

# NORTH ALABAMA TRAINS

The history of Alabama and the development of its railroads are deeply intertwined. Beginning with the 1832 opening of the Tuscumbia Railway in what is now North Alabama's Colbert County, the state's railroads solved transportation problems and created opportunities for schemers and legitimate businessmen alike. Over the next century, railroads tied the various parts of the state together, connecting Alabama to the rest of the nation.

Cotton dominated Alabama commerce in the antebellum period and river transport funneled much of it to the port of Mobile. North Alabama planters could use the Tennessee River to reach New Orleans, but Muscle Shoals, near Tuscumbia, formed a major barrier. This impediment prompted construction of the Tuscumbia Railway as a route around the shoals. The first two miles of track opened on June 12, 1832. Initially powered by horses, this pioneering line soon operated the first steam locomotive west of the Alleghenies, the *Fulton*. The Tuscumbia became part of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad, which completed its line between Chattanooga and Memphis in 1858.

The Civil War brought about massive change on Alabama's railroads. The Memphis & Charleston (M&C) initially moved Confederate troops and supplies but was largely dismantled in 1861 and 1862 so that its rails and equipment could be used elsewhere in the South and to prevent their use by Union forces. The M&O, A&F, and M&WP participated in the first large-scale troop movement in history. Following the Battle of Shiloh in 1862 in southwest Tennessee, Union general Don Carlos Buell began marching toward Chattanooga, in southeast Tennessee, alongside the ruined M&C.

To counter this, Confederate General Braxton Bragg used these three railroads, along with others in Georgia, to move 25,000 troops and supplies from Tupelo, Mississippi, to the Chattanooga area (a distance of almost 300 miles) in less than a week, arriving well ahead of Buell. As a result of heavy usage, minimal maintenance, and Union raids, particularly those led by Col. Abel Streight (1863), Maj. Gen. Lovell H. Rousseau (1864), and Gen. James H. Wilson (1865), the state's railroads were largely decimated at war's end.

Prior to the war, geologists had confirmed that the area around present-day Birmingham contained large deposits of iron ore and coal, but they were worthless without transportation to an industrial center. Supporters of the A&TR lobbied for Chattanooga as that center, but Alabamians Frank Gilmer and John Milner, both of whom had learned railroading on the A&F, envisioned Jones Valley in central Alabama as that industrial base, with a Montgomery–Decatur railroad to serve it. They chartered the Alabama Central Railroad (AC) in 1854, but A&TR backers and the Civil War stalled the project. After the war, Milner reorganized the AC as the South & North Railroad (S&N) and finally began construction in 1869.

The company had reached within 66 miles of Decatur in North Alabama when a lack of money to pay bond interest stopped the work. Railroad contractor John Stanton and other A&TR backers schemed to take control of the S&N, but a last-minute infusion of cash from Kentucky-based Louisville & Nashville Railroad (L&N) rescued the S&N and laid rail to Decatur by 1872. There, it connected with another L&N-controlled line, the Nashville & Decatur, giving the expanding L&N its first entry into the state.

The Panic of 1893 drastically reshaped Alabama's railroads, primarily because of the failure of the Richmond Terminal holding company. Through a convoluted process, the Central Railroad and Banking Company's lines emerged as the Central of Georgia Railway (C of G) in 1895. The ETV&G and the Alabama Great Southern Railroad, successor



*Map from 1888 by the Alabama Railroad Commissioners showing the North Alabama railroad network connecting to Birmingham in colored lines. (Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.)*

to the A&TR, were included in New York financier J. P. Morgan's new Southern Railway System, formed out of several Richmond Terminal lines in 1894. The L&N was not affected by the Richmond Terminal's collapse, but it instantly had a strong rival in the new Southern Railway. These two lines would dominate Alabama railroading for almost a century.

By 1910, the Alabama railroad map was largely complete, and the iron industry neared maturity as well. Alabama's major railroads fared reasonably well during most of the twentieth century, although federal control by the United States Railroad Administration during World War I dealt them a serious financial blow. The railroads also suffered financial setbacks during the Great Depression, but World War II spurred a recovery, and the state's railroads carried massive amounts of material and troops during the conflict.

