

Big names put their stamp on Peachtree Heights Park

By Judy Tindel

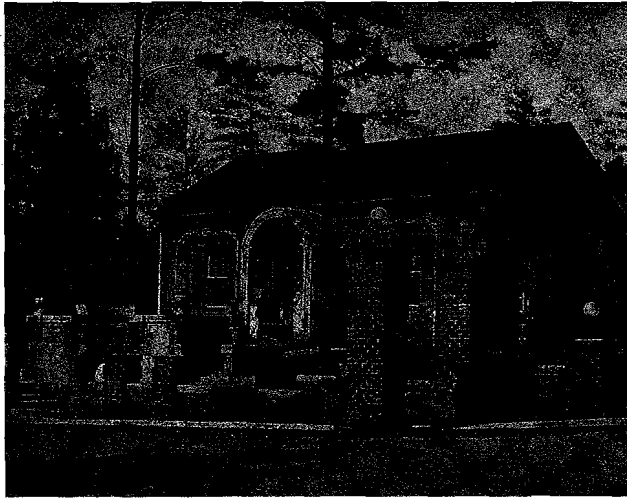
"The largest single real estate deal Atlanta has ever known," as the Atlanta Constitution called it, rocked the City 100 years ago and set the course for development of Peachtree Heights Park, which would evolve into a graceful residential neighborhood designed and influenced by nationally renowned engineers and architects.

Even before issuance of the company charter, a syndicate committee composed of David Woodward, Eretus Rivers and Walter Pemberton Andrews, initiated communications "with a number of landscape engineers of the east...[to secure] the best talent obtainable," the newspaper said.

In June 1910, Eretus Rivers wrote the Olmsted Brothers, a landscape firm with a long history of activity in Atlanta. "It is our intention to beautify this property into one of the most beautiful residence parks in the Southern states," Rivers said. "Therefore, we are anxious to secure the services of a mechanical engineer, and gardener, that will perfect our ideas."

The firm replied that no member was available to meet in the near future, but a final June 20 letter to Rivers offered, "If you care to have us do so, we should be glad to ask some engineers who have done this sort of work for us in the past to bid on the work."

The Constitution subsequently reported on July 7 that the Peachtree Heights Park Company was in correspondence with "E.A. Stevens & Co., of Brooklyn, N.Y. [sic], and Armstead [sic] Bros., of Brookline, Mass., well-known gardeners, with a view of secur-



The Lodge at Peachtree Heights Park (American Architect, 1913, courtesy of Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library).

ing propositions to beautify the property and put it in attractive park shape."

Just two weeks later, civil engineer Frank Stone Tainter of E.A. Stevens & Co. of Hoboken "rode over the property on horseback [with Woodward, Andrews and Rivers]. After an investigation of four days, he said that he had never seen a section of land that would lend itself

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so easily to the efforts of the landscape gardener."

As a consequence of his visit, the syndicate hired Tainter, who the newspaper described as "a landscape gardener of national reputation" and "a leading member of... a firm that has successfully managed some of the most magnificent landscape work in the country."

Frank Stone Tainter (1862-1941) had an extensive engineering practice based in Far Hills, N.J., and New York. He was also a partner in the engineering firm of E.A. Stevens & Co. with Edwin Augustus Stevens, scion of the famous family of engineers, marine and railroad entrepreneurs, and the well-

connected son of the founder of Stevens Institute of Technology.

In 1898, Tainter, the Architectural Record said, "acted in charge of entire work" for Blairsden, a 550-acre, 50,000 square foot estate designed by prominent architects Carrere & Hastings.

Later, Tainter wrote, "My last large work... was the general construction incident to the development of Mr. C. Ledyard Blair's estate near Bernardsville, N.J., and this I handled for him as his personal engineer. In this connection I did all of his road development; all of his water system work [including development of Ravine Lake]; all of his heavy masonry in connection with his Italian Gardens... and also built his house. I spent about four years on his work, and refer to him as to my ability and general qualifications..."

Tainter's credentials resulted in a contract for the construction of Carnegie Lake and the Washington Road Bridge in Princeton from 1904-1906 under his "personal direction," *The Princeton Alumni Weekly* reported in 1906.

In 1910, Tainter's agreement with Eretus Rivers called for immediate development of the Collier estate, starting with a topographical survey beginning the first of August, to be finished within four months, "[presenting] a vista of roads, driveways, bridle paths, parks and residence sites."

