

A Look Back at the American Name Society

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From Classic to Classy: Changing Fashions in Street Names

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Street names in Athens, Georgia, are of two kinds: older, traditional, central, commemorative, directional = "classic," and newer, innovative, suburban, evocative, given by real-estate developers for their commercial appeal = "classy." The city of Athens is the site of the University of Georgia, the State Botanical Garden, the Georgia Museum of Art, and notably a double-barreled cannon, which was supposed to fire two chain-linked cannon balls simultaneously, but which succeeded on its trial shot only in demolishing a fence and killing a cow. The city was consolidated with Clarke County, yielding a population of some 120,000.

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From the names people give to the places they live, we can tell something about the people themselves. Changes in those names, in turn, reveal changes in the lives of the people. Normally, placenames are relatively long-lasting, and thus changes have to be observed retrospectively at a great distance. However, in a time of expanding population, new areas of settlement are opened, new towns founded, and new streets laid out, all of which are given new names. Street names are doubtless the most abundant kind of placename and consequently they are the most convenient sort in which to observe changing fashions. They are not merely convenient, but also revealing. The population of our nation is increasingly an urban one, and the street is the place

most characteristic of the city-dweller and most influential in his life. If clothes make the man, streets make the urbanite. The names he chooses for his streets reveal his relationship to his most immediate environment.

The sample community investigated here is Athens, Georgia, a small city in the northeast section of the state and the site of the University of Georgia. Now slightly more than 175 years old, Athens is in many respects a typical American town. The kinds of names its streets are given have changed sharply in recent years. During the 1960s, the town and the university both had a period of very rapid growth. New residential subdivisions were started and new streets created in large numbers during a relatively short time. Most of the new residential areas are subdivisions, more or less planned by their developers. A contrast of old Athens street names with new ones points up some significant differences and some notable changes in naming patterns.

Historical background

In 1801 a committee consisting of Abraham Baldwin, John Milledge, and three others selected a site in northern Georgia, on the Oconee River at a spot known as the Cedar Shoals, to be the location of the University of Georgia.¹ Milledge bought 633 acres from the owner, Daniel Easley, and presented the land to the trustees of the university, which had been chartered by the state legislature in 1785. In the sixteen years between its chartering and the actual beginning of its operation, Abraham Baldwin was nominal president of the institution, which had no students, no other faculty, and no buildings — but did have 40,000 acres of land, with which it had been endowed by the state even before it was chartered. The fact that the site committee agreed unanimously upon the Cedar Shoals location, despite the fact that it had to be bought while the embryonic university was already land-poor, suggests that either the area was extraordinarily attractive or Easley was an extraordinarily gifted real-estate dealer. However that may be, the site was called Athens, and a town began to grow up immediately to the north of the new college yard.

The history of the town is reflected by a number of maps showing the increase of platted lots and streets in Athens. The first of these is a town plan drawn by Josiah Meigs, the president of the college, and the Reverend Hope Hull, a member of the board of trustees; it appears in the minutes of the trustees for 1805 and shows two east–west and four north–south streets, all unnamed. There is a seventh street leading out of town and labeled “Road to the Bridge.”² The second map shows the old town as of 1826 but not the new part that had begun as early as 1813 (Minutes, November 9 1813: 213); in the part shown the east–west and the north–south streets have increased to six each. There is still a road to the bridge, although it has shifted slightly in location from the 1805 map. Front Street, which divides the college yard from town, is the only street that is named. The third map, from 1854, shows both the old and new parts of town. It includes 41 named streets and several unnamed ones.³ The fourth map, showing the town in 1874, names some 60 streets.

On February 5 1859, a motion was passed in the town council to create a committee of three members “to name the different streets of Athens.” On March 5, the committee requested additional time to carry out their task, and finally reported their action to the council on April 2 1859, with the following preface:

To the Intendant and Wardens of Athens

Gentlemen — The Committee to whom was referred the naming of the streets of Athens, have discharged that duty, and have the honor to submit for your approval, the subjoined report. It will be seen that streets with well-known [names] have had them retained. The design in the others, has been to perpetuate the names of some of the early citizens of our town—particularly of those now dead — and also of some who have done service to the University of Georgia and the State.

