

Forest Hills - Perinton, New York

By Kenneth Dodgson

The Early Days

The earliest known plans for the development of the area known as Forest Hills are penciled “overlays” superimposed on a site survey done for Harold P. Dygert by John Abner Stuart and completed on December 17, 1927. The area surveyed includes the area bounded on the north by East Filbert Street, on the east by South Lincoln Road, on the south by East Ivy Street and on the west by Park Drive and Madison Street. This area is designated Parkcroft. The undeveloped area south of Parkcroft, which today comprises Forest Hills, was designated Parkcroft Heights, and included a street, Buena Vista Drive, of 51 plots, which is known today as Ridgeview Drive. The penciled overlays show an extension of Madison Street and a suggestion of what eventually would become Fair Oaks Drive. Whatever construction was proposed for the 1920s did not occur, presumably because of the intervention of the Great Depression.

There are other existing blueprints of Buena Vista Drive (now known as Ridgeview Drive) dated June 20, 1930, completed for the East Rochester Realty Co., Inc. On this site survey the land to the north, corresponding to Fair Oaks Drive and Regency Drive and the wooded area of Westwood Drive, is shown to be owned by Emma Leaman. Approximately three acres of land to the east of 39 Ridgeview Drive is shown to be owned by Elizabeth Waite and is undoubtedly the derivation of Waitefield Drive. The land to the south, which today includes Lake Crescent Circle, is shown to be owned by Marjorie H. Cox. Again, as before, Ridgeview Drive was not developed as plotted on this survey – although much of the eastern portion of present-day Ridgeview Drive follows this plan.

Titles and abstracts that apply to the properties that surround the wooded areas of Westwood Drive and Fair Oaks Drive trace the history of land ownership from the time of the transfer of ownership from Daniel Turrill to Roswell Turrill on September 20, 1821. Roswell Turrill purchased adjacent properties from Asahel Lusk, Jr., on May 19, 1825, and Lucy A. Mann on October 9, 1826. Roswell Turrill left the property to his wife, Letty, and the area was known as the Letty Turrill Farm until the late 1890s. On September 5, 1898, Egbert Etts deeded the Letty Turrill Farm to his

daughters, Emma M. Leaman and Sarah Aldrich, and it is from the Aldrich family that Lawrence Dygert (East Avenue Hills Development Co., Inc.) purchased the land on September 8, 1931. Title abstracts record plots being sold to original Forest Hills residents from 1932 to 1939 and include many whom Dygert included in his promotional brochures (Rockwell, Witham, Kerner, Kellogg, Payne, Covert, Hoffman, Gross and Abel). Interestingly, the first of these properties was purchased on August 23, 1932, by John Abner Stuart, the gentlemen who had done the early site survey in 1927.

Apparently construction of houses in Forest Hills did not begin along the street first plotted along “the Ridge” but commenced along Lake Crescent Drive. Photograph exist that show land adjacent to the Lake Crescent pond on Fairport Road being cleared and the house at 6 Lake Crescent Drive progressing to roof level. In the background trees on “the Ridge” are evident but the area is devoid of any signs of construction. (*See photos of 6 Lake Crescent Drive taken while it was being build on the next page.*)

Harold Dygert personally did the architectural design work in collaboration with each original resident, which accounts for the one-of-a-kind nature of Forest Hills homes. Residents who dealt with Dygert came to know him to be opinionated and determined and he obviously had strong stylistic feelings. The fact that individual residents had an influence in the design process may well account for the wide variety of architectural styles in Forest Hills and the fact that all plans were drawn by a single draftsman may account for the harmonious approximation of multiple architectural styles. Members of the Dygert family indicate that many trips were made to Pennsylvania to bring oak timbers for the floors, paneling, doors and woodwork that distinguish the homes. Stone masons were brought from the Adirondacks and camped on-site while completing the impressive brick and masonry highlights. In general, building progressed from Lake Crescent Drive in the early 1930s to Ridgeview Drive and Westwood Drives (in the mid-1930s) to Fair Oaks Drive and Regency Drive in the late 1930s. The Art Deco house at 13 Regency Drive commenced in 1941 and was completed in early 1942, the last of the “classic” Dygert homes to have been completed. With the onset of World War II, all construction ceased. When building resumed after the war, ranch style homes of the 1950s filled the remaining vacant lots.



