

**WELLINGTON GREENS
A MEMOIR**

by
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Wellington Greens: A Memoir

One of the definitions for "memoir" is "an account of something noteworthy." Wellington Greens is, indeed, noteworthy. Not only was it the first community living unit plan in Lincoln and, we believe, the third in the nation, it remains, in its maturity, a premier community in which to live. Turn east off bustling 70th Street into Wellington Greens' park-like setting and tranquility descends.

Imagine the land as it once was: Nebraska prairie in the 19th century—hilly, a creek or drainage way from the southeast to the northwest, probably not prime land for cultivation, some scrub trees here and there and maybe a farmhouse somewhere within the square mile.

Contrast that with present day Wellington Greens encompassing 70.45 acres—16+ of these acres in 277 townhouses. Paving of driveways and sidewalks covers nearly 8 acres. The green space that sets this area apart from newer town home communities equals nearly 42 acres enhanced by more than 3000 trees, countless shrubs and ornamental grasses. No wonder Wellington Greens is noteworthy.

In 1864 a list of tracts of public land at Lincoln, Nebraska subject to sale included all of Section 34, Township 10 North, Range 7 East—one square mile, 640 acres. Alvin Saunders was governor.

Enter C.T. and J.D. Sipple, residents of Fremont County Iowa, located in the southwest corner of the state across the river from Plattsmouth and Nebraska City. The Sipple brothers, and C.T.'s wife Hattie, purchased the southwest quarter (SW1/4) of Section 34—160 acres more or less—for \$1288 in the summer of 1869. The boundaries of this purchase are roughly present day 70th Street to 77th Street (extended) and Van Dorn to South Street/Trendwood.

While the Sipples never actually lived in Lincoln, they spent a considerable amount of time here. According to a Lancaster County employee at the time, "[T]hey (the Sipples) were at times possessed of considerable real estate in various parts of Lincoln," therefore they were frequent visitors as they bought and sold real estate. The county employee "...formed their acquaintance in the late seventies in connection with business transactions and socially."

Unanswered questions might include what made property near Lincoln appealing to land speculators from Iowa? Did they see the promise of this newly named capitol of the State of Nebraska? What was it about Section 34 that tempted them? Did C.T.'s wife Hattie join them in Lincoln and at the social occasions (most unlikely)? Did they travel by horse and carriage? Stagecoach? The Burlington railroad (via Plattsmouth) didn't reach Lincoln until 1870.

In June 1870 Philip H. Hyatt purchased the SW1/4, Section 34 from the Sipples for \$1600, a mere \$312 profit for the Iowa men (hardly enough to pay for travel and socializing). Hyatt, from Mount Vernon, Ohio, planned this as rental property, perhaps encouraged by his brother, Columbus Hyatt, a resident of Lincoln who owned land across Van Dorn Street directly south of his brother's purchase.

In 1892 Hyatt "conveyed" to John McClay and Edward Sizer five acres of the SW1/4 at the northwest corner of 70th and South Streets. The *Abstract* does not indicate the use of this parcel, nor does it further trace its disposition, although it was still exempted from the total acres in 1956.

When Philip Hyatt died in 1919, he willed his "farm of about 155 acres in Lancaster County" to his living siblings—two sisters and his brother Columbus. Hyatt descendents held the property until 1935 when Thurl Strain, President and Trust Officer of the Continental National Bank purchased it for \$17,437.50. Part of this land became known as Strain's Acres, next purchased by Roy and Elva Bateman in 1944.

Most of the SW1/4 remained farmland well into the 1950s. The *Abstract* records that the Batemans were granted permission to erect a "2000 bushel capacity for corn storage structure" in 1949. A retired teacher tells of the annual field trip she planned for her 5th and 6th graders in the early 50s when they were studying distances. The school bus brought the class to 70th and Van Dorn, from whence they hiked around the square mile. Most of the Bancroft School students hadn't experienced "country" on foot and were enthralled with the vast, open farmland, the creek, the ducks and other wildlife they spotted. "The farmer and his wife always gave us ice cream," the teacher recalls. Much of the land beyond Wellington Greens' boundaries was planted in milo as late as the early 70s with both 72nd and 74th Streets ending at Wellington Green's south property line.

A resident remembers that the Bateman's lived on 70th Street about where Carriage Glen is at Shamrock Road into the early 1950s when the house was torn down. The land to the south facing Van Dorn, Lots 8 and 15, where Silvercrest Assisted Living was built in 1998 and Legacy Estates in 2003, was known as the DuTeau Farm until Louis DuTeau's death in about 1997. Further references to the five acres on the northwest corner of 70th and South Streets owned by John McClay and Edward Sizer were not found, except for an easement for electric lines in 1961 given by Rex and Eylon Owens, the first mention of these names.

