

History & Highlights Tour of Piedmont Heights

Goals for Today's Tour

1. Share the story of PH with you so that you can appreciate the rich history of this neighborhood
2. Bring that history alive by taking you to various historical sites, including homes, churches, a cemetery, remnants of some magnificent gardens and an historic railroad corridor, which today we know as the Atlanta Beltline. We will also see some cool art and get to meet a giant cow named, Kathleen.
3. Give you an opportunity to meet some two very special individuals who have close ties to two of the families who settled this area, namely the Cheshires and the Monroes.

"Small Town in the Big City"

Over 3,000 residents occupy single-family homes, town homes, condominiums, one of Atlanta's first co-op apartment complexes and mid-rise apartments. It has two shopping centers with two major grocery stores, two drugstores and shops of every variety providing all manners of goods and services. Piedmont Heights has 16 restaurants, a bowling alley, several bars providing entertainment and even a tattoo parlor. It has three banks, two pharmacies, doctors, dentists, veterinarians, a Red Cross Blood Center, a hotel, two churches, many restaurants, a gym, an elementary school, three gasoline stations, three auto repair shops, an automobile body shop, a bicycle repair shop and most notably the landmark "Gorilla Car Wash." 50% commercial!

Morningside Shopping Center (Stop #4)

- 1925, Atlanta's first shopping center, originally had eleven stores.
- Masonic Lodge on the second floor became Gene and Gabe's, one of President Jimmy Carter's favorite restaurants. Added a theater where a play called "Della's Diner" became a 1980s cult classic.
- 1993, Smith's Olde Bar

Snapshot of Piedmont Heights [see maps]

- This triangular shaped neighborhood is bound by Piedmont Road on the east, I-85 on the north and the Atlanta Beltline corridor on the west [see maps]
- Other main thoroughfares include Monroe Drive and Montgomery Ferry Road
- Cheshire Bridge Road comes in from the NE and Rock Springs comes in from the SE
- Surrounding neighborhoods include Ansley Park (west), Armour (north), Morningside (east)
- It lies just north of Piedmont Park and just south of Armour Yard
- Atlanta Beltline (Northeast Trail) comes into play
- Lindbergh MARTA station is a critical transit hub

Daniel Pollock

The absence of a historically preserved battlefield means that visitors seeking firsthand knowledge about the places and events that figured prominently in the Battle of Atlanta must go beyond the almost effortless engagement with history available at well-preserved Civil War sites, such as Kennesaw Mountain, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg. Visits to the Atlanta battlefield, even via virtual tour, require greater self-reliance and a more active process of combining historical accounts, maps, and images with present-day visual evidence to ferret out what happened, where, and why. The rewards are great. By juxtaposing information from then and now, visitors traveling through contemporary Atlanta gain a new and powerful perspective on the city, its neighborhoods, and their place in history. Exploring seemingly ordinary sites is a way to gain a new awareness of history, even if the sites are often encountered during our everyday routines. Landscape historian John R. Stilgoe encourages us to scrutinize those places, put them in spatial context, and arrange them in time. "Enjoy the best kept secret around," Stilgoe writes, "the ordinary everyday landscape that rewards any explorer, that touches any explorer with magic."

Atlanta's Oldest Settlement

The first thing we would like you to know is that the area that is now the Piedmont Heights neighborhood dates back to 1833, making it Atlanta's oldest settlement. In the early 1800s there was a grist mill on Clear Creek, which runs behind Ansley Mall and along the eastern edge of Piedmont Park. In those days, Clear Creek was a large rushing stream, where local farmers ginned their cotton and ground their grain. The activity at Walker's Mill eventually gave rise to a town called Easton, which is today's Piedmont Heights.

The first settler was a man by the name of Benjamin Plaster. Mr. Plaster was granted 3,000 acres of land along Peachtree Creek and Clear Creek in recognition of his military service during the War of 1812. Plaster's tract, which had been Indian tribal land, featured a prominent knoll called "Council Bluff" where local chiefs met for their important meetings. We are standing at the top of Council Bluff right now. Plaster built a bridge across Peachtree Creek and the trail to it became known as Plaster's Bridge Road. Around 1917, that road was re-named Piedmont Road.

Around 1850 Captain Hezekiah Cheshire arrived from South Carolina. His sons, Napoleon and Jerome, settled on opposite sides of the south fork of Peachtree Creek. They built a bridge across the creek near to connect their farms and the road to it became Cheshire Bridge Road.

First settlers lived in tents and wagons until their homes were built. Their last names were Johnson, Chandler, Plaster, Cheshire, Liddell, Medlock, Collier, Montgomery and more. Do any of those sound familiar?

Morningside Baptist Church (Stop #5) | Council Bluff, Stop #10

Morningside Baptist Church occupies the second-largest tract of land in Piedmont Heights. Founded in 1930, the church's first sanctuary was in the Morningside neighborhood. In 1945, hired architect Thomas W. Gardner to design a larger building. Moved to a 14-acre wooded lot for sale bounded by Piedmont Road, Pelham Road, and Montgomery Ferry Drive in the Piedmont Heights neighborhood. The first service in the new sanctuary was held on October 21, 1951, and the Atlanta Journal called it "...one of the most beautiful, worshipful and attractive churches in the nation...with a spire tall enough to be seen in downtown Atlanta."

