

# Times of DeKalb

Summer  
2025

## A Brief History of the Georgia Peach

By Rebecca Selem, Exhibits & Communications Coordinator

### *Where did the peach come from?*

Peaches are originally from Asia. Long ago they were traded on the Silk Road, where they eventually ended up in Europe. The fruit was then brought across the Atlantic Ocean to what is now the United States of America.

### *How did they end up in Georgia?*

It is said that the first peaches were brought to America in 1571 by a group of Franciscan monks who landed on Georgia's coast near St. Simons and Cumberland Islands. By the mid-1700s, members of the Cherokee Nation were cultivating peaches as well as plums.

### *When did Georgia become the Peach State?*

The South was in need of some re-branding after the Civil War. Cotton, impacted by the destructive boll weevil, had a tainted reputation due to its associations with slavery and suffering. Around 1870, horticulturalists began taking notice of the peach and its potential to turn it into an orchard crop.

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Don Burrito Grill, originally a Davis Brothers Cafeteria c. 1960. Located in the Atlanta State Market in Forest Park.

## Farmers Markets of Atlanta and Decatur

By Marissa Howard, Membership & Programs Coordinator

### *Have you been to the Atlanta State Produce Terminal / Atlanta State Market in Forest Park?*

This public market has been operating since 1959. On a whim this past weekend, we decided to check it out. But first, a quick history of municipal markets.

People need to eat, and people need to shop. Until about 1916, there were

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# Memorial Drive Opening Reception

July 24th marked the opening of the DHC's newest exhibition, Memorial Drive. The exhibit opened with a well attended reception featuring opening remarks by Peter Essick, whose work is featured in the exhibit, and DeKalb County CEO Lorraine Cochran-Johnson.

Peter Essick's modern photography and gathered objects from local businesses present an imaginative means to view this historic corridor.

Museum Hours are Monday—Friday 10:00 am—4:00 pm and Saturdays 10:00 am—2:00 pm. Admission is free, but we certainly appreciate donations! ✦



Photos by Dean Hesse.

## Thank you Sponsors!



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# Upcoming Programs



**August 19, September 16**

## **Decatur Architecture Walking Tour**

8/19 7:00—8:30 pm

9/16 6:00—7:30 pm

This walking tour is focused on the history and homes of Sycamore Street—a significant Decatur street features many beautiful and unique houses that showcase a variety of architectural styles from the 19th and 20th centuries.

**Tickets: DHC Member \$5 / Non-member \$12.50**



**August 23**

## **Enchanted Masquerade and Silent Auction**

6:30—10:00 pm

*Join us for an evening of merriment and revelry at the Enchanted Masquerade.* This year's party will feature mouthwatering food from seven preferred caterers, an open bar with themed cocktails, and of course your chance to bid and win extraordinary treasures. We will be holding a Best Dressed contest, so slip on a mask of your choice, dust off your fairy wings, ivy crowns, or elegant attire, and go head-to-head with the most fashionable denizens in the land.

**Tickets: \$40 for Members / \$50 for Non-members**



**September 3**

## **Lunch & Learn: Mayra Garcia and Assembly Studios**

12:00—1:00 pm

Join Mayra Garcia as she talks about her career in film and about Assembly Studios in Doraville, GA. **Free to attend!**

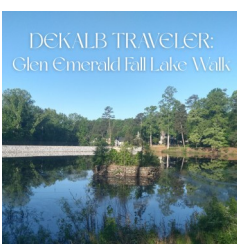


**September 20**

## **Workshop: Preserving Family and Community History**

10:00 am—1:00 pm

Join this workshop for helpful tips on preserving your family and community history. **Tickets: \$20 for Members / \$35 for Non-members**



**October 14**

## **DeKalb Traveler: Glen Emerald Fall Lake Walk**

11:00 am—1:00pm

Join DHC Members as we explore Glen Emerald Lake with DeKalb County Parks Naturalist, exploring the fall foliage and keeping an ear out for birds along the way. **FREE for Patron Membership and Above / \$5 Senior, Individual, Household levels**

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## Farmers Markets of

no public municipal markets in the metro area. Prior to that point, produce was purchased at informal curb markets (populated by pushcarts or sidewalk vendors) or small grocery stores.

