

The Great Speckled Bird

The Great Speckled Bird was an underground newspaper published in Atlanta from 1968 – 1976 and again from 1984 – 1985. Known for its provocative subject matter, *The Bird* battled social injustice, conservative southern politics and corporate corruption, while it championed the civil rights and anti-war movements, music and the rebellious life-style of the hippies.

This exhibition was first shown in 2008 to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of *The Bird* and has been restaged at the DeKalb History Center through the generous efforts of Tom and Stephanie Coffin, Bob Goodman, Linda Howard, Reid Jenkins, Barbara Joye and Steve Wise.

It is supplemented here through the efforts of Patrick Edmondson and Patti Kunkle of The Strip Project, who collected artifacts from the time period. And we extend a special thank you to Dr. Paul Hudson, Professor of History at Georgia Perimeter College, for his assistance with this exhibit.

The Bird burst upon the Atlanta scene in the midst of national upheaval. The country was polarized by the Vietnam War and struggles against discrimination at home. A growing in-your-face youth culture with strange clothes, hair, music, drugs and a wholesale rejection of middle-class values bewildered or angered many of the older generations.

From the first issue, which castigated Atlanta icon Ralph McGill for his support of the war, there was never a



The Great Speckled Bird Exhibit—on view now at the Historic Courthouse. Monday through Friday from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

DeKalb's Courtyards of Convenience

By David Rotenstein

DeKalb County's suburban landscapes are dominated by strip malls, subdivisions, and clogged transportation corridors. As the county went from an agricultural landscape to a suburban one, the people moving here brought with them cultural traditions that included a wide array of religious beliefs. As ranch house neighborhoods developed after World War II, churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship were built for the people who lived in them.

The Atlanta metropolitan area has the eleventh largest Jewish population in the United States. Approximately 119,800 Jews live in the metropolitan area, and many of them reside in DeKalb County. The authors of one 1984 population study of Atlanta's Jews described the region's Jewish population as "decidedly suburban." They found many Jews concentrated in the Druid Hills, Dunwoody,

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Atlanta's Stone Mountain, A Multicultural History

By Jacquelyn Gallo

The reader immediately gets a clear sense of the majesty of this natural wonder that dominates the landscape of the Piedmont area of Georgia. The above ground formation of this enormous granite rock appeared ten million years ago. Rising 800 feet into the air, it continues to impress newcomers as it did in the early 1800s.

While the story of Stone Mountain begins with the mountain's history, the authors, **Paul Stephen Hudson** and **Lora Pond Mirza**, both faculty members of Georgia Perimeter College, have chosen to also tell the account of Stone Mountain through the exploits of the various cultural groups that were part of the saga of this natural phenomenon. The authors have compiled a chronological history of the mountain from prehistoric time to the present. They have included a detailed discussion of the natural habitats at Stone Mountain Park.

At the core of any history of Stone Mountain is the story of the creation of the world's most famous tribute to the leaders of the Confederacy: the Confederate Memorial Carvings. Gutzon Borglum was originally commissioned as project sculptor in 1914; his most famous work is the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Work languished on the carvings for several years while various factions argued over the scope and theme of the work resulting in the unceremonious firing of Borglum in 1924. Taking his place as project sculptor was Henry Augustus Lukeman. More disagreements ensued and the project's completion fell to Walker Kirtland Hancock. The carvings as seen today were formally dedicated in 1970.

In telling the story of the memorial's completion, the authors have explored the various cultural groups' contributions to this monument and their effect on the development of Stone Mountain Village. All contributions to the development of both entities are noted; this includes documentation of the Native Americans who first inhabited the Georgia Piedmont region to the important role played by the African-American population. Of course, no balanced and forthright examination of this area would be complete without looking at the role of the Ku Klux Klan in its history. Hudson and Mirza provide an even-handed but detailed account of the Klan's activities and their impact on the social environment of Stone Mountain.

