

Doraville: a slice of Georgia history

By Bob Kelley

Pioneer community evolves from farmlands and dairies to a 21st Century multicultural Mecca

There is an old Southern saying that goes, “where we came from is part of who we are.” This certainly defines Doraville in northern DeKalb County where an agricultural community almost 200 years old has transformed today into a bustling multicultural urban city and transportation hub.

Doraville was founded in the 1830s as an agricultural settlement, little more than a whistle stop, along a portion of the Southern Railway on former Creek Indian lands. Early settlers were farmers, dependent not only upon agriculture but also on poultry and dairying. Large dairy farms covered land that was later sold and subdivided to create much of present-day Doraville. There are several legends that suggest how the community actually got its name, but the most widely accepted one is that it was named for Dora Jack, the daughter of a local Southern Railway official. This seems the most logical tale because of the town’s proximity to the railroad and its depot.

Not much growth occurred in the area through most of the 19th Century. Doraville, like so many other Georgia towns, survived the ravages of the

Civil War and stories are told of postwar hardship that brought locals to the brink of starvation. Women cleaned feed bins of stables and barns to gather grains of corn for their children. Even though the people suffered, they steadfastly remained to continue the efforts of their forefathers to forge a new town.

By the time the city was incorporated in 1871, it had evolved into a typical rustic town of hardware stores and lumber yards, dry goods stores and all-purpose groceries and pharmacies. It was the exemplar of small-town rural America, with residents experiencing their everyday lives, creating churches, building schools and establishing small businesses and eateries to meet the needs of a prosperous community. This rural American atmosphere was maintained well past World War I and into the 1930s.

In the late 1940s, life in Doraville changed drastically. The opening of the General Motors car manufacturing facility in 1947 created an explosion of the local labor force and brought many changes to the area, including increasing its number of businesses and the construction of new neighborhoods. In just 15 years, from 1947 to 1962, the city grew more than it had in the previous 100 years.

Even Buford Highway (State Route 13) that runs through the heart of Doraville has an historic pedigree. Unlike many of the streets in Doraville, which were built over original pioneer trails and Indian paths, Buford Highway was constructed along an entirely new route to meet the growing needs of the city.

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The tragic fire at the Triangle Refineries on April 2, 1972 was the worst calamity to ever strike Doraville. The fire burned for four days, killed two people and some claim the smoke could be seen as far away as Alabama. The flames were so hot that storage tanks turned red, the lights on the top of fire trucks melted and fire hoses burst.

(Courtesy of DeKalb County Fire Rescue)

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Upcoming Events

For all of these upcoming events, please check our website as we add information!

Old House Fair on February 2nd at the Decatur Marriott Courtyard Hotel. Come visit our booth and hear speakers on various “Old House” topics. Enjoy a day of new ideas, practical advice, innovative materials and quality services for homeowners.

Our sixth annual Black History Month Celebration will be honoring **Living Legends**. Join us as we recognize artists who have made a positive impact in DeKalb County. **Thursday, February 28, from 11:30 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.** at the Historic DeKalb Courthouse. This ticketed event includes lunch and entertainment. Tickets are \$30 for members or \$35 for non-members. Sponsorships are also available.

Lunch & Learn: Decatur 201; a Continuation of Decatur 101, by Walt Drake **on Tuesday, March 19 at Noon**. Walt is a managing partner for McCurdy and Candler, LLC and a former mayor of Decatur. He is a graduate of Davidson College and holds a law degree from the University Of Virginia School Of Law. Free—bring your lunch!

Join us for our **Annual Meeting and Silent Auction on Friday, March 22, from 6:00—8:30 p.m.** at the Historic DeKalb Courthouse. Enjoy an evening of wine, beer, hors d'oeuvres and music while bidding on fantastic items donated by generous local businesses. We are currently seeking Silent Auction Donations—for more information, please contact Leslie at borger@dekalbhistory.org or 404-373-1088, extension 20. ✦