In 1963 Batemans sold 115 acres of their holdings to First National Bank who apparently held the property until early 1967 when James Strauss, long-time owner of Trend Homes of Nebraska, Inc., planned and proposed the Wellington Greens neighborhood. The mortgage was for \$85,000 at 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ % interest. The City Council approved the city's first Community Unit Plan on March 20, 1967.

An early promotional piece for Wellington Greens begins:

Atop a gentle meadow in exclusive southeast Lincoln you'll find beautiful Wellington Greens. Like a sleepy old country village overlooking the sprawling Lincoln landscape it rests in quiet solitude. . .so far from the city's bustle. . .and still only minutes away from the everything. Easily accessible from the city's main arterials. . .Wellington Greens is situated for fast and easy commuting.

The schematic of the community included in the booklet is much as we know it today although a "teen play area" was planned at the west end of the golf course and the tennis courts were on the north side of South Street between Brian Glynn and Kimberly. The #7 fairway was shown between Regency and Chatham Park where the drain way flows and nine children's play areas were scattered in the green space among the courts. Obviously Strauss planned Wellington Greens as a community for young families; however, the amenities as they are today make community living especially appealing to working and retired age people. The daughter of former residents who bought a show home unit in Chatham Park in the early 70s remembers Wellington Greens fondly. "It was a wonderful place to grow up," she recalls. There were lots of other kids in the area and they had the freedom to ride bikes or play ball wherever they wanted. The green space was like a great playground.

The golf course is a Wellington Greens treasure with the vistas and the park-like ambience, whether or not you are a golfer. A former Board member describes the course as both an asset and a liability, thus it has always been. The developer apparently used the course as a bargaining chip with the City, agreeing that if Wellington Greens did not maintain the course properly, the City could take it over as a public course. Golf courses are high maintenance; therefore, owners' monthly assessments need to cover this care even though you are not a golfer.

Bunny Richards, Hillcrest Country Club golf pro at the time, was hired to design the course that opened in 1968 about the same time major residential construction began. Richards later bought a home in the community. When 70th Street was widened, the hole on the #4 green had to be moved and two huge silver maples were lost.

Dan Riner, longtime Superintendent of Grounds, deserves special mention in this memoir. Board members and residents come and go, but Dan has been a faithful employee since 1972 when he was hired at \$1.75 an hour. He is our collective memory. The golf course is a high priority for Dan and he has maintained this in pristine condition over the years—a prime example of small, privately owned courses. Although the course is not especially challenging for really serious golfers, it is perfect for duffers who want to carry, maybe, three clubs, have a bit of exercise and fresh air. One resident says he's had a good game if he finds more balls than he loses.

Maintenance costs are defrayed a bit by several golf leagues that pay to play. Owners are also expected to register and pay for their guests.

The club house/maintenance building was built early on, perhaps even before town house construction began. In the early years, a resident was hired to manage the clubhouse and golf course registering golfers, maintaining the locker rooms, overseeing the tennis court and managing rentals. She also sold golf supplies, sandwiches and other snacks. The tennis court was directly west of the maintenance garage. This was never heavily used as, a resident commented, it must have been designed by someone who never played tennis. The court was flooded in the winter for ice-skating. Of the many play areas proposed, only a minimal gathering of playground equipment east of Cambridge Court materialized. Little used and a safety liability, it was removed in 1975 or 1976.

Another feature that sets Wellington Greens apart from later town house communities is the railroad tie fence along 70th Street and South Street. Unlike the more common wooden slat fences, the Wellington Greens fence defines rather than shuts in the area. The berm along 70th Street further enhances the perimeter of our community. When 70th Street was widened, resulting in increased traffic, it was evident that some sort of sound deflection was needed. Early in 1995, after months of research, study and discussion, the Board decided a heavily treed berm was the best choice for the situation: aesthetically pleasing from both the street and the residences. With ten years of tender care, the berm is now Wellington Greens' own mini-forest with a variety of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs. Even a few of the original plum bushes remain.

Integral to a community unit plan is its green space, a common area owned by the Association for the use and enjoyment of the owners and such members of the public who walk through or drive around the area. Few of the more recent town home communities can equal or exceed Wellington Greens' more than 40 acres of common area with the great variety of trees and the well-tended grassy slopes. In cooperation with Dan Riner, University of Nebraska-Lincoln turf specialists have used Wellington Greens as testing grounds for various grass cultivars over the years, which assists the grounds crew in maintaining healthy lawns.

