

Times of DeKalb

America Field

By Marissa Howard, Programs & Membership Coordinator

In a quiet suburban DeKalb neighborhood off of Snapfinger Woods Drive, not much remains of Bill McCane's dream. On a balmy August night in 1962, the American Football League's (AFL) Dallas Texans and Oakland Raiders played an exhibition game on an old chicken farm. The attendance was meager, the facilities were lacking, but Bill McCane optimistically said, "I promise you, the best lies ahead."

Bill McCane, a DeKalb businessman, had a dream of bringing the AFL to Atlanta and DeKalb County. Tired of red tape and bureaucracy, McCane decided to do it himself. Up until the 1960s, Atlanta did not have a major professional sports team or a major municipal sports stadium. Smaller stadiums across the metro area were used, but if Atlanta wanted a professional team a larger one would have to be built. Stadiums, which were often funded by bonds and the

government, were built as a tool to entice new teams. The "if you build it, they will come" model.

DeKalb County and the City of Atlanta would continue to engage in a back and forth gridlock for the next decade on the subject of a municipal stadium: who would pay for it and where would it be located? In a sly foreshadowing, Cobb County asked the Georgia Assembly for

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FALL 2021



The Marble House as seen from N. McDonough Street across from Decatur High School.

Decatur's Second Empire Style "Marble House"

By Melissa Forgey, Executive Director

I had strolled by Decatur's only Second Empire house (119. N. McDonough Street) numerous times, and never noticed that something was "off" about the house. Suddenly, a closer look was in order and I decided to walk all around it. What was the house missing from the street? It was so obvious that I was a little embarrassed. What was missing was the front façade; I had only been looking at the side of this unique house for all these years. I needed to know, what was its story?

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America Field continued

the power to erect a municipal stadium of their own, in the vicinity of present day Truist Park. By the early 1960s, Atlanta was still at the top of the list for prospective major league teams and yet without a stadium. As far as professional football, the AFL and NFL were in a fierce battle to move into the Atlanta market. McCane was courting them both. The NFL would not have a team available to relocate until 1962, but the AFL was newly formed and eager to expand by 1961. But neither league had a stadium for a team to move into. In April 1961, an announcement was made by Bill McCane and his new organization, the Greater Atlanta Athletic Association, Inc.

McCane promised “105,000 seats and at least 50,000 seats ready by the start of the 1962 football season . . . and we hope to have the whole thing finished and be ready for major league baseball by 1963.” -*The Tennessean*, April 2, 1962.

The location would be in southwest DeKalb about 15 miles from downtown Atlanta on land donated by a chicken farmer. First, a temporary stadium would be built, and later after a franchise was secured, the permanent stadium would be built on the same site. Bud Adams, oil tycoon, founder of the Houston Oilers, and AFL founder was McCane’s biggest supporter. He was there alongside McCane at the groundbreaking in January 1962. However he made it clear he was not financially supporting America Field and would just bring in 12,500 temporary seats. But who was paying for the stadium?



Gearing up for the opening of America Field.
View of America Field in background.

McCane had lured AFL teams to sign on for four exhibition games. The opener would be Dallas Texans vs. Oakland Raiders on August 4th. Local press reporters were amazed McCane did more on his own in six months than the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County could do in decades. But they were still skeptical and “waiting for the concrete to be poured.”

On Saturday August 4, 1962 - Kickoff. There was dust on the field, the scoreboard clock did not work properly, and a bus drove over and busted the water line: the players couldn't shower after the game. The crowd was not what McCane expected, but he was still optimistic.

By Monday, August 13th, the Boston Patriots and New York Titans had pulled out of the scheduled exhibition game. Questions about money began instantly, and by August 21st the Greater Atlanta Athletic Association was put into receivership for lack of payments to over a 100 creditors. By October the Greater Atlanta Athletic Association failed to pay the \$300,000 it owed in back payment. It was uncertain whether the 350 stockholders would receive anything in return.

On a blistering cold February day in 1963, the items of America Field were auctioned off one by one. The bleachers, refreshments, unused lumber, lockers, furniture, lights, and the field itself. That was that, the dream of America Field was over.

So, what actually happened? If there was a choice in 1962 to watch any two football teams play, the Oakland Raiders and Dallas Texans were not on that list. The location of America Field was also a tough sell. It was in the middle of nowhere, with limited infrastructure. Tickets were also slightly more expensive than normal, so the first game only brought in around 6,000 fans. A decade later, a reporter caught up with McCane at his 100 acre property in Loganville. “I came to Atlanta in the 1940’s and I just got tired of hearing politicians double-talking about building a stadium here. I found out they’d been talking about it since 1910. So I thought I’d do it myself and bring the AFL here.” -Bill McCane, 1972

Atlanta finally secured pro teams in 1965 with the Atlanta Braves and Atlanta Falcons, and the Atlanta-Fulton County stadium was built in a year and lasted for 32 before being demolished. Turns out all stadiums are temporary. ✦

Please visit <https://dekalbhistory.org/dekalb-history-center-blog/> to view the full articles featured in this newsletter.

