

A Brief Modern History of Laurel Ridge Shamrock Area

At one time, the area now known as Laurel Ridge Shamrock was inhabited by Creek Indians. Typically, the Cherokees were found north of the Chattahoochee River and the Creeks to the south, but this area was probably a place of contact between the two tribes. During the Colonial period, Creeks outnumbered European colonists and enslaved Africans, and they occupied more land. Early interaction between the colonists and the Creeks centered on the exchange of deerskins and for a short time on slaves whom they captured from among Florida Indians.

Native peoples were encouraged to join the growing plantation economy, but they also forged ties with the African slaves, and during the 18th century hundreds of fugitive slaves settled in Creek towns. The Creeks largely avoided the Revolutionary War, but the deerskin trade vanished and as Georgia statehood occurred, Creeks were viewed as impediments to the plantation economy rather than as trading partners.

Thus began the ceding of land by the Creeks. U.S. troops and state militias were brought in to fight the Red Stick War in 1813 which resulted in the Treaty of Fort Jackson and the Creeks losing 22 million acres. In 1825 Georgia agents bribed Creek leader William McIntosh to sign away all their territory in return for plantation land along the Chattahoochee River. In 1826 Creek representatives signed away their remaining Georgia land, and a land lottery was held. In 1836 Creeks were forcibly rounded up and removed to "Indian territory" west of the Mississippi.

In 1822, DeKalb County was created from parts of Henry, Fayette and Gwinnett counties, and the Georgia Legislature designated Decatur as the county seat.

Once the area was settled by permanent European residents, the Lawrenceville Highway, which was probably an old Native American trail, became the key point of transportation for the then agricultural community. During the Battle of Atlanta campaign, the left wing of the Union Army marched along this road to Decatur and occupied that city in the summer of 1864.

After the Civil War, the railroad line was constructed. This line essentially ran from Atlanta into North Carolina, and has been in continuous use since approximately 1890. The building of this railroad spurred some development in the area and led to the establishment of such areas as Montreal Station and Tucker, which was formerly known as Browning. Originally the line was owned by the Georgia, Carolina and Northern Railway. This later merged into the Seaboard Airline Railway and is now part of the CSX system. The right of way was and still is 100 feet in width.

It is during this time that property came to be owned by the Kittredge family. Edward M. Kittredge, a Confederate veteran, acquired 102 ½ acres from the heirs of W. Kittredge in 1883. The Kittredges farmed the land for the most part. It is for this family that Kittredge School is named. A large portion of the land remained in the Kittredge family for years, and was gradually sold as North Druid Woods, Pine Glen, Fork Creek and Country Squire.

Lawrenceville Highway was exactly what its name implies, a road leading from Decatur, the county seat of DeKalb County (which at one time included Fulton County), to Lawrenceville, the county seat of Gwinnett County. It was along this road that European development began, and sometime in the dim past, the area generally located at the intersection of Frazier Road and Lawrenceville Highway became known as Pea Ridge. Obviously, the road is typical of many roads of the time, and does follow a ridge line, so at least the derivation of the name of this area is obvious. A saw mill was located where Norgate Manor Condominiums are now located. This mill eventually closed in the mid 1960's.

Homes were built throughout the area, mostly from the late 1940's to the early 1950's, many lived in by commuters employed in Atlanta. Usually the lots were larger than those commonly seen today. Typically, you might see four or five acres and maybe more, as part of the property. Some of these lots are now being assembled for cluster homes, especially along Pangborn and Frazier Roads.

DeKalb County contained a large number of dairy farms, one of which may have been the approximate area of North DeKalb Mall. This mall opened in the summer of 1965 as the first enclosed mall in Atlanta. Intensive residential development began in the 1950s and continues to this day. Laurel Ridge Elementary School was built in the late 1950s and Shamrock High School graduated its first class in 1970.

Perhaps the most prominent landmark of the area for many years was the "Hello World" gas station, which was located where the Happy Store is now. This gas station served as the bus stop for either Greyhound or Trailways. In fact, Pea Ridge was a station and a destination point for which you could at one time buy a ticket on these bus lines.

Prominent families in the area, in addition to the Kittredges, included the Medlocks (Susan Medlock was Edward Kittredge's sister), the Fraziers, the Pangborns, and the Vandegriffs. In fact, the Vandegriff home until recently was still located on North Druid Hills Road between Laurel Hill Drive and North Druid Woods Court. It is now the site of the Druid Walk subdivision. Clairmont Road, formerly known as Shallowford Road (named for the shallow ford over the south fork of the Peachtree Creek located near the Veterans' Hospital), and Lawrenceville Highway were main roads.

There once was a road generally in the area of North Druid Hills Road that was known as Vandergriff Road but it was never accepted or maintained by DeKalb County. It was later abandoned when North Druid Hills Road was constructed around 1944.

Located on the southeastern side of what is now N. Druid Hill Rd., the E.V. Camp Steel Works operated until recently. Because it was inaccessible, it built a road from Clairmont to Lawrenceville, part of which became N. Druid Hills Rd. in 1944. During World War II the Government directed the steel works to produce cast armor, ship chains and high explosive bomb bodies deemed crucial to the war effort, and the U.S. Navy paved that stretch of road. With the advent of more intensive land use and planning and zoning requirements, heavy industrial uses gradually were eliminated.

For years North Druid Hills Road was only a two lane road, which was often blocked by trains passing across the road near the site of the golf driving range. The bridge over the railroad was constructed in the mid 1960's after several fatalities at this intersection.

As can be seen in census records dating back over 100 years, there has always been a significant African American community located to the northwest of the railroad. In 1870 Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church was established by freed slaves around what is today LaVista Road. Members of the Nelms and Stokes families, among others, farmed land they obtained from former owners. Decedents of these families still own property and reside in the Mount Zion community.

With thanks to the New Georgia Encyclopedia and Bob Stubbs, long-time resident of Laurel Ridge Shamrock Community.