

City History

Founding

The community of Mountain Park was established in 1925 as a summer resort for camping and cabin living. Camping in the early 1900s was a way of escaping the stressful city life and trading it for the countryside where some visitors enjoyed simple surroundings while others enjoyed traveling to fully furnished tents with extravagant comforts. Mountain Park was close to the city of Atlanta and could provide both outdoor lifestyles, as well as cabin living, conveniently by car which many prosperous families owned in the mid 1920s.

It is a mystery how the people who originally developed Mountain Park came together. A group of businessmen created an organization named the Mountain Park Improvement Club (MPIC) to manage the project and selected a real estate company called Chambers & Co. to sell the lots. A financier, Gilbert W. Straus, loaned money to Inez Chambers to buy the land. They were part of the Mountain Park project in Milton County to make money.

Three of the known six members of the MPIC were associated with Southern Railway, a coveted employer in the 1920s. All the Club members except, perhaps, Tommy Garrett, were Masons. All the men and their wives were featured in the society pages of the newspapers as well as their activities in prominent organization memberships, churches, and charities.

The MPIC members had impressive resumes with their employment accented by additional leadership positions in associations, boards, and politics. The members were Charles G. Walker, freight agent for Southern Railway Company; William H. Wills, chief clerk, Southern Railway Company; James A. Broach, dentist and political activist; Thomas (Tommy) M. Garrett, farmer and merchant; Charles G. Warren, top selling roofing supplies salesman; and Robert S. Elrod, Atlanta labor leader and engineer for the Southern Railway.

It is not known if farmer and political activist John C. Hackett was an official member of the MPIC. However, he was very prominent in MPIC business activities. John Hackett and Tommy Garrett were brothers-in-law and, although all other members of the MPIC lived in Atlanta, they lived near Mountain Park.

The MPIC attorney was Stephens Mitchell, whose sister Margaret Mitchell wrote the book *Gone with the Wind*. Stephens was a well-known real estate attorney as well as a president of the Atlanta Bar Association, and an editor of the *Atlanta Historical Society Bulletin* at one time.

Milton Lester Chambers of Chambers & Co. was a member of a prominent Atlanta family where his father and uncle were in the real estate profession. Inez Adair attended Miss Hannah's School for Girls in Atlanta and the University of Tennessee. Milton opened his own real estate business in 1921, and married Inez in 1922. The real estate firm, Chambers & Co., was quite successful, selling in-town and suburban homes.

Gilbert W. Straus, the financier, moved from Baltimore to Atlanta in the early 1900s. He married Josie Eisman in Atlanta who was also from a very wealthy family of wholesale and retail clothiers in multiple cities. Gilbert received his mother's estate inheritance in 1915, and his first real estate transaction was recorded in the newspaper in 1916. His name was sometimes linked to top real estate professionals, although real estate was not his primary business. He was mostly involved with the clothing profession.

No matter the way the three entities came together, it was clear that the MPIC was the management agent and in charge. The early sales deeds defined the relationships that Chambers & Co. "agrees to build a dam for Garrett Lake but does not agree to maintain it or operate (the) lake. This is for the Mountain Park Improvement Club, Inc. or its successors." The MPIC was not incorporated at the time but claimed to be.

Almost two months before buying the land from William Garrett, Chambers & Co. ran its first sales advertisement for Mountain Park lots on February 2, 1925 in the Atlanta Constitution. It was a pre-sales ad for "camp sites." It and subsequent ads promoted 800 or 1000 lots measuring approximately 50 x 150 feet at \$10 each and promising beautiful trees, hills and valleys; six bold springs, with one of the best mineral springs in Georgia; a 25-acre lake formed from clear spring waters; an athletic field for baseball, tennis, and basketball along with

playgrounds for children; and private streets only for owners and their guests.

Other smaller ads in February and March promised an additional amenity, a club house with a reading room, billiard tables, dance hall, and card playing room. An ad on March 22, 1925 stated that grocery orders and delivery would be available as well as daily supplies of ice, milk, vegetables, laundry and more.

Another ad offered furnished tents to be erected for lot owners at \$30 each and that lumber was readily available for a 14 x 14 cabin at \$15 or, for twice the size cabin, at \$30. Simultaneously, MPIC member Charles G. Warren offered to build cabins for lot owners while he also built and sold cabins in Mountain Park. An ad on March 19, 1925 said the lake was ready for boating, fishing and bathing. It also says that Mountain Park plat maps were available at Garrett's store on Alabama Road.

