

The Ranch House in DeKalb County

The “Ranch House Initiative” was developed by the DeKalb History Center and Commissioner Jeff Rader in an effort to understand the ranch house boom that occurred in nearly every part of DeKalb County beginning in the 1940s. Why study houses? Houses make up more than three-quarters of our built environment, and are key in understanding social and cultural phenomena. Although it might seem that the ranch house is unpretentious in character, by examining this resource, we can gather much information about mid-20th century DeKalb.

We looked at a variety of ranch developments throughout the county and profiled four notable neighborhoods. They included subdivisions filled with high style modern houses designed by prominent architects (Briarpark Court), to developments composed of the simpler but widespread traditional red brick ranch. Two of the neighborhoods were large planned communities

(Northwoods and Belvedere Park), while the last shows how family farms were slowly sold off and developed, piece by piece (Sargent Hills). This study has shown how the ever present ranch house is an important part of the history and development of DeKalb County.

Northwoods, located in Doraville, was developed as a large planned community for families who sought an alternative to city living. The migration to the suburbs was especially dramatic in DeKalb County, where Scott Candler, the sole Commissioner of Roads and Revenues, encouraged growth and industry. Candler’s ambitions can be seen in the rapid industrialization of Doraville, which was also the site of the DeKalb County Water Works, completed in 1942. Candler was able to woo General Motors into locating in Doraville, and over the next decade, the once rural town grew dramatically.



A typical ranch house in DeKalb County, this one is in Belvedere Park.

In 1949, Doraville’s growing population called for a residential development that could provide infrastructure and municipal services. Atlanta developer Walter Tally envisioned Northwoods as a community that would be a magnet for young families eager to take advantage of DeKalb’s amenities. Located only 11 miles from Atlanta via Buford Highway, Northwoods grew steadily over the decade. Between 1950 and 1959, 700 homes were constructed on 250 acres. Northwoods differed

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Law and Justice Leaders

On February 25, 2010, the DeKalb History Center hosted our Third Annual Black History Month Celebration, with a *Salute to Law and Justice Leaders*. We recognized the outstanding contribution of five African-American citizens who made a positive impact on DeKalb County. During the presentation, Reverend Thomas Bristow was recognized for his military career, and Judge Gregory A. Adams, Sheriff Thomas E. Brown, Judge Barbara J. Mobley and Judge Desiree Sutton Peagler were honored for their work in Law and Justice.

Held at the historic Courthouse, the luncheon featured a performance by the James C. Ward Classical Arts Chorale from the Antioch-Lithonia Missionary Baptist Church. DeKalb County CEO Burrell Ellis welcomed the more than 150 guests, and Dr. Stuart Zola recognized the achievements of **Reverend Thomas N. Bristow, Sr.**, for his service to our country as a Documented

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Law and Justice Leaders

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Original Tuskegee Airman. Attorney General Thurbert Baker then presented the **Distinguished Service Award** to each nominee. The recipients were recognized as exceptional Law and Justice Leaders who have made a positive impact on DeKalb County.

Judge Gregory A. Adams served as the Chief Judge of the DeKalb County Juvenile Court for ten years. On July 20, 2004, Judge Adams was elected to the Superior Court of the Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit, and has been since been re-elected without opposition. On April 10, 2007, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to name the new \$45 million juvenile court, the "Gregory A. Adams Juvenile Justice Center," thereby making him the first judge to have a building named in his honor in the history of DeKalb County.

Thomas Brown has been the Sheriff of DeKalb County since 2001, when he won the Special Election with 83% of the votes, becoming the 48th sheriff in the history of the county. In 2004, Sheriff Brown was elected to his second term, running unopposed. In 1972, Brown, an Atlanta native, began his public service career as a firefighter for the City of Atlanta. In 1985, at the age of 31, he was chosen as the fifth Fire Chief for DeKalb, making him the youngest fire chief of any major city or county in the nation. After holding the position for five years, DeKalb CEO Manuel Maloof appointed Brown as the county's Public Safety Director, placing him in charge of all public safety functions of DeKalb County.

