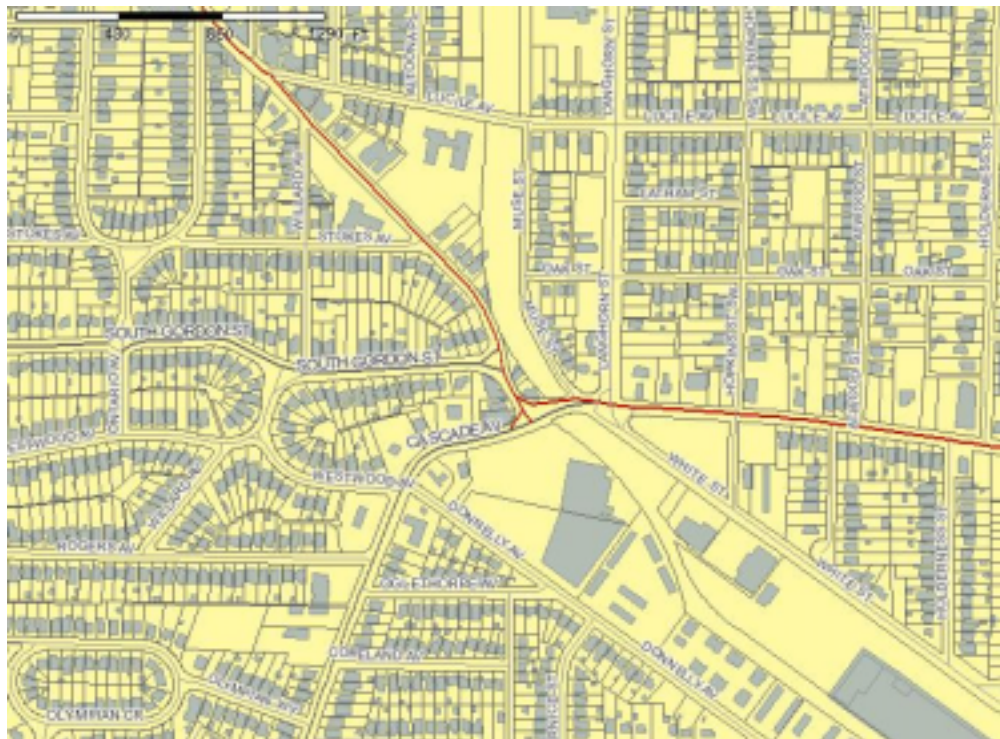


Cascade Avenue/Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard



Theme

The intersection of Cascade Avenue and Ralph David Abernathy is a commercial center at the junction of three historic neighborhoods: West End, Cascade Heights (today Westview) and Oakland City. Its development is typical of early 20th century commercial districts, with many local businesses, public services and civic institutions. Many of these resources remain today.

Developmental History

The Cascade Node of the Southwest Quadrant of the Beltline consists of Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard, where it intersects with Cascade Avenue, and continues along Ralph David Abernathy to the east, running to the south of, and roughly parallel to I-20. Atwood Street forms the eastern edge of the node, while the western edge of the node extends to Oglethorpe Avenue.

There are a number of neighborhoods and communities which are encompassed by the node. One of these is West End, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The neighborhood got its start with the Whitehall Inn, which by the 1830s, had become the first polling place and post office in the area. At that time, Atlanta was still known as Marthasville. Following the Civil War, the area became home to many railroad workers moving south from downtown Atlanta near the railroad hubs. This is a pattern similar to the pattern of settlement of the Pittsburgh area in the University node following the Civil War. Many wealthier Atlantans began moving to West End and building their estate homes by the 1880s. However, in 1880, a large fire destroyed many homes in West End and thus laid the groundwork for West End's incorporation as part of the City of Atlanta. By doing this, West End would have access to more adequate resources, such as fire and police protection. As these wealthy people began moving to the area, Gordon Street became the center of commercial activity for the area. Now Gordon Street is known as Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard.