The post-war era brought change and consolidation to the state's railroads. Diesel power replaced steam locomotives, and freight cars grew larger. An unexpected development was the rapid decline in passenger traffic in spite of large investments to re-equip existing passenger trains, such as *The Crescent* and *The Panama Limited* and to introduce new ones such as *The Humming Bird*. These trains remained attractive as sources of transportation throughout most of the 1950s, but a massive increase in the number of automobiles, the new Interstate Highway System, and the advent of jet airliners captured most intercity passenger business. A majority of passenger trains had been discontinued when the federally controlled Amtrak system assumed operation of a skeleton system in 1971. At first the Southern Railway was the only railroad serving Alabama that did not join Amtrak, continuing to run its renamed *Southern Crescent* until 1979, when it, too, joined Amtrak. Amtrak's *Crescent*, serving Anniston, Birmingham, and Tuscaloosa, is now the sole passenger train in the state.

Alabama's major railroads have been merged into larger companies, starting with Southern's acquisition of the C of G in 1963, eliminating most historic company names. CSX Transportation (1980) includes the former ACL, SAL, L&N, and Western of Alabama lines, and the Southern is now part of Norfolk Southern Corporation (1982). The BNSF Railway (1996) reaches Birmingham via the former St. Louis–San Francisco (Frisco) track, and the original M&O line into Mobile has been part of Canadian National Railway since 1998. Some smaller railroads remain, but many secondary lines have been abandoned.

*Adapted from The Encyclopedia of Alabama, J. Lawrence Lee, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. [www.encyclopediaofalabama.org](http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org)*



