

Almost a Century on Tienken Road: A History of King's Cove

In 1984, Cove resident Nancy Unwin interviewed Max Mallon, former owner of the land on which King's Cove was built. Her narrative appeared that year in the Cove's *Neighborhood News* where it was reprinted in 1992. In 2008, another resident, Sharon Muir, expanded Unwin's work into this broader history of the condominium association.

Early Years

The land on which the King's Cove condominiums stand once was occupied by a sand-brick plant. In 1913, J. H. Schluter, an experienced brick maker, "bought 110 acres of land near Paint Creek and the Michigan Central Railroad northwest of Rochester."¹ Excavations of the sandy terrain, dug until clay was reached, formed the contours that surround King's Cove. Sand was combined with lime in an intensely hot retort located near the current Clubhouse. The plant also housed a generator and a pumping station. Water that cooled the machinery ran from Paint Creek through pipes that still lie under the King's Cove property.

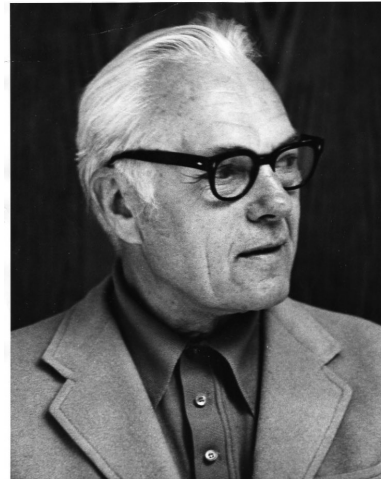
Two pairs of matched pines behind 1269 Candlestick Lane mark the entrance to the former location of a 15-room barracks, that housed migrant Mexican laborers. The Rochester Sand and Brick Company's typical weekly payroll of \$1,000 supported 25 workers who produced an average of one million bricks each year until bankruptcy was declared during the Great Depression. After the plant was abandoned, and into the late 1940s, the area was frequented by local hunters.



Early photo of the brick yard excavations

The Mallon Decades

In 1936, Dr. Max Mallon, a Detroit dentist, bought 125 acres for \$4,000 at a foreclosure sale. After his eyesight began to fail, Mallon taught biology at Rochester High School and served on the district's school board.



In 1982, Mallon was recognized as Rochester's Citizen of the Year. (1975 photo)

The purchase included the area that is now both King's Cove and the Cliffview Apartments. It contained an office building, a barn, and a few houses. *The Clarion Eccentric* later reported that Mallon had to enlist the sheriff to help him evict squatters.²

Some people in Rochester called the abandoned area "the town dump." This led Mallon's friends to razz him about the purchase and dub him the "Squire of Rochester." Mallon was an amateur historian and naturalist who initiated many local projects. He directed the effort to preserve historic Stoney Creek School. In fact, a plaque inside the building recognizes him as its "honorary principal." He also is credited with planting thousands of trees in the Rochester area, as far away as the grounds of Oakland University.



In 1950, Mallon's cottage (left) and the Mitchell's house (right) both faced south overlooking Paint Creek.

A series of tenants rented one house, Mallon's parents lived in the one converted from the old office building, and an Episcopalian minister and his family occupied another home. The Scott Mitchell family leased the two-story home on the site of King's Cove's tennis courts.*

As soon as Mallon returned from Army service, he and his wife, Sally, began renovating the small cottage, expanding it into a home for their growing family.**

The Mallons' extensive renovations moved the entrance to face the northwest (to the left of the present-day garage) and created three upstairs bedrooms and a bathroom for the children. Two large trees that still stand in front of the Clubhouse garage commemorated the births of daughter Emily and son Jim, both Rochester Hills residents. Mallon planted many trees and plants—evergreens, ferns, wisteria, mock orange, and smoke trees—and trilliums filled a swamp below Cliffview.

Sally Mallon got tired of the children losing their sneakers in the muck near the mosquito-ridden swamp.*** To drain the area, Mallon hired Phil Stramaglia to dig a pond that was spring fed and 10-ft deep at the center.

* In 1965, the Mitchell's son, Chuck—a well-known Southeast Michigan folk singer—married his Canadian girlfriend in the family's backyard. After the 18-month marriage ended, Joni Mitchell went on to gain international fame as a folk singer and songwriter, most notably for "Both Sides Now."

Readily available sand made a beach at one end. Mrs. Mallon kept a large salt shaker on hand to fend off leeches when the children went swimming.

