

# Life in a Railroad Town

The city of Opelika was one of many that sprang up as a result of settlers coming into Creek Indian territory following the signing of the final treaty with the Creek Nation in 1832. "Official" settlement dates range between 1836 and 1837. The city's name is derived from the Indian word "opillaka" meaning large swamp, and the city as it is known today began on 160 acres of land clustered around the Central of Georgia railway.

In February 1854, the city was incorporated as part of Russell County. Opelika grew around the Railroad Avenue Historic District with city limits extending one mile in every direction around the Montgomery and West Point Railway station. A second railroad built in 1864 to Columbus established Opelika as a major transportation hub, and in 1866 Lee County was established with Opelika named as county seat.

During the 1860s and 70s, the structures along what is now South Railroad Avenue housed businesses such as saloons and brothels. Today it is the lively center of a restoration and preservation effort by the citizens of Opelika to revive the historic downtown district and return it to its original state as the epicenter of the city. In 1894, a franchise was granted to the Opelika and Auburn Electric Railway Company to run a train nearly every hour between the two communities. Round trip was 35 cents with Christmas shopping specials of 10 cents. The **depot**, which exists to this day and was restored to its original grandeur in 2002, saw goods come and go, doughboys and soldiers kiss their sweethearts goodbye, and the arrival of colorful passengers from Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, and Chief Sitting Bull to statesmen such as Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson. Will Rogers, Duke Ellington, and Jefferson Davis were also among the celebrities who followed the railway into this thriving city.

The last passenger train pulled out in 1970, but several freight trains still rumble through daily. The busiest stretch of tracks in the Southeast, it averages about 12 trains daily on each of its two tracks.

One of Opelika's prize possessions, yesterday and today, is its **Northside Historic District**. With stately Victorian and Greek Revival homes dating back to the late 19th century, it is a pristine example of history comfortably ensconced and preserved within modern times. The neighborhood becomes a haven of peace and rebirth as it springs to life with the blooming azaleas and dogwoods that signal winter's end. In summers you'll find lively outdoor concerts in a picnic-laden park bubbling with the sounds of laughing children and happy families. And the holiday season comes alive with thousands of twinkling lights and luminaries that showcase the **Victorian Front Porch Christmas Tour**, an event featured in *Southern Living* and *Better Homes & Gardens*. Started almost by accident when local artist Jan Jones decided to play Christmas elf one year and decorated the porches of her neighbors' homes, the production has now been staged for more than a decade. Members of the community come together to adorn the porches of historic homes with life-sized reproductions of Victorian characters, Santas, carousel horses, angels, and toys. Costumes residents stroll the

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## Churches

Emmanuel Episcopal Church **13**  
800 First Avenue, 745-2054

First Baptist Church of Opelika **13**  
301 South 8th Street, 745-5715

First Presbyterian Church **10**  
900 2nd Avenue, 745-3421

First United Methodist Church **10**  
702 Avenue A, 745-7604

Trinity United Methodist Church **1**  
200 2nd Avenue, 745-2632

## Dining

Breezeway **12**  
213 South 8th Street, 749-5167  
*Casual dining featuring Chicken Fingers & Sandwiches*

Café 123 **8**  
123 South 8th Street, 737-0069  
*Casual fine dining featuring Southern & Continental fare*

Cottage Café **6**  
817 South Railroad Avenue, 745-7446  
*Homemade sandwiches, soups, & salads*

Eighth & Rail **6**  
807 South Railroad Avenue, 745-5456  
*Tavern & Dessert café featuring live entertainment*

Jimmy's Restaurant **9**  
104 South 8th Street, 745-2155  
*Casual southern fare featuring Creole & Cajun influences*

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streets and greet visitors as they are led on foot or guided wagon tours throughout the dozen city blocks that now comprise this annual extravaganza. And **Christmas in a Railroad Town** festival is another must during the holiday season for the kid in all of us!

A city of understated charm rich in heritage, Opelika enters the new millennium with a promising future. Named with sister city Auburn as one of the country's fastest growing Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Opelika is evolving while maintaining a high quality of life for its 25,000 residents. The City of Opelika, with a \$21 million budget, carefully guides the community's growth with a variety of services and programs.

# Downtown Opelika

## Historic District Guide



This information proudly presented by the  
Auburn-Opelika Tourism Bureau.

