

Cotaco County (later renamed Morgan) was created by an act of the Alabama Territorial Legislature on Feb. 6, 1818, from lands ceded by the Cherokees and Chickasaws in 1816. It was among the first counties when Alabama attained statehood in 1819. The County Court, which would later evolve into the Morgan County Commission, first met at the “White House” at Cotaco. In 1820, the county seat was moved to Somerville, where it would remain until 1892. The Somerville Courthouse, built in 1837, is today the oldest remaining purpose-built courthouse in the state. In 1821 legislators renamed the county Morgan, in honor of Gen. Daniel Morgan, Revolutionary War general and hero of the Battle of Cowpens.

On January 13, 1820, President James Monroe responded to a request by a group of investors and issued a proclamation that a town be laid out on the south bank of the Tennessee River, above the rapids of the Muscle Shoals. The town of Decatur was created on June 6 by the Articles of Association of the Decatur Land Company. Decatur experienced two major developments in 1832. The first was the choice of Decatur as a branch for the State Bank of Alabama. Although the venture collapsed amid controversy in 1841, the bank building remains the most recognizable Decatur landmark today. The other development in 1832 was the selection of Decatur as a terminus for the Tusculumbia, Courtland and Decatur Railroad. The railroad was designed as a means of swiftly moving cargo travelling down the Tennessee River around the nearly impassable rocks of the Muscle Shoals. It was eventually incorporated into the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, which built a bridge across the Tennessee River at Decatur in 1855.

Morgan County experienced great destruction during the war of 1861-1865. Union and Confederate armies marched through the county numerous times. Marauding troops took crops and livestock and many people nearly starved. Decatur switched hands several times during the war, and was almost completely destroyed when the Union fortified it to protect Gen. W. T. Sherman’s supply line as he marched across Georgia. Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood and the Army of Tennessee engaged Federal troops entrenched at Decatur in October of 1864, and lost upwards of 1,500 men in the action there. Hundreds of Morgan County’s men fought in the war. Although the vast majority of Morgan County’s white soldiers fought for the Confederacy, close to 100 fought for the Union, and it was not uncommon for families to have soldiers fighting on opposite sides of the conflict. Morgan County was also the only place in Alabama to raise a regiment of United States Colored Infantry as former slaves came to Decatur during Union occupation to join the 106th USCI.

After the war Morgan County experienced hardships but opportunity again came to the area when the great Louisville and Nashville Railroad was laid through the county in the 1870’s. When the railroad came the towns of Hartselle and Falkville were established, and those towns experienced great growth through the construction of cotton gins and sawmills. Decatur was chosen as the location for the great L & N car shops, which at one time employed over 2,000 men. Decatur’s “boom time” came in 1887 with the establishment of the town of New Decatur (later renamed Albany) and numerous businesses along the riverfront. Although growth slowed after the terror of a yellow fever epidemic in 1888, the town entered the 20th century experiencing healthy growth

and a variety of new business ventures. In 1892, the county seat was moved from Somerville to Decatur, and has remained there ever since.

Morgan County's people persevered during the trials of the Great Depression of the 1930's, but new hope came to the area in the form of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The system of dams on the Tennessee River solved the problem of navigating the Muscle Shoals, brought cheap, plentiful power to the region, flood control and the restoration of farmlands. New industries once again chose to locate along the River, and provided employment for thousands. During World War II, many Morgan County Workers were employed at Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation. The site of this shipyard is now a harbor and entertainment venue.

Morgan County has begun the 21st century with a new spirit of industry and cooperation that provides a bright promise of better lives for its citizens.

Total population figures for Morgan County:

1818:	2,253
1820:	5,263
1830:	9,062
1840:	9,841
1850:	10,125
1860:	11,335
1870:	12,187
1880:	16,428
1890:	24,089
1900:	28,820
1910:	33,781
1920:	40,196
1930:	46,176
1940:	48,148
1950:	52,924
1960:	60,454
1970:	77,306
1980:	90,231
1990:	100,043
2000:	111,064
2010:	119,490