The photos above show 6 Lake Crescent being built with the ridge in the background which would become Ridgeview Drive (circa 1928) and again when built (circa 1936).



Seventy-five Dygert designed homes of the 1930s occupy a contiguous area within Forest Hills. Architecturally, a third of these are Tudor Revival in style. There are an equal number, approximately 30% in total, of English Cottage and French Eclectic design, the later characterized by round tower entrances and referred to by Dygert as “Norman style.” Approximately 20% of the homes fall into the category of Colonial Revival done in wood, brick and stone, many featuring second floors, some having gabled roofs and one having Southern Colonial columns. One of the two done in French Regency style gives its name to Regency Drive.

The Kodak Connection

The Eastman Kodak Company introduced the first color film, *Kodachrome*, in 1935 and made a major effort to promote and popularize color photography at the New York World’s Fair in 1939-40. An estimated four million people visited the Kodak pavilion. *The Cavalcade of Color* was billed as the “greatest photographic show in the world.” 2,112 Kodachrome slides, mounted on the largest drum gears ever produced in the United States, were projected at 50,000 times enlargement by specially built twin projectors onto a screen 187 feet long and 22 feet high. For many viewers it was the first time they had experienced the kind of projected color slides that would revolutionize audiovisual imaging.

Ms. Andrea Imbrugia, Archive Assistant at the Kodak Library, was kind enough to preview hundreds of slides from *The Cavalcade of Color* exhibit and located five Kodachrome slides that featured homes in Forest Hills – confirming Harold Dygert’s advertised claim that Forest Hills homes had been a featured part of the New York World’s Fair. Because the scripts have not survived, the manner in which the slides were utilized is not known, but it is thought that they could have been part of a pictorial section of Kodak employee security that featured home ownership, health care, financial opportunities, and Kodak’s profit sharing wage dividends. According to the Dygert family, the Forest Hills slides went on to become a feature in the Kodak exhibit in New York City’s Grand Central Station.

Harold P. and Lawrence Dygert

Harold P. Dygert was born on May 23, 1889, in South Hammond, Lawrence County, New York. When he was two years old his parents moved to Despatch (later to be named East Rochester) where Harold spent the remaining years of his life, dying shortly after celebrating his 100th birthday. In 1916 he married Elsie Viola Howe, with whom he celebrated a 70th wedding anniversary prior to her death.

Harold graduated from high school in East Rochester and then, according to his grandson, it is believed that he studied architectural engineering/drawing by correspondence from Columbia University. At 17 years of age Harold began showing motion pictures at a small theater in the Village. Culver Dygert indicates that his grandfather's ambition and ability so impressed a local bank that they advanced the money to build a large theater – the Rialto which later became The Capri – which Harold owned and operated for many years. Eventually, in 1966, the theater was converted into the Rialto Apartment Complex. In 1972 he designed and built the adjacent Parkside Manor Nursing Home.

During his lifetime, beginning in the 1920s and through the 1960s, Harold claimed to have designed and built over 600 homes – mostly in the East Rochester area – but also in Brighton, Pittsford, and the City of Rochester. Harold's brother, Lawrence (Larry), supervised the construction of most of the Dygert homes, acting as a business manager and building superintendent. According to Dygert family members, Lawrence was as able an engineer as Harold was a draftsman and apparently had a better business acumen. Prior to development of the Forest Hills area, Harold had designed and built some houses along Madison Street and within the Parkcroft area, but Forest Hills became his first major project and apparently remained his favorite, due primarily to the harmonious variety of architectural styles that was accomplished.