

Early DeKalb



By the turn of the century, DeKalb remained a rural county that had less than 10,000 residents with 55 white public schools and 17 black public schools. In 1910, the county had only one paved road, which was constructed to run alongside the Georgia Railroad going from Decatur to Stone Mountain.

Industry



While most DeKalb 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 mining industry. In its wake only one company remained in business. Textile mills were also appearing throughout the county as they were in other parts of the state.

Dairy



Many DeKalb farmers switched to dairying after boll weevils began attacking cotton fields starting in 1915. So much of DeKalb County was farmland, that after this transition to dairy farms, DeKalb had more dairies than any county outside the state of Wisconsin. This ample, open space was later ripe for the development that would begin in the 1950s.

Camp Gordon



During WWI, DeKalb felt the affects of the influx of hundreds of thousands of men coming to Camp Gordon for military training. Paving helped to keep this area relevant after the war; New Peachtree Road was paved in 1926 and Buford Highway in 1936.

Scott Candler, Sr.



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. Candler is considered to be the central figure in the extraordinary growth of DeKalb in the 1940s and 1950s and he brought services into the county that had previously only been available in larger cities.

Candler proposed a one million dollar water treatment plant in Doraville, which the county built in 1942. By 1949, this area grew into an industrial area with over \$750 million dollars of construction.

General Motors



The amenities that DeKalb County offered appealed to many of the soldiers who returned to the US after WWII. Industries began to locate new plants throughout the county. General Motors chose DeKalb as the site of its new plant partly because of proximity of the water treatment plant. Doraville had a 30 inch water main while other towns only had 12 inch mains. Built in 1947, the General Motors Plant opened in 1948 and 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

Road Construction



GM needed additional infrastructure to support materials coming into the plant and the completed new 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.

Development



This photo shows Northwoods boundaries in 1955

What made DeKalb's a popular choice for suburban development and new residents? Ample land, good municipal services and infrastructure, burgeoning industry and of course its proximity to Atlanta.

Large Scale Developers

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DEKALB HISTORY CENTER

DeKalb had several large scale developers who were similar to the subdivision developers we know today. Both Northwoods and Belvedere Park were large scale developments. Northwoods was developed by Walter Tally. He later developed the Northcrest subdivision with similar contemporary influence in the architecture. Other well known Tally developments include Sexton Woods, Brookvalley, and Brittany.

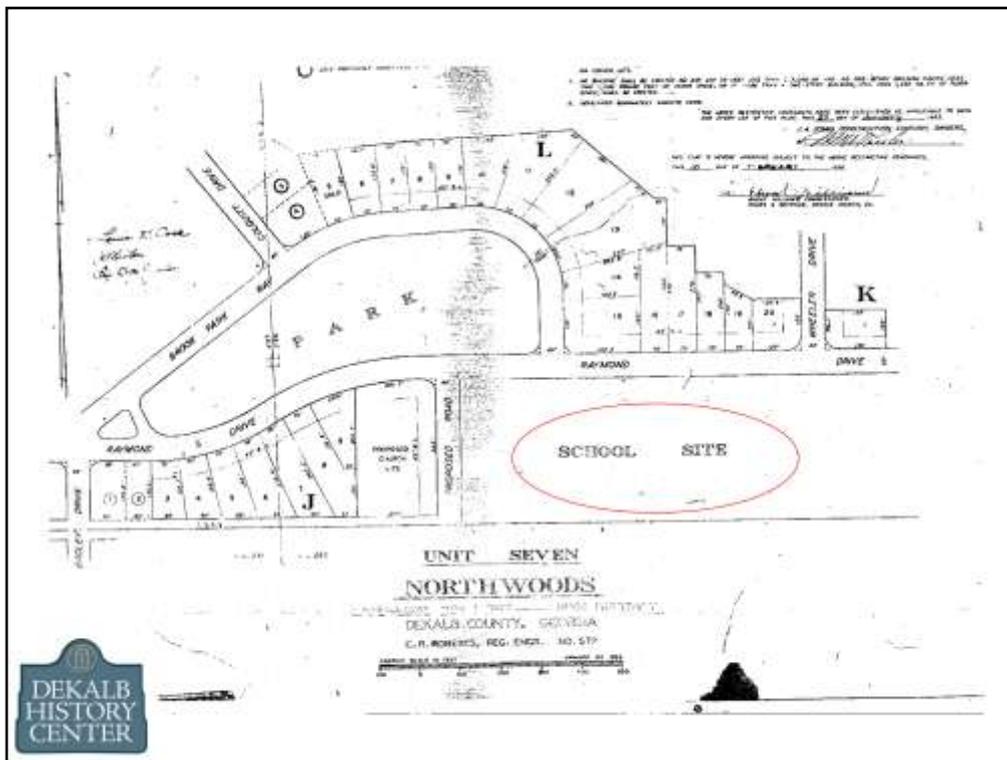
Under the 1934 National Housing Act, Congress established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA.) With FHA backed loans, potential buyers could borrow 90% of the appraised value of the home, with the obligation to make only a 10% down payment. With the length of the loan extended, buyers now had 25 to 30 year mortgages, which substantially lowered down payments

