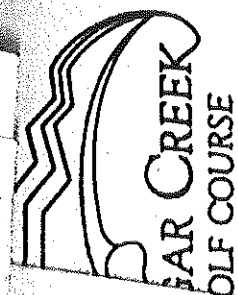


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DeKalb May Have Invented The Shopping Center

By Spencer Ragsdale

A distinctly American architectural form, the shopping center, has grown with DeKalb, perhaps was even invented in DeKalb.

Most of our towns began around a square. Homes mixed with offices for doctors and lawyers, were built around the square. In the days of unpaved roads you could tie your horse to the tree out front.

But the advent of the automobile changed our lifestyle, and the style of our architecture.

DeKalb's first purely retail buildings in the sense of a shopping complex probably were built in 1937 with the construction of the Piggly Wiggly in the Emory Village. The store, a division of Kroger, was built with the radical idea of parking for automobiles. Developer Moe Goldman included 14 off-street parking spaces, and a turn-around adjacent to the new Piggly Wiggly at 1401 South Oxford Rd.

The store, and its innovation of parking spaces, was a success. The building had Piggly Wiggly on one

side and Wheeler's Pharmacy on the other. In 1943 Mr. Goldman built the current Kroger building around the corner at 1554 North Decatur Rd. Moe Goldman's son, George recently renovated the building for Kroger.

The original Piggly Wiggly location was leased by Charles Horton who operated Horton's Shop 'N Basket, which was an institution at this location for 36 years. The building today is occupied by University Book Services, a division of Barnes & Noble.

Twin Oaks Shopping Center built in Avondale Estates in 1948 had a parking lot in front of the stores. This radically new form fit well with the thinking of Avondale, the first town in Georgia built to a single master plan. North Decatur Plaza at the corner of North Decatur Road and Clairmont was constructed in 1952.

The plaza style center with a long series of retail spaces side by side and parking in front was followed at Belvedere Plaza when Dan Bonner started what was to become DeKalb's largest "strip" shopping center. It

started with a bank building for Decatur Federal Savings and Loan, adjoining a grocery store and pharmacy.

The pattern of building a strip shopping center at an angle at major thoroughfares was followed with the construction of Suburban Plaza in 1960. Anchored at the Church Street side by Winn-Dixie and on the Medlock Road side by Lane Drug Store, the center had large prestige stores including Regensteins, and Belk-Caldwell. Fashion retailers like Casual Corner were part of the mix. A large S.S. Kresge store was highly successful, so successful that it was one of the last remaining Kresge style stores to stay open as the chain developed its distinctive K mart format elsewhere.

A large portion of land at Suburban Plaza along North Decatur road was held for Rich's, but the Atlanta retailer never constructed the planned store.

Candler Griffin modified the strip concept when they developed Briarcliff Village. Two lines of stores faced each other along a pedestrian mall.

The most radical change in design sprang from the mind of developer Scott Huggens who bought a large tract at North Druid Hills Road and Lawrenceville Highway. He designed two long parallel lines of stores along a mall - but added an unheard-of concept of covering the mall, enclosing and air conditioning it. It was the first air conditioned mall in the South - perhaps the nation.

The auto had changed the way we shop and changed the countryside. Our destinations became shopping malls, not downtowns, and the expressways followed.

As I-285 was built it ran beside Briarcliff Village, and the intersection of LaVista Road and I-285 became the site for Northlake Mall and the Northlake complex of office buildings.

The Stone Mountain Freeway interchange at I-285 cut a large chunk off the parking lot of North DeKalb Mall, but the mall continued to prosper and it was re-designed and re-opened in 1985 as MarketSquare at North DeKalb with 80 stores.

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