A. A. Franklin Hill, / A. H. Childs, / W. G. Delany.

The following report named 46 streets and identified them, chiefly by the houses or other structures built on them. “The whole report was received and unanimously adopted. The Chairman of the Committee was authorized to write the names on the map of the town.”⁴ This was the first official naming of Athens streets.

After the 1859 naming of streets and the 1874 map, the town continued to grow. Today there are over 850 named streets in the city and its surrounding suburban areas. For a comparison of changing fashions in street onomastics, the 46 names adopted in 1859 are matched with 46 street names in one of the newer residential parts of town, an area to the southeast of the city limits, but well within greater Athens, from three to six miles from the center of town. First the old street names are analyzed for their types, then the new street names, and finally a comparison of the two is drawn.

The old street names

Over three-quarters of the old street names (35) commemorate persons associated with the early history of the town or the university. They include the first five presidents of the university, the man who bought and donated the land on which town and university came to stand, and a large assortment of business men and politicians of the early nineteenth century:

Baldwin Street: Abraham Baldwin, first president of the University of Georgia, 1785–1801, was one of the principal authors of the university’s charter and proposed the bill in the state legislature authorizing its foundation.

Barber Street: Wethersby Barber was a town character. His given name is variously spelled Wethersby (Morris, n.d.: 49) and Weathersby (Rowe, 1923: 32) and is given as Wetherford in Hull’s *Annals* (1906:480). The confusion is appropriate. According to a story attributed to Barber himself, “his father lived in the Cherokee Nation, and Chief Wethersby was his friend, and he named his son Wethersby after the Indian” (Morris, n.d.: 49). The story is perhaps to be taken with a grain of salt, Barber being notorious as a jokester. He is supposed to have gotten five dollars from the journalist Henry Grady for a cock that could stand flat-footed and eat corn off a table four feet high (provided the corn and the cock were both on the table top). He also offered to sell bottom land for two dollars an acre and, when challenged with the fact that the land was a rocky hill, explained that it was indeed bottom land since rain had washed off all the top soil (Coulter, 1951: 226).

Baxter Street: Thomas W. Baxter settled in Athens in 1831.

Billups Street: The site-selection committee for the university began their work by meeting at Billups’ tavern on June 29 1801, probably somewhere south of modern Athens.⁵

Brown Street: Bedford Brown was an early merchant in the town and was captain of a home guard company during the war of 1812. John and Samuel Brown were

town commissioners in 1815. The Revd John Brown was the third president of the university, from 1811 to 1816. It is not clear which of these gentlemen the street was named for. In any event, the name did not last. By 1874 the one-block stretch, which was near a small cemetery, was called Graveyard Street; on recent maps it appears as Magazine Street, but the road no longer exists, having given way to university construction. All that remains is a staked-off entry way to a parking lot.

Chase Street: Albon Chase was a business man in insurance and paper manufacture, a warden (or city councilman), and publisher and editor of newspapers in antebellum Athens.

Clayton Street: Augustin S. Clayton was in the first graduating class of the university in 1804. He was prominent in local business and politics.

Cobb Street: A Cobb family was in the area from early times, a John Cobb having sold the land on which the original county seat, Watkinsville, was located. In 1834 John Addison Cobb developed Cobbham, a residential area immediately to the west of the original plat of Athens. One of his sons, Howell Cobb, became governor of Georgia, speaker of the US House of Representatives, Secretary of the Treasury, and finally a general in the Confederate Army; another, T. R. R. Cobb, was a lawyer who codified the state laws, a delegate to the Confederate Constitutional Convention (the original draft of the constitution being in his handwriting), and finally also a Confederate general (Rowe, 1923: 32).

Dearing Street: William Dearing was an officer of the Georgia Rail Road and one of the founders of the Athens Factory (*see* Factory Street *below*).

Dougherty Street: Major Charles Dougherty settled in Athens in the 1820s. In 1811 the street was called Walton Street (Hull, 1906: 6).

Espy Street: James and John Espy were Revolutionary soldiers who were founding members of the first Presbyterian Church in Athens. The street, which was on the outskirts of town, had disappeared by 1874, and the name along with it.