As adults, the Mallon children have many fond memories from their years growing up on the property: swinging over the creek on a rope; reading "sweet nothings" carved by local teenagers in the bark of trees; observing immersion baptisms in Paint Creek; and watching the high-speed Timberliner—a single, self-propelled passenger car that ran between Detroit and Bay City—"fly by" at 50 or 60 mph. To the children's delight, the train flattened pennies they laid on the rails.

Sparks from trains also started small fires next to the tracks, sometimes forcing family members to rush from the house and pound out flames with brooms. Mallon and his lawyers worked out settlements with the railroad for damage caused by some of the fires.

Some Rochester Hills residents, who as children in the 1950s grew up in the North Hill area (southwest of Rochester and Tienken Roads), tell tales about escapades—sometimes disobeying their

** After the Mallons and Mitchells each had five children, Mallon began calling the property "Fertile Valley."

*** Many years later, Cove residents at 1107 Kings Cove dug up rubber soles behind their condo.



Mallon home, facing north, after the cottage was enlarged in the 1950s

parents by crossing Tienken to explore, a tunnel and “caves” beneath Cliffview.*

When the Mallons’ well dried up, Rochester let the family hook into the city’s water supply. Dr. Mallon hand-dug a trench—5 feet deep and 600-feet long—in which he laid pipes that brought water from Tienken Road to the family home. He tried several times, each unsuccessfully, to secede from Avon Township and become part of Rochester. However, the property was still in the township when King’s Cove opened, and there it remained until Rochester Hills was incorporated in 1984.

Before Mallon put the property on the market, he again hired Stramaglia, who spent 2 years leveling the “Tabletop,” a prominent, flat mound in the center of the property. Shortly after the work was completed in 1966, he sold his holding to land speculators.

In 2007, Jim Mallon and Emily Mallon Ferry loaned to King’s Cove a large painted

* This adventure seems to have grown into an urban legend. Some people have described the under-ground area as a “warren a tunnels” extending from Bedford Square to the middle of Mallon’s vast property. Jim Mallon says the “caves” were merely deep depressions in the Cliffside. Both he and veteran firefighter Bob Tyrell confirm the existence of a single, short tunnel lined with concrete and with rails for a small tram; it may have been fitted with electric lights. The tunnel’s purpose and origin are unknown. Tyrell speculates that it may have been constructed in a futile effort to find limestone for the brick plant.

photograph of the property as it appeared around 1950. It now hangs above the fireplace in the Clubhouse’s main room.**

The King’s Cove Development

The property lay dormant for almost 8 years until, in the mid-1970s, developers began constructing condominiums. Dr. Mallon was saddened when 500 trees were removed to make way for the new buildings. He donated two of the crab apple trees to the City of Rochester; they still stand in front of City Hall at 400 Sixth Street.

Two main drives—Kings Cove and Kings Cove East—were laid with 20 lanes branching off from them. The U.S. Postal Service assigned a continuous sequence of numbers to the units—1101 to 1596—making lane names almost un-necessary (i.e., no number is repeated).***

The “model home” was built at 1136-1142 Kings Cove Drive. Construction of the



Many saved trees later died from the trauma of construction, including these on Surrey Lane.

** The picture was one in a set of six views throughout the Rochester area that once hung in Club Rochester (where the Rochester Chop House is located today). When the popular downtown restaurant-lounge was destroyed in a 1970 fire, Fireman Gene Byers saved the painting. It hung in his service station at the intersection of Second Street and Rochester Road for a few months until Jim Mallon acquired it as a gift for his father.³

*** In fact, the postal service erred, assigning the number 1395 twice, on both Crescent and Paddlewheel Lanes. The number on Crescent ought to have been an even number.

original 94 buildings was completed in three phases, between 1974 and 1980. Brochures for Phase I, distributed by the Multiplex Home Corporation of Michigan, advertised six designs featuring two or three bedrooms and one- or two-car garages: the Bluff, Brook, Coachman, Country Estate, Lakeside, and Town and Country floor plans. Prices started at \$30,000.

Newspaper articles featuring King's Cove, in both the *Detroit News* and *Free Press*, explained the then-new concept of condominium living:

"homes ... built for sale [that] share common walls and common [outdoor] areas with other homes. Owners have ... all the privileges of single-home owners, but with all outside maintenance taken care of by the condominium association, supported by owner fees. ... One of the advantages in better condominium communities is the amount of open space available for recreation or for just plain viewing."⁴

Burying utilities underground was another notable innovation.

The developer originally planned to raze the Mallon home and replace it with another four-plex. When he discovered that it stood on a flood plain, which prohibited new construction, he converted it into the association's clubhouse. The original fireplaces remain but extensive changes removed the second floor, moved the front door to its current location, extended the front roofline, and created dressing rooms by the pool. The pond was deepened, and tennis courts were installed.

