

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.

Perhaps the ever present ranch house might seem like an odd research project. Why focus on something as humble and ordinary as a ranch house? Simply stated, houses make up more than 75% of our built environment, and they are key in understanding social and cultural phenomena. By studying the single-family home, it is possible to take an up-close and personal view of the family that lives inside as well as the surrounding community.

Although it might seem that the ranch is unpretentious in character, by examining both the interior and exterior we can gather a great deal of information about mid-century America and specifically DeKalb County. As architectural historian Richard Cloues

explains, the “mid-century house has mid-century stories to tell.”

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 ranches. 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 ranch house is an important part of the history and development of DeKalb County.



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

The Rise of the Federal Housing Administration and Post War America

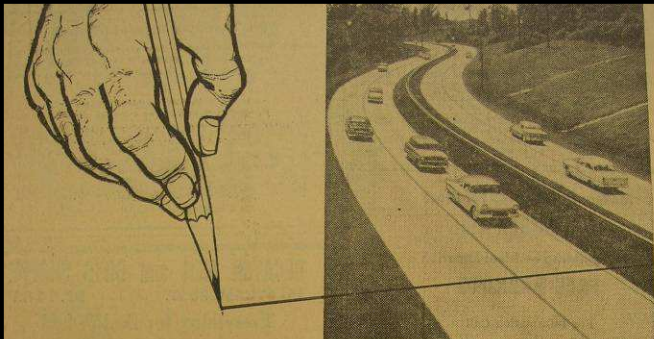
Historically, the United States government maintained a hands-off approach when it came to homeownership, leaving matters to the private market. However, the dire consequences of the Great Depression of 1929 forced Washington to intervene. By 1933, 1,000 homes were being foreclosed upon every day. The government, under the leadership of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, created the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, an agency which worked to refinance short-term mortgages and replaced them with long-term mortgages. The success of this program led to the development of the 1934 National Housing Act.

Under the 1934 National Housing Act, Congress established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The FHA worked to produce government-insured private, long-term mortgages, and millions of Americans took advantage of this opportunity and purchased their first homes. With FHA backed loans, potential buyers could borrow 90% of the appraised value of the home, with the obligation to make only a 10% down payment. With the length of the loan extended, buyers now had 25 to 30 year mortgages, substantially lowering down payments. By facilitating homeownership, the FHA was a major catalyst in the rejuvenation of the American housing market. The favorable financing terms provided by these new, long term mortgages often made it cheaper to purchase a home than to rent. In 1939, the government introduced a personal income tax deduction for mortgage interest, providing additional incentives to homeownership. FHA loans were not only an asset for buyers; they also provided substantial assistance to developers who were approved for long term loans.

FHA loans dramatically expanded the role of the builder. Instead of constructing houses as independent entities, builders now found it cheaper to purchase a large piece of land, make improvements and then cover it with tract housing. The demand for "tract" developments exploded in the wake of World War II, and the new breed of builder came to be known as an "operative builder," "merchant builder," or "community builder."

In order for developers and builders to receive the assistance provided in the FHA programs, they needed to comply with certain regulatory criteria which included minimum lot size, the house's distance from the street, and curvilinear street design. The FHA loans favored new, single-family home construction in suburban areas. Land use covenants, instituted by builders as a means of maintaining property values, were another factor influencing post-World War II subdivision design. Covenants, which are private contracts between the developer and subsequent buyers, regulated land use and typically imposed norms on subdivision property maintenance, architectural design and, sometimes, racial exclusion. Zoning controls also shaped the development of the suburbs, most of which were zoned solely for residential use.

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technology, and population. Between 1945 and 1946, more than 10 million men and women were discharged from the Armed Forces, and thousands of Americans returned home without a place to live. The government developed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly known as the G.I. Bill), which offered an array of benefits for veterans, including mortgage assistance programs. These incentives, coupled with post World War II economic prosperity, resulted in veterans experiencing a heightened interest in homeownership. Having lived through the economic collapse of the 1930s and the trauma of war, Americans began to view homeownership as a means of stability and security, and they eagerly utilized the assistance programs offered by the federal government to attain their dreams.

Building new houses became a booming business, and thousands of new jobs were created. The home buying process, which usually involved assistance from real estate brokers, title companies, appraisals, and land surveys, created employment opportunities which bolstered the U.S. economy. Consumer goods such as house furnishings, appliances, and landscaping equipment enhanced the Gross National Product. It is undeniable that the post war housing boom helped to pull America out of the depression by stimulating the American economy.

As the suburbs began to emerge, more paved roads were needed to accommodate the increased traffic. In 1944 the Federal Aid Highway Act was passed which led to the "golden age of highway construction." By implementing the Act, which called for 34,000 miles of freeway to be constructed, the government hoped to relieve the traffic congestion in cities while also enabling the growth of a suburban way of life. Businesses also profited from the rise in new highway construction. An increasing number of companies utilized the new highways to transport goods, which greatly enhanced product distribution. Fear also contributed to the surge in freeway expansion: at the dawn of the Cold War, many believed the freeways could provide an escape route if an atomic bomb was dropped.

During the post-war years, the rise of the automobile and the growth of the freeway led to the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956 and the construction of the Interstate Highway System. Before the automobile became commonplace people were forced to live near their workplace, with little alternative. The rise of the automobile age and the development of the highway system now enabled city workers to commute to and from the city. The fast-paced highways allowed for a relatively quick and easy commute for downtown workers, and the miles of new interstate construction provided realistic alternatives to city living. The suburbs had the added attraction of providing apparent refuge to uneasy urban dwellers, as racial tensions increased. White flight created a mass exodus from Atlanta. Scholar Howard L. Preston wrote, in *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of the Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935*, that "By 1930, if racism could be measured in miles and minutes, blacks and whites were more segregated in the city of Atlanta than ever before."

Following all of these changes after the Depression and World War II, the ranch house ascended to enormous popularity in Georgia. Ranch houses could be mass produced and they were affordable. Streamlined and modern, the ranch house fit the image of what young families desired in a home. With Georgia's population increase of 820,000 people in only 20 years, the ranch house became the housing type for two-thirds of these new families.