On Thursday March 26th, 1925, the Mountain Park Improvement Club's sales agent Inez Adair Chambers was granted a security deed on the Mountain Park land by Gilbert Straus for a loan of \$3000, payable in 90 days (June 26th, 1925) at 8% interest. The next day, Inez used the money plus \$100, for a total of \$3100, to buy the same land from William T. Garrett, Tommy Garrett's father. On Tuesday March 31st, Inez Chambers bought 50 lots from Gilbert at \$10 each for a total of \$500. The lots were primarily along Lakeshore Drive South on both sides of the road and along Mountain Park Road across from the lake and adjacent to the athletic field. Inez purchased other lots as sales opportunities were encountered.

The first lot sale was made on April 1st, 1925 at a cost of \$10 to Albert Howard for lakeside lot 9, block 19 on Lakeshore Drive. On April 2, MPIC member Charles G. Warren purchased three lots for \$30 in block 11, numbers 17, 18 and 20 plus prime lakeside lots 1 through 9 on Lakeshore Drive for \$90. On April 3, Warren bought three more lots. He was preparing to develop lots with cabins.

Sales were good. Prosperous people were buying the lots, and some were prominent names within the city of Atlanta and surrounding areas. Mrs. Porter King, the widow of the former mayor of Atlanta for the year of 1895-1896, bought 9 lots on Lakeshore Drive across the street from Garrett Lake. Mrs. King was active in many high-profile philanthropic activities, and her death in 1932 was front page news. Mrs. King's daughter Mrs. Willis E. Ragan bought a lot on

Mountain Park Road.

Mrs. Annie Hook Spratling bought two lots on Hickory Street just off Lakeshore Drive. She was the daughter of Judge James S. Hook, a member of a pioneering Georgia family, and wife of Fletcher J. Spratling, a two-term councilman for Atlanta's seventh ward. He later became deputy clerk of the superior court criminal division. Her two sisters bought two adjoining lots each. Families often bought lots close to each other forming little compounds.

A.W. (Pack) Smith purchased lots on Mountain Park Road. He was elected sheriff of Milton County in 1924, a position he held until Milton County merged with Fulton County in 1932. He was a colorful public servant who was often featured in newspaper stories about bootlegging and murders. His wife was politically active and the first president of the Alpharetta Garden Club which still exists.

Nelson T. Sprat was an influential alderman and council man for several years, serving as Atlanta's mayor pro tem in 1921 and acting as a chairman on many critical committees. He served on the committee overseeing \$1 million on the viaduct at Prior Street and Central Avenue bridging the railroad lines. Viaducts provided great value to the city of Atlanta and its growth. Nelson Spratt had sisters Mrs. A. J. Haley and Mrs. Roy D. Warren (son of MPIC member Charles G. Warren). The A. J. Haley family and the Warrens owned cabins in Mountain Park, too.

The warm months of 1925 were very tumultuous for the Mountain Park project. Garrett Lake's earthen Dam breached. Lot sales had been brisk at times but not brisk enough. When the \$3000 note Gilbert Straus issued to Inez Chambers came due on June 26, 1925, Inez did not have the money to pay the remaining debt of \$1500. She sold approximately 150 of the advertised 800 to 1000 lots available, meaning no one made any money.

From late June and through July, Inez Chambers sold only a few more lots. On August 4, 1925, Inez Chambers sold the last lot in Mountain Park for Chamber & Co. According to a then-living Garrett relative's scrapbook handwritten entry, Chambers & Co. filed for bankruptcy in the summer of 1925. There are no known sales by Inez Chambers in any Atlanta area after September 4, 1925.

On September 4, 1925, Inez Chambers sold all unsold lots in Mountain Park to the Mountain Park Improvement Club for \$1 along with the promise to pay Gilbert Straus' remaining loan balance of \$1500. This transaction began a series of property transfers between members of the MPIC along with schemes for raising money for more than a year to try to save Mountain Park and to find a way to satisfy the payment to Gilbert Straus.

Condensed from chapter one of a book being written

by resident Trish Hill about the history of Mountain Park.

See the chapters and more at mountainparkgahistory.com, launching in 1924.