Judge Barbara J. Mobley was born in Waynesboro, Georgia in 1947, and grew up in Tampa, Florida. Upon graduating from law school, Judge Mobley decided to return to her birth state to begin practicing law. Judge Mobley gained admittance to the State Bar of Georgia in 1985 and from 1993 to 2004 served in the Georgia House of Representatives. As a member of the Georgia General Assembly she was the Chairwomen for the Ethics Committee, a member of the Judiciary, Special Judiciary, Transportation and Higher Education Committees, and was historian for the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus. In 2005, Judge Mobley began serving on the DeKalb State Court, a position which she maintains to this day.

Judge Desiree Sutton Peagler came to Atlanta to pursue her ambitions of becoming a lawyer. In 1984 she enrolled in Emory University Law School, and in 1987, received her Juris Doctor degree from the University. In June, 1987, Judge Peagler was admitted to the State Bar of Georgia. She worked as an associate with a law firm in Cobb County, practicing both civil and criminal law before becoming an assistant district attorney with the DeKalb County District Attorney's Office in 1988. Judge Peagler remained there for nearly nine years where she handled all aspects of felony criminal prosecutions including trying felony cases ranging from misdemeanor to capitol felony charges and arguing cases before the Georgia Court of Appeals and the Georgia Supreme Court.

Special thanks to our Sponsors: A. S. Turner & Sons, Inc. and Bold American Food, and also to our Guardians: Bank of North Georgia, City of Decatur, Decatur Development Authority, Georgia Power, Gregory B. Levett and Sons, McCurdy & Candler, LLC and Char and Stuart Zola. ✦



After the Awards ceremony, honorees posed for a group picture. Pictured left to right: Attorney General Thurbert Baker, Reverend Thomas Bristow, Judge Desiree Sutton Peagler, Judge Gregory A. Adams, Sheriff Thomas E. Brown and Judge Barbara J. Mobley. Photo from Edward Anderson.

Ranch House Initiative

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from similar developments because it was more than a residential neighborhood. Tally's vision also included schools, churches, a professional building and a shopping center.

The first homes built in Northwoods were traditional red-brick ranches with designs from plan books. As the sale of the traditional ranch homes began to slow, Tally changed his development strategy. In 1954, he brought in young Georgia Tech trained architects Earnest Mastin and John Summers, who infused their designs with innovation, while keeping prices down.

The **Belvedere Park** neighborhood is located east of East Lake and south of Avondale Estates. It too was designed to be much more than a subdivision as it included schools, parks and a shopping center. With development beginning around 1952, Belvedere Park continued to grow and expand throughout the 1950s. In 1958, the *Atlanta Journal* advertised houses in Belvedere Park as selling between \$11,000 and \$14,800. One ad proclaimed: "Buy a Home in Belvedere Park with a 100% GI Loan - A Complete Established Community of Distinction and Quality Convenient to Everything." A majority of homes in Belvedere Park are one-story and while some are traditional red brick ranch homes, contemporary style houses were also constructed.

Soon, the thriving community had the Belvedere Motel which was operated by the legendary Dinkler Hotel Corporation. The Motor Inn was "dedicated to your traveling comfort" and had telephones and televisions in every room plus a playground and a shuffleboard court. In 1959, Dick Rich, president of Rich's Department Store, opened the second suburban branch of Rich's in the Belvedere Shopping Center. It's opening was an important addition to the Belvedere community; Rich's added an air of metropolitan living to the DeKalb suburbs. Belvedere Park has undergone a resurgence over the past couple years.

The development of the **Briarpark Court** subdivision, located off Old Briarcliff Road, was initiated by several upper-middle class members of DeKalb's Jewish community. The most noteworthy feature of Briarpark Court is the number of residential designs

from the innovative architect Andre Steiner. The architect designed his own home here, as well as those of friends and colleagues.

