

DRUID HILLS HISTORIC DISTRICT
US 29
Atlanta vicinity
Fulton County
Georgia

HABS GA-2390
GA-2390

HABS
GA-2390

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
100 Alabama St. NW
Atlanta, GA 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DRUID HILLS HISTORIC DISTRICT

HABS No. GA-2390

Location: Situated between the City of Atlanta, Decatur, and Emory University in the northeast Atlanta metropolitan area, DeKalb County.

Present Owner: Multiple ownership.

Present Occupant: Multiple occupants.

Present Use: Residential, Park and Recreation.

Significance:

Druid Hills is historically significant primarily in the areas of landscape architecture, architecture, and community planning. Druid Hills is the finest example of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century comprehensive suburban planning and development in the Atlanta metropolitan area, and one of the finest turn-of-the-century suburbs in the southeastern United States. Druid Hills is more specifically noted because: (1) it is a major work by the eminent landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and his successors, the Olmsted Brothers, and the only such work in Atlanta; (2) it is a good example of Frederick Law Olmsted's principles and practices regarding suburban development; (3) its overall planning, as conceived by Frederick Law Olmsted and more fully developed by the Olmsted Brothers, is of exceptionally high quality when measured against the prevailing standards for turn-of-the-century suburbs; (4) its landscaping, also designed originally by Frederick Law Olmsted and developed more fully by the Olmsted Brothers, is, like its planning, of exceptionally high quality; (5) its actual development, as carried out originally by Joel Hurt's Kirkwood Land Company and later by Asa G. Candler's Druid Hills Company, under the direction of company engineer O.F. Kauffmann, adhered remarkably to the Olmsted tenets in the face of changing times and conditions; (6) its residential architecture, designed by some of Atlanta's foremost architects, is of correspondingly high quality and represents a full range of early-twentieth-century eclectic and revivalistic styles, building materials, and construction techniques; and (7) as the second major metropolitan Atlanta suburb, it had a profound effect on the direction of future suburban development. In addition to its architecture, landscaping, and planning, Druid Hills is significant as the home of many of Atlanta's citizens who were prominent in early-twentieth-century political, financial, commercial, professional, academic, and cultural affairs.

1) Physical Context of the Site:

Druid Hills is a late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century suburb situated between the City of Atlanta, Decatur, and Emory University

in the northeast Atlanta metropolitan area. It encompasses approximately 1,300 acres of land and 1,300 properties. The suburb is primarily residential in nature, with a number of churches and schools and a small neighborhood commercial center in addition to houses. There are also several small parks and a golf course in Druid Hills.

The natural terrain in Druid Hills is that of the gently rolling Piedmont countryside with its low hills and dales. The suburban streets are set into this landscape; their alignment and grade follow to a large degree the natural contours of the land. These streets range from broadly curving, divided avenues through long, meandering roads to short, narrow, sharply curving lanes. All the streets are landscaped on either side like parkways. Carefully aligned curbs, smooth lawns, shrubs, and trees border the streets throughout the suburb. In some cases, the streets actually border park space or contain it in medians, and here, streetscape and landscape merge completely. Building lots are laid out along every street in Druid Hills. These lots range in size from several acres to one-half and one-third acre. Although a few lots are square in shape, most are long and narrow, with frontages of 60 feet to 150 feet and depths of 200 feet to nearly 1,000 feet. Front yards are generally landscaped with lawns, shrubs, flowers, and trees in a "natural" manner that, along with the streetsides, creates the appearance of a large public park. Back yards are well removed from the streets and public view, and in many cases have resorted to a natural condition. Houses date from the late 1890s through the 1930s and range from mansions to bungalows. Predominant architectural styles are those of early-twentieth-century eclecticism and revivalism, including Italian Renaissance, Spanish Villa, English Tudor, Jacobean, Georgian, and Federal. Neo-classical designs and bungalows, while not as prevalent, are also well represented. The churches, schools, and commercial buildings in the area partake of similar period styles. Parks are, for the most part, set into the wide median along Ponce de Leon Avenue, the principal divided avenue in Druid Hills. Like front yards and streetsides, they are landscaped in a "natural" manner, but with larger stands of trees, more open space, and fewer shrubs and flowers.