Finley Street: The Revd Robert Finley was the fourth president of the university, though he did not live long enough to exercise his office. He was hired for the position from Princeton and was apparently given a sales pitch that the reality failed to live up to. He was told the climate was so wholesome that, although the college was sixteen years old, “the grave of a student is not to be seen” (Coulter, 1951: 23), hardly surprising in view of the fact, of which he was not informed, that the student body had shrunk to twenty-eight by that time. Disillusionment set in when he discovered that it took fifteen days to travel from Savannah to Athens, about as long as the trip from Princeton to Savannah. He contracted typhus and died the year of his arrival (1817). The trustees of the university gave his widow two town lots in Athens and his children free tuition, the family remained in town.

Franklin Street: Leonidas Franklin was a town warden in 1848.

Fulton Street: The Fultons were not as prominent in the early records as some of the other street-namesake families; however, Fulton is only a modest one-block lane. M. C. Fulton married Virginia F. Hamilton in 1851 (Hull, 1906: 484).

Gilmer Street: Governor George R. Gilmer was a friend of the university in its early, difficult days. By the early 1970s, the original Gilmer Street had been renamed White Street (doubtlessly commemorating the family of John White, a businessman who settled in Athens in 1833); since then, the street has been closed to allow the expansion of a Holiday Inn. Present-day Gilmer Street, in a different part of town, is considerably more recent than the original one.

Hancock Avenue: Thomas Hancock came to Athens in 1819; he was an innkeeper who helped to organize the first Methodist Church. In 1811 the street was called Green Street (Hull, 1906: 6).

Hill Street: A Hill family was long prominent in the area. Blanton Hill was a merchant in the 1840s; A. A. Franklin Hill served on the street-naming committee.

Hoyt Street: James Hoyt bought one of the first town lots in 1804, and the Revd Dr. Nathan Hoyt was minister of the Presbyterian Church for over thirty years in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

Hull Street: Hope Hull was a Methodist preacher and a trustee of the university who built the first college chapel in 1807–1808; he was also one of the first town commissioners, designated in the act of incorporation.⁶

Jackson Street: Dr. Henry Jackson was a professor of mathematics at the university.⁷

Lumpkin Street: Wilson Lumpkin was a member of Congress, governor of the state, and a trustee of the university. Atlanta, earlier called Marthasville, was twice named for his daughter, Martha Atalanta Lumpkin. His house, built of granite blocks, an unusual form of construction for the area, is now a part of the campus.

Meigs Street: Josiah Meigs, second president of the university, served from 1801 to 1811.

Milledge Avenue: Governor John Milledge was one of the committee that selected the site of Athens for the university. It was he who bought the land on which the university and the town now stand and gave it to the trustees. Buildings are also named after him in all the older units of the state university system, including the University of Georgia.

Mitchell Street: William Mitchell came to Athens in 1803, and the family was prominent throughout the antebellum years. The original Mitchell Street was in the northwestern part of town; its exact location is uncertain, and it was not recorded on the 1854 or 1874 maps. The present-day Mitchell Street is a different one, in the southeastern sector of the old town.

Nesbit Street: The family name was variously spelled Nesbit, Nesbet, Nesbitt, Nisbet. John Nisbet was a founder of the Athens Factory, a director of the Georgia Rail Road, and a bank director. In 1874 the street was called Cemetery Street, because it was the access way to the Oconee Cemetery. Today it no longer exists, modern Cemetery Street being in a different location, albeit with the same function. The original name has also disappeared.

Newton Street: Elizur L. Newton and John Newton came to Athens about 1810. They were prominent as merchants, churchmen, innkeepers, and bankers.

Phinizy Street: Major Ferdinand Phinizy bought four town lots in 1805. Jacob Phinizy was a banker and a warden of the town in 1848. What was called Phinizy Street in 1859 was apparently known simply as the Elberton Road (the road to a nearby town) on the 1874 map; today sections of it are variously called the Athens (or Winterville) Road, Spring Valley Road, and the old Elberton Road. In 1874 a different road, one bordering the property of Ferdinand Phinizy, Jacob's son, was known as Phinizy Street; today it is an extension of Hancock Avenue.