It is clear that both authors have a respect and affection for the majesty of the mountain itself and a thorough understanding of the people who made it what it is today. As a recent transplant with minimal knowledge of this region, I believe that Hudson and Mirza provide a highly knowledgeable and entertaining narrative. This is not to say that this book is only for the uninformed; the depth of the knowledge brought forth makes it a valuable read for all who live in the shadow of Atlanta's Stone Mountain. Published by The History Press, this 160 page book is available here for \$19.99 (10% discount for members). ✦

Upcoming Programs

September Lunch and Learn, "20th Century Interiors: From Arts & Crafts to Arts & Machines" on **Tuesday, September 20**, at Noon with speakers David Ramsy and Beth Shorthouse, from Lord, Aeck & Sargent. The speakers will discuss the world of interior design for older and not-so-old house styles. This session will focus on the Arts & Crafts movement through the Modern Ranch House explosion.

Member Orientation, on **Saturday, October 1** from 10:00—11:30. Join staff and board members to learn more about the DHC, including a behind the scenes tour. Registration will be limited. More details to follow.

November Lunch and Learn, "DeKalb's Courtyards of Convenience: Jewish Communities Bound by String and Power Lines" on **Tuesday, November 15**, at Noon, with speaker David Rotenstein. David will explain the "courtyards" known as *eruv*s and their significance in DeKalb County. ✦

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My Remembrance of *The Bird*

By Britt Fayssoux

The retrospective exhibit of *The Great Speckled Bird*, Atlanta's premier alternative newspaper from 1968-1976, is now on display at the DeKalb History Center. This exhibit is excellent and has special resonance for me because I made the decision, which turned out to be a controversial one, to provide the facilities to print the first issues.

The time was turbulent early 1968 when opposition to the Vietnam War was at its height and one of *The Bird's* main objectives was opposition to the War. It was the classic counterculture journal opposing middle class values and extolling the new found "hippie" culture using four-letter words and racy artwork to make its points. The paper's editors put it this way: "...These are our opinions and we are entitled to them; they are not written anywhere else. So don't expect us to tell both sides of the story..." I thought it was well stated.

Because of its controversial viewpoints and the way they were presented, *The Bird* had a hard time finding a local printer. Gene Gurrero, Jr., who was the business manager for the paper, was told that the New Era Publishing Company which was known for printing publications with differing political viewpoints might be receptive to printing the paper. At the time I was publisher of its flagship paper, *The DeKalb New Era*, and CEO of the Publishing Company. Gene and I hit it off really well and I told him I didn't see any reason why we couldn't print *The Bird*. It was evident from mockups of the paper he presented that it was going to be a quality journalistic product. And it was. Not long after *The Bird* hit the streets it was cited in national journalistic circles as one of the best of its kind. *Sixty Minutes'* Mike Wallace called it one of the best alternative papers in the nation.

Because of its potentially controversial nature, my decision to print *The Bird* wasn't very popular with my staff, especially our business and production managers. I assured them it wasn't any more controversial than publications we were printing, such as one which expressed the views of the Ku Klux Klan. My own view

was that all legitimate viewpoints, no matter how repugnant or controversial, had a right to be heard, whether I agreed with them or not. As it happened, later on this principle would be put to the acid test.

We printed the first edition of *The Bird* in the winter of 1968 and continued to print it until the late fall of the year when the great "Smear Sheet" controversy arose. It began when a profile on me and *The New Era* appeared in the Atlanta Magazine which mentioned some of the many publications we printed, including *The Great Speckled Bird*. This reference to *The Bird* caught the eye of a political operative in the campaign of the candidate we opposed and he seized upon the idea of using it as a way to discredit or "smear" *The New Era* and by inference the candidate we supported.

The vehicle used was a four-page tabloid publication which became known in the local media as the infamous "Smear Sheet" which "exposed" *The New Era* for printing this "Smut Sheet" (i.e., *The Bird*). It maligned me, other members of *The New Era* staff and its Board of Directors.