2) Historical Context of the Site:

North of Druid Hills is the campus of Emory University. West of Druid Hills are the City of Atlanta neighborhoods of Virginia-Highland and Morningside. Morningside exhibits design characteristics similar to those of Druid Hills, but on a smaller scale, and the neighborhood was planned and developed separately from, and later than, Druid Hills. South of Druid Hills are several Atlanta neighborhoods, including Edgewood, Candler Park, and Kirkwood, each of which post-dates Druid Hills and none of which resembles it in plan or architecture. Southeast of Druid Hills, across the Seaboard Coast Line railroad tracks, is Parkwood, an area originally intended to be part of Druid Hills but not actually developed until the post-World War II era; a small subdivision along East Lake Road east of the railroad tracks is all that was developed here as an official "part of Druid Hills." Directly east of Druid Hills, and making an inroad into it, is the Fernbank Forest and

Recreation Center, developed on a large estate which pre-dates and never was incorporated into Druid Hills. Northeast of Druid Hills are several small residential subdivisions associated with Emory University which were developed separately from, and later than, Druid Hills.

3) and 4) Specific History of the Site; Physical Description of the Site:

Druid Hills is historically significant primarily in the areas of landscape architecture, architecture, and community planning. Druid Hills is the finest example of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century comprehensive suburban planning and development in the Atlanta metropolitan area, and one of the finest turn-of-century suburbs in the southeastern United States. Druid Hills is more specifically noted because: (1) it is a major work by the eminent landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and his successors, the Olmsted Brothers, and the only such work in Atlanta; (2) it is a good example of Frederick Law Olmsted's principles and practices regarding suburban development; (3) its overall planning, as conceived by Frederick Law Olmsted and more fully developed by the Olmsted Brothers, is of exceptionally high quality when measured against the prevailing standards for turn-of-the-century suburbs; (4) its landscaping, also designed originally by Frederick Law Olmsted and developed more fully by the Olmsted Brothers, is, like its planning, of exceptionally high quality; (5) its actual development, as carried out originally by Joel Hurt's Kirkwood Land Company and later by Asa G. Candler's Druid Hills Company, under the direction of company engineer O.F. Kauffmann, adhered remarkably to the Olmsted tenets in the face of changing times and and conditions; (6) its residential architecture, designed by some of Atlanta's foremost architects, is of correspondingly high quality and represents a full range of early-twentieth-century eclectic and revivalistic styles, building materials, and construction techniques; and (7) as the second major metropolitan Atlanta suburb, it had a profound effect on the direction of future suburban development. In addition to its architecture, landscaping, and planning, Druid Hills is significant as the home of many of Atlanta's citizens who were prominent in early-twentieth-century political, financial, commercial, professional, academic, and cultural affairs.

There are several large sections of subdistricts within Druid Hills. These sections reflect generally the historical development of the suburb. One of the largest of these sections, and the first to be developed, stretches across the southern end of the district along either side of Ponce de Leon Avenue from Briarcliff Road on the west to the Seaboard Coast Line railroad on the east. Ponce de Leon Avenue is a divided parkway containing a succession of parks within its median. Ponce de Leon Avenue is bordered by the largest lots (ranging from one to seven acres) and the grandest mansions in the suburb. Some of the mansions have been converted into churches, schools, and other institutions; a few are abandoned. Several estates have been recently subdivided and developed with low-rise apartment buildings or brick ranch houses. It is essentially this part of Druid Hills that was previously entered on the National Register. The second part of Druid Hills to be developed, and

