

Buckhead Heritage Article # 3

St. Anne's: Lessons in Fashion, Design, & Community

By Christine McCauley, Executive Director

As a child I would wear my soccer uniform to church. This does not surprise my friends and family (I've never had a recognizable sense of fashion), but looking back it does surprise me. How could I get away with this at St. Anne's Episcopal Church? How could the Very Right Frank Allan, who was elected Bishop Coadjutor of the Diocese in Atlanta in 1986, allow me to show up every Sunday in my green and yellow "Stingers" uniform? I guess I could also ask "where were my parents?", but I know where they were: they were at church cooking breakfast, serving on the Vestry, or chairing the Buildings and Grounds Committee, trying to ignore my outfit.

Frank, and St. Anne's for that matter, broke all the rules, as far as I could tell. We laughed a lot during Frank's sermons on Sunday mornings, which was surely not allowed in church. We were allowed to exit stage right, never making it back to the pew after Communion, before everyone else was finished drinking their watered-down wine. We were even witness to the ordination of the first female priest in the Diocese of Atlanta, Eloise Lester. We were so anti-establishment, weren't we? Probably not, but we were worshiping in this strange yet wonderful modern structure that looked nothing like my grandmother's Trinity Presbyterian Church across the street, and that was different.

"St. Anne's... is an impressive structure which combines the influence of Gothic architecture with the more functional use of the modern basic material." "The chief effect on entering... St. Anne's is that of light, color, power and symbolism, readily perceived in its glorious windows, and the harmony and consonance of its gleaming brass and other furnishings." Louis H. Swayze was a practicing architect in Atlanta during the 1950s and 1960s and a graduate of Emory University and of GA Tech. He was not only the architect of many of St. Anne's buildings (one of Atlanta's most interesting works of modern architecture), he was one of the forty or so folks who began St. Anne's as a mission in May of 1955.

In its earliest years, St. Anne's didn't have its own home; members arranged to hold services at the Lovett School, then located at 1415 West Wesley Road. It was during these earliest and lean years that "the men made an altar, lectern and kneeling benches. Women obtained prayer books, hymnals and choir robes, holy vessels, linens, and ornaments for the altar." They even began watering the wine and borrowing priests (the Cathedral of St. Philip loaned a few out on Sundays). There were a hundred sacrifices, personal and financial, made by the founding members to realize this dream known as St. Anne's Episcopal Church.

In 1956, St. Anne's purchased two lots, one of which was the Rosserville School, Buckhead's second oldest remaining school dating to 1899 (New Hope School, begun in 1872 on Arden Road for the black communities of Irby Alley and Happy Mill, predates the Rosserville School). After a \$20,000 renovation, the first service was held in the building in February of 1958. Through further additions (all modern and designed by

Swayze), the closing of Rilman Road, and the construction of the new church buildings (designed by Swayze), St. Anne's was finally able to hold its first service in its new church on Easter, 1966. It wasn't until May of 1981, however, that the church was consecrated – an act possible only after all debts have been paid.

A short thirty-six years passed between the inspiration for the mission and the consecration of St. Anne's Episcopal Church. By its consecration in 1981, I was no longer wearing my soccer uniform. Today, as I consider the trials and tribulations of that first thirty-six years, I realize why Frank Allen hardly noticed my green and yellow tube socks – he was busy. Frank, the members of the parish, the vestry, the choir director, the youth minister – they were all busy building one of Atlanta's great religious institutions. Now, with a booming congregation led by the dynamic and Very Reverend Eddie Ard and a day school busting at the seams, St. Anne's is continuing to build its missions programs and fulfill the spiritual need of a growing number of Atlantans, and St. Anne's is still a work in progress.

Today, in an appropriate church going outfit, I find myself at St. Anne's again as the executive director of an organization dedicated to historic preservation in Buckhead. In April, Buckhead Heritage held an event entitled "Good Design Transcends Time: A look at modern architecture's place in historic preservation" during which we learned about the evolution of modern architecture, the elements of good design, and the challenges of protecting the recent past. It occurs to me that in seven years, this church building will technically be "historic" (fifty years old), but it doesn't look like what most of us consider historic. And protecting this building will present challenges much like we see in the preservation of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings – materials conservation challenges and public opinion challenges. But St. Anne's will have yet another challenge – a growing congregation which will need either more space or additional services.

The founders of St. Anne's probably never considered these challenges as they were cutting and stitching their way to choir robes and building their altar and kneeling benches. They certainly did consider, however, the mark St. Anne's would make on our community in Buckhead – St. Anne's would raise our children, guide our adults, and care for our underprivileged, teaching us along the way the lessons of risk, the rewards of leadership, and the challenges of stewardship. This radical building is the founders' physical mark - a manifestation of their risk and leadership – and it is home to a church that has become a positive influence on so many of us in Buckhead. As one of the influenced, I am so grateful to have grown up within its harmonious yet out of the ordinary walls, and I revel in the accomplishments of its many architects.

Citation information can be obtained by calling Christine McCauley at 404-467-9447.