manicured lawns. These houses always have one story and are low to the ground. Front entries are usually off-center. Many of the larger Ranch houses have garages. Ranch houses look so different because automobiles were becoming more popular, and people could live further from where they worked. Cars replaced streetcars, so people didn't need walking neighborhoods. They could build rambling houses with larger lots.

The Ranch style started in California. It was influenced by early Spanish Colonial design - low-pitched long roofs with deep overhangs, private courtyards and backyard porches and patios. By the 1950s, magazines began to publish plans. People all over the country started building the houses. Federal housing guidelines favored the construction of entire neighborhoods being built at once, which is why entire blocks of our city are filled with Ranch houses. Ranch houses weren't just about design, they were about lifestyle and how people wanted to live after the war. They were publicized as "modern inside, traditional outside." Magazines and newspapers showed families with happy children playing in large yards. The interiors were often designed so all the bedrooms were on one side of the house and the family rooms (kitchen, dining room, living room, and den) were located on the other side of the house. Large sliding glass doors or windows provided lots of daylight.

## EARLY RESIDENTS: THE WHITMIRE

James Buford and Roberta Whitmire Jr. were early residents of this house, moving in by 1967 and living here for over thirty years. James was employed by the Wolverine company and was a veteran of World War II. The Wolverine company extrudes Aluminum metal that could be used for airplanes, boats, trains, trucks and industrial uses. The company is still located in Decatur.





## FAMILY TREE

Decatur has hundreds of Ranch houses. Explore some of the neighborhoods below. **How are these houses similar? In what ways are they different?**

- The Western Gardens neighborhood (the streets between Hartung Street SW and 8th Avenue SW)
- Houses along Carridale Street SW
- Houses along Elizabeth and Donna Avenues SE
- Houses along Brookwood-Meadowbrook Road SE between Acrilane and Quince Drive

.....

• Lots of Ranch houses had decorative cast iron metal porch supports. They often have flat designs, sometimes flower, or oak leaves. **If you were going to design porch supports, what would they look like?**

.....



**Can You Draw A Line To These Features?**

- 1** Low pitched, long roof
- 2** Front facing garage attached to side
- 3** Off-center front entry under main roof of house
- 4** Windows with **horizontal panes of glass**



# PEOPLES BANK OF ALABAMA

1737 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE

1969-1970

Architect: Hall & Colvard

The “Cupcake Bank,” is a nickname for this building! It is an unusual building, very geometric and simple, and so different than everything else around it. The building’s location, on a wide, busy part of the road, needed a design that would really stand out as cars rapidly passed by it. This building is a style known as “Neo Formalism.” Neo Formalism was a very popular between 1960 and 1975. It was often used for bank buildings and other public buildings. The style was a reaction to earlier modern architectural styles, which were very plain and boxy. People became tired of the boxes. Neo Formalist buildings copy a lot of classical Greek and Roman buildings, but in very simple ways. They use the most basic forms of the building, a circle, a square, and long poles for columns. The simple buildings can look a bit like they are made from wood building blocks. The drive through was added in the 1980s, and is not part of the original building design.

This building was designed as a branch office for First Federal Savings and Loan of Decatur. Savings and loans are similar to banks. They are places where you can deposit money, open a savings or a checking account. But savings and loans often work for different customers. Banks usually focus on large businesses, while savings and loans work with private homeowners. When First Federal Savings and Loan formed, local lumber companies were at the very first meetings. There was a lot of new home construction in both Old Decatur and Albany in the early 20th century. The company has merged with other companies and has changed names several times. The building is now owned by the People’s Bank of Alabama.