Pope Street: Nicholas Pope bought one of the first town lots in 1804, and Burwell Pope was a well-to-do resident of Athens in the 1830s.

Prince Avenue: Oliver Prince had a farm in the northwest of the town; Prince Avenue was the road to it. He was connected, by a chain of literary borrowing, to Thomas

Hardy, the novelist. Prince wrote a satirical sketch describing the drilling of the Georgia militia and published it in 1807 in his uncle's newspaper, *The Washington (Ga.) Monitor*. It was quickly reprinted in Massachusetts as a pamphlet entitled *The Ghost of Baron Steuben*. An Englishman, John Lambert, came across the satire and in 1810 reprinted it in his *Travels through [...] the United States*, from which it was borrowed by C. H. Gifford for his *History of the Wars Occasioned by the French Revolution* (1817). In 1835, Augustus Longstreet printed it as a chapter entitled "The Militia Company Drill" in his *Georgia Scenes*, crediting it to his friend, Oliver Prince. In 1879, when writing *The Trumpet-Major*, Hardy incorporated the account into his novel by taking it word for word from Gifford's *History*, under the mistaken impression that the English yeomanry was being described. The plagiarism, which says more for Hardy's sense of literary merit than for his conscience about literary property, was discovered in the United States by readers who were familiar with the Longstreet book. It haunted Hardy for the rest of his life, and afterward.⁸ The residents on modern Prince Avenue, however, are unconcerned with the literary misadventures of their street's namesake.

Pulaski Street: Casimir Pulaski, the Polish patriot and hero of the American Revolution, came to this country through the mediation of Benjamin Franklin, who was on a diplomatic mission in France. In 1779 he defended Charleston and was mortally wounded in an attack on Savannah. The motive for the naming of the Athens street has sometimes been questioned: "Why Count Pulaski should have been honored by having an Athens street named for him is one of the 'amiable and admirable secrets' of history" (Rowe, 1923: 32). The naming need, however, not be regarded as a mystery. The association of Pulaski with Benjamin Franklin, for whom the first permanent building on the university campus was named, from which the institution itself came to be called the Franklin College, and Pulaski's heroic death in the Revolutionary cause in Georgia are reasons enough to count him among those "who have done service to [...] the State" (as the naming committee characterized some of their honorees).

Strong Street: Elisha Strong was an early Athens merchant.

Thomas Street: Stevens Thomas, who was one of the first town commissioners (Carlton, 1881: 67) and the most prominent merchant of early Athens, had his house and store on this street, which was called Alley No. 2 in 1811 (Hull, 1906: 6).

Waddell Street: Moses Waddell (or Waddell) was the fifth president of the University of Georgia (1819–1829); his son, William Henry Waddell, was a professor of ancient languages.

Williams Street: William Williams was a business man in antebellum Athens. The street originally called Williams Street is present, though unnamed on the 1874 map; today it is called Madison Avenue. The present-day Williams Street is in a different part of town.

Wray Street: Thomas Wray was an early citizen of Athens; the street is a one-block road that led to his house. Fewer than a quarter of the original 1859 street names (11) have other than family names for their specifics. Most of them are named for some feature, man-made or natural, to which they lead. They were consequently strictly functional in origin. Some of the streets bearing family names were doubtless likewise originally functional, denoting the road one takes to get to, for example, the Prince farm, or Mr. Wray's house. Only the first of the remaining streets is clearly descriptive in origin:

Broad Street was presumably named for its width, although in fact it is not conspicuously wider than some of the other streets of the central town. The name must have been adopted not long before the 1859 action that officially designated the streets of Athens. Earlier it was generally known as Front Street because it was the boundary that divided the original college yard from the town lots and was thus the front of both. At one time it was also called Public Street (Hull, 1906: 148).

College Avenue is the street that leads through town to the college entrance.

Factory Street was the road that ran eastward of the college yard from the central town to the Athens Factory, which was proudly acknowledged locally as the first mill for the manufacture of cotton cloth south of the Potomac (Morris, n.d.: 11). The name was still on the 1874 map, but, with the disappearance of the Factory, the street was renamed. Today the upper portion of it is known as *Spring Street* (this portion running by what once was the town spring, no longer to be seen), and the lower portion has been renamed *Mitchell Street*, originally the name for a different street apparently no longer in existence.

