



**The Virginia Highland Church circa 1950's.**

# History of Virginia-Highland

## {Part IX}

by: Linda Merrill

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** THIS IS THE NINTH 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.

### **Part IX: Virginia Hills and Highlands**

In the 1920s, as the motorcar became ubiquitous in Atlanta, the brick-lined streets of Boulevard Park began to seem old-fashioned and undesirable. Newer subdivisions, such as Virginia Hills, boasted roads paved with concrete, which guaranteed a smoother drive. Adjoining Boulevard Park, Virginia Hills comprised Clement Drive and Greencove Avenue on the north side of Virginia Avenue and Virginia Circle and Adair Avenue (to Todd Road) on the south. A. J. Brownlee, who had sold the city the land on which Inman School was built, was the co-owner of Virginia Hills Realty Company: he had retained the surrounding property for development and could tout its proximity to “one of the finest grammar schools in the city” as a particular advantage. Initially offered in the fall of 1922, the lots in this “ideal residence section” were only slightly larger than typical properties in Boulevard Park, but it was hoped that the younger development would be considered a little more exclusive.

With the addition of the Virginia Avenue Baptist Church (now the Virginia-Highland Church) directly across the street from Inman School, the Virginia-Park-Ponce Place intersection became a secondary hub of the neighborhood. The church's congregation had formed in July 1923, with plans to purchase a lot and erect a building in Boulevard Park as soon as sufficient membership was secured; in the meantime, worshippers met faithfully in a

still-vacant store at the junction of Boulevard (now Monroe) and Cooledge Avenue. By September 1923 a pastor had been secured, and the new church opened its doors in 1924.

Further east along the avenue another subdivision was under way and advertised as “Atlanta's newest and most beautiful.” Called Virginia Highlands, it fronted on the east side of Highland Avenue near the trolley crossing at Virginia. That intersection must surely have suggested the name of the subdivision, but with the simple addition of an “s” to the ordinary name of a familiar avenue, the developers were able to evoke the Highlands of Scotland (or at least North Carolina). Indeed, the site was said to have the highest altitude of any point within the city limits. The developer, L. W. Rogers Realty, promised “a healthy community with culture and every safeguard conducive to health, wealth and happiness.” To that end they commissioned O. F. Kauffman, the civil engineer who had planned “the south's two finest residential districts” (Ansley Park and Druid Hills), to design the subdivision and engaged a landscape architect to “beautify” the property, with results we still see in the plantings along the medians of Hudson and Lanier. Each lot had a sixty-foot frontage to ensure that “there shall always be breathing room in Virginia Highlands,” and potential buyers were encouraged to build a “home-for-all-time—a home which will enhance in value with years.” Perhaps to set an

example, the manager of Rogers Realty, Ben R. Padgett, built a house there for his own family, choosing prime property on what was then the corner of Virginia and Lanier. Said to cost “upwards of \$25,000,” it was grander than most houses in the neighborhood and “one of the most attractive points in Virginia Highlands.”

Developing Virginia Highlands entailed extending Virginia Avenue (which until then had ended at Highland) somewhat circuitously to Rosedale Road, which formed the subdivision’s eastern boundary. The land between Rosedale and Briarcliff fell into an adjacent tract developed by the realtors who had negotiated the sale of the Virginia Highlands property. The twenty-eight lots of their little subdivision encompassed the final, further extension of Virginia Avenue to its inevitable intersection with Briarcliff Road, thereby establishing “a new artery,” as the Constitution observed, “by way of Highland avenue to the city.”

*Sources: The Historical Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution; Franklin M. Garrett, Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1954), vol. 2.*

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## **Neighborhood Preservation Committee Update**

The Virginia-Highland Civic Association Neighborhood Preservation Committee conducted a survey on historic designation interest within the Virginia-Highland neighborhood. The committee engaged Turner Research Network to conduct the survey that was mailed in late April. The survey results were presented to the community at the annual Virginia-Highland Civic Association meeting in September and are posted on the Virginia-Highland Civic Association website. The VHCA board is currently reviewing and discussing next steps based on the survey response. If you have any questions or comments, please email the committee at [chair@lovevh.org](mailto:chair@lovevh.org).