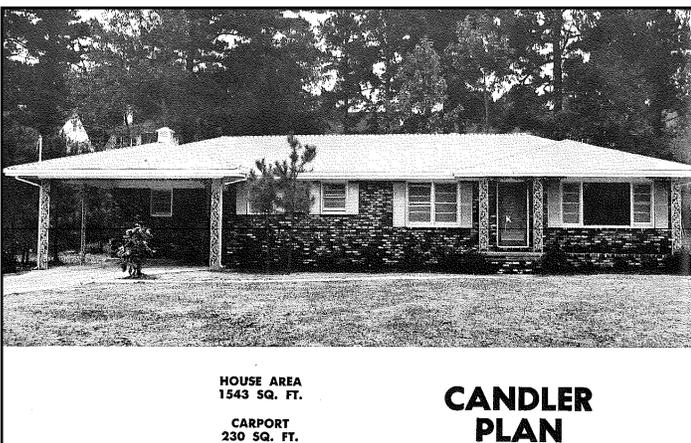
Steiner was a product of European upbringing and received an exceptional education at the Bauhaus, which is evident in his work in the United States. About 25 of Steiner's early 1950s homes are still extant in the metro area, and most of them are in the Briarpark Court subdivision. His residential architecture placed an emphasis on the horizontal plane and likely introduced the "Bauhaus Modern" style of architecture to Atlanta.

In the 1950s, the **Sargent Hills** subdivision was built on land near the intersection of Lawrenceville Highway and Stone Mountain Freeway - a part of Tucker known as Pea Ridge. The Wages family, who moved to the area in 1908, began purchasing a vast amount of land in the area which they would eventually pass on to their daughter, Lola Wages Sargent.

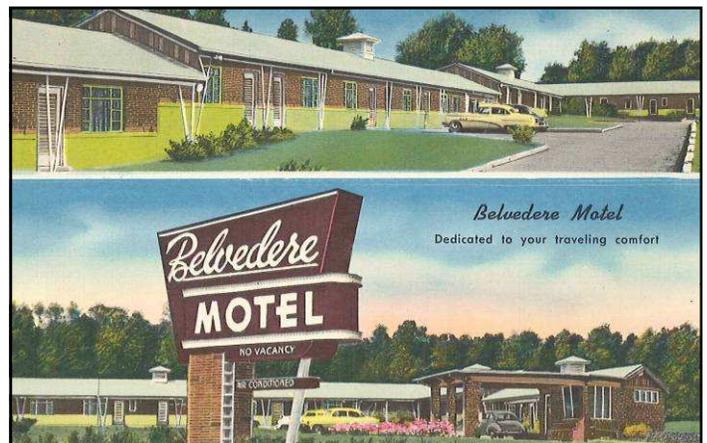
The construction of I-285 greatly affected the community cohesion of the Pea Ridge area. During the 1960s, the once thriving community was split, as the new highway came through acres of land that had formerly been green pastures. Many long-time residents sold off their land, and subdivisions and shopping centers began to emerge in this area as they had throughout other parts of DeKalb County.

Lola, and her husband Luke Sargent, sold much of their land to developers, and oversaw the construction of several subdivisions. Lola and her niece, Polly, provided input during the construction of the North DeKalb Apartments and North DeKalb II. Luke supported the development of the Sargent Hills subdivision, and he named Orion Street and Valley Place. Lola named Hollywood Place, Thrift Place, and Wages Drive.

The complete document can be found as a PDF on our website. Go to www.dekalbhistory.org and click on the "Newsletter" icon at the bottom of the home page. ✦



From The Home Builder's Plan Service, "Designs for Better Living."



Promotional postcard from the Motel in the 1950s.

Pocket Portraits and

I want to ask you to do something. Imagine yourself sitting in a room, perhaps on the floor, in front of box. We'll get to the box in a moment. The room will be small and dimly lit. It will have a musty smell not unlike a closet in your grandparents' home. It will be comforting, I promise. Put your hands on the box; trace your fingers along the edge of the lid. Its rough surface is almost like cardboard at this point, but that is only an illusion. Years of opening and closing, emptying and searching have nicked and scuffed its once clean lines into soft manila curves. Open the box. Pictures, diaries, the smell of dust and mildewed paper will flood the room. Sifting through these images of people you could have known, who share a bloodline and a history, holding their things – a mirror, a hand brush – in that moment you are struck with the enormity and complexity of a history you have never known before but always felt.