Foundry Street ran from Broad Street to the Foundry, an important manufactory of early Athens. The most famous product of the Athens Foundry was the Confederate double-barreled cannon. Produced in 1862 at a cost of \$350, it consisted of two barrels cast together and diverging by approximately three degrees. The cannon was simultaneously to fire two balls connected by a chain; the divergent angle of the barrels was to send the balls in slightly different directions, stretching the chain between them, and mowing down a whole line of Yankee troopers with one shot. "When the cannon was test fired on the Newton Bridge Road near Athens, one ball left the muzzle before the other, and the two balls pursued an erratic course. According to a contemporary report, "It had a kind of circular motion, plowed up an acre of ground, tore up a cornfield, mowed down saplings, and the chain broke, the two balls going in opposite directions. One of the balls killed a cow in a distant field, while the other knocked down a chimney from a log cabin." The observers "scattered as though the entire Yankee army had been turned loose in that vicinity" (Coleman, 1967: 96). The cannon was declared a success locally and sent off to the Confederate Arsenal at Augusta, where, however, it was declared unsatisfactory because of the difficulty in getting the two barrels to fire simultaneously. The cannon was returned to Athens, where its saga continued to unfold."

During the unpleasantness between the North and South there was a fear that the enemy were coming to Athens. A meeting was held and resolutions adopted, that on the approach of danger, Dr. Moore should fire the double-barrel cannon, then in front of the Town Hall. All the women were to get inside and the men were to form a circle and fight the foul invader to the death. One calm Sunday when the women were at church, and the men lying around home with little clothes on, some devilish boys fired that gun. The ensuing scene baffles description. The women ran screaming, the churches broke up, and the men appeared as they were. After the excitement subsided the hall was found packed with men, not a woman could get inside. The number wounded in the scuffle to get inside has never been reported. (Morris, n.d.: 15)

Market Street was the site of the false alarm just recounted. A combination town hall and public market had been built in the middle of Market Street, hence the name,

which remained on the 1874 map, but later was changed, probably when the market was closed. The street was then renamed *Washington*, in honor of the first president of the nation. The new designation, suggested by Eustace W. Speer, Professor of Belles Lettres at the university, makes it one of the few streets named for persons who did not reside in Athens.

Oconee Street runs from the old town to the lower bridge over the Oconee River.

River Street ran from the northeastern corner of the old town to the upper bridge over the Oconee River and thence on toward the neighboring town of Danielsville. Today the street is called North Avenue. The present-day River Road is a completely different street, paralleling the Oconee River in the south part of town.

Rock Spring Street is on the west side of town. It ran southward to and crossed a small branch and may, therefore, have been named after the branch's wellspring. On the other hand, the 1805 map identified the town spring, which was near the center of town, as Rock Spring; either there was more than one spring of that name or the street's name is purely commemorative.

School Street ran from the western edge of the old town to the Lucy Cobb Institute, named in memory of the eldest daughter of T. R. R. Cobb. The school was opened in January 1859, the same year that the streets were officially named, and eventually became one of the most distinguished women's finishing schools in the South. The coincidence of the opening of the school with the adoption of street names doubtless accounts for the name of this street; it did not, however, endure. On the 1854 map the street had been called *Taylor*; on the 1874 map, the western portion of the street was called *Taylor* and the eastern portion *Reese*. Today the entire stretch is known as *Reese Street*. The name *School Street* seems to have been a topical enthusiasm that failed to take hold.

Wall Street is perhaps the smallest street in Athens, being one short block in length and relatively narrow. It is located in the oldest part of town in the middle of one of the original blocks; it does not, however, appear on any of the early maps, even that of 1854. After having been named in 1859, it does appear on the 1874 and later maps. Possibly it began as an alley and only came to be regarded and used as a regular street after its naming. The name itself is a mystery. There is no clear motive for it, unless perhaps it refers to the wall of a building by which the alley ran.