**RAILWAY RELATED  
DEPOTS • FESTIVALS • MUSEUMS  
MARKERS • TRAIN RIDES**



**Red Bay Railroad Park  
On the cover: Tuscumbia Depot & Roundhouse**



# **NORTH ALABAMA**

**ALABAMA MOUNTAIN LAKES  
TOURIST ASSOCIATION**

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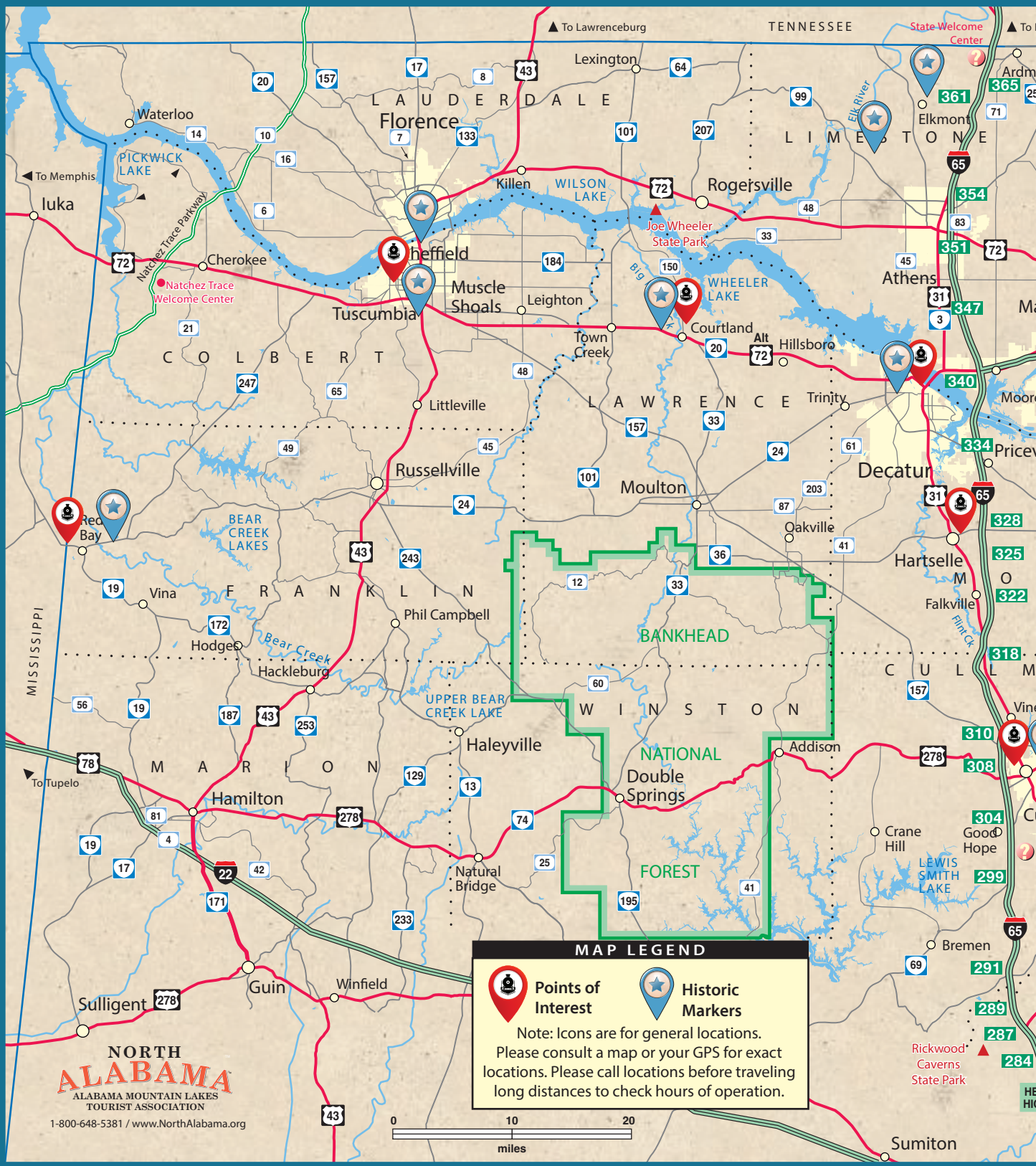
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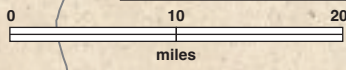
**MAP LEGEND**

