

1960S SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE IN  
DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA

by

GRACE FRANCES BURRIDGE

(Under the Direction of Mark Reinberger)

ABSTRACT

1960s suburban architecture and landscape in DeKalb County, Georgia are unique cultural resources, worthy of study and consideration for preservation. They represent the zenith of post-War residential development in the county. Also, they are an integral part of the post-War development and stylistic trends while also representing the height of both scale and application of styles during the immediate post-War period. 1960s suburban residential resources in DeKalb County have remained largely intact, thus providing an excellent study area for determining significant patterns of development and design and how those patterns were a product of the social and cultural environment of the time.

INDEX WORDS: Georgia, DeKalb, 1960s, Historic Preservation, House, Modern, Recent Past, Suburban, Residential, Ranch, Split-Level, Architecture, Landscape

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GEORGIA

by

GRACE FRANCES BURRIDGE

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GRACE FRANCES BURRIDGE

Major Professor: Mark Reinberger

Committee: Wayde Brown  
Amitabh Verma  
Rob Jaeger

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
August 2012



## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends. The love, support, and encouragement I regularly receive from the wonderful people around me was crucial during the thesis process, and always.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Post-World War II Era in the United States from the mid-1940s through the 1960s was a time of significant change – both nationally and in DeKalb. The most significant trend affecting millions of Americans was the growth of the middle class and the lifestyles that supported them. As national and personal wealth steadily grew, so did the average American's taste for a more luxurious lifestyle. The post-WWII housing of the 1940s and 1950s has been well researched and documented. The suburban residential environment of middle-class Americans during the 1960s, however, has not. This is partly due to the fact that these houses and landscapes are just now reaching the 50 year age of significance. It is also largely due to the nature of 1960s housing in the United States, a period neither totally a part of the immediate Post-War boom nor easily categorized in another phase of American residential development. While it has much in common with the decade-and-a-half preceding it, the 1960s represent a period of domestic architecture and landscape development unique in American history.

Culturally, a significant change took place in the United States during the 1960s. The unfettered optimism of the 1950s ended with increased apprehension over wars and social upheaval. The same personal wealth and spending capacity that allowed more Americans to enjoy comfortable homes and fast cars also increased the number of televisions in the home and the frequency with which families were inundated with bad

news at home and abroad. Timothy P. Maga, who holds the Oglesby Chair of American Heritage at Bradley University and has written several books on the United States' Post-War Era, attests that despite the atmosphere of anxiety and change, the '60s were also a time of hope and freedom.<sup>1</sup> National prosperity allowed Americans more leisure time for exploration and creativity than they had previously enjoyed. The rapidly changing society led many Americans to seriously question which elements of a traditional lifestyle they should hold on to and which elements should evolve with the times. It was in this era of nostalgia vs. experimentation that the suburban residential landscape emerged.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine DeKalb County, Georgia's 1960s suburban residential environment and how the social and cultural environment was reflected in it in order to determine its historical relevance. Attention was paid to the unique character of these resources while recognizing that they are part of the larger national trend of mid-century suburbanization. Furthermore, the purpose was to describe the historical context of these resources and the character of DeKalb's 1960s suburban residential architecture, yards and neighborhoods that resulted.

### **Methodology**

There was a dramatic growth of the suburbs in DeKalb during the 1950s that leveled off to steady, continuous growth throughout the 1960s. This pattern mirrors national trends in suburban growth allowing for other inferred similarities of development and design between DeKalb County and the rest of the nation. DeKalb County, Georgia was selected for study due to the author's familiarity with it, its

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy P. Maga. *The 1960s*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2003.

accessibility from Athens, and its manageable size. DeKalb was also selected because of the suburban development patterns that occurred there during the 1960s.

Photographic surveys were conducted by the author in selected subdivisions identified as original to the 1960s. These subdivisions are located in close proximity to Interstate Highway 285 and other major roads, in accordance with development trends of the time. Observations from these surveys combined with primary resources from magazines, newspapers and plan books comprised the basis for the observations and conclusions drawn. Supplemental and background information was obtained from secondary sources and previously conducted student research.

### ***Photographic Surveys***

The information obtained from these surveys, supported by primary sources, provides the basis for the assertions about the nature of 1960s DeKalb County houses, yards and neighborhoods. Countless windshield surveys were conducted in 1960s neighborhoods across DeKalb County, but the thirteen primary study areas were surveyed on foot and in more detail. Hundreds of photographs were taken, as well as copious field notes, that were reviewed and analyzed later to recognize patterns and draw conclusions. These surveys were conducted in the following subdivisions:

1. Churchill Downs – off Rainbow Drive, southeast of the 285/20 junction
2. Emerald North – off Snapfinger Road, northeast of the 285/20 junction
3. Flair Forest – off Shallowford Rd. NE and Briarcliff Rd. NE near I-85
4. Flintridge Forrest – off Rays Road, between Pine Lake and I-285
5. Hebron Hills – off Lawrenceville Hwy., southwest of Tucker
6. Huntley Hills – off N. Shallowford Rd. north of Doraville, near I-285

7. Imperial Hills – off Lawrenceville Highway, northeast of Tucker
8. Laurelwood – off Tilly Mill Road, south of the DeKalb County Water Works
9. Monterey – off Clifton Springs Road between Panthersville and Gresham Park
10. Sellars Farm – off Roberts Drive, north of Dunwoody
11. Shenandoah – off Cravey Drive NE, near Northlake Mall
12. Springfield – off Chamblee Dunwoody Road, south of Dunwoody
13. Surrey Place – off Chamblee Tucker Road, east of the DeKalb-Peachtree Airport



(Map on following page)

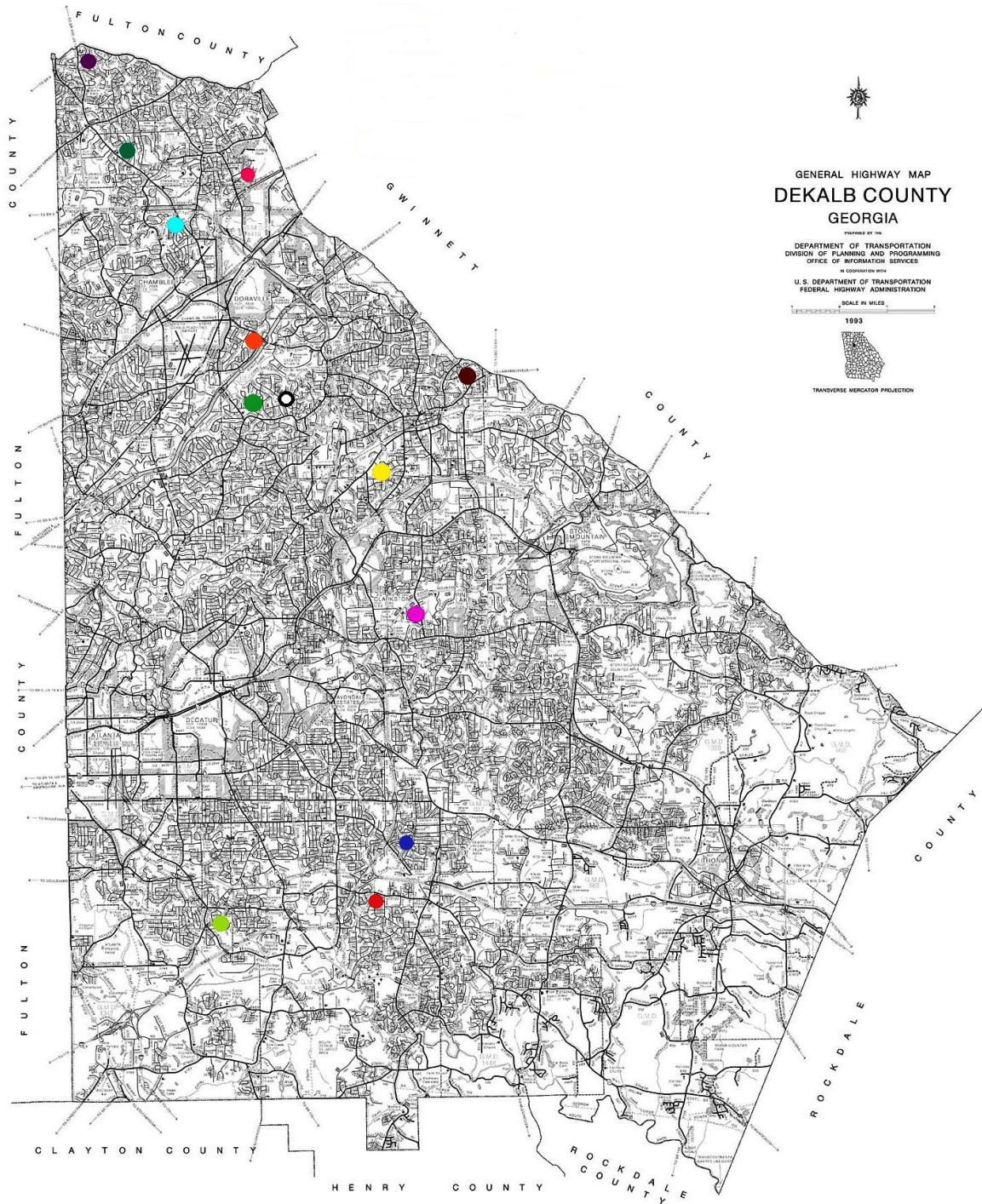


Figure 1.1: Location of Study Areas within DeKalb County, Georgia  
(Base Map Source: the Georgia Department of Transportation)



### ***Primary Sources***

Primary sources illustrating the styles and practices promoted and favored by homebuyers and homeowners of the time supported observations from the study areas. Magazines from the 1960s clearly illustrated gardening and architectural trends that were often manifested in DeKalb County. Magazines that were used for this purpose were:

1. *Southern Living*
2. *Better Homes & Gardens*
3. *Sunset*
4. *House and Home*

Sunday editions of *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* from the 1960s provided insight into which of these trends were prevalent in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area and DeKalb. The Urban Land Institute's *Community Builders Handbook* was valuable in determining subdivision development practices during the 1960s.

Plan books published during the time were valuable in determining the typical forms and arrangements of 1960s houses. Henry D. Norris' *Architecture for Contemporary Living*, W.D. Farmer's *Homes for Pleasant Living* and the Home Builder's Plan Service's *Designs for Better Living* were widely available in DeKalb in the 1960s. These sources of plans and exterior renderings, along with examples from magazines and newspapers, were the primary sources used in the study.

### ***Secondary Sources***

Dr. Richard Cloues, of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Historic Preservation Division, conducted previous studies on mid-twentieth century historic resources. His works published for the DNR were instrumental in determining

fundamental and background information, especially for Ranch houses. Basic categorizations of house forms and styles were synthesized from his works, as well as the *Atlanta Housing, 1944-1965* paper by Leigh Burns, Staci Catron-Sullivan, Jennifer Holcombe, Amie Spinks, Scott Thompson, Amy Waite, Matt Watts-Edwards, and Diana Welling (Georgia State students). The *Atlanta Housing 1944-1965* report, *Single-Family Residential Development: DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1970* (by Kimberly Burton, Susan Conger, Rebecca Crawford, Elisa Graf, Paul Graham, Debye Harvey, Nathan Jordan, Courtney Lankford, Molly Leatherman, Elizabeth Morris, Chris Mroczka, Maysyly Naolu, Zack Ray, Lius Rodriguez, Anthony Souther, David Westbrook, and Caitlin Zygmunt, also Georgia State students), and the National Register's Bulletin on historic residential suburbs provided background information and groundwork for further research. The two reports by Georgia State students, *Atlanta Housing 1944-1965* and *Single-Family Residential Development: DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1970*, were, however, primarily focused on the earlier post-World War II era. There was opportunity to expand upon 1960s resources as well as provide more detailed information on the actual architectural and landscape resources themselves.

Other key secondary resources include Timothy Maga's book on the United States in the 1960s, Bernard and Rice's *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War II*, Avi Friedman's article in the *Journal of Design History* on "The Evolution of Design Characteristics during the Post-Second World War Housing Boom" in the United States, and Girling and Helphand's *Yard, Street, Park: The Design of Suburban Open Space*. These secondary sources were utilized because of their all-encompassing nature and the insights they provided by professionals into specific elements of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE POST-WAR HOUSING BOOM

#### **Why it was Built**

For many years, due to the Great Depression and the strict wartime economy, house construction had slowed dramatically. Consequently, there was not a large supply of modern, affordable houses available for returning World War II G.I.s and their young families. This void in the housing market combined with strong demand among middle-class homebuyers led to a dramatic surge in home construction. Home buyers during this time desired modern, practical, and efficient plans and amenities within established designs.<sup>2</sup> The established designs of previous housing trends, however, were not possible in this era. The Post-War economy was still shaky, and both materials and labor were expensive. “Architects in the field were forced to redirect their practices away from ornate, decorative, and stylish dream houses.”<sup>3</sup>

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was the primary body which guided house and subdivision development during the post-War era. Created by the National Housing Act of 1934, the Federal Housing Administration set national standards for the home building industry. It also permitted the federal government to privately-financed

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<sup>2</sup> Avi Friedman. "The Evolution of Design Characteristics during the Post-Second World War Housing Boom: The U.S. Experience ." *Journal of Design History* 8-2 (1995): 131.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

mortgages for homes subdivision and house construction as well as home purchase.<sup>4</sup> The Housing Act of 1948 relaxed FHA mortgage terms by allowing low-interest loan payment periods of as much as 30 years. Additionally, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I.'s Bill of Rights, allowed veterans to borrow the entire price of an FHA approved house without a down payment.<sup>5</sup> Financially, homes were more available to the middle-class than ever before.

Because the terms of financing were so liberal, the Federal Housing Authority strictly limited the type of homes that would be financed. Home builders had to follow their guidelines if their potential customers were to be able to finance their homes under the program. FHA homes were small and efficient, making use of every square foot and often combining rooms with similar uses. The narrow guidelines often restricted progressive styles and forms in favor of established designs.<sup>6</sup>

The FHA set forth seven "minimum standards" that had to be followed if homes were to be financed:

1. Location exhibiting a healthy and active demand for homes.
2. Location possessing a suitable site in terms of topography, soil condition, tree cover, and absence of hazards such as flood, fog, smoke, obnoxious odors, etc.
3. Accessibility by means of public transportation (streetcars and buses) and adequate highways to schools, employment, and shopping centers.
4. Installation of appropriate utilities and street improvements (meeting city or county

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<sup>4</sup> Ames, David L., and Linda F. McClelland. *National Register Bulletin, Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluations and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places*. U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 2002.  
<http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/suburbs/index.htm> (accessed September 15, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Friedman, "Evolution of Design Characteristics," 131.

<sup>6</sup> Friedman, "Evolution of Design Characteristics," 133.

specifications), and carefully related to needs of the development.

5. Compliance with city, county or regional plans and regulations, particularly local zoning and subdivision regulations to ensure that the neighborhood will become stable (and real estate values as well.)

6. Protection of values through "appropriate" deed restrictions (including setbacks, lot sizes, minimum costs of construction).

7. Guarantee of a sound financial set up, whereby subdividers were financially able to carry through their sales and development program, and where taxes and assessments were in line with the type of development contemplated and likely to remain stable.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, a set of “desirable standards” often influenced the approval of a project:

- Careful adaptation of subdivision layout to topography and to natural features
- Adjustment of street plan and street widths and grades to best meet the traffic needs
- Elimination of sharp corners and dangerous intersections
- Long blocks that eliminated unnecessary streets
- Carefully studied lot plan with generous and well-shaped house sites
- Parks and playgrounds
- Establishment of community organizations of property owners
- Incorporation of features that add to the privacy and attractiveness of the community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> United States Federal Housing Administration. *Successful subdivisions : principles of planning for economy and protection against neighborhood blight*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941. p.90.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 91.

## **Who Built It**

Materials and labor may have been expensive in the years following World War II, but land and financing were cheap. These conditions gave rise to the popularity of simple, easily constructed designs that could be repeated over and over.<sup>9</sup> The repetitive nature of these designs allowed for the increase in house manufacturers. Capitalizing on mass assembly methods and industrial efficiency perfected in the years before and during World War II, house manufacturers created whole houses or, more commonly, housing components that could be erected quickly and easily on any site. Manufacturers engaged prominent architects and engineers to develop designs affordable and appealing to middle-class home buyers across the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Once the demand and most efficient method of construction were established, merchant builders were able to enter the scene. “With loan guarantees and an eager market, [merchant builders] were able to develop extensive tracts of affordable, mass-produced housing at unprecedented speeds.”<sup>11</sup> (Figure 2.1) The most famous of these merchant builders were the Levitts. The Levitts used prefabricated elements and specialized labor to create huge tracts of affordable housing. The rise of power tools, as well, fueled their projects. Essentially, subdivision construction was turned into a highly efficient assemble line process. At the height of their productivity, the Levitts claimed to be completing a new house every 15 minutes.<sup>12</sup> These large-scale, high profile “Levittowns,” as they came to be known, became immensely popular with young families

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<sup>9</sup> Friedman, “Evolution of Design Characteristics,” 133.

<sup>10</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

<sup>11</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

<sup>12</sup> Friedman, “Evolution of Design Characteristics,” 135.

after the War. Other merchant and community builders copied the successful model and other, slightly less massive, housing tracts and subdivisions were built across the country.



Figure 2.1: View of Levittown, New Jersey in 1948 (Source: *The New York Times* online)

### **What was Built**

The housing forms popularized by the Levitts and other builders became popular in subdivisions across the United States throughout the post-War years. In addition to the Cape Cod and Ranch House popularized in the Levitts' developments, the Minimum House and the Contemporary House gained national prominence at different phases during the post-World War II housing boom.

The Minimum House, first promoted by the Federal Housing Administration in 1936, was true to its name. This Depression-era housing form placed a high emphasis on

efficiency. The plan was streamlined and all non-essential spaces were deleted while modern appliances and amenities were incorporated. Gone were the parlors, sitting rooms and studies of previous domiciles. The Minimum House usually had only two bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen and a multi-purpose room. The multi-purpose room became popular as it allowed the home buyer, rather than the builder, to dictate the preferred use of the room. Although some were slightly larger, most of these types were one-story and only had about 534 square feet of livable space.<sup>13</sup> It did, however, set the standard from which other post-War housing forms developed.

The most popular housing form of the years immediately following the end of World War II was the Cape Cod (Figure 2.2). Popularized by the Levitts, this form was slightly larger than the Minimum House, but still placed a large emphasis on efficiency.

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<sup>13</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.





Figure 2.2: Cape Cod House in Levittown, 1948<sup>14</sup>

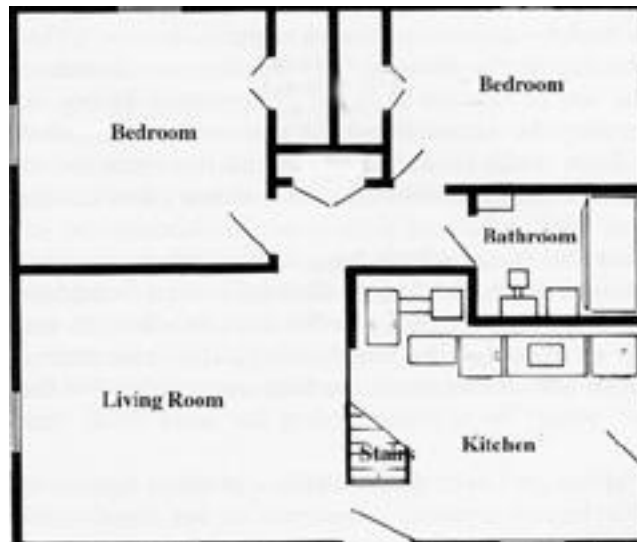


Figure 2.3: Levittown Cape Cod Floor Plan<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Peter Bacon Hales. "Building Levittown: A Rudimentary Primer." University of Illinois at Chicago. <http://tiger.uic.edu/~pbhales/Levittown/building.html> (accessed March 27, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Still usually only one-story high and covering about 750 square feet, the basic floor plan of two or three bedrooms, bath, kitchen, and multi-purpose room was maintained (Figure 2.3). The exterior of the Cape Cod was slightly less spartan than the Minimum House though. The Cape Cods of the Levittowns featured steeply pitched gabled roofs and were often clad in asbestos shingles or clapboard in a variety of colors. The American Small House, more commonly found in the Southeast than Cape Cods, is a variation of this house type.<sup>16</sup>

These early house forms of the late 1940s and early 1950s pioneered the modern idea of integrated indoor/outdoor living. Homeowners wanted to make the most of their tiny houses, so plate glass windows and doors were incorporated to unify the interior spaces with the outdoor landscape and create the illusion of more space. Outdoor rooms in the form of patios or decks also became popular as they increased the living space of the house without excessive material or building costs. Furthermore, “outdoor rooms were not subject to the FHA’s space limitations.”<sup>17</sup>

Although it had first been adapted to the FHA’s Minimum House in the 1940s, the Ranch House gained popularity in the 1950s. This, long, low, often rambling form reflected the nation’s growing wealth and prosperity. First popularized by Cliff May in the West and Southwest, the Ranch House form reflected the nation’s growing fascination with the West and informal living. Builders of middle and upper-middle-class houses copied the architect-designed forms of the West. Rustic decorative elements combined with more modern ones to create a housing form unique to 1950s suburbs

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<sup>16</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

<sup>17</sup> Friedman, “Evolution of Design Characteristics,” 140.

(Figure 2.4). Other unique design elements were also incorporated, such as sliding glass doors, picture windows, carports, and screens of decorative blocks.<sup>18</sup>

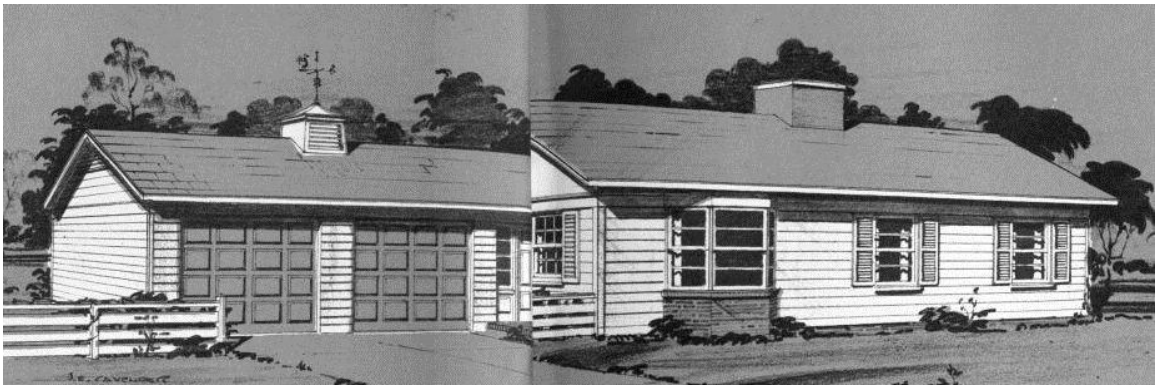


Figure 2.4: Combining Traditional and Modern Decorative Elements on a Ranch House  
(Source: Henry D. Norris, *Architecture for Contemporary Living*)

The Ranch House plan was well adapted to the evolving American family. As national wealth increased and families were able to support more children, the need for more rooms and square footage increased. In the 1950s, more young children as well as the popularity of television and radio made for an often noisy household and a demand for greater separation of activities. Plans developed “zones” that were designed to separate spaces dedicated to quiet or family living (Figure 2.5).

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<sup>18</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

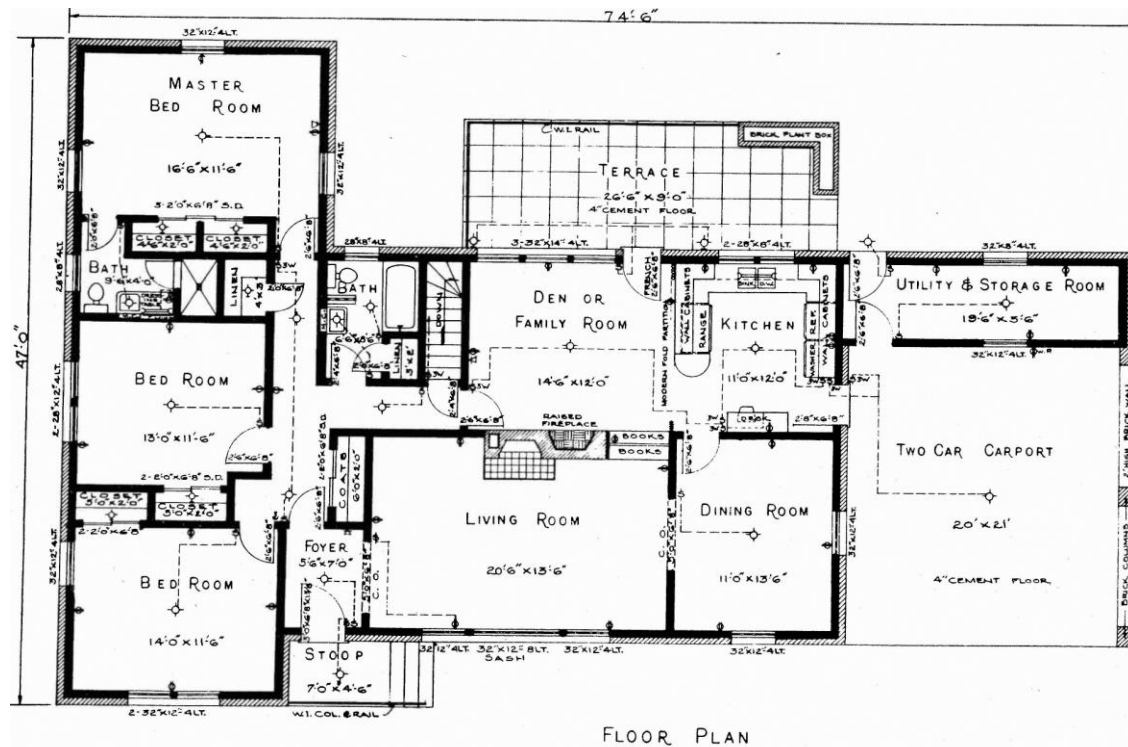


Figure 2.5: Zoned Floor Plan (Source: Home Builder's Plan Service, *Designs for Better Living*, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, p.5) (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)

The Split-Level is a sub-type of the Ranch House that maximized the use of zones in the house plan. Family living was located on the lower floor while the quiet sleeping/private spaces were sequestered into the upper half-story. The Ranch House and its sub-types fit the demands of the post-War consumer well and became the dominant house type throughout the 1960s.

The Contemporary House was closely related to, and often combined with, the Ranch House form. Influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Richard J. Neutra, Mies van der Rohe and other modernists, the Contemporary House employed new materials and organic design, often including cantilevered forms, glass

curtain walls, and post-and-beam construction.<sup>19</sup> (Figure 2.6) As in later versions of the Ranch House, the Contemporary House experimented with integrating the indoors with the outdoors and creating more open, flowing spaces. Many of these elements innovated in the Ranch and Contemporary House types are not unfamiliar in house construction today.



Figure 2.6: Contemporary Styling in Ranch House Form (Source: Henry D. Norris, *Architecture for Contemporary Living*)

### **Where it was Built**

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, industrialism led to the view of cities as dirty, noisy places ill-suited to pleasant, healthy living. The upper classes usually owned homes in the city's outer-lying areas that still featured unspoiled scenery. These and later suburbs "represent in physical form the enactment of cultural ideals, embodying philosophies and images of what constitutes the good life."<sup>20</sup> Single-family homes in a semi-rural environment allow homeowners to be master of their domain while having close access to urban amenities. These ideals eventually evolved into a large part of the American Dream.

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<sup>19</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

<sup>20</sup> C.L. Girling and K.I. Helphand. *Yard, Street, Park: The Design of Suburban Open Space*. New York: J. Wiley, 1994. 8.

After the end of World War II, the suburbs became affordable to the rising middle-classes for the first time. Cheap land combined with increased automobile ownership meant that the average American could afford a house and land in the suburbs and still work in the city center. City centers increasingly came to be thought of as places of work and the location of decaying slums.<sup>21</sup> In Atlanta, as elsewhere, the suburbs were seen as a place to escape the problems of the inner city. Atlanta suburbs, like many others, evolved radially. Earlier suburbs were closer to the center of the city and subsequent development occurred progressively further out.<sup>22</sup> (Figure 2.7) By 1960, a greater number of people in metropolitan areas lived in the suburbs than in the central city.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Leigh Burns, et al. "Atlanta Housing 1944 to 1965." Atlanta: Georgia State University, 2001. [http://hpd-test.gadnr.org/sites/uploads/hpd/pdf/atlanta\\_housing\\_1944-65.pdf](http://hpd-test.gadnr.org/sites/uploads/hpd/pdf/atlanta_housing_1944-65.pdf) (accessed September 4, 2011). 24.