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Development in DeKalb County

At the turn of the century, DeKalb remained a rural county with less than 10,000 residents. While most of DeKalb's residents were farmers, the new century brought a burgeoning industrial power to the county. Granite mining became a lucrative business, and quarries were established on Stone Mountain and Arabia Mountain. The success of the mining industry, however, had a brief life: the Great Depression nearly crushed DeKalb's granite quarrying industry. In its wake, only one company remained in business—Davidson Mineral Properties. Textile mills were also appearing throughout the county as they were in other parts of the state. In 1901, George Washington Scott, a prominent backer of Agnes Scott College, opened the Georgia Duck and Cordage Mill in Avondale and Scottdale Mill.

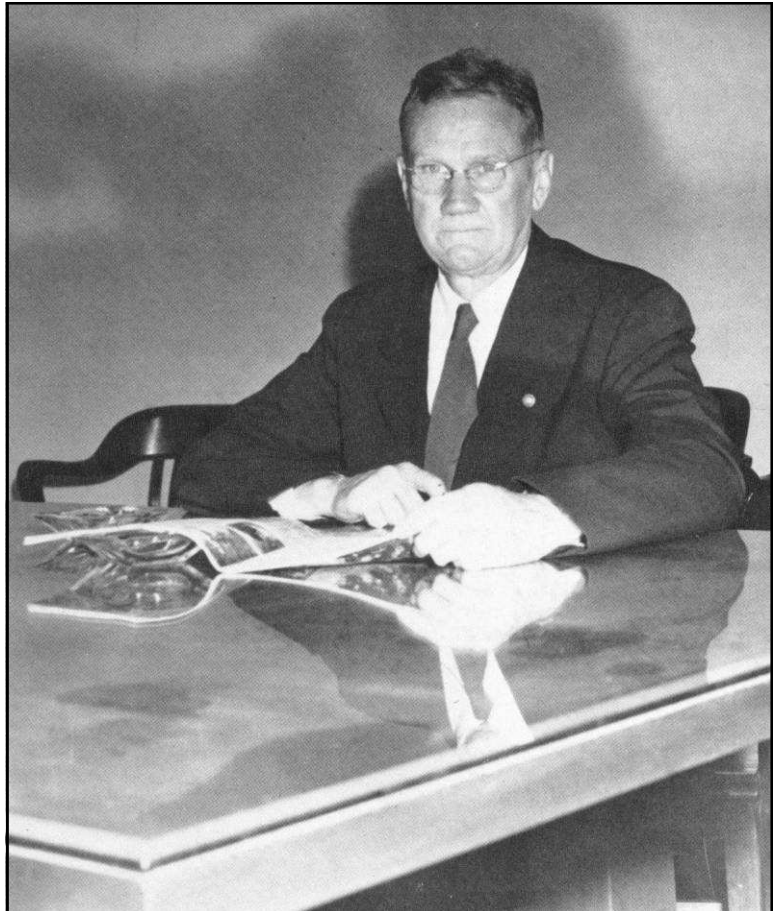
Agnes Scott College was established in DeKalb in 1889, and several other institutions for higher learning were then founded in DeKalb during the 20th century. In 1915, Asa and Warren Candler donated parts of their land in Druid Hills to create DeKalb County's largest university—Emory. Oglethorpe University, which had been chartered in 1835 but closed its doors in 1872, reemerged with a new location in DeKalb County.

As Atlanta continued its rapid growth, the rural expanse of DeKalb County provided a haven for city residents who wanted to retreat from the crowded metropolis. In 1924, entrepreneur George Francis Willis purchased an area of DeKalb known as Ingleside and began developing one of the first planned communities in the county. It would have homes, a tennis court, lake, clubhouse, dairy, playgrounds, and a swimming pool. Having recently visited the birthplace of William Shakespeare, Stratford-Upon-Avon, Willis decided to pattern his new development on the buildings he saw in England. Willis named the community Avondale Estates, and proclaimed that all residences and commercial buildings were to be constructed in the Tudor style. Avondale Estates can be viewed as a precursor to the aggressive suburban development which would emerge later in DeKalb.

Perhaps the greatest influence on the rapid growth of DeKalb County came from the legendary leadership of George Scott Candler. From 1939 to 1954, Scott Candler was the sole Commissioner of Roads and Revenues, and from 1954 to 1959 he served as the director of the Georgia Department of Commerce.

Scott Candler was born in Decatur in 1887. He attended the Donald Fraser School for Boys in Decatur and later attended Davison College. Candler completed his studies at the Atlanta Law School in 1912.

He was also born into a political family and



Scott Candler, Sr.

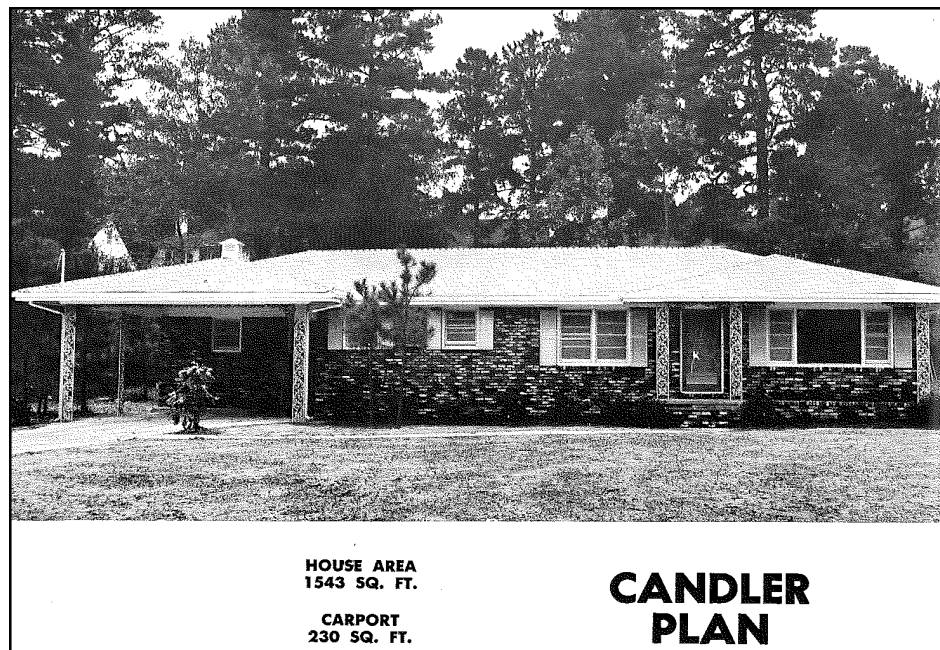
would carry on that legacy. His father, Charles Murphy Candler, was chairman of the Georgia Public Service Commission. The senior Candler proposed, in 1887, that DeKalb establish a Commission of Roads and Revenues, a position his son would later hold. Scott Candler's grandfather, Milton Anthony Candler, served as a Congressman from Georgia's 5th District.

