

AN EVENING WITH ROGER BLACKWOOD

By Pat Mccardy

On January 20th of this year, Roger Blackwood graciously gave me an entire evening of his time. We sat and talked about the origins and building of our subdivision. These are the highlights of the information he gave me.

The Fred Blackwood Company was founded in 1931 by Roger's father, Fred Blackwood, who passed away in late 1945. In 1948, James Taylor joined Roger as a partner. According to Roger, James had a great nose for land and land development. The company operated mostly in northwest Detroit in the early days, and developed land in Livonia. Following Roger's return from service during the Korean War, a 160 acre parcel of land, located on the east side of Adams Road and north of Square Lake Road came on the market. The land was owned by the Bloomfield Medical Center, which once had intentions of building on the site. The hospital, Beaumont, was later built on Woodward Avenue in Royal Oak. Fred Blackwood Company sold the land as brokers, plus an additional 100 acres between Beach and Coolidge Roads to Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Kelly of Kelly Coal Company. The Kellys held the land for one year, then sold it to Blackwood and Taylor, who then started development of the land.

The 260 acre parcel, now known as Charnwood Hills, Charnwood Hills #1, Charnwood Hills #2 and Charnwood Hills #3 was laid out by Wilbur McAlpine, a well known engineer-surveyor from Birmingham. The land was divided into 180 lots. All of the lots were planned to be at least one acre in size. Preserving the natural beauty of the area was a major priority with Blackwood and Taylor. In one instance that Blackwood remembered, they had McAlpine move the road at the corner of Ramsbury and Anslow Lane in order to save the two beautiful trees which are there.

In 1954, Charnwood Hills was started with 31 lots. Blackwood and Taylor had the first house built on the northeast corner of Adams Road and Malvern. They would sit in the house on Sundays to show the lots to potential buyers, but only about two cars would come by all day, and one of them would ask how to get to Birmingham! A buyer was finally found for the house and they became the first residents of Charnwood Hills. Shortly after this period, Ranch Homes, Inc. builders from Birmingham, became interested in the subdivision. Blackwood and Taylor sold them lots and handled the sale of the houses. Ranch Homes built a few "spec" homes. The original 1,600 square foot home sold for \$27,900, including the lot. The vacant lots sold for three to four thousand dollars.

The first phone exchange for the area was Pontiac. The school districts were Bloomfield Hills and Troy. The mailing address was Birmingham and the property was in Troy. What confusion!

In 1955, Troy became a city and Charnwood #3 was started. Most of the houses in Charnwood Hills were built on slabs with radiant heat, because that is the type of house which was selling in those days. It had nothing to do with the water table. Basements were seldom built, even if they were requested.

The area at Adams Road and Tewksbury had gravel deposits, and furnished enough gravel so the road contractor could supply all the streets with gravel.

The lots in Charnwood Hills were large because the Troy Township Zoning Commission was adamant at first that the lots contain five acres. However, Taylor and Blackwood took their attorney to the planning commission meeting for the final approval. The Zoning Commission backed down and the over-all plan for the 180 lots was approved.

Each house needed a well and septic tank and field, as there was no city water or sewers. City water did

not come into the area until approximately fifteen years ago.

At the direction of Blackwood and Taylor, their attorney wrote the restrictions for the subdivision. They have been copied by much subsequent subdivision since they are very well written and were inclusive of the major points that need to be covered. These restrictions were signed, approved and registered at the County Courthouse in Pontiac. The restrictions are still in force today. Taylor and Blackwood organized the Architectural Control Association. The Charnwood Hills Homeowners Association eventually took over the operation of the Architectural Control Committee.

Because of the foresight and planning of people like James Taylor, Roger Blackwood and engineer-surveyor Wilbur McAlpine, we now enjoy living in a truly beautiful area that has no rival anywhere else in the city of Troy. The wandering roads, the large lots, the hundreds of huge old trees make one believe that they are still in the country. We are able to enjoy the best of both worlds so let's do our best to work toward preserving this natural beauty.