

The Civil War: Atlanta and Copenhill

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The Carter Center and the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library are located on prime property that has been the scene for several historically significant events during Atlanta's relatively brief history. This site which now encompasses two fishing lakes, a Japanese garden, unparalleled view of Atlanta's skyline and 33 acres of greenery with unobtrusive circular buildings, is an oasis within the fast paced metropolis of Atlanta. This landscape did not evolve solely from the forces of nature but resulted from the vision, planning and work of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn.



The Carter Center represents President Carter's continuation and expansion of the human rights policy, which undergirded the foreign policies of his presidential administration. The not-for-profit organization identifies its mission as waging peace, fighting disease and building hope and has gained a world-wide reputation for monitoring elections, mediating conflicts and eradicating disease. President Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for these

and other humanitarian efforts. Connected to The Carter Center is the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library -- a federal government entity staffed and operated by the National Archives and Records Administration. The Library houses the records created by the executive office of the president during President Carter's administration. Following precedence set by President Franklin Roosevelt and followed by President Hoover and every president since then, President Carter raised the funds to build the Library then later deeded the Library and its presidential materials back to the American people. A formal ceremony was held Oct. 1, 1986, publically announcing the transference of the Library and its contents from private to public ownership. This ceremony attended by President Ronald Reagan and other dignitaries began a new era for this historic location. The Jimmy Carter Library is the repository of over 28 million pages of unique material and has been a *must visit* for domestic and foreign scholars who desire to study history between 1977 to 1981 from the perspective of the most powerful leader and country in the world.

The Hurt House

The property on which The Carter Center and The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library are built was once owned by Augustus F. Hurt during the nineteenth century. In 1858, Mr. Hurt built a two-story white framed summer home on what is presently the north side of The Carter Center on the crest of the hill along Freedom Parkway. The Hurt family abandoned the house with the coming of the Civil War and it was later occupied Dr. Shon and Thomas C. Howard. The house, which would enter the annals of Civil

War history in federal dispatches as the Howard House, was dismantled by union soldiers at some point between the Battle of Atlanta and General Sherman's march to the sea.

Like most of Atlanta, The Hurt House and the surrounding areas were engulfed by federal forces of the Civil War during the summer of 1864. Atlanta was a target during the Civil War because, unlike most major cities of the time, it was not settled on a significant waterway but was created in a forest as a railroad depot in 1837. Atlanta was not a settlement that grew from a trading post but was unique in that it was surveyed and created as an ideal place for a rail way junction or terminal, hence the town's original name Terminus - renamed Marthasville and later Atlanta. By 1854, this settlement had attracted four major railroads with connections to points north, south, east and west of its vicinity. The railroads and its insulated location in the lower south would elevate Atlanta's importance to the Confederacy as transportation and manufacturing hubs- thus a target of federal forces, and major cities on the coast and upper south were captured and occupied during the course of the War. Atlanta became a boomtown and saw her population balloon from approximately 9,500 in 1860, to over 20,000 in 1864.

The Hurt House and Civil War

In March 1864, General U.S. Grant was made commander-in-chief of all Union military forces. He thereafter put into place an overall strategy favored by President Lincoln calling for coordinated, simultaneous and sustained military efforts on all fronts. The intention of this strategy was to prevent the transference of men and war materiel from one front to another and creating the possibility that a breakdown or breakthrough on either front would collapse of the entire rebellion. In May 1864, Grant began simultaneous launched attacks on all military fronts in an effort to hasten the end of the War. The two most important military fronts of the Civil War were the eastern (east of the Appalachian Mountains) and western (west of the Appalachian Mountains). The eastern theater was considered the more important because of its proximity to Washington, DC, Richmond, and the presence of General Robert E. Lee. General Lee seemed especially invincible while fighting in Virginia and General Grant stayed east to personally oversee General Meade-making sure pressure was kept on General Lee and that Washington, DC was protected. In the west, Grant selected General Sherman, his second in command and personal friend, to lead the combined forces three armies totaling nearly 100,000 men to penetrate deep into the south and destroy the Army of Tennessee under General Johnston with about 65,000 men. When fighting began in the east, the result was a series of major battles with tremendous carnage but a stalemate as far as movement toward Richmond or Washington DC. On the other hand, in the west there were smaller battles or skirmishes yet significant advances by federal forces. This movement in the west was a result of Johnston's response to Sherman's constant flanking movements initiated with each military engagement or southern encampment. General Johnston thought that his retreating responses were necessary because he feared being surrounded by the larger Union forces and thus cutoff from the railroad and Atlanta. General Johnston's strategy was to force Sherman into a frontal attack somewhere in Georgia where the terrain favored him. Johnston found his opportunity at Kennesaw Mountain and despite a lopsided victory, Sherman outflanked him again and federal forces were on the outskirts of Atlanta by July 1864.

Federal forces had advanced from Ringgold, GA, to the outskirts of Atlanta within two and one-half months of engagements and although Atlanta was protected by extensive fortifications, this advance caused panic throughout the Confederacy. Confederate President Jefferson Davis, never a fan of Johnston's Fabian tactics and fearing Johnston might abandon Atlanta, dismissed him on July 17, 1864,

and selected the more aggressive General John Bell Hood as his replacement. President Davis hoped that Hood, who had served under General Robert E. Lee during the Seven Days Battles, would duplicate what Lee had done when he held union forces at bay and then ran them off the peninsula after they had advanced to the outskirts of Richmond. The importance of the situation was voiced by Alexander Stephens, vice-president of the Confederacy, who believed that if Atlanta and Richmond could hold until the 1864 Presidential elections in November, the Confederacy had a good chance to gain its independence.

