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Office profile: Atlanta

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atlanta

OFFICE PROFILE:
BY MICHAEL H. SUTTON,
STAFF ACCOUNTANT

We were in the conference room trying to decide why we like Atlanta. Stu Siewert told how shortly after moving here his wife got on the bus and a block later discovered she'd dropped a glove at the bus stop. The driver, overhearing her concern, stopped the bus and walked back two blocks to retrieve the glove. We agreed that this sort of friendly courtesy is what really spells Atlanta for us. How this atmosphere prevails in spite of a burgeoning metropolitan population of 1,200,000 people may be rather simple to explain. When people move here from all parts of the country (only two of our staff accountants are native Atlantans—the others are from such scattered parts as Alabama, Nebraska, Florida, Tennessee, Montana, Pennsylvania and California) they become part of this friendly spirit, they like it, and so it is preserved.

Of course, there have to be a lot of other things they like: the moderate climate (Atlanta is 1,050 feet above sea level); the way the streets ramble and weave through the rolling terrain, probably following old settlers' trails; the twisting creeks, lovely trees and lawns and flowering shrubs that bring the suburban atmosphere almost downtown; the Chattahoochee River, Lake Allatoona (and many others), and upland forests that make for great outdoor living. Atlanta has varied cultural attractions, too, including the Symphony (which gets strong support from Mr. Dykes, our retired partner-in-charge),

As many as 2,000 freight cars a day move in and out of Atlanta on thirteen main lines of seven major railroads, all of which are served by Haskins & Sells. One of the oldest is the Atlanta and West Point Railroad: Elijah Watt Sells accepted the first engagement before the turn of the century.

an annual visit by the Metropolitan Opera Company, the Civic Ballet, and, particularly popular with the H&S staff, numerous dramatic and musical theater offerings. We have an athletic past (Bobby Jones, Bitsy Grant and Ty Cobb, for example) as well as a future, with the baseball Braves coming to our new eighteen-million-dollar municipal Sport Stadium next year, and both major football leagues fighting for a franchise.

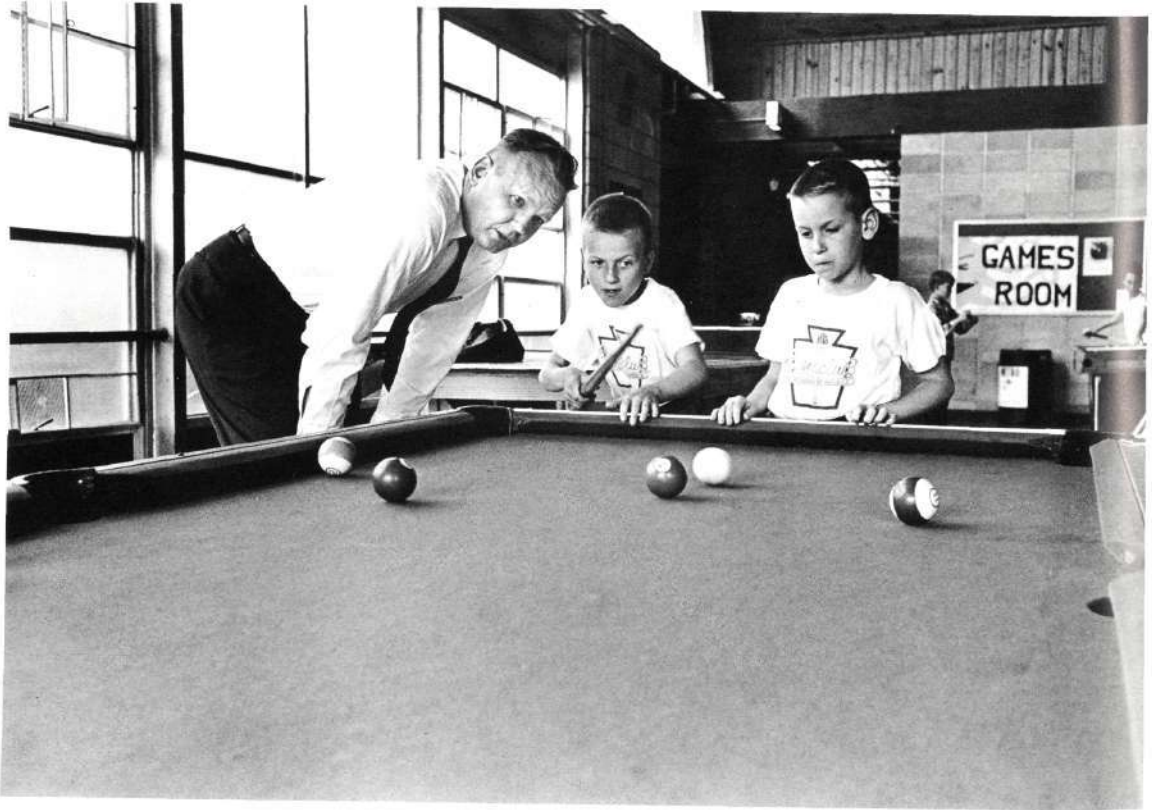
Then, too, and most important to us as accountants, Atlanta is the fast-growing business center of the Southeast, even though compared to other southern cities like Savannah and Charleston it is a youngster. It was just a scattering of farm houses 128 years ago, in 1837, when engineer Stephen Harriman Long recognized that here, at the southern end of the Appalachian range, was a spot designed by nature as a meeting place for railroads connecting the East, the South, Midwest, and Southwest. Near the center of what is now downtown Atlanta, in an area known as "Five Points," he drove a stake marking the end of the rail line he was building. Here evolved a community known first as Terminus, then as Marthasville, and finally as Atlanta. Today this same point marks the beginning of Atlanta's longest and most famous street, Peachtree Street.