Northwoods

- A planned community with parks, a school and professional building
- 700 homes
- 250 acres
- 11 miles from Atlanta



By 1949, Doraville was ready for new residential development. Northwoods was the perfect option for young families looking to take advantage of all that DeKalb had to offer. It was only 11 miles from Atlanta and convenient via Buford Highway. The 250 acre community was developed from 1950 -1959 and by its conclusion had 700 homes.



Northwoods differed from similar developments because it was more than just houses. It was a complete community with a school, parks, professional building...



Northwoods Methodist Church

This rendering was not completed as drawn.

... a church ...



al Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University



Shopping Center

... and a shopping center. Northwoods Plaza had a Big Apple Super Market, a service station, flower shop, furniture and toy stores, and more.

Traditional Ranch Homes



The first homes to be built by Tally were conventional ranch homes with hipped roofs that most likely came from a plan book or were purchased from a publication like Home Builder's Plan Service. These homes occupy the southwestern portion of Northwoods.

Contemporary Homes



As the sale of the more traditional style ranch homes began to slow, Tally brought in young Architects Mastin and Summer to design more contemporary style homes. This was the first time Tally had worked with architects and he felt contemporary design was a sensible way to build and bring costs down. He saved the buyers money by eliminating the attic space and with simple roof designs.

Model 400, basic price, \$19,400

Model 401, four options and feature additions

Model 402, basic price, \$19,400

True variety—six floor plans, nothing wasted on frills

Builder Tully is sold on architects' services at this point.

"I had never used an architect before I went into contemporary design," he points out. "But I felt this was the sensible way to build, and again, I wanted to bring the costs down out of the roof and put them into the living areas. So I picked Mastin & Spenser, who gave me logical designs. These actually did the trick."

How did he save money to benefit buyers? "We saved so money on extra roof loading, roof joists, cripple studs, boxing at eaves, flashing and the like. You see before don't have to stand around in a dark attic storage space. By building this way, we get 30% more closet space and 50 to 75 more square feet of first-floor living area for houses in this price class in our area."