Upcoming Events

<p>NOV 9</p>	<p>Decatur Architecture Tour, in collaboration with the Atlanta Preservation Center</p> <p>12:00—1:00 pm</p> <p>Take a tour and discover some of Decatur’s hidden architectural gems.</p> <p>\$10 for members / \$15 for non-members</p>
<p>NOV 11</p>	<p>Historic Courthouse Tour</p> <p>6:00—7:00 pm</p> <p>Learn about the vibrant history within the marble clad walls and ornate ceilings seen inside today’s Historic DeKalb Courthouse.</p> <p>\$5 for members / \$10 for non-members</p>
<p>NOV 16</p>	<p>Hops at the History Center: Georgia Tech Campus Architecture</p> <p>6:00—7:00 pm</p> <p>Author Robert M. Craig will be talking about his book, <i>Georgia Tech Campus Architecture</i>, which details the diversity of architecture on the Georgia Institute of Technology campus.</p> <p>\$5 for members / \$10 for non-members</p>
<p>DEC 9</p>	<p>Historic Courthouse Tour</p> <p>6:00—7:00 pm</p> <p>Learn about the vibrant history within the marble clad walls and ornate ceilings seen inside today’s Historic DeKalb Courthouse.</p> <p>\$5 for members / \$10 for non-members</p>

For more information on these events and how to attend, please visit dekalbhistory.org/programs.



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Decatur's Second Empire Style

Most small Georgia towns only have one or two homes built in this architectural style (1870s – 1880s), which was more popular in larger cities. The most distinctive feature of a Second Empire house is the mansard roof, which is actually the top floor. The walls of the top floor are curved or sloped, generally covered with slate tiles, and punctuated by dormer windows. These homes typically have a tower, and early photos show this feature before its pyramidal roof was removed. Now what remains is an out-of-context bay over the porch.



"Atlanta Georgian and News," Nov. 11, 1908. I suspect this is not the original porch, but instead a change made between 1890 and 1908. Note the roof on the central tower.

Built in 1880, it was called the Marble House by locals because it used a popular technique where the exterior brick was covered with stucco and then scored to appear like blocks of stone. This house was built with load bearing brick walls that range from 18" to 24" thick. Quoins were also frequently used on this style and here emphasized the "stone" construction. Arched windows and doors can be characteristic for this style and are seen on the Marble House. The two-over-two windows have semicircular glass transoms. The window arches are supported by plain engaged columns, while the main entry has a weighty door surround topped by a keystone. It has two sets of one-over-one triple windows that reach to the floor. Plain window hoods



The front of the Marble House cannot be seen from N. McDonough Street and it is also obscured by newer development.

adorn the windows lacking transoms.

The symmetrically balanced façade was missing its large one-story wood front porch when the house was restored. The replacement underplayed the size and decorative nature of the original front porch – but there were no remaining details to copy. I would have expected more substantial columns and some decorative gingerbread trim.

The front corner rooms are anchored with bay windows. On the interior, the southernmost room is octagonal, and this could be original as its trim and moldings appear unaltered. The northernmost room is not octagonal but could have been when originally built. Both bays have doors onto the front porch that likely replaced windows when the house was divided into apartments. The house retains scalloped gingerbread in the eaves of the dormers.

Many locals "lost sight" of the 6,000+ square foot Marble House by the 1980s because it was hidden by big trees and overgrown shrubbery. Over the years and during its use as an apartment building, some of its original features were lost, including two fireplace mantels and its grand staircase. Porches were removed or enclosed, and small, utilitarian kitchens and bathrooms were added. In 1985, its owners hired Mary McClam Designs to lead the restoration. For this prominent historic preservation project, she returned this apartment house to its "single family" layout, with the intention that it would become

“Marble House” continued

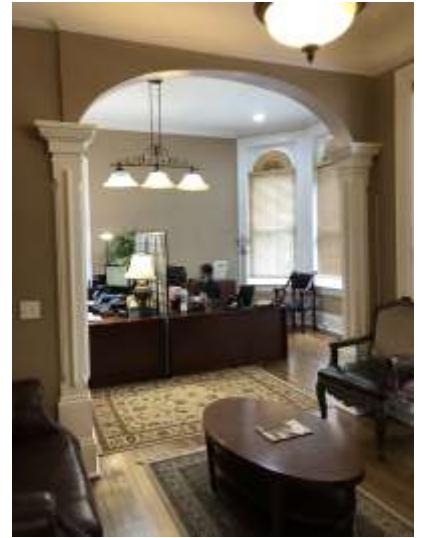
offices. The Marble House was restored to a total of 14 large rooms plus spacious hallways.

The current owner (since 2003), is attorney Bruce Hagen, who has continued the house’s preservation as a labor of love. He gave me a tour of the beautiful and well maintained house. Early in the pandemic, he refinished the original oak floors, which are in great shape. Prior to that, he completed extensive foundation repair which was required due to the masonry construction. The foundation bricks were not fire glazed and time and water eroded the stucco coat that held them together. Old house aficionados know that some of the most important - and expensive - repairs go unseen by visitors. Bruce’s work to shore up the foundation required a new structural I-beam and cross ties in the basement.

