

by: Linda Merrill

History of Virginia-Highland

{Part III}



The Adair estate - also known as Wood Cliff - sits on Rupley Drive.

Highland Park

In July 1892, the Atlanta Constitution illustrated the recent rise in property values along the Nine-Mile Circle with a pertinent example: a sixteen-acre tract of land that sold in the late 1880s for \$3,200 had recently been purchased for \$17,000. The newest landowner on the trolley circuit was Green B. Adair (c. 1837–1914), a cousin of the real-estate mogul George W. Adair and a native of Talladega County, Alabama. Adair had served in the Army of Northern Virginia and was among those who laid down their guns at Appomattox. Soon after the war he settled in Atlanta and rapidly became one of the city's most successful cotton merchants. Although he retired from active business in 1891, when his eldest son, Green B. Adair Jr., was still a toddler, Adair remained involved in charity work and was to be remembered as “one of Atlanta's most beloved citizens.”

When Adair purchased property on the Nine-Mile Circle, his family was living in the heart of Atlanta; the land outside town was acquired for a summer home. By 1911, however, the Adairs were living year-round at 1000 Highland Avenue (now 964 Rupley Drive) in the graciously proportioned Mediterranean-style house they named Wood Cliff. It was impressive on the outside, but according to the Atlanta Constitution the interior was still finer, “excelled perhaps for beauty by no house in the city.” Rooms on the first floor could be opened into a large single space for grand entertainments, and second-story parapets afforded stunning views of the surrounding countryside, with glimpses of the city in the distance.

The Adair estate was not to remain “an isolated country spot” for long. As early as 1897, what had previously been referred to as the Adairs’ “country place” had become “their suburban home,” for lands surrounding the Nine-Mile Circle, the newspaper reported, were “beginning to bloom like golden herbs under the manipulation of capital and scientific labor.” One “sprightly young suburb” on the trolley line was Highland Park, established on land originally owned by Richard Todd, which the family had begun to sell off in parcels. It occupied a ridge overlooking Atlanta, a prospect “of picturesque and surpassing beauty,” and

it was a comfortable distance from Ponce de Leon Springs, which had been discovered in 1868 during construction of the Air-Line (later Southern) Railroad (now the site of City Hall East). Since 1874, Atlantans had traveled by horse-drawn streetcar to enjoy the allegedly medicinal mineral water (hence the name, a reference to the Spanish explorer who sought the Fountain of Youth); the water in Highland Park was said to share its restorative powers.

The suburb was originally bordered on the north and south by St. Charles and Blue Ridge avenues, with Ponce de Leon running down the center from Barnett to Highland. The 50-by-200-foot lots were offered for \$1,000 each in May 1893, with advertisements noting that both Green Adair and the Reverend Dr. John W. Heidt (1841-1909) owned houses in the vicinity. Rev. Heidt,

former pastor of Trinity Methodist Church, had lately built an elegant home reminiscent of the antebellum South—“that romantic era,” one journalist declared, “whose civilization has never been surpassed”—and he avowed that there was nothing like a house on the edge of town for “making the most of God's pure air and the sunshine . . . in this part of the world.” The subdivision was still growing in 1902, when 65 more lots, primarily on St. Charles and Greenwood, were offered at auction: advertisements described the property as “free from any objections, nice white settlement, beautiful oak grove, fine spring water, paved street, etc.” The realtor promised auction attendees a free lunch and the chance to win one lot “absolutely free: Be on hand and get your start in life without cost.”

By 1912, there was no need for such inducements. A crowd of three hundred showed up at the auction sale of 28 lots on Greenwood Avenue and all but eight were sold. Potential buyers were guaranteed a sound investment, since the property was adjacent to the glamorous new development of Druid Hills; only passing reference was made to the natural beauty and pure water of the region. “Art is encroaching upon the domain of nature,” the Atlanta Constitution had presciently observed in 1894, “exchanging the views of woodland scenery for those of domestic civilization.”

Next issue: Turn-of-the-century Virginia-Highland

Sources:

Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution, 1924–32; Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events* (1954), vol. 2; A. D. Adair personality file, c 1905-10, and Neighborhood plats, district 14, Atlanta History Center.