The main concerns with these informal markets were the lack of sanitation, the quality of products, and the exposure to the elements.

**1914** - Kamper's Grocery opened in downtown Atlanta and became the forerunner to the modern supermarket. It was not a corner grocery store nor curb market but a multi-department market that offered meat, produce, and goods in a clean environment. The items were more expensive than what was sold at curb markets.

Local groups began advocating for a municipal market that could control prices and food safety.

**1917** - One of the first public municipally sanctioned markets opened in **Decatur** on the courthouse square. Open on Tuesdays and Saturdays, this market sold a wide range of products, including live chickens, eggs, canned goods, and pedigreed dogs. On opening day, vendors sold \$1,000 worth of goods.

**1924** - The **Atlanta Municipal Market** (now known as the Sweet Auburn Curb Market) was built as the city's

first public market. In its heyday, the Atlanta Municipal Market was the largest food and retail center in the state, serving 25,000 to 30,000 customers per week. This indoor market continued to grow, but pushed out the smaller independent farmers who sold their own product.

**1929** - Decatur City Commission enacted an ordinance against trading and peddling around the courthouse square. A new **Decatur Municipal Market** opened on Maple and McDonough Street.

**1936** - In Atlanta, a new state sponsored market known as the **Atlanta Farmers Market** opened just a few blocks away, offering customers a more open-air experience. This market was more of an overflow market for the Atlanta Municipal Market, just a few blocks away. This market was located at the corner of Courtland and Gilmer Street – now the location of the GSU Student Center. According to some accounts, despite being new it lacked modern facilities and quickly went downhill.

**1938** - The Georgia Department of Agriculture sought a larger space and found it south of downtown on Murphy Avenue and Sylvan Road in Southwest Atlanta. The new **Atlanta State Farmers Market** opened in 1941 and featured six produce buildings, which offered 117 market units. These open-air concrete sheds provided cover from the elements. This new market shifted consumers from a pedestrian-centric model to driving; they browsed from their cars. Imagine the chaos of this market. Space in the market would accommodate up to 600 trucks during peak season. This market was conveniently situated on a train line, with a spur that led directly into the market for easy transportation of goods.

These buildings still exist, for the most part, and are located on the Southside Beltline with the goal of redevelopment.



*Locals browsing at the market on the Decatur courthouse square. The Atlanta Journal, July 1917.*

# Atlanta and Decatur continued

**1945** - The **Atlanta State Farmers Market** was already running out of space and looking to expand. The Georgia Department of Agriculture inspected the Atlanta Municipal Market and the Atlanta State Farmers Market and deemed they were all out of space.

**1947** - **DeKalb Farmers Market** opens in Decatur on Atlanta Avenue, one block from the courthouse. It cost \$50,000 and was a “California Type” with an open court for 42 autos; it was developed by Guy Rutland, Jr. The market was home to just a few shops, including

Graddy’s Grocery and DeKalb Poultry and Egg, but by 1960 it was a parking lot. Eventually, it became the site of the new DeKalb Courthouse in 1967.

**1956** - The State of Georgia purchased a 140-acre site off I-75 in Forest Park.

**1959** - The new **Atlanta/Georgia State Farmers Market** opened in 1959. Occupying 146 acres, it was built for \$10,000,000. At the time, it was considered the world's largest market.

The market was home to a Davis Brothers Cafeteria that was once open 24 hours a day. It closed around 1995. Today, it is Don Burrito Grill. The ceiling features a striking mural of Atlanta, likely painted when the space was the Oakwood Cafe.

Today, the market stalls predominantly serve the Latino community. It's a fun experience that transports you out of Atlanta. When we visited earlier this month, we browsed the stalls while sipping on a freshly opened coconut and watching vendors clean nopales leaves. ✦



DeKalb New Era, 1947.