<sup>22</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 105.

<sup>23</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

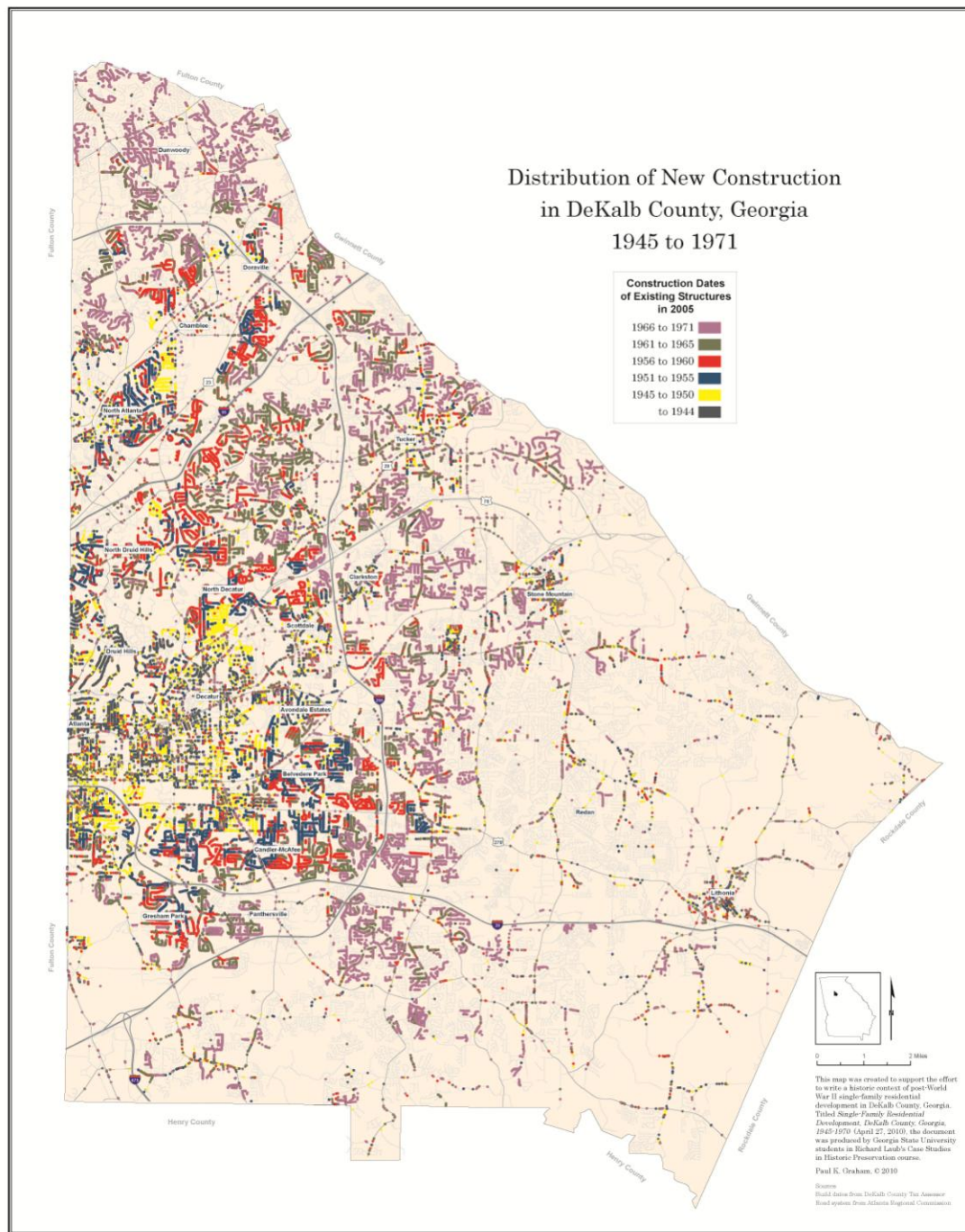


Figure 2.7: Distribution of New Construction in DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1971  
(Source: Map by Paul K. Graham)<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Paul K. Graham. "Index of DeKalb." Historical and Genealogical Research: Paul K. Graham, Certified Genealogist. <http://www.pkgraham.com/dekalb/dekalb45-71.jpg> (accessed March 21, 2012).

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **THE SHIFT TO THE SUNBELT**

The “shift to the Sunbelt” that began following World War II refers to the trend of businesses and families relocating from northern locales to the burgeoning cities of the South. The climate was milder in the United States’ southern regions, offering fewer weather-induced hindrances to productivity and a higher quality of life for workers. Atlanta soon emerged as the leader of these growing economic centers. Although the highway network and advanced airports were the primary factors promoting Atlanta’s growth, environmental and geographical factors also contributed to the area’s attractiveness. Atlanta has a higher elevation than other southeastern cities, making it cooler and less humid. Also, the gently rolling topography topped with mixed hardwoods and pine forests provided an idyllic setting for residential neighborhoods. The “sterile, flat, treeless tracts often seen in rapidly growing areas,” were not usually found in Atlanta during the ‘50s or ‘60s.<sup>25</sup> Overall, Atlanta suburbs were seen as an ideal location for development and fostering the American Dream. In a 1976 survey, 95% of Atlanta industrialists said “life in their locale was better,” compared to only 48% in Chicago and 8% in Detroit.<sup>26</sup>

At the dawn of the post-War era, the central business district of Atlanta was mostly surrounded by agricultural lands. Most of DeKalb County was originally the

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<sup>25</sup> Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 43.



location of numerous dairy farms and grain fields. However, between 1940 and 1950 the population of DeKalb increased 62% while the number of employed DeKalb residents working in the farming industry dropped to only 1.5%. The value of crops harvested during this decade decreased by over 70% as well.<sup>27</sup>

In the late 1940s and 1950s, these agricultural jobs were shifting primarily to manufacturing ones. General Motors opened a plant near Doraville in 1947, and Frito-Lay, Eastman Kodak, Kraft Foods and General Electric all had offices and manufacturing plants in other parts of DeKalb.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the influx of manufacturers from the Northeast and Midwest, Atlanta also had several thriving native companies. Southern National & Trust Company, Coca Cola, Rich's, Haverty's, Georgia Power and Atlanta Gas Light were all major successes throughout the years following World War II.<sup>29</sup>

As Atlanta's post-War economy progressed, manufacturing jobs began to be less of a draw for employees than those in white-collar sectors. Federal jobs and grants helped fuel Atlanta's progress between 1960 and 1970. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* claimed that Atlanta had the leading number of federal jobs behind only Washington, DC. The growth of higher education available in Atlanta also spurred the city's economic shift. During the 1960s, Georgia Institute of Technology turned out well-respected engineering graduates and its research attracted high technology firms to the area. "Tech also aided in the city's growth-promotion efforts by doing economic impact studies and preparing industrial site analyses."<sup>30</sup> The growth of Georgia State University

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<sup>27</sup> Kimberly Burton, et al. "Single-Family Residential Development: DeKalb County, Georgia 1945-1970." Atlanta: Georgia State University, 2010. <http://dekalbhistory.org/documents/Single-FamilyResidentialDevinDeKalbCounty.pdf> (accessed March 22, 2012). 55.

<sup>28</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 55.

<sup>29</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 14.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 42.

also contributed to a highly educated work force in these years. In 1961 Georgia State had 3,447 students enrolled mostly in business courses. By 1970 Georgia State had 13,000 students, twenty degrees in 150 fields and ten doctoral programs.<sup>31</sup>

As the number of businesses in Atlanta increased, so did centers of business. Executive Park in North DeKalb opened in 1965 and was the first major business complex outside Atlanta's Central Business District. Subsequent similar projects took place primarily on Atlanta's north side in close proximity to DeKalb. A 1970 comparison of 41 southern metropolitan areas concluded that Atlanta had great economic diversity, rather than leading in one employment sector. This gave Atlanta increased stability, as the entire economy would not falter if one area of the economy took a downturn.<sup>32</sup>

The relocation of employment and educational opportunities to Atlanta following World War II meant that the population of the metropolis grew as well. By the 1950s, Atlanta was larger than any other southern city.<sup>33</sup> Many of the metropolis' new residents settled in developing DeKalb County. With easy access to business centers and available land for subdivision development, DeKalb was an obvious choice for post-World War II growth. DeKalb's population grew an impressive 57% between 1940 and 1950, but grew an incredible additional 88% in the following decade. Resident influx slowed somewhat from 1960 to 1970, with the population increasing by 62%.<sup>34</sup> Most of DeKalb's new residents were white, although statistics indicate that most of the influx occurred from outside the metropolitan area rather than from so-called "white flight" from the inner

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<sup>31</sup> Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 42.

<sup>32</sup> J. Carroll Simms and Margaret L. Andersen. "Needs of the Metropolitan Area from a Regional Standpoint," *Atlanta Economic Review* 20 (June 1970): 38.

<sup>33</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 13.

<sup>34</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 47.

city.<sup>35</sup> Due to the huge increase in the white population, the percentage of the population in DeKalb County that was African-American fell by nearly 50% between 1940 and 1960. Most of DeKalb's African-American residents lived in the southern half of the county, while the upper-middle-class white population was mostly concentrated in the northern half.<sup>36</sup>

Atlanta's growth during the post-War era was staggering. Between the beginning of World War II and 1959, the "city had more than doubled its metropolitan population and attracted more than 2,800 new firms."<sup>37</sup> The growth, however, had not stopped yet. In addition to more important indexes of economic growth, Atlanta focused on acquiring "visible badges of urban maturity" such as major-league sports and skyscrapers during the 1960s. Atlanta constructed a big-league sports stadium for \$18 million in 1965 and bought its first major league sports team, the Atlanta Braves, in 1966. Also in 1966, Atlanta acquired the Falcons football team and purchased the National Basketball Association Hawks two years later in 1968. By the end of the 1960s, major league sports were worth as much as \$60 million annually to Atlanta's economy.<sup>38</sup> Atlanta seemed to be reaching for the sky both figuratively and literally during the 1960s. In 1970, eleven of Atlanta's twelve tallest buildings had been built in the previous ten years. Ivan Allen, Jr., former member of the Chamber of Commerce and City Mayor, said, "In 1959 we were known for Coca-Cola, Georgia Tech, dogwoods, the Atlanta Crackers [baseball team], and easy southern living; by 1969 we were known for gleaming skyscrapers,

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<sup>35</sup> Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight – Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. 87.

<sup>36</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 47.

<sup>37</sup> Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 38.

expressways, the Atlanta Braves, and... traffic jams.”<sup>39</sup> By the end of the 1960s, Atlanta had truly come into its own.

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<sup>39</sup> Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 37.

## CHAPTER 4

### POST-WORLD WAR II DEKALB COUNTY

Atlanta was ripe for growth and development after the Second World War, and DeKalb was poised to be at the forefront of this boom. National trends facilitated this unprecedented growth, but specific conditions in DeKalb County ensured its prominence during this era. Specifically, progressive planning, strong political leadership and convenient transportation made DeKalb an extremely desirable location for suburban residential growth during the 1950s and '60s.

In 1947, the Metropolitan Planning Commission was created by an act of the Georgia General Assembly.<sup>40</sup> It was also in this year that the Urban Land Institute, an independent nonprofit research organization dedicated to urban planning and land development, published its first edition of *The Community Builders' Handbook*. The Urban Land Institute was highly influential on community development of the time and promoted metropolitan-wide coordination in the development process. Their *Community Builders' Handbook* provided a detailed blueprint for curvilinear subdivision development based on the neighborhood unit and became a standard reference for guiding residential.<sup>41</sup> Atlanta's Metropolitan Planning Commission drew heavily from the Urban Land Institute's vision.

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<sup>40</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 22.

<sup>41</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

Atlanta's Metropolitan Planning Commission impacted DeKalb's planning and growth throughout the post-War boom. Their 1952 product, *Up Ahead: A Regional Land Use Plan for Metropolitan Atlanta*, focused heavily on growth in DeKalb. The comprehensive plan proposed new centers of industry, population growth in suburban areas, high capacity roads, and neighborhood designs supported by the Federal Housing Administration and Urban Land Institute.<sup>42</sup> This and subsequent plans and ordinances established standards for the development of DeKalb throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Neighborhoods and subdivisions were to be insular, with many cul-de-sacs and only limited access to arterial roads to reduce traffic flow.<sup>43</sup> The suburbs would have large lots and low population density, with creek beds and ridges providing green space within subdivisions.<sup>44</sup> DeKalb created its own comprehensive land use plan and zoning ordinance in 1956 (with revisions in 1962) but largely used the Metropolitan Planning Commission's 1952 land use plan and zoning ordinances throughout the 1960s.<sup>45</sup>

DeKalb County experienced its highest rate of growth during the 1950s. By 1962, the Metropolitan Planning Commission placed less emphasis on growth in DeKalb than it had in their 1952 land use plan.<sup>46</sup> DeKalb, however, continued to push for sustained growth in their county. The DeKalb County Chamber of Commerce's Annual Report to Members in 1962 included a timeline for projects promoting DeKalb regionally and nationally. Industry was recruited through ads placed in national business

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<sup>42</sup> Metropolitan Planning Commission, *Up Ahead; a regional land use plan for metropolitan Atlanta*. Atlanta, GA: MPC, 1952.

<sup>43</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 29.

<sup>44</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 21.

<sup>45</sup> "Master Plan for DeKalb Zoning OK'ed." *The DeKalb New Era*, September 6, 1956.

<sup>46</sup> Metropolitan Planning Commission, *Regional Development Plan: Land Use and Transportation City of Atlanta, Clayton County, Cobb County, DeKalb County, Fulton County, Gwinnett County*. Atlanta, GA: MPC, 1962.

publications and through the distribution of a four-page color brochure.<sup>47</sup> DeKalb was also advertised as a prime location for families. The Chamber of Commerce spent millions of dollars on promotional efforts that successfully attracted new homeowners throughout the 1960s.<sup>48</sup> DeKalb's growth and prosperity during the 1960s reflected national economic trends. The most vigorous, sustained period of American economic growth since the Great Depression, however, took place between early 1961 and mid-1969.<sup>49</sup> A report issued by the U.S. Commerce Department in 1963 attested that "the buying power of America's white middle-class suburban neighborhoods had increased by 43 percent during the first two years of the 1960s."<sup>50</sup> The people who moved to DeKalb's northern areas could afford, and expected, bigger, more extravagant homes than ever before. The average house size in Atlanta increased from 1,000 square feet in the 1940s to 1,500 square feet in the 1950s, finally reaching a typical size of 2,000 square feet in the 1960s. Lot sizes, too, increased from approximately 50-75 feet wide in the '40s to 85-100 feet wide in the '50s. During the 1960s it was not uncommon for Atlanta's suburban residential house lots to be 120 feet wide.<sup>51</sup> The pervasive culture of prosperity and excess during the 1960s in DeKalb manifested itself most visibly and permanently through the architecture and landscape of suburban subdivisions.

Scott Candler, Sr. was the key political figure guiding DeKalb County's growth during the post-War era. For sixteen years, between 1939 and 1955, Candler acted as Commissioner of Roads and Revenue. Under DeKalb's single commissioner system of

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<sup>47</sup> "For Release: Thursday February 1, 1962," DeKalb Chamber of Commerce subject file, DeKalb History Center Archives, DeKalb History Center, Decatur, Georgia, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 44.

<sup>49</sup> Michael French. *U.S. economic history since 1945*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997.

<sup>50</sup> Maga, *The 1960s*, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 105.

the time, Candler “had exclusive control over all phases of county operations” within DeKalb.<sup>52</sup> He used this control to improve the county’s infrastructure, thus creating a favorable environment for growth. Industries and families invested in DeKalb largely because of Candler’s work during his time as commissioner.<sup>53</sup>

For example, DeKalb’s state-of-the-art water treatment facility that opened in Doraville in 1942 attracted many investors.<sup>54</sup> Although it was designed to meet the county’s water needs for twenty years, DeKalb County industrial and residential areas grew more quickly than expected and the water treatment facility was expanded in 1953.<sup>55</sup> DeKalb, however, continued to grow at an unprecedented rate. In 1961, voters approved a \$1,250,000 bond program for further expansion of the water system. Ten water treatment facility projects were completed within the following two years. “In comparison to other counties, DeKalb’s water system was technologically advanced,” and highly desirable to prospective stakeholders.<sup>56</sup>

The sewer system in DeKalb was considered a draw as well. In the dawn of the post-World War II boom, DeKalb residents were connected to the metropolitan sewer system and paid the city of Atlanta a fee to use it.<sup>57</sup> By the early 1960s, however, the sewer lines were not able to keep up with the expanding developments. Aware of the drawbacks of satiated septic fields in subdivisions, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners approved the use of temporary sewage disposal plants in 1962. Each plant could serve up to fifty homes and eliminated the health hazards of septic systems

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<sup>52</sup> Morris Shelton. *Mr. DeKalb*. Atlanta: Dickson's Inc., 1971. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Vivian Price, *Historic DeKalb County: An Illustrated History*. San Antonio, Texas: Historical Publishing Network, 2008, 31.

<sup>54</sup> “Water System, Sewers and Roads Big DeKalb Assets.” *The DeKalb New Era*, September 17, 1953.

<sup>55</sup> Burton, “Single-Family Residential Development,” 35.

<sup>56</sup> Burton, “Single-Family Residential Development,” 36.

<sup>57</sup> “DeKalb Contracts With Atlanta for Sewerage Disposal.” *The DeKalb New Era*, April 27, 1944.



and disposal fields. Costing between \$30,000 and \$50,000, each unit was purchased by the developer but operated by DeKalb County under a dollar-a-year lease. Once Atlanta's sewer lines reached the neighborhood, the developer could remove the sewage disposal plant and reuse it in a new development.<sup>58</sup>

Sanitation services in DeKalb, too, were better than in surrounding counties. Scott Candler, Sr. was responsible for instituting weekly trash pickup in the 1940s. An 150-acre landfill was initially used to dispose of all of the county's garbage, but other landfills were later added to keep up with the growing population.<sup>59</sup> By the late 1950s, all of the landfills in DeKalb were reaching capacity. The DeKalb County Commission voted for the construction of an incinerator between Memorial Drive and Kensington Road near I-285. The incinerator was activated in October 1963 and eliminated the need for landfills in DeKalb.<sup>60</sup>

The Georgia Power Company embarked on a campaign to improve living conditions throughout Georgia in 1944.<sup>61</sup> DeKalb was one such county that benefitted from the program. Power was adequate throughout the county during its boom years and continued to be improved throughout the 1960s. In 1960, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners approved street lighting for unincorporated areas of the county. Residents could petition the Board of Commissioners for street lighting in their area. The Georgia Power Company was contracted to install the street lights and provide power to them.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "Temporary Disposal Plants Approved to Replace Septic Tanks in DeKalb." *The DeKalb New Era*, August 23, 1962.

<sup>59</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 38.

<sup>60</sup> "2.4 Million Incinerator Is Fired Up." *The DeKalb New Era*, October 24, 1963.

<sup>61</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 36-37.

<sup>62</sup> "Street Lighting Plan For County Areas Adopted by Board." *The DeKalb New Era*, January 14, 1960.

Street lights in neighborhoods created a safe and desirable environment for families in DeKalb's growing neighborhoods.

Telephone service in DeKalb was adequate throughout the post-War era. Southern Bell invested in major expansions to its telephone systems in 1945 and continued to serve the county well during the following decades.<sup>63</sup> Expansion to the system was occasionally delayed by equipment shortages, but overall efficiency was not impacted. In 1960, DeKalb County improved its telephone services again and introduced Direct Distance Dialing (DDD). DDD allowed callers to place long-distance calls without the aid of an operator and eliminated long-distance charges for calls from DeKalb to the areas around Atlanta. DDD was made possible by Centralized Automatic Message Accounting, a new electro-mechanical accounting system, in Tucker.<sup>64 65</sup>

Perhaps the biggest factor enabling DeKalb's huge growth during the '50s and '60s, however, was the benefits provided by transportation routes in the county. Residential developments that occurred in 1960s DeKalb are categorized as freeway suburbs. Completely dependent on the automobile, residents of these suburbs relied on local, county and state roads to connect to the freeways and interstates that linked them to the larger metropolis. Throughout history DeKalb has been on the forefront of transportation networks. Post-War improvements to that network, however, provided the backbone around which DeKalb County grew.

Subdivisions built in the Atlanta suburbs in the decades following World War II were built according to the watershed style transportation planning model named for the natural pattern of smaller streams converging into progressively larger creeks and rivers.

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<sup>63</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 38.

<sup>64</sup> "Direct Distance Dialing To Make Debut Sunday." *The DeKalb New Era*, September 29, 1960.

<sup>65</sup> "Telephone Building Completed At Tucker." *The DeKalb New Era*, March 9, 1961.

According to this model, new subdivisions were to connect to a branch, collector and then freeway in order to transport suburbanites from their homes to places of commerce.<sup>66</sup> Much of the backbone of the road network connecting DeKalb and the larger metropolitan area existed before the War, but Scott Candler allotted significant funds for their improvement in the years immediately following. In addition to numerous surface streets, major state and county roads connected DeKalb during this time. Figure 4.1 shows DeKalb County (outlined in light pink) with the main state and county roads: Ashford-Dunwoody Road (purple), Peachtree Industrial Boulevard (dark blue), Peachtree Road (light blue), Clairmont Road (dark green), Rockbridge Road, LaVista Road (yellow), Buford Highway (orange), Lawrenceville Highway (red), Covington Highway (pink), Briarcliff Road (lime green), and Flat Shoals Road (black), among others.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 41.

<sup>67</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 30.

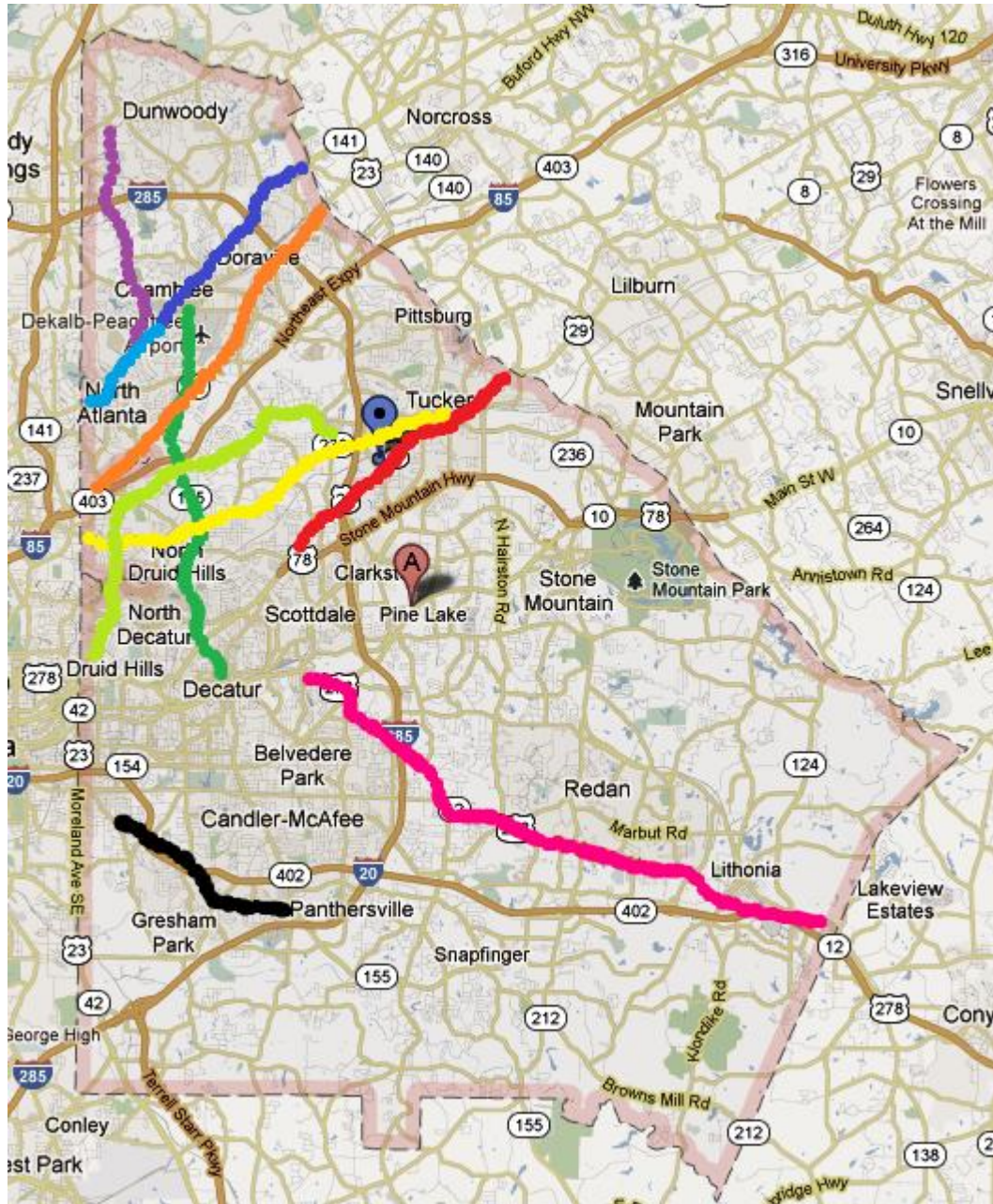


Figure 4.1: Major State and County Roads in 1960s DeKalb (Source: Google Maps)

State and county roads were originally adequate for the transportation needs of Atlanta and DeKalb, but policy makers soon realized that a larger and more sophisticated network was needed to connect the metropolitan areas to each other and the rest of the region. The *Highway and Transportation Plan for Atlanta Georgia* was developed in

1946 by H.W. Lochner & Company in association with De Leuw, Cather & Company for the State Highway Department of Georgia and the Public Roads Administration.<sup>68</sup> The Lochner Plan, as it came to be known, proposed links from the center of Atlanta towards Greenville, Chattanooga, Montgomery, Macon and Florida, Birmingham, and Augusta. When the Federal Highway Act was passed under the Eisenhower Administration in 1956, Atlanta acquired the funds to realize the Lochner Plan. Washington's support of an Interstate Highway System led to the construction of I-75, I-85 and I-20 through and I-285 around Atlanta. All of these but I-75 ran through portions of DeKalb.<sup>69</sup> (Figure 4.2) Construction occurred throughout the 1960s and was completed by the end of the decade. New residential developments during the decade occurred primarily within close proximity to these convenient new freeways, especially I-285.<sup>70</sup>



Figure 4.2: Atlanta Area Interstate System (Source: Atlanta Regional Commission)

<sup>68</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 32. Ma

<sup>69</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

<sup>70</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 33.

The 1960s was an exciting and challenging time in our nation's history. Society had begun to change rapidly, and average Americans were either promoting change or trying to reconcile themselves with it. This juxtaposition of progressive culture and the backlash against it dominated politics and society. Although this decade is often firmly lumped in with the post-War era, and for good reason, it is also unique. It was both the height and the end of the era. The 1960s represent the transition of the United States from a culture of endless prosperity and confidence into modern times. The pervasiveness of national news and trends permeated all levels and strata. Even the supposedly insulated and idyllic suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia reflect the varied and changing ideals of the 1960s.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUBDIVISION DEVELOPMENT IN DEKALB COUNTY**

In the early twentieth century, dairy farming rose as the prominent agricultural activity in DeKalb County. Gentle topography, a sparse population and close proximity to the markets in Atlanta made DeKalb an ideal location for the growth of this industry. Conditions for growth were also aided by new technologies of the time, such as automobiles, electricity and refrigeration. These allowed for increased shelf life and distribution opportunities, further contributing to the growth of dairy farming and milk production. In addition to pastures for dairy cows, DeKalb farmers also cultivated grain fields to feed their stock more cheaply. By 1939, over 200 dairies were operating in DeKalb County. Dairy farming was by far the largest farming-based industry in the county in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>71</sup>

In the early years of the 1940s, DeKalb County was still largely agrarian. The total farm population and percentage of residents who worked on farms was much higher than in surrounding counties.<sup>72</sup> The influx of new residents and businesses, however, coincided with a sharp decline in the dairy and farming industry in DeKalb. As housing demands increased, dairy farms were sold off to developers. A developer would purchase an individual farm with intentions of developing it as a residential subdivision. DeKalb dairy farms averaged about fifty acres in size and developers rarely combined

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<sup>71</sup> Mrs. Guy W. Hudson, "DeKalb County Leads South in Grade A Raw Milk." *The Atlanta Constitution* (1881-2001), May 14, 1939.

