

# Did You Know?

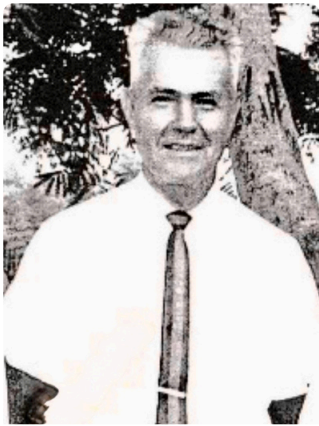
## Audubon Forest, the Welcoming Neighborhood We Know Today, Began as a Racially Restricted Community

Written By Joanne Huntley, AFNA History Committee Chair

A sign on the corner of Benjamin E. Mays and Willis Mill Road states that Audubon Forest was officially established in 1953; but a January 27, 1952 Atlanta Journal ("AJ") article reported that Audubon Forest was established in 1945. The earlier date appears more accurate given that by 1948, Plats for the Audubon Forest community were being filed in the Fulton County Recorder of Deeds and marketing and promotion of the Audubon Forest community in earnest had begun.



*Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, former president of Morehouse College and influential civil rights leader, stands at the site of the former Sewell Road, renamed to honor his legacy in 1981.*



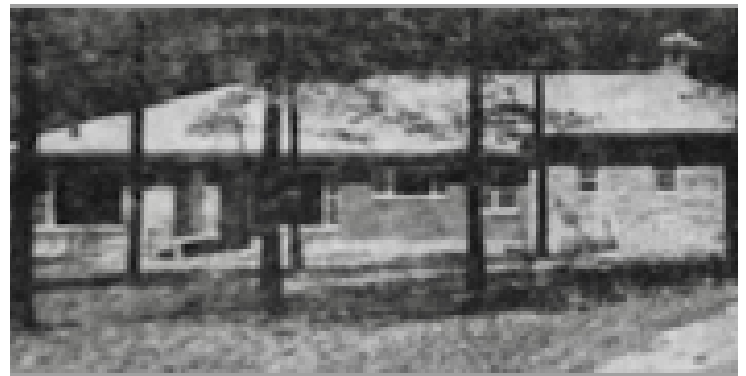
*Picture of George L. Wilson courtesy of familysearch.org.*

On October 24, 1948, the AJ first reported that George L. Wilson, a man prominently known in real estate circles, was adding a new 520-acre subdivision to the three subdivisions (i.e. Cascade Heights, Cascade Manor and Beecher Hills) that he had been marketing and promoting over the past two decades. Wilson was credited with naming the new subdivision Audubon Forest after James Audubon, the famous bird and tree lover, and planning north-south streets

named for birds (Flamingo, Oriole, Falcon, and Cardinal) and the east-west streets named for trees. The houses and lots would sell for \$20,000 to \$30,000.

A March 27, 1949, AJ article provided more information about Wilson and the Audubon Forest development. The article reported that 1,000 acres of wooded land would be developed with housing lots that have "the best restrictions in West Fulton County, running for 99 years." All lots sold by Wilson in any of his subdivisions carried strict regulations as to building distances and restrictions to the type of patrons to be sold as "a protection to preserve the community for the finest type of citizens for 99 years." It pictured the first two houses built in Audubon Forest: 1166 Flamingo at the corner of Sewell Rd (now Benjamin E. Mays Drive) and Flamingo Dr. that was purchased by Mr. Charles Seward and a house on Sewell Road that builder William F. Horton purchased from Wilson and sold to Mr. and Mrs.

J.D. Hagy. A May 1, 1949, AJ article reported that the first five houses in Audubon Forest had been constructed. These included the two noted above plus 1151 Flamingo owned by builder Hoke Morgan, 1166 Flamingo owned by Mr. and Mrs. Dewey Morgan, and 2460 Sewell Road owned by Dave Brock. Additionally, four more houses were under construction, with two being built by Morgan.