Water Street, on the south side of town, ran from Baldwin Street to the lower bridge over the Oconee River. A street in the same area today is known as *Williams Street*. The present-day Water Street parallels the east bank of the Oconee from Broad Street to the upper bridge in the northeast. Hynds (1974: 143, n. 20) records the name of the 1859 street as *Waler* or *Wales*, perhaps as a result of difficulty in reading the handwriting in which the Council Minutes were kept.

It is possible that the committee naming Athens streets in 1859 overlooked some — either as too insignificant or simply through oversight. Although not mentioned by the committee, a short street running east–west near the town spring was called *Spring Street* on the 1854 map. Today the same street is called *South Street* (going on the south side of Broad Street), whereas what is called *Spring Street* today runs north–south by the old spring site. It is likely that the streets around the spring in the early and mid-nineteenth century were ill-defined.

Two other streets not mentioned in the 1859 naming are present and named on the 1854 map and still exist: *Church Street* and *Harris Street*. Church Street was certainly named for Alonzo Church, the sixth president of the university (1829–1859). Church's

thirty years in office make him the longest tenured of all the presidents of the university and would certainly have qualified him as the namesake for an Athens Street during his lifetime, but perhaps the city fathers shared Thomas Jefferson's prejudice against naming places or institutions after living persons — it being more decorous and safer to await their demise, after which honorees can do nothing to change one's good opinion of them. As much is implied by the preface to the committee's report, quoted above. Church lived until 1862; it is possible that the street was popularly called by his name during the later years of his life, but was deliberately passed over by the committee of 1859, who left its naming for a more decorous time. The namesake of Harris Street is uncertain. Rowe (1923: 31) thinks it was either Col. Jephtha V. Harris or the Hon. Stephen W. Harris, "For which of these two the street was named is not recorded." Harris was a common name in early Athens history, so there are still other potential candidates for the honor.

By 1874, most of the 1859 streets still existed and maintained their names, as they do even today. Fifteen new streets had appeared, most of them on the outskirts of town. The name categories are approximately the same as those of the earlier streets. Many commemorate persons: *Adams*, *Carr*, *Erwin*, *Habersham*, *Miller*, *Phinizy*, and *Reese* streets. Others were directional: *Armory*, *Bobbin Mill*, *Buena Vista* (leading to the Buena Vista farm, there being also a Buena Vista Baptist Church), *Georgia Factory*, *Monroe* (town), and *Plantation* roads, and the *Road to Harmony Grove and Clarksville*. *Nowhere Road* should probably be regarded as a directional name, too. A new category, the propaganda name, appeared with *States Rights Street*, although 1874 was rather late for the message to have much effect; the street is called *Henderson Avenue* today.

The new street names

The forty-six new street names are all apparently post-1960. They thus are at least a hundred years later than the old names discussed in the preceding section. These names were chosen for study not quite, but almost, at random. They are all of the streets known to exist or mapped in four contiguous subdivisions and an apartment complex in one of the largest new residential areas. The area is typically suburban.

The most recently named street in the area is *Cedar Shoals Road*. The name *Cedar Shoals* itself has strong historical associations with Athens. The first settlement in the county was on the banks of the Oconee River at the spot called Cedar Shoals (not for decorative purposes, but because the river ran shallow and there was a grove of cedar trees). It was there that Daniel Easley had constructed a mill on part of his 1000 acres, of which he was to sell 633 as the site of the University of Georgia and the town of Athens. The name for this street is therefore commemorative or perhaps directional since it leads to the Cedar Shoals High School, a new institution built about the same time as the street. Two small streets branching off Cedar Shoals Road serve the Tivoli Apartments, the only structure, other than the school, located on the road. The apartment complex is named apparently not for the Italian community, but for the Danish park, for the streets have a Scandinavian theme: *Viking Court* and *Skandia Circle*.