<sup>72</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 54.



farms when creating a new subdivision. This resulted in smaller subdivisions than in other parts of the region. The vast majority of post-World War II subdivisions in DeKalb County consisted of less than fifty houses.<sup>73</sup> (Figures 5.1 and 5.2)

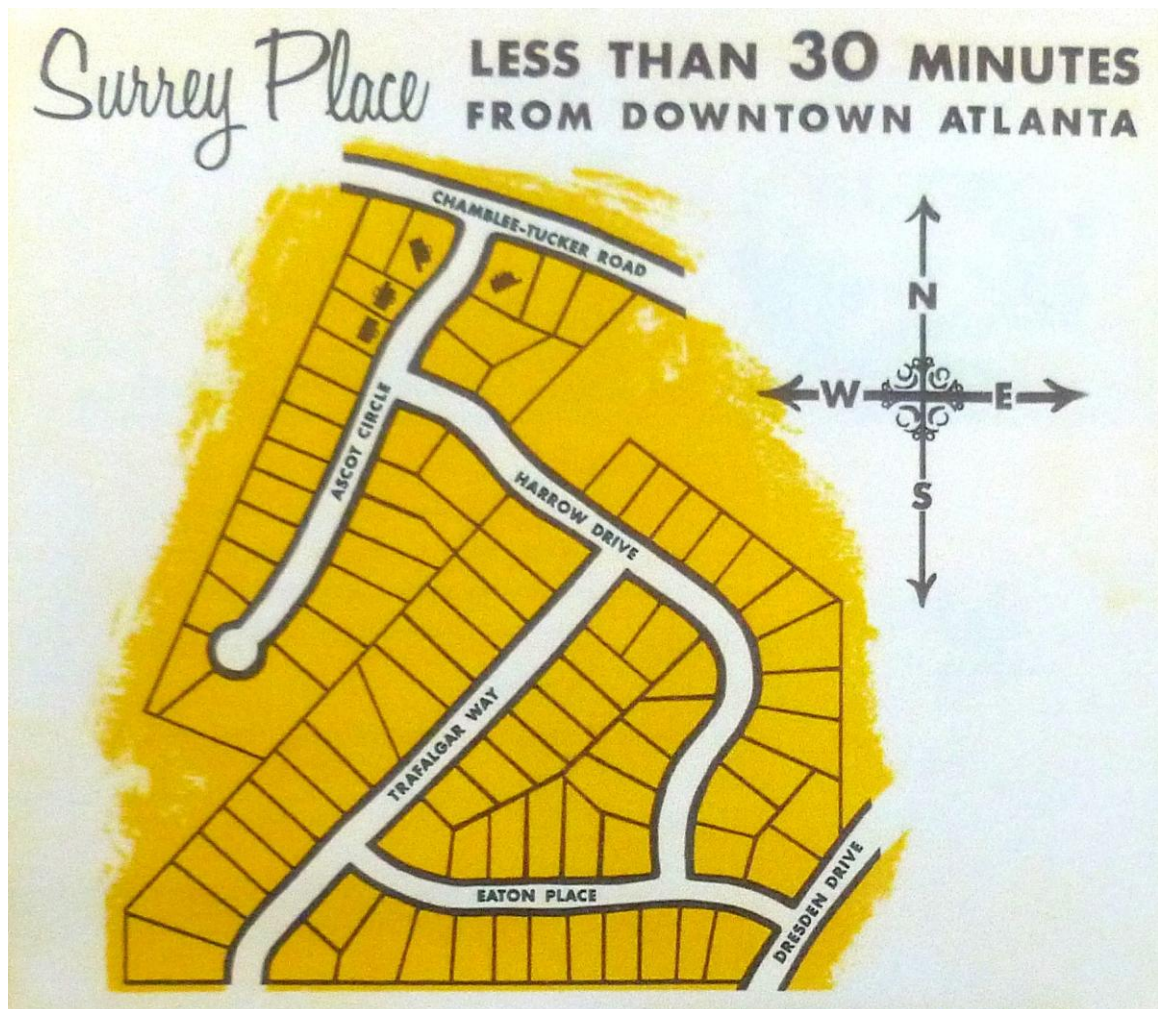


Figure 5.1: Surrey Place Subdivision Plan (Courtesy of the DeKalb History Center)

<sup>73</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 56.



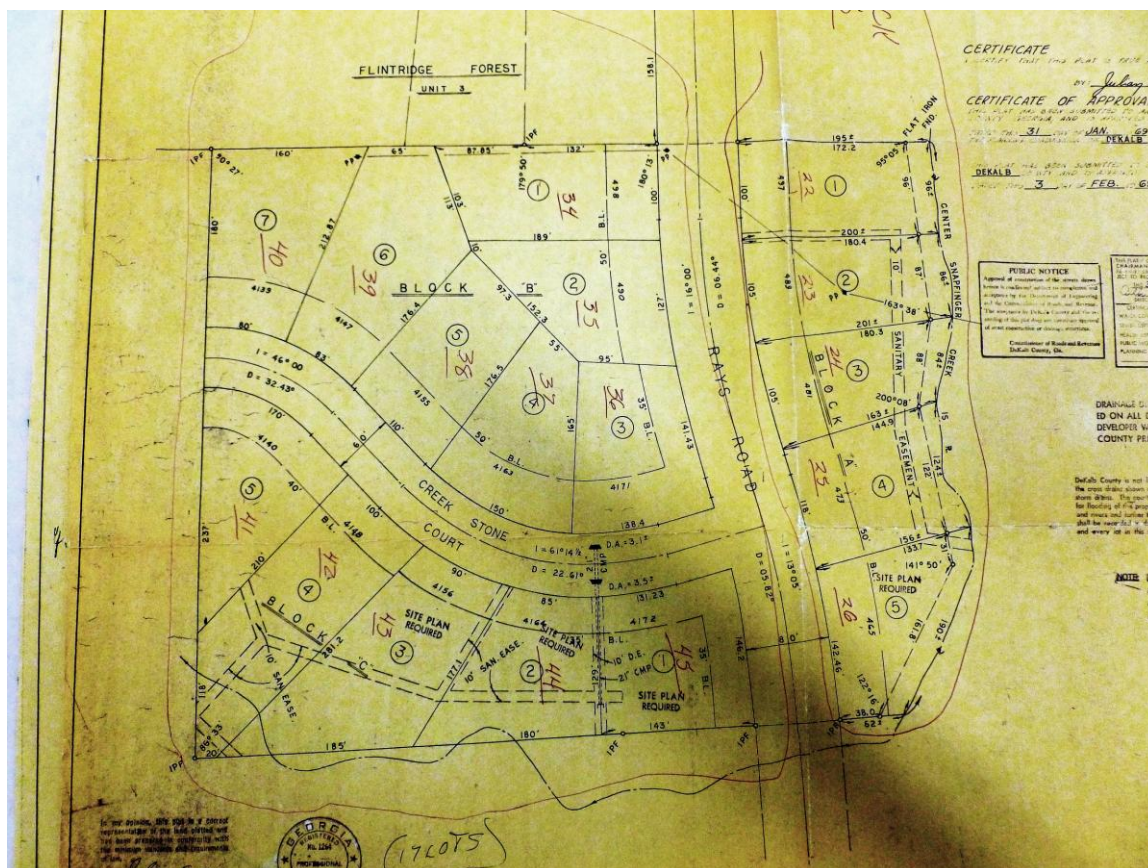


Figure 5.2: Plat Map of Flintridge Forrest Subdivision, section 2 (Courtesy of the DeKalb History Center)

Subdivision developers bought individual farms through local real estate brokers and obtained financing for their projects through banks in Atlanta and Decatur, usually in the form of acquisition and development loans. The developer then obtained the proper permits from the county and federal agencies and began the subdivision development process. Engineers were usually hired and collaborated closely with the developer to lay out the plans for streets and lots, grade the site, construct streets, and install utilities.<sup>74</sup> The developers, along with the engineers, were responsible for creating the backbone of the subdivision to make way for construction on individual lots.

<sup>74</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 59-60.

When individual lots were ready to be built upon, the developer would sell each lot to a builder. The relationship between the developer and builder was usually very close. Very often, they were the same person or entity, with the developer merely assuming the role of builder after the initial phase of development was complete. Buyers sometimes had already been identified at this point in the development process and would collaborate with the builder to create a house to their exact specifications. Usually, however, subdivisions were built on speculation. First National Bank of Atlanta financed many subdivision developments during the period of study by providing interim construction loans through mortgage companies such as Embury Mortgage and National Home Loans. Embury Mortgage, in particular, provided loans for many of the middle-to-higher income development projects in DeKalb County.<sup>75</sup> With these interim loans, home builders were able to finance construction until the project was complete and a buyer could be found. Real estate agents were responsible for marketing and selling new subdivisions to home buyers. Buyers then usually obtained FHA- and VA- backed loans from either local or national banks to finance the purchase of their new house.<sup>76</sup>

Builders were the primary parties responsible for home design and construction in DeKalb County during the post-War housing boom. W. D. Farmer, a house plan producer in Atlanta from 1948 throughout the 1960s, estimated that about 60% of the housing stock built during the post-War boom was builder designed and built while about 40% was architect designed and contractor built.<sup>77</sup> After acquiring the lot from the developer, builders could go about designing and constructing the house in several ways.

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<sup>75</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 60.

<sup>76</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 60.

<sup>77</sup> Farmer, William D. Interviewed by Rebecca Crawford, Susan Conger, Luis Rodriguez, and Anthony Souther. 1709 East Gate Drive, Stone Mountain, Georgia 30087. March 17, 2010.

From a design standpoint, builders could employ draftsmen or architects to create house plans from scratch. Alternately, many builders were inspired by the numerous house plans featured in magazines, newspapers and plan books and created their own plans based on these models.<sup>78</sup> Finally, builders could purchase countless architect or draftsman designed plans available in a multitude of periodicals.

Plan books from a specific designer or company were very popular and readily available. W. D. Farmer published countless plan books and booklets which he advertised heavily. In addition to featuring his plans in *House and Home*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies Home Journal*, W. D. Farmer plans were featured regularly in the Sunday editions of *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.<sup>79</sup> A Sunday, September 20, 1964 article in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution read:

12 Booklets offer homes to suit all. Homes for Pleasant Living, a series of 12 booklets of illustrated home plan ideas by well-known residential designer W .D. Farmer, are being offered free at all offices of Fulton Federal Savings & Loan Association. The homes have been designed to suit Southern tastes and to conform to the types of construction most in use in the Atlanta area. Fulton Federal's loan department had Mr. Farmer create the series of booklets to help its customers and others in planning the construction of a new home or in the selection of an existing home. Each booklet has a full-color cover and contains at least 16 different homes, with drawing and floor plan for each home.

Henry D. Norris, A.I.A. was another Atlanta producer of plan books. His 1961 book, *Architecture... For Contemporary Living: 59 Distinguished Houses* featured plans suited to the tastes of middle-class southerners. Norris claimed that all of the plans featured in this plan book had been bought and built.<sup>80</sup> *Designs for Better Living* by the Home Builder's Plan Service was another plan book widely available in DeKalb in the 1960s.

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<sup>78</sup> Friedman, "Evolution of Design Characteristics," 133.

<sup>79</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 102.

<sup>80</sup> Henry D. Norris. *Architecture for Contemporary Living: 59 Distinguished Homes* . New York: Simmons-Boardman, 1961. 6.



extremely difficult to identify key players. In addition to the large volume of developers, builders, contractors, architects and draftsmen, roles very often overlapped and changed over time and between projects.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 60.

## CHAPTER 6

### HISTORIC CONTEXT OF THE SUBURBAN LANDSCAPE

DeKalb County's suburban landscape of the 1960s was shaped by trends that came before. The Picturesque Movement of the nineteenth century forsook the previous landscape trend of formality in favor of a more natural, romantic landscape. Begun in England, the Picturesque Movement was popularized in the United States by Andrew Jackson Downing. His first book, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America*, in 1841 was a great success, and he continued to promote Picturesque Movement ideals throughout his career. His many plan books emphasized merging the house with the surrounding landscape through informal arrangements of trees and shrubberies, thus creating a Picturesque and romantic natural landscape for his residential designs.<sup>84</sup>

The Industrial Revolution spurred the growth of the suburbs for several reasons. Firstly, with the increase in factories and mills in urban centers, cities became dirty, loud places. Upper class citizens did not want to live in such conditions. The technological advances of the industrial revolution provided streetcars, trains and automobiles to allow people to commute between the suburbs and the city more easily.<sup>85</sup> Wealthy urbanites had both the desire and the means by which to work in the city and live in the suburbs. Riverside, Illinois, Glendale, Ohio, and Llewellyn Park, New Jersey of the mid-

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<sup>84</sup> G.B. Tobey. *A History of Landscape Architecture*. New York: Elsevier Science Ltd, 1973.

<sup>85</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 47.

nineteenth century were some of the first Romantically planned suburbs to cater to this growing trend.

Riverside, just outside of Chicago, is a prime example of this type of early United States suburb. Frederick Law Olmstead, Riverside's designer, was influenced by Downing and the Picturesque Movement and sought to create a lush, natural setting. "Gracefully curved lines, generous spaces, and the absence of sharp corners," were intended to "suggest and imply leisure, contemplativeness and happy tranquility."<sup>86</sup> (Figure 6.1) Olmstead also wanted the houses in Riverside to have a common setback from the street to help preserve "a general rural effect and domestic seclusion."<sup>87</sup> In essence, Riverside and other early United States suburbs were intended to provide the charms of rural life with all of the conveniences of close proximity to the city – an intention that continued throughout the post-War era.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Frederick Law Olmstead, "Preliminary Report Upon the Proposed Suburban Village at Riverside, near Chicago, by Olmstead, Vaux & Co." September 1, 1868, in David Schuyler and Jane Turner Censer, eds., *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmstead, Vol. 6, The Years of Olmstead, Vaux & Company, 1865-1874*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. 287.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 280.

<sup>88</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 50.



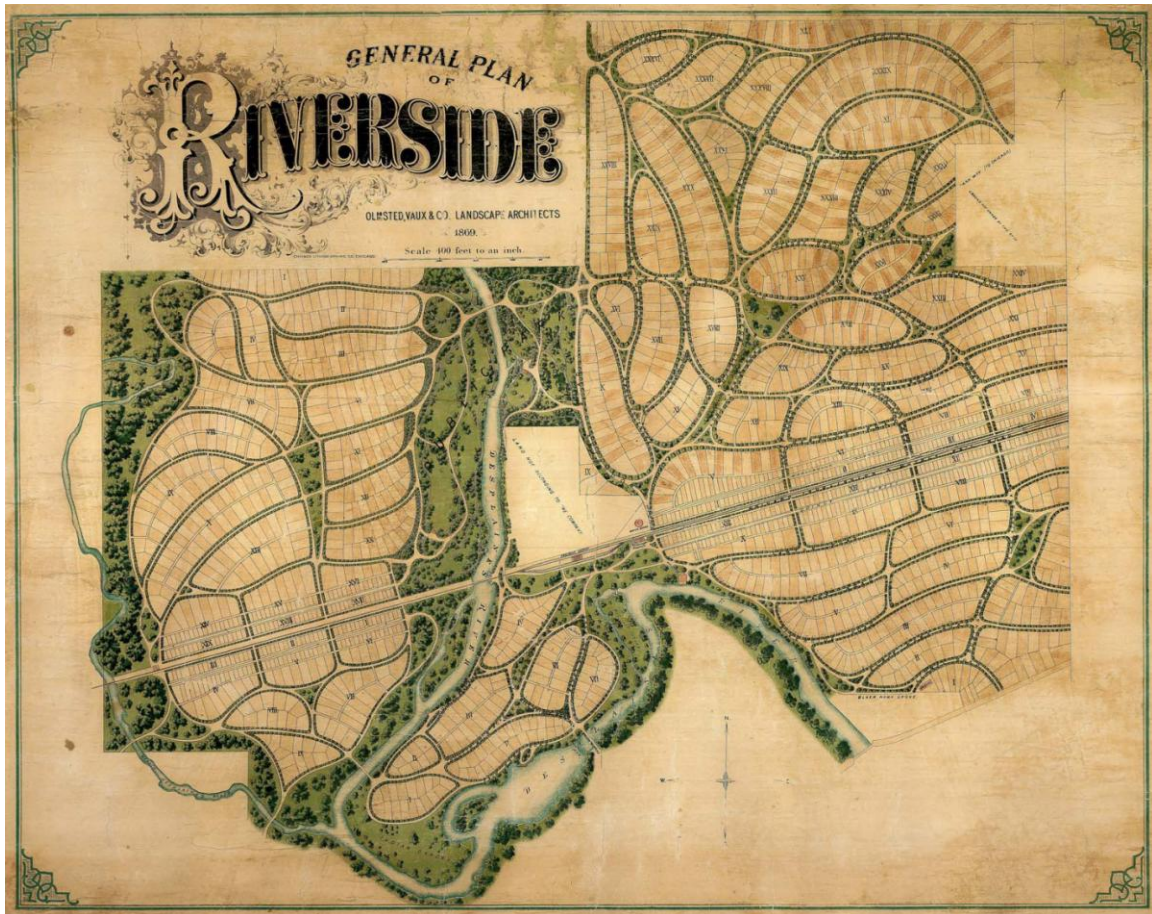


Figure 6.1: General Plan of Riverside – Olmsted, Vaux & Co. Landscape Architects – 1869 (Source: olmsteadsociety.org)

Late in his career, Olmsted brought his suburban residential designs to the planned community of Druid Hills in DeKalb County. Druid Hills was largely designed by the same principles as Riverside; its popularity and design characteristics undoubtedly influencing later DeKalb County suburbs.

The Garden City Movement occurred in tandem with the early American suburbs by Olmsted and others. Begun by Ebenezer Howard in Britain, this movement sought to remove residents from the industrial city centers in favor of self-contained communities. These communities were intended to contain separate areas for home, work and recreation within a natural setting. Howard's towns of Letchworth and Welwyn near



London were designed as “the perfect marriage between town and country” and gained worldwide fame for their “lush, gardenlike” qualities.<sup>89</sup> Many Garden Cities and Garden Suburbs were built in the United States before World War II. Radburn, in northern New Jersey, was designed by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright but heavily influenced by Howard. Radburn was, however, adapted to the American lifestyle by accounting for the popularity of the automobile.<sup>90</sup> Curvilinear streets and a park-like setting were taken from earlier models, but increased automobile ownership meant that Stein and Wright had to account for heavier traffic within the residential community of Radburn. Their solution to this problem was the cul-de-sac – intended to reduce both traffic speed and flow. Radburn also introduced the concept of the hierarchical road system and the size of the neighborhood being based on the amount of people roughly needed to support an elementary school. Radburn’s design proved to be highly influential on subsequent suburban plans.<sup>91</sup>

Early twentieth century suburban landscapes in Georgia were influenced by these trends. Curvilinear streets blended the subdivision landscape into the environment by adapting to the rolling topography of the Piedmont. The landscape of individual lots, too, retained many original features. Fitting suburban lots into the existing natural landscape meant that, although they were generally large, they were also irregularly shaped. House setbacks, however, were uniform and generous to create large front yards. These yards were mostly informal and consisted primarily of open lawns, trees, and shrubbery (Figure 6.2). Because the overall quality of these early Georgia suburbs was park-like, the only public open space tended to be lots that were unsuitable for building because of creek

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<sup>89</sup> Ebenezer Howard. *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, F.J. Osborn, ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 58.

<sup>91</sup> Tobey, *A History of Landscape Architecture*.

beds or steep slopes.<sup>92</sup> These early twentieth century suburban landscapes set the precedent for post-World War II suburban landscapes.



Figure 6.2: Photo of first house build in Ingleside, DeKalb County, 1924 (Source: Vanishing Georgia collection, Georgia Archives)

Early post-War suburban yard landscapes in Atlanta were fairly standardized. Lots featured a modest front yard with a prominent driveway and a larger backyard, usually with a deck or patio. The lawn was the most important feature, but trees,

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<sup>92</sup> Historic Preservation Section, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, *Georgia's Living Places: Historic Houses in Their Landscaped Settings* February 1991, I-46.

shrubberies and flower beds were also included. Most lawns were modestly landscaped, but higher style designs began to emerge.<sup>93</sup> Thomas Church's California Style of landscape design influenced later post-World War II suburban landscapes. His designs introduced more of a blending between indoor and outdoor spaces as well as the idea of the outdoor room. His informal, free-flowing designs were regularly featured in magazines like *House Beautiful* and *Sunset* and became very popular with landscape architects, developers and homeowners.<sup>94</sup> The overall landscape of 1960s subdivisions were similar to those of the preceding decades. Individual yard landscapes, however, increased in both size and complexity. Hard features became less simplistic and plantings more profuse. 1960s yard landscapes augmented the trends of the 1950s and before.

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<sup>93</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 149.

<sup>94</sup> Tobey, *A History of Landscape Architecture*.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUBDIVISION LOCATION AND SITE PLANNING

By the 1960s, subdivision design and development had become fairly standardized. Publications such as *The Community Builders Handbook* provided detailed guidelines for developers to create what were considered successful subdivisions. Standardization allowed numerous developers and builders to create many subdivisions that all shared common characteristics. Between 1945 and 1970, almost 1,300 suburban developments were built in DeKalb County. Unlike places like Levittown, where one development contained thousands of houses, DeKalb County tended toward hundreds of developments containing only a small number of houses.<sup>95</sup> Despite the large number of distinct subdivision developments, they retain a fairly homogenous nature. This is due largely to standards for neighborhood design that were rigorously enforced by the FHA to determine whether homeowners were eligible for home loans. Also, zoning laws and regulations had become similar across the nation.<sup>96</sup> Finally, handbooks and planning guides distributed nationally were popular and often closely adhered to.

One of the most important considerations in subdivision location was the accessibility of the site. Throughout the 1960s, *The Community Builders Handbook* recognized that the new freeways provided a good skeleton around which to plan new

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<sup>95</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 89.

<sup>96</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 83.

developments.<sup>97</sup> These new transportation routes provided quick and easy access to suburbanites who faced daily commutes. Although location near a freeway was desirable, the Metropolitan Planning Commission in Atlanta indicated that neighborhoods should have only limited access to arterial roads so as to reduce traffic flow.<sup>98</sup> Accessibility to local shopping, churches and schools was also an important consideration. As per recommendations from the Metropolitan Planning Commission, 1960s subdivisions in DeKalb County were often within walking distance of a local elementary school. Due to their insular nature, however, they were rarely within walking distance of any other amenities.<sup>99</sup>

The size of the development to was also an important consideration when selecting a site for development. *The Community Builders Handbook* indicated that “because of taxes and high carrying charges, it [was] not practical to carry too much acreage at one time.”<sup>100</sup> The local development conditions in DeKalb also supported this safer method of site development- the acquisition of small family dairy farms for development organically resulted in smaller subdivisions than elsewhere in the country.

It was advisable, however, for the larger neighborhood to have a population sufficient for supporting an elementary school. Developers often found it most financially feasible to collaborate on different sections of a larger neighborhood.<sup>101</sup> It is for this reason that subdivisions in DeKalb are rarely distinct entities. A single subdivision was often connected to another subdivision development or part of a larger

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<sup>97</sup> J. Ross McKeever, ed. *The Community Builders Handbook*. Washington, DC: Prepared by the Executive Group of the Community Builders Council of the Urban Land Institute, 1968. 35.

<sup>98</sup> Burns, “Atlanta Housing,” 29.

<sup>99</sup> Burns, “Atlanta Housing,” 29.

<sup>100</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*. Washington, DC: Prepared by the Community Builders Council of the Urban Land Institute, The Executive Edition 1960. 32.

<sup>101</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 82.

neighborhood. Each subdivision might have an individual given name, take its name from the collector street, or simply be referred to by the name of the larger neighborhood. A case in point, Sellars Farm in the far north of DeKalb is indistinguishable from the abutting subdivisions of Withamere and Mill Glen. All three of these subdivisions, along with others, are part of the larger Mill Glen neighborhood and are often referred to as such (Figure 7.1).

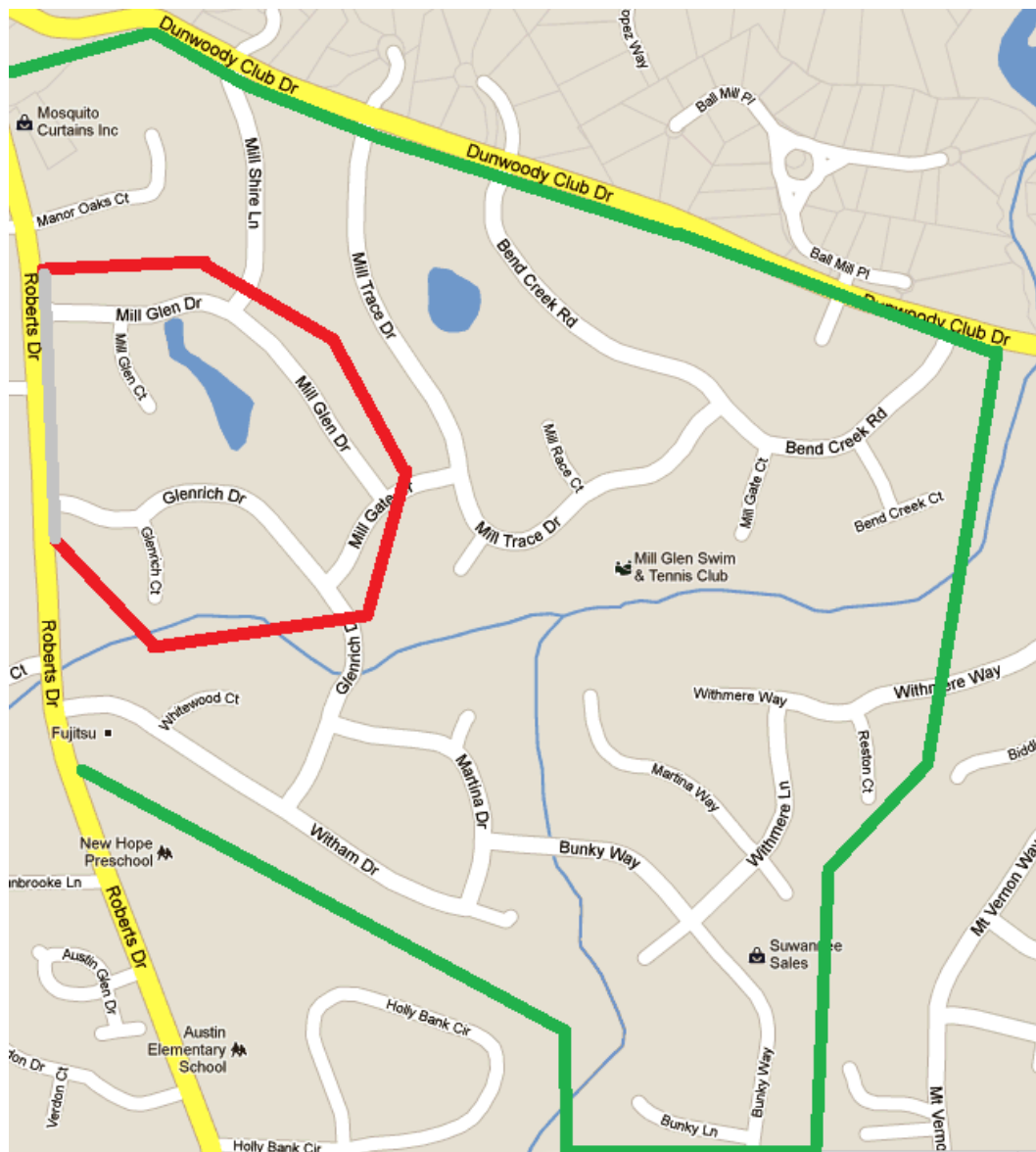


Figure 7.1: Sellars Farm Subdivision (bordered in red) within the larger neighborhood of Mill Glen (bordered in green) – (Source: Google Maps)

Once the developer had a specific site in mind, the physical characteristics of the site had to be taken into account. The topography was a good indicator of the overall success of the development. Moderately sloping sites were preferred for new development. If the grade was over 10 percent, improvement costs to ready the site would be too costly. A profit could be made, however, on slightly steeper grades if the development was to feature higher priced properties.<sup>102</sup> Alternately, sewage and storm drainage issues would arise if the topography was too flat. The gently rolling topography of DeKalb was ideal for subdivision development. Geographical or other boundaries also had to be favorable. Subdivisions with irregular or sprawling boundaries were costly to develop.<sup>103</sup> It was far more efficient for subdivision to be compact.