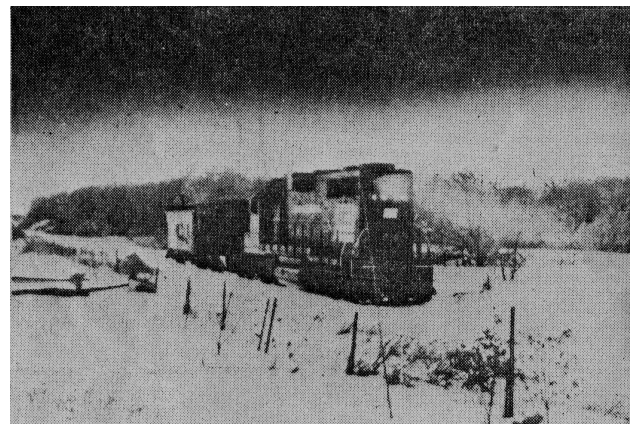
After a three-month delay, the first residents moved in on September 28, 1973. In November 1974, when Jim Gierczak became the maintenance supervisor, association dues ranged from \$75 to \$130. Monthly and special assessments were determined by a unit's "footprint," instead of a single, uniform rate or one based on square footage.⁵ The developer managed the Cove's financial affairs for the first 2 years before hiring Community

Management in 1976 and Association Management in May of 1981.

Not until 1987 was Paint Creek Lane added on the south side of the creek. Seven additional buildings were built, bringing the Cove to 399 units plus the Clubhouse. Later improvements included replacing a large coatroom in the Clubhouse with an on-site office (late 1980s), adding a carved, wooden entrance sign (1996), dredging the pond (1998), and rebuilding the tennis courts (2001).

Cove Adventures

Charter residents in King's Cove recall watching deer, pheasant, grouse, and other woodland creatures at play. The number of deer dwindled for a period of several years but returned ten-fold by the mid-1990s. During the first year, train whistles were heard as the Penn Central chugged along the nearby tracks, and excited children lined up when the circus train passed slowly by. In February, 1975, the Penn Central Railroad stopped operating.⁸ Sherwood Forest Landscaping recycled the creosote-soaked railway ties for the original retaining walls throughout the complex.



A Penn Central locomotive chugs along next to King's Cove shortly before discontinuing operations in February, 1975

In the early years, so many children lived in the Cove that they filled two school buses. Youngsters enjoyed sledding down the hills, ice skating on the pond, the Clubhouse, and climbing an elevated gazebo on the

where The Summit stands, just above Hidden Valley Lane.

Before liability became an issue, Memorial Day was marked by the Floatable Boatables—a Paint Creek parade of rafts built and decorated by area youth.



Children play on snowy hillside behind the midpoint of Crescent Lane in 1975

Until the early 1990s, the Rochester area was a center for hot-air ballooning. Cove residents often heard the “whoosh” of propane burners as balloons, launched from fields near Livernois and Dutton, seemed barely to clear their roofs. An absence of power lines made the Cove a target for more than one aborted ride.

A Few Disasters

A small landslide behind Crescent and Hidden Valley Lanes once came within several feet of some units lying below the Cliffview Apartments. When the original railroad-tie retaining wall began to buckle behind Brook Lane, the Association sued



One balloon skims rooftops and ...

the developer, whom it believed was responsible. Unfortunately, an out-of-court settlement of \$42,000 covered only 20 percent of the subsequent cost for what became known as “the Berlin Wall.” The expense of constructing the rock-and-wire retaining wall depleted the Association’s \$250,000 reserves, forcing residents to pay a \$600-per-year special assessment for 5 years to re-establish its reserves. Another special assessment began in 1999 to cover damage from ice dams that formed during a fierce winter storm and to re-roof units to higher specifications that would prevent similar damage in the future.

Over the years, major fires occurred on—aptly named?—Lantern (in 1977) and Candlestick Lanes (1982) as well as Kings Cove Drive (1984).⁶ In 1975, the creek slightly overflowed the entrance bridge, and a record rainfall in Spring 2004 nearly flooded the pond. Severe windstorms in the 1980s, 2001, and 2007 left significant damage.

Paint Creek Trailway

The trail that links Rochester Hills and Rochester with Oakland and Orion Townships—has attracted many people to the Cove. It came into existence after the Penn Central officially abandoned the route along Paint Creek, arguably “the best trout stream in all of Southeast Michigan.”⁷ When the trail opened in 1980, it



another one collapses at Gaslight Lane.



