

The Beginnings of our Neighborhood

By Phil Starcke ©

In 1907, Teddy Roosevelt was president, fighting to regulate exorbitant railroad shipping rates. He was also fighting most of the U.S. Senate, who supported the railroads and received free rail passes and other perks from their grateful “special interest”. Automobiles were becoming more common on American streets. George M. Cohan was the rising star of Broadway, and “ragtime”, which had originated in nearby Sedalia just before the turn of the century, was the popular music of the day.

In Kansas City, Mayor Henry Beardsley was pressing for reform and a new city charter. Both were opposed by the rival political organizations of Jim Pendergast and Joe Shannon, who had dominated Kansas City politics for the last decade. The city limits extended only as far south as Brush Creek. The area south of Brush Creek and west of Wornall was rural Jackson County, and was almost entirely farmland. The Ward Parkway Homes Association was 20 years in the future.

The few years prior to 1907 had seen a major increase in real estate development in Jackson County. J.C. Nichols, who developed the Plaza and the Country Club district to the north of our homes association, began his career during this time as a small Kansas builder, and by 1907 had expended modestly into a few sub developments south of Brush Creek. His Country Club Plaza was 20 years from being a reality. Nichols himself was still a relative unknown among scores of real estate men in 1907.

Others saw the potential in this area too. The Inland Security Co. had purchased a tract of land between Wornall Road and Summit Street from about 71st Terrace to 72nd Terrace. In June, 1907 the first subdivision in the WPHA area, called “Norwaldo” was created.

The new subdivision did not include what are now the northern five lots in the 7100 blocks from Wornall to Summit, which still belonged to the Armour family, nor the southern four lots in the 7200 blocks of the same streets, which were owned by the Patten family. Nichols later bought the entire 7100 block of Washington and the East side of the 7100 block of Pennsylvania. Together with the remaining Armour land, he would create a new subdivision, called “Armour Lawn”, in the 1920's.

In October 1907, Charles and Nannie Patten followed suit and created the second subdivision in the WPHA area called “Waldo Heights”. Their land extended from the Norwaldo subdivision South to almost 74th Street. Both subdivisions were named after a prominent early landowner whose name would become synonymous with the entire area: David Waldo.

Interestingly, the homes between Summit and Wornall which face 74th Street, do so because the lots were not part of Waldo Heights, but are part of a later subdivision.