It was estimated that more than 250,000 copies appeared on lawns throughout DeKalb County, causing a local sensation. It didn't work. Our candidate won handily. The "Smut Sheet" controversy was widely covered by the local media, including the Atlanta newspapers (at that time there were two) and all the major TV stations.

Later at a hastily called meeting of the New Era Board of Directors, which consisted of some of DeKalb's leading citizens, it was decided it would be untenable for us to continue to print *The Bird*. I made my case for printing the paper with which the Board agreed, but voted it would not be in the best interest of *The New Era Publishing Company* to continue printing it. I explained what happened to Gene. He said he understood and we parted as friends and remain so to this day. *The Bird* quickly found another printer and moved on to glory. ✦



Volunteers & Interns

Many thanks to the recent volunteers who have helped at the DeKalb History Center! From mailings to events, we rely on your support.

And special appreciation to our most recent Joyce Cohrs interns, **Victoria Belarde** and **Linda Holston**, for archival assistance.

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The Great Speckled

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doubt whose side *The Bird* was on. While in print, it acted as the "voice of the voiceless." *The Bird* reported on African-Americans fighting Jim Crow in the South and institutionalized racism in the North; striking garbage and farm workers; Vietnamese peasants being slaughtered by American bombs and napalm; women taking control of their bodies; students demanding meaningful educations; and young people seeking new ways to live. At its height, with a circulation around 22,000, *The Bird* was the most widely read weekly paper in Georgia.

This Timeline is provided at the beginning of the exhibit and gives a national context to this local newspaper.

1968 - *The Great Speckled Bird* of Atlanta was one of hundreds of "underground papers" published in America during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hailed by Mike Wallace on *60 Minutes* as "one of the two or three best" of its genre, *The Bird* launched on March 15, 1968, with a slashing attack, "What's It All About Ralphie?" on Atlanta Constitution publisher Ralph McGill for his advocacy of nuclear bombing of North Vietnam and his "go-slow" approach to civil rights.

The Bird started as a bi-weekly publication, but because of increasing demand, it became a weekly in September. The name was inspired by a rousing rendition of Roy Acuff's *Great Speckled Bird* performed by the black, blind, Americus street singer, Rev. Pearlie Brown, at the Twelfth Gate coffeehouse on 10th Street. Acuff's tune, in turn, derived from the Book of Jeremiah.

1969 - In its second year, *The Bird* continued its criticism of the new Nixon Administration and its escalation of the war in Vietnam -- the war would continue on for another six years as would *The*

Bird's strong critiques of it.

Piedmont Park became a focus of hip activities and often featured rock bands -- like the Allman Brothers, the Hampton Grease Band, Radar, Hydra, and others -- on spring, summer, and fall weekends. Those times, often recalled nostalgically, occasionally had a downside, like the notorious "police riot" in September, which featured the tossing of tear gas grenades, and the swinging of batons while attempting the arrests of young folks ("dirty hippies," as they were labeled) passing around marijuana joints.

1970 - One of *The Bird's* persistent stories was the effort of working people to get better pay, benefits, and conditions on the job. Often the story focused on Atlanta's garbage workers, whether under the administrations of Mayors Ivan Allen, Sam Massell, or Maynard Jackson. Two marches in 1970, one of garbage workers, another of antiwar protesters, merged in an impromptu combined rally and demonstration on the steps of City Hall.

As *The Bird* increased in circulation and influence, it began covering the nascent ecological movement and the enormous problems of pollution. It dissected some of Atlanta's problems in an article bluntly titled, "Peachtree Creek Is Full of S***! It reported on the Chattahoochee River and Atlanta's persistent problems with air pollution, and also promoted some partial solutions in recycling and bicycling.