Model 403, three extra features, \$24,400

Model 404, three extra features, \$24,400

Model 405, \$24,700, includes built-in appliances

Six Floor Plans

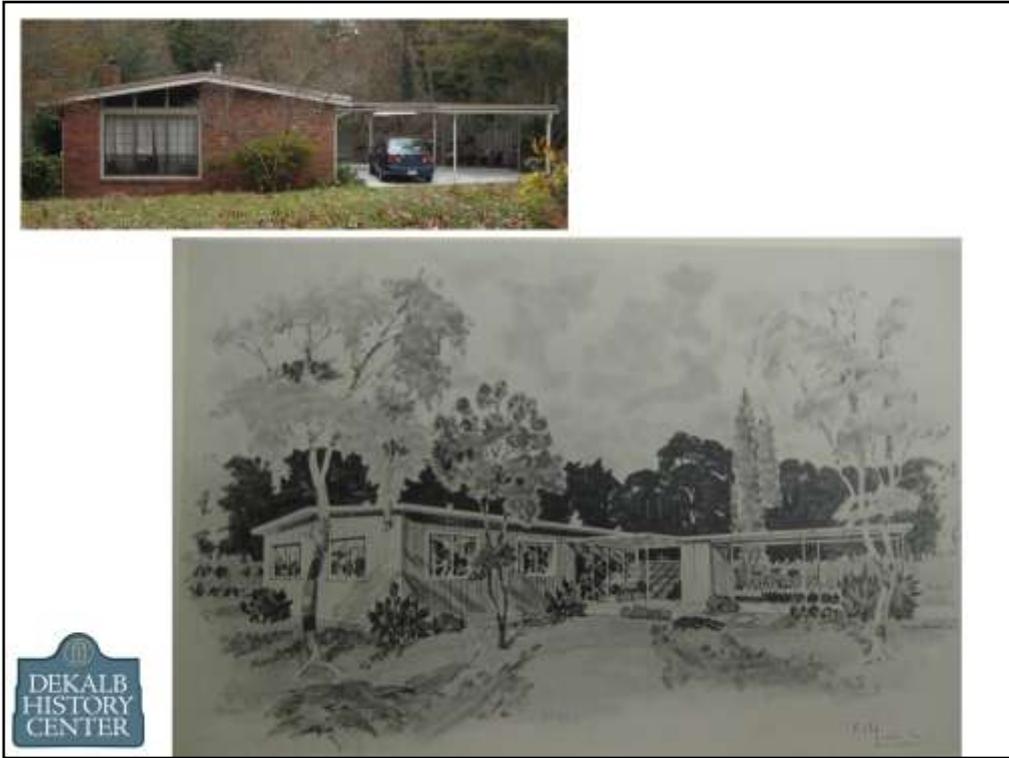
Of the contemporary models, there were six floor plans available. Each lot had its own septic tank and this left just enough space for the home and a one-car garage. According to Ernest Mastin, the lots were not large enough for the separate garage common in the 1920s and 1930s. The homes had just one bathroom and were not equipped with air conditioning.



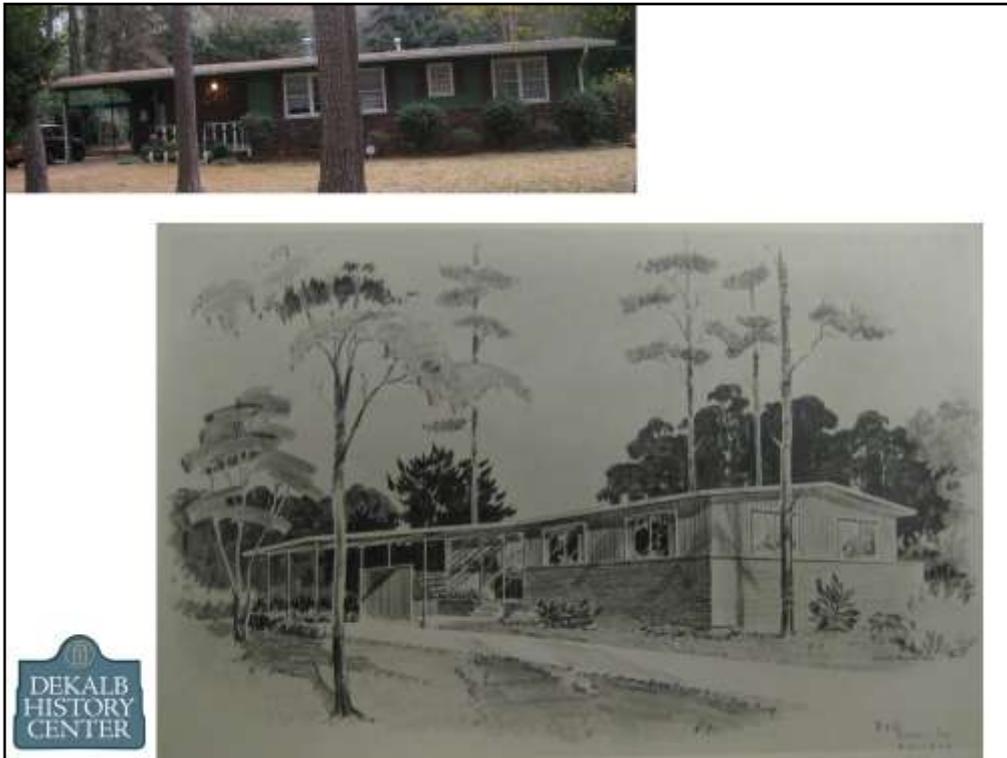
Open floor plans were something that Mastin and Summers deemed essential in the design of these contemporary homes. The kitchens gained focus in the 1950s, and had the newest amenities such as dishwashers and disposals. There was less emphasis on formal entertaining and it was now considered ok for the family to eat in the kitchen.



The split-level homes were designed to accommodate the sloping lots and provided additional zoned space, separating public and private areas in the house.