After maintaining a law practice for many years, Candler entered public service as the Commissioner of Roads and Revenues and nearly all of the governing power of the county was in his hands. During Candler's tenure as commissioner, DeKalb emerged as Georgia's second largest county, in part because Candler had prepared the county to absorb the population spillover from Atlanta. The county changed from rural to municipal as he brought his constituents many services which had generally only been available in large cities; he created a county-wide water and sewer system, fire and police protection, and parks and recreation services. As if that were not enough, Candler oversaw the construction of hundreds of miles of new roads, as well as the county airport. The abundance of municipal services was a huge draw for potential residents.

DeKalb's amenities appealed to many soldiers who returned to the area following World War II. New industrial plants sprang up throughout the county. The General Motors plant, which opened in 1948, provided thousands of jobs for veterans. The \$7 million Buick-Oldsmobile-Pontiac plant was built on 386 acres in Doraville. The new facility featured cutting edge technology, efficient labor methods, and an assembly line that could handle 550 cars at a time. All of these changes set the stage for the development of Northwoods, one of the large developments included in this report.



Road Construction in DeKalb County



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

The Evolution of the Ranch

Elsewhere in the U.S. during the early part of the 20th century several groundbreaking architects began experimenting with designing single-story homes in a naturalistic setting: Cliff May, Charles and Henry Greene (of Greene and Greene), and Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright, who is perhaps remembered as the most prominent among them, described his designs as “organic architecture;” he strongly believed that the built environment should be innately linked with nature. Wright’s “Usonian” houses exemplified the long, low, and horizontal characteristics that would become the hallmark design features of the ranch house. Cliff May and Charles and Henry Greene also designed houses that were harmonious with nature and on a horizontal plane, and inspired by the hacienda of the southwest. The work of these architects caught the attention of design magazines, which amplified the growing interest in the ranch house.



The ranch house began in California with the Bandini House, which was designed by Green and Green in 1903. Cliff May became the first architect to design, build, and promote the ranch house; he developed his own unique style, known as the California Ranch. This innovative house type became wildly popular in the Southwest, and eventually migrated to the Eastern side of the country in the 1940s.

The style and layout of the ranch house offered an alternative to the traditional revival-style houses that had long been the ideal in Georgia. In the early part of the 20th century, Beaux-Arts classicists, like Neel Reid and Phillip Shutze, became the most sought after architects in Atlanta. But in the wake of World War II the preferences of many Americans began to change. The ranch introduced innovative elements to the South: the emphasis on the horizontal plane, open floor plans, and the flow of space from room to room. What had only seemed possible in the pages of design magazines were now suddenly commonplace features of the residential developments of

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Levittown

post-World War II merchant builders. The ideas of architects were now incorporated into the homes of millions of Americans - democratization of design was possible as never before.

William J. Levitt revolutionized the concept of affordable, mass-produced housing with Levittown, a planned community in Nassau County, New York. In 1949, William Levitt's firm, Levitt & Sons, introduced the ranch house to Levittown, which was located only ten miles from New York City. Homes in Levittown were built quickly, with many parts being pre-fabricated and mass-produced in factories. Between 1947 and 1951, Levittown grew to over 17,000 homes and was considered a

successful suburban community. Developers in Atlanta and throughout the United States took notice of the success of Levittown, and it would serve as the model suburban community.

As GIs returned to the U.S., the millions of women who had joined the work force during the war were no longer needed; they could stay home and tend to housekeeping and childrearing. These social and cultural changes are evident in the design of the ranch. The open floor plans of overlapping rooms which flowed freely from one to the other encouraged family togetherness and entertaining. The emergence of these floor plans even affected the American lexicon, as the words "living room" and "dining room" became "living space" and "dining space." However, bedrooms and bathrooms remained private. No longer relegated to the back of the house, the kitchen was now integrated into the family areas. Such features were especially appealing to wives and mothers.

American homeowners of the post war era were eager to utilize the new designs and technology which had created an unprecedented standard of living. Magazines such as *House Beautiful* and *House and Home* disseminated design ideas and promoted the most up-to-date technological advances. The house began to serve as the springboard for numerous technological advances such as the washing machine, dryer, automatic dishwasher, exhaust fan, and the air conditioner.

The exterior of the ranch usually features large picture windows with a carport or garage located in a prominent position, usually to the front or side of the house. With architects such as May and Wright emphasizing the natural landscape, outdoor spaces became integral parts in the design of a ranch house. Often the rear of the home has large glass windows and sliding glass doors which can be easily opened for access to the patio and backyard.

Georgians liked these new modern homes and features and the ranch quickly became the most popular house type in the state during the mid-century.

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Model NR 8 G-illustrated

Defining Characteristics of the Georgia Ranch House

Between 1940—1960, over 175,000 ranch houses were built in Georgia, due in part to the development of the FHA, the popularity of the automobile and the expansion of the highway system. While some Georgia ranches represent sophisticated, architect-designed residences, most were built with middle class sensibilities in mind.