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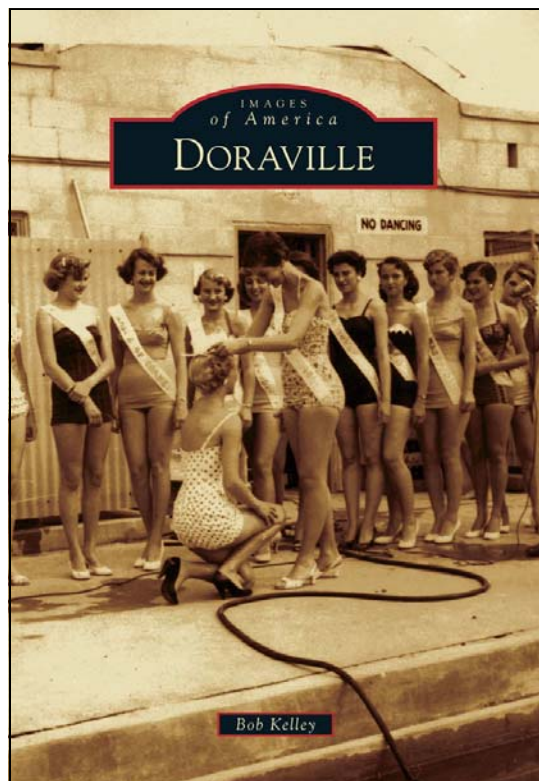
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The newest addition to Arcadia Publishing's popular Images of America series is *Doraville* from author and travel journalist Bob Kelley. The book boasts over 200 vintage images and memories of early Doraville families and the city's historic milestones plus gives a glimpse into present-day Doraville.

The book is currently available from local stores including Eagle Eye Book Shop and the Book Nook and also can be found online for \$21.99. ✦

Doraville (Cont.)

Shopping centers, groceries, diners and fine restaurants became the norm rather than the exception. In November 1961, the 338th McDonald's in the nation opened its doors on Buford Highway and, although completely rebuilt in 2005, the site still bears the distinction of being the fast food chain's first "golden arches" built in Georgia.

Every city takes pride in producing prominent native sons and daughters and Doraville is no exception. Evander Holyfield, early in his career, developed a buff physique with the help of trainers at the Paul Murphy Boxing Club, a block off Buford Highway. In the nearby Oakcliff area, the well-known Southern rock band Atlanta Rhythm Section belted out music hits at their studio on Oakcliff Industrial Court. One of their songs, "Doraville," immortalized the city and was the group's first Top 40 single.

At the main entrances into the city, there are welcome signs that read, "Home of Astronaut John Casper." Casper grew up in



The Two Bell or Pop's Café was a novelty in 1939. Built from two renovated streetcars (thus the name "two bell"), it was located in the downtown area.

(Photo courtesy of William Spires)



Main Street in Doraville circa 1949. The entire old downtown area was demolished in 1992 to make way for the MARTA station found today at the end of the Gold Line.

(Photo courtesy of John Maloney)

Doraville and went on to pilot the space shuttle Atlantis and serve on flight crews of the space shuttles Endeavour and Columbia. Even the Olympic torch passed through the city helping light the way to the 1996 Olympic Games in downtown Atlanta.

The city is home to historic neighborhoods such as Northwoods, a block off Buford Highway near Chamblee-Tucker Road. Built in the 1950s, Northwoods is a collection of unique mid-century modern homes designed by Georgia Tech grads Ernest Mastin and John Summer. Schools that were built in the neighborhood were early design projects of famed Atlanta architect John Portman. Northwoods is one of only three mid-century planned unit developments left in Georgia (the others are Embury Hills and a neighborhood in Savannah). In early 2013, the neighborhood is on track to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was assisted in this endeavor by staff at DeKalb History Center.

At a shopping center on Buford Highway where one of the first two Home Depots in Georgia was once located, the home improvement store has been replaced by the Buford Highway Farmers Market. With the opening of the huge market 25 years ago, it completed the cycle from an early day Doraville once dependent on its home grown vegetables to a marketplace offering shoppers thousands of varieties never envisioned by the city's forefathers.

Over the past two decades, diversity has exploded throughout the Doraville area, with growing ethnic communities giving rise to its international flavor. Their impact has been felt throughout the city and Buford Highway's dramatic increase in ethnic bakeries, diners and restaurants reflects their dramatic presence. Today there are approximately 175 multicultural restaurants throughout the city offering fine dining fare with a wide variety of choices from chimichangas to egg rolls to Brazilian beef.

The different ethnic groups actively give back to the community through special fundraising events like the annual Tea Walk which is sponsored by the Center for Pan Asian Community Services and other civic minded efforts and sponsorships directed to all citizens. Additional popular activities like fun runs and 5k races provide funds to groups like Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

MARTA's Gold Line ends in Doraville. This along with the city's proximity to I-85 and I-285 makes it an enviable location as a primary transportation hub on the northeastern edge of Atlanta.

In Doraville, family roots run deep and the city of today is a proud result of the pioneer families and their progeny who provided the basis of the city's slogan, "Doraville: A Good Place to Live." ✦

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