## Decatur Square Bandstand Update

Just outside the doors of the History Center, the city of Decatur is working on the “Square ShakeUp,” renovating and renewing the Square. The bandstand, assembled in 1996, has been taken apart to make way for a new facility. Businesses along the Square are still open so don’t forget to support your local restaurants and shops while construction is underway. The projected deadline for the construction is sometime in 2026.

You can check out the plans for the new Square by going to: [visitdecaturga.com/squareshakeup/](https://visitdecaturga.com/squareshakeup/) ✦



Decatur Square in the 1980s before the gazebo.



Gazebo construction in 1996.



Gazebo deconstruction, 2025.

## A Brief History of the Georgia Peach continued

Louis and Prosper Berckmans, a Belgian father-and-son duo, were an example of such horticulturalists. They set out on a mission to show that peaches could become just as important to the economy of the South as cotton. On their property in Augusta, Georgia, named Fruitland, they developed breeds of peaches that would lead to generations of prosperous Georgia peach crops. Today, the Augusta National Golf Club is located on land where the Berckmans Nursery once sat. Remnants of the nursery can be seen in the present day with Fruitland Manor serving as the Augusta National Clubhouse. Many plant varieties still thrive almost 100 years later.

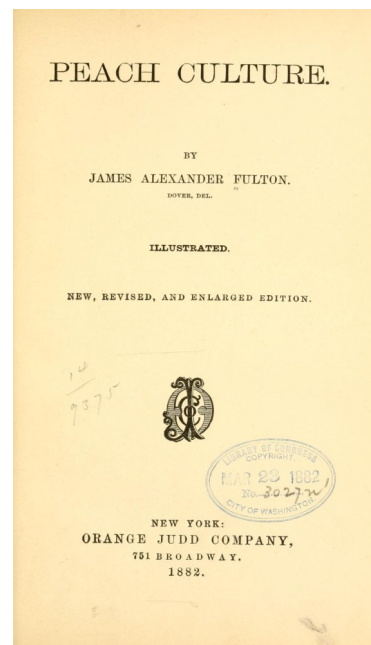


*Fruitlands Manor, date unknown. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Growing peaches became an elite practice. In order to grow peaches successfully, you had to keep up with the most recent horticultural research and the latest scientific findings, which involved a level of education held by very few people in the South. For instance, newly freed men and women did not have the necessary education and resources. Before the Civil War, people didn't pay much attention to peaches. They were considered a "low hanging fruit" until the elitists claimed it - making peaches off limits to anyone but the wealthy.

Peaches became associated with the "New South" while cotton represented the "Old South," though the production of peaches was equally reliant on Black labor to succeed.

Even though Georgia is officially known as the Peach State, it cannot claim to be the biggest producer of peaches. Georgia ranks third in peach production with the number one spot going to California. Presently, Georgia leads the nation in the production of peanuts, chickens, pecans, blueberries, and spring onions. ✦



*A book on peach horticulture, 1882. From the Library of Congress.*



*Georgia peach pickers lunchtime, 1936. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



# SWAPtember 2025



Swap the savings during the annual SWAPtember event at 23 metro Atlanta attractions! Show your DeKalb History Center membership card when you visit these participating Atlanta attractions between September 1-30, 2025 and receive \$10 off a membership purchase or comparable offer.

Or show your membership card from one of the participating attractions at the DeKalb History Center and get \$10 off your DeKalb History Center membership.

## In Memoriam

Charles "Charlie" Wycliffe Harrison

John Hewitt, *Beloved DHC Board Member*

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We hope you enjoyed the summer 2025 issue of Times of DeKalb. Please consider making a financial contribution through joining, rejoining, or a one time donation. Your generous contribution to the DeKalb History Center will provide you with a year-long membership that includes our quarterly journal to keep you informed on all our activities. We hope that you will join our team by either renewing your membership or joining as a first-time supporter.



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## DeKalb History Center

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