Commercial Row

Nomination for Historic Building Designation

990 Peachtree Street, NW Fulton County, City of Atlanta Zip Code 30309 Currently serves as the Visitor Center for the Margaret Mitchell House Site

Constructed: 1923 Architects: unknown

Description and Significance

Commercial Row is a single-story brick building originally comprising seven retail spaces constructed in 1923 covering the northwest end of Peachtree Street at Peachtree Place. Built at a time when retail and residential development were reaching northward of the downtown, Commercial Row represents both the unique character of Atlanta's development northward along the city's main thoroughfare, Peachtree Street, as well as, the establishment of distinct neighborhoods outside the city center in the 1920s.

One of Atlanta's few remnants of that age of early development, Commercial Row sits on its original site and retains a high degree of structural integrity. As continuing commercial development removes traces of this earlier time of neighborhood community at the Tenth Street intersection, Commercial Row represents what the Peachtree Street corridor from Fifth to Fourteenth Streets looked like before massive redevelopment of the area in the 1980s and 1990s.

Residential Peachtree Street

Peachtree Street from Eighth Street to Twelfth Street originally curved around a thirty-foot deep ravine on the east. This area was called the "Tight Squeeze" and was rumored to be the denizen of criminals. One was said to have a "tight squeeze getting through there with your life." In 1887, the ravine was filled in, and Peachtree Street was straightened in anticipation of the Piedmont Exposition fair held nearby in what would become Piedmont Park.

By this time, the city center was clogged with pedestrians, horse carts, streetcars and railroad tracks. The burgeoning popularity of automobiles further contributed to the overcrowding of downtown Atlanta. Those who once lived downtown where they worked were now moving further out to escape the congestion. By 1904, the City annexed the area north from Fifth to Fourteenth Streets to include these developing neighborhoods.

The M.R. Emmons House

By 1900, the block of Peachtree Street southwest of Tenth Street contained the residences of Cornelius J. Sheehan and Frank Ellis and across Peachtree Place was the residence of Sidney H. Phelan. In 1901, the present site of Commercial Row was purchased by Morton R. Emmons for \$5,500 from M.C. Carraway. On August 10, 1902, the *Atlanta Constitution* article entitled "Costly Atlanta Homes; Residences Now in the Course of Construction for Well Known Citizens

of Atlanta" featured the many homes being designed by W.F. Denny including one "For M.R. Emmons on corner Peachtree Street and Peachtree Place a beautiful home of colonial style architecture that will cost about \$8,000."

Morton Richard Emmons was born in Greenville, Tennessee. He came to Atlanta after spending several years in Rome, Georgia, to establish M.R. Emmons & Co. men's furnishings located on Whitehall Street. He and his wife, May Belle, and their daughter Ethelyn were part of Atlanta's social elite. Their home at 974 Peachtree Street was a grand residence worthy of their high standing. In 1909, Emmons was one of the founders of the Fulton National Bank. Ethelyn's marriage to Marshall Clarke Johnson in April 1911 was an event covered by the local newspapers.

On December 3, 1911, Morton Emmons accidently poisoned himself by swallowing carbolic acid instead of the iron tonic he was taking to soothe a throat problem. He was alone at his home at the time, but had enough time to write a note stating, "Have taken wrong medicine by mistake. Thought I had iron tonic. Can't phone or call for help – too weak – very weak. M.R. Emmons." His wife, May Belle Emmons, remained at 974 Peachtree Street until 1914. She died on August 26, 1931 at her home at 126 East Seventeenth Street.

The Roaring 1910s and 1920s

The Tenth Street area, which once held a few elaborate residences of the city's wealthy, now saw the division of some of these large residences into apartments and the construction of new apartments to serve the growing population. From 1905 to 1911, many of the lots on the Peachtree Street block between Tenth Street and Peachtree Place were subdivided and houses built along the Crescent Avenue side. In 1907-08, two commercial buildings erected by Jeremiah W. Goldsmith, a real estate developer, joined two other business buildings already built by R. L. Walker. Goldsmith's buildings originally held the Tenth Street Post Office and the L.W. Rogers Grocery.

