

THE
SCOTTSBORO
BOYS
TRIALS
HISTORIC
ROUTE

... a guide to historic sites
in **Alabama and Tennessee**
related to
the **Scottsboro Trials**
of the 1930s
and the stirrings of
civil rights activism
in the **U.S. South**

The Scottsboro Boys Museum and Cultural Center



SCOTTSBORO
BOYS MUSEUM &
CULTURAL
CENTER

The Scottsboro Boys Museum and Cultural Center is dedicated to commemorating the lives and legacy of the Scottsboro Boys. Located adjacent to downtown Scottsboro, one long block from the railroad tracks, the building was witness to the infamous events beginning in

1931 and may have hosted meetings for the defense. Joyce Chapel, the building which houses the museum, served as home to the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church of Scottsboro congregation for more than 100 years since the land for the church was originally gifted in 1878. Now, the building serves the community with a fresh set of goals: to promote knowledge, reconciliation, and healing.

The museum holds a collection of artifacts from the Scottsboro trials. Acquisitions include Defense Committee posters, trial transcripts, scrapbooks, photographs, original newspaper articles, and a juror's chair from the first trial courtroom in Scottsboro, among other documents and memorabilia. Public lectures and video resources are among the many educational offerings at the Center.

The Nine Scottsboro Defendants



Olen Montgomery
Clarence Norris
Haywood Patterson
Ozie Powell
Willie Roberson
Charlie Weems
Eugene Williams
Roy Wright
Andy Wright

Scottsboro Trials: Major Events

1931

March 25

After a fight among white and black youths riding the rails westbound from Chattanooga toward Memphis, a sheriff's posse pulls nine young African American men, ranging in age from 12 to 19, from a freight train in Paint Rock, Alabama. The nine are accused of raping two white women.

April 6-9

All nine defendants are tried in Judge Alfred E. Hawkins' courtroom in Scottsboro. All but Roy Wright, whose case was declared a mistrial, are convicted and sentenced to death.

1932

March 24

The Alabama Supreme Court upholds seven of the eight death sentences, sparing 13-year-old Eugene Williams. Only Chief Justice John C. Anderson dissents.

November 7

In *Patterson v. Alabama*, the United States Supreme Court rules that defendants had been denied the right to counsel, a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and orders a retrial.

1933

January

The International Labor Defense league hires noted New York attorney Samuel Leibowitz as chief legal counsel for the Scottsboro defendants.

March 23

Ruby Bates recants her original testimony; Victoria Price, the other accuser, does not.

March 27

The second round of trials begins in Decatur, Alabama.

June 22

The jury once again comes to a guilty verdict. Leibowitz calls for a mistrial, and Judge James Edwin Horton sets aside the jury's guilty verdict based on the evidence presented. The case returns to the U.S. Supreme Court.

1934

June 12

A year after his heroic ruling, Judge Horton loses his bid for reelection.

1935

April 1

In *Norris v. Alabama*, the U.S. Supreme Court again rules in favor of the defendants, ordering new trials because the Alabama judicial system excluded blacks from jury rolls.

1937

July 24

The State of Alabama drops the rape charges against Ozzie Powell, Willie Roberson, Olen Montgomery, Eugene Williams, and Roy Wright.

1943-46

Clarence Norris, Andrew Wright, and Charlie Weems are released from prison. Only Haywood Patterson remains imprisoned.

1948

July

Haywood Patterson escapes from prison and finds refuge in Michigan. The FBI tracks him down, but Michigan Governor Gerhard Mennen Williams refuses to extradite him.

1950

June

Andrew Wright, the last Scottsboro defendant still in prison, is paroled and released.

1976

October

Governor George Wallace pardons Scottsboro defendant Clarence Norris.

1989

January 23

Clarence Norris dies. He was the last surviving defendant in the Scottsboro trials.

2011

More than eighty years after the trials began, the U.S. criminal justice system—through incarceration, parole and probation—now oversees one-third of African American men in their twenties.

A Chattanooga, Tennessee -

On March 25, 1931, nine young African Americans hopped a train in a Chattanooga freight yard and headed west. Unemployed and desperate for a better life, they were not unlike millions during the Great Depression. In Memphis, perhaps, there would be work. Instead, they found themselves at the center of a life and death courtroom drama, falsely accused of rape. The Scottsboro Boys' cases became an international spectacle spotlighting Jim Crow in America.