Credits: The Atlanta Journal, The Atlanta Constitution, The Baltimore Sun

ancestry.com, familysearch.com, newspapers.com, genealogybank.com

findagrave.com, archives.com

The Fowler Family, Alpharetta and Old Milton County Historical Society

Mountain Park City Hall Records

Starting with some of the first cabins built in Mountain Park, families named them with creative identities such as the Buzzard's Roost, Rossier Holler, The Owl's Nest, Park-Ur-Carcass, Paradise, Buckeye Ridge, Shack-Toe-In and Nuth-in-Much. Recent homeowners have continued the tradition of naming their homes, too.

Early Cityhood

Mountain Park became a city through its incorporation in July 1927 which also established a mayor and city council and, in 1932, Milton County was merged with Fulton County to save it from bankruptcy. At that time, only three families lived in Mountain Park all year long.

A Mountain Park Skeet Club charter was finalized in April 1934 by the law firm of Mitchell & Mitchell in which the city attorney, Stephens Mitchell, was a partner with his father and brother.

Stephens, as stated before, was the brother of “*Gone with the Wind*” author Margaret Mitchell.

Among those competing in the skeet club activities on Saturdays and Sundays were the Cracker Baseball Club President Uncle Wilbert Robinson, Roswell Mayor C. P. Vaughan, A. A. Wills of Alpharetta, as well as Bob Mansell, Virgil Garrett, and Nap Rucker of baseball fame. Miss Marion Hembree was one of two women participating in a May 1934 shoot. Also, that month, Ace Jackson of Mountain Park won a hunting coat valued at \$9 as a skeet shooting contest prize.

While covering the 1934 skeet shoots, The North Fulton Progress also reported, “A good diamond has been graded and baseball games are played quite often at the Park,” and “The roads to the park are fine, and much work has been done on the lake and the surrounding grounds making Mountain Park a very pretty place.”

Mid Century in Mountain Park

In the 40s and 50s, resident “Charlie” Johnson operated Mountain Park’s only business, The Stand, which was a “sundry” store and casual family restaurant was located at what now is 100 Russell Road. The walls and floor were wooden, booths flanked the dance floor, it had a juke box for dancing, and the sand bottom pool was just outside the door. At night, the Stand was also a favorite drinking spot -- with the small jail next door housing overly intoxicated folks.

The city's unique beauty was enhanced when Lake Cherful was built next to the first lake, Garrett Lake. Lake Cherful was constructed in 1951 from Mountain Park’s designated athletic field and from a corn field purchased from local farmer Oscar Burrell. The combined land was in both Cherokee and Fulton counties, thus the name Lake Cherful. A small white structure where Burrell had his boat house still exists on the Cherokee county lakeside on Lake Cherful.

The non-denominational Mountain Park Sunday School was formed in 1956 by Estelle Hall, Florence Smith, and others. Bill Coleman was the first teacher, and meetings were held near the pool or in residents’ yards. On August 1, 1959, a Jewish man, R.A. Rozeboom, sold the 50’ x 135’ lot running from Cedar Street to Mountain Park Road for \$1 to the Sunday School. Early members built the current open-air structure. Mountain Park Sunday School is the longest standing continuous organization in Mountain Park other than the city itself, meeting each June,

July, and August. The Sunday School welcomes past residents back every year to its annual Homecoming service and potluck luncheon.

Utilities did not come early to Mountain Park. Electricity became available in the city in the late 1930s. In 1960, Cobb County started supplying water to the city and, until then, the mineral spring and some private wells were the primary sources of drinking water. Natural gas became available in 1968. Nearly 90 full-time families resided in Mountain Park then and, in the early 1970s, the residents were asked to voluntarily remove their outhouses. During that time the Civic Building, built by the Civic Club with the help of private donations, was nearing completion.

The Latter Part of the Decade

In 1976, Joyce Ayers became the first woman to be elected as mayor of Mountain Park. The city's Volunteer Fire Department was established during her term and remains a volunteer fire department today.

In the mid-70s, the Mountain Park “Green” was enlarged by Mayor Ayers using reclaimed land when Lake Garret was dredged as a result of winning litigation against the Brookfield West subdivision for severely silting the lake during their real estate development. The original sand bottom swimming pool was replaced in 1977 with a modern concrete pool.

