

# History of Virginia-Highland

## {Part VI}

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EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS IS THE SIXTH 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.

### Boulevard Park

“Have you seen North Boulevard Park?” wrote Charles H. Black, president of the North Boulevard Park Corporation, to a local real-estate agent in June 1916. “A visit will convince you that it is the prettiest residence Park in Atlanta.” New trolley tracks were being laid on Boulevard (now Monroe) north of Virginia Avenue to Orme Circle, and the corporation was busy installing gas mains, electrical and telephone lines, and water and sewer pipes to make the area more hospitable.

Apart from the new stretch of Boulevard, the only preexisting streets in the subdivision were Cresthill and Elmwood, dirt or gravel roads leading to orchards and farmhouses. The border streets, south and north, were Cooledge—named for F. J. Cooledge, vice-president of the North Boulevard Park Corporation in 1916—and Orme Circle, named for A. J. Orme, then secretary-treasurer. The developers took pride in Boulevard Park's shady sidewalks lining granite-curbed roadways. Because the streets were all laid at once, in a scheme that emphasized consistent design, they were all, presumably, originally paved with brick. Although many of the granite curbs survive, if sometimes in fragments, just one street—Cresthill Avenue—entirely escaped blacktop resurfacing in later years. Cooledge was later restored. In 1993, the Atlanta City Council adopted an ordinance preserving “the brick right-of-way” on Cresthill.

American involvement in the first World War slowed the real estate market, but the North Boulevard Park Corporation continued preparing the property, certain of selling it at a profit once funds were flowing again. In June 1919, some four hundred lots were advertised for sale at an average cost of \$45 per square foot. They were modestly proportioned—50 to 60 feet wide and 125 to 200 feet deep—and often irregularly shaped to fit the contours of the landscape. They came with regulations dictating a uniform building line (25 feet from the street) to order the appearance of the neighborhood. And according to the Atlanta Constitution, restrictions were imposed “to protect the property against the encroachment of undesirable citizens and undesirable structures placed on the lots.”

As the suburb's name suggests, the intersection of Boulevard and Park formed the hub of the district. One way or another, all roads led to Boulevard, and all but one (Elmwood, which intersects Cresthill) to Park Drive. As a continuation of Ponce de Leon Place to the south, Park Drive not only linked the older neighborhoods to the new, but also connected the more established residential areas to Piedmont Park. A gracious thoroughfare, Park Drive took a long, slow curve toward Boulevard and the Forrest

Avenue trolley line, where the intersection was marked with a pair of triangular traffic islands planted with flowering shrubs. These would have matched the ornamental triangle that still stands at the Piedmont Park end of the Park Drive bridge, and may even have been constructed from the same antique materials salvaged from the streets of antebellum Atlanta. The four vestigial islands now at Park and Monroe can hardly suggest the original, diamond-shaped design.

In keeping with its importance as the subdivision's primary artery, Park Drive was the first street prepared for home construction, and ten houses on Park were standing (and occupied) in 1919. Within two years, eighty-five percent of the lots in Boulevard Park had been sold. It was often said that “new homes sprung up overnight”: on Cresthill, for instance, there were 11 occupied houses in 1921 and 42 in 1923. That pace was in keeping with the neighborhood as a whole, which by 1926 had been “improved,” as the Constitution put it, “with 464 high type bungalows and two-story houses”—remarkably, a house on every lot.

The first occupants of those high type bungalows were, by the socio-economic standards of the day, solidly middle class. Among the early residents of Cresthill Avenue were bookkeepers, cashiers, bank tellers, school teachers, engineers, lawyers, and “traveling agents;” a landscape gardener, a theater manager, a barber, an auto mechanic, a watchmaker, a traveling salesman, a plumber, and a streetcar conductor; proprietors of a downtown drugstore and a bakery on Ponce; and employees of the city's railroads, service stations, insurance and utility companies, as well as such Atlanta institutions as Haverty's, Rich's, and Coca-Cola. There were students and newlyweds, families with young children and retirees; and although several households had two incomes, many consisted of widows and unmarried women. Within certain boundaries, therefore—established, if unspoken, from the start—anyone could feel at home in Boulevard Park, which may account for its slogan: “The Place to Live.”

Sources: The Historical Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution; Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, vol. 2 (1954); Timothy J. Crimmins, “Bungalow Suburbs: East and West,” *Atlanta Historical Journal* (Summer/Fall 1982); Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, North Boulevard Park Neighborhood File, Atlanta History Center.

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