1971 - The Nixon Administration's escalation of the fighting in Vietnam met an ongoing response in *The Bird* and in the streets of Atlanta and America. *The Bird* devoted many pages to analyzing and publicizing antiwar efforts in Atlanta and elsewhere, and often included excerpts taken from some of the 500 "underground papers" published by active-duty soldiers at virtually every military base.

During this time, *The Bird* reached its peak circulation of 21,000, usually with 28 or 32 pages, then the largest circulating weekly newspaper in Georgia.

1972 - The pages of *The Bird* reflected the burgeoning gay liberation movement and included reportage of the beginnings of what became the annual Gay Pride Week every June. *The Bird's* coverage ranged from ideological polemics to cultural critiques, from analyses of homophobia to the latest doings of Atlanta performer Diamond Lil.

The Bird published a series of hard-hitting investigative articles on local business and politics, including Georgia Power Company, Cox media (the Journal-Constitution, WSB,



Teri Stewart with some of her clothing from this exhibit.

Bird Exhibit (cont.)

etc.), the Atlanta Housing Authority, slumlords, the proliferation of vacant lots, and various corrupt elements of the Massell Administration.

1973 - Following a series of articles on the Massell Administration's lack of housing code enforcement and the presence of an Atlanta police official on a list of slumlords, *The Bird's* offices at 240 Westminster Drive, just down the hill from the Atlanta Botanical Gardens, suffered a firebombing. The fire destroyed the front of the building and much of the production equipment. Atlanta police ruled it arson, but did not investigate further.

If the still-unknown fire bombers hoped to quiet *The Bird's* investigative reporting, they were to be sadly disappointed. *The Bird* delved further into Atlanta politics and business. It noted the growth of black political strength and Maynard Jackson's historic successful campaign for the mayoralty. It highlighted corruption plaguing the Massell Administration, and criticized the sour grapes attitude of a declining white order often expressed in a racist fashion in the *Journal-Constitution* and on the airwaves.

1974 - *The Bird's* 1974 "Special Issue on Women" marked its sixth annual celebration of International Women's Day. Its first women's issue in 1969 focused on "the development of group consciousness" in the newly emerging women's liberation movement. *The Bird* campaigned to end discrimination in employment, promotions, and pay scales. It publicized clinics to provide safe abortions. It published breast self-examination and "do it yourself" divorce. It critiqued gender roles in childcare, household work, and the public arena. And it reported on the struggles and achievements of third world women, especially in Cuba, China and Palestine.

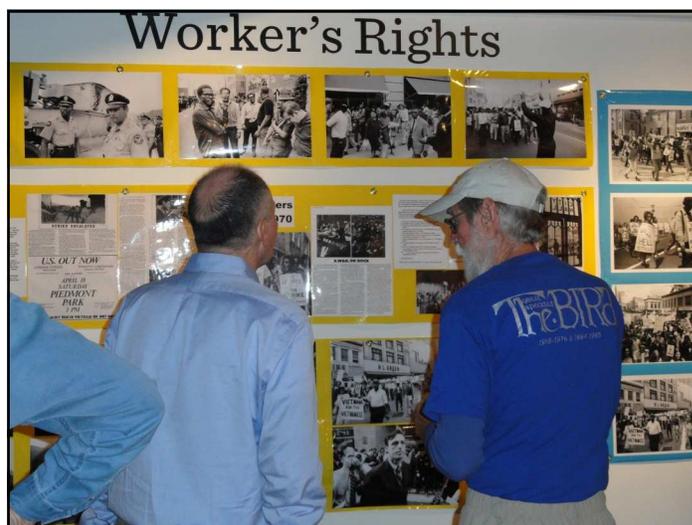


Internally, women at *The Bird* helped to develop a more co-operative and egalitarian structure in which both business and editorial jobs were rotated every few months. This prevented the development of small, mostly male, fiefdoms, and spread expertise and knowledge to all the Co-op's members.