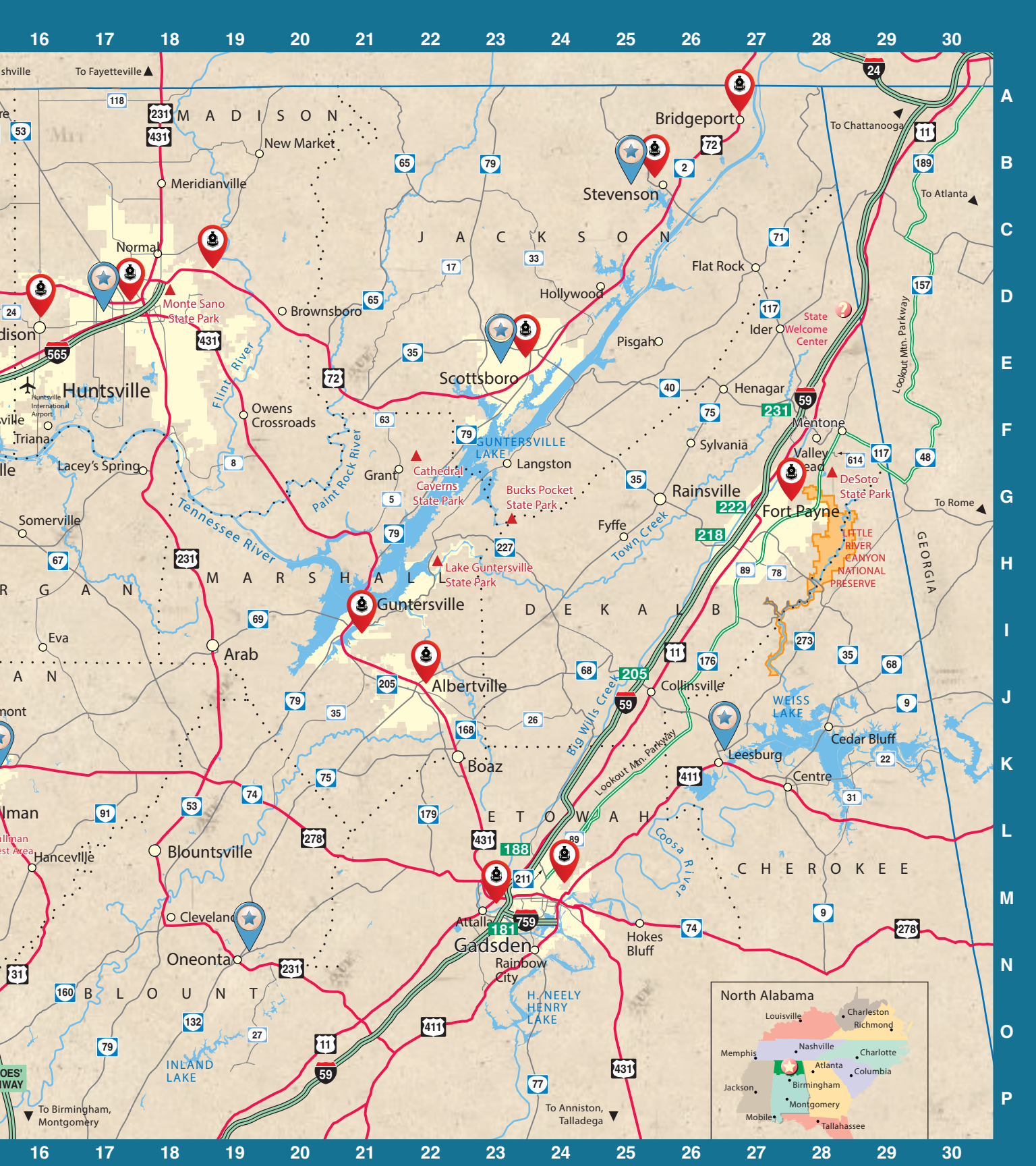
	<b>Points of Interest</b>		<b>Historic Markers</b>
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Note: Icons are for general locations. Please consult a map or your GPS for exact locations. Please call locations before traveling long distances to check hours of operation.

**NORTH ALABAMA**  
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## HISTORIC DEPOTS

### **Albertville Train Depot (I-22)**

221 E Main St, Albertville; (256) 891-8279

The train depot is one of only two buildings in Albertville on the National Register of Historic Places. The Albertville Depot, also known as L&N Railroad Depot, was built by the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway in 1892, one year after the town was incorporated. Passenger service ended in the 1940s, although the depot remained in use for freight. The NC&StL was purchased by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad in 1880, and the two companies operated separately until 1957. The depot was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on February 20, 1975. The building was renovated for use as a senior center in the mid-1990s. A former L&N caboose houses the Albertville Museum.

### **Bridgeport Depot Museum & Cultural Center (A-27)**

116 Soulard Square, Bridgeport; (256) 495-4020

The museum is home to railroad memorabilia as well as Native American and Civil War artifacts. Items in the museum's collection date back to 1807. Constructed in 1917, today's depot is the fourth built on this site and is operated by the City of Bridgeport. Depot is on the National Register of Historic Places. Open: Th-F 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., Sa 9 a.m.- 3 p.m., Su 12 p.m. - 4 p.m.

### **Cullman County Museum & Depot (K-15)**

304 First Avenue N.E., Cullman; (256) 739-1258;

[www.cullmancountymuseum.com](http://www.cullmancountymuseum.com)

John Cullmann, the founder of this community, was an agent for the railroad and brought in German settlers to support and be supplied by the railroad. The Depot was built in 1913 in a Pueblo style with Moorish influences at a cost of \$6,000. It was placed on the National Historical Registry in 1976. The restored waiting area contains several display cases featuring railroad artifacts. Museum: M-F 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Sa 10 a.m-2 p.m., Depot: Outside viewing only. Admission is free.