Maybe this scene isn't exactly what you experience when filtering through boxes of family knick-knacks, but I do. Ever since I was little I can recall reveling in the prospect of going to a grandparent or extended, elderly family's home. Not because of sweets, not the hugs or the kisses or games they would play with me, but because of their closets, book cases and the catacombs under their beds. It was a wonderland. In these nooks were tucked traces of their past, of lives I could never imagine them living, of their relatives. They all had stories, they all loved people, were a part of history I was learning in school, and were a part of me. As I child I craved that kind of connection to the past, to a time when things seemed constantly changing and imminent. When things felt as if they were moving towards something. I still do.

When I moved to DeKalb County in August of 2008 as a first-year at Agnes Scott College I knew what most high school graduates would know about the metro Atlanta area: Sherman. Fires. Carpet Baggers. Rail Roads. Atlanta and Decatur seemed like these towns with a history and life that I knew, but that wasn't mine. Ever since grade school we had learned of the calamities of American Culture and of course Atlanta was always mentioned. But it wasn't personal. It wasn't people. It was war, disease and things that a child is not eager to relate to. So I didn't. It seemed like one more unit of study I had to trudge through on my way to the end of school. However as the next two years passed by and I began to outgrow

the myopic mindset that is so intrinsically linked to adolescence, I felt that pull again. That pull of stories I knew were living and breathing in the buildings I walked every day.

You may or may not be familiar with the host of ghost stories that inundate the Agnes Scott Folklore, but that is where it started. The white ghost, the red ghost and more: students past and residents of Decatur before Agnes Scott was even a thought in General George Washington Scott's dizziest day dreams. It sounds cliché, but it is true: it all clicked. I was walking in on this town, on this institution, calling it my home and making it mine without any real investment in the people who had spent their entire lives here, been a part of a world I can only attempt to understand. I felt like a heretic.

Working at the History Center has opened up the world of DeKalb County to me. Open a box, any box, and there are ciphers and codes. Letters, notes, memos, class photos, candid photos. They all compile the lives of people who could very well have sat where I sit, walked where I walk, slept where I sleep. They weren't the distant and impersonal class photos, unnamed faces in a textbook. They expressly belong to the history of DeKalb County, and that is one interesting past to say the least. In school it seems that any part of history that a student does not understand or cannot connect

with is assumed to be the result of the past's ignorance, to their archaic nature. Eccentricity is avoided, deemed freakish, when in fact it is those eccentrics that have pushed DeKalb County into what it is today; they made it possible by living. These traces can start innocently enough. They can be subtle.

A collection of portraits. Nothing special, right? But what about when the portraits are thumb-sized, not unlike a yearbook photo you may carry of a loved one in your wallet. But look a little closer. One picture, "Sallie Bagwell" sits ready to be looked at. Her likeness is no larger than a bag of tea. The photo is losing its color with time, shows the scratches of daily handling. Her stare is straightforward, but not distant like so many other portraits from the latter half of the nineteenth century. Her mouth is pursed, almost as if there was something she wanted to say before the shot was taken. She is breathtakingly beautiful. Holding her in time is a tiny frame. A frame. How likely would you be to frame such a small



Miss Sally Bagwell's pocket portrait.

Precocious Evangelists

photo? Someone put the thought and money to have Ms. Bagwell framed, when her portrait today would likely find a grave in the bottom of some junk pile next to socks and newspapers.

Can't you just imagine someone carrying around her picture, fingers going over the frames edges whenever the heart panged? Sallie lived a life before and after this picture was taken. Was she happy? Did she go to school? She experienced the world in some capacity, was here when DeKalb County was just blooming. Her picture exists, her life has proof. It is up to us to give her life and those like her meaning by remembering her not as an abstract example of a Victorian woman, but instead as a woman from Georgia who someone loved enough to take their picture. It's definitely nice to think of it that way, anyways.