West End is one of Atlanta's oldest neighborhoods and has seen many changes since its establishment in the 1830s. The neighborhood, from its establishment until the 1960s, was a predominantly white upscale neighborhood. Residents of the area included writer Joel Chandler Harris, whose home, the Wren's Nest, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Railroads were an important part of West End's early years, and provided many opportunities for growth in the area. The tracks were destroyed and then rebuilt after the Civil War. West End was annexed into the City of Atlanta on January 1, 1894. The year 1894 ushered in a great period for the growth and development of West End. Peoples St, Lee St., and Lawton Street saw a surge in the construction of single-family residential homes as well. These single family homes were often modest in size and design. Along Gordon Street (Ralph David Abernathy) there was an increase in commercial buildings and churches constructed in the main business district, which was also the thriving center of West End.



West End Historic District, Wrens Nest

West End continued its growth into the twentieth century, when the introduction of the automobile to area in the 1920s spurred on even more growth. From 1910 to 1930, the population of West End went from 7132 to 22,882. This shift also reflected an increasing African American population, which would continue until the 1960s. By 1930, the African American population in West End was 15%. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the face of West End began to change. I-20 was added across the northern part of the community and the central business district on Gordon Street was demolished. West End Mall took the place of the demolished central business district and it opened in 1973. Also adding to the new face of West End, was a MARTA train station located across the street from the West End Mall. However, just as other neighborhoods such as Cascade Heights, West End was not immune to the phenomenon of white flight and by 1976, 86% of West End was black. A major contributing factor to this occurrence of white flight was the presence of the Atlanta University Center. The Atlanta University Center is home to traditionally African American colleges such as Morehouse, Spelman, Clark Atlanta, Interdenominational Theological Center, and Morris Brown. As these schools grew, many affiliated with them began moving closer to them. Since these schools are historically black colleges, those affiliated with them were, and are still today, majority black. Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard fell into a state of disrepair during the latter part of the 20th century.

Westview is another notable neighborhood in this node. This community began in the early 20th century as Cascade Heights, a planned community developed by Weyman and Connors. Featuring amenities such as paved streets, stylish bungalows and a bus line, it was truly a modern development. Like West End, Cascade Heights was no stranger to white flight. Starting in the latter half of the twentieth century, white residents left Cascade Heights and African American residents filled in the spaces in an often tempestuous transition. The Atlanta Journal Constitution chronicles this process in several articles from the late 1960s to early 1970s.

Today, however, there has been a renewed interest in the revival and revitalization of the area. One of the more predominant black churches in the area, the West Hunter Street Baptist Church, relocated to Gordon Street. One of the more famous homes located in West End is the Wren's Nest, which was home to Joel Chandler Harris, author of the Uncle Remus tales. West End is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Further south along Cascade Avenue, many new homes, most located in nicer neighborhoods, are attracting African Americans looking for the quality of life found in a comparable subdivision in Dunwoody or Alpharetta, but in a setting where they are the racial majority.

Many of the older homes that once lined Cascade Avenue during the first half of the twentieth century, and even into the latter part of the century, have now been cleared to make room for subdivisions. Many of these new subdivisions are similar to new subdivisions in the city's northern suburbs. However, the Cascade location and the appeal of new homes is a draw for many. These subdivisions attract many families looking for a neighborhood to raise their families. Also, many new residents in this area prefer the commute to a job in downtown from Cascade over a commute to the south every day. Notable residents of Cascade Heights today include Hank Aaron and Ambassador Andrew Young. Cascade and the Cascade Heights are also home to many apartment complexes as well.



West Hunter Street Baptist Church

Physical Description

The intersection of Cascade Rd. and Ralph David Abernathy is an early 20th century commercial district surrounded on all sides by residential development. To the north and east is West End, the oldest community in the neighborhood. To the south and west is Cascade Heights. And to the south and east is Oakland City, formerly an independent town before annexation into the City of Atlanta. These neighborhoods share typical characteristics. They are primarily early 20th century residential neighborhoods with gridded streets, lined with trees and sidewalks. Victorian cottages, Bungalows, and American Small Houses are the predominant architectural styles, with some brick ranch houses interspersed. Most houses are small, one or one and a half stories, with a few larger homes on prominent streets. Brick and clapboard are the common building materials, some with stone trim.



