

The History of the Crescent Knolls Developments at the Lake

By Jack Wooldridge

Today, I'm going to tell you a little bit about the Crescent Knolls Developments at Mountain Lake. If you're a resident of Mountain Lake or you live near there, you may have heard of the company. Crescents Knolls Inc, headed by the builder Tom Shields, apparently built one of their first houses in the developments in 1927, then lost a whole lot of land and resurfaced later with a different builder, Mr Bickel, in the 1950s. At one time, Tom Shields was generating an enormous amount of hype for his development, telling everyone they were going to put a railroad through, and then something happened and Crescent Knolls Inc didn't resurface until the 1950s. Perhaps, as one of our sources states, the Great Depression put an end to Shields' grandiose plans as he couldn't pay his debts.

One thing you must remember is that the concept of a development, or a planned community, was a new one at the time. Before that time people would purchase houses from other residents or buy their own tracts of land to build a house on. But what Shields, and later Bickel, were making was a planned community, where a large amount of land was purchased and subdivided. The individual plots would then be built on and sold. This was very different from what happened before.

But there is one particular house in the development I have been focusing on, 214 Lakeside Drive South, which is a two-story building. We went to the deeds office to track it down in the records there, and I managed to get its entire history from the first sale by Crescent Knolls Inc to its current owners.

One of the highlights of its history include a secret basement being constructed during prohibition, when alcohol was banned, to smuggle whiskey. It was actually quite a cloak and dagger operation, where a modified Ford, which had a secret compartment under one of the seats, was driven by the "whiskey runner", named Harold Savitz, into New York City. There, Savitz would back his car into a certain address and beep his horn once. While he looked the other way, the seat was removed and the chamber was loaded with bottles. Thanks to corrupt policemen, if he was stopped he would give the cops the local sheriff's card and he would be allowed to move on. He would deliver the bottles back to 214 Lakeside Drive South, where they would be moved into the secret basement by Mr. Dugan , who probably rented the house, as we can find no mention of him on the deeds. A fascinating bit of history, I would say!

Sources

Jodee Inscho

Helen Danitz

Red Inscho

Warren County Deeds Office

Liberty Township, 75th Anniversary 1926-2001 by the Community Day Founders