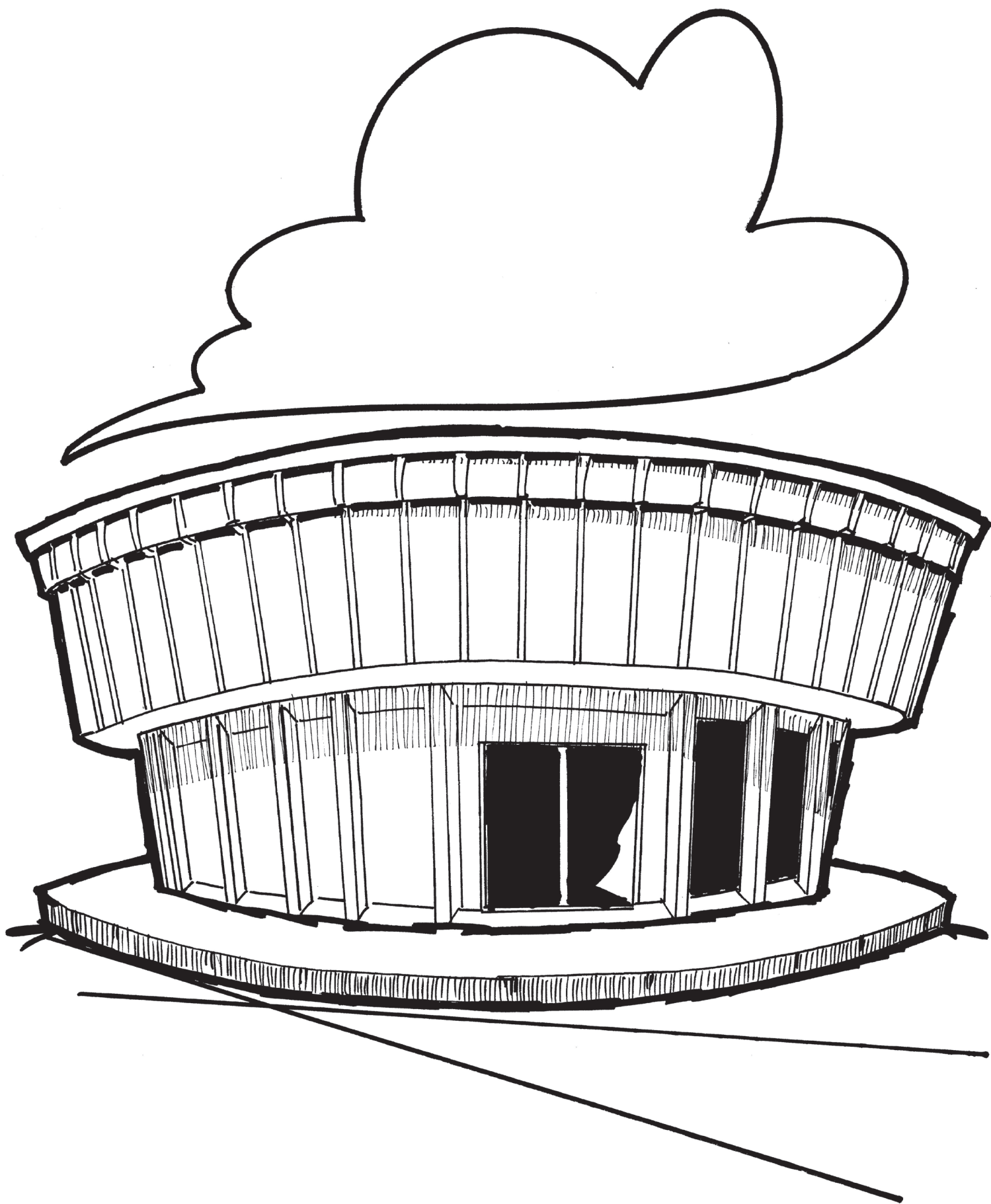
**Both the Old State Bank and the People’s Bank of Alabama copy Greek and Roman architecture. How are the two banks similar to each other? How are they different? Which one do you like better? Why?**

---

---

---

---





# POINT MALLARD WAVE POOL

1969-1970

What is one of the best ways to cool off on a hot summer day in Decatur? Point Mallard Wave Pool! Although most people do not think of the Wave Pool as historic, it is 50 years old. For five decades families have been coming to the pool to cool down and enjoy the summer months. The Wave Pool was J. Gilmer Blackburn's idea. Mr. Blackburn served as Decatur's mayor from 1962 until 1968. Blackburn saw pools in Germany that used modern technology to make waves, just like those at the ocean. He thought that a similar pool would do well in Decatur, and increase tourism. Instead of families driving for hundreds of miles to visit the Gulf Coast, they could stay locally and enjoy the salt-free "ocean" waves. Point Mallard Authority formed in 1967 to create the new city park. The park is located on land originally owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority for industrial use. The pool, which is over 180 feet long, has three-foot waves created by hydraulic fans hidden behind a stone wall. The Point Mallard Wave Pool opened in August of 1970, a year after the first wave pool in the U.S. opened in Tempe, Arizona. It was over a decade before other wave pools were constructed in the United States.