*1151 Flamingo Drive circa 1949.*



*1151 Flamingo Drive circa 2026.*

On the same day, the AJ ran a Wilson ad offering the lots in the neighborhood for sale that read as follows:

*If you want to join a satisfied group of home-owners, where it is cool, shady and inviting; where it is quiet and peaceful, with beautiful wooded areas all around you, contact Mr. Wilson. He has many pretty lots he can sell you at fair prices; he can build you a home – or have one built for you – in keeping with the surroundings in which you can live peacefully and contented. Reasonable restriction; rigidly enforced. Drive out and around these pretty homes and buildings, on well paved streets, where all the comforts of public utilities are already provided – select a lot for building a home away from the smoke and noise and bustle of the city; with transportation convenient.*

*Did You Know?...continued*



**Audubon Forest ad featured in Atlanta Journal on May 1, 1949.**

Neither the AJ article nor the ad detailed the restrictions that Wilson was placing on these properties. A review of an early deed revealed the ten covenants that run with the land for 99 years. Covenant 1 requires houses be no nearer than 30 feet from the street. Covenant 2 prohibits subdivision of lot and only one single family dwelling per lot. Covenant 3 requires a first floor of no less than 1,400 square feet. Covenant 4 reads "Said property shall not be sold, rented, occupied or used by any person except those of Anglo-American race." Covenant 5 requires a permanent roof. Covenant 6 requires houses to be equipped with automatic smokeless heat. Covenant 7 requires that the front width of the house be no less than 45 feet. Covenant 8 says "no noxious or offensive trade shall be carried on upon any lot nor shall anything be done thereon which may be or become an annoyance or nuisance to the neighborhood". Covenant 9 allows either party to prosecute any proceeding at law or in equity against anyone who is violating a covenant. Finally, Covenant 10 said any invalidation of a provision by a court would not affect the validity of the remaining covenants.

By the end of 1949, the development in the four neighborhoods had brought about 10,000 new residents to the southwest area of the city. Wilson had reportedly seen to it that the area would have schools, churches, a library, a new firehouse and a commercial section to provide groceries, drugs and other items essential to the new homes. He donated land to the Audubon Forest Methodist Church for the construction of a new church on Sewell Road between Audubon Court and Willis Mills Road which was being completed.

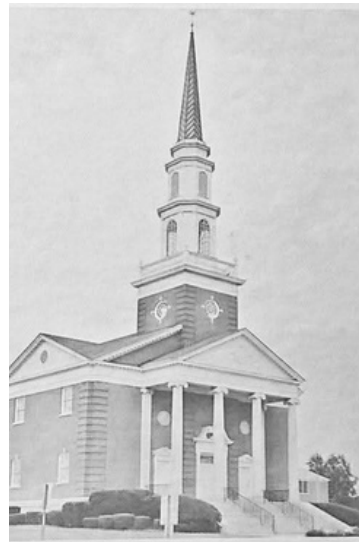


**Audubon Forest United Methodist Church circa 1960s.**



**Hoosier United Methodist Church circa 2026.**

A new fire station headquarters on Sewell Rd. had just been completed as had the newly built Beecher Hills Baptist Church on the corner of Sewell and Beecher Rds. although it was awaiting the construction of its auditorium.



**Beecher Hills Baptist Church circa 1960's (left) and Providence Missionary Baptist Church circa 2026 (right).**

Underway were the construction of the new Southwest High School at Sewell Rd and Lynnhurst St. and a new Colonial Foods store at 2329 Cascade Rd. bringing food and home goods to the area.

A September 11, 1949, AJ article reported that there were 300-odd lots planned for the 520 acres Audubon Forest Subdivision. The lots would be "estate size" with larger tracts available. The houses would have "all individual designs to add to the general character of the

## Did You Know? ...continued

project"; no mass building was planned. The subdivision improvements would include water, lights, gas and paved streets, the first two of which had already been cut and were being paved over (i.e. Flamingo and Oriole).

