



At 9:00 a.m. on August 4, 2015 officials held a brief “topping off” ceremony at the historic Decatur railroad depot. This ceremony entailed placing via a large crane a virtually exact replica design [cupola](#) on the depot as it was when the depot was constructed in 1905.

The original cupola is clearly evident in early pictures of the depot but did not exist by the 1940s—and possibly before.



The depot was erected by the [Southern Railway](#) whose chief architect in 1905 was the nationally famous [Frank Pierce Milburn](#) who generally designed depots in the Spanish Revival style of architecture, the same style as the Decatur depot. The Decatur depot was later used by both the [Southern and L&N Railroads](#), therefore, was for many years considered a “union” depot.



About 75 officials and members of the public attended the topping off ceremony including Mayor **Don Kyle** and City Council President **Gary Hammon** together with Morgan County Commission Chairman **Ray Long**. Also attending was 94 year old **Ross Malone** who worked in the depot for about 35 years beginning in 1947 as well as many historical railroad enthusiast citizens. Decatur was the eastern terminus of the [Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur Railroad](#), the nation’s first railroad west of the [Allegheny Mountains](#). The city has a railroad history spanning more than 180 years.

Participants included 94 year old **Ross Malone** (who worked in the Depot for 30+ years beginning in 1947), **Bill Wyker** (life-long Decatur resident and local businessman whose family established Wyker Hardware on Bank St. in 1888—Ross Malone was the caddy as a young man for Bill’s dad **Billy Wyker** when BW golfed at [Decatur Country Club](#)). Bill and Ross have been friends virtually Bill’s entire life), **David Breland** (Director of Historic Resources and Events, City of Decatur and life-long Decatur resident), **Wally Terry** (life-long Decatur resident and Director of Economic Resources (Building, Planning and Community Development Departments) for the City of Decatur and **Allen Stover** may have made a brief appearance (he is the Grants Administrator for the City of Decatur and instrumental in the restoration of the Depot).



Ross Malone and the others talked about the layout of the Depot in the 1940s, various jobs and people who undertook them during this time period both in the Depot and the **Railway Express Agency**, railroads themselves and related businesses.

We also discussed the history of Decatur’s downtown during this era including locations of various long-gone landmarks such as hotels, restaurants, the Decatur City Hall and other government buildings. We discussed how segregation of the races affected operation of the Depot during that era. Many former leaders and interesting personalities (now deceased) in the city were discussed as well.

Ross took us on a complete tour of the interior of the Depot outlining where various rooms originally were located as well as their purposes. We also discussed when [Jackie Robinson](#), [Willie Mays](#), [Roy Campanella](#) and other Major League Baseball hall of famers would come to Decatur to play barnstorm games against Decatur semi-pro and pro stars Ross Malone, Junior Vaughn and Leo Gray (the latter two played professional baseball in the old [Negro League](#)). A great walk down memory lane....