Site work was to begin by December and take six months, with the track ready for sale of lots by May 1911. No record has surfaced and no publicity of the period describes the commission of architects Carrere & Hastings who are credited with design of Peachtree Heights Park, the only subdivision in their oeuvre.

Carrere & Hastings, with whom Tainter had worked at Blairsden, "... were the leading practitioners in New York of urban domestic architecture for the very rich from 1900 to 1915" and by 1910, they "had reached the zenith of their fame," according to *The Architecture of Carrere and Hastings* by Curtis Channing Blake.

Thomas Hastings (1860-1929) and John Mervyn Carrere (1858-1911) trained at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and apprenticed with the firm of McKim, Mead & White in New York. In 1885, they opened their practice when Standard Oil and railroad magnate Henry Morrison Flagler commissioned the Hotel Ponce de Leon in St. Augustine. Winner of the national competition for the New York Public Library in 1897, Carrere & Hastings anticipated the opening of their masterpiece on May 23, 1911, but grave circumstances altered the life of the firm. In January of that year, Thomas Hastings contracted ty-

phoid fever and was confined to bed. On February 12, Carrere was fatally injured in a taxicab accident and died on March 1.

A complete list of works by Carrere & Hastings recorded in 1929 by a member of the firm features "File No. 254, Atlanta, Ga. Development scheme (Peach Tree Hgts.)."

On April 23, 1911, the Atlanta Constitution presented the "Plan for Subdivision of Property of the Peachtree Heights Park Company" promoting the first auction of lots. Dated 1910-11, the plat featured the entire Collier tract with entrance Lodge and Parkway Lake extending south from the junction of Habersham and Rivers Roads to Peachtree Creek.

Winding roads followed the topography and many carried names of the investors: Ellis Road, Woodward Way, Rivers Road, Andrews Avenue. Lots were generously proportioned along 50-foot roads and streams were protected with forest reservations.

A building plan for the Lodge, designed as the Rivers Realty office, was published in *The American Architect* in 1913. The efficient structure, with floor plan detailed in the journal, demonstrated several techniques common to Carrere & Hastings as defined by architectural historian Curtis Channing Blake: flat, rectangular-shaped mass set atop a rise with a series of steps and terraces marching up an incline; solid stucco walls with brick quoins; brick outline at roofline; lattice trellis.

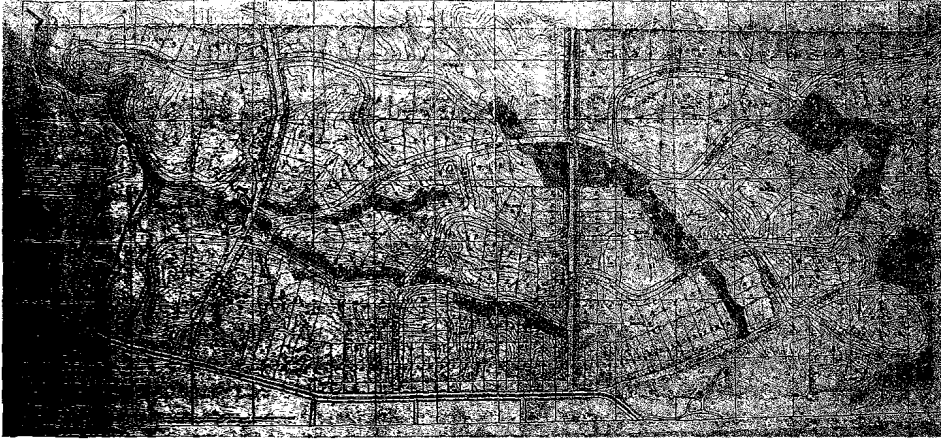
The structure, integrated with its setting through a matching wall, exhibited the architects' preference for controlling the landscape surrounding their designs. Today, the exterior of the building and surrounding grounds show evidence of modifications.

A revised plat for Peachtree Heights Park dated Feb. 8, 1915, by the original firm left plans south of Wesley Avenue intact, but replatted lots and roads on the north side. In 1925, local engineer Littleton H. Fitzpatrick revised the plat again in preparation for road paving, replacing Parkway Lake with the divided parkway, previously graded around 1917, and replatting roads and lots south of Peachtree Battle Avenue.

Peachtree Heights Park, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, today retains much of the character of the original design. On the centennial anniversary of the development, it remains one of the most beautiful residence parks in the Southern states and a tribute to its visionary developers, architects and engineers.

Judy Tindel is a member of the Buckhead Heritage Society and serves on the board of the Peachtree Battle Alliance.

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1910-11 plat of Peachtree Heights Park (courtesy of the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center).