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# Retailers

Alabama Office Supply **12**  
201 South 8th Street, 749-4567  
*Office supplies & Business Furnishings*

Apple Tree **12**  
231 South 8th Street, 749-6910  
*Educational supplies & Home-school resources*

Brass Brassiere **6**  
801 South Railroad Avenue, 749-6122  
*Antiques, Wine, & Unique Gifts*

Canine American **9**  
108 South 8th Street, 705-0484  
*Unique accessories & gifts for dogs & dog lovers*

Cottage Antiques **6**  
817 South Railroad Avenue  
*Fine antiques, art, & furnishings*

Downtown Antique Mall and Great Dogs Eatery **6**  
811 South Railroad Avenue, 745-6200 or 745-3800  
*Fine antiques, art, & furnishings*

Easterday Antiques **6**  
805 South Railroad Avenue, 749-6407  
*Fine antiques, rugs, art, & furniture*

Envy Salon **9**  
829 South Railroad Avenue, 749-3366  
*Hair and Personal Service Salon featuring Bare Escentuals make-up and skin care lines*

FlipFlopFoto **9**  
116 South 8th Street, 737-1474  
*Portraits, Fine art, Commercial, & Event photography*

Fringe **8**  
115 South 8th Street, 705-6727  
*Ladies & juniors Designer consignment*

The Gallery **6**  
809 South Railroad Avenue, 749-2462  
*Custom framing, Original art, & Reproductions*

Gatherings **5**  
929 South Railroad Avenue, 704-7644  
*Antiques, Gifts, & Home accessories*

Heritage Gifts and Gourmet **9**  
108 South 8th Street, 705-0484  
*Gourmet foods, Gifts, & Collectibles*

Historic Possibilities **14**  
1001 Avenue B, 749-5616  
*Historic renovation and Period pieces & supplies*

Jackie's Cards and Gifts **8**  
127 South 8th Street, 749-1449  
*Greeting cards, Gifts, & Accessories*

Kiddie Closet **12**  
209 South 8th Street, 745-4497  
*Children's upscale consignment apparel*

L & M Interior Design  
Bella Casa Furniture & Fabrics **6**  
829 South Railroad Avenue, Suite 102, 745-7780  
*Full-service commercial and residential Interior Design, Designer fabrics, & Fine furnishings*

Mint Julep **9**  
124 South 8th Street, 749-5925  
*Day spa, Hair salon & Specialty Boutique*

Moms & Tots **9**  
221 South 8th Street, 745-5400  
*Consignment Clothing for Expectant mothers and Babies*

New York Fashions **9**  
106-½ South 8th Street, 749-7193  
*Men's & Women's apparel*

Old Timers & Chimer Clock Museum at the Gingerbread House **6**  
405 South 9th Street, 745-0129  
*Clock sales, repair, and Museum open for Public tours*

Picket Fence **6**  
817 South Railroad Avenue, 741-0012  
*Specialty gifts, Vera Bradley, & Home Accessories*

Roland's Thrift Store **6**  
825 South Railroad Avenue, 703-9652  
*Vintage furnishings, Household items, Antiques, & more*

Red Door June Coffee and Floral  
831 South Railroad Avenue, 745-8096  
*Specialty Coffees and Teas, Homemade Pastries, Soups, Sandwiches, and Floral arrangements for any occasion*

Southern Crossing **6**  
813 South Railroad Avenue, 741-0015  
*Gifts, Home décor, Bridal, Baby gifts, & Women's accessories*

Taylor Made Designs **9**  
120 South 8th Street, 749-2343  
*Handmade jewelry, Women's accessories, & Gifts*

Top Hat Hearth and Patio Shoppe **12**  
227 South 8th Street, 749-3559  
*Fireplace accessories & Fine outdoor furniture*

V3 Media Group **6**  
122 South 8th Street, 705-6900  
*Website development, Graphic design, Video production, and more*

Victory Design / Victory Engraving **6**  
817 South Railroad Avenue, 742-9300  
*Screen printing, Embroidery, Engraving, & Gift items*

Winston Smith T Hardware **4**  
812 North Railroad Avenue, 745-4618  
*Hardware & Home improvement supplies*

# Historic, Government

City Hall **16**  
204 South 7th Street, 705-5104

Federal Courthouse **15**  
701 Avenue A, 745-2381

Historic Train Depot **3**  
1032 South Railroad Avenue, 749-8105

Lee County Courthouse **11**  
215 South 9th Street, 737-3621

Museum of East Alabama **7**  
121 South 9th Street, 749-2751

Opelika Chamber of Commerce **17**  
601 Avenue A, 745-4861