the central section of the suburb, lies between Ponce de Leon Avenue on the south, North Decatur Road on the north, Briarcliff Road on the west, and Lullwater Road on the east. This section of Druid Hills features long, parallel streets, moderately-sized lots (one to two acres) with long, narrow dimensions, and moderately-sized period houses. Two tracts of land within this section have been recently subdivided and developed with brick ranch houses. There are numerous intrusions, including ranch houses and low-rise apartment buildings, along the east side of Briarcliff Road. North of North Decatur Road is one of the last sections of Druid Hills to be developed. In this part of the suburb, the streets are laid out in a highly irregular plan. The smallest lots (one-half to one-third acre) in the suburb are located here, as are the most modest period houses. The few intrusions are mostly brick ranch houses. Similar to this part of Druid Hills is a contemporary development along East Lake and Ridgecrest Roads in the extreme southeast corner of the suburb. The final residential section of Druid Hills is located along Clifton Road in the northeast part of the suburb. This section is a compromise in terms of layout, sites, and houses between the central and northern sections. An unusual aspect of this section is the circular street pattern formed by Clifton and East Clifton Road. A small commercial center, consisting of 1920s-period row shops, is located in the northern area of Druid Hills at the intersection of North Decatur and Oxford Roads. Originally lining the streets south of the intersection, the commercial center has recently been reduced in size by a fire which destroyed the stores along South Oxford Road; these sites are currently vacant, and plans for rebuilding are still being made. Directly south of this commercial center is the northern edge of a golf course which stretches south through Druid Hills all the way to Ponce de Leon Avenue.

Overall, Druid Hills is characterized by continuity of natural terrain, landscape architecture, street layout, and site planning, and by consistency of scale among architecture, landscape architecture, and streetscape. Druid Hills is an exceptionally well-preserved, early-twentieth-century suburb with few non-contributing properties and even fewer intrusions.

"Druid Hills" and "Druid Hills Parks and Parkways"

This "Druid Hills" historic district incorporates in its entirety the previously register "Druid Hills Parks and Parkways" historic district (entered on the National Register on April 11, 1975). The earlier district extends along either side of Ponce de Leon Avenue from Briarcliff Road on the west to the Seaboard Coast Line railroad tracks on the east. At that time the earlier district was nominated, it was believed that Frederick Law Olmsted's involvement with Druid Hills was limited to this area, and the history of the suburb as a whole was not fully understood. Since then, research has brought to light documents which demonstrate Olmsted's involvement, at least in a preliminary way, with the entire suburb. The history of Druid Hills is also more fully understood now, and it shows how the planning and development of the whole suburb were directly guided by Olmsted's designs, as revised by the Olmsted Brothers. Thus, the area which was previously nominated as "Druid Hills Parks and Parkways" is now seen as but one section of the larger "Druid Hills."

For most of the nineteenth century, the site of Druid Hills was "unimproved" farm land in the country between Atlanta and Decatur. The area was traversed by Williams Mill Road (later Briarcliff Road) on the west, the Seaboard Coast Line railroad on the east, the turnpike between Decatur and Buckhead (later North Druid Hills Road) on the north, and the Georgia Railroad on the south. Land in this area was generally owned in large agricultural tracts.

During the late 1880's, Joel Hurt conceived of an "ideal residential suburb" to be developed on this land. Hurt was a prominent Atlanta businessman and developer. In the 1880's he had developed Inman Park, Atlanta's first suburb (listed on the National Register on July 23, 1973), built and operated Atlanta's first electric street railway from the suburb to the city along Edgewood Avenue, and commercial planning for Atlanta's first skyscraper, the Equitable Building (later the Trust Company of Georgia Building, demolished in 1971). Druid Hills was thus to be Hurt's second suburban residential development, and his largest and most comprehensive undertaking.

Between 1889 and 1892, Hurt made several moves toward carrying out his ideas for the new suburb. First, he organized the Kirkwood Land Company. Several prominent Atlantans were original stockholders in the company, including Robert Lowry, a banker who owned property in the area to be developed. The Kirkwood Land Company then acquired nearly 1,500 acres of land including the Johnson, Kilpatrick, Pedan, Washington, Harrison, and Lowry tracts. S.Z. Ruff was hired as company engineer to prepare a topographic map of the holdings.