Atlanta's population of 150,000 by 1910 continued to surge in the wake of World War I. By 1920, the city boasted a population of 200,000, and by 1930, that number had swelled to 270,000. During World War I, the price of construction materials soared, so Atlanta's building industry experienced a slump. The influx of people during and just after the war was met with a lack of housing. By 1920s, the construction industry recovered at a feverish pace to meet the growing demand. For example, while only 35 building permits were issued for multifamily dwellings in 1921, 143 were issued in 1922 and 132 in 1923.

As new residential areas sprang up north of the downtown district, retailers established businesses in these areas to serve the needs of these communities. Grocers, druggists, tailors and bankers set up shop in these new residential sections. This trend, which occurred at Peachtree Street and Tenth Street in the 1920s, was repeated all over town as retail areas popped up in neighborhoods like Little Five Points, Peachtree Hills, Lakewood Heights, and Kirkwood.

In 1923, the Emmons residence at 794 Peachtree Street was demolished and replaced immediately with Commercial Row, a building consisting of seven shop spaces – four on Peachtree Street (792, 794, 796, 798 Peachtree Street), two on Peachtree Place (90, 92 Peachtree

Place), and one on Crescent Avenue (1 Crescent Avenue.) In 1928 these addresses changed to 962, 962, 966, 968 Peachtree Street; 990, 992 Peachtree Place; and 965 Crescent Avenue.

The 1926 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows this particular block containing three apartment buildings three single-family dwellings, a bank and a movie theater and eleven shop spaces including the seven in the Commercial Row building. Across Peachtree Street were the Witham Apartments and the Hampton Court Apartments, and across Peachtree Place were the Palmer Apartments and the Phelan Apartments.

The importance of the automobile is evidenced by the proximity of two garages at Tenth Street and Peachtree in 1926 – the east side of Peachtree had the Minute Man Garage and one block north was the Universal Garage Co. with repair shop. The Tenth Street intersection was also home at this time to hardware stores, plumbers, locksmiths, shoemakers, pharmacies, dry cleaners, hairdressers and a bakery.

The area boasted no less than nine grocery stores including a Piggly Wiggly, and in addition to the grocers listed in the 1926 city directory, the Tenth Street intersection of Peachtree also had a delicatessen, two fish markets and two butchers. For one's entertainment there was a movie theater on the southwest corner of the intersection, and for one's financial needs there was a Citizens and Southern branch bank next to the theater.

Margaret Mitchell Marsh

Newlyweds Margaret Mitchell Marsh and John Marsh moved into the Crescent Apartments just two land lots north of Commercial Row in July 1925. They had many retail shops to take advantage of on their own block and in the surrounding area. According to Mitchell biographer Marianne Walker, "The Marshes thought that the neighborhood was convenient, for the post office on Tenth Street was only two blocks away and the grocery store only a block away."

Soon after their marriage, Margaret quit her job with the *Atlanta Journal Sunday Magazine* and began writing what would become <u>Gone with the Wind</u>. During this period, Commercial Row contained the Beasley & McCorkle drugstore and the Great A & P Tea Company grocery store. In 1929, the grocery store space (964 Peachtree) was taken over by Emile's Hairdressing Studio. The site remained a hair salon through several owners until 1952. The Marshes lived in the apartment at 17 Crescent Avenue until 1931.

Changing Times, 1930 to 1985

While the neighborhood changed from charming residential area to popular shopping area of the 1920s to an area for hippies in the 1960s, Commercial Row continued to serve the needs of the neighborhood. In 1934, the corner store, 962 Peachtree Street, was inhabited by Jeanne's Dress Shoppe, which remained for fifty-two years until 1986. Other tenants included the Lowe Co. premium department store, Herman's Fine Tailoring, the Overstreet Shoe Salon and Mary Mobley Picture Framing in the 1940s. From the late 1930s to 1956, Wall's Odorless Cleaners operated out of the 92 Peachtree Place location, and Grant Plumbing Co. resided at 90 Peachtree Place from 1935 to the late 1940s. From 1951 to the early 1970s, the Noble's Tenth Street Bootery occupied the 966 Peachtree Street space.

The 1970s and 1980s brought decline to the area. Improvement projects on Tenth Street during those years resulted in the demolition of the Tenth Street Theater as well as the two commercial buildings next door to the Crescent Apartments. In 1985, Dallas-based developers Trammell Crow Company purchased the property while assembling property on Peachtree Street between Eighth and Eleventh Streets with plans to construct four office towers.