General Hood wasted little time after his installation as leader of the Army of Tennessee and attacked union forces on July 20, 1864 at what has become known as the Battle of Peachtree Creek or Hood's First Sortie. Hood was defeated and he blamed the outcome on his subordinates. As the fight moved to what is now East Atlanta in what is called the *Battle of Atlanta* or *Hood's Second Sortie*, the Augustus F. Hurt House enters history as Sherman selects it as his headquarters on July 21, 1864. The Hurt House had the advantage on being built on one of the highest points in Atlanta, which gave Sherman an unobstructed view of fortifications across what was then known as Clear Creek toward Atlanta. In addition, an artillery battery placed near the house would play an integral part in the intense fighting next day around the incomplete brick Troop-Hurt House. On July 22, 1864, General James McPherson met Sherman in the yard of the Hurt House for a strategy meeting. While at this meeting, McPherson heard gunfire from what is now East Atlanta alerting him to an engagement between his troops and the confederates. He quickly got on his horse and rode off to the fight, followed by members of his staff. Later, he rode into confederate troops who asked him to stop, but he waved his hat, turned to flee and was shot dead. McPherson's body was brought back to the Hurt House in an ambulance wagon, covered with an American flag and laid out on an unhinged door supported on two chairs in a room of the Hurt House before being shipped to Ohio. Later that day, The Hurt House was the target of Confederate fire and Sherman and his aides had to abandon it for the nearby trees until the fighting subsided. General McPherson has the distinction of being the highest ranking Union soldier to be killed in the Civil War.

The Battle of Atlanta was followed by the Battle of Ezra Church on July 28, 1864, and then by a 36-day federal bombardment and siege of Atlanta. On Aug. 25, 1864, General Sherman ceased the bombardment of Atlanta and surprised Hood by leading forces around the city to the south and cutting the last railroad connection to Atlanta. The confederate defeat at the Battle of Jonesborough on Aug. 31, 1864, made it apparent to Hood that he must evacuate the city. After blowing up a train containing war materiel, General Hood evacuated the city on Sept. 1, 1864. Atlanta was occupied by federal troops the next day.

In 1864, the Democrat Party's popularity in the north had ridden the crest of anti-emancipation sentiment and war weariness. Its 1864 presidential campaign platform emphasized an armistice, peace negotiations with the Confederacy and a repudiation of the Emancipation Proclamation. Democratic Party gains in the 1862 Congressional elections and stalemates on both eastern and western fronts strengthen arguments for the credibility to the Democratic platform. Also, the draft riots in 1863 and fear that former slaves would flood the north and threaten jobs had many northerners thinking that the emancipation proclamation was dangerous and a return to the status quo was best. The premise of the platform and its arguments for change were based on the idea that the north was losing and could not win the War. Also, prior to the fall of Atlanta, the Republican Party and President Lincoln himself thought that he would lose the election and it had gotten to the point that some Republicans were looking for someone other than Lincoln to head the ticket. President Lincoln wrote in August 1864 that it "seems exceedingly probable" that he would

lose the election. The news of Atlanta's fall and Sherman's statement that "Atlanta is ours and fairly won," shattered the Democratic Party's premise of an unwinnable war and revived Republican hopes. It also erased much of the melancholy caused by the doldrums of a conflict in its third year but now expected to end within ninety days. With this news, the North exploded in spontaneous jubilation accompanied by a sense of relief by those backing the union cause. Fireworks, one hundred gun salutes and a general belief the union and President Lincoln were winning the war infused the union cause and created value for all the sacrifices the north had made during the previous three years.

What a Democratic Party victory in 1864 would have meant to the United States is impossible to know, but it is safe to say that the country that we know today would be significantly different.

The Confederacy survived the often mentioned turning points of Shiloh, Antietam, Vicksburg and Gettysburg with the hope of a political if not military victory still intact. Although the stalemate continued in the East, the capture of Atlanta, Sherman's marching through the south and the use of "hard war" tactics in the Shenandoah Valley by General Sheridan destroyed southern morale, isolated General Lee and made it difficult for him to feed his troops, receive help or escape; sealing the fate of the Confederacy. The Civil War was an emotional rollercoaster for both sides but historical evidence points to the fact that the fall of Atlanta in addition to General Sherman's subsequent march through Georgia and the Carolinas, was a psychological and as well a strategic turning point of no return.

Copenhill

In the summer of the 1906, Copenhill was back in the news. In a racially charged atmosphere, an African-American man was accused of assault and robbery by two white women in the Copenhill neighborhood. Many men armed with shotguns and pistols congregated in the neighborhood for retribution but the local sheriff skillfully avoided any confrontation between the accused individual and the assembled group - averting mob action.

Copenhill, created by combining the names of three Atlanta realtors - Coker, Pennington and Hill - became a famous 19th century Atlanta suburb. The centerpiece of the new neighborhood was Madeira Park and bordered by Williams Hill Road to the south, Sinclair Avenue to the northwest, Southern Railroad tracks to the east and located only several blocks from the streetcar line on Ponce de Leon Avenue. Copenhill was designated to follow Inman Park as Atlanta's second garden suburb. The site later became the home of Atlanta insurance man, A. L. Walden and subsequently the Southern Christian House. Most of Copenhill was rezoned as an industrial zone in 1929, and razed in the 1960's for the creation of I-485. I-485 was never constructed and President Carter acquired 33 acres of this prime property for the construction of The Carter Center. Prior to developing The Carter Center, Copenhill had fallen into disrepair. Revitalized and reclaimed through the efforts of a southern son, and raised like the symbol of Atlanta - a *phoenix from the ashes* - Copenhill is presently flourishing in the midst of thriving, present day communities of Poncey-Highland and Inman Park.

Sources

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