Seven-ft icicles formed in the 1998 storm.

was a narrow path, closely encroached on by bushes and trees. As today, it crossed Paint Creek on the original railway trestle bridges. In the late 1980s, the trail was widened to 8 feet, and in 1991, a crushed-limestone surface was created. Some Cove residents greeted bikers when the trailway formed part of the route in the 1993 five-day, cross-state bicycle tour.⁸

Paint Creek Bridge

Early Cove residents appreciated the fine condition of their drives and lanes, which were regularly maintained by the Association. That explains why many of them were alarmed when, in 1979, the City of Rochester Hills took over maintenance of the two main drives, King's Cove and King's Cove East. However, 20 years later, when city engineers condemned the rustic wooden bridge just inside the entrance, they were relieved that the City, not the Cove, would bear the cost of replacing it.

For 2 years before construction of the new bridge began, heavy equipment was prohibited from crossing it, and large delivery

trucks and moving vans had to be off-loaded onto smaller trucks that ferried furniture and other goods to condos on the north side of the creek. During demolition, engineers gained new respect for the original bridge's strength, and some people believe the new \$1M metal bridge is only marginally stronger than the wooden railway bridge it replaced.

The Summit

For years, landscape timbers formed a stairway from the end of Ravine Lane to the top of the hill where The Summit now stands. A small pond on that hill often was home to a pair of blue herons. Most Cove residents hoped that no one would ever develop the area. When The Summit was proposed, scores of Cove residents turned out at Planning Commission and City Council meetings to voice their opposition. Their speeches and petitions were effective in stopping the most hated proposal: to use the Summit's roads to link Tienken and Lake Orion Roads, which would have brought high volumes of traffic through the King's Cove "shortcut." Still, construction of The Summit was approved.



The old, wooden bridge over Paint Creek

During the Summit's early development in 2005, heavy rains washed so much soil down the ends of the main drives that the city had to filter its rain sewers. Much of the run off seeped into the pond, forcing the Summit's developer to be financially responsible for a future dredging of the pond.



Pond dock during the near-flood of May, 2006

Traffic and “The Light”

In the early 1950s, Tienken Road* was so muddy after rain fell that often the Mallons would walk home from the North Hill corner at Rochester Road where they left their cars. When King’s Cove’s first residents moved in, all area roads had only two lanes, and most intersections were marked with stop signs.

Growth throughout North Oakland County in the mid-1980s created strains on the surface infrastructure, and traffic began to back up between Livernois and Rochester Roads. After a Cove resident died in an accident at the Cove’s entrance in 1995, the King’s Cove and Oakbrook Associations began appealing to the City of Rochester

* The name “Tienken Road” appeared on area maps as early as 1905. Yet, for decades people in the area referred to it as Brick Yard Road. The official name honors John T. Tienken, whose dairy farm lay southwest of the intersection with Livernois.⁹

Hills to install a stoplight. Results from traffic studies, however, did not meet the minimum requirements for another 12 years.

When The Summit’s development was approved, the projected increase in traffic—and a \$10,000 contribution from The Summit’s developer—finally gained approval for the light. The entrance to King’s Cove was realigned, the trailway path was re-routed to cross at the light, and Tienken Road was closed for six months while a new four-lane bridge was built over Paint Creek in 2006 ... costing taxpayers \$3M.¹⁰

