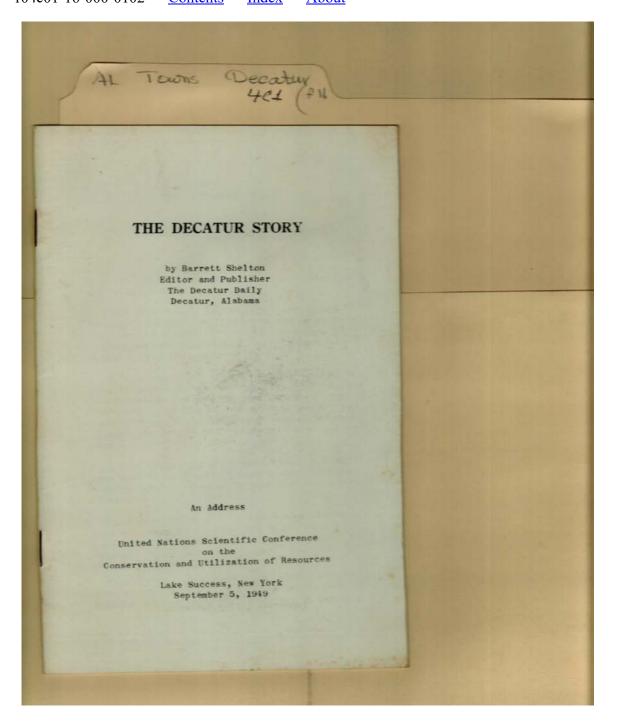
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Names:

Decatur Story

Places:

Decatur, AL

Types:

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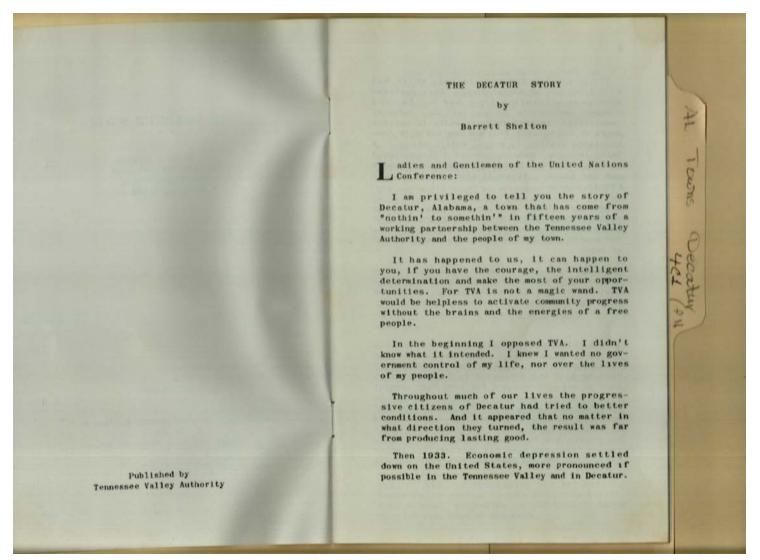
Dates: Sep 05, 1949 Shelton, Barrett, Editor

Lake Success, NY

book

United Nations Scientific Conference

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Names:

Shelton, Barrett,

Decatur, AL

TVA

The Decatur Story

Types:

Places:

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The one major industry we had, which had kept 2,000 men at work, closed. This railroad shop gave way to the truck and the bus and economic conditions. Decatur lost this industry completely. Another industry which in earlier years we had brought from New England with considerable subsidy in money, went bankrupt. A third industry, manufacturer of full-resultioned hosiery, went to the wall from poor management and bad times. Seven of eight banks in our County closed.

Our farm situation. We had only one crop in the Decatur area--cotton--and cotton was five cents a pound. Lands were selling for taxes, the people were ill-housed, ill-clothed and out of hope.

So you can see that we were not interested in saving a dollar or so on our power bill. That would solve little or nothing. We needed jobs and opportunities for our people.

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I nto this dismal, perplexed economic setting one late midwinter afternoon came David Lilienthal, then a member of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Four of our citizens who had long been hopeful of improving conditions generally met him in conference. We were almost frankly hostile, for he represented to us another way of thought and another way of life. And our conversation might be summarized in this fashion, "All right, you're here, you were not invited, but you're here. You are in command, now what are you going to do?" Dave leaned his chair back against the wall and the twinkle of a smile came into his eyes, as he said gently and firmly, "I'm not going to do anything. You're going to do it." 3

1 DWMS

He went on to tell us something we never knew before. He went on to say that TVA would provide the tools of opportunity--flood control, malaria control, navigation on the river, low cost power, test-demonstration farming to show how our soils could be returned to fertility, a fertility lost through land erosion, another wayward child of a one-crop system. He told us the river would no longer defeat man, but would become the servant of man. "What you do with these tools," he said, "is up to you."

