

Eiseman Building

A Condemned Building Lives On

Regenstein's . . . Davison's . . . Muse's . . . Rich's . . . J.P. Allen . . . J.M. High . . . For decades, Peachtree Street was a retail destination. And these were some of its mainstays. In those days, shopping was more than an errand. It was an event. Atlantans – and visitors to the city – sometimes made a day out of visiting downtown Atlanta's stores. But, by the middle of the twentieth century, Peachtree Street had changed. Residents had long since moved away from the downtown core and many shops had followed them. One by one, Atlanta's retail institutions were disappearing.



*Atlanta street scene, c. 1907
Eiseman building visible with awning
Image via GSU.edu*

In their place, a modern city center was taking shape. Some vestiges of the area's past, a retailer here or a theater there, had survived. But, mostly, Peachtree Street was a full-fledged business center. Streetcars gave way to automobiles and buses. Architect and developer John Portman's Peachtree Center project changed the vision of a big city office. Further south in

downtown, the storefronts that had lined the railroad's edge formed the core of the Underground Atlanta entertainment complex. By the 1970s, this area of the city was almost unrecognizable to its former self.

In the mid-1970's, construction was underway on the first rail segments of MARTA, the city's public transit system. One of the early stations was near the Five Points area of downtown Atlanta. It would eventually serve as the transfer point for MARTA's north- and southbound trains, as well as the east- and westbound lines.

In later years, many MARTA stations would feature artistic elements. Colorful murals adorned the walls of the North Avenue and Ashby stations. Sculptures are on the grounds of the East Point, and Indian Creek rail stations. And, a concrete relief runs trackside at Arts Center.

Rather than create something new, the Five Points station artwork features a piece of downtown Atlanta's past. Built in 1901, the six-story Eiseman building at 47 Whitehall (later Peachtree) Street had been home to a clothing shop. Though, like many other downtown retailers, the store had closed. As MARTA construction progressed, the Eiseman had been demolished. But, before it was totally destroyed, a local architect was able to salvage the building's ornate, terra cotta façade.



*Eiseman building facade, Five Points
Image via AtlantaTimeMachine / Jeff Morrison*

A team of workmen, it is said, dismantled the façade, breaking it into hundreds of pieces. The pieces were catalogued. And, as construction on the Five Points MARTA station continued, the collection of pieces were reassembled down to the tiniest detail inside of the station. The façade remains there today, a piece of the past in the middle of the modern city.

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