

HISTORY OF THE ORCHARDS

The Orchards is a North Baltimore community bounded by Melrose Avenue on the South, Charles Street on the East, Lake Avenue on the North and Kenmore Road on the West.

A residential area of gently rolling hills and slightly curved streets, The Orchards was named after the early twentieth century estate of Douglas H. Gordon. The community is composed of large, detached stone or brick structures of mostly colonial design. The Elkridge Hunt Club and Golf Course and the Bryn Mawr School in the northern and southwestern portions of the neighborhood provide the community with considerable open space.

The Orchards was part of an early land grant patented by James Murray in 1694. Early in the nineteenth century, Sidney Winder owned 330 acres of this parcel, which was divided by today's Lake Avenue. By the 1830's, a new owner in the area, David Wilson, of the well-known Baltimore family of clipper ship owners, had built a frame house on the highest point of the property, now the south side of Castlewood Road. Southwest of his home were the orchards from which the tract takes its name. In 1878 all of this land that extended to Lake Avenue, and which was bisected by the Stony Run, was still in the hands of the Wilson family.

In the 1840's Melville Wilson, brother of William, also bought property from Sidney Winder. He later sold this parcel to Governor Augustus Bradford in 1853. After renaming his estate "Multivadeo Park," Union sympathizer Bradford built a mansion, which was burned in 1864 during one of Confederate Colonel Harry Gilmor's raids. This Civil War action was in apparent retaliation for the destruction of the home of Governor Letcher of Virginia, at Lexington. The federal government offered to assess his neighbors who were Southern sympathizers for the value of Bradford's burned dwelling, but the Governor declined the offer, and was never compensated for his loss by either the state or federal government. In 1884, a well-attended auction sale of the estate of Bradford's heirs was held. However, only a few of the 2- to 12- acre lots, which had been carved from the 125-acre parcel, were purchased. In addition to the ruins of the old homestead, the site included a large three-story frame cottage, two stone quarries, and 30 acres of woodland. Most of these improvements were located in the portion of the estate which remains in Baltimore County today. The portion now within the city limits included some woodland and marsh, and was intended for subdivision into nine large residential lots. This portion was eventually absorbed by The Orchards community, while the larger northern section became the Elkridge Hunt Club and Golf Course.

One advertising feature used to attract prospective buyers to the 1884 estate auction was the fact that one could be downtown by steam railway fifteen minutes after leaving either the nearby Homeland or Woodbrook Stations of the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad (then called the Baltimore & Lehigh) that ran along the Stony Run Valley - an impressive feat! Although the train no longer runs and most of the rails have long since been removed, the Homeland station, now a private residence, remains south of Lake Avenue and west of Kenmore Road.

Charles Street Avenue, initially, a toll road, was extended past The Orchards area in 1854. Heading north, the first tollgate for the extension was located at University Parkway. Near The Orchards, tolls were collected at the intersection of Belvedere Avenue (Northern Parkway today).

By 1898, the City and Suburban Realty and Investment Company held title to at least three quarters of The Orchards. A good portion of what remained, the section south of Melrose Avenue and west of Charles Street, was owned by Greenleaf Johnson, who was perhaps the source of the name for the present Greenleaf Road.

Later, about 1900, Douglas H. Gordon, Sr., a local financier, acquired about 125 acres of the tract through the foreclosure of a mortgage. Mr. Gordon was a banker, the owner of The Baltimore News and a general business promoter. Prominent as a leader in both civil and business affairs, his interest was the reform and modernization of Baltimore.

Mr. Gordon acquired The Orchards as a site for a summer home. It was known for its beautiful trees and was one of the most lovely pieces of land. The Orchards was situated on the main street of the city, Charles Street, as it ran into the county.

In 1902, Mr. Gordon built a house; surrounded it with attractive gardens and shortly, thereafter, gave the house and 24 acres to his wife, Mr. Elizabeth Clarke Gordon. The Orchards was used as a summer home, by the Gordon family, from April to November each year until after Mr. Gordon's death on April 8, 1918. The Orchards was used by the Gordon family continuously as a summer home until September 1921, when Mrs. Gordon remarried and moved to Philadelphia.

The Orchards, except for the 24- acre parcel mentioned above comprised part of Mr. Gordon's residuary estate. In 1921, Mrs. Gordon and The Trust which Mr. Gordon established, leased approximately 46 acres to the Elkridge Hunt Club for a term of 99 years. The lease may be perpetually renewed.

The home on The Orchards was leased to various persons from September 1921 until 1928. In the Spring of 1928, the Bryn Mawr School decided to move from an old residential part of Baltimore to the county and resultantly purchased the house and the 24- acre parcel for \$150,000. Today, the house is known as The Gordon Building.

When it became known that the house at The Orchards had been sold, interest arose as to the availability of the remaining acreage. Subsequently, a 5-acre tract was sold for use as a home site. Thereafter, Gillet and Company, a real estate development firm, purchased the remaining 50 acres for \$7,000 an acre in 1928. \$50,000. was paid in cash and \$300,000 of the remainder of the purchase price was paid by a mortgage.

Gillet and Company subdivided the acreage, erected a rather elaborate stone gateway to the subdivision, constructed four concrete streets with curbs and sidewalks through the greater part of the property and, as well, installed sewers and utilities. These improvements cost \$102,000.

In 1933, Mrs. Gordon and The Trust foreclosed on the mortgage (except for six lots previously sold by Gillet and Company). The remaining 40 1/2 acres was purchased at the foreclosure sale by The Trust for \$85,000. plus costs, a very low price relative to the value of the property. In the following three years no attempt was made to sell.

In 1936, The Roland Park Company, a real estate development company, renowned for its restrictive covenants, the beauty with which streets were laid out and landscaped and the great care it took in passing on architectural plans for homes in its subdivisions (Roland Park, Guilford, Homeland), was entrusted with the sale of the remaining lots in The Orchards. (Interestingly, Mr. Gordon owned a substantial amount of The Roland Park Company which had been willed to Mrs. Gordon.)

The Roland Park Company took total charge of the properties and was given broad latitude (as if an owner) to approve purchases, require restrictions, prepare contracts and supervise maintenance. Minimum prices for the lots totaled \$395,020.

In order to make certain the unsold lots in The Orchards subdivision were subject to covenants and restriction similar to those used by The Roland Park Company, The Trust and Douglas H. Gordon, Jr. as trustee for Mrs. Gordon's separate estate, executed on October 22, 1936 a deed as grantors to Douglas H. Gordon, Jr. as grantee. This deed and the accompanying plot were recorded in the land records of Baltimore and is published elsewhere in this booklet.

During the period from 1936 through 1951, sales of lots and parts of lots in The Orchards were made by The Roland Park Company. Sales of partial lots were usually due to the fact that persons who had previously purchased lots in The Orchards sometimes decided that they would like to have larger acres, and if there was an adjoining lot, would purchase part of it.

Thus, today, The Orchards with 126 homes remains as a residential subdivision, strictly governed by the Deed of Trust of 1936. It is still beautifully landscaped and maintained and is one of the premier subdivisions on Northern Baltimore City.