Dave Lilienthal had passed the task right back to us, right back to local control. He let us know that simple economics could be applied in the Tennessee Valley and that the faith, determination and sweat of the people would bring about the result we had eagerly sought for so many years.

Later, Dr. Harcourt Morgan, another member of the TVA Board of Directors, came to us and taiked to us about lime and phosphate and legumes, and the relationship of people and land. He did not speak of great industry. Rather did he speak of the need for farm markets and farm processing plants and of increasing the value of our farm products through manufacturing processes. He opposed the tearing down of other sections of the United States by seeking their industry with subsidy, the promise of chear people the simple story of making the most of what we had, of developing our own natural resources, of putting to work the little capital that we owned, of growing our own industry based upon the resources of the land.

Names:

Lilienthal, David

2

Morgan, Harcourt, Dr.

Places:

Decatur, AL

Types:

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What was this? Dave Lilienthal and Dr. Harcourt Morgan had promised us nothing beyond the tools which were to come from the waters of the Tennessee River and the land-building and health-building practices which were included in TVA at the direction of a wise Congress when this independent corporation of the government was created in the nation's darkest economic hour.

We decided then and there that the economic system we had followed had to be improved upon, and to improve it we had to pioneer an entirely new plan of economics.

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Our townspeople needed jobs, our farm people needed month-by-month payrolls, rather than a once-a-year income secured from the harvesting of one crop.

The old order, the old way of doing things had to change, or our people could never have the opportunities to which their efforts entitled them.

First, we had to adopt this new thought given to us by the two members of the TVA board. We had to quit thinking of reaching into other sections of the U. S. and subsidizing industry to come into our section. Second, we had to begin in a small way to build toward a diversified agriculture and a diversified industry. We could never again, if our people were to survive, allow ourselves to be dependent upon a one-industry and a one-crop system.

Our first step was to form our own Chamber of Commerce, formed at a time when most people didn't believe it could be done. There was very little money. So, with considerable struggle,

Names:

Chamber of Commerce

Places:

Decatur, AL

Types:

book

Lilienthal, David

we got together some cash and more pledges amounting to \$3,000 for the budget the first year. A man who had lost all he had in the crash of one of the industries we had brought to Decatur with subsidy, became the first secretary at a salary of \$100 a month.

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We then decided we were going to develop a cash market every day in the year for every farm product grown in the Decatur area. We were going to welcome industry, but not wait for it. We were going to develop our own farm processing plants.

We decided a packing plant would be the first venture and persuaded the local ice company to put in packing plant facilities when there wasn't as much as one wagon load of hogs in our whole county. We are now producing our own livestock to meet the demands of this market.

We then turned to milk, formed a little corporation with paid-in capital of \$15,000, telling every stockholder to forget his investment, that he would never receive any return from his money anyway. What we were trying to do was establish a payroll every two weeks for the farm families of our section. The first day that plant went into operation there was a total supply of 1,800 pounds of milk. Today the production of milk pouring into this one plant peaks at 60,000 pounds and we have just started in this agricultural industry. What happened to the stockholders? Well, they never failed to receive six percent annually on their money and about two months ago that little plant paid stockholders a 100 percent dividend.

A long about that time we got some help from the outside. Navigation on the Tennessee River made it possible. Here, you see, is an exciting example of what can happen when a liability is changed into an asset. The Tennessee wasn't

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Morgan, Harcourt, Dr. Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 4, Subseries C, Box 1, Folder 16"The Decatur Story" by Shelton, Barrett, 1949Image 5r04c01-16-000-0106ContentsIndexAbout

navigable before the creation of TVA, there was no opportunity for a successful flour mill operation. Low-cost power didn't attract Nebraska Consolidated Mills Company to establish the Alabama Flour Mills at Decatur. Navigable water did it, plus the possibilities that flour could be produced at a cheaper cost per barrel owing to savings on freight. The impact of this industry on our section was tremendous. Farmers could grow grains because there was now a daily cash market. They could produce core and wheat, and all the grains with assurance that they would sell their production. They could get cash for products for which previously there had been no market.

Tennessee Valley Fertilizer Cooperative, a fertilizer mixing plant serving ten counties, was established by the people. Later, when we saw the possibility of selling seed commercially, this same organization put up a modern and efficient seed-cleaning plant.

