



Displaced and Erased: The Black Experience in Decatur Walking Tour



<http://blog.historian4hire.net/decatur-tour/>



Walking Tour Points of Interest

A. Courthouse Square

Decatur is a typical Southern courthouse square town. Prominent landmarks include a Confederate monument (1908) and a contextualizing marker (2019), artifacts and markers celebrating DeKalb County history, and a municipal bandstand (1996) dedicated to late bank president and politician J. Robin Harris (1925-1989).

B. Decatur City Hall

This local landmark was completed in 1926 and is a contributing element to the Decatur Downtown Historic District (National Register of Historic Places, 2012). Notable points of interest include a 1937 monument declaring Decatur as the “City of Homes, Schools, and Churches.” Visible to the southeast is the former site of Antioch A.M.E. Church.

C. Decatur High School

Decatur originally had high schools for the city’s white boys and girls. The current school was completed in 1965 as part of the downtown redevelopment project that included the urban renewal of the Beacon Community. Decatur High School is a contributing element in the Decatur Downtown Historic District (National Register of Historic Places, 2012). The modernist building was designed by noted architects Bothwell and Nash.

D. Commerce & Howard

This intersection didn’t exist before the 1960s. It was created during urban renewal when the City of Decatur extended then-Oliver Street south to Howard. Visible to the south is Carl G. Renfroe Middle School.

E. Swanton Heights Apartments

The Swanton Heights apartments were built during urban renewal using lots with existing single-family homes and the unsurfaced White Street into a single consolidated parcel.

F. Robin & Commerce

This intersection marks the terminus of Oliver Street (named for prominent African American entrepreneur Henry Oliver; renamed 1985). It is the southeast corner of the superblock created during slum clearance in 1940 to construct the 200-unit Allen Wilson Terrace public housing project (all African American). Visible from this location is the Decatur High School football stadium and the redeveloped Allen Wilson Terrace apartments.

G. Former Trinity Presbyterian Church (266 Robin Street)

This church was constructed c. 1945 and it served families relocated to the Allen Wilson Terrace apartments. Former Decatur Mayor Elizabeth Wilson lived in a public housing apartment across the street from this church.

H. Robin & Electric

This intersection marks the southwest corner of the Allen Wilson Terrace superblock. The Pearce family lived in a three-story frame home on the northwest corner that Beacon residents affectionately called the “Green Castle.” The “brick wall,” a WPA retaining wall and local landmark, was located along the south side of Robin.

I. Lilly Hill Baptist Church (344 Robin Street)

Founded in 1913 in an unincorporated area just outside of Decatur, the church moved to the downtown in 1915 when it bought a lot on nearby Electric Avenue. The church outgrew its first building and in 1945 it bought two lots in Robin Street where it built this brick church.

J. Ebster Park

Prior to 1947, the City of Decatur labelled this space “the colored Park area.” In 1947, the city formally named it for an African American community leader, Donald G. Ebster (1874-1965).

K. Beacon Municipal Complex

For the first half of the twentieth century, Decatur’s “colored school” was located in this space. After the 1954 Brown v. Board decision, the city built two “equalization schools” for African Americans: Beacon Elementary and Trinity High. The schools were demolished in 2013 and the city created interior and exterior interpretive spaces in the new municipal complex commemorating the erased African American community. The city’s trash incinerator was located directly across the street, south of the school.