Most of the trees on the property have been planted over the years, but long time residents remember the ancient, majestic cottonwood in the island at the Old Post Road entrance that predated the development. It was removed after it became unsafe from age and years of lightening strikes.

At the beginning, Jennings Haggerty, nurseryman and resident, ordered bare root trees and chose the location for each to be planted by the grounds crew. Later Dan Riner drove to Shenandoah, Iowa each spring for years to bring back 200 to 300 trees, usually about 1" diameter, 6 feet tall to add to the common area. Residents frequently plant trees in the vicinity of their home, presumably with the approval of the Board. Currently the grounds staff maintains a seedling nursery near the maintenance building to fill in spaces amongst the older trees.

Over the years, Wellington Greens has been a natural habitat for assorted wildlife, some just passing through, while other species are permanent residents. At various times raccoons, opossums, an occasional fox,

quail, pheasants, wild turkeys, owls, bats, hawks, ducks and other species of birds have been sighted, as well as the ever-present squirrels.

No one is sure where the dream for Wellington Greens began. A resident remembers hearing that Strauss and Sid Campbell, one of the architects, made a trip to Europe to look at versions of community living before devising this plan. This is a reasonable assumption for European and British influences are reflected in the overall concept: the gated courtyards, enclosed gardens, architectural design of the buildings, the use of a variety of building materials and, especially, the British influence in naming courts within the area.

This innovative idea could not have been sold easily to the Planning Commission and the City Council; however, on March 2, 1967, Wellington Greens was platted and dedicated by Trend Homes of Nebraska, Inc., James Strauss, President, and a representative of First National Bank. Just a year later, April 28, 1968, the first owners ratified a replat of the property. Wellington Greens had begun. (see addendum)

An integral part of the community unit plan approved by the City is the Declaration of Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions—in effect a contract between the developer and the City; the rules, regulations, privileges and restrictions owners acknowledge upon purchase of property in Wellington Greens. The covenants in their entirety may be found in the *Abstract of Title* or the most pertinent information and Association bylaws are in the infamous Green Book that every resident has been issued and should read. The bylaws are revised periodically to reflect changes approved by the Board.

Persons buying a portion of a community unit plan often overlook or don't understand that there are restrictions as dictated by the original covenants (contract) and, when purchasing a piece of property in the Association, they are agreeing to abide by the covenants described.

Permission to deviate from these regulations may be obtained by submitting a request and plan to the proper committee of the Board; the committee considers and approves or denies; and, ultimately, the Board of Directors makes the final decision, approving or denying. Such requests are not considered lightly; rather they are discussed as they affect the entire community. Tedious as this may seem, these regulations help keep Wellington Greens looking good and, thereby, uphold property values.

To counter the restrictions, the many privileges owners receive should be considered. In addition to use of the golf course, clubhouse and green space, residents enjoy—depending on the season—freedom from lawn mowing, fertilizing and spraying; gathering leaves from all those deciduous trees (although some residents rake just for the pleasure of it); clearing fallen branches and debris from storm damage. Dan Riner recalls especially the infamous blizzard in October 1997 when the grounds crew cleared broken trees for weeks. They stopped counting after hauling 150 pickup loads of debris to the landfill.

Perhaps the most appreciated benefit is snow removal. Remember Wellington Greens has nearly 8 acres of paved surfaces to be kept snow free and as safe as possible. Oftimes the court drives and sidewalks are in better shape than city streets, excepting the arterials. The grounds crew is out at all hours, day or night, to clear access streets for residents and emergency vehicles. Water and sewer fees are often overlooked as part of the monthly assessment.

Of course, the privileges mentioned are not without cost. Article VI, Section 1 of the covenants states, "... each owner... is deemed to covenant and agree to pay the Association an annual assessment or charge..." (payable in monthly installments) Section 2 further explains, "The assessments are to be levied by the Association for use exclusively to promote recreation, health, safety and welfare of the residents and in particular for the services and facilities devoted to this purpose..."

The monthly assessment remembered by an early owner was \$12.50; in 1972, it was \$15. Today residents pay \$125 a month; still a modest fee compared to other such communities in Lincoln. Proportionately fees haven't gone up anymore than a loaf of ordinary white bread, less if you prefer more nutritious loaves. Fees pay for salaries, seasonal labor, insurance, equipment and the gasoline needed, supplies, water, electricity for the clubhouse/ workshop, general maintenance, etc. And Wellington Greens continues to look good.