The natural drainage of the proposed site also had to be taken into account. Low-lying or marshy land would prove frustrating and costly to drain correctly. Naturally occurring streams or culverts were desirable in that they could provide a natural alternative to municipal storm drainage.<sup>104</sup> (Figure 7.2) Although these features could not be developed for housing, they, along with ridges, often provided the only green space in DeKalb subdivisions. Although parks and public spaces within the neighborhood were recommended by national agencies and organizations, they were rarely included in the small-scale subdivisions of 1960s DeKalb. It was not until the 1970s that the county began to fully develop their public parks. Again, however, the gently rolling topography of DeKalb was well suited to good, natural drainage within subdivisions. Underlying granite was frequently the primary obstacle when selecting a site in DeKalb. If the granite was too close to the surface, drainage and grading became far more difficult.

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<sup>102</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 37.

<sup>103</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 37.

<sup>104</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 38.





Figure 7.2: Natural drainage via creek in Flair Forest Subdivision (Photo by author)

The gently rolling topography of most subdivisions in DeKalb County meant that developers faced few challenges in grading the site. Grading was mostly focused on improving the natural drainage. Steep slopes were graded to a more manageable incline or, if the steep slope was not on a street, driveway, or central to a lot, it was often just planted with shrubs or vines to minimize erosion. Lots were generally graded so that the front lawn sloped down to the street, but the natural topography often resulted in lawns that sloped up or sideways.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 155.



Mature trees were another factor to be considered when selecting a site. *The Community Builders Handbook* advised retaining as many of the existing trees as possible, despite the increased cost and effort it would require during development. Homeowners found existing trees on their property to be attractive and desirable, thus increasing property values and sales. Large, attractive trees provided visual interest on a new site and added to the lush, garden-like qualities so valued by historic and contemporary community designers. “Being able to see several blocks at a glance gives any new development that depressing mass housing project look.”<sup>106</sup>

Also important when considering a site for development was the availability of utilities. If electricity, water, telephone and other amenities were unavailable or costly to obtain, the subdivision was unlikely to be a success. Fortunately, DeKalb County’s utilities had undergone great improvements during the post-World War II era thanks to the efforts of Scott Candler. By the 1960s, all modern utilities and amenities were available and affordable at new building sites throughout DeKalb. During the site planning stage, developers laid out water, sewer, storm drainage, gas, telephone and power lines. Although underground wiring for telephone and cable was a growing trend, some new subdivisions in DeKalb in the 1960s still ran these lines to houses via regularly spaced wooden poles along the street. Wooden poles remained popular because they were also used to provide the street lighting within the subdivision.

Municipal regulations were also to be taken into account. Zoning and subdivision regulations were favorable for single-family residential development in DeKalb. They supported standards in development by establishing regulations for lots sizes, setbacks, maximum lot coverage, minimum floor areas, and maximum heights. While zoning

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<sup>106</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 38.

provided general guidelines, subdivision regulations were more likely to control the actual development and use of the land. They often included guidelines for design of streets, blocks, lots, and open spaces as well as subdivision names.<sup>107</sup> These guidelines were rarely cumbersome and mutually safeguarded the interests of the homeowner, the subdivider, and the local government.<sup>108</sup> (Further discussion at end of chapter)

Once all of these factors had been considered by the developer and conditions had been found favorable for a new development to occur, a general plan or plat was drawn up and filed with the local government. The plan, or plat, indicated the boundaries of the parcel to be developed, provision of utilities and drainage, and the layout of streets and lots (Figure 7.3). The general plan was then drawn up by the developer, often with the assistance of a surveyor, engineer or site planner.<sup>109</sup> During the site planning phase of development, the intricacies of the actual subdivision had to be taken into account. While some features, such as the design or construction of house and yard landscaping was sometimes left to the builder or homeowner, the developer was responsible for making the site ready for buyers and builders.

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<sup>107</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 67.

<sup>108</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 65.

<sup>109</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.



Figure 7.3: Emerald North Subdivision Plat Map, 1969 (Source: DeKalb History Center)

An important consideration was always the price range and dwelling type to be installed at the site. This often guided the tone of the entire project. Developers and builders recognized that a growing portion of the homebuyers in the 1960s rejected the repetitive, mass produced appearance of the quickly built subdivisions of the immediate post-War housing boom. By the 1960s, national and personal wealth had increased and many homebuyers were ready to upgrade to a more thoughtfully designed subdivision. Although it was inadvisable to mix houses that varied too greatly in price or design, buyers desired properties that did not look like every other lot on the block.<sup>110</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook* suggested investing in quality materials and designs that would be attractive to all middle and upper-middle-class homebuyers. Furthermore, by the 1960s, amendments to the Housing Act and FHA were making it financially advantageous for homeowners to buy more high quality houses on better lots.<sup>111</sup>

Lot sizes and lines were another factor to be considered. By the 1960s, lot sizes had increased drastically from the 50'-60' lots recommended by the FHA in the 1940s and '50s.<sup>112</sup> Zoning regulations in Atlanta during the 1960s meant that subdivision lots generally fell into zoning categories requiring 100-, 85-, or 75-foot widths at the street.<sup>113</sup> Many of the subdivisions in DeKalb in the '60s, however, had average lot widths of up to 110 or 120 feet.<sup>114</sup> The increasing floor area of homes as well as the established popularity of long and low house design required larger lots than in the past. It was standard practice for the lot depth to be twice the width, providing ample front and back

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<sup>110</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 89.

<sup>111</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 90.

<sup>112</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 86.

<sup>113</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 57.

<sup>114</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 105.



yard space.<sup>115</sup> It was generally advisable for lot lines to be drawn perpendicular to the street, creating uniform lot widths within a subdivision and eliminated awkward angles. Lots along curves in the road had radiating boundaries, so as to avoid acute angles (Figure 7.4). It was widely acknowledged that odd shaped lots were hard to sell and were therefore avoided. Butt lots and easements were used to buffer homeowners from undesirable elements within or around the subdivision. They were usually used to buffer outlying houses from adjoining arterial street traffic and noise as well as to eliminate the need to locate utilities or signage on privately owned property.<sup>116</sup>



Figure 7.4: Lot lines, house orientation, and buffer areas in Imperial Hills Subdivision  
(Source: Zillow.com)

<sup>115</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 114.

<sup>116</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 118.

Building lines within individual lots were another site planning feature that had to be established. According to *The Community Builders Handbook*, setback of houses and garages 20-30 feet from the street was standard throughout the 1960s.<sup>117</sup> Study areas in DeKalb indicate that setback was sometimes greater than 30 feet- 50 to 60-foot setbacks from the street were not uncommon. Ample setbacks were recommended so that off-street parking on private driveways would be convenient and encouraged. Also, locating the house farther from the street afforded more privacy and grander front lawns.

The primary configuration of 1960s subdivisions in DeKalb was one, or several, long blocks. Long blocks were favorable because they reduced street area within the subdivision and were less costly to build and supply utilities to. Long blocks reduced traffic hazards, while their curvilinear form sufficiently reduced traffic speeds. Cross walks intersecting these long blocks, with the exception of areas near elementary schools, were not encouraged. Developers of the time found that they were rarely used and homeowners felt that encouraging pedestrian traffic increased trespassing and vandalism.<sup>118</sup> It was recommended that blocks be between 1800 and 2000 feet long. Cul-de-sacs and loop streets were commonly intersected with these long blocks to create the transportation infrastructure within the subdivision.<sup>119</sup> (Figure 7.5)

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<sup>117</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 119.

<sup>118</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 106.

<sup>119</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 107.

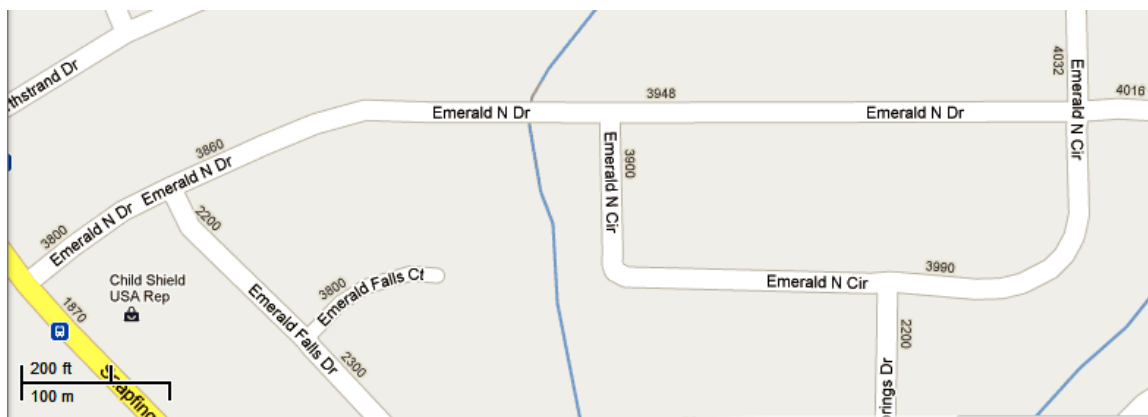


Figure 7.5: Blocks, cul-de-sac, and loop street in Emerald North Subdivision (Source: Google Maps)

Curvilinear streets geared toward automobile travel that had evolved out of the Radburn plan were the predominant pattern in DeKalb through the 1960s and beyond (Figure 7.6). Endorsed by the FHA, the curvilinear street design was rarely deviated from. Gridiron street plans had come to be thought of as monotonous and inefficient, creating more street area, higher maintenance, and increased traffic and dangerous intersections.<sup>120</sup> Opposed to the gridiron plan, curvilinear street design “provided greater privacy and visual interest; could be adapted to greater variations in topography; reduced the cost of utilities and road construction,” and made a safer environment for domestic activities.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, curvilinear street design evoked images of bucolic paths and country roads as well as the aristocratic drive,<sup>122</sup> further supporting the American Dream and established ideals. Although streets were the circulation corridors within the subdivision, the collector and branch streets within were not intended to flow effortlessly into the outside arterial streets. Limited access between the inside and outside streets was encouraged to reduce cut-through traffic with the neighborhood. This design, however,

<sup>120</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 121.

<sup>121</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

<sup>122</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 36.



had to be balanced with a need for access of emergency vehicles. According to former developer John Thibadeau, DeKalb County wanted every subdivision to have an entrance and an exit. Dead ends were minimized and only used on short streets.<sup>123</sup> Despite the desire, the cul-de-sacs and loop streets prominently featured in DeKalb subdivision design in the 1960s did not foster ease of navigation for the outsider.



Figure 7.6: Curvilinear Street in Flair Forest Subdivision (Photo by author)

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<sup>123</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 57.



Established street widths were used by developers throughout DeKalb in the 1960s. *The Community Builders Handbook* recommended that collector streets within the subdivision should be between 34 and 36 feet wide to accommodate the slightly higher volume of traffic. Other streets within the subdivision did not need to be wider than 26 feet from curb to curb. This width was thought to be sufficient for slow-moving two-way traffic while accounting for cars parked on street parallel to the curb. It was also deemed sufficient for the maneuvering space needed by cars backing out of driveways.<sup>124</sup> Sidewalks along the streets were recommended to be approximately four feet wide. They were sometimes separated from the curb by a narrow strip of lawn but, in the South where snow plow build-up was not an issue, sidewalks were often integral with the curb. The FHA encouraged sidewalks on busier streets, but felt they were not needed on smaller ones.<sup>125</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook* further recommended that, even on busier streets, sidewalks were only needed on one side of the street.<sup>126</sup> Despite these recommendations, it was generally felt that subdivisions with larger lots and frontages did not need sidewalks. Generally considered superfluous in the automobile-centric society of 1960s DeKalb, sidewalks were thought to encourage children to play near the street as well as bring in undesirable elements. Excluding sidewalks also saved developers time and money. It was for these reasons that few subdivisions built in DeKalb County in the 1960s included sidewalks on all but the busiest collector streets.

Streets in 1960s subdivisions generally had rolled curbs, a type considered favorable because it provided an unbroken street line and did not require curb cuts for

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<sup>124</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 124.

<sup>125</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 86.

<sup>126</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 126.

driveways. Furthermore, they were the most cost effective method of curb construction.<sup>127</sup> (Figure 7.8) As the '60s progressed, rolled curbs gained a lower profile to accommodate lower carriages on cars that might pass over them while exiting a driveway. Although this was the most common type of curb found in study areas, especially in DeKalb subdivisions built in the later '60s, granite curbs were also common in subdivisions of this time (Figure 7.7). The availability of this local building material provided for a durable and affordable curbing option. Sunk into the ground to form a right angle with the street, many original 1960s granite curbs remain and retain a high degree of integrity with little maintenance.



Figure 7.7: Granite Curb in Shenandoah Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 7.8: Rolled Curb in Mill Glen Subdivision (Photo by author)

Both the FHA and MPC encouraged the liberal use of cul-de-sacs in subdivision development, and DeKalb subdivision developers readily obliged when planning their development site. This street type consisted of a short street ending in a turnaround with

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<sup>127</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 129.

a radius of approximately 40 feet from the center to the curb.<sup>128</sup> (Figure 7.9) Cul-de-sacs fit easily into the rolling terrain of DeKalb County and often allowed developers to build lots on otherwise inaccessible parcels as well as maximizing the number of lots that could be built on a parcel. Furthermore, cul-de-sacs reduced the required paved street surface needed for each lot.<sup>129 130</sup> Homebuyers preferred lots on cul-de-sacs as well. Reduced through traffic made outdoor play safer for children and provided increased privacy within the suburban environment. *The Community Builders Handbook* ventured that the cul-de-sac was the best type of street to build because of the increased desirability of the lots served and the higher price they fetched.<sup>131</sup> The cul-de-sac street was generally shorter than other streets so as to reduce the cost and increase the efficiency of providing utilities and services. Mains, drains and lines all had to be extended to the end of the cul-de-sac without being able to connect back to the main street. Garbage and mail men also disliked the inefficiency of having to double back along their route.



Figure 7.9: Cul-de-sac in Imperial Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)

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<sup>128</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 132.

<sup>129</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 86.

<sup>130</sup> Burns, "Atlanta Housing," 29.

<sup>131</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 131.

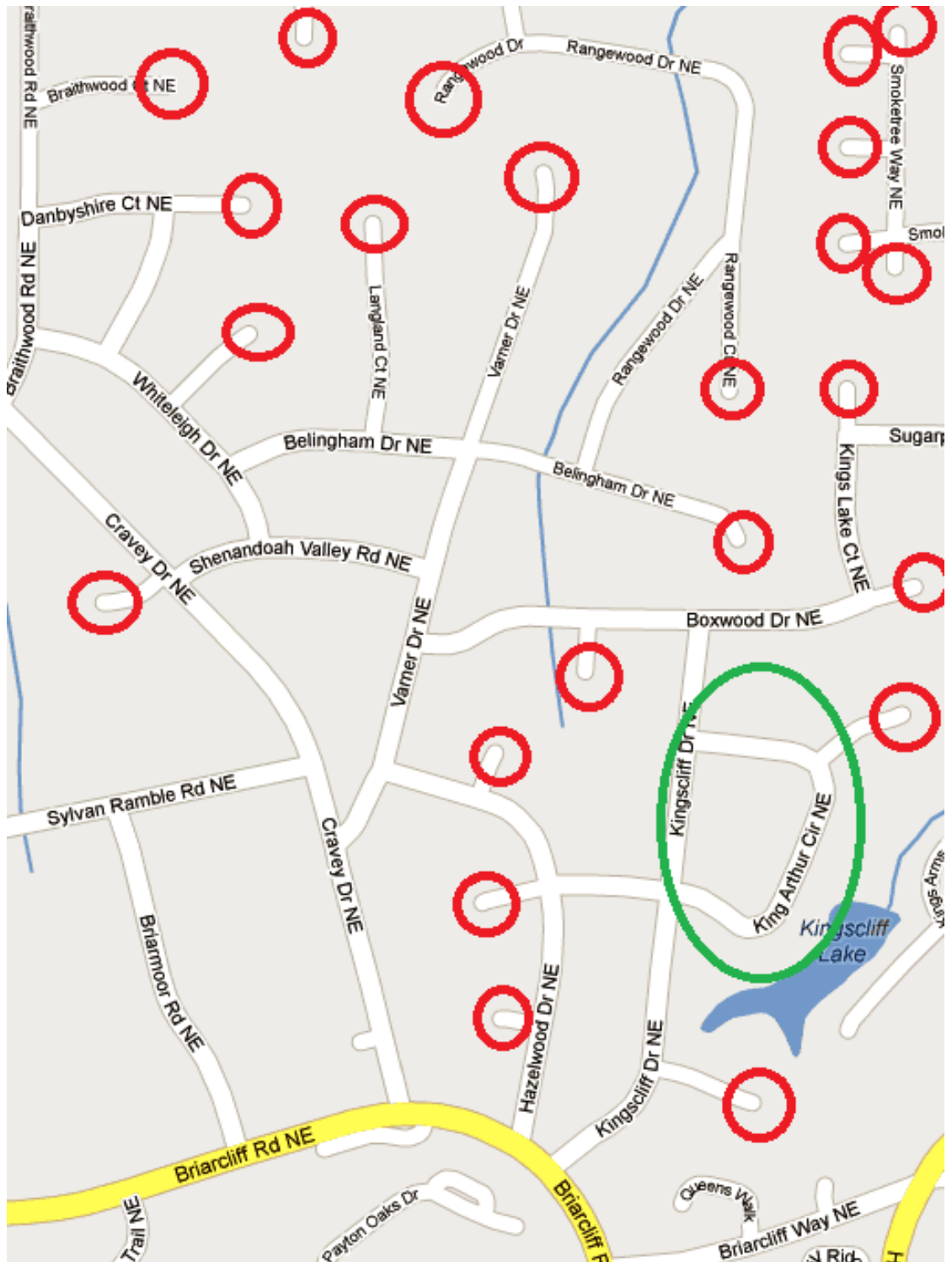


Figure 7.10: Shenandoah Subdivision with cul-de-sacs circled in red and loop street in green (Source: Google Maps)

These obstacles were overcome through the use of the loop street. This type of street, common in '60s subdivisions in DeKalb, usually ran parallel to the main street while connecting back to it at either end. Although slightly less effective at providing the maximum number of lots per acre of land, the loop street afforded increased privacy and reduced traffic while eliminating utility and service inefficiencies.<sup>132</sup>

The intersections of subdivision streets were carefully planned to create safe and easy driving conditions within the subdivision. By the 1960s, the best methods for achieving these objectives had been established and become standard practice among developers. It was widely regarded that T-intersections were safer than four-way intersections. Intersecting streets on opposite sides of the collector road were to be built at least 125 feet apart so as to eliminate slight jogs that could prove to be inconvenient or dangerous. Streets should also not intersect to form acute angles. Acute angles at subdivisions would create awkward or difficult turns while the resulting obtuse angle opposite would encourage drivers to enter the collector street without fully stopping.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, acute angles at intersections would create oddly shaped, undesirable lots at the intersection corners.<sup>134</sup> Finally, the corners created at intersections were to be rounded rather than sharp.<sup>135</sup> This feature provided ease of turning and contributed to the visually pleasant curvilinear quality of the streets. Traffic lights and other electric signs are not found at these intersections. While the volume of traffic does not usually warrant them, the visual blight they would create makes them unsuitable to the carefully regulated

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<sup>132</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 135.

<sup>133</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 139.

<sup>134</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 118.

<sup>135</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 106.

visual aesthetic of the 1960s DeKalb subdivision. Traffic signs, however, are frequently featured along collector streets.

Although driveways would later be maintained by the homeowner, they would usually be originally planned and constructed by the developer. Eight feet was considered the minimum width for a single-family residential driveway, although wider driveways to accommodate multiple cars are frequently found. Circular or curved driveways are rare in DeKalb except for cases in which a steep grade must be accommodated. Almost all driveways in 1960s DeKalb subdivisions form a straight path from the garage to the street. Where they reached the street, driveways widened slightly to allow cars to maneuver (Figure 7.11). Granite curbs had to be cut so that the driveway could transition smoothly to the street. Driveways could simply meet rolled curbs, however, with the exiting automobile easily passing over them. *The Community Builders Handbook*'s recommendation for paving the entire driveway seems to have been largely followed in DeKalb. Other materials or methods employed by the developer were thought to incur needless maintenance.<sup>136</sup> It is difficult to determine the original qualities of subdivision driveways through the DeKalb County study areas due to a low degree of integrity today. While other hard features largely remain intact, driveways have often been replaced or altered. It is likely correct to assume, however, that the driveways found in these neighborhoods today are very similar in nature to the driveways from the 1960s.

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<sup>136</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 140.





Figure 7.11: Typical driveway in Springfield Subdivision (Photo by author)

Materials used for the hard surfaces in the subdivision were carefully planned to reduce construction and maintenance costs. The 1960 edition of *The Community Builders Handbook* claimed that bituminous bound paving was almost universally used in subdivision street construction.<sup>137</sup> Although the 1968 edition of the same handbook claims that concrete had become a more affordable and preferable paving material, bituminous bound paving seems to have remained the pavement of choice in DeKalb throughout the '60s.<sup>138</sup> Concrete was, however, widely used in driveways, sidewalks and curbs. Concrete poured into reusable molds was the easiest method for constructing these subdivision features. Whatever paving was used for streets and driveways was likely to have been darkened with a color compound to reduce glare and avoid discoloration from car grease and oil.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 155.

<sup>138</sup> McKeever, *The Community Builders Handbook*, 176.

<sup>139</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 156.

While landscaping of individual lots was usually left to the homebuyer, developers made some improvements to the landscape to make their subdivision more attractive to potential buyers. As many mature trees as possible were left on the site to maintain visual interest and valuable shade. Small shrubs and vines were planted on steep slopes to reduce erosion. Larger shrubs and hedges were also planted to buffer lots from noisy or unsightly features within or around the subdivision. Entrances to the subdivision were usually more carefully landscaped by the developer than interior lots to better attract buyers. Flowering trees and shrubs, particularly, were planted at this location to add beauty and value. If the subdivision had been named, the developer also usually erected a sign with the name at the entrance in full view of passing cars. These signs usually take one of three main types as illustrated below (Figures 7.12, 7.13 and 7.14). Many of these original signs still exist, although some have been replaced or added.

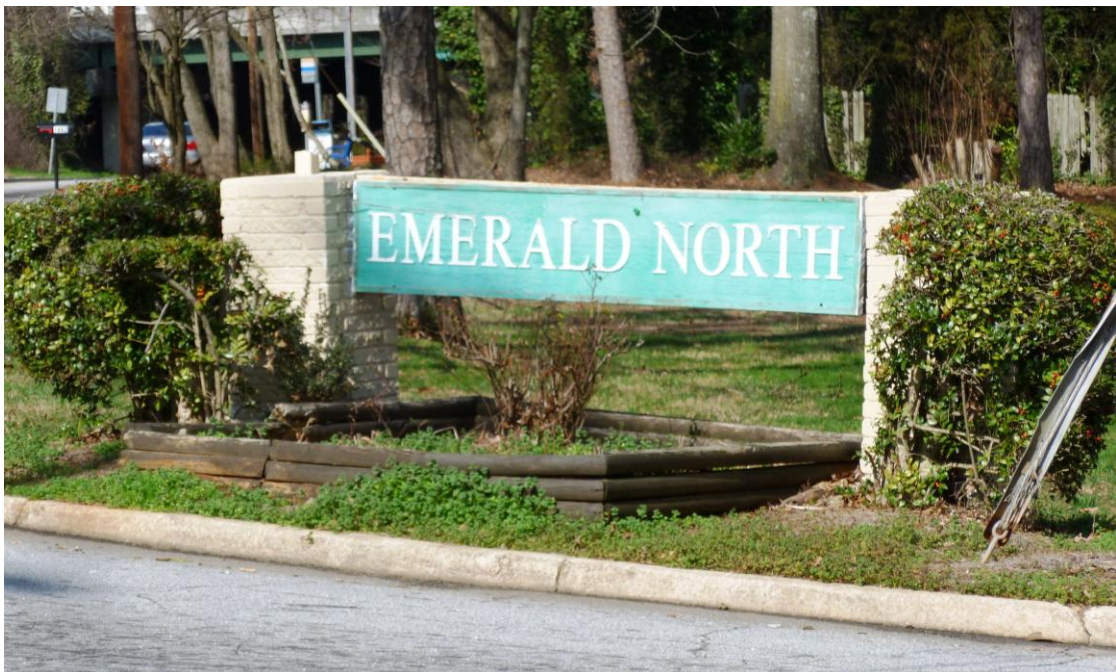


Figure 7.12: “Banner between Piers” Type Signage (Photo by author)





Figure 7.13: Hanging Type Signage (Photo by author)



Figure 7.14: Billboard Type Signage (Photo by author)

Protective covenants between the subdivider and home buyer were the primary way in which property values were ensured and retained and neighborhood nuisances were reduced.<sup>140</sup> They ensured that the homogenous and desirable character of the subdivision so carefully planned by developers and builders would not be undermined by later features. Protective covenants usually covered the entire subdivision rather than individual properties so that they could be more uniformly enforced. The FHA endorsed protective covenants and providing one for a subdivision made attractive financing more available to homebuyers.<sup>141</sup> Protective covenants commonly included:

- Land use control, including dwelling type and design
- Architectural and design control
- Minimum setback requirements
- Location or prohibition of accessory dwellings
- Minimum lot size requirements
- Sign regulations
- Restrictions on temporary dwellings or trailers
- Structure size minimums and maximums<sup>142</sup>

Originally agreed between subdividers and homebuyers, they were usually enforced by a homeowners association within the neighborhood. These covenants usually lasted for several decades or longer.

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<sup>140</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 191.

<sup>141</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 192.

<sup>142</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 193.



**PROTECTIVE COVENANTS**

LOTS SHOWN ON THIS PLAT ARE SOLD SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING RESTRICTIONS WHICH ARE COVENANTS RUNNING WITH THE LAND AND MAY BE ENFORCED BY THE OWNER OF ANY LOT SHOWN ON SAID PLAT AND SHALL REMAIN IN FULL FORCE AND EFFECT UNTIL JANUARY 1, 1989

1. SAID PROPERTY SHALL BE USED FOR SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE ONLY.
2. NO TEMPORARY HOUSE, SHACK, TENT OR TRAILER SHALL BE ERECTED ON SAID PROPERTY TO BE USED FOR RESIDENTIAL OR CHURCH PURPOSES; NO LOT SHALL BE USED FOR SCHOOLS, KINDERGARDENS OR CHURCHES.
3. NO LOT SHALL BE SUBDIVIDED TO LESS THAN 11,000 SQ. FT., NOR SHALL MORE THAN ONE HOUSE BE ERECTED ON ANY LOT.
4. NO HOUSE SHALL BE BUILT NEARER TO A STREET LINE THAN SHOWN ON THE PLAT NOR NEARER TO ANY SIDE LINE THAN 7.5 FEET.
5. NO ONE-STORY BUILDING LESS THAN 1,000 SQ. FT. OF FLOOR SPACE, OR IF MORE THAN ONE-STORY BUILDING, LESS THAN 1,000 SQ. FT. OF FLOOR SPACE, SHALL BE ERECTED ON ANY LOT.

THE ABOVE RESTRICTIONS ESTABLISHED THIS 16th DAY OF OCT. 1968 *John D. L. Onner* OWNER

**PROTECTIVE COVENANTS**

LOTS SHOWN ON THIS PLAT ARE SOLD SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING RESTRICTIONS WHICH ARE COVENANTS RUNNING WITH THE LAND AND MAY BE ENFORCED BY THE OWNER OF ANY LOT SHOWN ON SAID PLAT AND SHALL REMAIN IN FULL FORCE AND EFFECT UNTIL JANUARY 1, 1988

1. SAID PROPERTY SHALL BE USED FOR SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCE ONLY.
2. NO TEMPORARY HOUSE, SHACK, TENT OR TRAILER SHALL BE ERECTED ON SAID PROPERTY TO BE USED FOR RESIDENTIAL OR CHURCH PURPOSES; NO LOT SHALL BE USED FOR SCHOOLS, KINDERGARDENS OR CHURCHES.
3. NO LOT SHALL BE SUBDIVIDED TO LESS THAN        SQ. FT., NOR SHALL MORE THAN ONE HOUSE BE ERECTED ON ANY LOT.
4. NO HOUSE SHALL BE BUILT NEARER TO A STREET LINE THAN SHOWN ON THE PLAT NOR NEARER TO ANY SIDE LINE THAN 10 FEET.
5. NO ONE-STORY BUILDING LESS THAN 1400 SQ. FT. OF FLOOR SPACE, OR IF MORE THAN ONE-STORY BUILDING, LESS THAN 1750 SQ. FT. OF FLOOR SPACE, SHALL BE ERECTED ON ANY LOT.