The architects incorporated the outdoors with patios and built-in barbecues.



The houses with flat roofs did not have attics or space for duct work, so heat was provided by a system of radiant pipes in the floors.

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at Northwoods Subdivision

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the window with every
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WALTER L. TALLY, INC., Builder and Developer

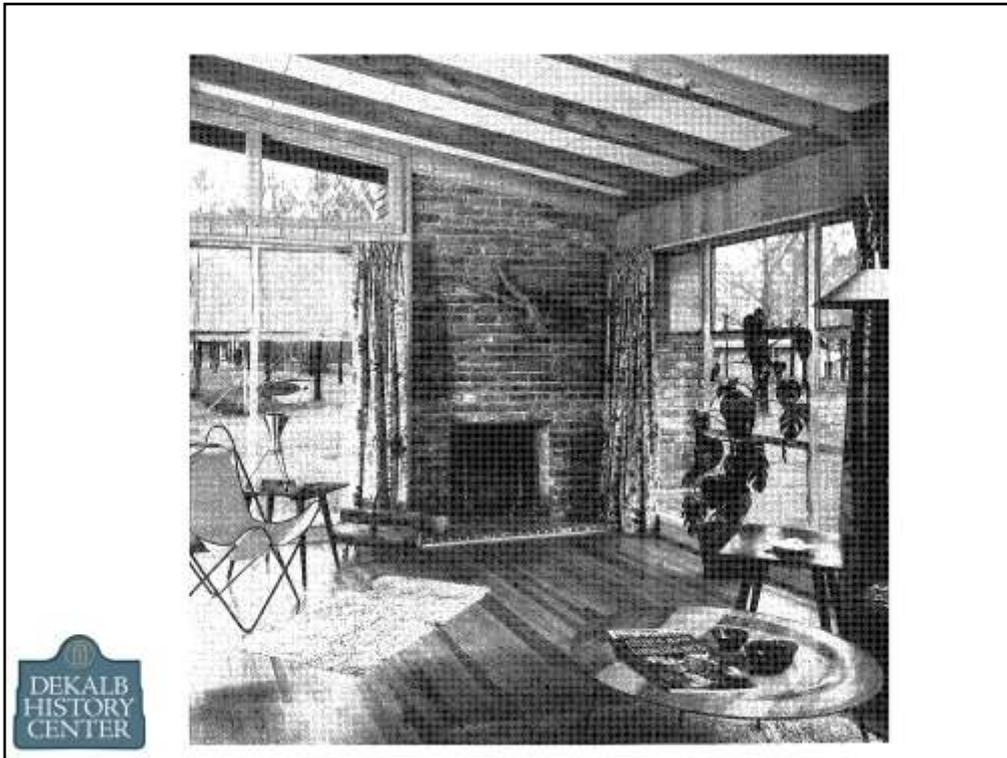
Go Buford Highway 2 miles past Clairmont Rd. to
Northwoods Shopping Center and follow signs to Model
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MAXWELL & HITCHCOCK, INC.
191 SIMPSON ST., N. W. LA 400

