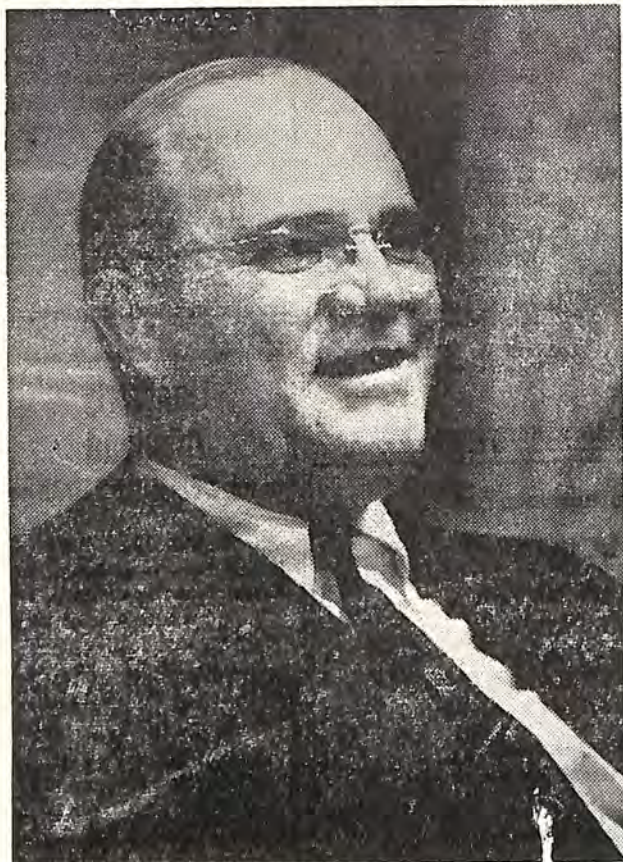


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Atlanta Rushes to National Role



Mills B. Lane Jr. heads Citizens & Southern National Bank

Many Consider City a Business Mecca for the South

By VARTANIG G. VARTAN
Special to The New York Times

ATLANTA—"The city of Atlanta," Mills B. Lane Jr. asserts, "is a commercial venture."

Mr. Lane, who charges about this city with the unabashed power of a bulldozer, is a bald, chunky banker who knows what he's talking about. He serves as President of the Citizens & Southern National Bank, the biggest bank in Georgia.

He is a third-generation Georgia banker who was graduated from Yale in 1934. He owns 50 vintage automobiles and he wears a tie bearing the slogan, "It's a wonderful world."

But setting aside a flair for the unusual, Mr. Mills and other Atlanta executives are deadly serious about the role of this city, the home of Coca-Cola and "Gone With the Wind," in the business world.

When they talk about Atlanta, some local businessmen refer to it as "Mecca." It has the reputation of a congenial place to live, and one pretty research analyst who came South to con-

duct a company study for her Wall Street firm went home to report, "It's the friendliest city I've ever, ever seen."

Today Atlanta is scrambling to become "a national city."

In typically aggressive fashion, the city is building an \$18-million sports stadium in an effort to obtain the baseball franchise of the Milwaukee Braves.

This move has set the beer homeland to foaming, but Atlanta's leading citizens are confident of their ultimate triumph. "Just think!" exclaims an advertising man. "The world series in Atlanta!"

An equally impressive building was constructed much earlier here at more modest expense. This is the state capitol, completed in 1899 at a cost of \$1 million and modeled after the capitol in Washington.

Today the spirit of business is the spirit that moves Atlanta and the tell-tale sounds abound.

For one thing, a surprising number of business leaders drink martinis instead of bourbon. One political figure is partial to a Scotch mist with a twist of lemon peel at lunch time.

But Coca-Cola is still known locally as "Georgia champagne" and some people in Atlanta drink it for breakfast.

It is significant that the man now serving his first term as mayor—Ivan Allen Jr.—has a business background in running a family-owned office supply company.

Atlanta has been fortunate over the last three decades in the leadership provided by its bankers who are friendly to business. The First National Bank, second largest in the city, is preparing to put up a 41-story skyscraper. It will add luster to Atlanta's growing skyline and loom as the tallest building in the southeast.

The Trust Company of Georgia, sometimes known as "the Coca-Cola Bank," also has played an active role in the city's rapid growth. Thanks to these and other banks, as well as a complex of insurance and financial institutions, Atlanta regards itself as "the Wall Street of the South."

And Other Things

One businessman paid the ultimate compliment to Charlotte, N.C. by describing it as "a little Atlanta."

But when you bite below the skin of the peach, there are other things to be found. Some informed persons, for example, will acknowledge the deep-rooted rivalry between Atlanta and the small towns and rural areas of Georgia. "There is a tremendous jealousy here," declares one leading citizen. "The plain fact is that Atlanta has got to quit looking down its nose at the rest of the state if all of Georgia is going to prosper."

This rivalry is basically both economic and political. For decades, Atlanta has been the shopping Mecca for well-heeled Georgians and the most promising youngsters have left such places as Americus, the seat of Sumter County, for the big city of Atlanta.

The political rift stems from Georgia's county unit system, which, until recently outlawed, meant that the rural parts of the state could dominate Atlanta despite the vast gap in population.

Finally, Atlanta today is the most liberal city in the Southeast in its attitude toward the Negro. The basis for Atlanta's behavior reflects the hard-headed awareness of its business community. But this comparatively liberal attitude for the South has served only to whet the animosity of much of rural Georgia toward Atlanta.

Just what did Atlanta have at the start?

First, it had location. This brought the first railroad crossing here in the mid-19th century and transportation has been booming ever since.

Second, it had as one leader frankly puts it, "no bugs." This meant that its altitude kept the town free from yellow fever dangers.

What has Atlanta got at the

present time? The local Chamber of Commerce unblushingly begins its description as follows: "Atlanta, the capital of Georgia, is the commercial, industrial and financial dynamo of the Southeast."

A Chamber of Commerce, of course, tends to emphasize the good points of any given area while omitting the fact that, say, a city is built on the lip of a smoldering volcano.

But the key to the Chamber of Commerce in Atlanta is its domination by the city's most aggressive business leaders.

One brokerage office manager who has worked in the East describes his schedule as follows:

An 11-Hour Day

"My friends in New York City think it just great that I can drive from home to the office in 20 minutes. What they don't realize, however, is that I'm apt to get into town at 6:30 A.M. for some civic committee meeting and then go to another meeting for breakfast. At night I usually attend a fundraising meeting or another session of some kind before I drive home. Portal to portal, it's an 11-hour day."

Atlanta-based companies range from Scripto, makers of ballpoint pens, to Rich's, a department store that is approximately Nieman-Marcus, Macy's and Lord & Taylor all rolled into one. There is also Oxford Manufacturing, Atlantic Steel, and the Southern Company.

There is manufacturing done in Atlanta, but this is characteristically a city that puts together parts rather than producing parts. The assembly plants of General Motors and Ford serve as examples.

But Atlanta has gained a mix in its economy that is lacking, for example, in a city such as Birmingham, which is so heavily dependent upon its iron and steel complex.

One 9-year-old boy who grew up in New England until the second grade sums up his main reaction to Atlanta as follows: "It's got space."

A Government economist takes a somewhat more sophisticated view. "The economics of conglomeration are at work here," he explained. "The fact that Atlanta is already a center for regional offices will attract similar offices from other companies."