The initial purchase of land for Wellington Greens extended farther east than the present boundary. An administrative amendment in October 1971 removed lots on the east side of Devonshire Drive between South Street and Trendwood, plus one lot south of South Street and two north of Trendwood, in addition to a portion of common area between Cambridge Court and Devonshire. In July 1971 an administrative amendment reduced the number of building lots from 322 to 280 to satisfy planning commission density

requirements. The excluded lots were deeded to the Association to be dedicated to open space.

Wellington Court was probably the first built in 1968, although all the units were not constructed at the same time. The west building of the court, numbers 3 through 8, for example, was completed in 1969. It is assumed that all the buildings on the south and east side of Old Post Road were either built shortly after or concurrently with Wellington Court. There is no information readily available that confirms that the owners who signed the replat in April 1968 actually were living in finished units at that time. They may have purchased based on plans only.

Construction continued apace over the next six years with the building on the east side of Ramsgate—7100 Old Post Road, numbers 19 through 21 filling that court and the east building in Chatham Park—7300 Old Post Road, numbers 14 through 18, completed in 1974. The Chatham Park space was used as materials storage during construction of other units.

Wellington Greens had reached its total of 277 units, three shy of the 280 permitted by the city's density regulations.

Imagine if you will, living in one of the early units while construction was going on all around you. Lumber trucks, concrete transit mixers, probably dozens of carpenters starting early, quitting late. Wellington Greens could not have been peaceful nor easy to get around.

Development was not without problems as could be expected for such a sizeable development. An early member of the Board bluntly stated, "...Strauss was not a good builder." Shortcuts and economies were many, as evidenced several years down the road. Driveways were laid with improperly placed and scanty reinforcement resulting in breakup leading to the problems facing the Association now. Exacerbating the problem were the construction vehicles, garbage trucks and other heavy equipment using the drives. Placement of buildings did not always agree with the approved plat. Later surveys, upon selling property, for instance, might show a particular unit built partially in the dedicated green space. These errors were corrected through two additional replats of the total Association property. An early owner recalls that their building was planned to be 50 feet to the east until someone realized it would be directly over primary water lines. Therefore, the court has a narrower driveway than shown on paper.

Underground water and drainage has been and continues to be a problem. Adequate soil compaction in the beginning would have helped prevent some of these problems. An owner of one of the first-built units backing on the golf course awoke one morning after a heavy rain to find all the sod from the slope on her patio.

Sid Campbell was probably the architect for most of the development, although James Strauss's son, an architectural student at UN-L designed units 6 through 10 in San Simeon as a class project. Even though there is no indication of his role in the development, Mike Johnson for Gollehon-Schemmer, Architect-Engineer-Planner, signed a document dated July 1971.

Those who purchased units under construction could make changes in their dwelling such as adding fireplaces, moving interior walls, creating studies from bedrooms and the like. Over the years numerous owners have remodeled the interiors of their unit, updating kitchens and bathrooms especially. By covenant, any remodeling affecting the exterior, such as skylights, enclosing entries or patios, must be approved by the Board. Of course, penetration of firewalls between units is forbidden by fire code.

In July 1972, Trend Homes of Nebraska, Inc. sold all of Wellington Greens Replat to Style Mark, Inc. owned by Ivan Ingwerson. Someone said Strauss had a disagreement with City Hall, so he sold and moved to Colorado where he continued to build. Strauss, Ingwerson and Sid Campbell all lived in Wellington Greens at one time or another.

Wellington Greens is, actually, a small town of between 350 and 400 residents. Instead of a City Council, we have a six member Board of Directors elected by the citizens they represent. Their concerns are many—well beyond those evident to residents. Thanks for their time and efforts are scarce.

The twenty named courts are quite typical of neighborhoods everywhere—individual in nature, yet remarkably alike. Although the population tends to be older, there are working people, families with school-age children, singles and couples. Of course, grandchildren are ever present. Some neighbors gather for monthly canasta games; some for lunch each month. Some have an ongoing squabble about something; some are friendly, but merely wave or chat at the mailbox. Some gather once a year or so for a luncheon, soup supper or picnic. Card players regularly congregate at the Clubhouse for games and gossip.

Generally, however, residents of one court don't really get to know other neighbors. Busy lives preclude such interaction.

Wellington Greens still thrives after more than 35 years.
Let's hope it continues.

As with any memoir, information has been accumulated from many sources and errors or misinterpretations are unavoidable. City Directories and newspapers were searched. The *Abstract of Title* was indispensable. Special thanks go to residents, former residents, friends who remember when, and those amongst us who know about construction, engineering and such important details.