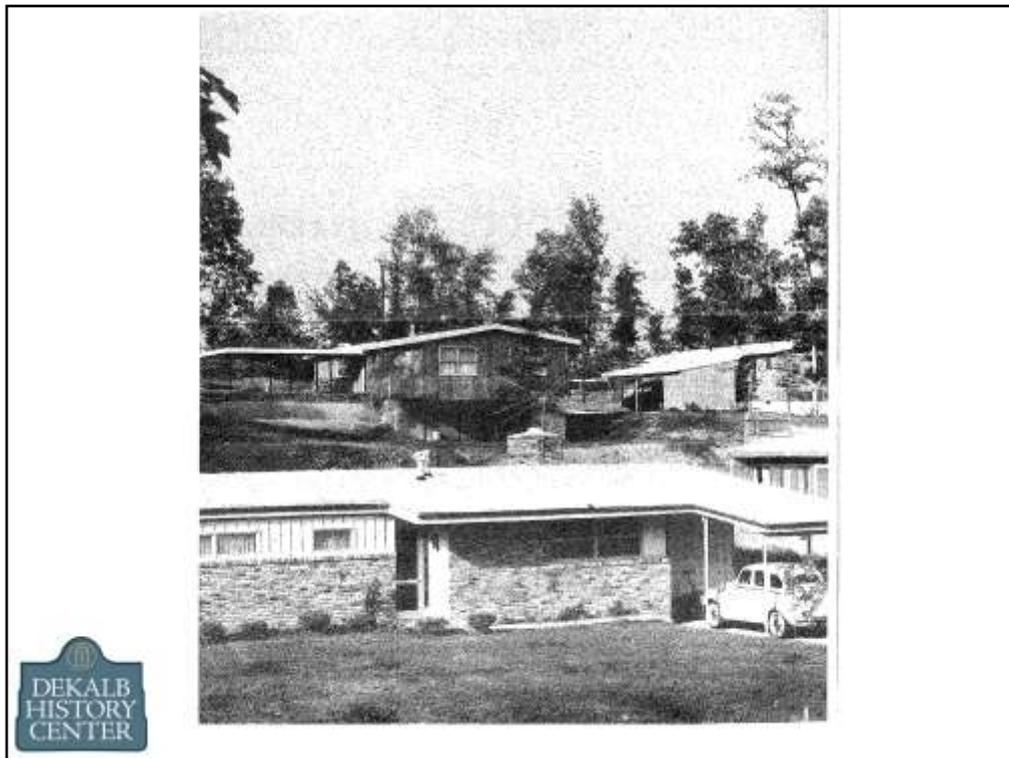


From the AJC, 1955

Jalousie and sliding glass windows, another modern element, were used to create air flow since there was no central air conditioning.



The architects' designs included wood burning fireplaces, a feature that was not usually included in lower cost homes. Mastin and Summer also used floor – to – ceiling windows in their designs to emphasize views and the outdoors.



The development appealed to potential buyers because Tally allowed them to choose the lots they wanted and to customize their homes. They could talk to the architects about the design of their homes, making them feel they got a custom home at a bargain price.

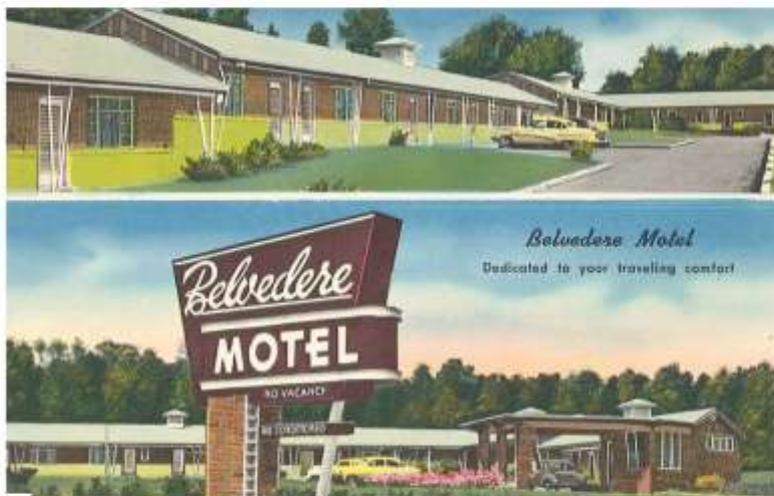
Sample of Occupations 1962

- Sales manager
- Analyst - Chevy Motors
- Assistant to Vice President - Southern Bakeries
- Office Manager - Southern States Chemistry
- Commercial Photographer - Rich's
- Manager - Skyland Gulf Service
- Engineer
- Salesman
- Forman – General Motors



Northwoods was built with young families in mind. Among the early residents were the architects and engineers and employees of Lockheed, General Motors, and Delta.

Belvedere Park



Belvedere Park, built just across Memorial Drive from Avondale Estates, was a similar development to Northwoods ... the development included the first Rich's outside of downtown Atlanta. It also had a motel and shopping center.