There are several regional adaptations to the traditional ranch that are commonly found in Georgia. Many architects and plan book designers often added classical or colonial elements to their ranch designs in an effort to appeal to Georgians' more traditional and conservative tastes. Most ranches in the state are red brick, although some houses were outfitted with a granite façade or have granite foundations - another regional element. Other unique characteristics of the Georgia ranches include stonemasonry as a contrast to the red brick and faux-vine metal porch posts. Historian Richard Cloues theorizes that these posts may be a variation on Cliff May's climbing vines on his California designs. Awnings provided shade and jalousie windows gave the necessary ventilation needed for Georgia's hot climate. Screened porches are another regional trait found in ranches of the southeast.

Doraville and Northwoods

For hundreds of years, Native Americans occupied the area known as Doraville. In 1821, the area would be forever changed when Creek Indian Chiefs agreed to cede a large tract of their land, spanning from the Chattahoochee to the Ocmulgee River, to the United States. Almost immediately, white settlers began to stream into the area. Many came from the Carolinas and Virginia, as well as other parts of Georgia. The white population grew yet again with the forced removal of the Cherokees in 1838.

Most of these early pioneers acquired their land during the Georgia land lotteries. The Doraville area had vast agricultural potential due to its location on the Peachtree Ridge and close proximity to Nancy Creek, and these natural resources were the primary reason settlers flocked to the area. Abundant amounts of water and timber were a draw for the pioneers, many of whom sought to establish their own mills and family farms. The Hightower and Peachtree Trails, which had long ago been created by the Native Americans, provided convenient and efficient transportation routes for farmers and merchants.

Although there are conflicting accounts of how Doraville came to be named, perhaps the most popular explanation is that the town was named for Dora Jack, whose father was an official for the Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line Railroad (which eventually became the Southern Railroad). In an effort by church leaders to control two saloons that had opened in the area, Doraville was incorporated by the General Assembly on December 15, 1871. The railroad depot (where the MARTA station is currently located) was the center of town, and the boundary-lines extended from the



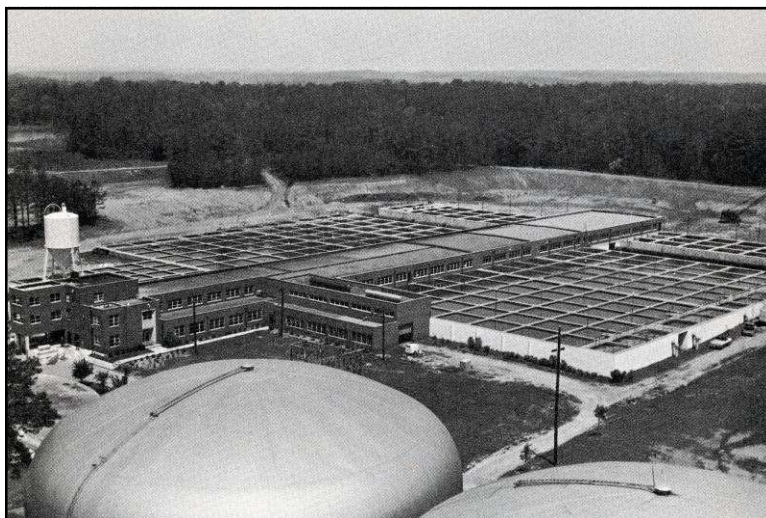
depot to one-half mile in every direction.

According to the 1900 census, Doraville was home to about 114 people: there were 25 families and 23 dwellings. At the turn of the century, downtown consisted of a jail, three stores, a corn mill, a barbershop (open only on Saturdays), a post office, a doctor's office, and a church. The main road was New Peachtree Road, formerly called Main Street, and it stretched from downtown Atlanta's Five Points through Doraville and on to Pinckneyville.

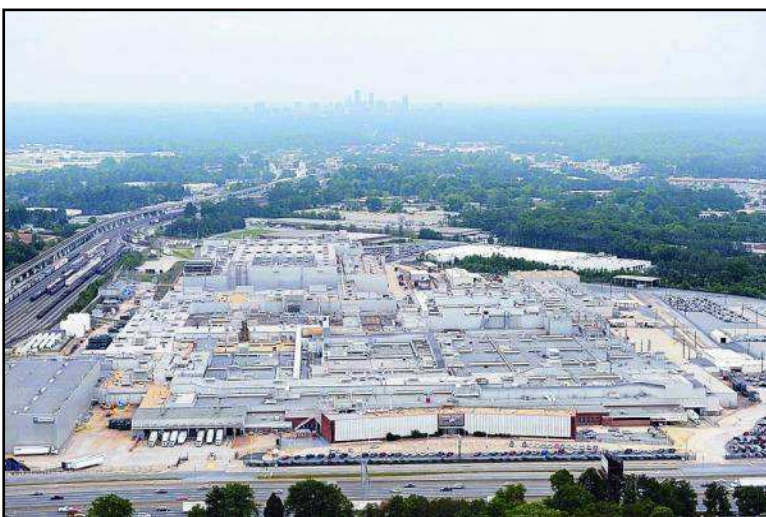
During World War I, Chamblee – the town next to Doraville – was transformed from corn fields into one of the largest cantonments areas in the country, Camp Gordon. Built in 1917 30,000 army recruits were trained at Camp Gordon, and small town Doraville felt the effects of the densely populated Chamblee. Due to the increased traffic created by the military base, New Peachtree Road was paved in 1926, and Buford Highway, another busy thoroughfare, was paved in 1936. World War II also had a strong impact on Chamblee and Doraville, as the area that had formerly been occupied by Camp Gordon was transformed into the Lawson General Hospital and the Navel Air Station.

During the 1930s, severe economic depression led to the closing of the Southern Railway's Doraville depot. Although there were efforts to reopen the depot in the 1940s, it was eventually demolished to make way for the MARTA station. By the end of the 1930s, Doraville and surrounding areas were considered to be an economic wasteland. The town struggled to survive as Georgia's economy transformed from agricultural to industrial. Doraville's seemingly grim fate changed when Scott Candler proposed a new \$1,000,000 water plant to be built in Doraville.