John Decker, on-site director of Trammell Crow's Midtown projects was quoted in the Atlanta Constitution in August 1986 saying, "We want to draw life and urban flavor back to the streets. That's why we're renovating the store fronts, short-term." Decker went on to mention several "sturdy structures" soon to undergo remodeling specifically noting Jeanne's Dress Shop at 962 Peachtree Street. In 1987-88, the remaining commercial buildings on the block were demolished with the exception of Commercial Row.

Conclusion

Having been adapted for reuse as the Visitor Center to the Margaret Mitchell House Historic Site, the exterior of Commercial Row maintains a high degree of structural integrity retaining the character-defining elements of the original 1923 retail conglomeration. Continued redevelopment of the Peachtree Street corridor is obliterating all traces of the earlier residences and early commercial buildings that once lined this main thoroughfare. Thus, this Commercial Row remains as one of the few examples of Atlanta's growth northward along Peachtree Street from the downtown city core. The building bears witness to the role of Peachtree Street at Tenth Street as an active community center from the 1920s to the 1960s.

References

Art Work of Atlanta. Chicago: The Gravure Illustration Co., 1903.

Atlanta City Building Permits (microfilm collection at the Atlanta History Center.)

Atlanta City Directories, 1903-1991

Atlanta Urban Design Commission. <u>Atlanta's Lasting Landmarks</u>. Atlanta: Atlanta Urban Design Commission, 1987.

Atlanta Urban Design Commission. <u>Palmer House Apartments Landmark Building Designation</u>. Atlanta: Atlanta Urban Design Commission, 1992.

Atlanta Urban Design Commission. <u>Windsor House Apartments Landmark Building Designation</u>. Atlanta: Atlanta Urban Design Commission, 1989.

Kuhn, Clifford. <u>Living Atlanta</u>: <u>An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948</u>. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990.

Preston, Howard L. <u>Automobile Age Atlanta</u>: The Making of a Southern Metropolis, 1900-1935. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979.

Sanborn Insurance Maps, Atlanta 1911, 1923, 1926, 1951. New York. (microfilm collection at the Atlanta History Center)

Walker, Marianne. <u>Margaret Mitchell & John Marsh: The Love Story Behind Gone with the Wind</u>. Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, Ltd., 1993.

Articles

"Costly Atlanta Homes; Residences Now in the Course of Construction for Well Known Citizens of Atlanta," <u>The Atlanta Constitution</u>, Aug. 10, 1902, pg. A6

"Nowhere to Go But Up in Tight Squeeze," The Atlanta Constitution, Aug. 24, 1986, pg. H1

"Much anew about Midtown," The Atlanta Constitution, Dec. 1, 1985, pg A1

Criteria

Group I: (1) (2) (3)

Group II: (1) (4) (9) (10) (11)

Group III: (1)(2)(3)

Historical Maps

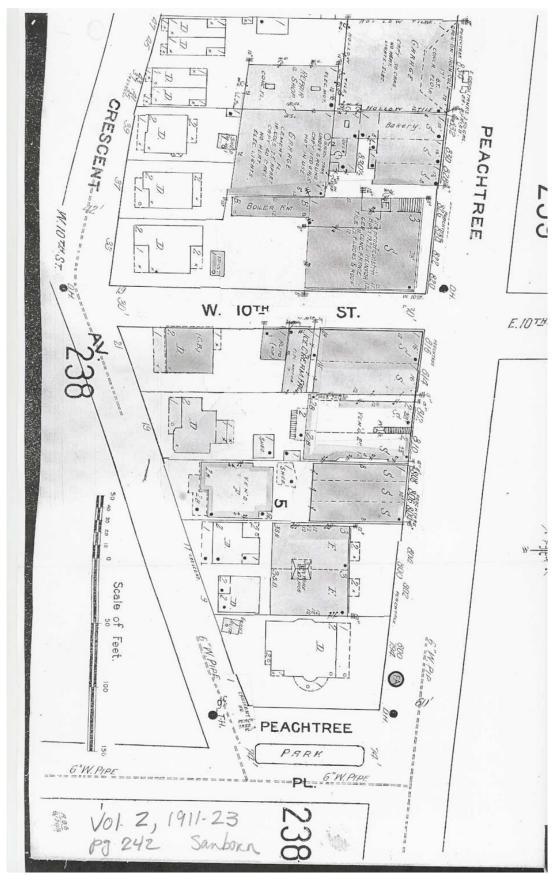
- 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Atlanta, Vol 2, pg. 242
- 1926 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Atlanta, Vol. 2, pg. 242
- 1932 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Atlanta, Vol. 2, pg. 205
- 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Atlanta, Vo. 2, pg. 205