On December 12, 1950, in an article titled "High Priced Homes Selling for Cash," the Atlanta Constitution ("AC") reported a man had come to Wilson's real estate office to settle on his new home, paying in cash with a check for \$41,000. It reported that the prices in Audubon Forest had risen to \$35,000 to \$50,000 and that most people buying at these prices prefer to pay cash. According to the AC, "Audubon Forest is a dream come true for Wilson" because the three subdivisions that he had first developed were all small lots and moderately-priced homes. When those buyers had saved for a more substantial home, they went to the northside of Atlanta. The minimum lot and home sizes in Audubon Forest made it "an exclusive section intended to keep the community's leaders at home." That had resulted in homes being built with "10 rooms, three-bath affairs, with two-car garages and maybe a swimming pool." By 1952, it was reported that "some of the finest homes in Atlanta" can be found in



*Colonial Stores grocery at 2329 Cascade Road (date unknown).*



*This photo of the former Colonial Store was taken in March 2026. This location most recently served as the home of Life's Essentials Market health food store for several decades before closing in the early 2010's.*

Audubon Forest with the prices ranging from \$20,000 to \$60,000. Audubon Forest attracted a group of financial investors who bought multiple vacant lots in Audubon Forest as shown on

the tax records of the Fulton County Board of Tax Assessors in its Book 141 for years 1954-1970, a copy of which is housed at the Atlanta History Center. The first purchasers of many of the lots in the subdivision were Wilson, W.O. Duvall, the Duvall Foundation, the Young L.G. Harris College (a Methodist vocational college for about 300 men and women in North Georgia) and the Georgia Baptist Children's Home Inc. Duvall, a 1921 graduate of Young Harris College, was a lawyer, a banker and a business partner of Wilson's for this development. He became an officer and director of the Atlanta Federal Savings & Loan Association, rising from Secretary and Attorney in 1946, to Executive Vice President and Secretary in 1948, to President in 1950, to Chairman of the Board in 1966 and retired in 1982 as Chairman Emeritus. He served as Trustee and Treasurer of Young Harris College for 30 years, received the College's Medallion of Honor award for public service to the school, and has a building on the campus named the "DuVall Building in his honor.

Another connection to Young Harris College was through another early owner of multiple lots, Mrs. J.W. Hurt. Mrs. Hurt's name appears on the first Plat submitted for Audubon Forest and she was the record owner of multiple lots on Oriole and Willis Mill Rd. In 1923 and 1924, Mrs. Mary Hurt served as the President of the Atlanta Traveler's Aid Society and continued to serve on its Board of Directors through at least 1945. Mrs. Alva Maxwell of Young Harris, GA followed her as President in 1934 and then served on the Board until the mid 1940's. Edna Maxwell and her husband, Alva, were both graduates of Young Harris College. Alva Maxwell served on the Young Harris Board for over 50 years, serving as its Chairman for thirty years. He was the recipient of the first Medallion of Honor for public service to the college. A \$1.8 million educational building was named the "Alva and Edna Maxwell Center. Alva was employed by the Citizens and Southern National Bank from 1923, serving as a Vice President and head of the Development Division until his retirement.

In 1961, Mrs. Hurt sold her six properties on Willis Mills to Francis W. Scott & Gardner Cushman and the Scott Building Co. Inc. which eventually built homes and sold them to residents in 1968. In 1972, a number of the lots held by the Home and the Foundation were sold to the Young Harris College, directly or purchased by Duvall and then sold to the College. At the same time, the College directly purchased a dozen more vacant lots in Audubon Forest. To date, the Home's connection to the development has not yet been determined.

The last street to be developed in Audubon Forest was Chickadee Court which consists of 14 lots. Fulton County tax records show that Atlanta Federal Savings & Loan Association was the initial owner of all the lots, before it sold the lots to Georgia Federal Savings & Loan Association in 1976.

In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court held that courts could not enforce racial restrictive covenants; however their effects lingered for decades as realtors refused to show houses to persons covered by such covenants. As a result, African American families did not begin to purchase houses in Audubon Forest until the late 1960's.