THE ABOVE RESTRICTIONS ESTABLISHED THIS 12 DAY OF SEPT. 1967 *John D. L. Onner* OWNER

Figure 7.15 and 7.16: Protective Covenants from Emerald North and Flintridge Forrest Subdivisions, respectively (Courtesy of the DeKalb History Center)

## CHAPTER 8

### THE 1960S DEKALB COUNTY YARD

Second only to the house, the yard is very nearly the most character defining feature of 1960s subdivisions in DeKalb County. Despite groundwork laid and development structured by the planners and designers, the nearly continuous landscape of individual yards occupies the majority of space within a subdivision and provides the backdrop for suburban life. Just as the frame contributes to the view of the painting, the yard defines and enhances the house. While one focuses on the house when viewing an individual lot, the compilation of yards creates the defining impression when driving or walking subdivision streets. Although the yards seem, at a glance, to create the homogenous nature of a block, their design reflects the greater culture's values and ideals as well as the individual owner's attitudes and aspirations.<sup>143</sup>

The yard in 1960s DeKalb County subdivisions was almost universally comprised of a front yard divided from the larger backyard by the house itself and diminutive side yards. Individual yards were often separated by trees, hedges or fences. Even when such literal delineations did not occur, lot lines were generally understood between adjacent owners who confined improvements and maintenance to their private yards. Most suburban lots in the United States are called "yards" but follow the European/English model of the "garden," implying a higher level of care and nurturing.<sup>144</sup> Few yards in

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<sup>143</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 23.

<sup>144</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 23.

DeKalb's 1960s subdivisions were professionally designed. Rather, the more high style residential designs of local landscape architects such as Edward Dougherty were often copied on a more modest scale. Designed landscapes featured in popular magazines and guides were also highly influential and regularly adapted by amateur gardeners to their middle and upper-middle-class yards.<sup>145</sup> It was often the case that yards in upper middle-class neighborhoods had a higher degree of landscaping because those owners had the time and resources to create and maintain them.

Overall, however, regardless of the level of landscaping, the suburban residential yard represented an idealized landscape- a mixture of both nature and culture. The idea of Eden, or garden paradise, is the ideal landscape archetype in Western culture. Suburban landscapes attempt to embody attributes of the Eden archetype such as "peacefulness, innocence, an idealized nature, a place where the world is both useful *and* good to look at."<sup>146</sup> These attributes also draw largely from the features of previous Garden Cities and Picturesque landscapes. Suburban landscapes, especially in the American Deep South, also draw largely from the region's Anglo-Saxon roots. The ideal of the classic English gentleman farmer manifested itself in the glorification of the farm and domesticated landscape. Southern suburbanites sought to recreate the domesticated English countryside on a smaller scale.<sup>147</sup> Hedges, expansive lawns and winding lanes were prominently featured in all study areas of DeKalb County's '60s suburbs. Traditional preferences in landscape design as well as influences from popular culture were highly influential creating a consistent character among the yards of DeKalb County's 1960s subdivisions.

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<sup>145</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

<sup>146</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 23.

<sup>147</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 9.

## **The Front Yard**

The most recognizable part of the suburban residential lot is the front yard. Separating the house from the street, the front yard is a zone intended to buffer the homeowner from the public. The front yard was the first impression made on a visitor and was therefore the most carefully landscaped part of the lot. Its public nature also led the front yard into being the most traditional and conservative part of the lot; it often closely adhered to the Old English prototype. Conjointly, the front yards of DeKalb County's 1960s suburban residences were very similar to those of the previous decade as well as the following decades because of this prevailing adherence of southern homeowners to the established model.

The overwhelming majority of front yards in 1960s DeKalb subdivisions were comprised of a large grass lawn, foundation plantings, trees, flower beds, a driveway, and a front walkway (Figure 8.1). The front walk almost always led from the driveway to the front door in a gentle outward-sweeping curve. Only rarely did it follow the historic precedent of leading from the front door directly to the street. This arrangement had become largely obsolete because of the prevalent automobile culture of 1960s suburbs in DeKalb. Although largely homogenous across a neighborhood, individual front yards did vary in their arrangement of the basic components. The style of the house often dictated the landscaping of the front yard. More formal and symmetrical houses were reflected through similar front yard designs. Conversely, asymmetrical or more contemporary houses had more casual and Picturesque landscaping. The primary function of the landscaping arrangement was to frame the house and create a public façade.

The house was usually framed by the landscape in such a way that the front entrance was highlighted and emphasized. The popularity of air conditioning had made front porches mostly ornamental, but the desire to create a sheltered entrance was reflected in most post-War housing. A raised floor, overhanging roof and decorative columns and railings contributed to the sheltering nature of these houses. The front entrance was, at the very least, up a short flight of stairs. Ranch House design combined with traditional southern style made for a prevalent pattern of porch-sheltered front entrances in DeKalb's post-War suburban houses. The 1960s, however, saw a change in the nature of the front entrance. Courtyards further recessing and sheltering the front entrance with walls became increasingly common. Porches also became less open to the front yard, often being enclosed by masonry arcades or screen walls (Figure 8.3). Both the courtyard and the enclosed porch might reflect the need to withdraw into the safety of one's home during the turbulent times of the late '60s. Increased privacy and fortification protected the family against an increasingly frightening outside world. Although this trend in front entrances gained popularity throughout the 1960s in DeKalb, the southern model of creating an inviting and hospitable front lawn remained the predominant landscape design.





Figure 8.1: Front Yard showing typical front yard composition in Flair Forest Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 8.2: Front Yard in Hebron Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)





Figure 8.3: Front Yard in Laurelwood Subdivision (Photo by author)

### **The Back Yard**

While the front yard was often formulaic in its adherence to traditional landscape standards, the back yard was often a more casual and contemporary space. Whereas the front yard was restrained and tasteful, the backyard was a place for experimentation with design trends. The overarching goal was to create a private space that reflected the owner's lifestyle. The value placed on this type of personal expression increased significantly during the 1960s. The back yard was often referred to as an extension of the indoor space, and landscaping often reflected that trend. An increasing prevalence of glass doors and walls throughout the 1960s served to further integrate the outdoors as a living space. Porches and patios of previous decades remained immensely popular. As young children became teenagers and individual spending power increased, personal back yard swimming pools became more common. While the lawn was still an important feature, it was more important to create a private space through fences and hedges. More

lush and dense plantings arranged informally also created a feeling of intimacy. The ultimate goal was to create a private space in which the family could relax and enjoy the outdoors (Figure 8.4).



Figure 8.4: Back Yard in Hebron Hills Subdivision (Photo by Author)

### **The Side Yard**

The separate uses of the front and back yards were divided primarily by the house itself. Small side yards, however, existed primarily to distance neighbors. In the previous decades, the side yard had largely become a utility space to house garbage cans, air conditioner units and other unsightly features.<sup>148</sup> Side yards in 1960s DeKalb County subdivisions followed this trend. They existed as a buffer zone between the front yard,

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<sup>148</sup> Girling and Helphand, *Yard, Street, Park*, 26.



back yard, and neighbors and were landscaped accordingly with utilitarian hedges, trees and fences (Figure 8.5).

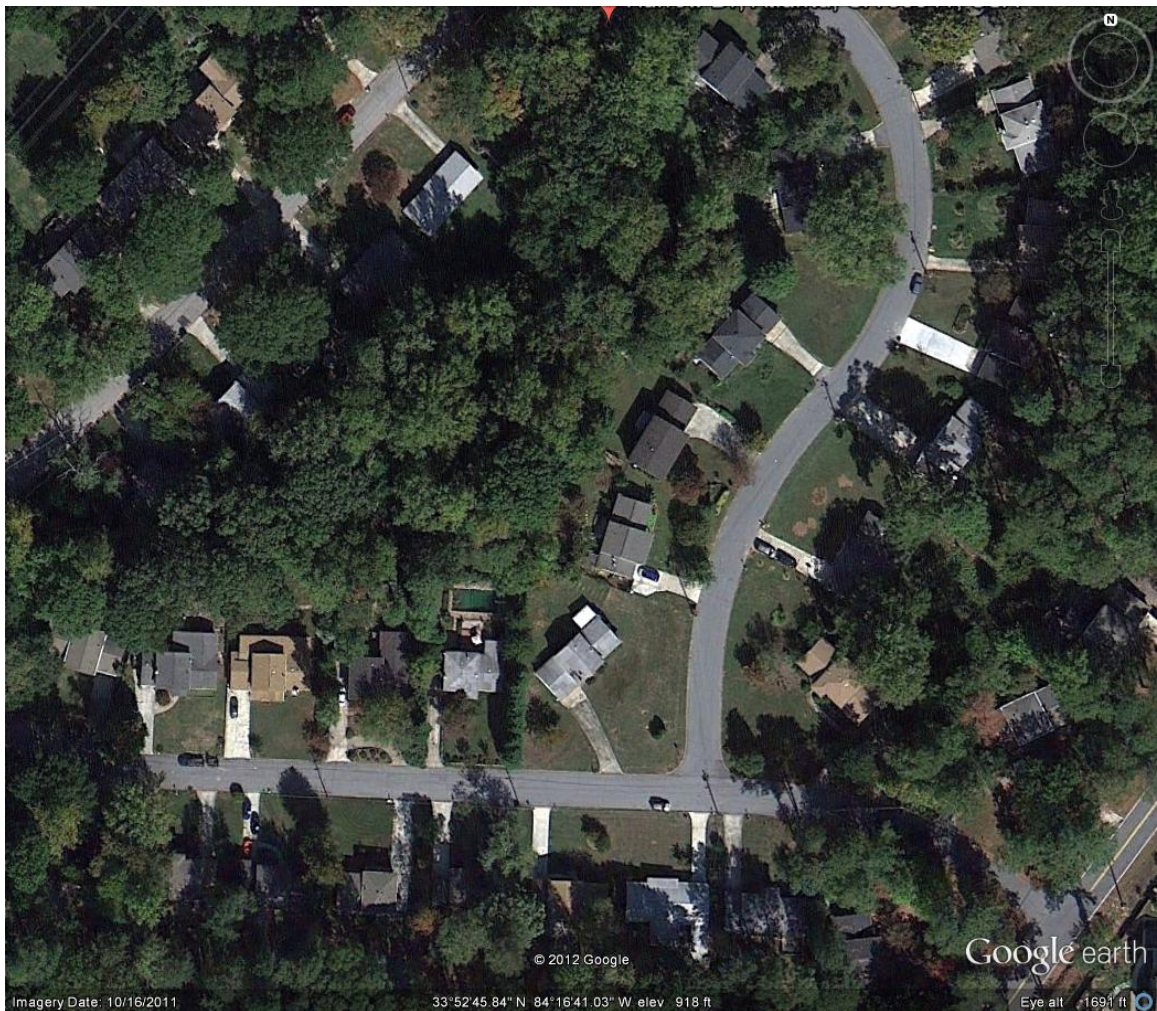


Figure 8.5: Yard layouts and compositions in Surrey Place Subdivision (Source: Google Earth)

### **Hard Features**

In both the front and back yards, hard features put into place by the owners provided structure and order. Moreover, they were often the primary means by which design trends and personal tastes were expressed. Unfortunately, due to a high degree of wear suffered by outdoor hard features, the features witnessed in 1960s yards in DeKalb

County today are often not original. While some features of the time are still widely used today, others were more specific to the 1960s. Popular magazines such as *Southern Living*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and *House and Home*, however, provide valuable insight into the landscape design trends of the time. Fortunately, many of the hard features found in DeKalb County yards today, particularly regarding the front yard, are very similar to those of the study period.

Just as the front porch was a prominent feature of the front yard, a deck or patio was the central hard feature of the back yard in DeKalb's suburbs. This hardscape was the primary means by which much valued outdoor living was accomplished. *Southern Living* claimed that a back deck was "almost as indispensable as a garage or carport."<sup>149</sup> The hard, flat surface was essential in DeKalb's rolling topography for use of outdoor seating, eating areas and barbeques. In their most basic forms, decks and patios have changed little throughout the last 65 years. Flat or slightly sloping yards accommodate poured concrete, brick and stone patios very well. Usually only a few inches above grade, patios of this sort blend almost seamlessly into the rest of the backyard. Back yards with moderate or steep slopes often utilize a raised wooden deck (Figure 8.6). This deck type common to 1960s homes in DeKalb usually extends out from the main living floor with a basement built into the hillside underneath. Wooden steps are usually built into the deck and lead to the yard below. Railings around the perimeter and along the stairs are also usually constructed (Figure 8.7). These railings were often horizontally oriented utilizing heavy rails and diminutive balusters. Sometimes, however, the effect was reversed by emphasizing the vertical balusters. Such basic decks and patios were usually rectangular for ease of construction.

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<sup>149</sup> "Decks Extend Living Space." *Southern Living*. April 1967. 48.

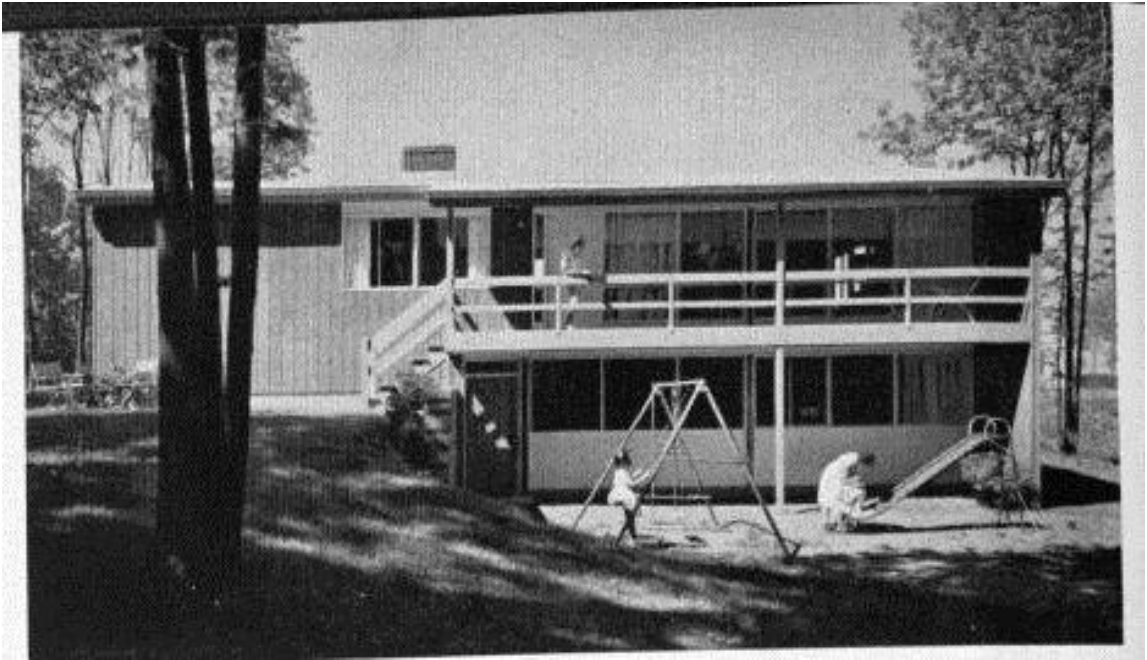


Figure 8.6: Basic 1960s deck similar to those in DeKalb (Source: *Better Homes & Gardens*, July 1962, p.12)



Figure 8.7: Basic 1960s deck similar to those in DeKalb (Source: *Southern Living*, February 1966, p.35)

Roughhewn wood was a popular building material because of the rustic character it lent the landscape. Plastic and glass, too, were used with increasing frequency because of their adaptability to bold, geometric forms. The high value placed on privacy during this decade resulted in the popularity of screens and partial walls to be built around the outdoor living area. Screened porches also increased in popularity during the 1960s in DeKalb (Figure 8.8). Screening in the outdoor space allowed for the enjoyment of the outdoors without having to suffer attacks from insects common during the warmer months. It also provided for a higher degree of privacy. The increased prosperity of most homeowners during the '60s allowed for increased construction of this more expensive type of outdoor living space.



Figure 8.8: Interior view of a typical screened porch (Source: *Southern Living*, September 1968, p.43)

Use of fences and walls was also common to achieve privacy in the back yard living space. Tall hedges were a popular and attractive option for screening in the back yard, but took years to reach full maturity. Fences and walls could be erected quickly and efficiently to the same end. The most frequently utilized fence form was constructed from wooden boards placed side-by-side. The starkness of this type of fence was reduced by featuring plants of medium height along its length. Vines were also used to increase visual interest and soften the fence. 1960s homeowners sought to create more visually interesting fences and walls through the use of patterns and geometric forms. Building louvered, rather than solid, wooden fences was a popular option often featured in magazines. Louvered vertical boards still offered privacy while providing for increased air flow and an interesting pattern. Masonry walls utilizing geometric patterns were another popular option for increasing privacy within the DeKalb yard (Figure 8.10). Concrete formed into patterned blocks could be employed to create a dramatic and cost-effective statement wall (Figure 8.11). Pierced brick was used to create a more traditional look. Low screen walls often enclosed part of the yard near the house. Wooden fences were primarily used around the edges of the yard while “lacey” masonry walls were usually featured around patios, carports and courtyards (Figure 8.9). Fortunately, original masonry walls can often still be seen in DeKalb’s 1960s neighborhoods.





Figure 8.9: Masonry wall on a carport in Hebron Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)

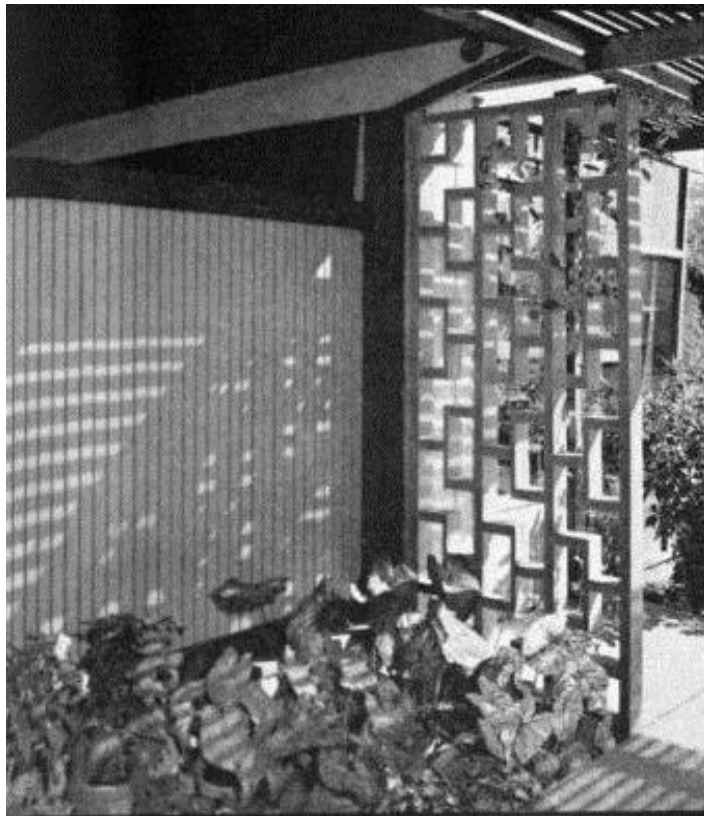


Figure 8.10: Geometric design on outdoor screen wall (Source: *Better Homes & Gardens*, July 1961, p.25)





Figure 8.11: Geometric cut-out, aka "lacey," design, on outdoor wall (Source: *Better Homes & Gardens*, June 1961, p.20)

Large, translucent plastic panels in varying colors were advertised and featured during period magazines as desirable materials for fences and walls. Plastic offered an even more distinctive way of expressing personal taste within the domestic landscape. That taste, however, was either never acquired within DeKalb or later faded – no use of plastic paneling in outdoor wall or fence construction could be documented in the study areas.

Accessory structures such as storage sheds, detached garages or shelters, or other utility structures are not common in DeKalb County's 1960s subdivisions. This is likely due to zoning restrictions, subdivision regulations or protective covenants prohibiting their construction. While many residents considered these structures eyesores, lots that do contain them tend to make them as unobtrusive as possible. Accessory structures were usually located at the far back of the lot and utilized designs that were compatible with the overall character of the lot or subdivision. The most common designs were barn-inspired and used clapboard or roughhewn wood.

Paths and walkways are another feature of the hardscape ubiquitous to 1960s suburban yards in DeKalb County. The most commonly used type of path was and is the walkway leading from the front door to the upper third of the driveway. Almost all properties in 1960s subdivisions featured this type of walkway to provide an easily traversable route from one's car to the front entrance. These walkways served to reduce wear on the lawn along this commonly used route while eliminating the need for the pedestrian to get wet or dirty feet while walking through the lawn. Usually made of poured concrete for ease of maintenance and cost efficiency, these walkways occasionally utilized brick or stone in their construction. Gravel or pebbles were less common. A few of these walkways were built in a straight line parallel to the house's façade, but most were built in a gentle, outward sweeping curve. This reinforced other lines in the Picturesque landscape. The durable nature of these 1960s walks led to many original ones lasting into the present time.

Other paths were more ornamental than utilitarian and were frequently located in the back yard. These paths usually served to connect decks and patios to ornamental

plantings, sheds, fountains, or other accentuated landscape features. These paths usually took much more circuitous routes to foster a sense of leisure and provide vantage points throughout the garden. These paths often reinforced a feeling of tranquility and relaxation in the back yard while still serving the utilitarian purpose of providing a durable, clean path along a frequently traversed route. The path usually curved in accordance to the natural topography or landscaped features so as to better merge it with the surrounding landscape. More natural materials were used in this application as well to serve the same purpose. Stepping stones of flagstone or fieldstone were common, as were edged paths filled with pine straw, mulch, or other natural filler. Steeper lots in DeKalb sometimes used railroad ties to create naturalistic steps down the slope. Because homeowners sought to merge these ornamental paths with the landscape by using unobtrusive or natural materials, original 1960s ornamental paths are rare in DeKalb subdivisions today.

Retaining walls were common hard features in the suburban lots in DeKalb County's hilly landscape. Retaining walls prevented erosion down a slope while also creating even surfaces suitable for decorative landscaping. Frequently located in both front and back as well as side yards, retaining walls were constructed to blend into the landscape as seamlessly as possible. Railroad ties were the most common material used for retaining walls during the 1960s in DeKalb, but flat stacked stones or concrete blocks were also sometimes employed. By nature, retaining walls were horizontally oriented, reflecting the long and low design principle popular of the time. Railroad ties and other common building materials emphasized this orientation. Magazines and practices in the field, however, began to experiment with elements of verticality in the largely horizontal

retaining walls. Some retaining walls in DeKalb's 1960s yards were created using vertical posts sunk into the ground. The effect was both rustic and contemporary- two popular design trends of the time.



Figure 8.12: Railroad Ties used in Landscaping (*Southern Living Magazine*, February 1961, p.27)

Plant beds common to DeKalb's suburban lots in the 1960s were often edged with hard materials for ease of maintenance. Lawn mowers and edging tools were less likely to damage hard edging as they maneuvered around bed borders. Hard edging materials

also gave definition to the sweeping, curvilinear beds. A wide variety of edging materials were promoted in popular magazines and used in suburban yards. Edging materials common in DeKalb County's 1960s suburban neighborhoods were brick, concrete, metal and wood. Bricks were often laid end to end but could also be arranged in repetitive geometric patterns. Poured concrete was another very popular edging option that created a more formal look. The components were flat forms with a scalloped top that could be sunk into the ground to create a continuous edge. This method and design were influenced by the Victorian edging tiles that had been popular in the past. Thin strips of metal could also be sunk into the ground around beds to create a low, inconspicuous border. Finally, the ever-popular wooden railroad ties could either be sunk into the ground so that their tops were at grade or laid on top of the ground to create a raised bed (Figure 8.12). As with retaining walls, edges were sometimes created by sinking small, short wooden posts into the ground at either uniform or varying heights. Both of the wooden edging materials lent a natural, rustic air to the landscape design. Beds were usually filled with pine straw, wood chips or mulch to provide an attractive base for the ornamental plantings as well as to inhibit weed growth (Figure 8.13).



Figure 8.13: Plant bed filled with pine straw and edged with bricks (Source: *Better Homes & Gardens*, June 1969, p.64)

Statuary was not common in DeKalb County's 1960s suburban yards. The formality lent by most statues was not in keeping with the design trends of the time. Occasionally, granite boulders were focal points in the landscape, but this was probably due to their natural frequency in DeKalb and their immovable nature. The rustic quality they imparted on the yard, however, was in keeping with the rustic western trend. Tranquility pools and other small water features were promoted in magazines during the

later years of the 1960s, but they seem to have rarely been implemented in DeKalb. The primary manmade ornamentation featured in 1960s yards was the lamp.



Figures 8.14 and 8.15: Lamps in Flintridge Forrest and Imperial Hills Subdivisions, respectively (Photos by author)

A lone electric lamp atop a metal post was and is a frequent feature in DeKalb's front yards. Defying easy explanation, this landscape feature was rarely overtly promoted in magazines or other periodicals. Its pervasiveness in southern lawns is likely due to the charming, hospitable and stately qualities associated with it.

Finally, the mailbox was a hard feature required on all subdivision lots. Usually located next to the driveway at the street, it served the dual purpose of providing a receptacle for mail distribution and displaying the house number. Although the box itself



had to meet United States Postal Service requirements, overall mailbox design varied. The most basic form consisted of a black metal box atop a black metal post (Figure 8.16). The post was usually a plain cylinder, but could also be ornamental cast iron reflecting porch ornamentation. Metal boxes atop sturdy wooden posts were also very common (Figure 8.18). The wooden posts could be stained, painted or left natural. Finally, brick was often built up around the entire post and box to create a durable and attractive landscape feature (Figure 8.17). These usually had a square base and rounded, flat, or gabled tops. The brick often matched other landscape or house features. Magazines promoted wood as a suitable covering for mailboxes but this was rarely implemented in DeKalb's 1960s neighborhoods. Flower beds or low shrubberies were frequently planted around the mailbox base. While design trends dictated the overall look of mailboxes within a subdivision, individual mailboxes were usually unique.



Figure 8.16: Mailbox on a Metal Post in Flintridge Forrest Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 8.17: Mailbox with Brick Surround in Sellars Farm Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 8.18: Mailbox on a Wooden Post in Huntley Hills Subdivision (Photo by Author)

## **Plants**

The often lush plantings of DeKalb County's 1960s subdivisions significantly contribute to their character. The types of plants and designs used in landscaping during the 1960s are still widely used in the study areas today, creating an appearance that has changed little over the past 50 years. DeKalb's suburban families and housewives had more leisure time and increased wealth during the 1960s, leading to more time that could be spent cultivating yards or paying others to cultivate them. Gardening and landscape management seemed to have been popular during the study period. Homeowners took great care in selecting plants that would be visually pleasing and practical for the environment. DeKalb County lies between Hardiness Zones 7 and 8 according to the United States Department of Agriculture.<sup>150</sup> These guidelines determined which plants to choose and were often employed by magazines and gardeners alike. People's pride in their yards was widely reflected throughout DeKalb County in the 1960s.

An expansive grass lawn was the most defining feature of 1960s subdivision yard in DeKalb County. It provided the canvas on which all other landscaping designs were placed while imparting a sense of Old World grandeur to the lot. All yards, even if they featured nothing else, would have had a grass lawn. Homeowners strived to maintain neat, even lawns uniform in their coverage. It was important to select a suitable variety of grass to achieve a thick, colorful lawn year round. A great deal of time was spent cutting, watering and fertilizing the lawn to maintain its appearance.

Mature trees were often left on a lot as it was developed. These provided the mature and shady character often found in DeKalb's 1960s subdivision landscapes. The

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<sup>150</sup> "USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map." The United States National Arboretum. <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/> (accessed February 10, 2012).

most common native trees in DeKalb County are pine, oak and hickory.<sup>151</sup> These trees are the most common varieties found in the study areas. Although shade was desirable in DeKalb's southern climate, front yards usually had three or fewer mature trees so as to not block the view of the house from the street. Side and back yards retained a higher number of mature trees, especially around the edges of the lot, to better provide privacy for the homeowner.

In addition to native trees left on the lot, yards often contained specimen trees and shrubs planted by the homeowner (Figure 8.20). These were usually chosen for their aesthetic qualities, ease of maintenance and suitability to the climate. Types of specimen trees and shrubs commonly planted in DeKalb County during the 1960s include: magnolias, maples, crabapple, redbud, dogwood, crepe myrtle, river birch, hawthorn, larger hollies, smaller pines, ligustrum, camellias and hydrangeas. Specimens were either planted alone or in groupings and were often surrounded by a bed or edging (Figure 8.19).