The landscape of Doraville was forever altered when the DeKalb County Water Works was completed 1942. In the early 1940s, General Motors began surveying the suburbs of Atlanta to find an



DeKalb County Water Works



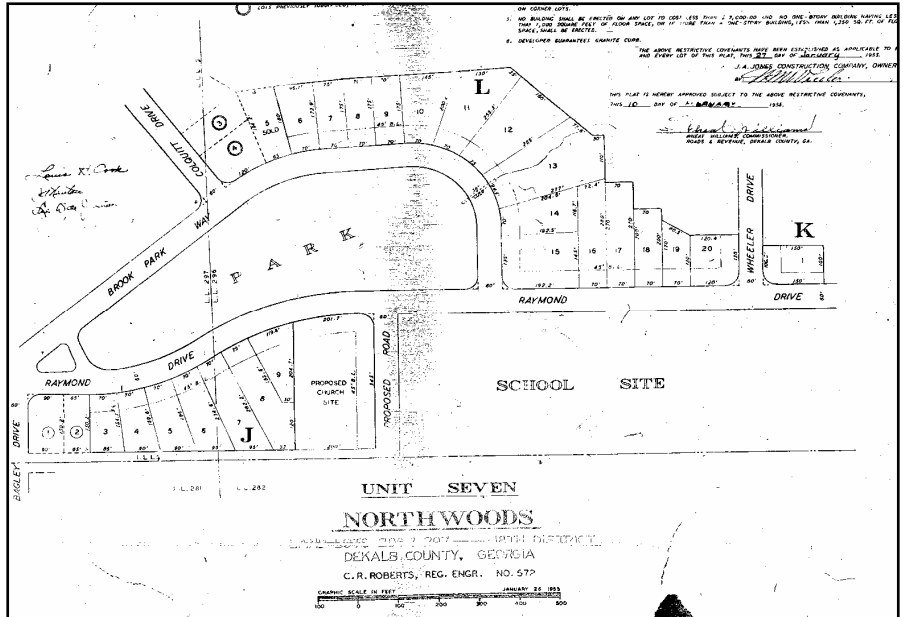
General Motors Plant



appropriate location for their new plant. Doraville's new water main was 30 inches in diameter, which overshadowed other towns which typically had 12 inch water mains. By 1949, Candler's water system had brought \$75,000,000 worth of industrial development to north DeKalb.

Scott Candler was able to woo General Motors into choosing Doraville for their new plant in Georgia. By 1945, the deal was closed and the corporation began sorting out the logistics of their newest endeavor. Yet, before the arrival of GM, there were several smaller industrial companies that made their home in Doraville. The Plantation Pipeline Company opened a facility in 1942 and suddenly there were thousands of tanks stored in Doraville tank farms. Shell Oil Company, Standard Oil, and American Oil Company staked out sectors of Doraville in which they could store gasoline, oil, and kerosene which would then be exported to various regions.

Construction of the GM plant commenced on land purchased from African-American residents of Doraville. For \$171,667, the corporation purchased 408 acres from 50 different landowners. In 1949 the displaced population was relocated to Carver Hills, a subdivision created by GM. Named after George Washington Carver, the neighborhood was intended only for African-Americans, although it reportedly had up-to-date amenities such as water, electricity, and paved streets. Guilford Village was the first subdivision built for Doraville's white community, and was constructed on 58 acres near Tilly Mill and Flowers Roads.



Plat map of a portion of Northwoods



Photo of Northwoods from House and Home magazine, July 1955

GM needed additional infrastructure to support materials coming into the plant and completed cars leaving the plant. In a state and federal partnership, Peachtree Industrial Boulevard was created in 1947 to serve this need and it opened concurrently with GM's plant. The new state highway also accommodated workers on their commute to and from the plant. At four lanes and \$803,000, Peachtree Industrial was more than \$100,000 over the projected cost. At the end of 1947, the plant had completed production of 350 cars. That number would jump to over 29,000 the following year.

In 1949, Doraville's growing population called for a residential development composed of middle-class, single-family homes. Atlanta developer Walter Tally envisioned a community which he named Northwoods, as one that would serve as 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 nearly a decade. Between 1950 and 1959, 700 new homes were constructed on 250 acres of land bounded by Shallowford Road, Buford Highway, and Addison Drive. Northwoods differed from similar developments because it was more than a residential neighborhood. Tally's vision not only included single family homes, but also a community which had new schools, churches, a professional building, and a shopping center.

It was in the wake of the post World War II housing boom that the ground broke to build the first homes in Northwoods. Now located in the southwestern portion of the development, these early homes were conventional looking ranches with hipped roofs. The designs were purchased from plan books such as *Designs for Better Living* published by Home Builder's Plan Service.

In 1953, as the sale of the traditional ranch homes began to slow, Tally decided to change his development strategy. He brought in young Georgia Tech trained architects Earnest Mastin and John Summers who infused their designs with innovation while still keeping prices down. Buyers could choose from six different floor plans that Mastin and Summers had designed, and each lot had its own septic tank and included enough space for the home and an

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Northwoods Shopping Center

attached carport. The homes had one bathroom, and were not equipped with air conditioning. The flat roofs prevented the homes from having attics with duct work, and the architects used radiant heat from the floor instead.

Open floor plans were an essential element of Masten and Summers' designs. In these contemporary houses, kitchens were no longer relegated to the rear of the home; they became an important area for the family. Homes in Northwoods were equipped with the most up-to-date amenities such as dishwashers and disposals, and there was less emphasis on formal entertaining. For some families it became commonplace to eat in the kitchen. The designs also included wood burning fireplaces which were not usually available in homes within Northwoods price range.

The architects were able to adapt their plans to Peachtree Ridge's hilly topography by designing split level homes, which easily accommodated sloping lots. Mastin and Summers' designs emphasized the importance of nature and the outdoors and many models featured outside patios and barbeques. The architects used modern products like sliding glass doors and jalousie windows. Floor to ceiling windows helped to blend the indoors of the homes with their surrounding natural environment.