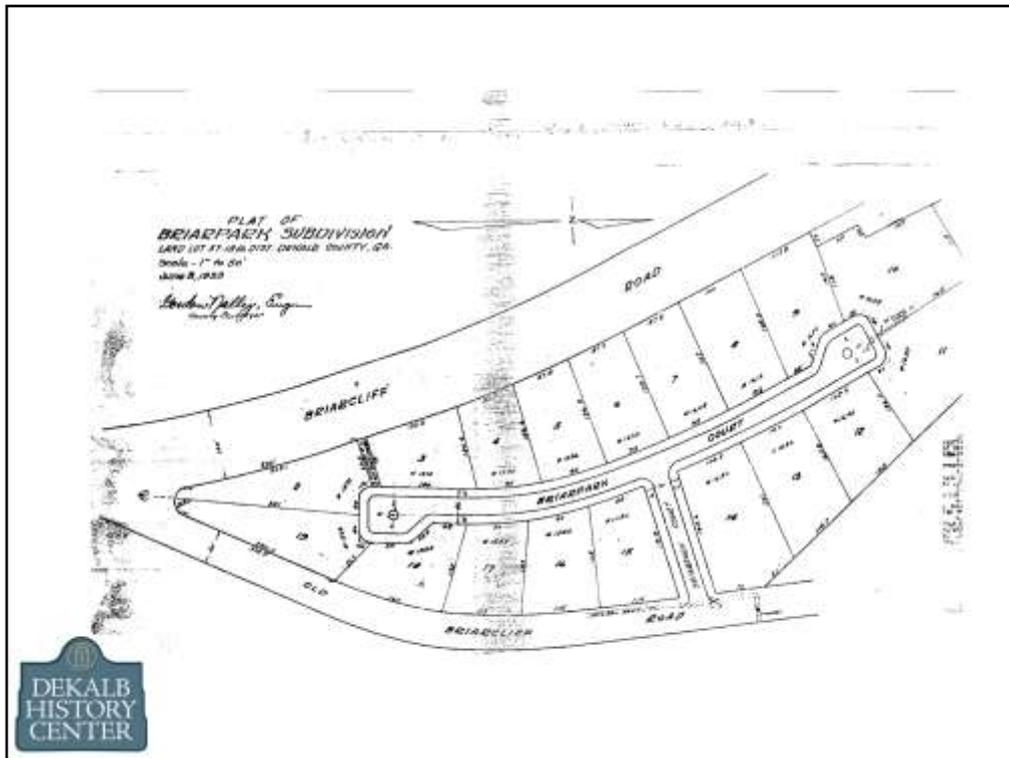


In addition to the shopping center, the developers of Belvedere Park set aside land within the community for a school. This is now the site of Knollwood Elementary.

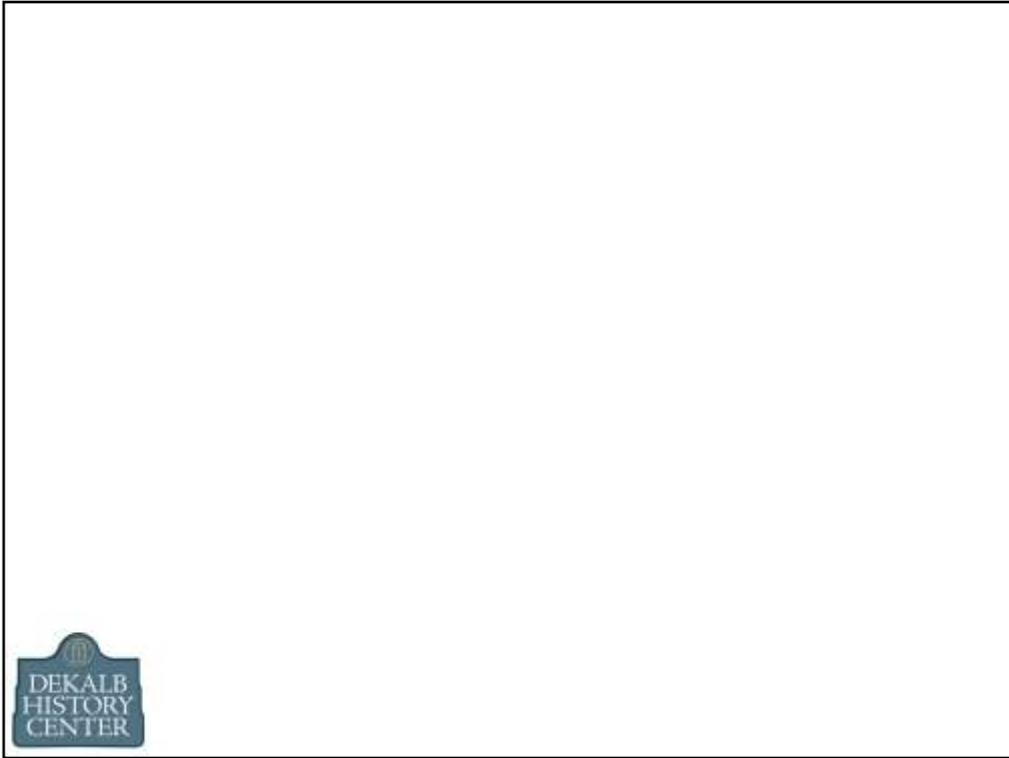
Briarpark Court



Briarpark Court is a development of mid-century modern houses located off Old Briarcliff Road. It differs from the other developments because it is much smaller and the homes were architect commissioned. Its location is also closer to Atlanta than the larger suburban developments.

