

History of Virginia-Highland

{Part VII}

Linda Merrill

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS IS THE SEVENTH 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.

Orme Park

North Boulevard Park, “one of Atlanta’s choice home sections,” proved so popular that in 1922 its boundaries were expanded to fill the remaining gap between Piedmont Park and Highland Avenue. Extending north from Park Drive to Amsterdam and encompassing Glen Arden and Elkmont, Crestridge, and Brookridge drives, the additional property increased the number of lots by fifty percent, making Boulevard Park the single largest real-estate development in the district.

This development depended upon the completion, in 1925, of a concrete-and-stucco bridge to connect the new section of the subdivision with the original lots. Spanning a spring-water stream called Meadow Brook, the bridge stood at the western end of a deep, wooded ravine. It was designed in an Italiante style, with rusticated pillars and decorative cartouches, by C. E. Kauffmann, the same city engineer who designed the Park Drive bridge. (Kauffmann is also responsible for Fire Station No. 19 in the heart of Virginia-Highland.) The picturesque eight-acre park surrounding the stream was donated to the city by the North Boulevard Park Corporation and was eventually named Orme Park after the company’s president, A. J. Orme.

In those early years, the neighborhood grew so fast that it might have spun into a state of confused alienation had it not been for the North Boulevard Park Auxiliary. This was the “woman’s branch” of the Civic League, “an effective organization of men living in this progressive section of Atlanta” that, in practice, played a relatively minor role in making a neighborhood of Boulevard Park. The Auxiliary was founded in 1922 by fifteen women who met at the home of the club’s first president, Florence Dreyfus of 39 (now 559) Elmwood Drive; their stated purpose was to encourage “a feeling of friendly neighborliness and mutual interest in community improvement.” As additional lots were sold and settled, the ladies made a point of meeting each new neighbor, the Atlanta Constitution reported, “so that interest in his new surroundings would be established, the committee assuring the family a cordial welcome into the neighborhood.”

Throughout its early decades, Boulevard Park remained a solid, stable place that was widely regarded as “one of Atlanta’s hand-

somest subdivisions.” The women’s Auxiliary made sure that property owners kept the alleys clear of rubbish, “which breeds disease and is naturally unsightly,” and organized periodic “clean-up” and “keep clean” campaigns since some residents were less than conscientious about gathering up their grass clippings. The ladies befriended the garbage collector, “a human being after all,” who they found would gladly keep their backyards tidy in exchange for some small reward (“an occasional red apple or a slice of cake”). Their dedication to neighborhood beautification was in keeping with the prevailing spirit of ‘boosterism’ in the 1920s: “In advertising Atlanta this little club feels that one of the best ways to do so is to make and keep the city clean and attractive, so they begin ‘at home’ to clean their special corner.”

The ladies of the Boulevard Park Auxiliary also raised the momentum, and the money, to build a Boy Scout lodge, or “hut,” near the park, “in a grove on the hillside overlooking Elkmont drive,” as well as a clubhouse of their own. And in 1926, they supported improvements to Piedmont Park that directly benefited the adjacent neighborhood—construction of the swimming pool and a nine-hole golf course (in what is now the Meadow), along with several new buildings and facilities. The Piedmont Park Clubhouse at the corner of Boulevard and Tenth (now Park



Tavern) was constructed in 1928, and for many years provided a convenient and congenial venue for neighborhood gatherings.

Sources: The Historical Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution; Timothy J. Crimmins, "Bungalow Suburbs: East and West," The Atlanta Historical Journal 26 (Summer/Fall 1982): 83-94; Franklin M. Garrett, Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1954), vol. 2; C. E. Kauffmann Personality File, Atlanta History Center; Atlanta Federation of Women's Clubs Year Book, May 1927-29, quoted in "Virginia-Highland Historic District," nomination for National Register of Historic Places, March 24, 2005, section 8.

Next issue: **The Better Homes Movement**

Orme Park Renovation Planned

Pamela Papner

Orme Park is a lovely 6.6-acre park tucked in between Elkmont and Brookridge drives. Like most parks maintained by the city of Atlanta, Orme suffers from overuse and lack of funding to pay for improvements. That's why Friends of Orme Park and the Virginia-Highland Conservation League (a 501(c)(3) subsidiary of the Virginia-Highland Civic Association) have stepped up to improve this important community park. The following improvements were endorsed by the community's 2007 Visioning Plan, are in line with the overall goal to retain Orme's "woody" look/feel, and are being performed under the auspices of the City of Atlanta Parks Department. Details and a copy of the planned Phase I improvements are posted online at vahi.org.

Summary of Phase I Improvements

The main entrance to Orme Park (at the existing playground) is in a general state of disrepair. The new design includes an entrance plaza, stairway, and gently sloping sidewalks that provide wheelchair accessibility into the site. This end of the park will be reconfigured so that the entrance overlooks a central lawn area, rather than the back of a playground. A new plaza space will improve safety conditions by creating a larger landing area between

the road and stairway, providing a safe transitional space between the park and the roadway (currently there is no landing/separation between the top of the existing steps and the roadway).

Looking from Brookridge, the playground will be moved a bit to the right to a shadier area. Estimated cost of Phase One improvements is \$220,000.

Funds Raised To-Date

In addition to almost \$97,000 obtained from former city councilwoman Anne Fauver's discretionary funds, a VHCA grant and fundraisers, we were just told that we received a \$50,000 grant from Park Pride and a \$38,000 allocation from the City of Atlanta's Parks Department. That gets us to a total of \$185,000, much closer to our \$220,000 goal.

Project Construction Timeline

- Permitting is expected to be complete by July. We have already received approval from the City of Atlanta's Urban Design Council as well as Park Design.
- A City of Atlanta Stream Buffer Variance should be approved by June.
- Construction bids should be received in July.
- Construction is expected to begin late summer/fall.

These Phase One improvements are just one (albeit large) component of the overall Orme Park Master Visioning Plan adopted in November 2007. Renovation of the stream bank, entry stairs near the bridge and restoration of the historic bridge are two projects that can hopefully be accomplished in the future as additional funds are raised.