

The Rage of Atlanta

LENOX SQUARE IS BECOMING
A GEORGIAN BY-WORD
FOR CONVENIENCE, BEAUTY AND CHARM
—AND IT ALL BEGAN IN OKLAHOMA—

By Carol J. Robinson, '59journalist

ATLANTA means Peachtree Street and Sherman's siege and *Gone with the Wind* and Uncle Remus and Southern belles and "Dixie" . . . and Lenox Square. Granted that Lenox Square is more ultramodern than antebellum, but its 72 acres of Georgia are the Deep South all the same—Deep South by way of Soonerland and the University of Oklahoma.

When Atlanta's gigantic new regional shopping center opened on August 3, 1959, a far-sighted young Sooner saw his years of planning and dreaming in tons of concrete and steel. Edward E. Noble, '51geol, had done more than ramrod an architectural triumph, however. His thriving center was a shrewd business venture that had tapped the South's richest retail market and changed the shopping habits of its fastest growing city.

Lenox Square's 59 shops are within 15 minutes driving time of 375,000 Atlantans, who may park in the center's 6,000-car lots. With the completion of Atlanta's new expressway, the city's entire population—over a million people—will be within 35 minutes of the Square.

The president's chair of such an enterprise might be considered an unusual place to find a geologist, but then Ed Noble was an unusual geologist. Though he followed in the footsteps of his oil-conscious family through O.U.'s School of Geology, Noble



Ed Noble, '51geol

didn't catch the oil fever.

He went to work in Midland, Texas, for 3½ years in the production office of Samedan Oil Co., founded in Ardmore by his father, the late Lloyd Noble, '23, and named for the three Noble children, Sam, Ed and Ann. Ann Noble, '51, married Dr. David R. Brown, '49med, of Oklahoma City, and Sam Noble, '47ba, went on to become presi-

dent of Samedan, but Ed Noble was beginning to think in terms of real estate development.

Then came the shopping center idea—a big regional center that could match the downtown in merchandise and outstrip it in convenience. After being transferred to Samedan's Tulsa office, Noble made a personal hobby of studying the shopping needs of the various cities across the nation.

By 1955 Atlanta was looming large in the young Oklahoman's plans. At that time Georgia's state capital had a population of 900,000 while Tulsa boasted 300,000. Yet Tulsans had three times as much retail shopping area. Ed Noble was sold—and so was the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation of Ardmore.

Lloyd Noble had established the Foundation in 1945 in memory of his father to carry on biomedical research, primarily the fight against cancer, and agricultural research for southern Oklahoma. The Foundation was interested in diverting some of its investments from the oil business. By its nature, the shopping center is diversification in itself, not being dependent on any one store but rather a complex of businesses.

A corporation was formed with Ed Noble as president, Sam Noble and Foundation President James E. Thompson as vice presidents and directors, and Cecil Forbes



Enough gleaming white concrete went into the construction of Lenox Square to build a 24-foot highway 27½ miles long. By investing in equipment to prepare the concrete on-the-spot and a new "gun" to spray the mixture, Ed Noble was able to cut the cost of concrete construction in half.

of Ardmore, director. The entire project was Oklahoma financed with the Foundation holding a majority of the stock.

In the fall of 1956, Ed Noble moved his family and his "team" to Atlanta. The team is actually a trio—Noble himself, John D. Smith, '51 bus, and an Aggie named Victor Schroeder. Smith has become manager of Lenox Square, while Schroeder heads the Lenox Contracting & Engineering Co., originally created to build the center.

Noble bought an estate on historic Peachtree Street and Lenox Road, seven miles from the center of Atlanta, fought several pitched legal battles on commercial rezoning, and lured the city's two big department stores, Davison-Paxon of the Macy chain and Rich's, into his camp. In June, 1958,

the construction began. Fourteen months later Atlanta had started shopping in the suburbs.

Ed Noble knew what he wanted in Lenox Square. In a month's time he flew to practically every shopping center of any consequence in the United States. He was determined to give Atlanta something for its money.

A regional center needs at least one major department store. Noble had two. But the two titans wanted to be located side by side so each could benefit from the other's advertising output and drawing power. Noble urged them to take up space at opposite ends of a central mall, giving the smaller businesses the advantage of the exchange traffic.

This type of center could count on drawing shoppers from 60 to 100 miles away on once or twice a year buying sprees. Noble wanted to put branches of every better merchandiser from downtown Atlanta in a Lenox Square location. He violated the rule book in leasing to six men's wear stores. Too many, said the book, but it worked, and more and more men were drawn into the Lenox clientele.

Noble and his team were novices—and what's more, they knew it. Perhaps for this reason only, they were able to go ahead with the innovations which set Lenox Square apart from the average shopping center. Building a complete and convenient place to shop was not enough for Noble. He wanted Lenox Square to have a per-



This shaded outdoor escalator carries Atlanta's shoppers from the lower Plaza level to an upper level built around a 1,014-foot central mall. Fifty-nine shops are located on the two levels.

sonality all its own. He wanted to create a place where people would like to come even if they had nothing to buy.

The 100-foot drop from one end of the site to the other made possible the construction of the center on two different levels. The central Mall, with its city park atmosphere, is reached by escalators from the lower Plaza level. Shoppers have no auto dodging problems in the car-free shaded walks within the center.

On his whirlwind shopping center tour, Noble had noticed that most of the landscaping was permanent. He favored variety and changeability in Lenox Square and had its landscaping done in huge concrete pots—300 of them—holding everything from holly plants to crepe myrtle.

Still the planners felt something else was needed to add warmth and charm to the Square. The team hit upon an idea close to Southern hearts.

Atlanta sculptor Julian Harris was commissioned to make the model for a grouping of the Uncle Remus "critters," Brer Fox, Brer Rabbit and Tar Baby, from the tales originating in that city. The son of author Joel Chandler Harris dedicated the finished work, located on the Plaza level. Several other whimsically sculptured animals dot the Mall.

The Lenox Square corporation maintains an office in the center and a staff of 15 for public relations, advertising, maintenance of buildings and grounds and police protection. The center has its own police force to patrol the mall and plaza, direct traffic.

Soft-spoken, scholarly Ed Noble loves Lenox Square, just as he, his wife, LaVerne, and their children, Ben, 7, and Vivian, 5, love Atlanta. Yet Noble is fond of saying, "Oklahoma is still home—and always will be."

But with the Square completed, Noble has found what he missed in the oil fields. "You can see the results here—that you've accomplished something," he explains. "In drilling an oil well, everything is underground."

Noble is not the only one to note the results, however. Even while the corporation studies other cities for future locations, developers are coming to Atlanta for advice on their own projects. Even the "real pros" in the business have pronounced the Oklahoman's shopping center one of—if not *the*—finest in the United States.

But sweet as national recognition is to Ed Noble, the enthusiastic local endorsement of Lenox Square is even sweeter. Why, there hasn't been so much talk in Atlanta since Rhett left Scarlett weeping on the stairway.



Joel Chandler Harris, Jr., shown here with his granddaughters, dedicated Lenox Square's "Uncle Remus critters," based on the stories created by his famous author father in Atlanta.



From the white canopies and arches overhead to the decorative two-color paving underfoot, Lenox Square was planned with an eye to beauty as well as to utility. That much needed place to rest is often as welcome as the well-stocked shop.