Rock Spring Presbyterian Church (Stop #11) [10:30 – 11:00]

Read passage from Page 1 of Spirit of Rock Spring

- 1923, designed by English architect Charles Hopson (1865-1941)
- Gothic Revival and Tudor Revival styles
- Granite quarried from nearby Cheshire Creek and features half-timbering and stucco reminiscent of 16th-century England
- The church is attended today by seventh-generation descendants of the congregation who founded it in 1870 and initially worshiped in a simple wood-framed church on the site.
- 1990, the church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places and cited, among its other qualifications, as "... an important aspect of religious history in Atlanta."
- 1874, Daniel Liddell Plaster (Benjamin's grandson) became charter member and donated one acre for cemetery

Barbara Wright Cheshire, Church Historian

- Daughter of Bill and Blanche Wright
- 7th generation Cheshire; married Joseph Monroe in this sanctuary
- Both grew up on Monroe Drive
- 25 years, professor of writing and research at GSU
- Documented the history of the church and surrounding area in her book, "The Spirit of Rock Spring."
- Cornerstone of the present church laid in 1922.

Monroe Gardens (Stop #16) [11:15 – 11:30]

- William L. Monroe, Sr. (1892-1965) landscape architect from NC
- 1917, Moved to ATL in via military
- 1925, founded the Monroe's Landscape and Nursery Company on 15-acre property Monroe Drive (originally Boulevard, but renamed in 1937 in Monroe's honor)
- Designed and installed over 10,000 gardens—private, commercial, and public in ATL and SE.
- Emory University, Coca-Cola headquarters, Chastain Park and more.
- Popular wedding venue and social hangout with a fishing pond, waterfall, wishing well, picnic areas, an outdoor bar, and more.
- Monroe died in 1965, leaving his son, Billy, to run the business until its closing in 1985.
- Land was donated to Red Cross
- Now you can find remnants of an outdoor chapel, bomb shelter and outdoor fireplace among the Ansley-Monroe Villas townhomes property.
- 1937, northern section of Boulevard Avenue was renamed Monroe Drive
- Vicky Allen-Monroe – granddaughter of Mr. Monroe

“Monroe designed for both residential and commercial properties and was well known for his use of stonework, streams, and rock gardens in naturalistic settings. Beginning in the 1930s Monroe served as special consultant for Fulton County and helped to develop Chastain Memorial Park as well as Adams Park. Many of Monroe's clients included Buckhead residences such as the Troy Chastain estate on Habersham Road, the Hugh Nunnally estate on Blackland Road, and the Chester Martin estate on Blackland Road. Monroe also worked on projects outside of Atlanta, such as Dunaway Gardens in Coweta County and Berry College in Rome. William L. Monroe, Sr. died in 1965. His son, William (Billy) L. Monroe, Jr., joined his father's business in 1948 and operated the nursery until retiring in 1986.”

Monroe House (Stop #15)

- 1951, Monroe built for his daughter, Evelyn, and her family
- Today it is subdivided into six apartments
- Met owner and he said the walls are thick concrete /rock

Airline Belle (Stop #1) [11:40 – 11:55]

- Steam passenger train running between Atlanta and Toccoa Atlanta operated by Richmond Air Line Railway (later the Southern Railway) 1879 – 1931
- 93 miles w/ 39 stops
- Oldest of the four “belt lines” which were built as a “bypass” for trains
- Read passage from Gravel book
- Beltline art mural by Benjamin Janik under MF bridge)

Traffic Signal Art (see website)

- Lauren Pallotta Stumberg
- Made possible by a Neighborhood Arts Grant from the City of Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (2018)
- Two boxes: 1) Intersection of Monroe & Montgomery Ferry; 2) Monroe & Armour

Think Greatly, LLC is an art + design projects incubator led by Lauren Pallotta Stumberg – an artist, muralist, designer, illustrator and creative consultant based out of Atlanta, GA.

Lauren received a 2016/2017 Emerging Artist Award from the City of Atlanta. She serves on the board of C4 Atlanta as an artist voice as well as the Arts Community Liaison. Additionally, Lauren leads beautification efforts and community arts programming opportunities as a board member at large for Fourth Ward Neighbors Association.

Notable projects include the Moreland Mural Project; public art funding from the City of Atlanta, Norcross Public Art Commission, Hapeville Office of Economic Development; community art events such as Forward Warrior and Little Five Arts Alive; design work for small businesses in Atlanta and beyond; retail products at local shops such as Crafted and Sugarboo.

Liddell House (Stop #7)

- Second-oldest house in Atlanta
- Built in the 1860s by Capt James McAlpin Liddell who served with distinction in Company I of the 16th Georgia Regiment during the Civil War.
- Capt Liddell lived in the house until his death at age 82 in 1915.
- Member of the Rock Spring Presbyterian Church where he served as secretary for 52 years.
- Buried in the Rock Spring Cemetery beside the church.
- Classic Antebellum farmhouse with a porte-cochère (coach gateway), clapboard siding and slate roof.
- Originally situated on 150 acres, which Captain Liddell actively farmed until 1900.
- Located barely 100 yards from the Airline Belle it is thought that the Liddell house might at one time have served meals for hungry travelers passing through.
- 11 owners over the years.
- Retains much of its original ornamentation such as fireplace mantels, doorknobs, hand-blown glass window panes, and heart-pine flooring hand-nailed with horseshoe nails.

Kathleen the Cow (Stop #6)

- Moved to PH in 2013
- Named “Kathleen” by her owner, nod to the dairy farms that once populated Piedmont Heights
- Originated in Mexico and arrived here by way of Cindy’s Dragonfly, a metal yard art shop in Dillard, GA.
- Belongs to Donna Bryans Gensler, a longtime Piedmont Heights resident.
- Gift from her family in memory of the herds of cattle on the farm in Madison, GA, where Donna grew up. Cows were Donna’s favorite animals, and she loved them so much that she became a vegetarian.
- Twin “sister” named Priscilla who lives on Lanier Boulevard in the nearby Morningside neighborhood.