An alfalfa-drying plant has been built, another way of keeping our pledge that markets would be established every day in the year for every product grown in the Decatur area.

These are specific illustrations of the forward-looking change which has taken place in the minds of our people. These industries, land builders and man builders, could never have been pictured in the minds of a defeated people, of a people who in the year before TVA saw an uncontrolled river flood and wash away the best soil, erode the back lands, wash crops, houses and barns down an angry stream.

You can see by now that the opportunities which were at hand in the development of the river and the region were being seized upon by our people with renewed courage and confidence. We now knew that we couldn't be licked again,

Tennessee Valley

Fertilizer CoOp

Names:

Alabama Flour Mills Malaria

Places:

Decatur, AL

Types:

book

that what had been preached to us by TVA was the economic truth.

A resident of a nearby town came into Decatur with an idea that he could build a market for poultry. We agreed with him and encouraged him to go forward. Today, that market though no more than three years old in our area is doing a \$3,000,000 business.

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Today there is a market for cotton, corn, wheat, livestock, milk, timber, small grains, truck crops. Fifteen years ago we were dozing in the sunshine waiting for that once-a-year payroll brought by cotton and wearing out our second finest resource, the land. Today the cash income from all farm products in the area surrounding Decatur is \$43,000,000. Land building did it. Flood control did it. Navigation did it. Malaria control did it. TVA, with the other State and Federal agricultural and health agencies, their teachings activated by an intelligent and determined people, did it.

Let's stop here for an illustration of the value of malaria control. Bid you ever have malaria? I have, the majority of my people have. Do you know what you want to do when you have malaria? Nothing. You want to prop your feet on your desk, or if you are not an office man, perhaps you'll take a day or two off from your job in industry or take out of the fields, just to get a rest. Malaria is restful - and nonproductive. Soon after the creation of TVA a nationally known manufacturer of full-fashioned hosiery bought a bankrupt hosiery plant in our community. The new company introduced physical examinations for all employees had found that 35 percent of all employees had malaria. Ten years later, after the TVA malaria control program had Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 4, Subseries C, Box 1, Folder 16"The Decatur Story" by Shelton, Barrett, 1949Image 6r04c01-16-000-0107ContentsIndexAbout

been in action. the figure had dropped below one percent. Today, because malaria is completely controlled, this hosiery firm does not even require the malaria test in physical examination. And what happened to the people in that plant? Why, they out-produce the employees of three other plants of this same company. That's what defeating malaria has meant just in this one illustration of how government can be helpful to people by making it possible for them to help themselves.

Industry-wise, our people have not been sleeping. Here again the pledge has been kept to never again be dependent upon any one major industry, or to seek after big industry alone. By the year 1940, there were 61 firms manufacturing a product in Decatur, Alabama, employing 2,834 people with an annual payroll of \$3,159,000. By 1944 the number of industries was 68, employing 6,908 people with an annual payroll of \$12,927,000. In 1948 the number of firms making a product had reached 87 and employment, off from the war peak, was 5,204, but the annual payroll was \$12,605,000, just a quarter of a million short of the payroll total during the war. You see, through the years we have been putting together the industrial picture in sound fashion. We had sought after diversity of industry rather than bigness.

> Keeping soundness ahead of bigness in industry, you will be interested in a partial list of products now processed or manufactured in Decatur. These include: flour, brick, tile, meats, furniture, boxes, baskets, structural and ornamental iron products, tanks, skids, septic and grease traps, poultry processing, felt hats, crude cottonseed and oll, steel ships and barges, dairy products, aluminum

Places:

Decatur, AL

Types:

book

fabricating, steel nuts and screws, concrete pipe, copper tubing fabrication, cotton and rayon tire fabric. Once, a short time ago, we were dependent on one industry.

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 $\mathbf{D}_{\mathrm{to}}^{\mathrm{own}}$ through the years we have never hesitated by use the technical opportunities within TVA. In our considerations of types of industry needed in our community, we have gone to TVA repeatedly to ask that the facts concerning such projected industry be assembled. I have said before and I say now that TVA has the most capable personnel with which I have ever come in contact, either in private or public service. No matter what department we sought out for advice on industrial or agricultural matters, we have always received willing and dependable factual assistance. The people in TVA have worked weeks and months on some of our requests, and never once has there been any directive issued to us. They have always told us, "Now here are the facts, the decision on what you do with them is up to you." The decision was our own, this government corporation believes and practices community development at the local level.