Images

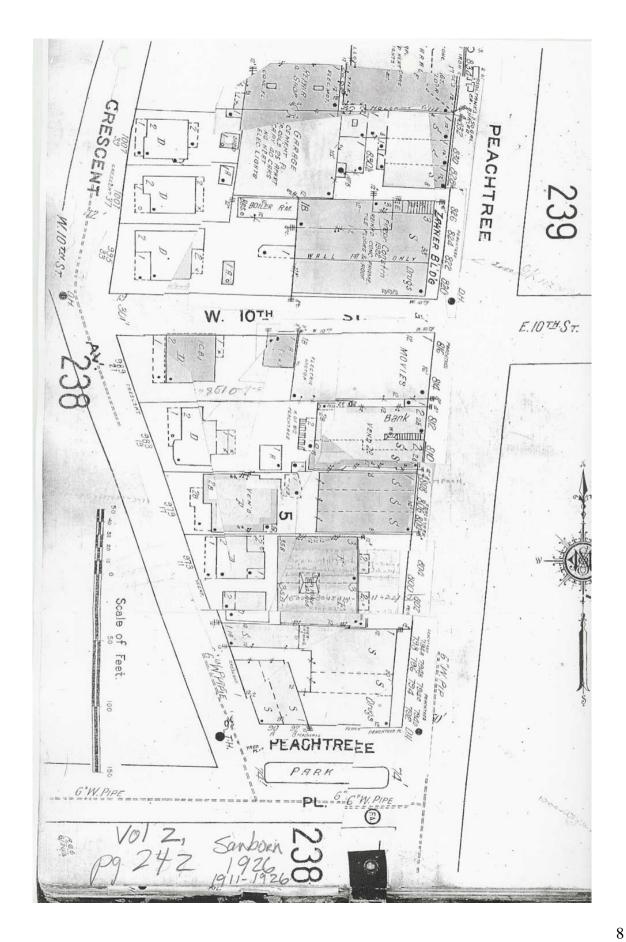
- 1903 View of Peachtree Place at Peachtree Street showing the Emmons House on the right and the Phelan House on the left. (From <u>Art Work of Atlanta</u>. Chicago: The Gravure Illustration Co., 1903. Atlanta History Center Visual Arts Collection #589)
- c. 1903 View of Emmons House at corner of Peachtree Place and Peachtree Street with the Elysee Palace Apartments behind. (Atlanta History Center Visual Arts Collection # 3149)
- 1927 Advertisement in the Atlanta Constitution for Saunders Grocery (June 22, 1927, pg. 3)
- 1928 Advertisement in the <u>Atlanta Constitution</u> for Emile's Hair Dressing Studio (Sept. 8, 1928, pg. 2M)
- 1938 Advertisement in the <u>Atlanta Constitution</u> for Jeanne's Dress Shop (Nov. 24, 1938, pg. 4K)
- 1987 View of Commercial Row from Peachtree Street showing Jeanne's Dress Shop and Cha-Gio Oriental Grocery in the mid-1980s (<u>Atlanta's Lasting Landmarks</u>, Atlanta Urban Design Commission, 1987)
- 2008 View of Commercial Row from Peachtree Street