Houses on South Gordon Street



Cascade Grill

At the intersection of these neighborhoods, commercial development began to appear. Ralph David Abernathy and Cascade Rd. have for years been the main commercial thoroughfares through the area, and many remnants of that remain today. At their intersection, a small cluster of commercial buildings, dating to the 1920s, still exists. The most architecturally unique building in the node is at the southwest corner of Cascade and Abernathy, and is a corner-facing building, 587 Cascade Ave, features a hipped roof and lacework trim about the entrance. Some have speculated that this was originally a trolley barn, but no information has been uncovered to verify this. Next to this is a two story historic fire station, and a low commercial building sits next to that, curving around the corner into Westview. 1053 Cascade Avenue is today the Cascade Grill, but the same brick building forty years ago was a filling station.

From its beginnings until now, there have been religious and civic institutions dotting the roadways of the Cascade Node. One of these is the Shrine of the Black Madonna, located at 944 Ralph David Abernathy Blvd. It is a Pan-African Christian Orthodox Church. The building that houses the Shrine of the Black Madonna is brick and was constructed in 1941. Adjacent is the Shrine Youth Center, which was constructed in the 1950s. Both are listed on the National Register. Another notable church on Ralph David Abernathy is the Catholic Church of St. Anthony of Padua. It is located at 928 Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard. Ground was broken for the brick multi-story church in 1911 and was dedicated in 1924 after completion. The parish of St. Anthony of Padua still occupies this location today. At the west end of the node, on Lucille Avenue, the circa 1927 J.C. Harris school stands directly adjacent to the Beltline.



944 Ralph David Abernathy, Shrine of the Black Madonna

Westview Cemetery is located near this node as well. Westview Cemetery is located at Ralph David Abernathy and Westview Dr. at I-20. The cemetery was established in the late 19th century and by the late 1880s had sold all of its available plots. The cemetery is part of the battlefield where the 1864 Civil War battle of Ezra Church took place. Today, many notable Atlantans, including Asa Candler, Ivan Allen Jr., Henry Grady, Joel Chandler Harris, and William B. Hartsfield are buried there.

One of the main landmarks to occupy the node now is the Kroger Citi-Center. The Kroger Citi-Center retail complex is located near the intersection of Ralph David Abernathy and Cascade Avenue. Traditionally this node has been one of small retail operations and residential areas. Many of the buildings found in the survey of the area, however, are commercial buildings, built mostly of brick, and dating from about the 1920s up to 1960. There are buildings in this category, such as Payton's Body Shop, near Beecher St. and Cascade Ave, and Gloria's Barber and Beauty Shop, located near Beecher St. and Cascade Ave. as well, that have already been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are contributing buildings similar to those that have already been listed on the National Register, which in time, will most likely become eligible for listing on the Register themselves. Some of these buildings include Joe's Cleaners and Golden Hawk Motorcycles.

Conclusion

This node is significant for its association with three historic neighborhoods. Two of these neighborhoods, West End and Oakland City, are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Westview is eligible for listing. Additionally, it is significant as an early 20th century center of commerce and society.

Today, the Cascade area is changing, and developing. New homes are springing up and developments such as the Kroger Citi-Center, a large outdoor shopping center are becoming more noticeable and more prevalent. The anchor tenants are currently a Kroger grocery store, Washington Mutual Bank, and Hollywood Video. The center has approximately 115,000 square feet of retail and commercial space. As this continues, preservation will become more important than ever in the area. Buildings have been placed on the National Register, but there are still many more that could be, if the time would just be spent closely evaluating these remaining resources. This will become more of a struggle though, as the new developments such as those in Cascade Heights, demand shopping centers such as the Kroger Citi-Center and not the small convenience store or independently run car repair shop in the old brick building on Cascade Avenue.