Figure 8.19: Crepe Myrtle with Surrounding Azaleas and Liriope (Photo by author)

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<sup>151</sup> Frank B. Golley. "Piedmont." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, June 28, 2004, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2126> (accessed January 28, 2012).



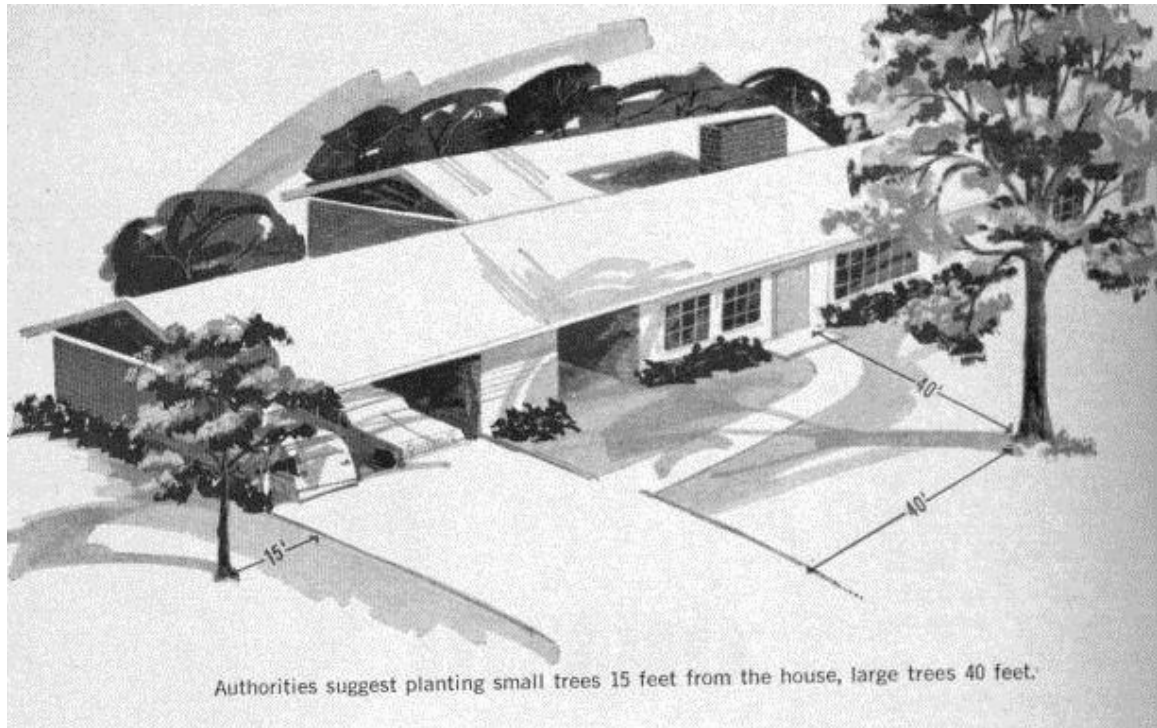


Figure 8.20: Typical arrangement of specimen trees and other front yard features (Source: *Southern Living*, February 1966, p.74)

Second in significance only to the lawn, foundation plantings were the backbone of the 1960s yard in DeKalb County. They anchored and provided structure for the rest of the curvilinear and Picturesque landscape. Foundation plantings lent a traditional and formal character to the yard. Their prominence in front yards throughout the study areas illustrates the desire of many southern homeowners to maintain elements of traditional landscape design. The plants hid uneven or unsightly foundations from view while also reducing erosion and splash back. Foundation plantings also framed and accentuated the house. Taller specimens were planted at the corners and beside the front entrance. Lower shrubs were appropriate along the length of the façade where they would not block the windows (Figure 8.21). Plants used in these applications were usually evergreens. Bare branches during winter would not do well to frame and shape the landscape.



Figure 8.21: Foundation Plantings in Surrey Place Subdivision (Photo by author)

Hollies and boxwoods were most widely used as foundation plantings in DeKalb's 1960s subdivisions. *Southern Living* magazine claimed that "hollies [were] the most important plant group used in Southern landscape plantings."<sup>152</sup> Both hollies and boxwoods featured dense, compact forms and attractive evergreen leaves. They were both also frequently pruned into round or rectangular shapes. Nandina and juniper were also popular foundation plantings. Yucca was popular in more rustic or contemporary landscape designs. Aucuba was one of the trendiest plants during the 1960s. Magazines regularly promoted them because of their large, shiny, colorful leaves (Figure 8.23). Their ability to thrive in the shade made them ideal for 1960s DeKalb subdivisions full of mature trees. Liriope was another plant commonly employed as a low foundation planting (Figure 8.22). This hardy perennial was regularly planted in a row in front of taller foundation plantings or used as edging along beds and walkways. All of these

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<sup>152</sup> "More Hollies To Brighten Your Garden." *Southern Living*. December 1967. 38.

plants had low-maintenance and visually attractive qualities that continually made them the most popular foundation plants in DeKalb County.

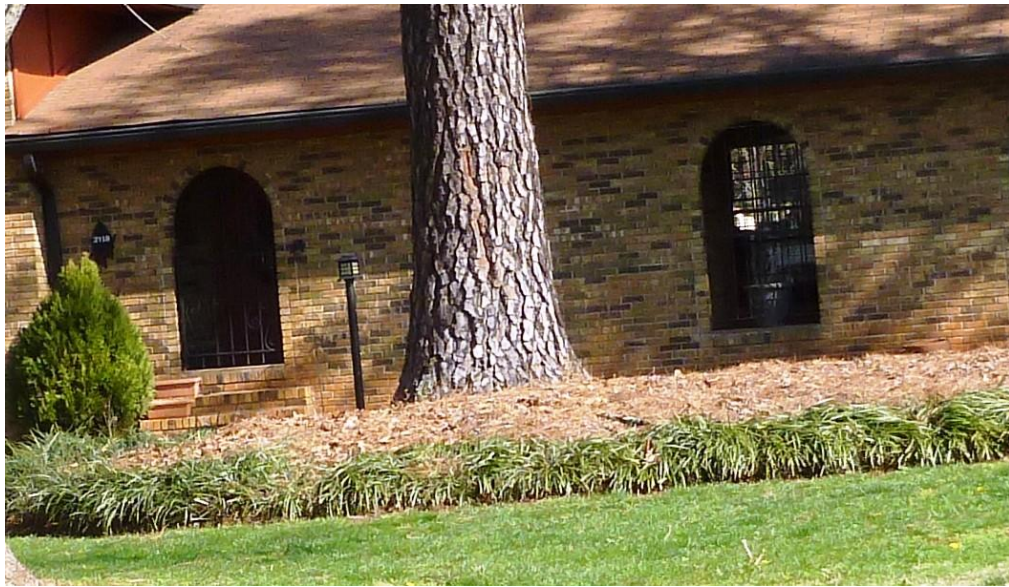


Figure 8.22: Liriope in Churchill Downs Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 8.23: Aucuba was a popular shrub in the 1960s DeKalb landscaping (Source: *Southern Living*, April 1966, p.68)



Flower and plant beds were described as the “sparkling jewels that trim the landscape picture.”<sup>153</sup> Gone were the tentative, angular beds of immediate post-War landscaping. Landscape trends of the 1960s encouraged excess and lushness. Sweeping beds imitated a natural landscape while their curvilinear form was drawn from Picturesque principles (Figure 8.24). Bold and colorful groupings within the beds, however, gave structure and drama. Beds were often located along the borders of permanent landscape features such as patios, fences, trees and mailboxes. They were sometimes freestanding, but this arrangement usually required the inclusion of a larger specimen or feature anchor it within the larger landscape.

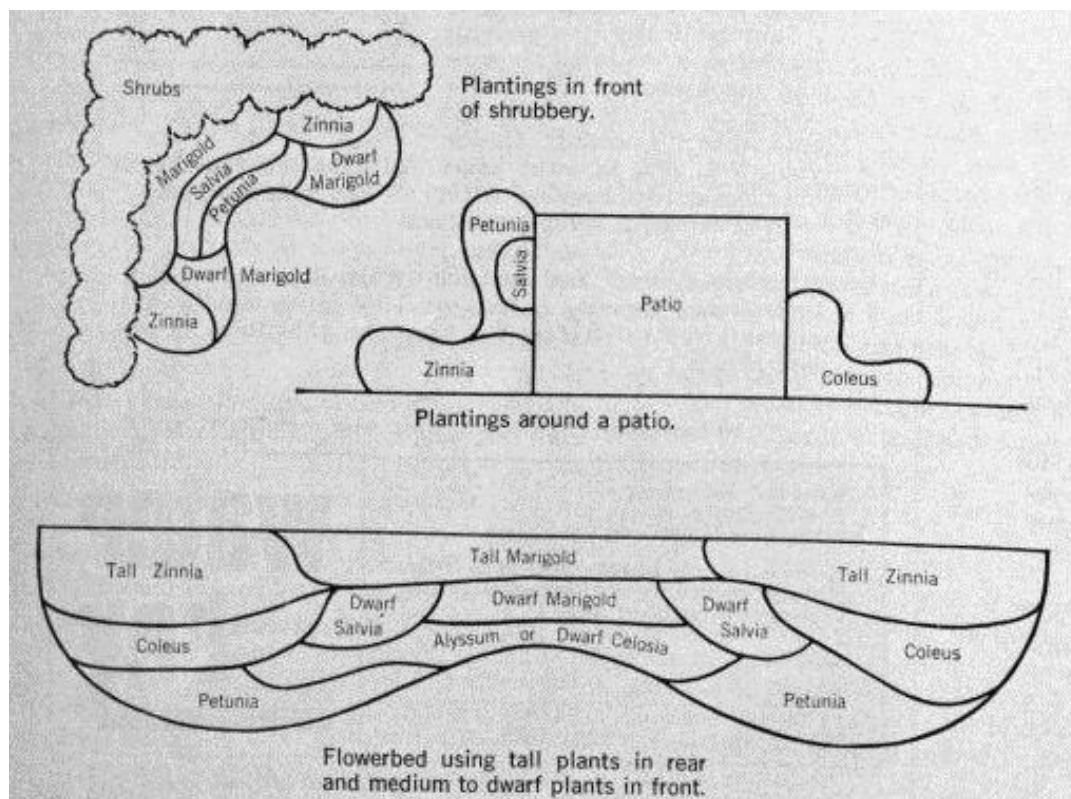


Figure 8.24: Typical Flower Bed Arrangement (Source: *Southern Living*, February May 1966, p.62)

<sup>153</sup> “Planning and Planting To Extend Your Color Show.” *Southern Living*. April 1968. 94.

The most basic beds could still providing visual interest by utilizing low-maintenance plants within it. This approach was frequently used in beds on sloping parts of lots. English ivy was most frequently used but liriop and mondo grass were also popular. These plants required little effort on the part of the homeowner and resulted in dense, uniform coverage within the bed. A wide variety of flowering annuals and perennials were used in beds in DeKalb County's 1960s neighborhoods. Roses were a classic favorite of homeowners and in magazines, but required a higher level of maintenance. Lower maintenance plants were far more common. For example, azaleas were a traditional southern plant widely used throughout the study areas. *Southern Living* even asserted that "no yard should be without them."<sup>154</sup> These medium sized shrubs produced profusions of colorful blooms in the spring and were usually grouped together in beds for more impact (Figure 8.25). They were frequently planted beneath pine trees to take advantage of the filtered sunlight they thrived in but could also be found in masses where they bordered or defined the lawn.



Figure 8.25:  
"Azaleas!  
Glory of the  
Landscape,"  
*Southern  
Living  
Magazine*,  
March 1968,  
p.34

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<sup>154</sup> "Azaleas! Glory of the Landscape." *Southern Living*. March 1968. 34.

Daylilies were another flowering plant frequently used in beds throughout DeKalb. The June 1967 issue of *Southern Living* magazine included an article claiming that daylilies had “become one of the most popular perennials in the South” in recent years.<sup>155</sup> Whereas daylilies needed to be planted in beds receiving large amounts of sunlight, caladiums were a popular option for shadier beds (Figure 8.26). These dramatic plants were popular in the ‘60s because of their large, ornamental leaves that featured bold patterns of red, pink, white and green. All of these plants were commonly planted in yards throughout the 1960s in DeKalb County, but many other flowering plants were also employed in beds. Magazines and periodicals provide good indicators of popular plants of the time, but the changeable nature of many flower beds means that few beds in DeKalb’s suburban yards today are original to the study period. Fortunately, landscape trends established in DeKalb in the ‘60s are still currently followed in these neighborhoods to a large degree.



Figure 8.26: Flagstone path in front of liriope, caladiums, and hollies (Source: *Southern Living*, June 1967, p.65)

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<sup>155</sup> “Day Lilies: Beautiful But Tough.” *Southern Living*. June 1967. 60.

## **Overall Trends**

Residential yards in DeKalb County's 1960s subdivisions are significant because of the larger themes they reflect. The culture of change and the shift from traditional to contemporary throughout the decade can be seen in DeKalb's suburban landscapes. Some ideas in landscape design remain grounded in historical precedent. The increasing cultural experimentation and excess, however, also manifested itself in the design of the yard.

Landscape design during the 1960s in DeKalb's subdivisions was still heavily influenced by the FHA standards and a preference for the Garden City model. Curved lines and Picturesque forms were still considered to be the most aesthetically pleasing arrangement. In DeKalb County, value placed on the past and tradition resulted in a more structured arrangement around which more naturalistic elements could exist. As the decade progressed, however, an increasing number of homeowners embraced more dramatic design schemes. The National Register Bulletin on Historic Residential Suburbs attests that the landscape features of the later post-World War II period were often "arranged to form abstract geometrical patterns [that] reinforced the horizontal and vertical planes of the modern suburban house."<sup>156</sup> This supports the idea that similar trends in popular culture, such as modern designs, were influential on landscape design as well. While it was progressive to experiment with trendy geometric forms, landscapes more easily lent themselves to experimentation with naturalistic elements. Natural colors, textures and materials became increasingly popular in designs throughout the '60s as people adopted a "back-to-basics" approach in the face of social and political turmoil.

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<sup>156</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

The use of natural, rough wood, stones and rocks, and other rustic materials became increasingly common in landscape design.

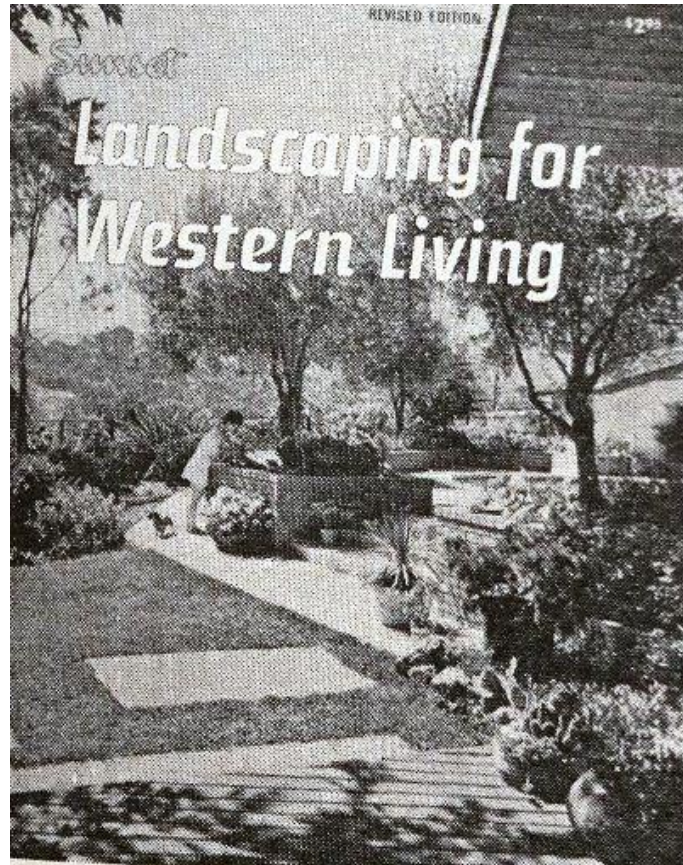


Figure 8.27 Advertisement for Western Landscaping in *Sunset* Magazine, 1967

The popularity of exotic designs during the 1960s was easily incorporated into the larger trend of natural, rustic designs. Landscape elements from the Southwest and Old West were both traditional and contemporary (Figure 8.27). Westerns had long been popular for their support of traditional values and simple way of life, but the plants and hardscapes used in these designs were often stark, bold, and geometric. Both popular magazines and yards in the study areas sometimes featured cacti, yucca, gravel, rocks, etc. (Figure 8.28)



Figure 8.28: Cacti in front of a house in Churchill Downs Subdivision (Photo by author)

While the popularity of western motifs had been established by the beginning of the '60s, Far East designs emphasizing tranquility and the use of simple, quiet materials gained popularity in the later years of the decade (Figure 8.30). The ideal of the yard being a protected oasis for the family's enjoyment and relaxation was readily supported by Far East-inspired landscape design. Magazines promoted the use of Eastern aesthetics through the use of bonsais, bamboo, water features, and an overall "quietness" of design (Figure 8.29). Small Japanese maples and stands of bamboo, particularly near low-lying areas, are featured in DeKalb's 1960s subdivisions.





Figure 8.29: Asian-Inspired Garden in *Southern Living Magazine*, October 1966, p.144

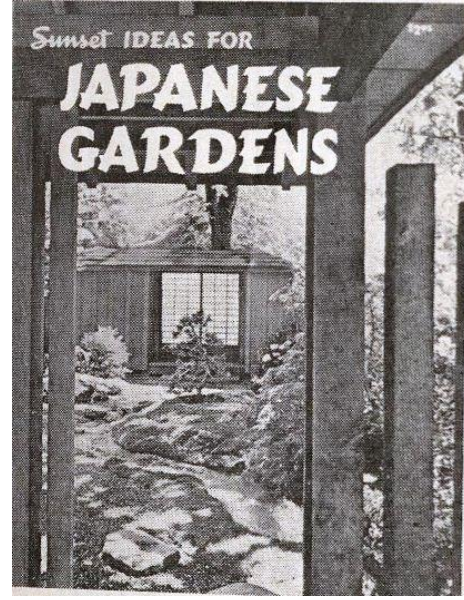


Figure 8.30: Japanese Gardens Advertisement in *Sunset Magazine*, 1967

Supporting, but independent from, naturalistic and exotic landscape designs was the growing popularity of informal landscaping and design. The idea of unpretentious, relaxed domestic settings arose out of an increasing desire for serenity and peace at home. Intimate, casual settings were thought to better support a healthy, happy family. In the South and DeKalb, this led to an increased stratification of zones within the suburban yard. The front yard, as the public face of the property, retained a traditional, structured appearance. The back yard became a zone for experimenting with more dramatic and less formal landscaping designs. The prevalence of these zones furthered the trend of the back yard being a place for casual outdoor living and the front yard serving to frame and display the house.

Ultimately, the increased personal wealth and leisure time enjoyed by families in DeKalb County's 1960s suburbs meant that they had the time and resources to turn their



yards into personal oases reflecting their ideals and values. Preferences influenced by larger design trends shaped the yard into a defining feature in 1960s subdivisions in DeKalb County.

## CHAPTER 9

### COMMON DEKALB COUNTY HOUSE FORMS

#### **Architecture Overview**

The architecture in DeKalb County's 1960s subdivisions, while unique in many ways, was also a product of building practices established in the preceding decades. Firstly, building methods had been honed to allow for highly efficient home construction during the '60s. The standardization, mass production and prefabrication of building components allowed houses to be built quickly and easily. The widespread use of the platform-framing method – characterized by a lightweight frame that could be erected quickly, inexpensively and “with fewer and less experienced workers,” – increased this efficiency.<sup>157</sup> Also, lower construction costs, combined with increased national wealth, allowed for bigger, better houses to be built in DeKalb's suburbs in the 1960s.

Few houses built in DeKalb County's suburban neighborhoods during the 1960s were designed by architects. Instead, they tended to be adaptations of popular high-style designs. While it was primarily builders who controlled housing forms and styles, during the 1960s they had nearly perfected the formula for successful suburban houses. Builders largely recognized that homebuyers during the 1960s wanted, and could afford, a larger, higher quality house that did not have the mass-produced look of earlier designs.<sup>158</sup>

Builders reflected these preferences by creating houses made with higher quality building

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<sup>157</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

<sup>158</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 169.

materials and with more distinctive stylistic elements. House plans that emphasized privacy, efficiency and ample space were also desired by buyers and provided by builders. Well planned, stylistically detailed houses were more available in the '60s in DeKalb than in any other time during the post-War era.

### **Ranch House**

“DeKalb County, in the Atlanta metropolitan area, was the epicenter of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Ranch House development in Georgia.”<sup>159</sup> The Ranch House is also the primary house form associated with 1960s suburban architecture in DeKalb County, Georgia. Although strongly influenced by rural homesteads of the American West and Southwest, the Ranch House also draws heavily from the Prairie Style, Modern/International Styles, and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonian House.<sup>160 161</sup> Cliff May was responsible for initially popularizing the Ranch House as a suburban residential housing form in the western regions of the United States. United States popular culture was “brimming with the myth of the West in the 1930s and 1940s,” providing the ideal climate for the dissemination of the Ranch House form.<sup>162</sup> Builders began mimicking architect-designed Ranch houses and adapting them to the larger market through the inclusion of sliding glass doors, picture windows, carports and popular stylistic elements. As their popularity grew, the FHA adapted their minimal house to include Ranch House design elements in the 1940s. The role of builders in Ranch House design and construction continued to grow along

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<sup>159</sup> Richard Cloues. "The Georgia Ranch House Initiative: Mid-20th Century Ranch Houses in Georgia." Georgia Department of natural Resources: Historic Preservation Division. [http://hpd-test.gadnr.org/sites/uploads/hpd/pdf/ranch\\_house\\_initiative.pdf](http://hpd-test.gadnr.org/sites/uploads/hpd/pdf/ranch_house_initiative.pdf) (accessed January 10, 2012). 42.

<sup>160</sup> Alan Hess. *Ranch House*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005. 11.

<sup>161</sup> Friedman, “Evolution of Design Characteristics,” 132.

<sup>162</sup> Hess, *Ranch House*, 27.

with the popularity of tract housing and subdivision development. By the 1950s, the architect's role in the process had largely ended.<sup>163</sup>

1950s Ranch houses are iconic. They had evolved from architect-designed homes or adapted minimal houses into a unique form that dominated new subdivisions. Ranch houses grew in size throughout the 1950s, reflecting Americans' increasing prosperity. They assumed the typically long, low and rambling forms they are usually characterized by and offered increasing levels of privacy and space. The Ranch House was largely defined by its merger with the outdoors through the use of large glass windows and doors onto patios and decks. These design elements were influenced by and contributed to the nation's fascination with the perceived informal and rustic lifestyle of the American West and their search for a homestead in nature.<sup>164</sup>

The obsession with the West in the 1950s and much of the '60s resulted in Ranch houses that often included rustic or traditional designs (Figure 9.1). As the '60s progressed, however, the Ranch House form drew from and blended with the Contemporary House (Figure 9.2). Also influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright along with Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Richard J. Neutra, Mies van der Rohe, and other modernists, this Ranch House form included new or heightened designs (Figure 9.3). The popularity of Joseph Eichler's designs heavily influenced contemporary house designs of the 1960s in DeKalb as well.<sup>165</sup> Elements associated with the Contemporary House were cantilevered forms, glass curtain walls, and post-and-beam construction.

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<sup>163</sup> Hess, *Ranch House*, 17.

<sup>164</sup> Hess, *Ranch House*, 11.

<sup>165</sup> Richard Cloues. "The Ordinary Iconic Ranch House: Mid-20th Century Ranch Houses in Georgia." Georgia Department of Natural Resources: Historic Preservation Division. [http://hpd-test.gadnr.org/sites/uploads/hpd/pdf/Ranch House in Georgia FINAL PDF.pdf](http://hpd-test.gadnr.org/sites/uploads/hpd/pdf/Ranch%20House%20in%20Georgia%20FINAL%20PDF.pdf) (accessed January 10, 2012). III-51.

Ranch houses absorbed these elements and merged with the form. Contemporary Ranch houses of the later 1960s featured increased indoor/outdoor living, flowing spaces and transparent walls.<sup>166</sup> The popularity of these designs signals a shift in Americans' preference for traditional forms to their embrace of more progressive aesthetics.



Figure 9.1: Traditional Ranch in Hebron Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 9.2: Blending Traditional designs with Contemporary elements in Laurelwood Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 9.3: Contemporary Ranch in Shenandoah Subdivision (Photo by author)

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<sup>166</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

## *Massing and Construction*

Ranch houses are primarily defined by their horizontally oriented, long, low forms. They are comprised of one or more rectangular sections that orient the house towards the street. Ranch houses are characterized by a general asymmetry but many of their façades are symmetrical in DeKalb County. Their one-story forms are topped by a low-pitched, gabled or hipped roof with wide eaves. Ranch houses sought to merge with the surrounding landscape through the use outdoor decks and patios. Increased use of large glass windows and sliding glass doors was a popular way to achieve this goal as well. *The Community Builders Handbook* stated that “a big window-wall opening the house to the outdoor area is the cheapest living space that can be added.”<sup>167</sup> (Figure 9.4)

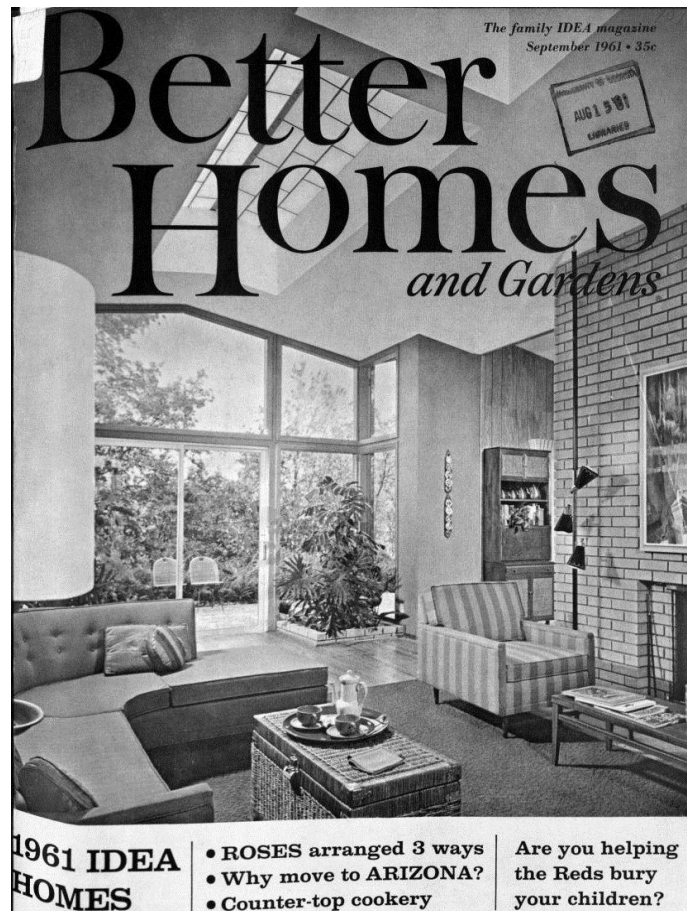


Figure 9.4:  
Glass  
window  
wall on the  
cover of  
*Better  
Homes &  
Gardens*  
(September  
1961)

<sup>167</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 171.



Larger glass expanses in exterior walls meant that house orientation and roof overhangs had to be more carefully accounted for. Large windows with western exposure needed wider eaves than did other orientations. Other windows came in a variety of shapes, sizes and types. Front porches did not project far from the house or seek to integrate the outdoors with the indoors. Garages and carports were usually attached to the main house. Both their traditional and contemporary forms utilized rustic or naturalistic designs that seek to integrate the house and the landscape.<sup>168</sup> The Ranch House form exudes an overall simplicity that is supported by its individual design components.

Ranch houses were built utilizing wood frames with applied veneers or cladding. Platform framing and slab-on-grade were the most frequently utilized construction methods but post-and-beam construction was sometimes used for Contemporary Ranches. The increasing quality and affordability of dimensioned lumber, building materials and prefabricated parts allowed for better and easier construction than had previously been possible.<sup>169</sup> Roof types vary among DeKalb's Ranch houses, but always have low-pitches and moderate to wide eaves. "A typical Ranch roof pitch ranges from around 25° (a 5.6-over-12 slope, in builder's terminology) to around 32° (a 7.5-over-12 slope)." <sup>170</sup> Gabled roofs were most common in the study areas, but Contemporary Ranches sometimes had flat, shed or butterfly roofs. Asphalt shingles were the most common roofing material. Attics are not large in Ranch houses, if they are present at all.

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<sup>168</sup> Hess, *Ranch House*, 17.