The early 1980s produced one of the favorite traditions in Mountain Park, the annual Fourth of July fireworks display. For two years, a resident rowed a boat into the middle of Garrett Lake shooting off his fireworks in what appeared to be an inebriated state. Mayor Philip Clark, fearing for the resident’s safety, rescinded the city’s fireworks ban and allowed shooting of fireworks by residents from the city green at the edge of the water. Lifting of the ban inspired abuse, and fireworks were released throughout the city on July 4th for a few years. Ultimately, the Civic Club started fundraisers each year to pay for professional fireworks shot over Cherful Lake from near the dam. The city eventually took over financially. The spectacular fireworks were popular with residents and people throughout the area, drawing great crowds to every watching vantage point. The evening activities expanded with live band performances – the Elton John tribute band was fantastic – and sometimes food trucks by the pool.

A few years after the fireworks began, resident Trish Hill started a tradition of a city-wide parade. It began with only the Mountain Park Volunteer Fire and Rescue water pump truck and a few local politicians in their cars. With encouragement in the following years, residents decorated their cars, trucks, motorcycles, and bikes to join in the parade which circled the city with blaring sirens and horns. It has become a favorite annual activity in the city, now with patriotic music playing while vehicles park and line up, along with an opening ceremony beginning with the pledge of allegiance and ending with the mayor announcing, “ladies and gentlemen, start your engines!”

In 1989, Mountain Park became the first municipality in Georgia to mandate a recycling program. A group of city volunteers, The Mountain Park Improvement Club, completed several enhancements to the city including renovation of the Sunday School pavilion, picnic pavilion and fishing bridge in 1997 and 1998. More recently in 2003, the MPIC built a shelter and refurbished the mineral spring area near the Community Building.

The 2000s

From the turn of the century in 2000 and to 2024, a number of annual events continued. Each December, the Mountain Park Volunteer Fire & Rescue Santa Run delivered thousands of gifts (provided by parents) to delighted children with Santa and his elves arriving at their homes in the fire truck. The Civic Club holds annual December holiday dinners, Valentine’s dinners, Easter Egg hunts, pool opening and closing parties, Halloween parties, quarterly Coffee with Neighbors events and more.

A city council election in 2005 between political newcomer businessman Frank Baia and former Mountain Park Mayor Jay Barnett was tied two times and only settled with the third election results. Newspapers from Seattle and Washington D.C. to London carried the stories and online betting sites were hot with the odds high. Frank Baia eventually won the election only by one vote!

The city lost litigation with a Final Order and Judgement in 2011 that cost millions of city dollars against upland subdivision developers who claimed not guilty to silting Lake Garrett. Tensions ran high in the city with supporters and non-supporters of the legal expenses, but after the verdict, Mountain Park residents pulled back together over time to explore dredging Lake Garrett or not – which has yet to be decided as of January 2024.

Over the years, a specimen tree ordinance passed to keep the city as a canopy of trees, and the city became a USA Tree City. Four-term Mayor Jim Still joined the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge project, planting specific bushes on the Green to attract butterflies. Among his other accomplishments, he not only navigated the city through the contentious lawsuit against developers, he sent the city into the future with its first website, helped establish the Citizens Communication System for emergency and information dissemination, and participated with the larger surrounding city mayors in the North Fulton Municipal Association for the betterment of all. Roads in the entire city were paved by Atlanta Gas Light when their updating project ruined many of the streets. The Community Building was completely renovated and brought up to date, along with construction of a new pool house and world class pool, all built with matching funds grants.

In 2023, the historic mineral spring, an amenity listed in original lot sales advertisements and a primary source of water from 1925 to 1960, as well as the surrounding area at the corner of Mountain Park Road and Lakeshore Drive were revitalized. The city replaced the decaying mineral spring roof with a new one. A fund raiser was held by a private citizen to create a garden area surrounding the mineral spring. Approximately \$3800 was raised in only a few weeks with the highest donation of \$1000 coming from a relative of a 1925 cabin owner. Volunteers from the city cleaned the area then planted a garden of mostly native plants to upgrade the entire corner. A resident donated three hand made benches and some dogwood trees. A plaque commemorating the historic value of the mineral spring was placed on a post.

All in all, the Fulton Reporter newspaper of 1934 is still right. "Mountain Park is a very pretty place."