Rail travel is central to the story of the Scottsboro Boys. In Chattanooga, the **Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum** (4119 Cromwell Road, Chattanooga, TN 37421, 423-894-8028) lies about one mile from the freight yards where both the defendants and their accusers boarded a westbound train. The Rail Museum displays Southern Railway gondola cars similar to those the nine teenagers rode. Downtown, the archives on the third floor of the **Chattanooga-Hamilton Bicentennial Library** contain histories of the four defendants who lived in that city (1001 Broad Street, Chattanooga, TN 37402, 423-757-5310). Nearby the library, the **Bessie Smith Cultural Center** is home to memorabilia from the Scottsboro trials (200 East M.L. King Boulevard, Chattanooga, TN 37403 423-266-8658); and just north of the city is the cemetery where Andy, Roy and their mother Ada Wright—who became an international advocate for the defendants' freedom—are buried. **Pleasant Hill Cemetery** is located twenty-seven miles northeast of Chattanooga. Follow Highway 27 north from Chattanooga for twenty-four miles to the town of Bakewell. Take McCall Ferry Road for one mile; turn onto May Road for two miles to the cemetery entrance.



Joyce Chapel
Scottsboro, Alabama

B Stevenson, Alabama -

The train that carried the ill-fated young men headed toward Memphis stopped briefly in Stevenson, Alabama, before continuing its journey. Soon after the train left Stevenson, a fight broke out on board one of the cars. While the details of the scuffle are contested, later testimony suggests that the struggle pitted some of the defendants against a group of young white men. After being forced to jump off the train, a number of the whites ran back to the Stevenson Depot to report the incident. The stationmaster then alerted authorities down the line about the mischief. Within a short period of time, a sheriff's posse in Paint Rock pulled nine African Americans off the train, handcuffed them with rope and drove them to Scottsboro to await their fate.

At Stevenson today, the rail station looks much the way it did in 1931. The building, now the **Stevenson Depot and Museum** (207 West Main Street, Stevenson, AL 35772, 256-437-3012) was built in 1872. Later named an historic site by the Alabama Historical Commission, the community museum recognizes the town's significance as a center of trade during the Civil War.



C D Scottsboro/ Paint Rock, Alabama -

"The firstest I knowed anything was wrong, or knowed who else was on that train was when that crowd of white men stopped the train at Paint Rock and took us off. They took us up the railroad bank to a white rock and stood us against it with their guns aimed at our heads." – Roy Wright, Interview with F. Raymond Daniell of *The New York Times*, March 10, 1933

After their arrest at the Paint Rock Station, a sheriff's posse put the nine young men in the back of a flatbed truck and transported them to the jail in Scottsboro, where they first discovered that they had been charged with rape. Jackson County Sheriff Matt Wann held off the angry lynch mob that formed outside the jailhouse, refusing them access to the accused. The mob dispersed and the National Guard surrounded the two-story jailhouse where the defendants stayed for twelve days before the trials began. The threat of mob violence prompted local officials to insist that the trials proceed quickly. The jury reached a verdict in less than three days, with eight of the nine defendants receiving a death sentence. After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the cases a mistrial, jailers moved the young men to a dilapidated prison in Decatur, Alabama, to wait for a retrial.

The starting point in Scottsboro is the **Scottsboro Boys Museum and Cultural Center** (428 West Willow Street, Scottsboro, AL 35768, 256-244-1310). Established in 2010, the museum holds a collection of local artifacts relating to the trials. In the clearing directly behind the museum, Benson Park frames a view of the very tracks along which the Scottsboro Boys passed before they were arrested at Paint Rock, about twenty miles west of the chapel.