<sup>169</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 170.

<sup>170</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 701.

Some ceilings, especially in the living areas of later Ranch houses, were vaulted to be flush with the roof.<sup>171</sup>

DeKalb County's Ranch houses were often adapted to the site on which they were built. The hilly terrain builders often encountered was not conducive to the sprawling, single-story form popularized in the West. For this reason, full and partial basements are common additions to the Ranch House form in DeKalb. If the terrain sloped sideways, a partial basement would be built on one side of the house (Figure 9.5). In these instances, the basement was sometimes not finished and used as a carport or garage. If the ground fell away toward the back of the lot, full basements were built on the back side of the house.<sup>172</sup>



Figure 9.5: Side Basement on Sloping Lot in Flair Forest Subdivision (Photo by author)

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<sup>171</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 69.

<sup>172</sup> Burton, "Single-Family Residential Development," 72.

### ***Floor Plan and Interior Organization***

Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian House, with its central living areas and radiation of other rooms into the landscape, provided the historical model for Ranch House organization.<sup>173</sup> The defining feature of the interior space of a Ranch House, however, was the use of zoned spaces (Figure 9.6). While circulation was important throughout the rooms and the outdoors, separation of uses between different rooms was stressed. The rise of zoned spaces within the home can be attributed to the introduction of phonographs, radio and television. Heightened noise levels in the house created the need for separation of activities and quiet areas.<sup>174</sup>

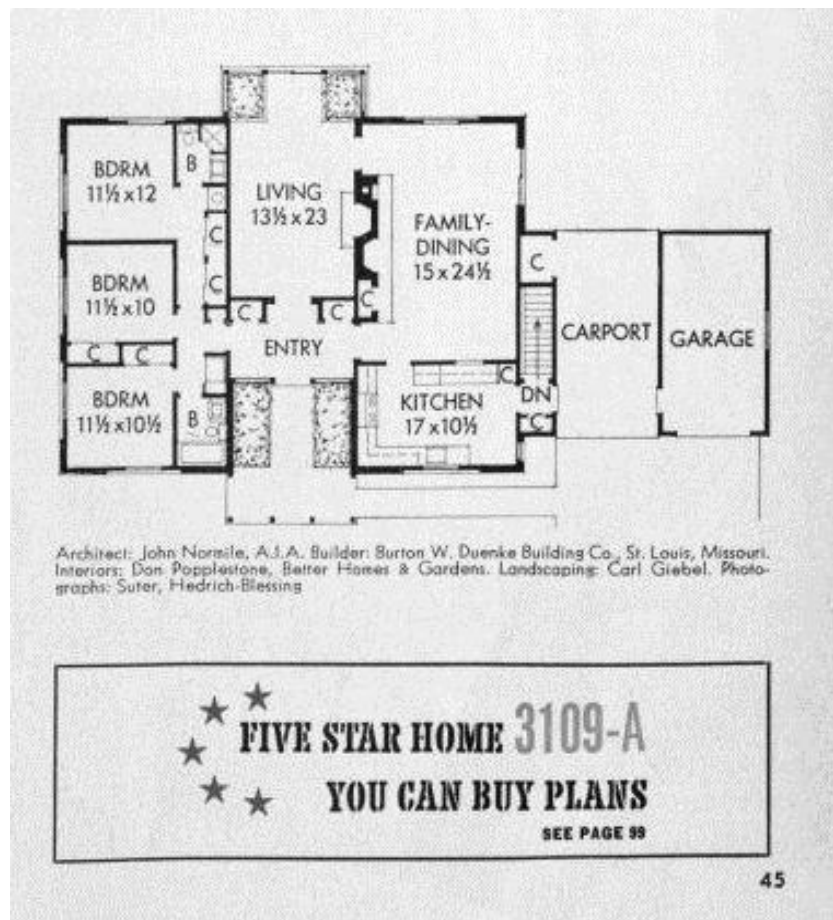


Figure 9.6:  
Zoned  
Floor Plan  
in a Ranch  
House  
with front  
entry  
courtyard  
(Source:  
*Better  
Homes &  
Gardens*,  
September  
1961,  
p.45)

<sup>173</sup> Barbara L. Allen. "The Ranch-Style House in America: A Cultural and Environmental Discourse." *Journal of Architectural Education* 49-3 (1996): 159.

<sup>174</sup> Ames and McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs*.

The family room became the central living area intended for casual, all-purpose living. This room was often integrated with the kitchen or other informal areas.<sup>175</sup> Kitchens, bathrooms and other utility areas were often grouped together within the plan to facilitate an efficient plumbing arrangement. The number of bathrooms increased as well. Formal living rooms and dining rooms were separated from these spaces and were usually in the front half of the house. The family room was usually located at the rear of the house for easy integration with the backyard living space through the use of sliding glass doors and window walls. Formal living areas at the front of the house and casual ones at the back correlated with the outdoor zones (Figure 9.7). Bedrooms were frequently sequestered together at one end of the house to maintain their quiet, private nature.<sup>176</sup>

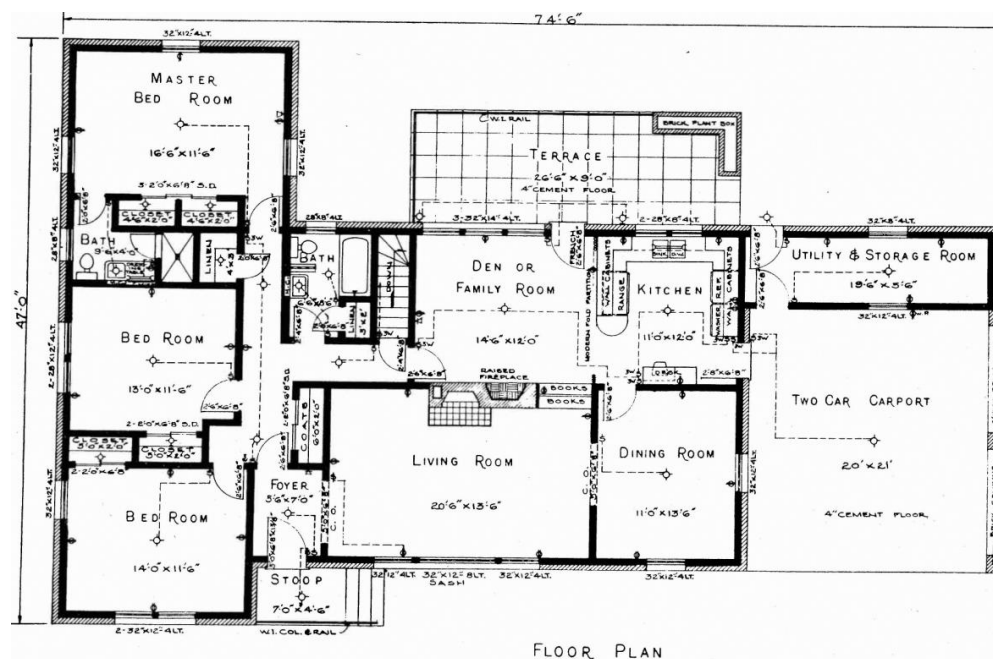


Figure 9.7: Zoned floor plan (Source: Home Builder's Plan Service, *Designs for Better Living*, 12<sup>th</sup> edition) (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)

<sup>175</sup> Norris. *Architecture for Contemporary Living*.

<sup>176</sup> *The Community Builders Handbook*, 173.

The contemporary trend in home design that increased throughout the 1960s in DeKalb and elsewhere resulted in slight modifications to the typical Ranch floor plan. More rooms began to have access to back patios and the outdoors, while interior rooms became less divided from each other (Figure 9.8). Screens and partition walls were used with increasing frequency to define spaces without closing them off. Ceilings became higher, too, and utilized techniques such as vaulting to create more open space indoors.

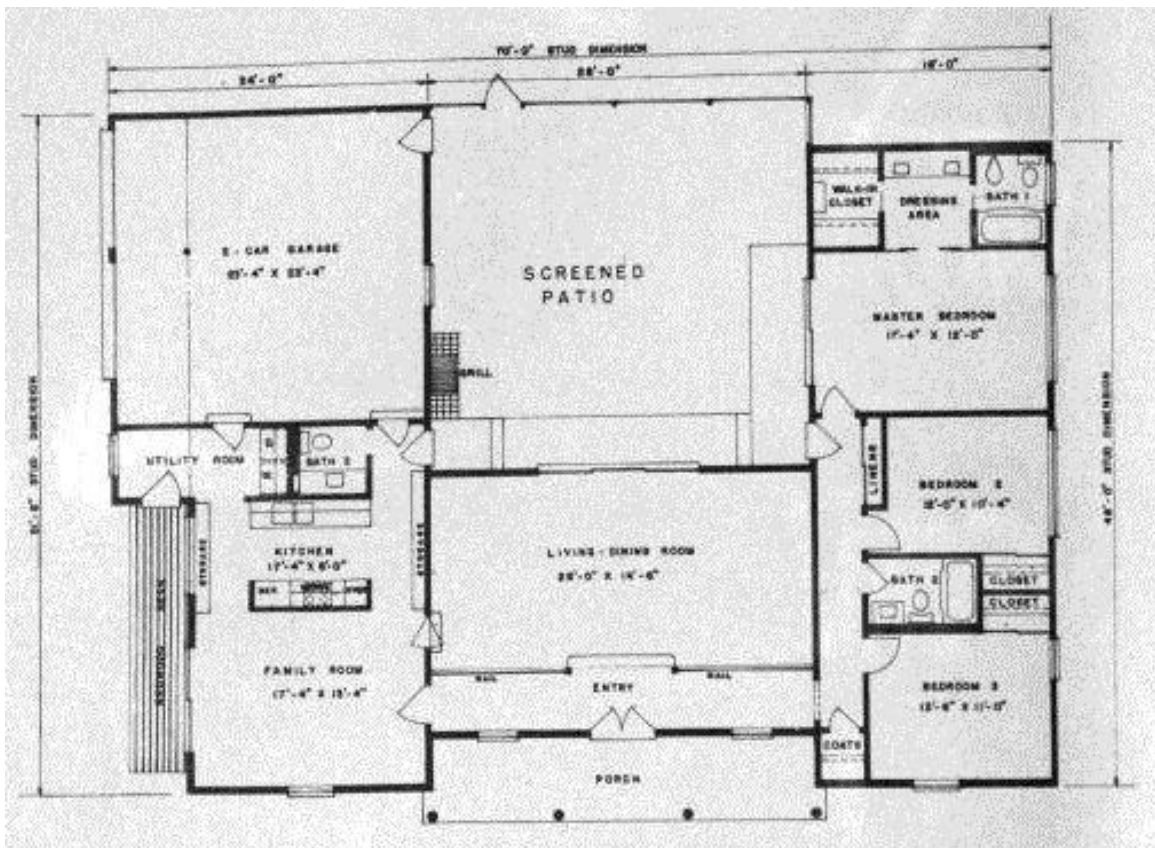


Figure 9.8: Contemporary floor plan with more open living spaces and integrated indoor/outdoor living (Source: Norris, *Architecture for Contemporary Living*)

Although often thought of as having a purely linear form, the Ranch house can be arranged in a variety of ways. If linear in form, Ranch houses are usually two rooms deep and form a single rectangle. Rooms lead directly into each other without a strong

hallway. Ranch houses, too, may be arranged in L, T or U floor plans.<sup>177</sup> The attached garage or carport is frequently the front projection creating the L shape. U floor plans are conducive to popular front or back courtyards. Finally, some Ranch houses arrange all rooms in a tighter cluster with no clear form. This occurred in DeKalb in the 1960s because of increased affluence, maturing families, and the desire for larger houses. With this arrangement, the façade generally still imparts a sense of the horizontality associated with the Ranch House form.

### **Split-Level House**

An increasingly popular housing form in DeKalb in the 1960s was the Split-Level House. Regularly featured in magazines and plan books, the Split-Level became a favorite form of both builders and buyers. The Split-Level House form is characterized as a separate from the Ranch, but they share many similarities. Heavily influenced by its predecessor, the Split-Level could be categorized as a “Ranch-and-a-Half.” It evolved during the 1960s from earlier high-style models as the most efficient way to encompass highly zoned areas within the house while easily adapting to DeKalb’s rolling terrain.<sup>178</sup> Split-Levels also were able to accommodate larger square footages than Ranches. For example, a 50-foot-long Ranch House on a 70-foot-wide lot provided about 1,300 square feet of living space. A Split-Level House of the same length on the same width lot could provide an additional 300 square feet of living space.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Burns, “Atlanta Housing,” 75-77.

<sup>178</sup> Friedman, “Evolution of Design Characteristics,” 141.

<sup>179</sup> Cloues, *Ordinary Iconic Ranch*, IV-80.



### ***Massing and Construction***

Split-Levels in DeKalb have either two or three levels. Two-level forms feature one main floor and a partial second story on top of one end. Three-level forms feature a two story cluster on one end and a single story projection on the other that bisects the cluster. It is not uncommon for the upper level of the two-story cluster to be cantilevered approximately one foot over the lower story. Split-Levels could feature a prominent main floor, a prominent two-story cluster, or a main floor proportional with the cluster.<sup>180</sup> The main front entry is usually located on the single-story portion near the middle of the façade. Windows are typically oriented horizontally on the two-story side and either horizontally or vertically on the one-story projection (Figure 9.9).



Figure 9.9: Split-Level House in Imperial Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)

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<sup>180</sup> Cloues, Richard. *Mid-20th Century Split-Level Houses in Georgia*. Georgia Department of Natural Resources: Historic Preservation Division, 2012.

Split-Levels feature similar framing methods as Ranches and frequently utilized mixed materials in their veneers or cladding. They are most commonly clad in brick on the lower levels and clapboard or similar materials on the upper level. Split-Level House roofs in DeKalb are usually side gabled on the one-story portion and either front gabled or hipped on the two-story portion. They are occasionally side gabled across the entire structure. A variation common across the study areas is the faux-gambrel roof. This variation is characterized by a front gable on the upper level that is “clipped” at the edges by decorative beams (Figure 9.10). Mansard roofs were also occasionally encountered on the upper level of Split-Levels in the study areas.



Figure 9.10: Mixed Materials and Faux-Gambrel Roof in Emerald North Subdivision  
(Photo by author)

### ***Floor Plan and Interior Organization***

Split-Level and Ranch houses were arranged similarly. Split-Levels, however, allowed for increased zoning of uses between the areas in the house. Split-Levels were

“based on the concept that the house needs three different types of space: quiet space, noisy and service space, and sleeping areas.”<sup>181</sup>

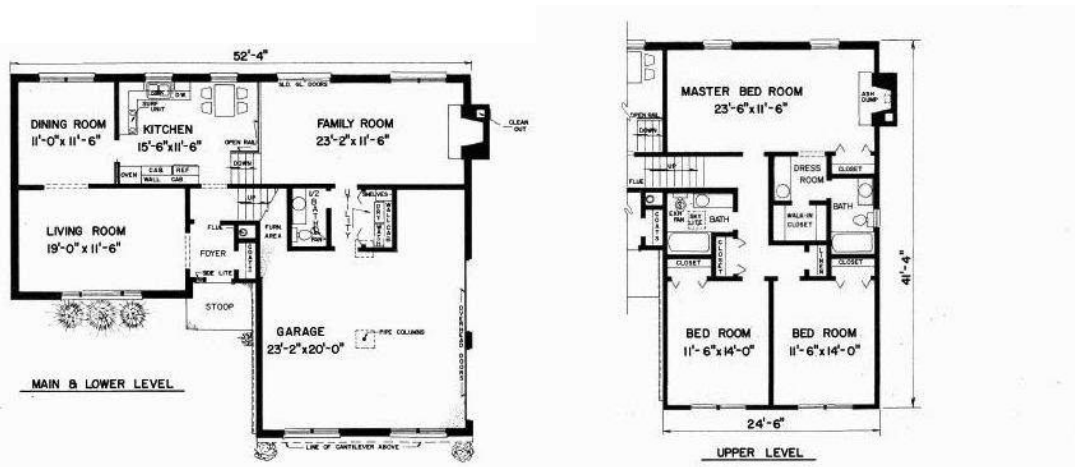


Figure 9.11: Split-Level floor plan (Source: W.D. Farmer, *Homes for Pleasant Living: Home Plans of All Kinds – Stock and Custom Designs*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, p.5) (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)

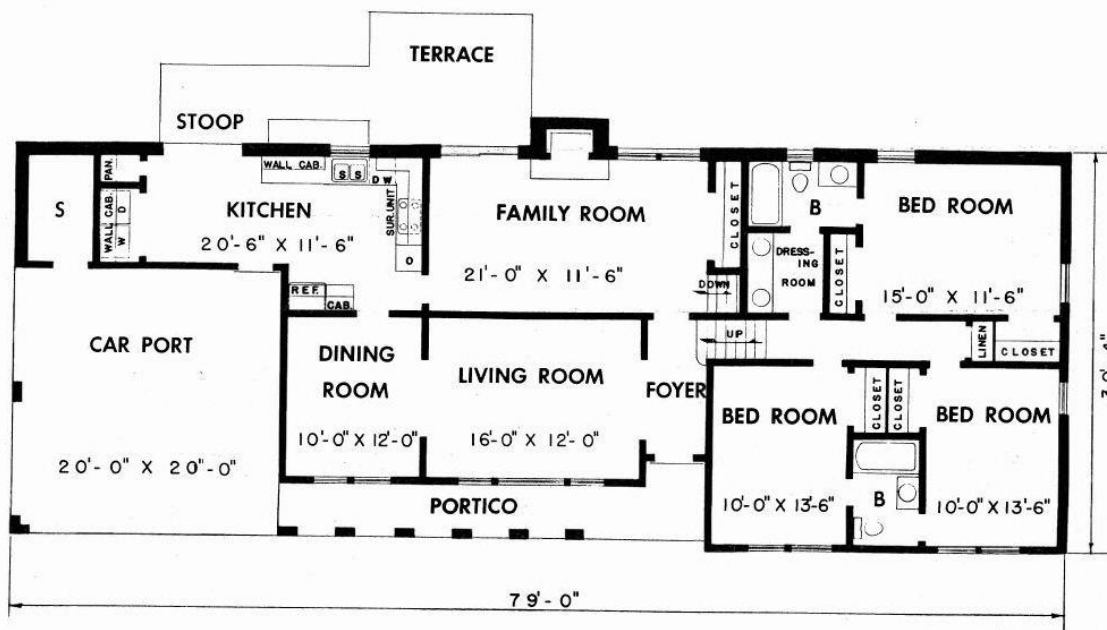


Figure 9.12 Split-Level floor plan with lower level below the bedrooms left unfinished by designer (Source: Home Builder’s Plan Service, *Designs for Better Living*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition) (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)

<sup>181</sup> Burns, “Atlanta Housing,” 80.

The main floor usually housed the living room, dining room and kitchen. The upper half-story almost always held bedrooms and private bathrooms. The lower half-story usually held a family, recreational, or bonus room but could also house a garage or extra bedrooms.<sup>182</sup> The location of the bedrooms on a different level, in particular, created a perceived distance between the public and private areas of the house.<sup>183</sup> The different levels were connected by half-flights of stairs. Preferences for informal living, or, at least, separation of formal and informal living, were fully supported by the Split-Level plan.

### **Two-Story House**

Just as the Split-Level is a “Ranch-and-a-Half,” the Two-Story House form of the 1960s is essentially a Double Ranch. Zoning and efficiency are still the dominant design concerns, resulting in what could be a large Ranch House folded in half on top of itself. This housing form evolved as families grew and matured and needed more living space. Increased prosperity in families also allowed for larger house forms to emerge.

### ***Massing and Construction***

The Two-Story House in DeKalb County consists of a main living block and a single-story attached garage (Figure 9.13). Wooden platform framing was the most common construction method. The second-story was sometimes slightly cantilevered over the first-story (Figure 9.14). Solid veneers of brick or wood cladding are common, as is use of mixed materials. Two-Story House roofs in the study area are almost exclusively side gabled. Mansard roofs were occasionally observed. This house form

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<sup>182</sup> Richard Cloues. “...And the first runner-up is: the split-level house.” - *Mid-20th Century Split-Level Houses*. Georgia Department of Natural Resources: Historic Preservation Division, 2012.

<sup>183</sup> Friedman, “Evolution of Design Characteristics,” 141.



tends to be more formal and symmetrical than Ranches or Split-Levels, and tends to incorporate traditional design elements more frequently (Figure 9.15).



Figure 9.13: Two-Story House in Laurelwood Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 9.14: Two-Story House in Huntley Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 9.15: Two Story House in Laurelwood Subdivision (Photo by author)

### ***Floor Plan and Interior Organization***

Although still usually two rooms deep, Two-Story houses tend to be more formally arranged than Ranches or Split-Levels. Centrally located front entrances often lead into formal hallways or foyers. As in Ranch houses, formal or “quiet” living areas tend to be located in the front half of the first-story while family and utility areas are in the back. Private bedrooms and bathrooms sequestered in the second-story were usually accessed by a central main staircase. The box-like massing of the house dictated that the rooms be organized into a more ordered arrangement than in rambling Ranches.



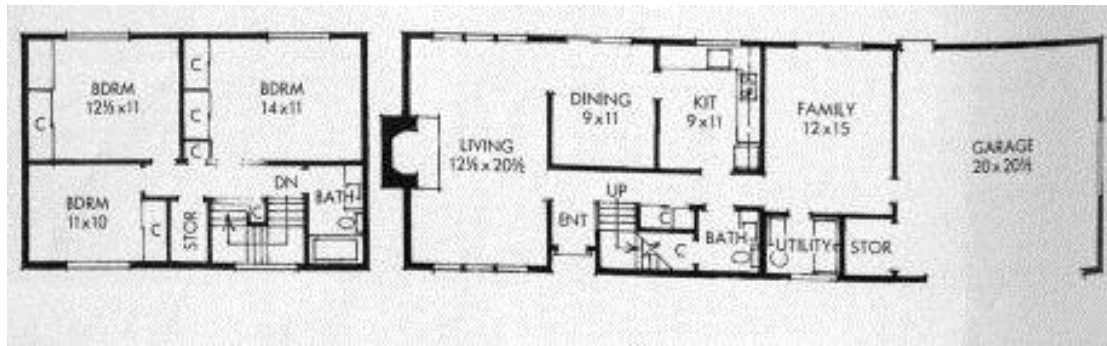


Figure 9.16: Two Story Floor Plan (Source: *Better Homes & Gardens*, June 1963, p.52)

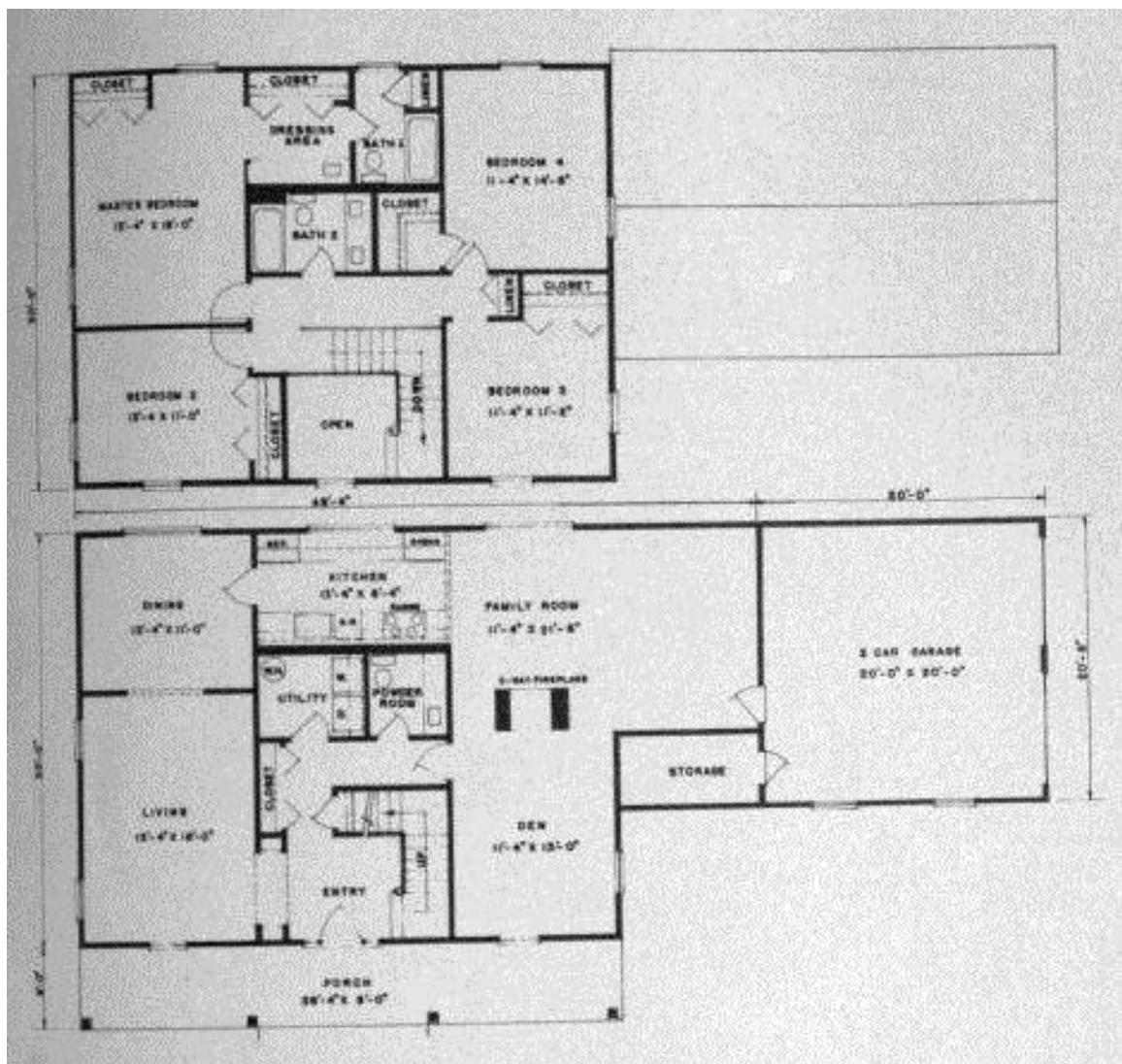


Figure 9.17: Two-Story floor plan with highly regular arrangement (Source: Norris, *Architecture for Contemporary Living*)

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **COMMON DEKALB COUNTY HOUSE STYLES**

DeKalb County, Georgia subdivisions from the 1960s contain three main house forms: Ranch, Split-Level, and Two-Story. Beyond these basic forms, however, are a variety of applied styles. A dominant trend in DeKalb in the 1960s was the increased stylishness of and ornamentation applied to homes than in previous decades. These styles reflect general design trends as well as the aesthetic preferences of DeKalb home buyers. The most popular house styles of the time observed in the study areas fall into two categories:

*Traditional Styles:* Mid-Century Traditional, Neo-Colonial Revival, Neo-Tudor

*Contemporary Styles:* Contemporary Ranch, Neo-Mediterranean and Far East

The categorization of DeKalb's popular styles into these two categories is reinforced by terminology used in period publications. While contemporary styles seem to have been most popular in the last half of the '60s, traditional house styles continued to be popular throughout the study period. The rise in popularity of contemporary aesthetics reflects the growing appreciation of change and experimentation among middle-class homeowners. Simplicity and a return to nature were also important values associated with the rise in this trend. Traditional styles, however, remained popular. While the volatile nature of the 1960s prompted people everywhere to cling to safe and familiar things, the South was more prone to uphold the establishment.

## **Mid-Century Traditional**

Mid-Century Traditional style began with a plainer interpretation in 1950s that continued throughout the 1960s because of its timeless aesthetics and financial efficiency. This style was largely defined by the larger form and drew from the minimalistic house designs from the earlier post-World War II years. Dominant features include a long, low form, low-pitched roof with overhanging eaves, and rectangular windows with few panes. The façade could be either symmetrical or asymmetrical. Richard Cloues, of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Historic Preservation Division, defines the most spartan of these as falling into the “Plain Ranch” style. Houses of this style usually possessed a red brick veneer with no stylistic elements. In the study areas of DeKalb, it was much more common to find plainer Mid-Century Traditional Styles that featured non-working window shutters and decorative ironwork on the porch railings and supports. Ironwork usually possessed an organic vine design but in later years sometimes became more geometric. When applied to the Split-Level form, Mid-Century Traditional Style included a clapboard upper story in addition to brick cladding on the bottom.