Next photo: Revered Metz Joiyner. We have all seen many pictures of men of religious standing, probably enough to last us a lifetime. But Joiyner is different. He was a nine-year-old preacher. What were you doing when you were nine? He is standing in the picture, Bible poised in one hand whilst the other raises a finger towards Heaven, enumerating some point to his flock, no doubt. He is dressed in a fine suit, bow tie and watch completing the look. He has a look of complete conviction on his young face. The idea of a community placing so much faith in a child is mesmerizing. For a child to have that much faith in God, enough to preach about, is equally mesmerizing. Under what circumstances did this child come into such a position of power? It is next to impossible that he lived among complacent people who would photograph a child pretending to be a preacher. He must have been truly extraordinary, an eccentric to say the least, to manage becoming a Reverend by nine. He also was likely an insufferable child as precocious children have the tendency of being. Little facts like this, little eccentricities, they make the characters real. These photos obviously raise a lot more questions than answers they can give, but is our world ever without questions? Can you imagine a world without a past worth questioning?

While these two examples may not seem of paramount importance to the grand scheme of history and its effect today, they are just one piece of the puzzle. So much of our

present understanding of history stems from big-picture concepts: war, depression, and discovery. But what about the people that lived every single day in the vague time periods we study? The events in DeKalb County's history happened because real life people made them happen, they talked about issues and moved through their troubles, creating the world we live in today. How can anyone possibly think that the future can greet us as gently as possible if we do not have a concept of how it felt to those like us in the past? Not everyone in the past was an activist, politician or figurehead. Most weren't. It is not so different today. It is true we must learn from the past; study the bullet points and chapter headings. But by closely reading the story of the past we can begin to appreciate its culture, which is inherently ours. We can map our lives by studying theirs, understand why our cities behave the way they do by looking at their past.

Since 1947, how many stories have been saved, stored and are now waiting for hungry eyes, waiting to be told? It is easy enough to go through your day to day as it is. Life is hectic and complicated and does not often lend itself to the luxury of studying history. But if you take one moment out of your walk through Decatur's Square, on a drive to Stone Mountain or any other reach of DeKalb County it can be fulfilling to just imagine what happened exactly where you stand 100, fifty, even just fifteen years ago. The world is in such a

constant state of flux that things that seem commonplace today will be obsolete tomorrow. Just imagining what could have been happening where you are can be an adventure in historical romanticism and significance. Try and hold on to some of the things that are so intoxicating about your favorite parts of the past. I bet you can find a trace of them feet away from your door. It is all around us.

I will go so far as to say that one would not take on a new endeavor without weighing things that have happened in their lives, experiences that may lend themselves to a new venture or deter it. The same should be said for living today: you cannot go anywhere until you know where you have been, who you could have been.

Christen Thompson, originally of Chapel Hill, NC, is a Creative Writing major at Agnes Scott College. She has worked as a Joyce Cohrs Archival Intern at the DeKalb History Center since February. ✦



Reverend Joiyner, nine years old, poses with his bible.

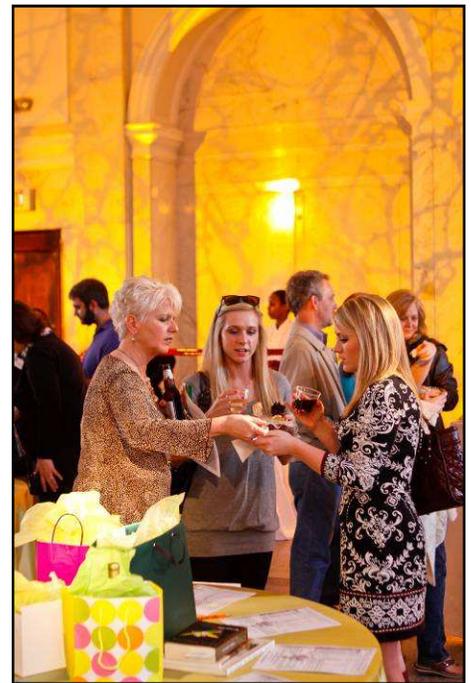
Annual Meeting and

On March 19th, the DeKalb History Center celebrated our 63rd anniversary at the Old Courthouse on the Square. At the Annual Meeting, new directors and officers were elected. Officers for the next year are President - Robert W. Espy, IV, Treasurer - Melvin Bettis, President Elect - Kerri Morrin, Past President - Stuart M. Zola, Ph.D., Secretary - John Keys. New directors included Catherine Mullins, Paul Hudson and Stacy Reno. Outgoing board members—George Coletti and Jane Grabowski—were thanked for their service to the organization.

