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Written By: [John Hewitt](#) | 6/1/11 | Categorized in: [DeKalb News](#) [Lifestyle](#)



Atlanta's underground, hippy-culture newspaper on display at DeKalb History Center. Photo by John Hewitt

Atlanta's underground, hippy-culture newspaper on display at DeKalb History Center

Many who grew up in or around the Atlanta area during the '60s and '70s probably remember the iconic weekly counter-culture newspaper The Great Speckled Bird. First published in 1968, The Bird is now back and on display at the DeKalb History Center.

Billed as an "exhibit of the South's standard underground newspaper which chronicled turbulent times in Atlanta from 1968-1976," the exhibition is as much a chronicle of counter-culture as it is a lesson in the history. The 1960s and 1970s were a time when many young people rebelled against established norms of society, experimented with illegal drugs and developed a new sense of fashion. This alternative lifestyle and the resulting social and political views were recorded each week in the pages of The Bird.

Melissa Forgey, executive director of DeKalb History Center said, "We are delighted to host this special exhibit covering The Great Speck Bird, Visitors to this exhibit can learn much about DeKalb, Atlanta and the nation during this time period, with sections covering the anti-war movement, worker's rights, women's liberation and

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more.”

At the height of its influence, the 22,000-circulation Bird, was distributed statewide, but the focus of its distribution was in Atlanta’s “hippy district,” loosely defined as the 10th, 14th and Peachtree streets area where runaways, students, flower children and drug dealers peacefully coexisted and created their own sub-culture.

Walking through The Bird exhibit at DeKalb’s History Center, one will see collections of rolling papers (for homemade cigarettes, of course), vintage clothing and accessories, and an impressive collection of images and writings that defined Atlanta’s flower power culture. Also on display are numerous front pages of The Bird, each with a provocative headline often accompanied by a hand-drawn image. One headline states “101 black students go on trial in dekalb county,” others state “G S Bird kidnapped, ransom-\$3500,” “\$100,000 coat at Nieman Mark Up,” “Save The Fox,” and “Christopher Columbus died of VD.”

I grew up in rural north Georgia and had an older sibling who participated in sit-ins and bra burning and other counter-culture activities I found fascinating. On the rare occasion that I was able to get my hands on a copy of The Bird, it gave me an opportunity to see what life outside a small town could be like and evoked images of the power of youth as they demanded that their voices be heard and slowly changed society. The Bird encouraged somewhat radical, open-minded thinking and ideals of unity that weren’t common in Georgia during those times. The Bird was our connection to another world, a world that some of us yearned to be a part of, a world that influenced how we dressed, spoke, wore our hair and viewed the world. The Bird became the voice for a generation of youth trying to make their mark on society as the country struggled with a myriad of social and political issues.

According to the statement released by DeKalb History Center, “From the first issue, which castigated Atlanta icon Ralph McGill for his support of the war, there was never a doubt whose side The Bird was on. For more than eight years it was the ‘voice of the voiceless’ – African-Americans fighting Jim Crow in the South and institutionalized racism in the North; striking garbage and farm workers; Vietnamese peasants being slaughtered by American bombs and napalm; women taking control of their bodies; students demanding meaningful educations; and young people seeking new ways to live.”

As a baby boomer having the opportunity to revisit history that many of us were a part of was entertaining, amusing and gave me a sudden, albeit short-lived, adrenaline burst. I encourage anyone in the 50-plus age group to see the exhibit. It never hurts to be young at heart, even if only temporarily.

The exhibit will be open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. until Nov. 30. For additional information, visit www.DeKalbHistory.org.

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