1975 - "The more things change, the more they stay the same." That adage is illustrated by *The Bird's* front-page story on Grady Hospital's travails 33 years ago. *The Bird* emphasized local news coverage, especially Mayor Maynard Jackson's successful attempt to control and reform the Atlanta police department, which in an 18-month period had shot and killed 26 people, 25 of them black.

1976 - *The Bird* announced its demise with its masthead lowered to the bottom of the page. Years of declining circulation, and the lack of a good business plan took their toll. The paper, even though free, struggled to publish monthly in its last year. Through the years, *The Bird* became a center for dialogue and a vehicle for airing views not available in the mainstream media. Politicians, community leaders, activists, and angry citizens sought out the paper to express views not heard elsewhere.

1984-85 - Several old Bird writers united with a new group of mostly black activists and intellectuals to attempt a resurrection of *The Bird* as a progressive voice in the middle of the Reagan Administration. The re-born paper featured commentary opposing Reagan's wars in Central America. It examined bitter battles over dilapidated housing with the Atlanta Housing Authority. It reported community efforts to stop, and then alter the piggyback rail yard built alongside the old Fulton Cotton Mill. But this resurgence was not to last; the paper folded in January 1985. ✦



During the opening reception, about 150 visitors enjoyed re-living history and visiting with friends.

DeKalb's Courtyards

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and Briarcliff-Northlake areas.

Among the three major Jewish denominations – Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform – Orthodox Jews adhere most strictly to the religious laws spelled out in the Torah and to rabbinic law. Jewish law contains prohibitions against eating certain foods and working during the 25-hour Sabbath. Work includes such activities as driving and carrying objects. As Jews found themselves living in dense and sprawling urban areas, they developed ways to adapt to modern urban environments. To circumvent the prohibitions on carrying during the Sabbath, rabbis invented the *eruv*: a symbolic boundary that makes public domains private through enclosure.

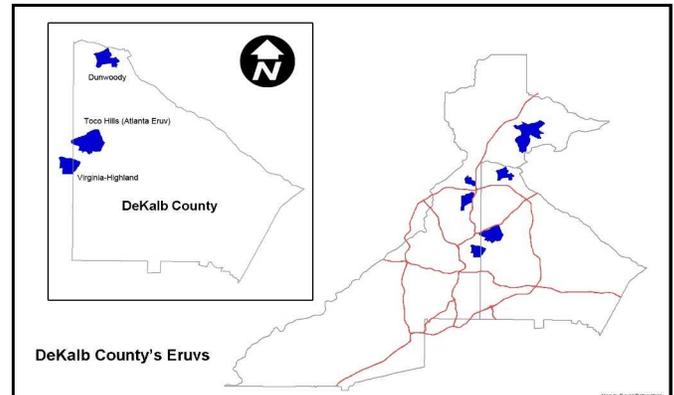
DeKalb's Orthodox Jews are more visible because of their adherence to religious laws. Anyone driving in the Toco Hills area knows that on Friday evenings and Saturdays the sidewalks and road shoulders are crowded with the observant walking to and from the Beth Jacob synagogue. Some folks simply call them “the walkers.” They are so prominent that smart growth planners pictured “desire lines” worn into grass alongside roads where there are no sidewalks and attributed them, in part, to Orthodox Jews walking on the Sabbath.

Synagogues and people walking are the most visible dimensions of the county's thriving Jewish population. Unseen by many people, however, are the *eruv*s that enclose large areas in neighborhoods surrounding Orthodox synagogues: Toco Hills, Dunwoody, and Virginia-Highland. Together they enclose about 6.8 square miles in DeKalb County.

So what is an *eruv*? The Hebrew word means to mingle or mix. The mixture is a combination of public and private spaces into a hybrid of the two. Jewish beliefs rigidly divide space into public and private domains. Inside the home, the private domain, Jews are allowed to carry. Outside the home, in the public domain, they are not. An *eruv* is like a large symbolic courtyard where the space typically associated with domesticity and households has been expanded to embrace public spaces like roads, parks, government buildings, and even shopping malls.