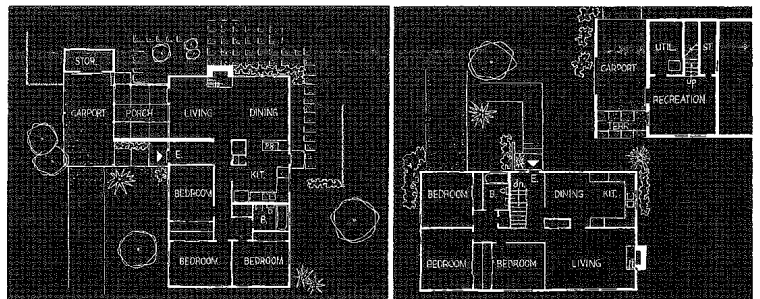
Walter Tally, who would later develop the Northcrest, Sexton Woods, Brookvalley, and Brittany subdivisions, worked with Mastin and Summers to develop ways to keep the cost of the homes low, while still making them desirable to young couples. Tally appealed to homebuyers because he would let them choose the lots they wanted. Potential residents could also meet with Mastin and Summers to customize their homes, which was a savvy sales tactic that made the buyers feel as though they were getting a custom home at a bargain price. Early Northwoods residents included architects (Mastin and Summers each purchased a home in the community), engineers, and employees of Lockheed, General Motors, and Delta.



The architect's rendering of a Northwoods residence



Another rendering from the architect



Model 601, final version will feature built-ins

Model 602, basic price, \$13,600

Two of Mastin and Summer's floor plans from House and Home, July 1955

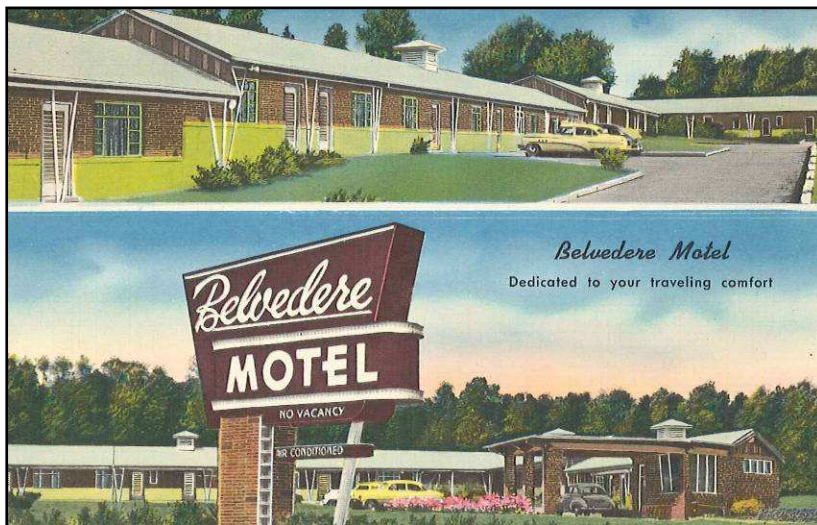
Belvedere Park

The Belvedere Park neighborhood is located east of East Lake and south of Avondale Estates and the Decatur Square. Located in the 15th District, 200th Land Lot in DeKalb, Belvedere Park emerged during the 1950s and quickly became much more than a subdivision. It was a planned community with 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.” Families could purchase homes with six rooms and an option of either one or two bathes. 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.

Adair Realty and Loan, a powerful real estate company in Atlanta during the early to mid 20th century, represented Belvedere Park. Soon, the thriving community had the Belvedere Motel, as well as a popular shopping center. The Belvedere Motel, operated by the legendary Dinkler Hotel Corporation, had telephones and large screen televisions in every room. The Motor Inn claimed to be “dedicated to your traveling comfort” and indeed featured amenities such as a playground and a shuffleboard court.

In the 1950s, Dick Rich, president of Rich’s Department Store, which was located in downtown Atlanta, decided to open several new stores in order to take advantage of the suburban



boom. In 1959, the second branch of Rich's Department Store was opened in the Belvedere Shopping Center (the first branch was opened at Lenox Square Mall). The opening of Rich's was an important addition to the Belvedere community; it added an air of metropolitan living to the DeKalb suburbs.

In 1963, Towers High School opened and is still in operation as a DeKalb County School today. Midway Park, located on Midway Road, serves as a popular recreational center for the neighborhood. The park has several fields for baseball and football and a public swimming pool.

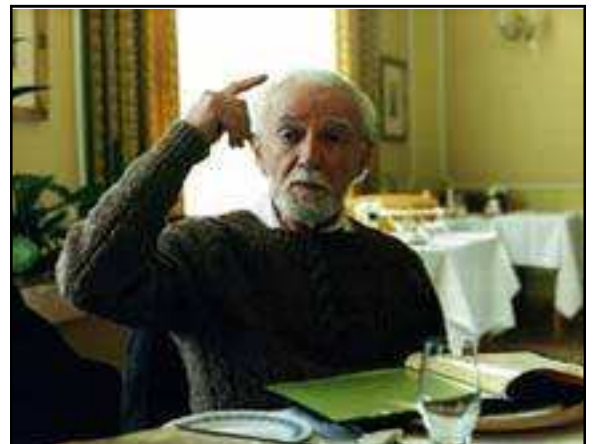


Briarpark Court

Briarpark Court is a one-street development of mid-century modern houses, located in the 18th District, Land Lot 57. In 1844, DeKalb pioneer, Ammi Williams purchased Land Lot 57 from Thomas and William Durham. Ammi Williams, the original owner of the Swanton House, held a substantial amount of Atlanta area land that he eventually sold for a great profit. In 1888, W.J. Houston, who opened the Houston Mill in 1876, expanded his land holdings when he purchased this piece of Williams' land.

The property changed hands several times throughout the early part of the 20th century, but by the 1950s was effected by the housing explosion which was redefining DeKalb. 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 and was in close proximity to the Beth Jacob Congregation. The most noteworthy feature of Briarpark Court is the number of residential designs from the innovative architect Andre Steiner, who was the head planner and architect at the Atlanta firm, Robert and Company. The architect designed his own home, as well as those of several of his friends and colleagues, on the street. Steiner's original plans for these homes were found in the basement of one of his friends, Harold Montague; they are now a part of his architectural drawings collection of the Atlanta History Center.