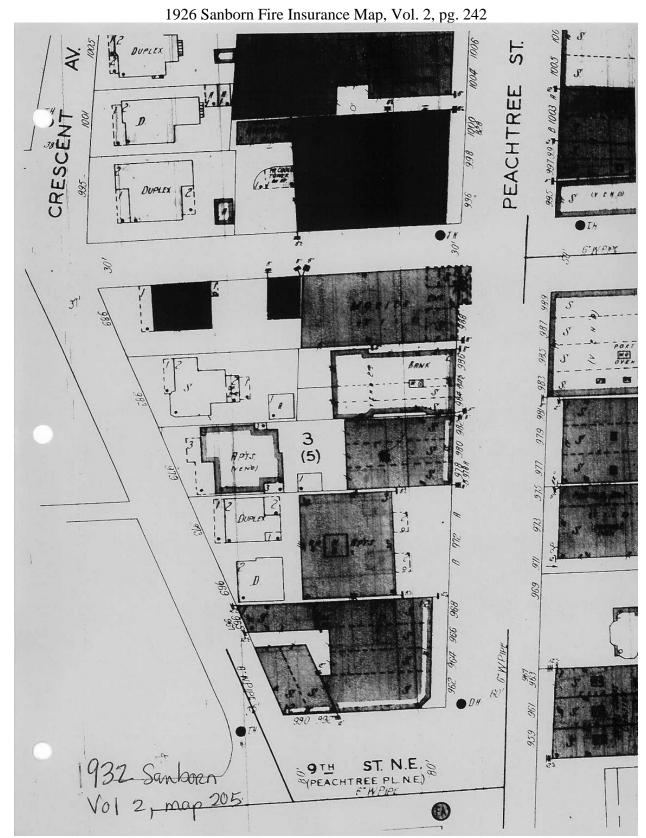
Compiled Documents

- 1901 1985 History of Property Ownership
- 1904 1991 History of Property Tenants

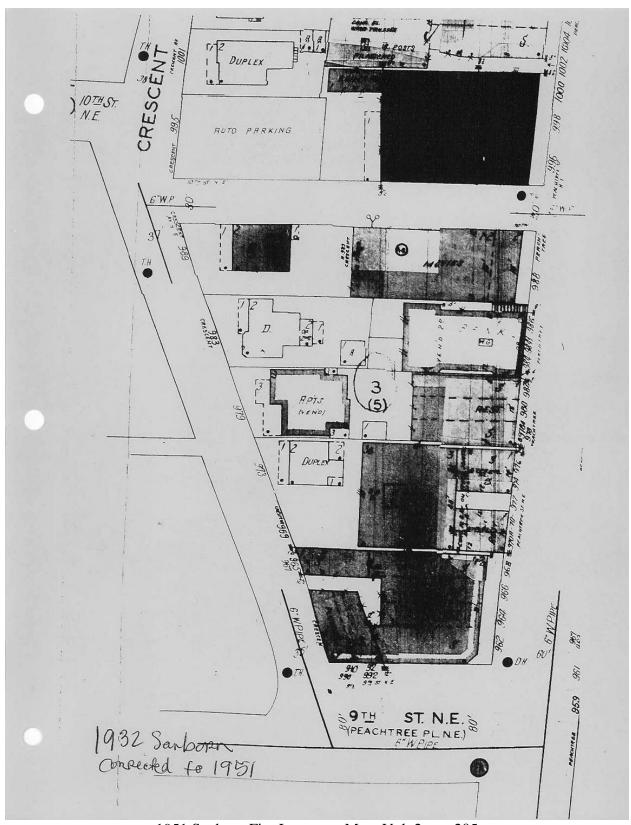


1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Vol. 2, pg. 242





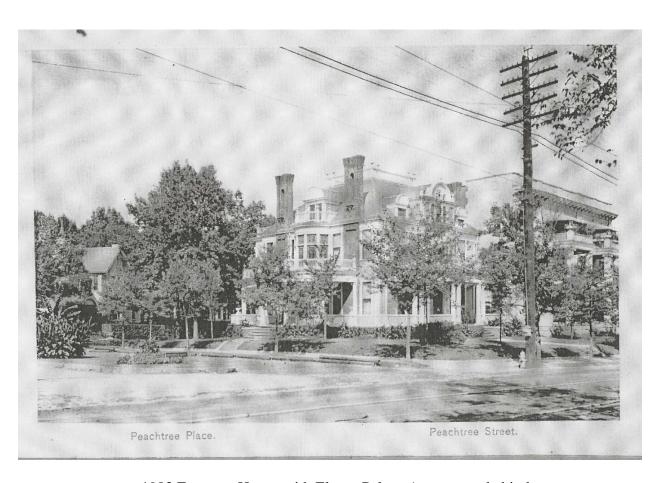
1932 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Vol 2, pg. 205



