

ALBERT FORTUNE RECALLS EARLY MALVERN HILLS

I had the great pleasure of speaking with Albert Fortune of School Rd recently about his recollections of the early days of Malvern Hills. Albert is an active 97-year-old. After he returned from WWII in 1947, he owned and operated Fortune Hardware which was on the corner of Haywood and Brevard Roads in West Asheville for several decades.

Albert and his wife, Lina, bought their property at 66 School Road in 1947 after seeing a "For Sale" sign tacked to a tree in the development that was still mostly wooded. All but a dozen or so lots were unsold at that time. Albert and Lina purchased 2 lots for \$1,500 each.

Because building materials were scarce and expensive after the war, Albert harvested 13 tall pines along School Road for framing. Of 15 oak trees, he took down only 2 for the home site with the remaining oaks standing today as a reminder of the woods that were once Malvern Hills.

Albert first built a garage apartment to live in while building his home. Before the garage, he and Lina had no place to live so Mrs. O.E. Starnes, with a large house on Houghton Place, let them stay in the servants' quarters.

With no building blocks available in Asheville at that time, Albert leased a truck and drove to Bluefield, WV to haul 1,000 blocks back to School Road himself. All the masons Albert knew were still at war. A retired mason, Noah McDonald, came into the hardware store one day and Albert asked him if he'd lay the block him. Noah agreed if Albert would mix the mortar and carry the blocks to him!

Albert and Lina raised a son, Larry, and a daughter, Marie, in that house. Lina taught at Vance elementary for 35 years and died in 1990. Albert says he still loves Malvern Hills.

The original Malvern Hills property was acquired in the 1920s by Asheville School, planned as a development for the parents of Asheville School students. The development was extraordinarily well designed and surveyed for its time. Albert doesn't know of a single property line dispute in all these years. However, sales of lots did not meet the School's expectations and not more than 10 lots were

developed before the stock market crash of 1929. After the crash, the development languished and Imperial Mortgage foreclosed on the property just before 1945.

The Malvern Hills development provided a glimpse into the now progressive use of underground utilities by putting power and phone lines in wooden tubes underground with manholes placed every 500 feet. Another nice touch was the ornamental street lights at intersections which stood until the 1930s. Unfortunately, vandals stole all the underground electric lines, pulling them out through the manholes when the price of copper soared during the War. Carolina Power and Light put in above ground power poles in 1944/45. Phone lines, sheathed in less expensive lead, remained in use underground until the 1950s when they were finally added to the poles.

The original plan for the Malvern Hills development called for a covenant that restricted building costs to a minimum of \$3,000 on Arthur Rd and \$4,000 for the rest of Malvern Hills. The covenant became obsolete during the WWII. Building in Malvern Hills finally began to increase as men returned from the War.

In 1948, Albert and a group of 4 or 5 other residents created the Malvern Hills Community Club for the purpose of controlling the quality of construction. This is the origin of our present day Club. The members of the club approached new property owners in hopes of convincing them through friendly conversation, rather than resorting to covenants or legal measures, to build to a higher standard. Some of the homes being built were GI houses, simple box-like designs that were adaptable to a more decent structure. The Club was successful in its first project, and the new owners agreed to make improved modifications after speaking with the committee. As the community grew, the Malvern Hills Community Club expanded its role.

Malvern Hills continues to be a lovely part of Asheville with its diverse homes, old trees, sidewalks, and friendly neighbors. How wonderful to be able to hear about its origins from Albert. Living history!

--Reported by Stephen Canner