The party included a silent auction as a fundraiser. Over 95 generous restaurants, artists, hotels and merchants made donations to the auction which was a huge success! More than \$4,000 was raised to benefit the History Center.

Guests enjoyed delicious food from our preferred caterers: **Affairs to Remember, Avante, Avenue, Badda Bing, Bold American, Carole Parks, Endive, Low Country Barbecue, Soiree and Sun in My Belly.**

Music was provided by **Complete Music Disc Jockey Service**, lighting by **Active Production and Design** and additional decor by **Floral Couture**. The photographs were taken by **Zack Porter Photography**. ✦



Upcoming Events

Lunch & Learn, “The Gordons; Lake Claire's First Family,” on **Wednesday, May 26, at Noon**, featuring speaker Teri Stewart. Free—bring your lunch!

Log Cabin Storytelling, Fran Frantz presents storytelling and frontier crafts “with a twist.” Mrs. Frantz is a local historian and enthusiastic storyteller who weaves fascinating tales of pioneer life with children’s chores, entertainment, bartering and science. Sessions are **Wednesdays from 10:00 to 11:30 am** at the historic Biffle Cabin, 720 W. Trinity Pl., for children 6 - 12. Ages 4 - 5 may attend if accompanied by an adult. The cost is \$6 per child per session. Tickets are required; please call 404-373-1088 for reservations or information. **Schedule:** June 16 — Open Hearth Cooking, June 23 — Candle Making, June 30 — Butter Churning, July 7— Pottery, July 21 — Weaving, July 28— Ice Cream Making.

Talking Walls—A workshop for DeKalb Educators, **June 7—11**. Registration is required. For more information, go to the “Education” section of the website or contact the Heritage Education Coordinator at dhs@dekalbhistory.org. ✦

Silent Auction

Silent Auction Packages included donations from:

Academy Theater, Aikido Center of Atlanta, Alliance Theater, ART Station, Atlanta Botanical Garden, Atlanta Braves, Atlanta Hawks, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta Opera, Atlanta Preservation Center, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta's United Tae Kwon Do, Badda Bing, Bikram Yoga Decatur, Bold American, Boutique Karma, Brick Store Pub, Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, Carole Parks, Charlie Yates Golf Course, Center for Puppetry Arts, Chick-fil-A, The Cookie Studio, The Cook's Warehouse, The Corner Pub, Courtyard by Marriott, Dad's Garage Theater, Blake Dalton, Decatur CD, Decatur City Jewelers, Decatur Downtown Development Authority, Decatur Estate and Wayback Antiques, Decatur Healing Arts, Decatur School of Ballet, Decatur Yoga & Pilates, Doubletree Hotel Atlanta NE – Northlake, Dusty Attic Digital Services, Eddie's Attic, Emory Conference Center Hotel, Ericsson, Fabu Face Spa, Fernbank Museum, Fresche Salon and Boutique, Georgia Aquarium, Georgia Shakespeare, Greene's Fine Foods, High Museum of Art, Holiday Inn Decatur, Imagine It!, Intown Quilters, Java Monkey, Jazmin Spa, Jekyll Island Club Hotel, Johnny's Pizza, Kingsized Entertainment, LLC, The Kirkwood Public House, Ginger Krawiec and Jack Regan, Leon's Full Service, Little Shop of Stories, Live Nation/Peter Conlon, Love Street Studio, M. Cary & Daughters Plumbing Contractors, The Marley House, Matador Mexican Cantina, Mellow Mushroom, The Mercantile, Michael C. Carlos Museum, Mystery Valley Golf Club, Noodle, Northlake Movie Tavern, Parker's on Ponce, Louise Runyon, Salon Red, Skeledog, The 17 Steps, Smoke Rise Golf and Country Club, Solley Bags, Squash Blossom, Stone Mountain Golf Club, Stone Mountain Park, Sweet Melissa's, Taqueria del Sol, Ted's Montana Grill, The Thinking Man Tavern, Thumbs Up Diner, Variety Playhouse, Wahoo! A Decatur Grill, Wall Crawler Rock Club, Jenny Watts, Young Chefs Academy, Char & Stuart Zola ✦

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