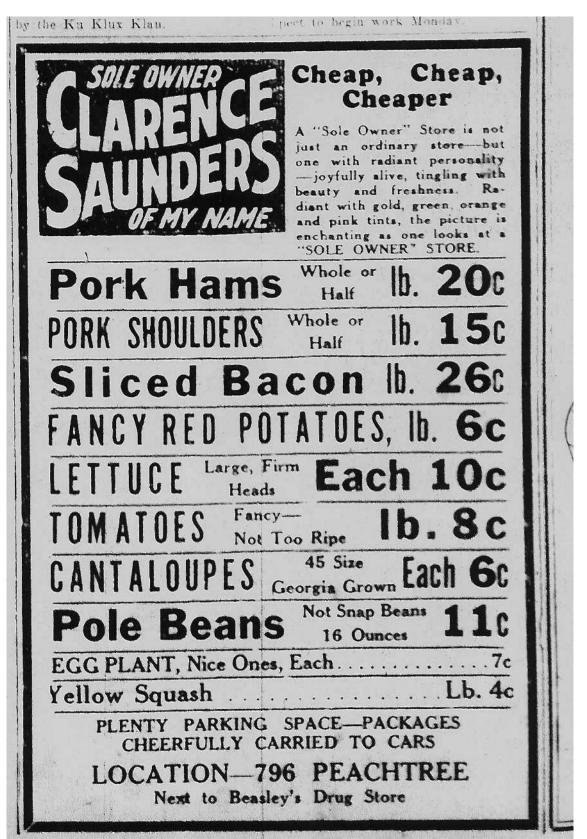
1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Vol. 2, pg. 205



1903 Art Works of Atlanta



c. 1903 Emmons House with Elysee Palace Apartments behind.



June 22, 1927 Ad in the <u>Atlanta Constitution</u> for Clarence Saunders Grocery located at 796 Peachtree Street next to Beasley's Drug Store.



Sept. 9, 1928 Ad in the <u>Atlanta Constitution</u> for Emle's Hair Dressing Studio at 964 Peachtree Street.



Nov. 24, 1938 Ad in the Atlanta Constitution for Jeanne's Dress Shop.



Commercial Row in the 1987 book Atlanta's Lasting Landmarks



Commercial Row now serves as the Visitor Center for the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum.



Margaret Mitchell House and Commercial Row along Crescent Avenue, 2008



Commercial Row from Peachtree Place, 2008



Commercial Row from Crescent Street, 2008



Commercial Row looking south along Peachtree Street, 2008



View of Commercial Row looking north along Peachtree Street, 2008

Commercial Row 990 Peachtree Street, NW, 30309 Tenant History

Year	794 Peachtree St	reet					
1904	Morton R. Emmons						
1906	M. Richard Emmons						
1907	Morton R. Emmo	ns					
1911	Morton R. Emmo	ns					
1914	Mrs. May Belle E	mmons					
1916	Mrs. A. J. Parish						
1918	Vacant						
1919	Mrs. M. M. Ozme	er					
1920	Mrs. M. M. Ozme						
1921	C. P. Edmundson						
1922							
1923	Mrs. Roxie Walker						
	1923 – residence demolished and commercial building erected in its						
	place.						
	792	794	796	798	90 P'tree Pl	92 P'tree Pl	1 Crescent Ave
1924	Beasley & McCorkle drugs	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant			
1925	Beasley &	Gt A & P Tea	Vacant	Vacant			Vacant
	McCorkle drugs	Co					
1926	Beasley &	Gt A & P Tea	Vacant	Vacant			Apartments
	McCorkle drugs	Co					
1927	Beasley's	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant			
	962	964	966	968	90 P'tree Pl	92 P'tree Pl	965 Crescent Av
1928	Vacant	Vacant	Hawkins D B	Saunders	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant
			Dr.	Clarence			
				Paces Bakery			

