



# 14th Annual Virginia-Highland Tour of Homes December 6th & 7th

by: Rob Glancy



The Virginia-Highland Civic Association, along with media partner Dave FM, is proud to present the 14th Annual Virginia-Highland Tour of Homes. This is the tour's fifth consecutive year after a hiatus of over twenty years. The event takes place on **Saturday, December 6th from 10AM - 5PM**, and **Sunday, December 7th from Noon - 5PM**.

Themed "Homes for the Holidays", the event has established itself as the most distinctive home tour in the city thanks to the pairing of wonderful homes and some of Atlanta's finest restaurants. Over the past four years the tour has raised over \$80,000 for the neighborhood with tour proceeds directly benefiting Virginia-Highland schools, parks and sidewalk projects. New this year is the pairing of Food and Art to the tour, with a silent auction of a major work from local artist and painter Tracy Sharp, represented by Linstrum Matre Artworks. Tracy's work is featured across the country in galleries in Atlanta, Charleston, Santa Monica, Aspen, and Nashville.

by: Linda Merrill

# History of Virginia-Highland

## {Part I}

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS IS THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON THE HISTORY OF VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND. THE ARTICLES ARE EXCERPTS FROM A LONGER WORK-IN-PROGRESS BEING RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY 9-YEAR VA-HI RESIDENT LINDA MERRILL. AN ART HISTORIAN BY TRAINING, LINDA WORKED AS A CURATOR AT THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION FOR THIRTEEN YEARS, AT THE HIGH MUSEUM FOR TWO, AND NOW—AFTER A HIATUS TO STAY HOME WITH HER TWO CHILDREN — SHE IS TEACHING AT EMORY. Linda welcomes comments and questions on her work. She can be reached at [magdalin@mindspring.com](mailto:magdalin@mindspring.com).

### Introduction

The neighborhood we know as Virginia-Highland was originally a cluster of subdivisions making up a suburban district three miles from the center of Atlanta. Its earliest attraction was its farmland; later, it became a place for country homes -- an oasis from city life offering clean air, cool breezes, and proximity to the healing waters of Ponce de Leon Springs. As the trolley became a central factor in urban development, the Virginia-Highland area became a convenient and affordable place for city workers to live, and in the 1920s new houses proliferated, chiefly single-family homes in the bungalow style.

In this way, Virginia-Highland exemplifies American housing trends. After WWI, the Harding and Coolidge administrations urged Americans to settle down in homes of their own in the belief that property ownership would not only strengthen the economy but create citizens who would support national security. Small, efficient houses such as single-story bungalows that were within the financial reach of a growing middle class were also promoted as a means of liberating women (a new constituency) from the drudgery of housework.

The neighborhood was developed and settled quickly, and it remained stable until the late 1950s, when scores of middle-class families left Virginia-Highland for more distant suburbs. The area began to recover from the consequences of that urban flight only in the 1970s, when young families gradually began moving

back into the city and renovating neglected houses with the help of a newly formed civic association. Revitalization continues to this day, with many residents drawn to the neighborhood by its convenience to the city center, exemplary schools, appealing commercial district, and comfortable, unpretentious style—the very factors that contributed to its development nearly a century ago.

### Early Pioneers

Soon after the War of 1812, the United States government granted the veteran William Zachry—the first known white settler in the present-day Virginia-Highland district—Land Lot 17 of the Fourteenth District in recognition of his “patriotic service.” Then a neutral zone in the territorial battles between the Cherokee and Creek (Muscogee) Indians, the land was part of the territory ceded by the Creek Nation in January 1821. Perhaps anticipating a rise in land values, Zachry sold his 212 acres just over a year later, in February 1822, for \$100. Zachry sold his land to Richard Copeland Todd (1792–1852), a pioneer from Chester, South Carolina. Todd's older sister Sarah (d. 1865) was married to Hardy Ivy (d. 1843), who in 1833 would settle on the future site of downtown Atlanta. When Todd took possession of the land it was deeply forested, and as the journalist Paul Hinde noted in 1924, “only those aged sentinels of centuries past, Kennesaw and Stone Mountain, stood as today, in blue-gray outline—to the west and to the east of the splendid rolling country destined to become Atlanta.”