### **Decatur Historic Union Depot (F-14)**

701 Railroad Street, Decatur; (256) 565-3788; [www.decaturparks.com](http://www.decaturparks.com)

The historic Decatur Union Passenger Depot was built by the Southern Railway in 1905 and is a symbol of the city's rich railroad heritage which extends back to the 1830s when the first railroad west of the Allegheny Mountains, the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur railroad, was built. A



*Cullman County Depot*

union depot was the result of the joint use of the depot by two railroads, the Southern and the Louisville & Nashville railroads. The lobby itself now depicts a number of scenes and artifacts from Decatur businesses of the early 1900s which surrounded the depot. Other items of interest include the original ticket office, a model train layout, actual railroad signage, and a unique depot desk from the 1920s Tuscumbia depot. Open: M-F 10 a.m. to noon, 1 to 3 p.m. Please call ahead for weekend and holiday hours.

### **Fort Payne Depot Museum (G-28)**

105 5th St., Fort Payne; (256) 845-5714; [www.fortpaynedepotmuseum.com](http://www.fortpaynedepotmuseum.com)

The Old Fort Payne Depot was built by the Alabama Great Southern Railroad in 1891. The museum features exhibits typical of the lifestyles of the late 1800s and the early 1900s, Native American pottery, basketry, tools, and clothing. Hours: W, Th, F 10 a.m.-3 p.m.; Su 2-4 p.m. Admission.

### **Guntersville Depot (Outside viewing only) (H-21)**

Off Blount Avenue on Greenwood Street; tours by appointment by calling (256) 571-7560

In 1847 the Alabama legislature launched a project to connect the Tennessee River with the Coosa River with a railway from Guntersville to Gadsden. Work on the project stopped in 1861 because of the Civil War but resumed after the conclusion of the conflict. It was during this time the Guntersville Depot was built. The first scheduled passenger trip from Guntersville was in October 1892. The Guntersville train depot was



*Bridgeport's stunning Depot Museum*



*The restored Historic Union Depot in Decatur*



PHOTO BY JOHN DERSHAM

*Fort Payne Depot Museum*

dedicated as a historic site in 2000.

**Historic Hartselle Depot (H-14)**

*110 Railroad Street Southwest, downtown Hartselle; (256) 773-4370*

Built in 1914, the Depot includes historical displays that have been provided by the Hartselle Historical Society. It is also home to Hartselle Area Chamber of Commerce and plays host to many community and civic affairs. Open M-F 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

**Historic Huntsville Depot (Outside Viewing Only) (D-17)**

*320 Church St NW, Huntsville; (256) 564-8100*

An active passenger station until 1968, the original depot building stands as a symbol of Huntsville's transportation history and city growth. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Depot served as the local passenger house and the corporate offices for the Eastern division of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad.

**Scottsboro Depot Museum (D-23)**

*230 N Houston St, Scottsboro; www.scottsborodepotmuseum.com*

The Scottsboro Depot Museum houses a wide range of exhibits in the Scottsboro brick depot constructed by the Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company 1859-1860. The depot in January 1861 and serviced both passengers and freight until January 1892 when a separate passenger depot was opened in Scottsboro. It is Scottsboro and Jackson County's oldest



*Historic Hartselle Depot*



*Stevenson Railroad Depot Museum*

business house and saw active service for 132 years. It is significant to the State since this building is one of only three pre-Civil War depots still standing in the State of Alabama. Open: Fridays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Stevenson Railroad Depot Museum (B-25)**

*207 W Main St, Stevenson; (256) 437-3012*

An important Civil War railroad junction, the Station now houses a collection of military, agricultural, Indian artifacts, railroad, and other local memorabilia. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Hours: M-F 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Closed on state holidays. Free.

**Tuscumbia Depot & Roundhouse (D-6)**

*204 W. 5th St., Tuscumbia; (256) 389-1357; www.colbertcountytourism.org, www.tuscumbiarailway.com*

Tuscumbia is known as America's First Frontier Railroad Town for being part of the first railroad west of the Appalachian Mountains. The 1888 restored passenger Depot was utilized by both the Memphis and Charleston and Southern Railway companies. In its early years, the depot was used often by Helen Keller and her teacher, Annie Sullivan. Today it is a museum dedicated to rail and train memorabilia, interactive train simulators, telegraph demonstrations and information about Tuscumbia's history. A Keller family carriage occupies one room of the museum. Admission. Call for open dates and times.