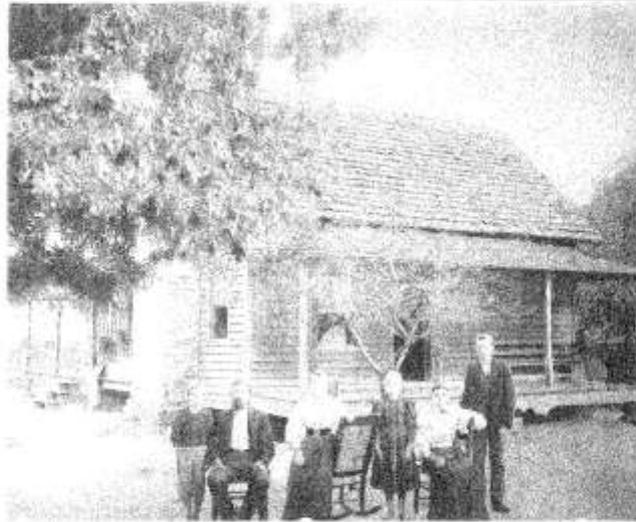


The development of the Briarpark Court subdivision was initiated by several upper-middle class members of DeKalb's Jewish community, including lawyers, doctors and executives. A number of these houses were designed by the innovative architect Andre Steiner, including his own home.



Steiner was a Holocaust survivor who fled to Cuba and moved to Atlanta in 1950. He was a planner at Robert & Company and was responsible for the master plans of Jekyll Island and Callaway Gardens. His drawings may be viewed at the Atlanta History Center and about 25 of his homes, including those on Briar Park Court, are sprinkled through the North Atlanta area.

Sargent Hills



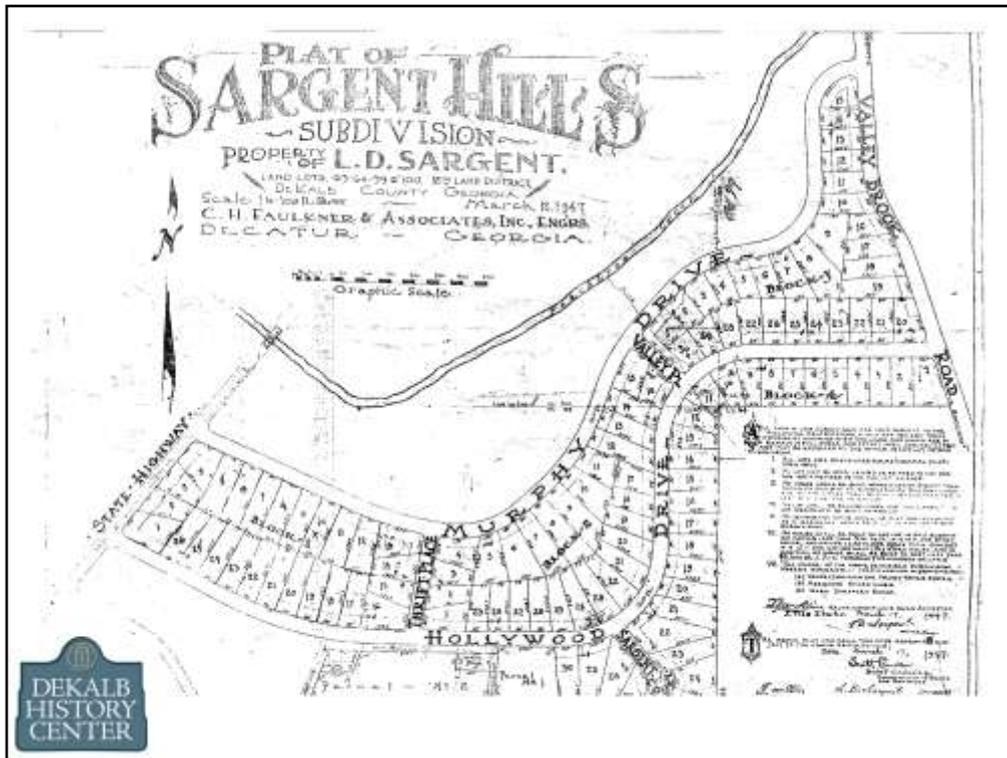
In the 1900s, the neighborhood now known as Sargent Hills was farmland which belonged to John Bolen Johns. Johns was instrumental in establishing the Pea Ridge/Rehoboth community, which is located between Decatur and Tucker. In 1908, Jim and Dicey Wages built their home on part of this farmland near the intersection of Lawrenceville Highway and Stone Mountain Freeway.