In 1892, Hurt secured Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., as planner and designer for the new suburb. Apparently, Olmsted was to prepare preliminary overall plans and designs, and company engineer Ruff was to supervise their execution. Between 1892 and 1894, Olmsted visited Atlanta several times for the express purpose of consulting with Hurt and visiting the site. Hurt, in turn, visited Olmsted's office in Brookline, Mass., on at least one occasion to confer with Olmsted and view the latest suburban developments in the northeast. Considerable correspondence between the two men reviewed these meetings and elaborated upon the major points of discussion. Hurt, for example, wanted Olmsted to move ahead with working drawings for some 600 acres at the outset, while Olmsted argued for a general plan for the whole 1,500-acre suburb before any development was allowed to take place. Hurt also wanted an arrow-straight principal avenue modeled after Edgewood Avenue, which connected his earlier Inman Park suburb with Atlanta; Olmsted, characteristically, urged a more picturesque, curving avenue.

At this same time, Hurt became an amateur botanist and established a nursery on Williams Mill (later Briarcliff) Road. Here, under Olmsted's observation, he collected and cultivated a wide range of exotic and domestic landscaping plants.

By 1893, Olmsted had prepared a preliminary plan for the new suburb. Olmsted's plan called for a broad, curving, divided major avenue (Ponce de Leon), with a succession of public parks in the median, bordered

by large estates. Secondary streets, narrower in width and also gently curving in alignment, ran northward, more or less perpendicular to the major divided avenue, and were bordered by smaller, long and narrow lots. Olmsted's plan also called for two artificial lakes and additional park land around them. This was to be Olmsted's most prestigious Southern work, his first significant work in Atlanta, and one of the last major works of his career. It embodied the general principles of suburban development set forth in Olmsted's first suburb of Riverside, to which he steadfastly adhered throughout his career. In general, the plan exhibited the combination of picturesque planning and landscaping with concern for function and livability that has made Olmsted's work famous. It also sought to combine, as most of Olmsted's residential work did, the civilization of the city as manifest in modern technology and sophisticated design with the natural attributes of the country in a suburban setting. Some of the more specific characteristics of the Olmsted plan are also worth noting. The principal avenue was divided for more than aesthetic reasons: one roadway was devoted to through or express traffic, while the other was designated as a more leisurely parkway. The electric trolley line was placed in the median rather than in the street to separate the different modes of transportation and to allow for more effective landscaping of the railbed, tracks, poles, and wires. Each of the series of median parks was differentiated by its landscaping; they ranged from relatively open greenswards to nearly impenetrable woods. There was a clear hierarchy of streets, depending upon their use, and all streets were sensitively laid into the natural terrain instead of being imposed upon it. To a large degree, these aspects of Olmsted's preliminary plan have been translated into the reality of Druid Hills.

After the preparation of Olmsted's plan, Hurt intended to proceed immediately with the laying out of rights-of-way, the grading of streets, and the building of the lakes. However, the Panic of 1893 slowed business activity nationwide, and in its wake, the Kirkwood Land Company experienced financial difficulties. Several loans on the company's property later in the 1890s and a letter to a Boston lawyer regarding fees owed to the Olmsted firm record some of the problems. In addition, Hurt's numerous business activities, especially his electric street railway company, demanded his immediate attention.

After settlement and sale of the electric street railway company in 1901 allowed the repayment of some outstanding loans and bills, Hurt once again turned his attention to Druid Hills. By this time, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., had been incapacitated by illness; his successors, the Olmsted Brothers, assumed work on the suburb. Olmsted's original 1893 plan served as the basis for consultations between Hurt and Olmsted's stepson, John C. Olmsted, in 1902 and 1903. John Olmsted maintained the argument for comprehensive planning and was given the authority to do so. In 1904, the suburb was officially named "Druid Hills." In 1905, the Olmsted Brothers submitted a final plan for the southernmost portion of the Kirkwood Company land, including the Ponce de Leon corridor; this "general plan" was based entirely upon Olmsted's original plan. Accompanying this general plan was a schedule of deed covenants, also based on Olmsted's earlier suggestion, designed to secure the suburb from