Just a moment on the electric picture. Have the benefits of electricity been made widespread? In 1939 there were 3,800 customers in Decatur, in 1949 there are 6,933. In 1938 they burned 12,000,000 KWH annually, now they burn 120,000,000 KWH annually. In 1938 the average sales price to the residential customer was 3 cents per KWH. Today it is just above 1 centand our Electric Department made \$182,000 net for the year closing June 30, 1949. You ask if the Electric Department pays any taxes. Well, the private company paid \$7,500 annually in 1938. The municipal operation pays to the

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City of Decatur \$28,000. Yet we have the second lowest residential rate in the U.S.

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What has happened in these 15 years in the spirit of our people? Are we confident without being over-confident? Do we look toward the future with assurance?

Let me give you three illustrations. Recently a copper processing plant decided to build a branch plant in the South. Two hundred seventyfour communities in eleven states were contacted. Do you know where that plant was located, an investment of \$12,000,000? In Decatur, Alabama. Do you know what the difference was between that valued plant locating with us or elsewhere? The difference was in the spirit of the people--our confidence, our friendliness, our genuine interest in working with them on their problem, was the difference.

Or let's look at this figure to prove what's happening in Decatur, Alabama, in this partnership between the people and an independent corporation of the government. In 1933 there were 7,000 property owners listed on the tax books of our county, today there are 11,000. The assessed valuation has grown from \$15,000,000 to \$22,000,000. The population of our town has grown from 12,000 to 24,000, and yet, the most significant, change has been in the thinking of our people. We have come from the status of a well-nigh beaten citizenship, merely existing, to a hopeful, exuberant, smilingly confident people, secure in the belief that given the opportunities afforded through making the forces of nature the servant of man, and with intelligent determination and sound application of the principles of economics, we could rise to heights of good citizenship, limited only by our own imposed limitations. Decatur today is a community of 35 churches, all instruments of a kindly Father above, Who guides and directs our every step, a young City whose people recently taxed themselves to build a new \$1,500,000 high school for our boys and girls, where the hand of the future has already shown us the necessity for doubling the capacity of our water system at a cost of \$1,100,000, where our electric department is just completing a \$400,000 expansion program to be ready for the future, where our people are constantly at work on new plans to perfect a soundly begun economic system so that our people might have opportunities to earn better things of life.

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I would like to close with this summary. Senator William Knowland, of California, who came to the Tennessee Valley to see for himself what had been accomplished since the creation of TVA, returned to tell Congress that TVA was the greatest boon to private enterprise he ever saw. Or in the words of Dr. Sen, a visitor in Decatur from the Embassy of India, who viewed TVA as an improvement in an ever-improving democracy, or in my own way of answering visitors who come into our section of the Valley and ask, Wouldn't this all have happened without a TVA?" And my answer to one and all is, "It didn't!"

Names:

Knowland, William, Sen, Dr. Senator

Places:

Decatur, AL

Types:

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Fennell, Johnny, Jr.

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Shelton, Barrett,

The Decatur Story

Names:

Civic Improvement

Places:

Decatur, AL

Types:

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection:Series 4, Subseries C, Box 1, Folder 16"The Decatur Story" by Shelton, Barrett, 1949ContentsIndexAbout

Table of Contents

<u>Image 1</u> (r04c01-16-000-0102) <u>Image 2</u> (r04c01-16-000-0103) <u>Image 3</u> (r04c01-16-000-0104) <u>Image 4</u> (r04c01-16-000-0105) <u>Image 5</u> (r04c01-16-000-0106) <u>Image 6</u> (r04c01-16-000-0107) <u>Image 7</u> (r04c01-16-000-0108) <u>Image 8</u> (r04c01-16-000-0109) <u>Table of Contents</u> Name & Place Index About the Collection

Name & Place Index

Alabama Flour Mills <u>5</u> Chamber of Commerce <u>4</u> Civic Improvement <u>8</u> Decatur Story <u>1</u> Decatur, AL <u>1</u>, <u>2</u>, <u>3</u>, <u>4</u>, <u>5</u>, <u>6</u>, <u>7</u>, <u>8</u> Fennell, Johnny, Jr. <u>8</u> Knowland, William, Senator <u>7</u> Lake Success, NY <u>1</u> Lilienthal, David <u>3</u>, <u>4</u> Malaria <u>5</u> Morgan, Harcourt, Dr. <u>3</u>, <u>4</u> Sen, Dr. <u>7</u> Shelton, Barrett, Editor <u>1</u> Shelton, Barrett, <u>2</u>, <u>8</u> Tennessee Valley Fertilizer CoOp <u>5</u> The Decatur Story <u>2</u>, <u>8</u> TVA <u>2</u> United Nations Scientific Conference <u>1</u>

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