

Cedarwood: A slice of suburbia in the city

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CEARWOOD — Visitors who enter Cedarwood between two squat stone pillars might think they've stumbled into a Norman Rockwell painting, a slice of quintessential New England suburbia.

Chisled out of 130 acres of Waltham's choicest southwestern cedar forest in 1928 by Park Land Developers, Cedarwood was billed as one of the city's first planned residential developments. Today, it's considered a bedroom neighborhood, boasting no retail outlets or pubs.

Even sales record in the state was broken within the first month of sales in 1928, as more than 50 percent of the lots were sold, according to news reports.

Never in their long career have they opened a tract that has so touched public fancy," one newspaper writer remarked.

Billed as "scenic and convenient," most of the lots were subdivided into parcels suitable for one-family homes. Qualified buyers, which were never defined, were offered their choice of 600 housing types before construction began on their "dream home."

During 1928, lots were selling like hot cakes for a measly \$500 each. That same year, four rooms of furniture at Jordan Furniture Co. could be yours for only \$399.



The Weston Street entrance to Cedarwood boasts two stone pillars. The section was one of the first planned residential developments in Waltham.

The inventive, eager-to-please developers had thought of it all. Electricity poles, water lines and 50-foot wide streets were all designed and carefully executed as planned. Current residents remain puzzled, however, as to why much of Cedarwood today still has no sidewalks.

Even Mayor Henry Beal used the development to his political advantage. In 1928, he was quoted as saving the "at-

tractive acreage is being carried out in a commendable manner and will be a distinct asset to the City of Waltham."

However, living some 280 feet above sea level, some urbanites considered the handsome, but isolated property a little too remote for comfort.

At age 12, Margaret M. Nolan moved from the South Side to pleasant but deserted Florance Road with her parents and three siblings, into a home her father

had built for his wife, Margaret J. Nolan.

"It was a wonderful place to grow up," she remembered, recalling blueberry trips with her sisters into her backyard woods and day-long runs to the Creamery, a pond once situated on what is now Brandeis University land.

"Up hill and dale," she mused. "It always felt like country. But life on the hill was always quiet and simple." Four of the remaining Nolan clan still occupy the Florance Road house.

Former Police Chief Francis Dacey, who grew up near Cedarwood, remembers going "nutting" with boyhood chums, searching for pig nuts and chestnuts, in back of the famous Waltham Bicycle Park.

That park, now the site of Nipper Maher Playground, was internationally known for bicycle racing at the turn of the century, attracting thousands to its famous grandstand, according to James "Nipper" Maher himself.

"I understand it was quite a showplace," Maher, who is 79, says. Maher was not yet born in 1905, when the deaths of two bicyclists at a Memorial Day convention stopped races at the 3-4-mile cement oval race track.

Today's Cedarwood boasts few cedar trees and barely an empty residential lot. Some residents say their neighbors might be a little too close for comfort.