undesirable influences and to insure that the high standards of development would be maintained by future residents and property owners. These covenants called for: (1) a minimum lot size of one-quarter acre, (2) a minimum house cost, (3) allowance for only single-family houses, with no further lot subdivision, (4) the elimination and barring of nuisances, (5) uniform building setbacks, (6) prohibition of manufacturing or commerce, and (7) a 40-year covenant period. These restrictive covenants, largely adopted, were more comprehensive than the restrictive covenants in other local suburban developments and were considered an integral part of the planning and development of Druid Hills. More than the inherent quality of the suburb's design, they may have been responsible for the enduring character of Druid Hills.

Shortly after receipt of the 1905 general plan, construction began in Druid Hills. Roads were laid out and graded, surface drainage was engineered, the parks were developed, and a few building lots were graded and landscaped. Presumably, this work was done under the supervision of S.Z. Ruff, although this is not certain.

In 1908, the Kirkwood Land Company and its holdings in Druid Hills were purchased by a consortium of local businessmen. Circumstances surrounding the sale are unclear, but the sale price of 500,000 constituted the largest real-estate transaction in Atlanta's history. The new owners subsequently organized the Druid Hills Company. Coca-Cola magnate Asa Griggs Candler assumed the presidency; Forrest and George Adair, real-estate brokers, served as vice-president and secretary-treasurer respectively.

The Druid Hills Company made several changes in the planning and development of the Druid Hills suburb. Although the new company insisted that it would follow "in the main" the original plans of Frederick Law Olmsted as amended by the Olmsted Brothers, it immediately notified the Olmsted Brothers that their services were "no longer required" and then hired a new company engineer, O.F. Kauffmann, to prepare revised plans and working drawings. Previously established parts of the suburb, including the Ponce de Leon corridor, were left largely unchanged, but modifications were made elsewhere. Between 1908 and 1911, for example, much property was systematically replatted. Lots became progressively smaller as time went on. Plans for the two lakes were permanently shelved. Some intersections and stretches of roadway were realigned. Deed restrictions became progressively less restrictive and shorter in term. Sales of building lots were handled exclusively by the Forrest and George Adair real-estate agency.

Between 1908 and 1936, the Druid Hills Company successfully carried out the development of Druid Hills according to these new policies and procedures. The result was one of the finest early-twentieth-century suburbs in Atlanta and the Southeast. The decision to replat lots and eliminate some luxuries seems to have been based on a clear understanding of the changes taking place in the residential real-estate market of the time. Turn-of-the-century visions of mansions and estates were being replaced by the realities of period houses on modest, manageable lots. Furthermore, coordinated sales of lots through

the Adair real-estate agency provided a degree of harmonious development otherwise unobtainable. Throughout, however, the legacy of Fredrick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted Brothers is evident. Olmsted's original plans for the Ponce de Leon corridor have survived more or less intact, his plans for the entire suburb as amended by the Olmsted Brothers served as the framework for later developments, and the Olmsted design philosophy persevered through the two development companies and two company engineers.

The residences built in Druid Hills during the early-twentieth century are among the finest examples of period architecture in the Atlanta metropolitan area and the state of Georgia. These period houses range from mansions to bungalows, with a concentration in the middle range. They partake of a wide variety of eclectic and revivalistic styles, with the Georgian, Tudor, Jacobean, and Italian Renaissance represented in greatest numbers. Significant period materials include brick, tile, slate, half-timber, weatherboard, and shingle. Construction techniques are typically load-bearing masonry or wood frame with veneer. Although varied in design, the Druid Hills houses are related in terms of their period characteristics, setbacks, and site landscaping.

Some of Atlanta's most distinguished early-twentieth-century architects designed houses in Druid Hills. The list of these includes Walter T. Downing; Arthur Neal Robinson; Henry Hornbostel; Hentz, Reid, and Adler; Hentz, Adler, and Shutze; and Pringle and Smith. Several of these architects have more than one example of their work represented in the suburb; Neel Reid, for example, designed at least six houses of differing styles in addition to his own Georgian Revival home (1914).