*Guntersville Train Depot*

## MUSEUMS

### Courtland Heritage Museum (E-10)

252 College St, Courtland; (256) 637-2710, (256) 355-7875

The Museum contains exhibits on the 1st railroad west of the Appalachian Mountains, a book written in Courtland in 1832, the story of the Goliad (Texas) massacre in 1836, the battle of Courtland in 1862, the Courtland Army Air Force Base, Dinky Davis' bicycle, and lots of other local history.

### Mary G. Hardin Center for Cultural Arts (M-24)

501 Broad Street, Gadsden; (256) 543-2787; [www.culturalarts.com](http://www.culturalarts.com)

The Hardin Center is located in the heart of historic Downtown Gadsden and is adjacent to dining, shopping, and entertainment. There are three changing exhibition halls featuring regional and national exhibits and a 72-foot model of Gadsden in the 1940s with working railroads. Imagination Place Children's Museum features hours of hands-on family activities and fun. Special activities and performances take place throughout the year.

### North Alabama Railroad Museum (C-19)

694 Chase Rd NE, Huntsville; (256) 851-6276; [northalabamarailroadmuseum.com](http://northalabamarailroadmuseum.com)

The centerpiece of the museum features the Chase Depot, the smallest union depot in the country since it served more than one railroad when in service. If you visit the museum on a day when the train is running (see Events on their website), you can ride a vintage train over the museum's own Mercury & Chase Railroad. Over thirty pieces of major rolling stock have been preserved including both freight and passenger equipment and three historic locomotives. Open: The museum's volunteer staff is present each Wednesday and Saturday morning for member work sessions and to assist visitors. The museum is also open by special appointment. Visitors may take a free self-guided tour and there are tour sheets and museum brochures in the waybill box located on the north side of the Chase Depot. Donations are welcomed.

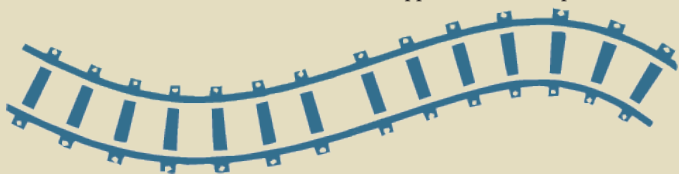
### Red Bay Museum (H-1)

400 4th St. SW, Red Bay; (256) 356-8758; [www.redbaymuseum.org](http://www.redbaymuseum.org)

The museum showcases various displays of artifacts of Red Bay's past and also a display of items donated by Tammy Wynette and family and friends of Tammy. A featured display is The Red Bay Depot, destroyed by fire in the early 1990s, which includes one of the Red Bay signs that was on each end of the depot building, ticket counter, benches, scales, several telegraph instruments and many other items related to the depot and railroad. Open: Tu and Th 1:30-4:00 p.m. and by appointment. On Fridays you can enter the museum through the Civitan Thrift Store next door. Admission.

### Red Bay Railroad Park (H-1)

111 4th Avenue East, Red Bay; (256) 356-8758; [www.redbaymuseum.org](http://www.redbaymuseum.org)  
Red Bay Railroad Park sits directly across from the Red Bay Museum and is part of the museum experience. The park features an Illinois Central Caboose, Red Bay's original steam locomotive water tower, and a fully restored 1923 East Broad Top steam locomotive from Pennsylvania. While the park is open daily, the caboose is only accessible during museum hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:30-4:00 p.m., and Fridays through the connected Civitan Thrift Store, which also supports museum operations.



## TRAIN RELATED ACTIVITIES

### Hartselle Depot Days Festival (H-14)

Downtown Hartselle; (256) 773-4370; [www.hartselledepotdays.com](http://www.hartselledepotdays.com)

The Depot Days Festival is a tribute to the railroad industry and its contribution to Hartselle and the North Alabama region. Activities, consisting of an art show, craft vendors, children's games, a tractor and engine show, a car, truck and motorcycle show and live music, take place around the historic depot and downtown area.

