

# History of Virginia-Highland {Part XI}

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EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS IS THE ELEVENTH IN A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON THE HISTORY OF VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND, EXCERPTED FROM A LONGER WORK-IN-PROGRESS BEING RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY 10-YEAR VA-HI RESIDENT LINDA MERRILL. AN ART HISTORIAN BY TRAINING, LINDA WORKED AS A CURATOR AT THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION FOR THIRTEEN YEARS, AT THE HIGH MUSEUM FOR TWO, AND NOW – AFTER A HIATUS TO STAY HOME WITH HER TWO CHILDREN – SHE TEACHES AT EMORY. LINDA WELCOMES COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS ON HER WORK. SHE CAN BE REACHED AT MAGDALIN@MINDSPRING.COM.

## Commerce

Natalie Cohen, who grew up in one of the condominiums at 982 Virginia Avenue, recalled that the area surrounding the intersection of Virginia and North Highland avenues was a veritable wilderness in 1921, “very woody.” Virginia ended abruptly at Highland, which was still an unpaved country road. From her bedroom window, Natalie witnessed the construction of the new commercial block at “the Corner” (as the intersection would long be known), and by 1927 it had become the hub of the neighborhood, offering the amenities of suburban life: a shoe-repair shop, a pharmacy, a barbershop, and a Piggly Wiggly.

Further south along Highland, where the number of houses in Highland Park had more than doubled, businesses sprang up to serve the burgeoning community. Several older, two-story houses lining the avenue were replaced with a pharmacy, a grocery store, and a dry cleaner, and in 1922 the roof of one surviving residence was raised twenty feet and two storefronts added below. One of those establishments, a delicatessen, is in business today as Atkins Park Restaurant, reputed to be the oldest continuously licensed tavern in Atlanta.

Another long-lived business was the Atkins Park Pharmacy, which opened in 1914 on the northwest corner of Highland and St. Charles Avenue. In the 1930s, as Cox & Baucom, it was one of ten pharmacies within a two-block stretch—a testament to the phenomenal popularity of the soda fountain (and, by extension, of Coca-Cola). As automobiles overtook the trolley on Highland Avenue, curbside service became a welcome convenience, and one of the “curb boys,” Jack Fleeman, eventually took over the business. Fleeman’s Pharmacy operated for decades as the “oldest independent drug store” in Atlanta, remaining in business well into the 1990s. The building, virtually unchanged, now houses Belly General Store; the original marble countertop is still in place.

On the opposite side of the district, a cluster of shops on Boulevard (now Monroe) at Cooledge Avenue served the residents of Boulevard Park. As in the other commercial blocks, low brick buildings with tiled roofs nestled unobtrusively along the boundary of the bungalow neighborhood. Lining both sides of the street, the Boulevard Park businesses created a commercial gateway to the community from the south and buffered it from the industrial district at Tenth Street. In 1922, when the subdivision was still developing, the block already featured a dry-cleaner,

two grocery stores, and the Boulevard Park Pharmacy; six years later it expanded to include a veritable supermarket—the Great A&P Tea Co.—which stood next door to the Nifty Jiffy Store, with a tire and battery shop across the street. Though comparatively modest, the business district was significant enough to merit a “white way,” brilliantly lit by electric lights, inaugurated in October 1929 with an orchestra and dancing in the streets. A similar commercial strip took shape around 1930 along the subdivision’s northern perimeter at Highland and Amsterdam, with a predictable array of shops—the Howard Dry Cleaning Company, the Phelps Millard Grocery, and Reeves Pharmacy, which conducted business on that corner for thirty years.

Besides dry goods, haircuts, and Coca-Cola, Virginia-Highland residents required gasoline, and a surprising number of businesses arose to satisfy the demand. Among the first was a “very attractive filling station” that replaced an unsightly coal yard on Boulevard, where the furniture store Cantoni now stands. In 1931, the Woco Pep opened on the corner of Highland and Drewry. Owned and operated by the brothers Doyle and Bell Langford, the station expanded into the adjacent lot on Highland Avenue, and the Langfords beautified the Drewry side with a rose garden that flourished, along with the business, for over fifty years. The 1939 building is now a bar and restaurant aptly named Diesel Filling Station.

Sources: Ann Taylor Boutwell, “Seventy Years Later, Her Tree is Doing Just Fine,” *Atlanta* 30306 (May 1995), p. 28; *The Historical Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution*; Virginia-Highland neighborhood file, Atlanta History Center; Atlanta City Directories; [www.bellystore.com](http://www.bellystore.com), [www.atkinspark.com](http://www.atkinspark.com).