Despite the changes, a visitor today crosses the threshold and steps back in time. The front door delivers you to a large hallway that faces the main staircase, and which was presumably grander when originally built. There are two parlors on either side and 12 foot ceilings throughout the first floor. All rooms are finished with large baseboards and window and door casings. One room has an elaborate picture mold and another has a sculpturally curved crown molding made of plaster. Elegant wood pilasters frame

the entrance into the southwestern parlor, which may have served as a morning room. One can imagine other uses for the downstairs rooms – there would have been a dining room, perhaps a breakfast room, and possibly a library or study for the men. There would have been a gender separation for some of the public rooms during its early history.

There is much more to the story – please visit our blog, which includes historic photos, maps, and plats. ✦



View into the southwestern parlor, which may have been a morning room.

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New Exhibits



Avondale Estates: The Haven of Health and Happiness explores the history of Avondale Estates from its conception and provokes a conversation regarding cities and towns that are learning to embrace their whole histories.

Opened August 2021 (closing date has yet to be determined)

Visit the exhibit: Mon-Fri, 10 AM - 4 PM. Free admission.

Located on the 1st floor of the Historic DeKalb Courthouse

In honor of 25 years since the **1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics**, we have filled the Rehoboth cabinet in the lobby with some of our favorite Olympics-related items taken from the collections here at the DeKalb History Center.

Visit the cabinet: Mon-Fri, 9 AM - 5 PM. Free to view.

Located on the 1st floor of the Historic DeKalb Courthouse



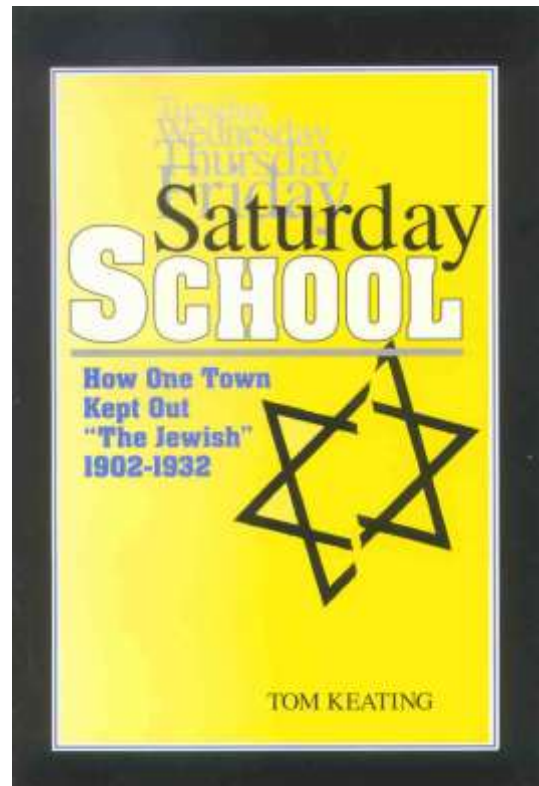
New in the Archives

Nicolas Raulin, a Fulbright visiting scholar at Emory, began visiting the History Center in the fall of 2019. His research focused on the return migration of African Americans to the South since the 1970s. He took advantage of our local newspaper inventory and culled much information from it. He also interviewed local residents. Nicolas has made his research available to the History Center, which includes some of the interview transcripts. We are in the process of transcribing more interviews. Please visit the "Research and Archives" section of our website and then click on the "The Return" box for more information. There's a lot to read and learn! If you'd like to come see our newspapers, take a look at our inventory list and get in touch to set an appointment.



Click this image on the archives page of the website to view the interview transcripts.

Dr. Tom Keating published the book *Saturday School* in 1999. The book is about Decatur's effort to keep Jewish families out of the community by holding school on Saturday, from 1902-1932. Dr. Keating was generous enough to donate a copy of the book at that time, and he presented a lecture here on the subject. Now, he has donated his notes, research, speech transcripts, photos, and more to our collection. Make an appointment today to come and see it.



The cover for the book *Saturday School* by Tom Keating.

To make an appointment to visit the archives, please email blomqvist@dekalbhistory.org or call 404-373-1088, ext. 1005.

In Memoriam

Naomi Bell

Neal Pope

Betty Blondeau

We were very fortunate to have Betty as an active member of our Board of Directors. Her passion and commitment were enjoyed by all who worked with her. She will be greatly missed.

Join * Renew * Give

We hope you enjoyed the fall 2021 issue of Times of DeKalb. Please consider making a financial contribution through joining, rejoining, or a one time donation. Your contributions help support programs, exhibits, and the archives.

Your generous contribution to the DeKalb History Center will provide you with a year-long membership that includes our quarterly newsletter to keep you informed on all our activities. We hope that you will join the DeKalb History Center by either renewing your membership or joining as a first-time supporter.

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or call 404-373-1088 ext. 1003. Visit our website www.dekalbhistory.org to pay online.

(All funds received through memberships directly support the preservation of DeKalb County history and are tax-deductible as allowed by law.)

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