Steiner was born in 1908 in Slovakia. Much to the dismay of his father, who envisioned his son becoming a lawyer, Steiner attended the legendary Bauhaus school in Weimar, Germany. Upon graduation, the young architect returned to Slovakia, where he worked



Andre Steiner

as a resort planner for the government. After getting married and having a son, the couple settled in Bratislava, the capitol of Slovakia.

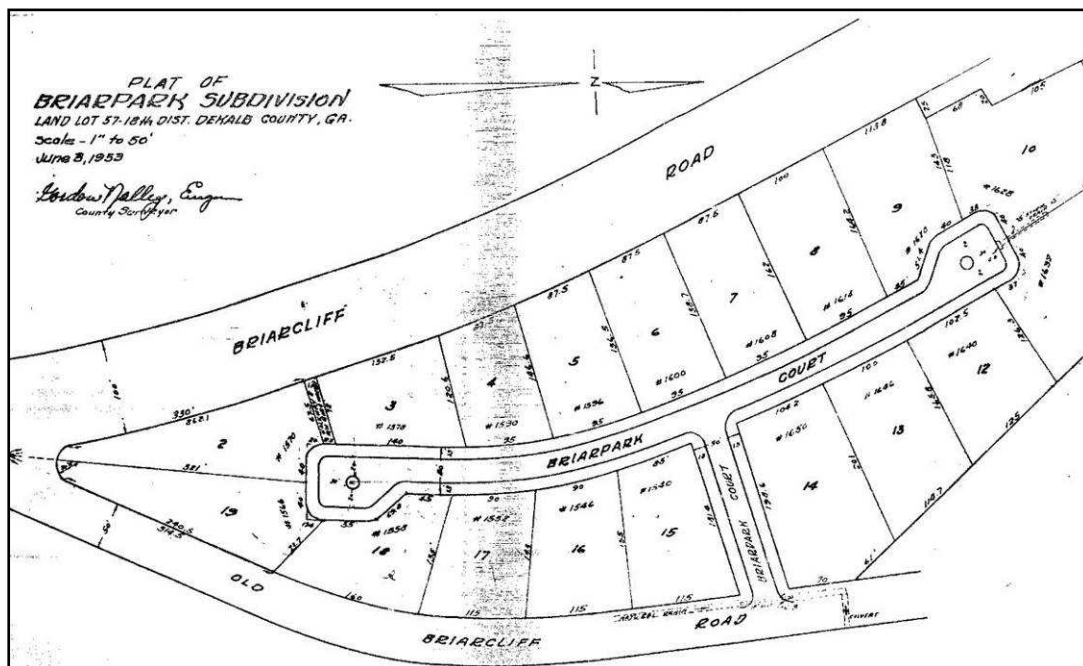
Due to war tensions, Andre and his family were forced to leave their home and fled to live with his parents. In September 1940, the Pro-Nazi and Pro-Nationalist Government of the Slovak Republic established a fully-controlled central office of Jewish affairs, "Ústredná Židov," and all activities of Jewish institutions were soon prohibited.

In 1941, when the Nazis began the concentration of Jews in the Slovak Republic, three cities were chosen in which to set up labor camps: Sered, Noraky, and Vyhne. Steiner was arrested when the Nazis seized control of Slovakia; but he was soon released on condition that he would serve as an architect designing work camps. He was put to work surveying the cities and designing labor camps where Jews were to build furniture for the German government. Steiner felt that if he and his fellow Jews cooperated, they could stay in the work camps and avoid deportation's certainty of death.

When Andre Steiner and several friends found out that the Nazi official Julius Pecuch would spare Slovak Jews from the deportation list in exchange for cash bribes, they banded together and came up with a plan to smuggle in bribe money from abroad. They confronted Pecuch with the proposition, which he



Steiner's residential designs, including his home shown here, were featured in the June 1955 issue of "House and Home".



Plat Map of Briarpark Court

accepted. Steiner and his comrades became known as the “Working Group” and their bribe scheme saved thousands of lives.

The Working Group prevented the deportation of more than 7,000 Jews. Their success inspired them to broaden their rescue efforts, and they developed a plan to protect Jews throughout the country. In 1944, the Slovak partisans revolted, but the German military crushed the uprising. Unable to secure enough cash for the high stakes bribes, two members of the Group were captured and deported to Auschwitz. Andre and his family fled to the Tatras Mountains, where they hid for months and braved freezing temperatures.

In 1948, with the war over, Andre, his wife and son fled Europe, briefly settling in Cuba before arriving in Atlanta in 1950.

Steiner began working for Robert and Company in Atlanta, first as an architect, and then as the Director of Planning and Urban Development. While at Robert and Company, Steiner created the Master Plans for Georgia State University, Emory University, Stone Mountain, Jekyll Island, and he revised plans for Callaway Gardens.

Steiner was a product of European upbringing and an exceptional education at the Bauhaus, which is evident in his work in the United States. He brought unique and innovative ideas about planning to Atlanta, and his designs were vastly different than the traditional approaches to art and architecture which had become commonplace in the South. An early proponent of urban design, he introduced distinctive elements to Atlanta landscape and confidently incorporated European design perspectives into his master plans.

Andre established a close group of friends with whom he would often meet to discuss architecture, life, and ideas. His colleagues remember him as a positive and creative force, with a love of people and work. Steiner also had a reputation for being fiery and passionate. After he retired from Robert and Company, Steiner spent the remainder of his life in Atlanta and lived to be 100 years old.

Near the end of Andre’s life, his sons took him back to Czechoslovakia. A documentary film titled “Andre’s Lives” was made about the trip, and it offers a fascinating portrait of Steiner. While visiting the sights where the work camps once stood the architect himself claims that he blocked out the war and his traumatic experiences. He also admits



Two of Steiner’s designs in Briarpark Court

that he was distant from his family, explaining that, “Profession was number one and family was only number two. You can say that was a typical European attitude or you could say it was the attitude maybe of an upcoming architect who, after the Holocaust times, made up my mind ... forget about everything else and let’s concentrate on architecture and planning.”