Figure 10.1: Mid-Century Traditional Ranch House with non-working shutters and decorative ironwork in Hebron Hills (Photo by the author)



Figure 10.2: Mid-Century Traditional Style with clapboard upper level and minimal ironwork applied to the Split-Level Form in Shenandoah (Photo by the author)

In addition to the plainer interpretation of Mid-Century Traditional style, many houses also included rustic ornamentation. This was largely influenced by the designs of the previous decade and the popularity of Western motifs. It contributed to a traditional and casual home aesthetic- two characteristics appreciated by many during the '60s. The rustic air of this home style was lent primarily through the use of natural materials. Rustic ornamentation often observed on Mid-Century Traditional houses in the study areas included board and batten siding, field and flagstone veneers, cross-tie patterns on porches and doors, turned porch supports, diamond paned glass, and lanterns. The fascia board on the porch overhang often dipped down to meet turned or squared porch supports, creating a gentle scalloped pattern along the top of the porch. Red brick still a popular cladding material, but rougher forms of it along with other rusticated types of masonry were used as well. A rustic or casual air was often imparted through the use of bricks of varying shades. Windows were shuttered and often multi-paned. On the Split-Level form, windows were often vertically oriented on the main floor/block of the house and horizontally oriented on projections or clusters. Front doors were usually centrally located and feature an outer screened door with wood surrounds/detailing. Massive



chimneys evoking Western Ranch House design were common additions. Mixed materials were often used on the exterior, the most common application being brick on the lower portion and wood or stone on the top. Wood details on walls or porches could be either painted or left natural.



Figure 10.3: Cross-tie pattern, turned columns, and rustic brick veneer on a Mid-Century Traditional Ranch House in Flair Forest Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.4: Board and batten siding on a Mid-Century Traditional Ranch House in Laurelwood Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.5: Field stone veneer, turned columns with scalloped facia, and diamond paned glass on a Mid-Century Traditional Ranch House in Churchill Downs Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.6: Porch lantern and board and batten siding on upper story of a Mid-Century Traditional Split-Level House in Sellars Farm (Photo by author)



Figure 10.7: Rustic Porch on a Two-Story House in Laurelwood Subdivision (Photo by author)

### **Neo-Colonial Revival**

Neo-Colonial Revival styles, along with the Mid-Century Traditional style, make up the majority of house styles in DeKalb County's 1960s subdivisions. This style most closely drew from the romance of the Antebellum South and the English ideal. Usually symmetrical in design, Neo-Colonial Revival style was most readily applied to Ranch and Two-Story houses. The primary indicators of this style are found on front porch or door ornamentation. Front porches of these homes tend to be more prominent than on



other styles, harkening to hospitable and formal ideals. The front porch was topped with a pediment, sometimes with dentils or a circular attic vent, and supported by columns. On the Two-Story House form, the height of the porch meant that the columns appeared very slender and delicate. Porch columns were usually round but could also be square, especially on Two-Story houses. Front doors or windows were often pedimented. The large picture windows on the façades of earlier Ranch houses were applied to Neo-Colonial houses in the form of multi-paned bay windows. Pilasters, sidelights and fanlights also contributed to this style. Roofs were almost always gabled and the symmetrical design was upheld by aligned windows and doors. Double-hung, multi-paned windows were almost always flanked by decorative shutters and vertically oriented. Bay windows were common additions. Many Neo-Colonial Revival homes were clad in solid red brick. Saltbox inspired varieties, however, sometimes employed mixed materials with brick on the bottom and clapboard on the top. Saltbox variety houses also featured an overhanging second-story and less prominent front porch. Neo-Colonial Revival styles varied greatly but remained immensely popular because of the high-status associated with their design.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Jack L. Nasar. "Symbolic Meanings of House Styles." *Environment and Behavior* 21-3 (1989): 253.

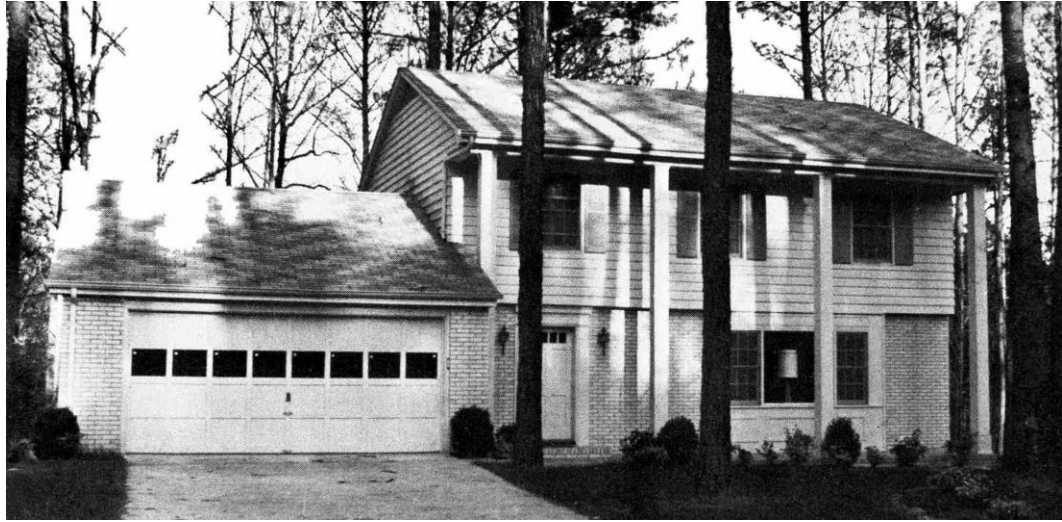


Figure 10.8: Two Story Colonial (Source: *Designs for Better Living*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, p.31 – (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries))



Figure 10.9: Two Story Colonial in Sellars Farm Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.10: Colonial Ranch in Hebron Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)



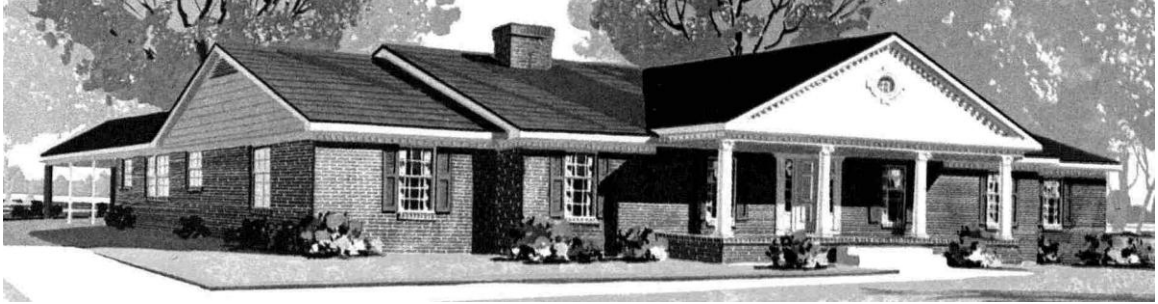


Figure 10.11: Colonial Ranch (Source: W.D. Farmer, *Homes for Pleasant Living: Home Plans of All Kinds – Stock and Custom Designs*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, p.29) (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)

Neo-Colonial Revival style on Split-Level houses in the study areas was often influenced by Dutch Colonial style. The roof is its most defining feature of this subset. On Split-Levels, the two-story end of the house was often topped with a front-oriented faux-gambrel roof. The roof was actually front-gabled, but decorative beams gave the roof a “clipped” look. Corners on garage doors sometimes mirrored the clipped shape of the roof.



Figure 10.12: Dutch-influenced Neo-Colonial Revival Split-Level with faux-gambrel roof and surface shingles in Huntley Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.13: Dutch-influenced Neo-Colonial Revival Two-Story with gambrel roof and dormer windows in Sellars Farm Subdivision (Photo by author)

When applied to Two-Story House forms, this style subset usually featured a true gambrel roof which was sometimes perforated by dormer windows. Other windows and doors were similar to those of the Neo-Colonial Revival style. Multi-paned or diamond-paned windows were usually flanked by ornamental shutters. Roofs of this style commonly employed imitation shake or slate roofing materials and had widely overhanging eaves. Neo-Colonial Revival houses of Dutch Colonial influence were typically clad in solid red brick or mixed materials of brick and wood. Shingles could also be applied as surface cladding. The application of stylistic shingles imparted a high status, yet warm and informal character to the house.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Edward K. Sadilla and Virgil L. Sheets. "Symbolism in Building Materials: Self-Presentational and Cognitive Components." *Environment and Behavior* 25-2 (1993): 165.

## Neo-Tudor

Neo-Tudor is another DeKalb house style that imparts a sense of warmth and higher social status. Although utilized on all three common house forms, Split-Level houses were the most common recipients of the Neo-Tudor Style. The primary indicator of Neo-Tudor style in the 1960s was decorative half-timbering on the upper half of the façade. Mixed use of materials was common on this style. Stucco or imitation-stucco were frequently employed to highlight the decorative timbering. Prominent chimneys, complicated gables and leaded glass were employed neither as frequently nor as dramatically as in Tudor Revival styles of the past.



Figure 10.14: Neo-Tudor Style, Source: *Homes for Pleasant Living: Home Plans of All Kinds – Stock and Custom Designs* by W.D. Farmer, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, p.5 (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)



Figure 10.15: Neo-Tudor Style on a Split-Level House in Laurelwood Subdivision (Photo by author)





Figure 10.16: Neo-Tudor Style on a Split-Level House in Emerald North (Photo by author)

### **Contemporary Ranch**

Contemporary Ranch styled houses occurred in most of the study areas within DeKalb. This style drew greatly from the overall Ranch form but employed quieter, more dramatic lines and forms influenced by the modern architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and others. Roof lines and surfaces tended to be clean and continuous. One prominent front gable was common but some houses of this style featured dramatic butterfly roofs. The Contemporary Ranch style augmented traditional Ranch House qualities such as the long and low form as well as the merger with the surrounding landscape. If the long and low form was interrupted by half or second stories, they were usually emphasized as separate planes on the façade. Each plane could then itself be horizontally oriented. Contemporary Ranch houses frequently utilized large, single paned windows or entire window walls to blend the indoors with the out. Window walls frequently were employed on a gabled wall and extended up to the roofline. Sometimes, just the upper portion of the gable was glassed in. Projecting



gables were left open or were part of the larger wall. Bold, geometric lines and forms reinforced the house's integration with the landscape. While the overall form was horizontal, many contemporary houses featured strong vertical lines or triangular shapes. A single, hanging geometric light was common above the front door. Natural materials such as board and batten siding, stone and glass were usually used as cladding. Red brick was a widely available and popular building material in DeKalb County. If a Contemporary Ranch House was clad in red brick, the brick was often painted a neutral color to "quiet" the design. Although a single surface cladding was often applied, some Contemporary Ranch houses used contrast panels or geometric patterns in the otherwise unbroken wall to add interest and support the design scheme. Although called "Contemporary Ranch," this style was frequently applied to Split-Level houses as well.



Figure 10.17: Eichler-Inspired Contemporary in Churchill Downs Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.18: Contemporary Style in Flair Forest Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.19: Contemporary Style in Flintridge Forrest Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.20: Horizontal Planes Emphasized in a Contemporary Style in Huntley Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.21: Modern Butterfly Roof in Shenandoah Subdivision (Photo by author)



Figure 10.22: Contemporary Style in Imperial Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)



## Neo-Mediterranean

Neo-Mediterranean style emerged in DeKalb in the late 1960s. Most frequently applied to Split-Level House forms, its character defining feature was a heavy masonry arcade across the front of the porch. Thick, Roman arches of painted brick reinforced by large, Roman arch windows created a dramatic and bold façade. Neo-Mediterranean style houses often featured a front courtyard enclosed by a solid or pierced brick wall. Mixed materials were regularly used on the exterior surfaces- the most common combination being painted brick and either clapboard or board and batten. Wrought iron railings and Juliet balconies were frequent additions on houses of the Neo-Mediterranean style. This was the most fortified and protective house style found in the study area. Enclosed courtyards and heavy arcades drew the entrance and living areas into the recesses of the home.



Figure 10.23: Neo-Mediterranean Style ranch House (Source: *Designs for Better Living*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 14) (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)



Figure 10.24: Neo-Mediterranean Style Split-Level House in Churchill Downs Subdivision (Photo by author)

## **Far East**

The most interesting and unique house style found in the study areas of DeKalb's 1960s subdivisions was the Far East house. This style drew from the aesthetics of China and Japan to create a Ranch House form with East Asian details. Hipped roofs featured flared pyramidal corners to imitate the roof lines of a traditional pagoda. Roofs with these characteristics are not common in the study areas, but more subtle East Asian style elements are common. Doors and porch railings employed geometric patterns vaguely reminiscent of traditional Asian design. Windows were usually comprised of few, large panes. Exterior cladding was usually simple brick and/or board and batten. Screen walls at the front or back of Far East houses often enclosed courtyards that featured smooth stones, serenity pools, bonsais or other East Asian-inspired elements.



Figure 10.25: Far East Style Ranch House (Source: *Designs for Better Living*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 46 (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)



Figure 10.26: Far East Style Ranch House in Hebron Hills Subdivision (Photo by author)

## CHAPTER 11

### GENERAL ARCHITECTURAL TRENDS IN 1960S DEKALB

#### **Traditional versus Contemporary**

An overarching trend throughout 1960s subdivisions in DeKalb County was the juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary architecture. The two types of styles often coexisted within the same subdivision and both contributed significantly to the overall character of the study areas. The volatile national climate led even middle-class United States citizens to become dissatisfied and begin experimenting with alternative house and lifestyles. This change was not always a negative reaction to the climate of the 1960s, however. As the 1960s progressed, so did the value society placed on creativity and personal expression. Americans were inundated with social trends encouraging them to “do their own thing.”<sup>186</sup> All of these factors, along with the rise of pop culture, heavily influenced the unique designs of 1960s contemporary styles in DeKalb’s subdivisions.

Despite the increasing popularity of contemporary house and lifestyles, traditional designs remained dominant in the study areas in DeKalb throughout the 1960s. Traditional styles were, however, incorporated into modern house forms. The social upheaval and violence that permeated the 1960s led many Americans to react by clinging to the traditional and familiar. Traditional, rustic aesthetics were pervasive and top rated shows like *Gunsmoke*, *Wagon Train*, *Bonanza* and *The Andy Griffith Show* reinforced

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<sup>186</sup> Paul Boyer. *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1995, p. 298.

Americans' fascination with traditional themes.<sup>187</sup> Established designs and styles helped to create a domestic environment that felt safe and familiar.

### **Informal Living**

Despite the proliferation of traditional house styles in the 1960s in DeKalb County, home builders sought to create spaces that supported the popular idea of the casual lifestyle. Endlessly touted by popular magazines and home design publications, informal living became synonymous with “the good life.” Formality and convention was replaced by a high value on livability and ease. The merger between indoor and outdoor living increased significantly, as did free flow between indoor spaces (Figure 11.1). Efficient use of space and the family room concept had been popular throughout the post-War period, but the 1960s saw a decrease in formal living space in favor of multi-purpose and combined rooms. The popularity of the California lifestyle and the freedom of expression promoted in the 1960s no doubt contributed to the rise in this trend. The worries of war, assassinations and social upheaval also contributed to many Americans placing a higher value on creating a carefree home life.

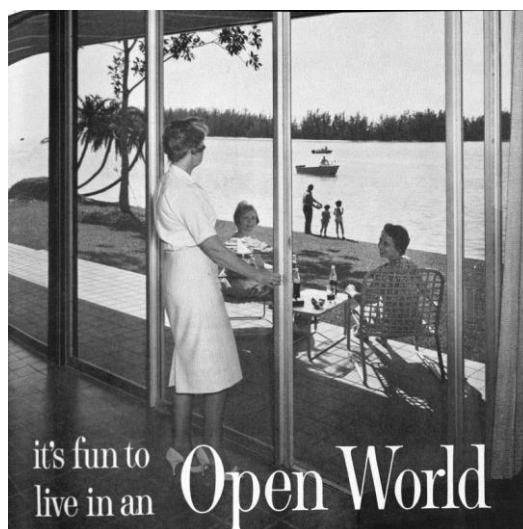


Figure 11.1:  
Parallel-O-Plate  
Glass  
Advertisement,  
*Better Homes &  
Gardens*, July  
1961, p.17

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<sup>187</sup> Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh. *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1997. 1692.



It is important to note, however, that while informal living was valued during the 1960s, so was privacy. Landscaping and hard features in the yard, as well as home design, often geared toward creating a private oasis that supported the relaxed lifestyle.

### **Horizontal versus Vertical**

Designs of the 1950s began experimenting with extreme horizontality of house forms and elements. The 1960s introduced vertical elements into home design as well. While overall forms remained long and low, vertical details were often applied. Board and batten was a popular cladding throughout the 1960s in DeKalb and created a bold, repetitive vertical pattern on large portions of the exterior. Vertical clapboard, too, served to create the same effect. Horizontal ribbon windows were still utilized, but they began to be used vertically as well (Figures 11.2 and 11.3). Even when horizontal windows were used, heavier vertical muntins were often used to divide panes. Tall slender columns on Neo-Colonial Revival style houses gave an impression of verticality.

Emphasis on horizontal elements, however, remained strong throughout the 1960s. Continuous low rooflines were extremely horizontally oriented, as was the Roman brick that was still popular. Taller house forms, such as Split-Levels and Two-Stories, often divided the levels into separate planes through cantilevering or stepping-out to create an illusion of horizontality. Split-Levels sometimes juxtaposed the two orientations by featuring a very horizontal main story attached to a very vertical two-story cluster. Horizontal orientations still reigned in DeKalb's 1960s subdivisions, but the incorporation of vertical elements created the dramatic appearance so favored in 1960s design.



Figure 11.2: Vertical windows on a horizontal house form (Source: *Southern Living Magazine*, May 1966, p.30)



Figure 11.3: Vertical windows on a horizontal house form in Flair Forest Subdivision (Photo by author)

### **Clean Lines and Geometric Forms**

Popular culture of the 1960s resulted in distinct architectural and design trends among new construction in DeKalb County's subdivisions. Over and over, magazines featured articles and pictorials touting designs that highlighted bold forms without excess detail (Figure 11.4). The increasing prominence of the gable as a central design detail supported this trend. Rooflines on Ranches and Ranch-type houses had always been long and low, and gables had always been popular on the more traditional styles. The 1960s, however, saw a rise in the use of gables, particularly front gables, on contemporary homes. A large, shallow gable, either regular or inverted, often took up the majority of the façade's roofline. The gable usually flowed seamlessly into the rest of the roofline, creating one long continuous line across the length of the house (Figure 11.5).

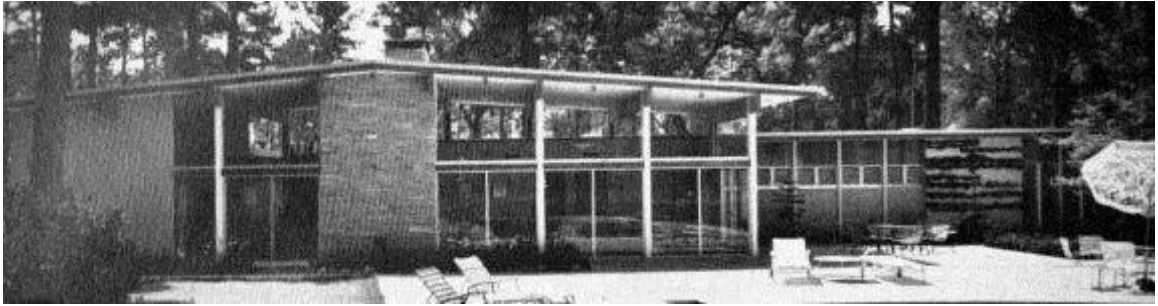


Figure 11.4: Clean lines and geometric forms (Source: *Southern Living Magazine*, June 1968, p40.)



Figure 11.5: Clean lines and geometric forms on a Contemporary Ranch House in Shenandoah Subdivision (Photo by author)

Overall quietness of design was another trend heavily promoted and employed. Exterior materials and style details often avoided ornamentation beyond elements that highlighted the geometric form of the architecture. The shape of the roof, windows and doors, and house itself were highlighted and exaggerated to create a simple, modern design. This effect was sometimes increased through the use of mixed cladding materials and bold colors applied to geometric elements or accent panels. These bold, geometric forms can most easily be attributed to the popularity of modern designs and fashions.

## **Naturalistic Elements**

Naturalistic elements supported many popular 1960s house styles. Mid-Century Traditional houses regularly employed these elements, as did the contemporary homes of the later '60s. The most common way naturalistic elements were incorporated into 1960s DeKalb home design was through the application of vertical boards and battens. These could be stained, painted a neutral color, or left raw, but they almost always had been milled to retain a rough, weathered appearance. Wooden shakes, too, became an increasingly common cladding and roofing material. Increasingly, brick veneers became either more rusticated or cleaner and more minimal. The overall color scheme of 1960s houses tended to be very neutral. Magazines indicate that when bold color was utilized, it was often earthy tones of orange, green, yellow, brown and red.

Naturalistic elements were also incorporated into the home by merging the indoor spaces with the outdoors. Large expanses of plate glass were used in windows, doors and as entire walls. Skylights were used and advertised with increasing frequency. The natural landscape scenery became wholly integrated with the overall design of the home (Figure 11.6). Profuse use of glass and open spaces was a neutral, quiet way to highlight the outdoors from both exterior and interior vantage points.

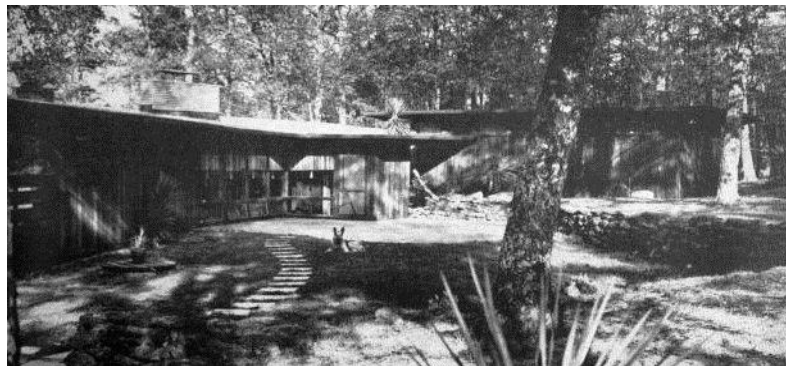


Figure 11.6: “A House Created for its Setting,” *Southern Living Magazine*, September 1968, p.41

## **Exotic Influences**

The 1960s in the United States saw a significant increase in the average person's awareness of international places. The Kennedy family regularly appeared in glamorous, overseas locations and travel also became more feasible for many Americans – plane travel was popular and heavily advertised. Many popular magazines and newspapers devoted articles and large advertising sections to domestic and international travel.

The coverage of news from the Soviet Union, Cuba and Southeast Asia on television also increased the public's awareness of exotic locations. With this increased awareness came an affinity for certain exotic designs, especially from the Far East. The acceptance of modern architecture, too, influenced the popularity of this trend. These preferences were mostly manifested in small details within the landscape or general design. Occasionally, however, they were central to the overall design and style. Far East aesthetics were likely popular because of their adaptability to other design trends emphasizing quiet and nature.

The Old West may not have been exotic, exactly, to residents of DeKalb County in the 1960s, but neither was it native. The overall Ranch House form was taken from this region, as were cladding materials and design details. Builders and homeowners imported forms and styles from the Old West with such frequency that they became permanently associated with mid-century design. The popularity of Old West aesthetics again reflects middle-class Americans' devotion to a simpler, more traditional time in United States history.<sup>188</sup> (Figure 11.7) Yet again, the suburbs were shaped into an escape and refuge from a frightening and rapidly changing world.

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<sup>188</sup> Norris, *Architecture for Contemporary Living*, 5-6.



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Figure 11.7: Western Travel Advertisement in “The Sunset Travel Directory,” *Sunset Magazine*, April 1966, p. 27

## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUSION

The 1960s were a unique time in United States and DeKalb County history. They represent the height and culmination of the prosperity and excess of the mid-century, post-War boom as well as an overall maturation and loss of innocence of the American middle-class lifestyle. Unfettered optimism and the explosion of a vibrant youth culture were finally checked in the 1960s by war, assassinations, and social and political unrest. The economic prosperity and culture of excess that had continued to grow since the end of World War II peaked in and ended with the 1960s. The Vietnam War had been extremely expensive and by the end of the decade Washington was predicting a severe economic downturn. The United States had finally overextended itself. 1971 heralded a period of inflation combined with high unemployment that came to be called “stagflation.”<sup>189</sup> The oil crisis of 1973 only added to the nation’s economic troubles.

The economic downturn resulted in changes to the previous pattern of subdivision development in DeKalb County. In 1969, the number of building permits issued in DeKalb County dropped for the first time in 20 years.<sup>190</sup> The economic environment did not support the excessive house and landscape design that had characterized much of the 1960s. Land prices became more expensive in the 1970s, resulting in more compact

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<sup>189</sup> Rebecca Jackson, Rebecca. *The 1960s: an annotated bibliography of social and political movements in the United States*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992. p193.

<sup>190</sup> Burton, “Single-Family Residential Development,” 45.

houses on smaller pieces of property. “Rising energy costs made low rambling one-story homes with large picture windows more expensive to maintain.”<sup>191</sup> DeKalb County also passed amendments to countywide zoning and a new land use plan in 1970 in which more emphasis was placed on developing DeKalb’s multi-family housing and business centers. The Metropolitan Planning Commission was also renamed the Atlanta Regional Commission and incorporated new counties. Gwinnett, DeKalb’s neighbor to the east, become a more desirable and affordable location in which to focus new middle-class residential development efforts.<sup>192</sup> DeKalb’s most significant period of residential growth and development had passed.

Suburban residential architecture and landscapes of 1960s DeKalb County represent the zenith of the trends from preceding decades. The culture of excess and experimentation fostered an environment in which the domestic trends of the ‘40s and ‘50s were manifested in their biggest and best forms. National prosperity in the ‘60s combined with the pursuit of the Great American Dream of Post-War years created the architecture and landscape of 1960s DeKalb. Houses and yards were larger and grander than in the previous post-War decades, while decorative trends were fostered and evolved to become iconic of the time. It truly was the height of the post-WWII housing boom in the United States and DeKalb.

Although the suburban architecture and landscape of 1960s DeKalb was rooted in the decades before, it was certainly an era unto itself. The ranch form so iconic of the 1950s thrived and was augmented in the 1960s. The typical ranch house spawned into more sprawling forms found throughout the suburbs of the 1960s. The unique time in

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<sup>191</sup> Hess, *Ranch House*, 17.

<sup>192</sup> Burton, “Single-Family Residential Development,” 41.

American society that was the 1960s cultivated a suburban residential environment to match. The explosion of media and pop culture was highly influential in the fabric of suburban development, and guided its development. The changing nature of society in the United States, however, resulted in a more varied pattern of architectural expression. Society in turmoil also caused a backlash in which average Americans retreated into the safety and comfort of their homes. They created environments around themselves which reflected their own idealized view of the world.

This thesis was based primarily on detailed observations from thirteen 1960s subdivisions across DeKalb County- enough to recognize patterns and draw conclusions- but there are thousands of other 1960s subdivisions in the county that deserve study and recognition. An effort should also be made in the near future to identify and interview key players in DeKalb's 1960s suburban residential housing boom while they are still available. These individuals could offer valuable insight into relevant conditions that influenced the nature of these resources. Finally, further research could be undertaken on the individual stylistic components of 1960s suburban residential architecture and landscape in DeKalb. More information of their origins and applications could provide increased insight into their significance.

The legacy of the architecture and landscape of the 1960s in DeKalb County is still present today. The model for subdivision development perfected in the 1960s continued throughout the following decades. Lot sizes and designs, house square footages, and floor plans remained fairly constant with the precedent set in the 1960s for many years. It was not until the housing bubble of the early 2000s that Neo-Eclectic houses (aka McMansions) took center stage in new residential construction. Suburban

residential landscapes of 1960s DeKalb remained fairly consistent until this time, too, when preferences shifted toward larger homes on smaller lots. The legacy of the Post-War housing boom is present all throughout DeKalb and the nation, but the distinction of development in the suburbs was surpassed neither before nor after the 1960s.

If this legacy is to be maintained, action must be taken to preserve this period of suburban development in DeKalb County. Because the model for development and construction remained the standard in United States suburbs for many years, many houses in 1960s subdivisions are still capable of being utilized in their original purpose by homeowners and families. The level of integrity that remained in most of the study areas was heartening, but that integrity must be protected. Many other areas of earlier Post-War development in DeKalb have succumbed to insensitive infill. Each year, more of these houses and subdivisions reach the 50 year mark required to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Preservationists must learn lessons from earlier losses and take measures to protect 1960s resources before they are compromised. More study into these resources is needed. The iconic designs of 1960s suburban architecture and landscapes in DeKalb are valuable to the historic fabric of the county and nation.



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