Immediately to the north of Cedar Shoals Road is the Cedar Creek subdivision, which is named after a small branch that flows through it. One of the two main

entry streets to the subdivision is named *Cedar Creek Drive*; it leads to and crosses the creek, but is less a directional name than a decorative one. “Cedar Creek” was adopted by the developers of the area as a term for the subdivision and one of its streets, not to direct persons to the creek, but because of the picturesque value of the name. Spin-off names are *Cedar Creek Court*, *Cedar Springs Drive* (there is no spring in the area), and *Cedar Circle*. There is a dominant arboreal theme for street names in the subdivision. Others derived from trees are *Chinquapin Place* and *Way* (the specific term being of Algonquian origin and not especially characteristic of north Georgia), *Ponderosa Drive* (the second main entry street to the subdivision, named after a Western tree), *Spruce Valley Road* (there is no valley in the area), *Sweet Gum Drive*, and *Torrey Pine Place* (a California tree). Generalized tree names are *Arbor View Drive* and *Orchard Knob Lane* (there are no arbors to be viewed in the area and no knobs on which orchards might be planted). Hardly named for a tree, although at least for vegetation, are *Broomsedge Court* and *Trail*. Suggestive of trees because of the morpheme *wood* in their names are *Dunwoody Drive*; *Ravenwood Court*, *Place*, and *Run*; and *Rollingwood Drive* (which curves, if it does not quite roll). Trees suggest birds (and the name *Ravenwood* is at least semi-avian), thus: *Mockingbird Circle* and *Whippoorwill Circle*. *Sunnybrook Drive*, although in no sense a tree name, is aquatically linked to the second part of the subdivision name, *Cedar Creek*. A few names seem to have no connection with the dominant theme: *Sandstone Circle*, *Court*, and *Drive*; and *Horseshoe Circle* (which is shaped like neither a horseshoe nor a circle, being only slightly curved).

Jockey Club Estates is a small four-street development to the east of Cedar Creek. The main entry, *Jockey Club Drive*, sets the theme, which is followed by *Churchill Circle* (suggesting Churchill Downs, site of the Kentucky Derby), *Shoemaker Court* (Willie Shoemaker, the jockey who holds the record for winning races), and *Citation Court* (the winner of the triple crown in 1948).

To the south of Jockey Club Estates is Plantation Estates, with a pioneer theme. The main street is *Plantation Drive*; smaller streets are *Homestead Drive*, *Frontier Court*, and *Doe Run*.⁹ Adjacent to these streets are *Orchard Circle* and *Indian Lake Court* (needless to say, there is no lake in the area).

Still further to the south is the subdivision Waverly Woods, from which one might have expected a literary theme. In fact, the theme is again arboreal. Some streets in the area have specific tree names: *Tamarack Drive* and *Great Oak Drive* and *Court*; others have generalized or suggestive names: *Shady Grove Drive*, *Woodstock Drive*, and *Deertree Drive*. One sport is *Longview Drive*, although a long view of anything hardly seems possible amid so much vegetation.

Comparison of the old and the new

What is most characteristic of all the early names, whether they commemorate prominent citizens (like *Lumpkin Street*), identify places to which they lead (like *Foundry Street*), or otherwise reflect the local scene (as *Broad Street* describes itself), is that they speak an attachment to the area, its history, geography, and culture. Nineteenth-century street names “belong” to the locality; they are appropriate names, being commemorative, functional, or descriptive. A striking change has come over the names

given to streets in recent years. With the exception of *Cedar Shoals Road*, which commemorates the original settlement in the Athens area, and possibly *Cedar Creek Drive*, which at least leads to Cedar Creek, all of the new names lack the kind of appropriateness the old names have. Instead, the new names are decorative. They are chosen for their pleasant associations and hence for their commercial value. They do not relate to the land or the community, but are synthetic concoctions that might as well be used to name streets in Arizona, Wisconsin, or Maine. They seem, indeed, to be deliberately unlocal.

On the other hand, the new names have a kind of internal patterning that the old ones lack. Although most of the old names commemorate persons, they are not grouped so that, for example, all the streets named for university presidents are in one place, all those named for bankers in another, and so on. The old names are distributed without pattern, relative to one another. Not so the new names. Each subdivision has a dominant theme to which its street names relate: trees, horse racing, pioneering, Scandinavia. In effect, then, the use of a theme has replaced the older custom of naming streets appropriately (whether commemoratively, functionally, or descriptively). One of the new names is “appropriate” if it relates to the dominant theme of its subdivision. The “appropriateness” of the new names is linguistic, relating a name to other names around it; the appropriateness of the old names is referential, relating a name to the thing it designates or to the history of the community.