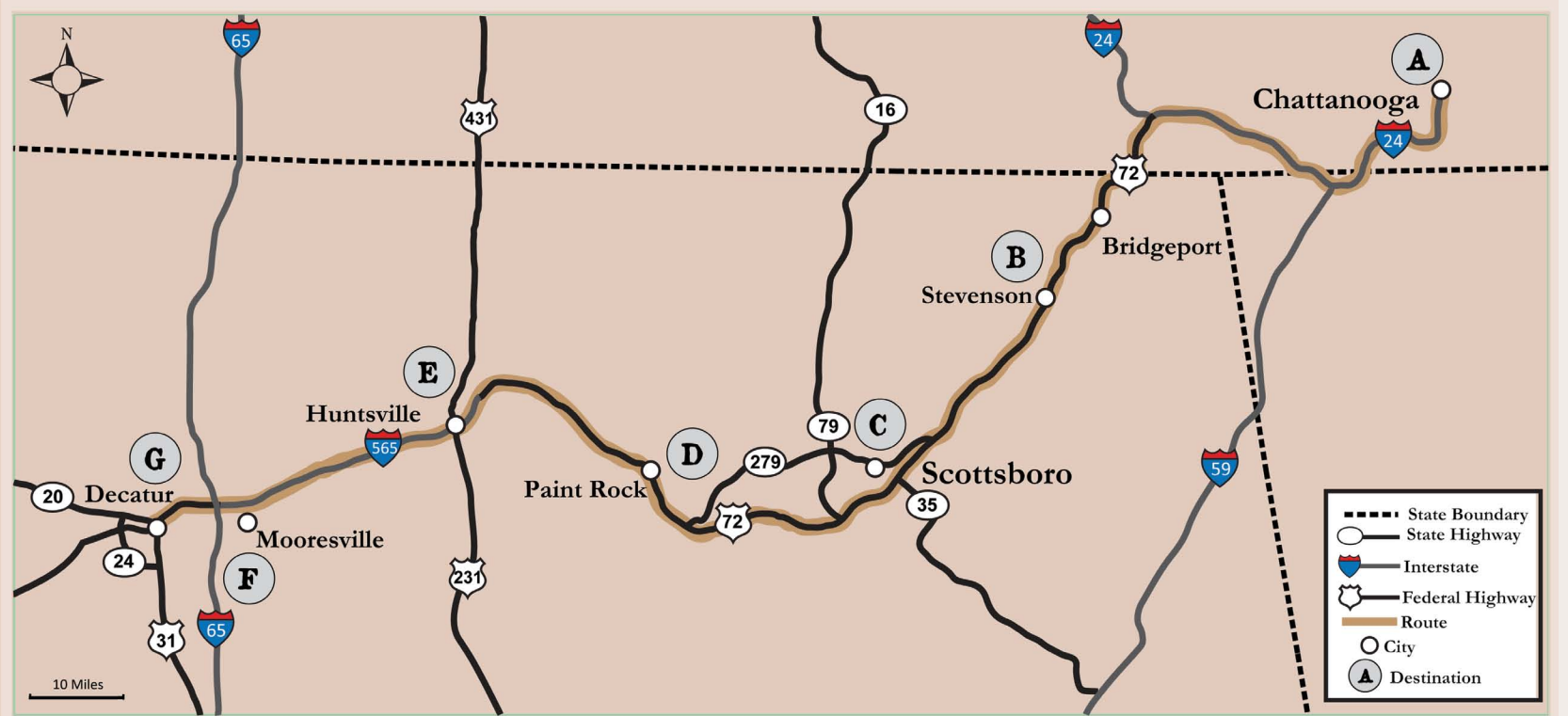
From the Museum, head east on Willow Street—on foot or by car—to visit the related sites in Scottsboro's downtown. The original Jackson County Jail in which the accused spent their fearful first night no longer stands.

A plaque acknowledging the events marks the south face of the remodeled **Jackson County Courthouse** (102 East Laurel Street, Scottsboro, AL 35768) where the Scottsboro Boys first stood trial. During weekday hours when court is not in session, the public can visit a second floor courtroom to view the original bench from which Judge Alfred E. Hawkins officiated during the first trial.

Two blocks west of the courthouse along Laurel Street is the **Scottsboro-Jackson County Heritage Center** (208 South Houston Street, Scottsboro, AL 35768-4318, 256-259-2122), which has a small collection of Scottsboro books and documentaries, including some for sale. Appointments can be scheduled for examining historic documents. Tourists to the area may also wish to shop at **Unclaimed Baggage** (509 West Willow Street, Scottsboro, AL 35768, 256-259-1525) just one block west of the Scottsboro Museum and Cultural Center.

E Huntsville, Alabama -

The accusers of the nine were two local young women from Huntsville, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, who had hitched a freight train to Chattanooga and were returning home in similar fashion when the train was stopped in Paint Rock. Questioned by authorities at



the Paint Rock station, Bates and Price charged rape. Though Bates later recanted and spoke in defense of the Scottsboro defendants at public rallies, their accusations of rape led to the repeated convictions.

The **Huntsville Historic Railroad Depot** (320 Church Street, Huntsville, AL 35801, 256-564-8100) is open to the public and houses a museum that tells the history of the town from a mill town to a space and rocket center. Also in Huntsville are the **Madison County Archives** (915 Monroe Street Southwest, Huntsville, AL 35801, 256-532-5940). The Archives occupy the third floor of the main **Madison County Public Library** and contain many original documents and photographs relating to the trial, the defendants, the accusers, and the attorneys who were involved in the case.