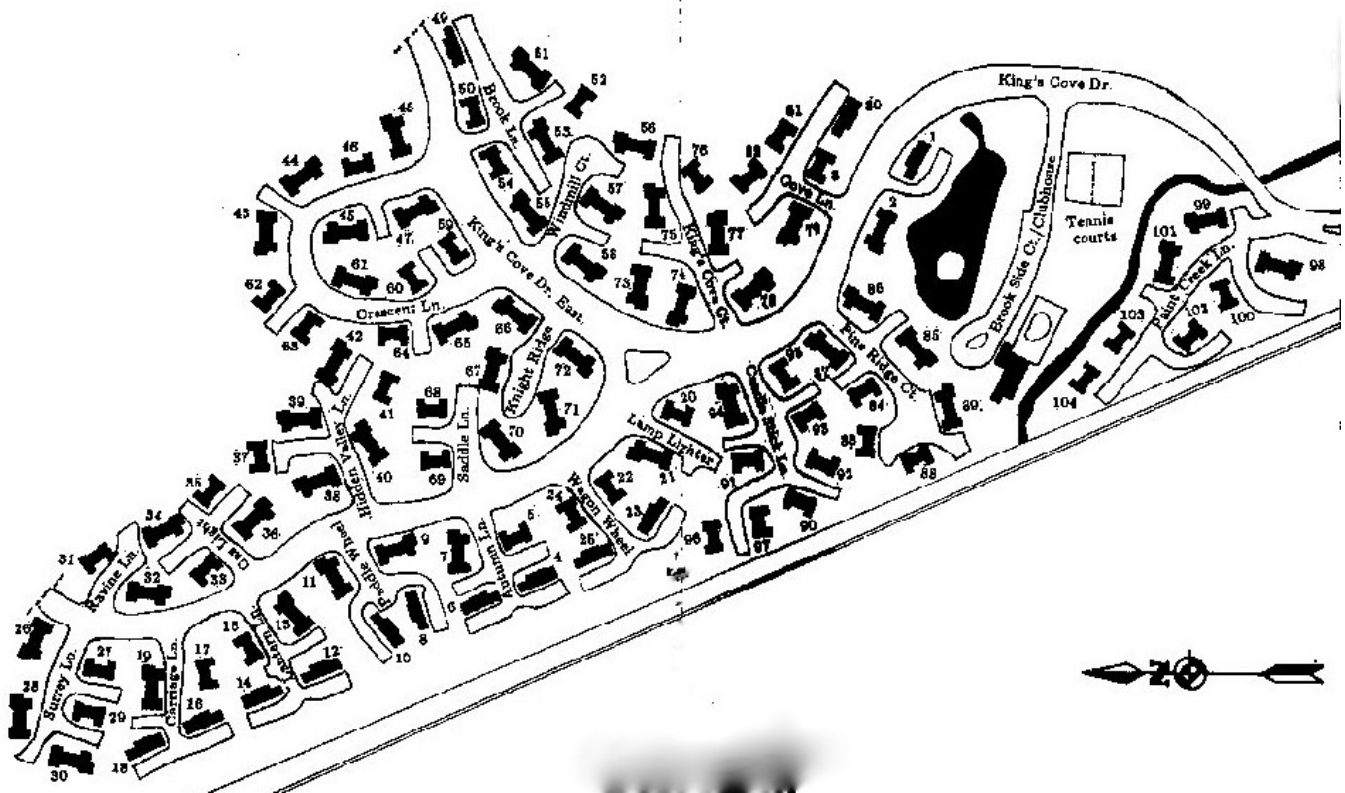
In 2008, the City changed the designation of the main drives from “major roadways” to “local roads.”



“New” bridge inside the King’s Cove entrance



Since 2002, DNR workers have removed young Canada geese in June, before they come to think of the Cove as “home.”



Map of King's Cove, drafted by charter resident Robert Bronstead; diagonal line is Paint Creek Trail

Sources

Sharon Muir acquired a new respect for historians, especially when confronted with different memories by various people. She especially thanks Nancy Unwin for her 1984 interview with Max Mallon. The bulk of the new narrative rests on interviews with Jim Mallon and Emily Mallon Ferry, Dick Stinson (veteran board member), Jim Gierczak (maintenance supervisor), Joyce Myers (charter resident), Doris Uhlmann (proofreader), Kelly Simakas (mail carrier), staff at the Rochester Hills Museum, and these Rochester Hills residents: Mrs. Vito Stramaglia and her daughter, Nancy; Bill Byers; and Retired Firefighter Bob Tyrell.

Photos from Jim Mallon and Emily Mallon Ferry, Jim Gierczak, Sharon Muir, Joyce Myers, Earnest Elliott.

- ¹ Pray, Eula. (1986). *History of Avon Township, 1820-1940* (pp. 70-71). Ann Arbor, MI: The Nonce Press.
- ² Max Mallon obituary, *The Clarion Eccentric*, April 30, 1998, pp. B-1, B-16.
- ³ Cahill, William. (1995). *The Rochester Fire Department: A Centennial History, 1895-1995* (pp. 72-73). Rochester, MI: Rochester Volunteer Fire Department.
- ⁴ *Detroit Free Press*, October 20, 1973, p. B-1; *The Detroit News*, February 10, 1974, pp. K-1, K-3.
- ⁵ Board minutes summary note this earlier decision in *The King's Cove Newsletter*, November, 1989.
- ⁶ Clippings from unidentified newspapers dated December 22, 1977; January 28, 1982; January 5, 1984.
- ⁷ Clinton River Watershed Council Director Dan Keifer quoted by Dave Groves in "Tienken Bridge to Be Done by End of Year," *The Oakland Press*, November 4, 2006.
- ⁸ Kirsten Myers and the Paint Creek Trailway website.
- ⁹ Michelle Akers-Berg, Documents Curator, Rochester Hills Museum.
- ¹⁰ Dave Groves, "Tienken Bridge to Be Done by End of Year," *The Oakland Press*, November 4, 2006.

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