A third striking difference between the old street names and the new ones is the choice of generics. Among the old names, *street* is the overwhelming favorite (42 of 46), with *avenue* a very distant second (4). Neither of those generics is used in the new street names, which have far greater variety: *drive* (18), *court* (10), *circle* (8), *place* (3), *road* (2), *run* (2), *way* (1), *lane* (1), and *trail* (1). The new generics are clearly chosen for variety and for their associations of rusticity or exclusiveness and opulence. The generic *street* in the old names is purely functional, being the most usual common noun for the referent. On the other hand, the several generics in the new names aim to be, like the specifics, decorative. They are chosen for effect, not for usefulness.

These three differences between old and new names all result from a single cause. In the early nineteenth century it was usual for settlement to precede naming. First came the people, building houses, setting up businesses, organizing a community; then, after a street was already in use, someone would decide it was high time for an official name. A long while might lapse between those two events; the first streets in Athens were laid out in the early 1800s, but it was not until 1859, three generations later, that names were officially chosen. When the time came for official action, perhaps a name had already become attached to the street by popular consensus; if so, only official adoption of that name was needed. On the other hand, no name might have developed spontaneously, or a scattering of different names: in that case, to settle the matter, the official namers could look to the history of the street and the larger community or to the uses and characteristics of the street. Thus developed the commemorative, functional, and descriptive names — the classic sort of name in earlier Athens, as in earlier America generally.

Today the order of events has been reversed. Now naming precedes settlement. Typically, a developer subdivides a large plot of land into residential lots, lays out the

streets and paves some of them, and gives names to his creations, which become the official designations of those streets before there are any people living on them. When the first suburbanites settle in the new area, it has no history or existing institutions, and the streets are likely to be indistinguishable from one another in appearance; but the streets have names. The developer has had a tabula rasa to write upon, limited only by his sense of style and of what will help to sell the lots. The result is the new naming pattern for streets.

Whereas once a street name was an integral part of the history and life of the community, today it is often an artificial appliqué, a mere decoration of doubtful taste. Popular culture in the second half of the twentieth century can be characterized, in part, as one of prepackaged, plastic ostentation. The new street names are part of that new culture. They have few or no local associations. Like clothing from a mailorder house, packaged food from the chain store, and news over the national networks, there is a uniformity of street names everywhere.

Local distinctiveness in them is going the way of local distinctiveness in dress, cookery, and opinion — a victim of democratic homogeneity. Classic names have given way to classy ones.

How will the future regard these names we are giving our streets today? Time smoothes over many a rough edge and mellows a gaudy hue with its patina. Will the passing years lend dignity to *Doe Run*? Will they build up historical associations for *Broomsedge Trail*? Will they improve the esthetics of *Jockey Club Drive*? Or are such names destined to remain artificial and slick — classy names, not classic ones? Some onomatologist of the year 2100 will have to answer those questions.

Notes

¹ Unless specifically noted otherwise, the historical information that follows is based on the accounts by Coleman, Coulter, Hull, Hynds, Morris, Rowe, Warren, and other sources listed in the bibliography.

² Minutes of the Trustees of the University of Georgia, vol. 1, May 31 1805, p. 107 (University of Georgia Library).

³ I am indebted to Charlotte Marshall for copies of the 1826 and 1854 maps, as well as many leads about early Athens street names.

⁴ Minutes of Intendant and Wardens of the Town of Athens, Georgia, Book 1, 1847–1860.

⁵ *The Augusta Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, June 20 1801, p. 3/2.

⁶ Carlton, 1881: 67.

⁷ By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the area east of Jackson Street to the river and between Hoyt Street on the north and Clayton on the south was known as *Licksillet* (Morris, n.d.: 45), a nickname that is still used elsewhere for a poor section of town (Cassidy, 1977 52: 19–28).

⁸ This tangled web is laid out by Carl J. Weber (1940: 115–22). I am indebted to George O. Marshall, Jr., for this information and for many other suggestions embodied throughout this paper.

⁹ Although deer are occasionally still seen in the area, this name is probably decorative; it is unlikely that the street was the site of a deer path. On the other hand, the town of Doerun (pronounced to rhyme with *flo-rin*), Georgia, surely preserves a bit of natural history.

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