Third Saturday in September. Free Admission.

### Trains on Main Scavenger Hunt (D-16)

130 Park Square Lane, Madison, Inside the Hogan YMCA; (256) 325.8317; [www.trainsonmain.com](http://www.trainsonmain.com)

Trains on Main is a permanent, 24/7 outdoor scavenger hunt through downtown Madison created by the Madison Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with the City of Madison and the Huntsville-Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau. Participants hunt for 8 bronze trains by utilizing clue cards, available from the Madison Chamber and City Hall. Once train spotters find all 8 trains, they bring their completed clue cards to the Madison Chamber office to collect a prize.

## SMALL-SCALE TRAIN RIDES

### Sportsman Lake Park

#### Cullman County Parks and Recreation Department (K-15)

1544 Sportsman Lake Rd, NW, Cullman; (256) 734-3052; [www.cullmancountyparks.com](http://www.cullmancountyparks.com)

Located around a large shallow body of water teeming with fish and wildlife in downtown Cullman, Sportsman Lake Park is the perfect place for family gatherings at picnic tables, pavilions, and RV or tent camping. A fan favorite is the small-scale train wrapping around the lake. Kids of all ages will enjoy it and the 18 hole putt-putt golf course and paddle boats.



Small-scale train at Spring Park, Tuscumbia

### Spring Park Tuscumbia (D-6) Tuscumbia Parks & Recreation

Downtown Tuscumbia; (256) 383-0783; [www.colbertcountytourism.org](http://www.colbertcountytourism.org)

Several amusements provide an excellent venue for young children to enjoy: a roller coaster, carousel and narrow gauge train that runs through the park (nominal fee for amusements). A breathtaking centerpiece of Spring Park is a large 51-jet fountain that shoots water more than 150 feet into the air.

### Noccalula Falls Park (M-23)

Hwy. 211, Gadsden; (256) 549-4663, campground (256) 543-7412; [www.cityofgadsden.com](http://www.cityofgadsden.com)

A favorite attraction at Noccalula Falls Park is their C.P. Huntington Train. The train operates daily and takes visitors on a scenic one mile ride in and around the park. Unlimited train rides are included in park admission. Park also includes a 90-foot waterfall with canyon, nature trails, botanical garden, and pioneer village. Beautiful

rocks and gardens with an array of shrubs and flowers may be viewed as you walk the park's paved trail system. Call for hours. Admission.

### **North Alabama Railroad Museum (D-18)**

694 Chase Rd NE, Huntsville, AL 35811; (256) 851-6276;

[northalabamarailroadmuseum.com](http://northalabamarailroadmuseum.com)

Regular excursions are run over the entire length of their line to make a 10 mile round trip. These trips last a little over 1 hour. Shorter trips last approximately 35 minutes. Please check website for train schedule.

## RESTAURANTS

### **Freight House Restaurant & Catering**

200 Railroad St. SW, Hartselle;

256-773-4600;

[www.freighthousecatering.com](http://www.freighthousecatering.com)

The Freight House

Restaurant is a modern

Southern restaurant located

in downtown Hartselle,

Alabama. Located in the

historic freight terminal,

this historic landmark has

been remodeled as a dining

facility and event venue. Our

guests may hear passing trains and witness unique union of the past and

present. Menu is posted on our website. Hours: Su, M, T, W 11 am - 2

pm; Th 11-8 pm; F-S 11 am 9 pm.



## HISTORIC MARKERS

*There are a wealth of historic markers located across North Alabama that mark significant events and places as part of our heritage. Below are listed a selection of National Register of Historic Places, Alabama Historical Commission, and local city and historical society markers.*

### **• Historic Oneonta L & N Railroad Depot (N-19)**

Location: 2nd Street South ¼ mile south of Alabama Highway 75, Oneonta, Alabama

Coordinates: N 33° 56.664 W 086° 28.548, 33.9444 -86.4758

Erected 2010 by Alabama Tourism Department and the City of Oneonta.

