

History of the Glen Lennox Apartments & Shopping Center

DEMAND CREATES OPPORTUNITY

After World War II, American colleges and universities across the country swelled with the ranks of returning veterans taking advantage of educational allowances provided through the GI Bill. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was no exception to this with enrollment increasing from 4,100 in 1941 to over 6,800 by 1946 in just that five-year period alone.ⁱ Similarly, the town of Chapel Hill exploded after the war with the population of the town growing by over 250% from 1940 to 1950.ⁱⁱ All of this growth caused enormous demand for housing and led to a severe shortage by the late 1940's. It was around that time, as the story goes, that former UNC President W.D. Carmichael approached local businessman and contractor William Muirhead with the idea of creating a modern housing development to provide relief to the impending housing crisis.ⁱⁱⁱ

A COMMUNITY VISION

Examples of “modern” planned communities existed throughout the country and were often featured in popular magazines of the day. Many of these served as reference for Mr. Muirhead when planning began for a new community in Chapel Hill. In nearby Raleigh as well, a number of “modern-style” apartment communities had begun to emerge outside of the traditional downtown and by 1949 the first modern “shopping center” between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta was completed. Named Cameron Village and designed by renowned architect Leif Valand, this complex was a significant model for Mr. Muirhead.^{iv} As friends and professional colleagues, Leif Valand and Mr. Muirhead collaborated in planning the new Chapel Hill community that was named Glen Lennox; “Glen” coming from the Muirhead’s Scottish immigrant heritage, and “Lennox” from the maiden name of Mrs. Muirhead.^v



VISION BECOMES REALITY



The community was laid out with wide curvilinear streets and sidewalks to accommodate the automobile as well as the pedestrian and formed a loose grid-like pattern across the rolling topography. Each of the streets was named after a personal connection to the Muirheads like Hamilton Road, the street Mrs. Muirhead grew up on in Scotland. Many existing trees were preserved but new street trees were also planted. The apartments were designed and built in a single story “cottage” style with lawns and plantings giving the homes a picturesque quality and a sense of spaciousness in spite of the multi-family format and smaller unit size when compared to single family houses of its day. Glen Lennox opened in 1950 with 314 apartments and by 1953 had expanded to include the 440 units found on the property today.^{vi}

A MODERN SHOPPING CENTER TO SERVE CHAPEL HILL

Integrated with Mr. Muirhead’s housing community was a vision for a modern shopping center to serve the needs of a rapidly growing community that included the adjacent residents of his Glen Lennox Cottages. In 1952 he completed construction of Chapel Hill’s first shopping center also believed to be the second in North Carolina.^{vii} It was designed in the modern style with a streamlined appearance utilizing a combination of brick and storefront materials with a low-slung, covered arcade supported on slender steel columns. The shopping center was designed with

all of the modern conveniences in mind including a full service Sinclair Gas Station, the Colonial Grocery Store, and the Dairy Bar Restaurant where one could order a toasted egg salad sandwich, a milkshake or an ice cream float among other favorites. The shopping center, unlike the traditional downtown where parking was rare and metered, parking at Glen Lennox was designed to accommodate the modern automobile with plenty of free surface parking located between the stores and Raleigh Road (NC-54). Other notable tenants at the time included Pace's Gift Shop, a Laundromat, the Glen Lennox Beauty Salon, a branch of the Bank of Chapel Hill, and Glen Lennox Pharmacy all of which would later become regular institutions in the town's post war history.^{viii}

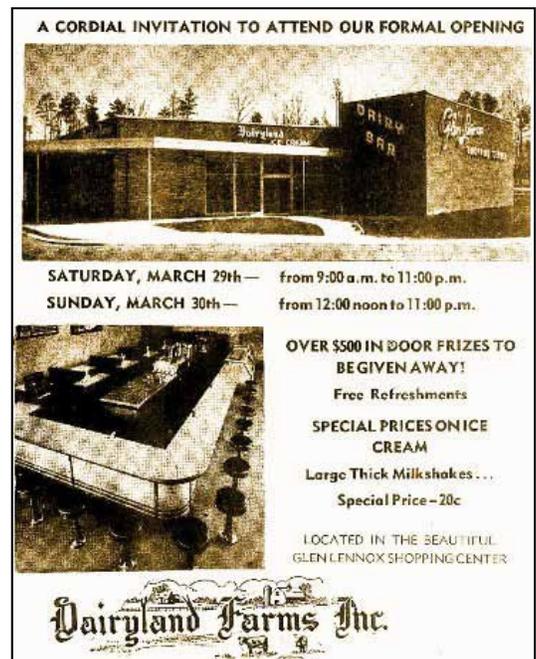
GLEN LENNOX OVER THE YEARS

Over the years following its construction, Glen Lennox quickly became a favorite housing choice for many young families that formed the "baby-boomer" generation following the war. It also became a favorite of graduate students as Mr. Muirhead wisely provided a shuttle bus system to the campus since the community was originally considered so far "out of town".^{ix} In addition, the community restricted undergraduate students creating a stable base of slightly older residents that took pride in their neighborhood. Many of North Carolina's most successful future lawyers, doctors and businessmen lived in Glen Lennox over the years as they attended graduate school, worked at the University, or interned at the hospital as medical students. For many families it was where they had their children, discovered their career path, and participated in the educational and social experiences that would shape their lives and friendships. Famous residents such as football legend and UNC All American, Charlie "Choo-Choo" Justice once lived at Glen Lennox where rumor has it the pet policy was changed to accommodate the pet boxer of the future NFL star.^x Roy Williams, current coach of the legendary UNC basketball team

lived for a short time in Glen Lennox in 1979 during his first year as the assistant part-time coach under Dean Smith.^{xi}



For many others, the apartments and shopping center represents an era of American optimism, the promise of modern living, and the stream-lined aesthetics of a new form of shopping experience that would later become the dominant pattern. Whether it is a student's memory of a milkshake from the Dairy Bar on a study break in the 1950's, a childhood experience of collecting soda bottles to redeem at the Colonial Grocery for 2 cents each in the early 60's, or a great dinner at Bin 54 restaurant just last week, many memories like these have shaped the Glen Lennox brand over the years.



ⁱ Vickers, James. *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History*. Chapel Hill NC: Barclay Publishers, 1985, Page 167.

ⁱⁱ Jacobson, Linda. *Glen Lennox Apartment: Synthesizing Visual and Written Evidence to Reveal Postwar Middle Class Culture*, Page 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hobbs, Pat. Interviewed by Rachel Russell, Chapel Hill, NC, March 12, 2010.

^{iv} North Carolina History Project. Accessed March 2010. <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/74/entry>

^v Hobbs, Pat. Interviewed by Rachel Russell, Chapel Hill, NC, March 12, 2010.

^{vi} Vickers, James. *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History*. Chapel Hill NC: Barclay Publishers, 1985 Page 168.

^{vii} Eyre, John Douglas. *Profiles of Chapel Hill Since 1900*. Chapel Hill NC: The Chapel Hill Historical Society, 2009, Page 104.

^{viii-ix} Mann, Charly. *Chapel Hill's Glen Lennox Apartments and Shopping Center; Chapel Hill Memories*, 2010.

^x Hobbs, Pat. Interviewed by Rachel Russell, Chapel Hill, NC, March 12, 2010.

^{xi} Chansky, Art and Dick Vitale. *Blue Blood: Duke-Carolina, Inside the Most Storied Rivalry in College Hoops*, Page 28.