Point Mallard Park was part of the "New Decatur Plan" of the 1960s. The goal was to redesign Decatur as a family-friendly, modern city. The ambitious plan included building a new civic center, city hall, courthouse, schools, and recreation centers. In addition to the Wave Pool, other recreational facilities were constructed. The Point Mallard Campground was built in 1972, followed by the ice rink the next year. In May, the park hosts the Alabama Jubilee Hot Air Balloon Festival. This event is one of the largest and oldest hot air balloon races in the south. A favorite family event, people can watch hot air balloons float over the Tennessee River.

**If you were going to redesign Decatur, what buildings would you add?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Bryson Thurston





# MORGAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE

302 Lee Street NE

1975-1976

Architect: Hall & Colvard

## BRUTALIST STYLE

The style of this building is called Brutalism. The style started in Great Britain, after World War II. It was often used in reconstruction projects. Brutalism was a favorite style for government projects and university buildings. It was valued for its inexpensive construction and design methods. The style is known for simple and functional buildings, that are contemporary in their design aesthetic. Repeating modular units are used, each representing a specific zone or function. Brutalist buildings have simple form and emphasize strong horizontal and vertical lines. Raw concrete is the most common material used. The style's name is based on the French phrase *beton brut* (raw concrete).



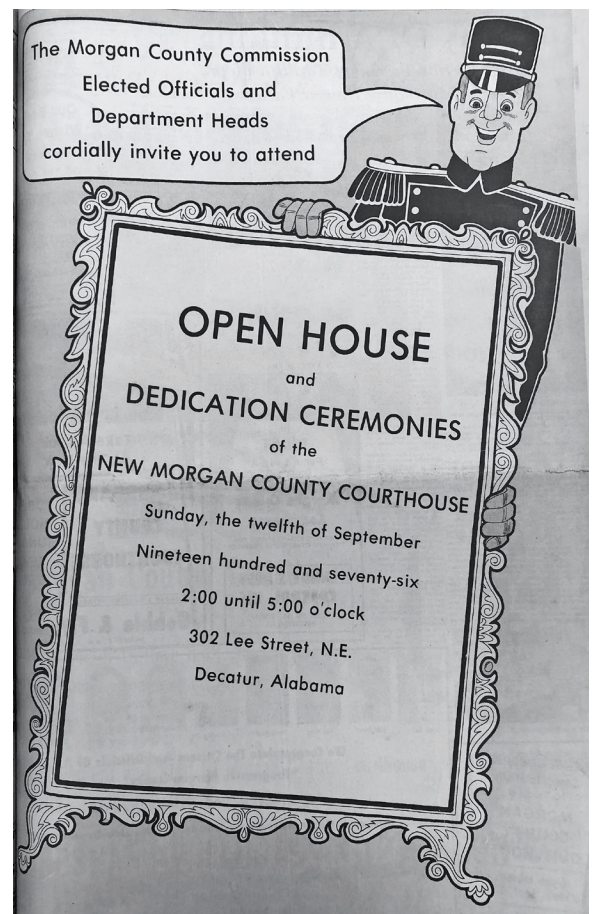
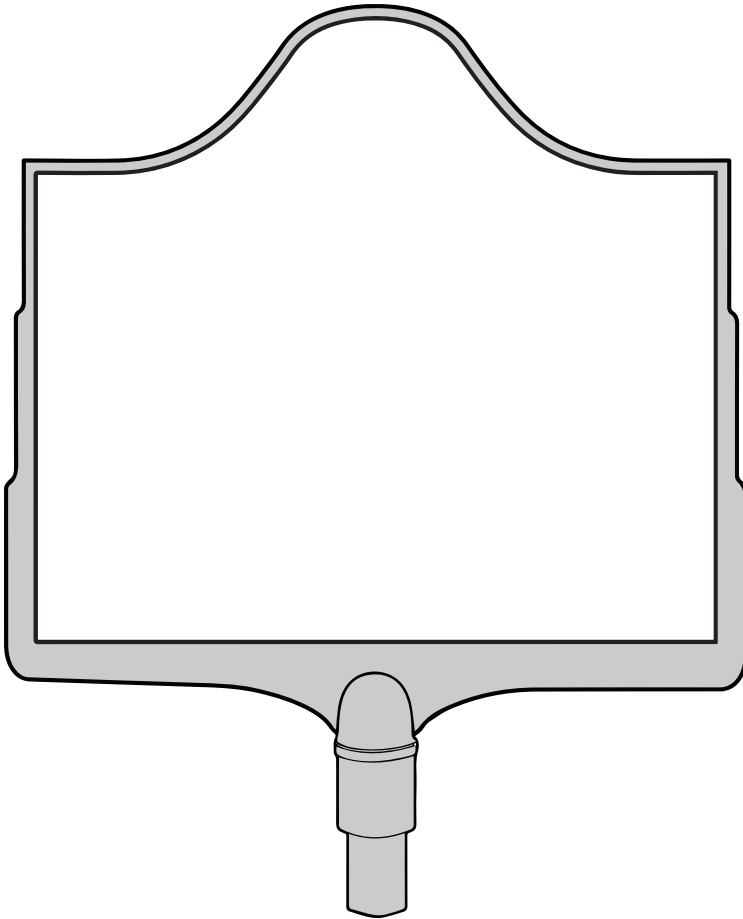
The Morgan County Courthouse was built between 1975 and 1976. It was designed by the Decatur architectural firm of Hall and Colvard. They designed some of downtown Decatur's most notable modern buildings including Decatur City Hall, the Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce, the Regions Bank building, and the Decatur Post Office.