Janie Patterson (here leading a 1933 Washington, D.C. march), Ada Wright, and other mothers spoke out in defense of their sons. Photo donated by Corbis.

F Mooresville, Alabama -

Judge James E. Horton famously set aside a jury verdict of guilty in the second round of Scottsboro trials, which were held in Decatur. The courageous decision was lauded by defenders of civil rights, even though locally it was quite unpopular. Horton lost his next bid for re-election and never again served in public office. By 1940, he retired from law altogether to become a full time farmer, a passion which he pursued until his death in 1973.

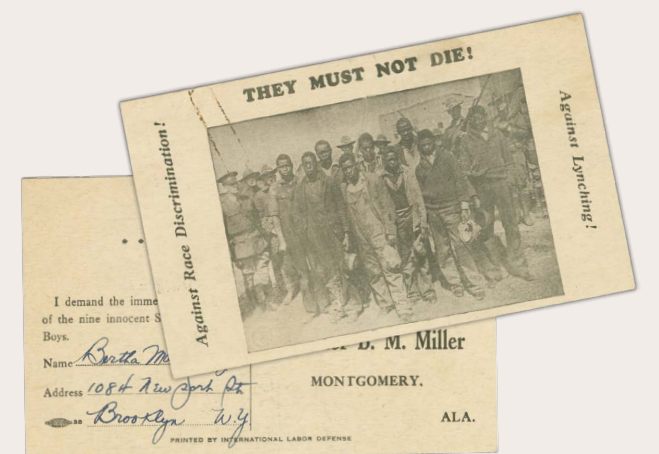
When asked later in his life about the momentous 1933 decision, Horton replied simply, "fiat justitia ruat coelum." "Let justice be done though the heavens may fall." **Judge Horton's stately home** can be seen today in Mooresville just minutes from I-565. From I-565 take the Greenbriar Road exit and go north two miles. Turn right onto County Road 10. The Horton home is the first one on the right. An historical marker denoting the names of successive owners of the home and the date the home was first built, "Maclin, Horton, Garrett, 1848" stands near the driveway entrance.

G Decatur, Alabama -

"Now gentlemen under our law when it comes to the courts we know neither native or alien, we know neither Jew nor Gentile, we know neither black nor white, native or foreign born, but to each it is our duty to mete out even handed justice." – Judge Horton's address to the Decatur Jury March 31, 1933

In 1933, the Scottsboro Boys trials were moved from Scottsboro to Decatur and the **Morgan County Courthouse** (302 Lee Street N.E., Decatur, AL 35602, 256-351-4600). Here Ruby Bates recanted under oath her claim that she had been raped. And it was here where Judge Horton set aside the highly prejudiced jury verdict. While the courthouse has been rebuilt since the 1930s, the new building houses displays about the trials as well as large portrait of Judge Horton.

The Schaudies-Banks Cottage (1004 Sycamore St. NW, Decatur, AL 35601, 256-353-7191) was the home of local civil rights activist Athelyne Banks. Banks welcomed visiting African American journalists who hoped to cover the trials without interference from antagonistic local white groups. Several African American churches in Decatur opened their doors to the defense team. Among the more prominent of these churches that still stand are **First Missionary Baptist Church** (123 Church Street Northeast, Decatur, AL 35601, 256-353-0423) and **King's Memorial United Methodist Church** (702 McCartney Street Northwest, Decatur, AL 35601, 256-353-9267). A significant collection of original Scottsboro Boys trial documents and hundreds of photographs taken during the trial are located in the **Morgan County Archives**, (24 Bank Street Northeast, Decatur, AL 3560, 256-351-4726). One block from the archives is the Old Train Station in Decatur, the site where nearly all the major figures in the Scottsboro trials passed through the city.



International Labor Defense (ILD) mounted a worldwide campaign. The NAACP also worked for the defendants' freedom.

The Scottsboro Boys Museum and Cultural Center
receives support from:

The National Trust for Historic Preservation

The Ford Foundation

The University of Alabama

New College

Center for Community-Based Partnerships

Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility

Department of American Studies

Department of History, Summersell Center
for the Study of the South

Auburn University

Department of History

Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the
Arts and Humanities

Generous individual donors

To contact the museum or to contribute, visit the
website at:

www.scottsborotrials.org

428 West Willow Street

Scottsboro, AL 35768

Phone: (256) 609-4202 or (256) 244-1310

Museum hours

10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Every second and third Saturday of the month

Or, by appointment

Contact the museum for group and educational tours

Printed on 40% recycled stock