The Wages family amassed a large amount of land in the Pea Ridge area. Jim Wages gave DeKalb the right of way to build what is now known as Valley Brook Road. Lola Wages inherited much of the land and after her marriage to Luke Sargent, they began to gradually develop the land around Valley Brook Road and Lawrenceville Highway. Their store fed multitudes of factory workers in the area, including those from the nearby steel plant.

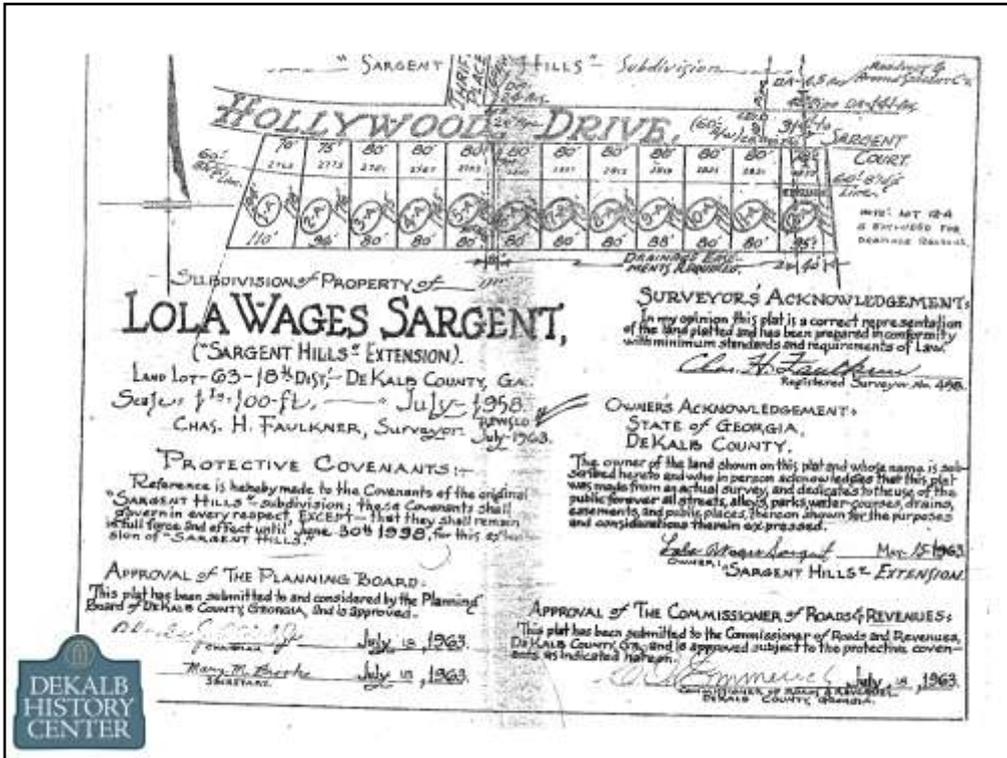


Eventually Luke Sargent opened a sawmill, which employed workers from the nearby Scottsdale Mill.



The construction of I-285 greatly affected the community of Pea Ridge, which split as the new highway came through its green pastures. Many long-time residents sold off their land, and subdivisions and shopping centers began to emerge in this area as they had throughout other parts of DeKalb.

The Sargent family likely sold much of their land to developers, and oversaw the construction of several subdivisions. Lola provided input during the construction of the North DeKalb Apartments while Luke supported the development of the Sargent Hills subdivision. Sargent Hills was developed piece by piece over time. This plat map shows the community in the late 1940s.



And this plat shows a portion of Hollywood drive developed by Lola Wages Sargent in 1963.

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The plans for homes in Sargent Hills were most likely acquired from plan books and featured the latest features of the modern home... including the aluminum jalousie window.

Continuing the Initiative