	962	964	966	968	90 P'tree Pl	92 P'tree Pl	965 Crescent Av
1929	Franklin's Drug Store & Coffee Shoppe	Emile's Hairdressing Studio	Vacant	Vacant			
1930	Franklin's Drug Store	Emile's Hairdressing Studio	Vacant	Vacant	No listing	No listing	Vacant
1931	Vacant	Emile's Hairdressing Studio	Vacant	Vacant			
1932	Vacant	Emile's Hairdressing Studio	Trinity Studios interior decorators	Trinity Studios interior decorators			
1933	Morris Specialty Shop variety store	Emile's Hairdressing Studio	Trinity Studios interior decorators	Trinity Studios interior decorators	Vacant	Adamson Dry Cleaning Co.	
1934	Jeanne's women's furngs	Emile's Hairdressing Studio	Vacant	Howard Cleaners			
1935	Jeanne's women's furngs	Emile's Hairdressing Studio	Vacant	Dodd Julian E clo clnr	Grant Plumbing Co	Vacant	Vacant
1936	Jeanne's women's furngs	Emile's Hairdressing Studios	Des Artistes interior decorators	Vacant			
1937	Jeanne's Inc women's furngs	Claudette's Beauty Salon	Janko Max tailor	Barber Thos L Co elec equipment			
1938	Jeanne's Inc. women's furngs	Claudette's Beauty Salon	Vacant	Colgren's elec equipment			
1939	Jeanne's Inc. women's furngs	Claudette's Beauty Salon	Lowe Joe Co premium dept	Vacant	Grant Plumbing Co	Wall Germ Proof Hand Laundry	Barclay R S Co mfgs agts

	962	964	966	968	90 P'tree Pl	92 P'tree Pl	965 Crescent Av
1940	Jeanne's Inc	Claudette's	Lowe Joe Co	Vacant			
	women's furngs	Beauty Salon	premium dept				
1941	Jeanne's Inc.	Claudett's	Lowe Joe Co	Vacant			
	women's furngs	Beauty Salon	premium dept				
1942	Jeanne's	Claudett's	Lowe Joe Co	Knit-To-Fit			
	women's furngs	Beauty Salon	premium dept	Shop knit gds			
1943	Jeanne's	Claudett's	Vacant	Vacant			
	women's furngs	Beauty Salon					
1944	Jeanne's	Claudette's	Vacant	Vacant			
	women's furngs	Beauty Salon					
1945	Jeanne's	Claudette's	Herman's Fine	Vacant	Grant Plumbing	Wall's Odorless	Barclay Richd
	women's furngs	Beauty Salon	Tailoring		Co.	Cleaners	S Co mfrs
							agts
1946-	Jeanne's Dress	Lee Evelyn	Herman's Fine	Mobley Mary			
7	Shop women's	Beauty Salon	Tailoring	Picture Framing			
	furngs						
1948-	Jeanne's Dress	Lee Evelyn	Overstreet Shoe	Mobley Mary			
9	Shop women's	Beauty Salon	Salon	Picture Framing			
	furngs						
1950	Jeanne's Dress	Lee Evelyn	Overstreet Shoe	Mobley Mary			
	Shop women's	Beauty Salon	Salon	Picture Framing			
	furngs						
1951-	Jeanne's Dress	Evelyn Lee	Noble's Tenth	Mobley Mary			
2	Shop women's	Beauty Salon	St. Bootery	Picture Framing			
	furngs						
1953	Jeanne's Dress	Vacant	Noble's Tenth	Ptree Letter	Randy's Telev.	Wall's Odorless	Sou Biscuit
	Shoppe Inc		St. Bootery	Serv	Co radio and	Cleaners Inc	Co
	women's clo				telev rprs		Nelson Stud
							Welding
							distrs

	962	964	966	968	90 P'tree Pl	92 P'tree Pl	965 Crescent Av
1954- 5	Jeanne's Dress Shoppe Inc women's clo	Tailor's Tailor The	Noble's Tenth St. Bootery	Ptree Letter Serv			
1956	Jeanne's Dress Shoppe Inc women's clo	Ronsvaille The Tailor's tailor Ronsvalle Salvatore	Noble's Tenth St. Bootery	Ptree Letter Serv Alert Tel Answering & Secretarial Serv	Dennard Ralph Co. carpets whol	Wall's Odorless Clns Inc.	Atl. Newspaper Inc (sub sta)
1957							
1958- 59	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Noble's Tenth Street Bootery	Peachtree Letter Service	Dennard Ralph Co carpets distr	Vacant	McGinnis Robt L. photog
1960	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Noble's Tenth Street Bootery	Peachtree Letter Service	Dennard Ralph Co carpets distr	Reece Beauty Shop	No listing
1961							
1962	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Noble's Tenth Street Bootery	Peachtree Letter Service			
1963	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Noble's Tenth Street Bootery	Peachtree Letter Service	No listing	Peachtree Place Salon of Beauty	No listing
1964							
1965							
1966	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Noble's Tenth Street Bootery	Peachtree Letter Service	Ayers Paper & Sup Co ofc sups	Peachtree Place Salon of Beauty	No listing
1967							
1968							
1969							
1970	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Noble's Tenth Street Bootery	Peachtree Letter Service			Peachtree Letter Service (rear ent)
1971							
1972							