L. Trinity Walk Apartments (Gateway Apartments)

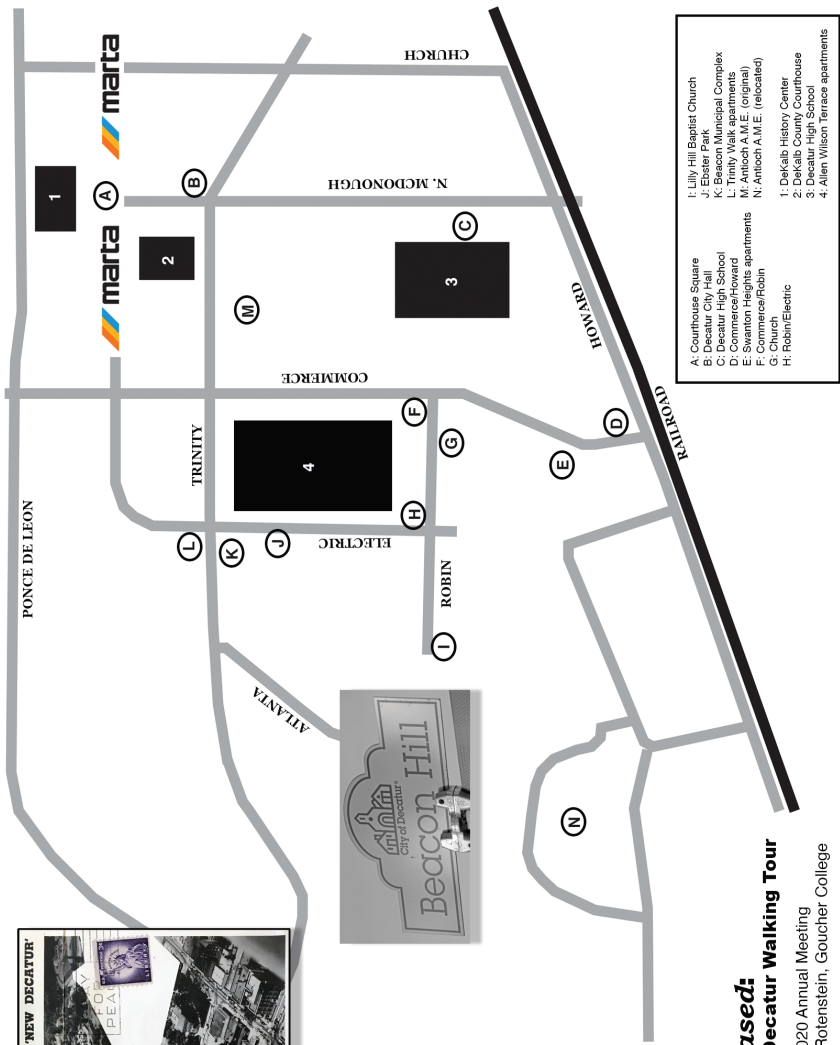
Originally developed as public housing in the 1960s urban renewal, this consolidated parcel replaced single family homes demolished during urban renewal. Before 1965, people standing in this location would have seen the original Thankful Baptist Church, an unsurfaced street called Bennett’s Alley, and the Swanton Branch, a stream where Beacon residents performed baptisms before urban renewal.

M. Antioch A.M.E. Church (Original)

Decatur’s oldest African American church congregation (est. 1868) built a wood-frame church at the corner of Marshall Avenue and Herring Street. The congregation was displaced in the 1960s when Decatur converted its property into a new county office building. That building was demolished in 2016 and it was replaced by a high-density mixed-use development.

N. Antioch A.M.E. Church (Relocated)

After being displaced by urban renewal, Antioch acquired a parcel on the east side of Atlanta Avenue where it built a new brick church. Displacement pressures began in the early 1990s and the church sold its property in 1995 and moved to Stone Mountain.



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| A: | Courthouse Square | I: | Lilly Hill Baptist Church |
| B: | Decatur City Hall | J: | Elisler Park |
| C: | Decatur High School | K: | Beacon Municipal Complex |
| D: | Commerce/Howard | L: | Trinity Walk apartments |
| E: | Swanton Heights apartments | M: | Antioch A.M.E. (original) |
| F: | Commerce/Roblin | N: | Antioch A.M.E. (relocated) |
| G: | Commerce/Roblin | | |
| H: | Roblin/Electric | 1: | DeKalb History Center |
| | | 2: | DeKalb County Courthouse |
| | | 3: | Decatur High School |
| | | 4: | Allen Wilson Terrace apartments |



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Tour designed and led by Dr. David Rotenstein, Goucher College