

Long before the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto first set foot on Decatur County soil in 1540, the early Seminole Indians thrived on the bluffs along the Flint River. They believed very strongly that their souls were intertwined with the "soul" of the land-that where they were was a part of who they were.

Those of us who now call the beautiful Bainbridge-Decatur County area home understand some of what those proud Native Americans must have felt. To us, this wonderful place is more than geography-it is a part of who we are.

Southwest Georgia is home to many picturesque regions and captivating communities, but none so enchanting as Bainbridge and Decatur County. Generations of Southerners have witnessed the evolution of this magnificent landscape-rich with Indian lore, scarred by battle, and blessed with beautifully preserved monuments that honor these life changes.

With its deep agricultural roots and extensive waterways, Decatur County was formed by the Georgia Legislature in 1823 and named for Commodore Stephen Decatur, a naval hero during the War of 1812. Even before that, in 1765, the present site of Bainbridge was an Indian village known as Pucknawhitla. As early as 1778, it became known as Burgess Town, when a trader named James Burgess established a trading post here. Later a federal outpost, it was called Fort Hughes from 1817-1824. After the Seminoles were defeated in battle in late 1824, Fort Hughes was named Bainbridge for Commodore William Bainbridge, Commander of "Old Ironsides" during the War of 1812. Land for a county seat was purchased in 1826, and the city itself was incorporated in 1829.

The waterways surrounding Decatur County were instrumental in the early growth and development of the region. An early inhabitant of Decatur County stated, "The Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers, together with their product, the Apalachicola River to the Gulf of Mexico, made the equivalent of a pretty big ready-made highway system." Archaeologists digging along the lake and its tributaries have uncovered several prehistoric fossils, dating back 15,000 years, as well as artifacts from the Civil War and turn-of-the-century riverboat excursions.

The historical sites found throughout Decatur County are important reminders of our heritage-battles fought, lives lost, victories won, and progress made. They all help explain, not just where we are, but who we are.