The same geography that served the railroads is now making Atlanta a great highway and airline center, where soon six of the nation's new interstate super-highways will meet and where today 2½ million passengers a year crowd the new air terminal.

Atlanta's evolution as a storehouse and chief distributor has brought approximately four thousand national concerns to the area. For H&S Atlanta this adds many opportunities to participate in serving clients of other



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offices. General Motors Corporation, for example, operates three large assembly plants served by the Atlanta office.

During the Civil War, Atlanta was the center of war industries and, as such, was a primary target for the armies of the North. General Sherman's forces completely destroyed the city, but within a month the citizens returned and began rebuilding. By the end of the War, the population had grown to 22,000. Henry Grady, the great southern leader and early editor of *The Constitution*, commented, "I want to say to General Sherman, that from the ashes he left us in 1864, we have raised a brave and beautiful city; that somehow or other we have caught the sunshine in the bricks and mortar of our homes and have builded therein not one ignoble prejudice or memory."

As Atlanta grew, Haskins & Sells in 1915 recognized the potential of the area, and on June 1 of that year opened this office, the eighth of the Firm, to meet the demands of its expanding practice in the South. Although 1965 marks our fiftieth anniversary, the office today continues an even older practice started in Savannah in 1908. In 1961, Haskins & Sells merged with the surviving firm of this early practice, Barnes, Askew, Mills and Company, and since then has also continued the operation of the office in Savannah. Mack Barnes, Jr., is currently chairman of the State Board of Accountancy (as his father, now retired, had been before him) and was instrumental in getting the Accountancy Act changed to include a college degree in accounting as a requirement for taking the CPA examination.

The Firm had also merged, in 1942, with Joel Hunter & Company, another long-established Georgia practice. The Joel Hunter of that firm, who is now president of an H&S client, Crucible Steel Company, was the son of Joel Hunter, Sr., who held Georgia CPA certificate Number One.