	962	964	966	968	90 P'tree Pl	92 P'tree Pl	965 Crescent Av	
1973	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Noble's Tenth Street Bootery	Logographics prntg	Seal Solomons book & curio shop	Alma's Coiffures beauty shop	Peachtree Letter Service (rear ent)	
1974					•			
1975								
1976								
1977	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant	
1978								
1979								
1980	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Francis Designer Flowers	No listing	Georgia Photo Restoration serv coml. Photog	Tonsus make up studio	F-22 Graphics	
1981								
1982								
1983								
1984- 85	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Vacant	Vacant	Vacant	Tonsus make up hair studio	Vacant	
1986	Jeanne's Dress Shop	No listing	Vacant	Vacant	Quarter Flash shop gifts	Tondere make up & hair studio	No listing	
1987	Vacant	No listing	Gallery Tow Ninety One Art Gallery	No listing	Quarter Flash shop gifts	Vacant	No listing	
1988								
1989								
1990								
1991	No listing	No listing	Cha Gio Vietnamese restaurant	Cha Gio Vietnamese restaurant	Vacant	Vacant	No listing	
1996		Margaret Mitchell House Visitor Center						

Commercial Row 990 Peachtree Street, NW, 30309 Ownership History

June 22, 1901 Morton Richard Emmons purchased lot "commencing at the north street corner of Peachtree St. and Peachtree Place" from M.C. Carraway for \$5,500.

August 10, 1902 Atlanta Constitution article entitled "Costly Atlanta Homes" states, "W.F. Denny will tell you that he has in the course of construction a home...for M.R. Emmons on corner Peachtree street and Peachtree Place a beautiful home of colonial style architecture that will cost about \$8,000." (AC, Aug.

10, 1902, pg. A6)

Photograph of M.R. Emmons home at Peachtree Street and Peachtree Place appears in Art Works of Atlanta, Georgia book.

Sept. 3, 1909 M.R. Emmons made president of newly formed Fulton National Bank in Atlanta.

April 27, 1911 Atlanta Constitution article "Miss Ethelyn Emmons weds Mr.

Marshall Clarke Johnson"

December 5, 1911 M.R. Emmons dies at home after mistakenly ingesting carbolic

acid.

1914 Atlanta City Directory lists Mrs. May Belle Emmons as residing at

address.

A search of Fulton County deeds for May Belle Emmons, Marshall Johnson, Ethelyn Emmons Johnson, Ethelyn Emmons Berman and Paul Berman from 1910 through 1947 yielded no record of the sale of the property at 794 Peachtree Street, though one would presume that they parted with the property before the house was demolished and replaced by the commercial building. Also searched were the names Parish, Ozmer, Edmundson and Walker.

1916 City Directory lists Mrs. A.J. Parish as resident of 794 Peachtree St.

1923 Sanborn Map shows Emmons house still on site.

1926 Sanborn Map shows existing commercial building on site.

May 1929 Ethelyn Emmons Johnson (daughter) weds Rev. Paul Berman

August 26, 1931 Mrs. Morton R. (May Belle) Emmons dies at her residence, 126 East

Seventeenth Street.

According to the Atlanta Constitution, Trammell Crow bought several blocks of Peachtree at 10th Street in 1985. A search of deeds for 1983 to 1986 produced evidence of properties purchased by Crow Childress Mobley and Midtown Ten

Assoc. in the area, but all of it on the east side of Peachtree Street. No evidence of the transactions for the properties on the west side of Peachtree south of 10^{th} Street could be found.

1985 Trammell Crow owns property and proposes revitalizing the block along with others at 10th Street area.