Landscaping of private grounds around houses in Druid Hills was designed in a variety of ways. In some cases, the architect of the house suggested plans for landscaping. In other cases, the architect would subcontract with a landscape architect. In still other cases, independent landscape gardeners provided their services directly to the property owners; one such firm known to have been active in Druid Hills was the C.A. Dahl Company of Atlanta, whose motto was, "You build your house, let us make it a home." Regardless of the means, almost all landscaping led to the same end: informal "English" landscaping with an emphasis on broad, undulating lawns and casually disposed trees, shrubbery, flower gardens, and walks.

Little is known at the present time about the contractors who actually built Druid Hills.

It is important to note that the design and construction of houses and landscaping was not provided by the Druid Hills Company but rather by each property owner independently with the professionals of the owner's choice. That such an arrangement produced results characterized by the harmony and grace of Druid Hills is a testimony to the strength of early-twentieth-century period design.

The planning and development of Druid Hills exerted a powerful influence on the direction of future suburban development in the Atlanta

area. Most significantly, as a major real-estate undertaking, it strengthened the move toward suburban residency and away from downtown residency. Along with Inman Park, Joel Hurt's earlier suburb, it shifted the course of suburban residential development for the south to the east and northeast. The establishment of the Ponce de Leon corridor connecting eventually to Peachtree Road bolstered the suburban development of north Atlanta. It set an example to be emulated in such developing areas as Ansley Park, the West Paces Ferry Road neighborhood, Brookwood Hills, and, on a more modest scale, Morningside. Local designers who were not just influenced but actually trained in the Olmsted way at Druid Hills include S.Z. Ruff, the Kirkwood Land Company engineer who later designed Ansley Park for the South-Eastern Real Estate Improvement Company (listed on the National Register on April 20, 1979), and O.F. Kauffmann, the Druid Hills Company engineer who platted many significant suburban subdivisions.

The historical significance of Druid Hills as a suburb cannot be divorced from the historical significance of the many prominent Atlanta citizens who made Druid Hills their home in the early-twentieth century. These citizens constituted much of the leadership in Atlanta's political, financial, commercial, professional, academic, and cultural affairs. Chief among them was Asa Griggs Candler, founding president of the Coca-Cola Company, who has already been mentioned as not only living in the Druid Hills neighborhood but, as president of the Druid Hills Company, playing an important role in its planning and development. Two generations of the Candler family lived in Druid Hills, as did many executives of the Coca-Cola Company, the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Atlanta, and the Trust Company of Georgia. Candler's land grant and endowment of Emory University, located immediately northeast of Druid Hills, not only insured the future of this educational institution, but more or less guaranteed a body of academic and professional people seeking homes in nearby Druid Hills. Other Druid Hills residents, generally not as well known as Candler, also contributed to the history of the city. Guy Woolford, who lived on Springdale Road, founded Retail Credit Company; William D. Thompson was Dean of the Emory University Law School; Charles F. Stone was president of Atlantic Steel; John Ray Patillo was president of the Patillo Lumber Company; William Brownlee was president of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Atlanta; Simon Selig was president of the Selig Disinfectant Company. Other noted residents of Druid Hills include George and Forrest Adair, Monie Allen Ferst, Adolf Montag, Sigmund Montag, Samuel Candler Dobbs, O.F. Stone, Dr. Olin S. Cofer, Charles B. Shelton, and many others too numerous to mention. It is interesting to note that several of Atlanta's foremost architects, including Walter T. Downing, Robert Pringle, Neel Reid, and Arthur Neal Robinson, chose Druid Hills as the area in which they built their homes.