Atlanta has been described as an urban island in a sea of the rural South,

a part of the Atlanta professional and office staff. [Ed. note: Immediately after this picture was taken, the office again became a beehive of activity.]

b Russell P. Shomler, partner in charge of the Atlanta Office, imparts poolroom technique to members of Whitehead Memorial Boys Club. Mr. Shomler was on inspection tour as chairman of United Appeal budget committee.

c Studios, broadcasting equipment, and executive offices of Cox Broadcasting Corporation share "White Columns," typical of outer Peachtree Street architecture and settings. Stewart Siewert, senior accountant (r.), visits with Joe Dwyer, Business Manager.



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d Georgia Tech is right in Atlanta, a few blocks off Peachtree Street. Bob Eskew (c.), business manager of our client, the Athletic Association, Roy White (l.), senior accountant, and Theron Parr, principal, confer in the stadium. The Association uses a computer to apply seating priorities for football fans, whose slogan "In Dodd we trust" bespeaks their faith in coach of Yellow Jackets.

e Rodney Wall, senior accountant, and his wife, Barbara, host their neighbors Mike and Nancy Ford. The Fords have since moved to Chattanooga, where Mike is a senior accountant in our new office.

f (from left) Anna Cook, Chris Russell, and Betty Hale, members of tax staff, mull over a case in the tax library. Atlanta Office's heavy tax practice includes serving all the tax needs of Citizens & Southern National Bank, next-to-largest in the Southeast.

and so our practice may take us to small towns which are in large part supported by one industry—a textile mill, a rail center, or a plantation. Our visits there are expected and widely heralded events. Sometimes a drugstore clerk or a factory worker will ask if it isn't about time to mail accounts receivable confirmations. Nowhere do our men get a warmer welcome than at Mother Morgan's boarding house in Erwin, Tennessee, a town of 1,500 in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. We go there on the Clinchfield Railroad engagement, and Bob Burdell doesn't exaggerate very much when he complains that he gains a pound a day on her cooking.

We travel 150 miles south to the flat country to serve several plantations—huge tracts of land, some of 12,000 acres or more, maintained for timbering, farming, and hunting. Increasing use of heavy and expensive equipment in recent years has greatly reduced the labor force on these plantations and has almost eliminated the "sharecropper." This and other changes have created some interesting accounting and financial problems.

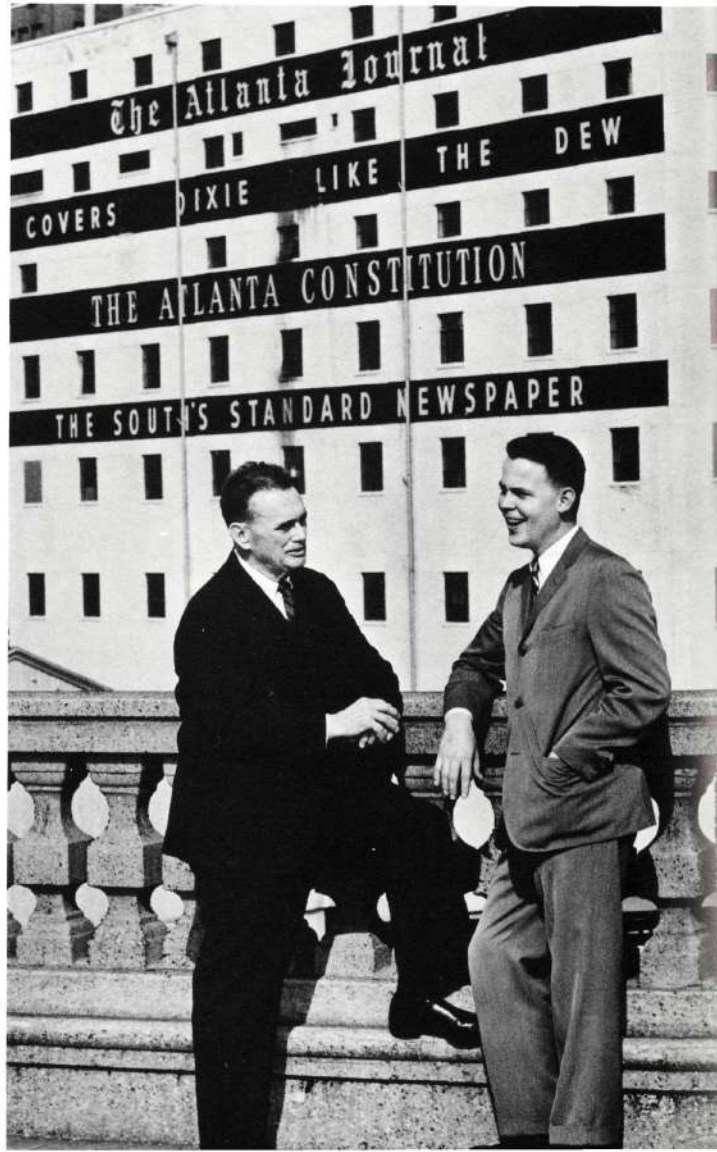
In Atlanta proper our clients range from small one- or two-man operations to complex multi-corporation structures, and they fall into all but two of the Firm's industry groups. A number of our people have become deeply immersed in the savings and loan industry. As one result, we were recently asked to help organize a Management Group among officials of our savings and loan clients and to assist them in programming their periodic meetings, in researching their common and unusual management, tax, and accounting problems, and in compiling comparative operating data.

