

Sale of Buckhead property rocked Atlanta a century ago

By Judy Tindel

At the time, the Atlanta Constitution called it "the largest single real estate deal Atlanta has ever known." The deal rocked the city 100 years ago and set the course for development of Peachtree Heights Park.

In May 1910, a syndicate of Atlanta businessmen purchased 483 acres five miles north of Atlanta on Peachtree Road from the estate of prosperous farmer Wesley Gray Collier. The \$375,000 transaction was hailed by the Atlanta Journal as a "development that will have the most far-reaching effect on...Peachtree Road's great possibilities."

At its centennial, the neighborhood -- now known as Peachtree Heights West -- is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and remains one of Atlanta's significant neighborhoods.

Wesley Gray Collier

Wesley Gray Collier (1824-1906) was the son of Meredith and Elizabeth Gray Collier, pioneer settlers who moved from North Carolina to north Georgia in 1806. In 1822, following the Indian cession of land to the federal government, the Colliers acquired property in land lot 104, seventeenth district of present-day Fulton County, built a farmhouse on land known today as Lady Marian Lane in Sherwood Forest and raised a large family, securing additional acreage over the years.

Wesley was born and lived on the farm, one of 15 siblings, before moving north of Peachtree Creek to family property on Peachtree Road. His older brother, George Washington 'Wash' Collier (1813-1903), was a builder and real estate developer and served as Atlanta's first post master. Another brother, John (1815-1892), was a prominent attorney and judge.

In a deed recorded in 1849, Meredith

Collier gave the north half of lot 111 and the entirety of lot 112 to his son, Wesley G. Collier, although Wesley would later testify that he had lived on the property since 1847. In 1851, Wesley Collier purchased Land Lot 113 for \$250.

Wesley Collier's house was located on the west side of Peachtree Road, south of Muscogee Avenue. Married in 1847, Collier and his first wife Luceller Minerva Smith (c.1831-1861/64) had four children. Following her death, he married Eliza Ann McDonald (1844-1908) in 1867 and had seven children.

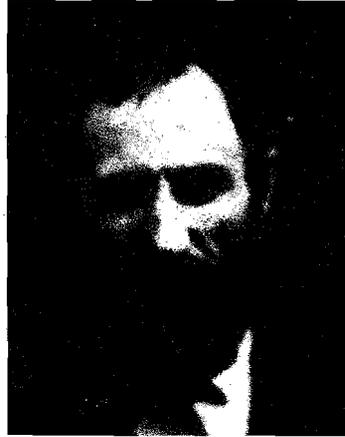
Wesley Collier died in his house on March 1, 1906 following a brief illness. His obituary in the Atlanta Constitution described the man as "another of those rugged pioneers who laid the foundation of the city's greatness... Wesley Collier was a farmer. He cared for little besides his family, his fields

and his church, though he was not lacking in conceptions of civic duty. He never sought office, however, or engaged to any extent in politics. His life was simple, homely, healthy. He sought to teach his children right living; he was devoted to his church, and he knew how to till the soil."

Estate

Perhaps influenced by the success of Ansley Park, developed in 1904 on the estate of his brother George Washington 'Wash' Collier, Wesley Collier subdivided his land south of Peachtree Creek in 1904 and sold a few lots fronting Peachtree Road. It was after his death, however, that the majority of his land holdings were dispersed.

In his will, filed by the firm of attorney Walter Pemberton Andrews, Collier named as executors "...my son George Washington Collier by my first marriage and my son John Wesley Collier by my second marriage... I



Wesley Gray Collier, 1880, Courtesy of the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center

Local History

authorize them to sell all of my property... either as a whole or in parcels or subdivisions, as they may think best, and as they may judge to be for the best interest of my wife and all of my children."

Three months after their father's death, his sons sold 13.35 acres in Land Lot 113 to Leontine Chisolm Andrews, wife of Collier's attorney. Walter P. Andrews had been a member of the syndicate that bought Wash Collier's land, and his independently wealthy wife was active in her own real estate deals.

In 1907, the Collier brothers drew plans for subdivision of a portion of the estate north of Peachtree Creek, in land lots 111 and 112. Three roads were established, including Franklin Avenue (today's Peachtree Battle Avenue), Lucile Ave. (today's Muscogee Ave.) and Wesley Avenue (West Wesley Road), with lots lining Peachtree Road just steps from the new streetcar tracks connecting Atlanta to Buckhead.

The Colliers were mindful of the potential value of their holdings but also aware of the costs of preparing land for sale, risks of dividing the estate too soon, and competition from other developers working in the area. These matters were detailed in a highly publicized family lawsuit that laid out the issues and challenges.

In the first year of operations, the Colliers sold about \$31,000 worth of land in the subdivision. In contrast to common sales hy-

perbole of the day, a small classified advertisement from January 1910 featured "10 acres of Peachtree Battle Ave., just off Peachtree Road, near the car line. It will make you a nice truck farm or a nice summer home."

While the Collier brothers were subdividing land lots 111 and 112, developer Frank C. Owens and his partner Eretus Rivers purchased neighboring property across Peachtree Road in Land Lot 101 from Leontine Chisolm Andrews in 1906. Site work on the property, which became Peachtree Heights [East], began in 1908 and prominent newspaper articles and advertisements promoted water, sewer and electric lights.

"All of this costly work has been done by Messrs. Owens and Rivers in a quiet, systematic way, entirely at their own expense," the Constitution said. In June 1909, in marked contrast to the Collier brothers' sales efforts, a real estate auction of Peachtree Heights [East] parcels sold 82 of the 135 available lots for a total of



Plat of Land Lots 111, 112 and 113 from the Atlanta Constitution, May 22, 1910.

\$171,000.

Less than a year later, in May of 1910, that Wesley Collier's executors sold his entire estate, exempting seven lots previously sold, to a syndicate represented by attorney Walter P. Andrews and realtor Eretus Rivers.

Judy Tindel is a member of the Buckhead Heritage Society. This article is the first of two parts on the development of Peachtree Heights Park.