During his early years in Atlanta, Steiner maintained his own practice on the side, designing houses. About 25 of Steiner’s 1950s homes are still extant, and most of them are in the Briarpark Court subdivision. His residential architecture placed an emphasis on the horizontal plane, and, in building them, he likely introduced the “Bauhaus Modern” style of architecture to Atlanta. Eventually Robert and Company asked that he not design for anyone except their firm and they gave him a promotion to ensure that he would not leave.

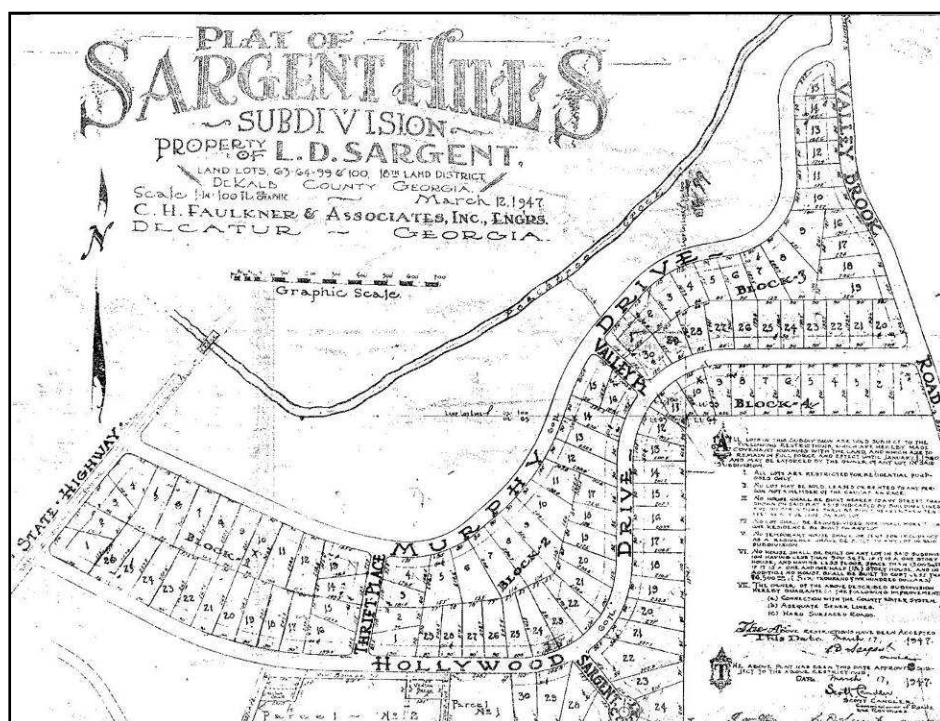
Sargent Hills

The neighborhood known as Sargent Hills is located in the Rehoboth/Pea Ridge area of DeKalb. In 1823, John Bolen Johns moved to DeKalb and was instrumental in establishing the Rehoboth/Pea Ridge community which is located between Decatur and Tucker. Although it is now densely developed, at the turn of the century its dirt roads were lined with green pastures, cotton fields and strawberry patches.

In 1854, the first meeting of the Rehoboth Baptist Church took place in a schoolhouse located on Johns’ property, and the congregation built their own building before the year was over. By 1912, the community outgrew their small schoolhouse and a new building was constructed near Frazier Road. Until recently, descendants of J.B. Johns lived on their ancestor’s property, which is located near the present home of the Rehoboth Baptist Church.

Tucker was created from Browning Militia District #572. Most of Tucker’s early settlers are buried in the Rehoboth Cemetery, including the pioneer families of Cash, Johns, Chewning, Goza, Knight, and Wilson.

The land that would someday become Sargent Hills was owned by Benjamin Burdett during the mid 19th century. The land exchanged hands several times before the Wages family settled in the area. In 1908, Jim and Dicey Wages moved their family from Gwinnett County and built their home near the intersection of Lawrenceville Highway and Stone Mountain Freeway. Living in an era before the widespread popularity of the



automobile, the Wages children walked up Lawrenceville Highway to the Rehoboth School.

During this era, Rehoboth was known as Pea Ridge, because most residents in the area raised peas. The boundaries of Pea Ridge as described by "unofficial mayor" and resident, Nathan Haralson, are "part of south Tucker, straddling Lawrenceville Highway along the Continental Divide, that runs from Cooledge Road down Sargent's Hill to North Druid Hills, south to Burnt Fork Creek and north to the Seaboard (CSX) Railroad."

The Wages family continued to purchase land in Pea Ridge, extending their holdings to include parts of Tucker and the Little Creek Ranch. Jim Wages gave DeKalb the right of way to build what is now known as Valley Brook Road. Upon her parent's death, Lola Wages inherited a vast amount her family's land as she was the only child who was not yet married. Lola eventually married World War I veteran Luke Sargent, and the young couple gradually developed the land around Valley Brook Road and Lawrenceville Highway.

Besides the Wages family there were several other prominent, land-owning families living in Pea Ridge during the early 20th century. The Honeas family owned and operated the Honeas Dairy Farm, which was where the Northlake Regional Hospital is now located.

Another important resident was Richard F. Sams, Jr., who owned a 200-acre tract of land off Lawrenceville Highway not far from the Wages home. Sams eventually sold 88 acres to the Georgia Department of Transportation for the construction of I-285.



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The Buice family was also an early presence in the Pea Ridge area. A young Lester Buice was baptized at Rehoboth Church in 1933. In 1947, Buice became the church's pastor and would oversee the expansion of the church. The church is now one of the largest in the county; a dramatic change from its once very humble beginnings.

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 and acres of land that had formerly been green pastures. Many long-time residents sold off their land and these subdivisions and shopping centers began to emerge in this area as they had throughout other parts of DeKalb County.

Evidence demonstrates that the Sargent family likely embraced these changes. Lola and Luke sold much of their land to developers, and oversaw the construction of several subdivisions. Lola and her niece, Polly, whom she raised, 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 Orian Street and Valley Place. Lola named Hollywood Place, Thrift Place, and Wages Drive which she named after her father.

They eventually opened "Sargent Hill's Store" which fed multitudes of factory workers in the area from the steel plant on North Druid Hills and Willivee. Eventually Luke Sargent opened Sargent's Sawmill which employed workers from the nearby Scottdale Mill. ✦



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