5) Sources of Information:

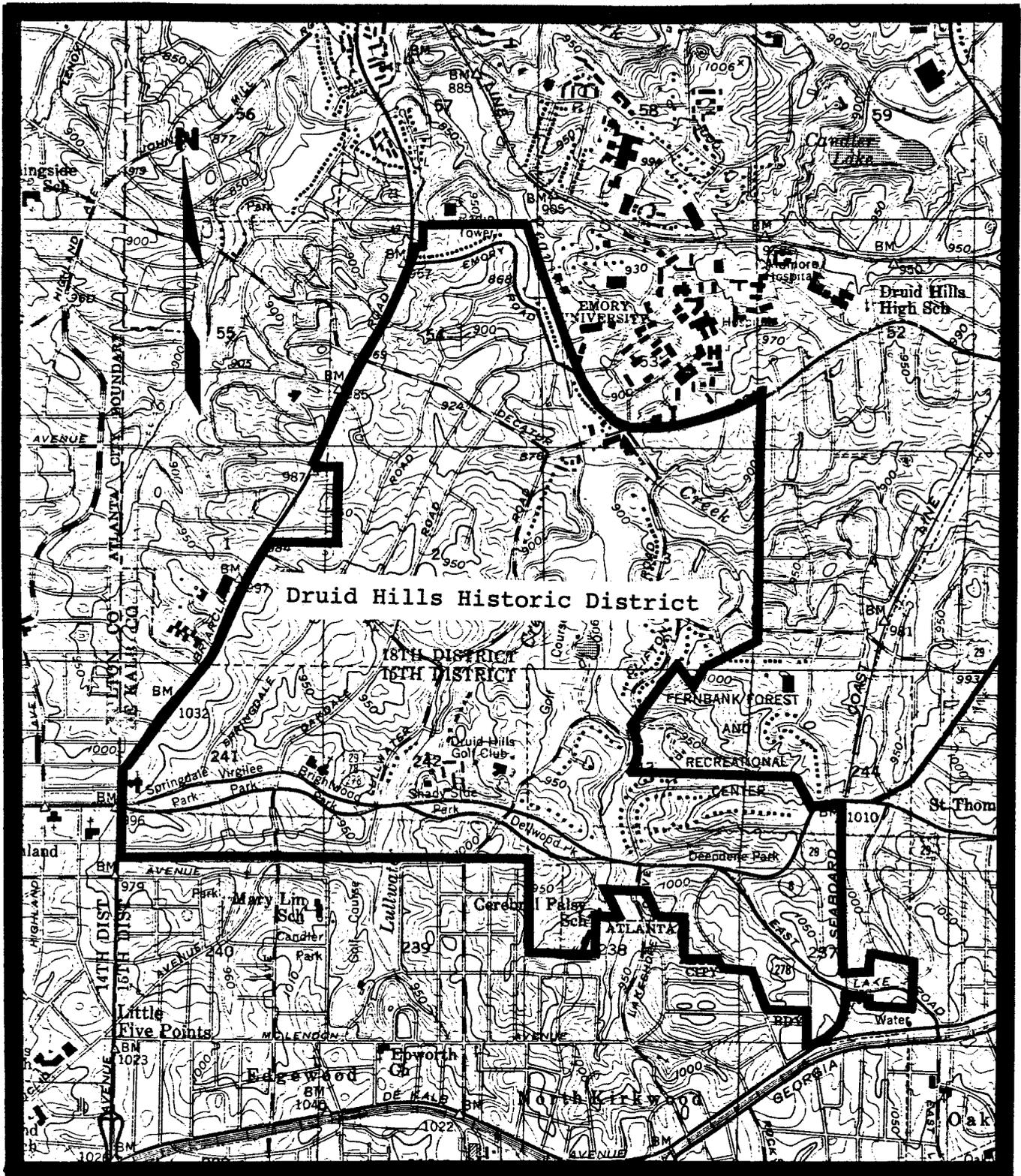
The information contained herein is taken directly from the National Register Nomination Form for the Druid Hills Historic District on file at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Section.

6) Form Prepared By:

Jayne H. Maxwell
Transportation Planner II
Georgia Department of Transportation
September 23, 1987

7) Project Information:

The documentation contained herein was prepared pursuant to commitments made by the Georgia Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Presidential Parkway transportation project.



National Register Boundary
for the
Druid Hills Historic District