Todd built his house on high land with a view of that rolling landscape, at what eventually became 816 Greenwood Avenue; he farmed the fields around his home until his death in 1852. During the Civil War, a Federal battery was established on a ridge not far from the Todd residence, and according to one account, Confederate breastworks were erected right in front of the house. One of Richard's sons, John C. Todd (1847–1925), lived in the house until October 31, 1910, when that oldest of Atlanta's landmarks was demolished by fire. A large, two-story brick residence with a wraparound front porch was subsequently constructed on the same site, and members of the Todd family continued to occupy it well into the 1950s. Since then, the lot has been occupied by an apartment building

Richard Todd and his wife Martha, together with many of their descendants, were buried in a family cemetery a short distance behind the house on what is now Ponce de Leon Terrace. Its existence did not become publicly known until the executors of Judge Todd's estate applied for a permit to exhume his grave from Sardis Cemetery for reburial in the family plot; by then, the cemetery contained thirty-six unmarked graves. Some neighbors complained, insisting that the bodies be exhumed and buried elsewhere; the city denied the executors' request, and upon appeal a judge upheld the decision but ruled that the land be "cleaned off" and a monument erected in the Todds' honor. In 1932 the burial ground (one-fourteenth of an acre, or two lots) was deeded to the city for conversion to a park, with a large granite log to mark the graves of Richard and Martha Todd. As late as 1979 a path led to the graveyard from the street, "through the blooming hepatica and the bare, skinny trees," and in 1980 neighborhood residents joined together to clean up the area. Today, regrettably, there is no public access to the former cemetery, although the Todd marker survives, surrounded by a wrought-iron fence.

#### Sources

Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events* (Athens, GA, 1954); "History of Virginia-Highland," City of Atlanta, Department of Planning, Development, and Neighborhood Conservation, Bureau of Planning, June 1998; *Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution*, 1924–79; *The Virginia-Highland Voice*, May 1980.

**Next Issue: The Cheshire Family and the Nine-Mile Circle**

## Colonel Mustard in the Kitchen With a Knife

*Colonel Mustard – referring to the character from the board game Clue – is a pseudonym for a Virginia-Highland resident who enjoys dining at the many wonderful restaurants in our neighborhood and sharing thoughts on the dining experience with others. In this issue the Colonel takes a look at two of the neighborhood's oldest and most treasured establishments: La Tavola Trattoria.*

Saturday night is busy, busy at La Tavola. Fortunately, our group of 4 ready-to-be-fed Italian food lovers had made a reservation. It's fair to say the place is more popular than it really has room for. Customers and servers jockey for position around the tables. The servers are adroit at weaving through with trays and going to the restroom is a 'getting-to-know-your-neighbor' experience as you wind and bump your way to the back of the restaurant. Nobody minds and everyone smiles. These are robust and discerning customers and workers.

On this night we had out-of-town visitors with us who have dined all over the country as well as internationally, including in Italy. The first thing they ordered was a negroni cocktail. Their faces couldn't hide their amazement – first, that the waitress knew what they were ordering and second, that the cocktail was very well made with gin, Campari and sweet vermouth. I let out a sigh of relief since our friends are considered gourmets. The relief, though, would not last.

First, we shared the seared sea scallops appetizer with polenta, spinach and tomatoes. The dish comes with 3 scallops and the waitress added a fourth so we could easily share. This was an outstanding dish that I will have all to myself next time. As an entrée, I had spaghetti with tomatoes, basil and veal meatballs - I love meatballs and these were very good. My husband ordered the grilled sword fish with capers. He thought the portion was a little small but was able to fill up on the sides of roasted sweet potatoes and spinach, all good. One of our guests had baked manicotti made with beef, veal, pancetta, spinach and mozzarella. She said this dish is always a good test for an Italian restaurant. There was a little hesitation but she ended up enjoying it.

But here was the kicker: our other gourmet ordered the veal scallopine. It arrived quite dry from over cooking. Our friend the raconteur - a famously charming man with a Puerto Rican accent - had already entertained our server with his expertise and he took this opportunity to inform her exactly how scallopine should be served. She took the dish off and the manager returned with a new plate and stayed to see how it was received. Ah - good at last! The waitress and manager couldn't have been more gracious and the relief again was sweet. Bottom line, the evening was a success!

Colonel Mustard gives La Tavola 5 hot dogs on a scale of 1 to 5