The Morgan County Courthouse, Decatur's City Hall Building, and Post Office were all a part of the "New Decatur" plan. The "New Decatur" plan was a city-wide urban renewal program. Buildings we now consider historic and worth preserving, were considered old-fashioned, and worthy of demolition. The city wanted modern buildings. The prior courthouse (built in 1928) was home to the famous Scottsboro Boys trial of 1932. This was a re-trial of nine African American boys wrongly accused of assault. The landmark trial began a path for racial equality in the U.S. justice system.



Built the same year that the mobile phone was patented and the first commercial computers were created, the Morgan County Courthouse is almost old enough for its own historic marker.

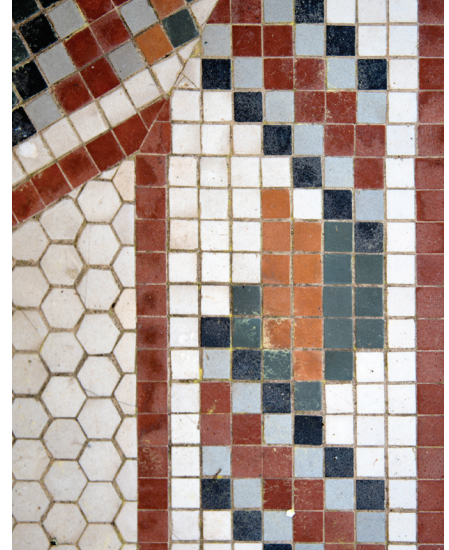
**If you could write the marker text, what would you say about the importance of this building?**



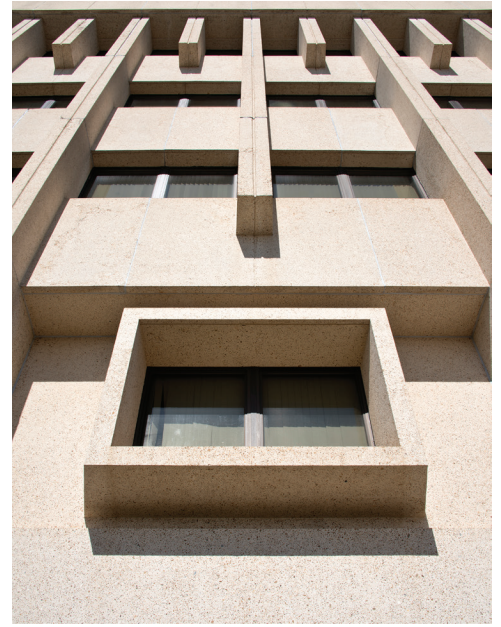


**Buildings are made up of lots of unique, individual parts. Sometimes you can identify a building from seeing just a small portion of it. Match the details with building!**

- Austinville Elementary School
- Carnegie Visual Arts Center
- Craftsman House
- Frank's Hardware Store
- Morgan County Courthouse
- Old State Bank
- Peoples Bank of Alabama
- Princess Theatre
- Ranch House
- St. John's Episcopal Church
- Tudor Revival House
- Victorian House









## COVER IMAGE:

### THE NORFOLK SOUTHERN TENNESSEE RIVER BRIDGE

1978-79

The first railroad bridge on this site was burned by Union troops during the Civil War. This modern drawbridge is a lift bridge, the center section can lift up to allow boats to travel under it. The hot air balloons represent the Alabama Jubilee Hot Air Balloon Classic. This annual event, held on Memorial Day weekend, is one of the oldest hot-air balloon races in the South. The Alabama Jubilee Hot Air Balloon Classic was first held in 1978.

