

# Rolader family's water enterprise could have earned road naming

By Chad Wright

In the mid-1800s, Moores Mill Road served as a major east-west thoroughfare connecting settlers along the Chattahoochee to Buckhead.

Today, the road's name serves as a constant reminder to Buckhead residents of the Moore family and their mill that once thrived on Peachtree Creek at the west end of the road. Overshadowed by this fact is a family whose entrepreneurial enterprises dominated the eastern section of the road and could have earned it the name of Rolader Road.

In 1849, Prussian immigrant William

Joseph Rolader departed Hall County, Ga., and settled his growing family in the Howell Mill area of Buckhead. As a Methodist Episcopal preacher, he set about spreading the word of God in the area. In 1879, at the age of 25, his son William Washington (W.W.) left his father's home on Howell Mill and bought 50 acres in Land Lot 157 from the estate of Clark Howell for \$800. The land was colored by an abundance of red clay and became known as "Red Ridge," and it would envelop the eventual intersection of Moores Mill Road and Northside Drive.

After acquiring "Red Ridge," W.W. moved a 17-by-19-foot log cabin onto the property and added a rustic stacked-stone fireplace that remains visible today. He married Arrie Cofield, the daughter of a local potter, and he set about making earthenware. In a time

without refrigeration, the clay jars kept perishables cool in basements, springhouses or in the bottom of wells. W.W. dug his clay from a rich vein discovered behind the cabin. East of the cabin, a team of mules and skilled hands processed and molded the clay into churns, pitchers, jugs, pots and other vessels. Once the goods were fired overnight in a wood-burning kiln, local residents and businesses would purchase the wares.

Between 1881 and 1902, W.W. and Arrie gave life to eight children, whom they raised in the log cabin and put to work as pottery assistants or field hands. As the children grew, the acreage along

Moores Mill was divided among them. Sons Ivon, Homer and Clark took over the operation of a general store on their uncle's land on the northwest corner of Moores Mill and Northside Drive. The store sold all the expected sundries. Attendants pumped gas into the cars of the wealthy estate holders living along Paces Ferry Road, and a blacksmith took care of the horses of the less wealthy. A tub out front was filled with Coca-Colas made exceptionally cold by means of a 200-pound block of ice that was delivered daily.

In the 1920s, the three brothers teamed up to start the Rolader Spring Water Company on land Clark purchased nearby around current-day Beechwood and Randall Mill roads. A bottling device drew water from the spring, and gravity fed it into 5-gallon bottles that were filled four at a time. The bottles

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## History Corner



DAN VICKERS

A Rolader Spring Water delivery truck being loaded about 1930 by, left to right, Edna Earle Rolader, Joseph Rolader, Hickey Reeves and Homer Rolader.

were stacked and trucked to businesses from Buckhead to Atlanta five days a week for 50 cents per bottle.

After World War I, Ivon inherited the pottery business on Moores Mill. He outsourced the labor and kept it thriving. He maintained his focus on his other family businesses but also found the time to start a dairy. From there he delivered unpasteurized, fresh milk to Buckhead residents and beyond.

Ivon put his two boys to work in the family ventures. Son Pete, a local Atlanta lawyer who eventually inherited his father's wood house in the 1940s, recalls working

at the Rolader Spring Water site at an early age. "We boys would work and wash bottles and load the truck in the afternoons and get paid by taking turns driving the truck up the long driveway to the public road. We were too young to have driver's licenses. That was our pay for washing bottles."

Pete and his fellow fourth generation of Roladers witnessed the postwar growth of Buckhead and Atlanta and discovered new opportunity beyond the family land. Rolader Springs, as well as most of the Rolader houses along Moores Mill, gave way to subdivisions. The city of Atlanta claimed the former site of the general store for a water storage

facility, and the cabin that started it all was dismantled in 1991 and painstakingly reassembled at the Atlanta History Center as a monument to settler life. All that remains today on the family home site is the listing stacked-stone fireplace, standing sentinel to a time when the east end of Moores Mill Road was synonymous with Rolader industry.

*Chad Wright, a native Atlantian and real estate developer, serves as secretary of the Buckhead Heritage Society. To learn more about the Roladers, visit the BHS Oral History archive at [www.BuckheadHeritage.com](http://www.BuckheadHeritage.com).*