To meet the needs of our growing practice Atlanta Office has the strength



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that comes from a young, dynamic, professionally-oriented staff (almost 90 per cent of whom have passed the CPA examination).

Our office makes a particular point of keeping communications channels open between everyone at all levels and between audit, tax, and MAS staffs. One way we do this is in our bi-monthly dinner meetings of partners, principals, and senior accountants, held usually at the Capital City Club. The format calls for a question-and-answer session on current administrative matters, followed by discussion of a subject selected by the seniors. The success of these meetings is attested by one senior accountant who says they give him the feeling of having taken part in decision-making on major office problems.

The Atlanta office sponsors two major social events each year, a dinner dance in the fall, and a stag outing in the spring at the Atlanta Yacht Club on Lake Allatoona. The outing usually begins with a softball game between the Audit Pirates (recently renamed the Braves) and Tax Dodgers. The competition between the audit and tax staffs for good players is always keen—so keen that some audit people insist that temporary assignments to the tax staff in the months just before the outing must be based more on athletic prowess than on tax aptitude. Both teams seem equally proficient at tapping the ice-cold keg of beer that sits in the cool shade beneath a tall pine tree near home plate.

Gathering notes for this profile unearthed one astounding item: Lloyds of London had predicted that Atlanta would be the largest city in the world by the year 2000. Checking with Lloyds' local representative, the Chamber of Commerce, and the newspapers showed the story to be baseless rumor, but apparently the more attempts were made to squelch it, the more the people believed it. That, in a nut-shell, is the Atlanta spirit. We in the Atlanta Office might be a bit more cautious in predicting that ours will be the largest office in H&S—but not much more so.



g Fulton Federal Savings and Loan Association is largest of a number of clients in that industry. Principal Jim Craft (l.) and Haines Hargrett, executive vice-president, meet in lobby.

h The masthead slogans of morning (Constitution) and evening (Journal) newspapers form a backdrop for Ralph McGill (l.), Pulitzer Prize-winner and publisher of the Constitution, and Tom Wood, senior accountant on the Atlanta Newspapers engagement. The Constitution claims Margaret Mitchell (Gone With the Wind) and Joel Chandler Harris (Uncle Remus) as former staffers.

i Almost every spring for fifty years the New York Metropolitan Opera has come to Atlanta for a week, latterly to the huge Fox Theatre, second in size only to Radio City Music Hall. Frank Garner, principal, and his wife, Bobbie, cross Peachtree Street to the Georgia Terrace Hotel at intermission.