



Wooded acres, spacious living quarters and individual design all were attractions of Oaklands, the developers of which were talking suburb before much of anyone else had thought of the concept. Al-



though these photographs are taken from the original brochure, these homes still are in existence today and look very much the same.

## Depression crushes dreams of elegant subdivision

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

A developer's dream from the 1920s survives amid the modern-day subdivision surrounding Bond Elementary School in Farmington Hills.

Oaklands, the subdivision dreamed up by the Great Lakes Land Corp. was offered as an option to the hectic city living at a time when Oakland County was generally farmlands.

The group of developers from the Washington Blvd. Building in Detroit used one of the oldest devices in advertising by converting a seeming flaw into an asset and offering acre estates in the area west of Orchard Lake Road and north of 13 Mile behind Bond Elementary School.

Each of the developers built their own homes in the area as well as one which served as a model for prospective buyers. The six homes survive, but the most noticeable belongs to Brian Sprague on Ardmore.

The Cotswold cottage style of the home sums up the attitude taken by the corporation which aimed its sale pitch at businessmen and professionals tired of living in the city but unwilling to move into a farm house.

Before the Depression forced the plan to fold, brochures illustrated the virtues of living in "an ideal setting where rolling country dotted by pleasing woods and broken by broad expanses of meadowland afford an outlook of charming character and never-ending delight."

"In this distinguished setting for a home," the brochure gushes, "the business or professional man of Detroit finds a practical, sane solution to the problem of where to live."

The Sprague home, designed by Ted Wilkins, a native of England's Cotswold district, features the gingerbread beams and stucco as well as the slanting roof characteristic of that area.

The home was built by Edward D. Beals, one of the developers with the Great Lakes Land Corp. Once he moved into the home, Beals discovered his maid had a difficult time running up one stairway from the kitchen to the dining room to entertain. So he obliged her and made a small secret stairway behind the walls, according to Harlem Morris, a real estate agent and former builder.

It was Morris' stepfather, Henry Bach who was active in the Oaklands project. Bach, along with other developers who lived in the subdivision, stressed the luxury inherent in living on a small estate rather than the distances each owner would face driving to work in the city.

"No one who would own these homes would have to be at work at a certain hour," Morris explained.

HE STILL has the project's original brochures with their delicate illustrations of children coveting with pets on broad lawns and men decked out in golfing gear enjoying the greens.

Brochures extolled the virtues of the yet-to-be-built Glen Oaks Country Club and golf course. The nearness of the greens as well as the planned Northwestern "Superhighway" was emphasized in Oaklands' brochures as much as the distance between neighbors was cited as an equally desirable feature.

Each acre estate was to have frontage on two streets. The grounds were

*'It is the dream of several men to build up a delightful suburban community affording every comfort, every convenience of the city and offering the advantages of a happy home in healthy surroundings.'*

— Distinctive Acre Estates of Oaklands brochure

to be 150 feet wide by 240 feet deep. Future owners were assured that they could eventually sell half of the property and keep one piece measuring 150 feet wide and 120 feet deep.

Landscaping had everything to do with the selling of farmlands that the developers purchased on land contract from Isaac Bond.

Besides having several models to choose from, potential estate-owners were regaled with landscaping plans drawn up by the Farmington based firm of Butterfield & Butterfield.

The spacious backyards could include such details as a kennel yard and formal garden. A vegetable patch began where the formal garden's bird baths and sun dials ended.

Other schemes suggested laundry yards for housekeepers and a service yard on the opposite side of the home from a shubbery lawn.

FOR MORRIS, who still lives in the area of the unfinished subdivision, the

plans bring back memories of that era.

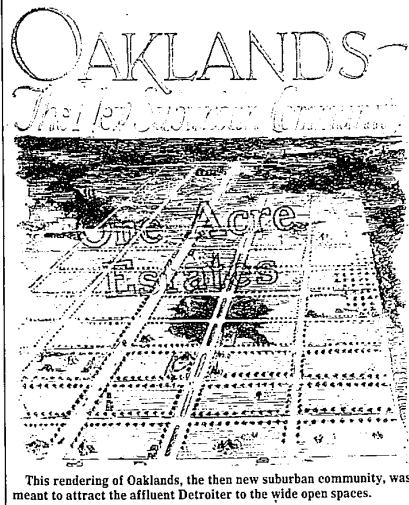
"You couldn't afford to keep up a lawn like that today," he says as he carefully runs a forefinger down the photocopy of one of the landscaping plans.

"One of the homes even had a putting green beside it," he said, smiling.

The purchasers of the estates were to be assured that their neighbors were required to construct temporary structures and all residences must cost at least \$5,000 and be built from plans meeting the developers' approval.

"Of course, that's ridiculously low, now," Morris says.

The dreams of broad yards and little girls with big bows in their hair running on the lawns died with the Depression. The property reverted to Bond under the land contract for non-payment. And for a time, Bond, a farmer, plowed his fields and harvested his crops around six homes and their manicured lawns.



This rendering of Oaklands, the then new suburban community, was meant to attract the affluent Detroiters to the wide open spaces.

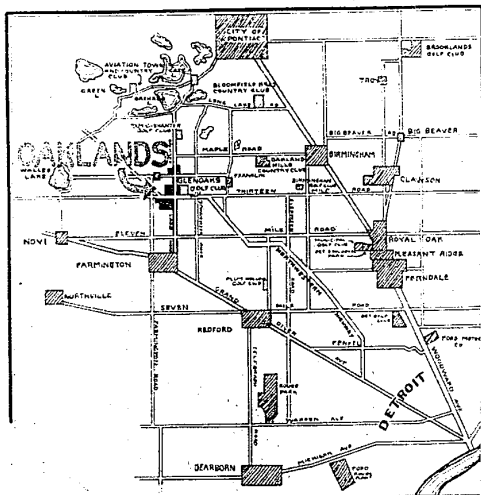
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Great Lakes Land Corp.  
1903 Washington Boulevard Building  
DEVELOPERS OF  
OAKLANDS

This map attempted to show potential homebuyers how close, yet how far the country living of Oaklands was to their places of work. Although the map is a bit distorted

when it comes to distances, it points out some interesting Detroit area landmarks like the Ford Rouge Plant, Rouge Park, and many of the golf and country clubs of the '20s.