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Echoes from Greenway Downs

How It Started

Growing pains attacked Greenway Downs in March, 1943. The community had been growing before then, imperceptibly at first with the addition of a house or two at a time, and then by leaps and bounds. The growing pains were sharp and persistent.

All new houses have shaking-down periods. Cracks appear in smooth plaster, plumbing won't work, leaks develop around flashing, windows and doors stick, errors in design are discovered, and all the business of getting a family settled must be faced. Multiply all such headaches by the number of houses mass-erected in Greenway Downs, even before March, 1943, and growing pains could be an understatement.

Being solid American citizens born with an inalienable right to beef about what did not suit them, the residents of the community did some tall bellyaching. A politer term would be inadequate. On the bus trips to Washington, in the car pools, in small groups on street corners, over the back fences (figuratively, because there were few fences) the yelping and complaining went on. Most of the resentments vented their pressures that way and the complainers felt better.

But we had a wet season that spring—remember? There was talk of the river flooding and surface water had a way of accumulating in strange places because of all the landscape which had been moved to build houses. Typhoid fever was rumored because many septic tanks were incorrectly installed or were involved in unpredictable subsurface water conditions. What had been wholesome, safety-valve squawking, began to border on panic. Those were wartimes and all the elements of epidemic disease were assembled.

Al Keniston was not much for loud talking, but he figured something had to be done. He gathered some 20 men in his basement one night to discuss ways and means. The principal topic was the sanitary situation, but try to keep 20-odd men on one subject when they are worked up over countless grievances! Individually they had complained to the contractors and developers, and severally they had been given the merry old round-and-round. Clearly the time had come for collective action, and for representations to the county authorities.

Some present at this indignation meeting understood there was or had been a citizens' association in Greenway Downs. It was not represented at the meeting and, either by design or through misinformation, a feeling was fostered that such an association, if one there were, was unwilling or unable to cope with problems of the increasing population of the community. Instead of ferreting out and resurrecting

the moribund organization, the meeting determined to organize all over again, and a committee was appointed to draw up articles and by-laws.

Let the record at this point bear witness that the older association was more sinned against than sinning. True, it failed dismally to draw to itself the newcomers who the sequel showed were ripe for concerted action. Also, true, its membership dwindled after Pearl Harbor; but remember—many institutions lapsed following that dark hour. The old organization was disrupted, not by dissension and discord, as so many of you now believe, but because its ranks were thinned by the transfer of many active members for war work elsewhere.

It was unfortunate that the meeting in Al Keniston's basement on that wet night in March 1943 could not have taken over the then existing machinery of the original Greenway Downs Citizens Association. Unfortunately, that is, not because the duplication in any way handicapped the new group as it felt its way along. The present association, as you all now know it, differs in no structural respect from the old, and the old bylaws could have been readily adapted to the new ideas.

It was also unfortunate that many members of the original association were alienated. Several families which were among the first to live in Greenway Downs have never been active in our present Greenway Downs Citizens Association. These people were organizers and devoted members to the only body once entitled to speak for the community in which they lived, and in which they still live. They are your good neighbors now and were ready to welcome you when you came. They were not indifferent to new problems created by a 20-0fold increase in population within a few short months. They were simply overwhelmed by the prospect of absorbing so many people so rapidly.

Without a single exception known to your present reporter those who lived in Greenway Downs before December 7, 1941 and are still here, are at least nominal members of the Greenway Downs Citizens Association, as you now know it. In the pleasant excitement of getting the present association organized and operating, emphasis was placed on constantly on the theme that this was anew and effective organization, in no way to be confused with the one that had discredited itself and should be avoided.

In name, in purpose, in membership, in contacts with town and county officialdom, we are direct heirs of a loyal group which organized a Greenway Downs Citizens Association not later than 1934 or 1935. Is it too much to suggest that by some hocus-pocus formality acknowledge that kinship. In March 1943, we living in Greenway Downs were mostly strangers to each other. That is not true today. Correct the record. Do now what those in the Keniston basement and those who did not attend the meeting would have done in March 1943, had they collectively known then what we all know now.

The Greenway Downs Citizens Association dates, not from March 1943, but from those dimming ante-bellum days. Make it official, since it is a fact.