### **• Tennessee, Alabama & Georgia Railway (J-27)**

Location: 3595 AL-273, Leesburg, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 13.338 W 085° 43.439, 34.2223 -85.72398333

Erected by Cherokee County Historical Society.

### **• Battle of Sulphur Creek Trestle (B-13)**

Location: Elkmont Road/North Jefferson Street (State Highway 127) south of Upper Fort Hampton Road (County Road 49), Elkmont, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 54.683 W 086° 59.3, 34.91138333 -86.98833333

Erected 1982 by Limestone County Historical Society.

### **• Old Railroad Bed (D-7)**

Location: Ashe Blvd., Sheffield, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 46.764 W 087° 40.032, 34.7794 -87.6672

Sponsored by the Old Railroad Bridge Company and Colbert County Historical Landmarks Foundation.

### **• Old Railroad Bridge (D-7)**

Location: N. Broad St., Sheffield, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 46.818 W 087° 40.06, 34.7803 -87.66766666

Sponsored by the Old Railroad Bridge Company and Colbert County Historical Landmarks Foundation.

### **• Tuscumbia Railroad - First Railroad West of Alleghenies (D-7)**

Location: U.S. Hwy 43, Tuscumbia, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 43.951 W 087° 42.726, 34.73251666 -87.7121

Erected by Alabama Historical Commission.

### **• Cullman Railroad Depot (K-15)**

Location: 2nd Ave. NE, Cullman, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 10.774 W 086° 50.687, 34.17956666 -86.84478333

Restoration began in February 1991, funded by donations from Cullman County Historical Society, citizens of Cullman County, and public grants. Added to the National Register of Historic Places June 17, 1976.

### **• Red Bay Depot & Hotel (H-2)**

Location: 2nd St. SE and 4th Ave. S (AL Route 24), Red Bay, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 26.486 W 088° 8.701, 34.44143333 -88.14501666

The last train rolled through Red Bay in 1990. Plans were in process to move and preserve the depot when it mysteriously burned.

### **• Scottsboro Railroad Depot (D-23)**

Location: Maple Avenue near N Houston Street, Scottsboro, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 40.506 W 086° 2.214, 34.6751 -86.0369

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998

Date Dedicated / Placed: 1998

### **• Stevenson Depot and Hotel (B-25)**

Location: West Main Street (State Highway 117), Stevenson, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 52.074 W 085° 50.4, 34.8679 -85.84

Listed on The National Register of Historic Places May 13, 1974.

Erected by Alabama Historical Commission.

### **• Early Roads / One of the South's First Railroads 1832 (D-10)**

#### **One of the South's First Railroads / Early Roads**

Location: in front of Old Train Depot across train tracks, past Square Park in Courtland, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 39.968 W 087° 18.627, 34.66613333 -87.31045

Erected 1994 by the Courtland Historical Foundation and the Town of Courtland.

### **• End of One of the South's First Railroads / Early Roads (B-14)**

#### **Tenn. & Ala. Central Railroad**

Elkmont, Alabama

Location: County Road 49 east of Railroad Street, Elkmont, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 55.75 W 086° 58.383, 34.92916666 -86.97305

Erected 2005 by Elkmont Town Council & Limestone County Historical Society.

### **• Passenger Depot (D-17)**

Location: Church St., Huntsville, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 44.064 W 086° 35.454, 34.7344 -86.5909

National Register of Historic Places 1971

Erected 1978 by Alabama Historical Association.

### **• First Railroad West of Allegheny Mountains (F-14)**

Location: at the intersection of Wilson Street Northeast (U.S. 72) and Harborview Drive Northeast, Decatur, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 36.873 W 086° 58.999, 34.61455 -86.98331666

Erected 1952 by Alabama Historical Association.

### **• Old Decatur Historic District/Historic Depot (F-14) The Battle for Decatur 7 - Two Bridges Across The Tennessee River**

Location: 701 Railroad St. NW, Decatur, Alabama

Coordinates: N 34° 36.813 W 086° 59.177, 34.61355 -86.98628333

Erected by City of Decatur.