To construct an *eruv*, builders must create an unbroken chain of symbolic doorways. Modern infrastructure provides *eruv* builders with many of the materials. Utility poles are the uprights in the doorframe and power wires or specially placed string become the lintels. Also incorporated are existing fences and walls if they meet certain criteria. In DeKalb County, large parts of the busy Clairemont, North Druid Hills, and Lavista roads corridors are inside the Atlanta *Eruv*. In fact, the I-85 sound wall between Cheshire Bridge Road and Clairemont Road comprises part of the *eruv*'s northern boundary.

The Atlanta area's oldest *eruv* was completed in 1992. Based in the Beth Jacob synagogue, the Atlanta *Eruv*, Inc., *eruv* wraps around 4.1 square miles. Beth Jacob has been in its DeKalb County location on LaVista Road since 1961 when it moved from Atlanta. According to Joseph Tate, members of Beth Jacob began discussing the possibility



From top: Map showing location of local eruv; Eruv string attached to utility pole in Dunwoody; I-85 sound wall is a boundary; Strings, hooks and a tree in the Emory woods carry the eruv alongside Peachtree Creek. (Images from the author)

Of Convenience (cont.)

of building an *eruv* in 1988. Tate is a former engineer and an obstetrician. He is also the president and founder of the Atlanta *Eruv*.

Atlanta's *eruv* builders have close ties to Baltimore, Maryland. They consulted with Baltimore rabbis on design issues and a prominent Baltimore rabbi inspected the Atlanta *Eruv* after it was completed. Baltimore's first *eruv* opened in 1979 and the materials and construction methods used in it have been adopted by other *eruv* builders, including the Atlanta *Eruv*. At first, the Atlanta *Eruv* created its doorways by attaching plastic strips to power poles like they did in Baltimore. They quickly found that method was too costly to maintain and they switched to a system worked out with Georgia Power Company engineers.

Tate's system uses Georgia Power infrastructure almost exclusively except for a one-mile stretch that runs through the Emory woods. For that segment, Tate recruited Jan Siegelman. An avid outdoors enthusiast, Siegelman helped survey and attach strings to trees that form the *eruv's* southern boundary along Peachtree Creek.

Siegleman became the Atlanta *Eruv's* first weekly inspector ensuring that the *eruv* was intact for the Sabbath. He burned out after about five years; for the past 10 years, Rabbi Ariel Asa has inspected the *eruv*. A *mohel* (rabbi who performs circumcisions) in his day job, Asa dons an orange vest and travels the *eruv* boundary looking for breaks and other problems, like replaced

poles. It's a paid job and it takes about five hours each week.

After the Atlanta *Eruv* went up, *eruvs* in Dunwoody (1998) and Virginia-Highland (2004) followed. Now there are six *eruvs* in Fulton and DeKalb counties. The Beth Jacob *eruv* experts helped Dunwoody complete its *eruv*, which enframes the community around the Congregation Ariel synagogue. The Virginia-Highland *eruv* straddles the Fulton-DeKalb County line and is based in the Anshi S'fard synagogue.

Congregations with *eruvs* experienced dramatic changes once the structures went up. In addition to creating an *eruv* subculture of inspectors and maintainers, the *eruvs* enabled women with young children more freedom to socialize and to attend synagogue. Now that they can carry food from house to house over the Sabbath, families are socializing more and there is a greater sense of community.

Although DeKalb's *eruvs* are barely more than a generation old, they are significant reminders of our development as a late twentieth century suburban county. The Jews who moved to the suburbs after the Second World War adapted to the new landscape and altered it to fit their religious needs. As new immigrants with different ethnic and religious heritages settle in DeKalb County, they too will bring with them parts of their cultures that will have visible and not so visible effects on our landscape, adding to the county's rich and diverse heritage. ✦

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