



The Meadows Has a Fascinating History

Sonia Pressman Fuentes—Guest Contributor



A green on the Meadows' golf course is seen across one of the development's 80 lakes and ponds. Photo by Robert Hackney

The Meadows is one of the oldest large, planned communities in Sarasota County, with its development having begun in the 1970s. In a presentation he made at the Meadows Country Club in February 2018 and in subsequent telephone interviews, Colin Parsons, former chairman of Taylor Woodrow, the British construction firm which developed the Meadows, offered a fascinating look at the history of the project and Taylor Woodrow.

Parsons, who lives in Toronto, Canada, was born in Neath, South Wales, but immigrated to Canada as a young man and thereafter also lived in the United Kingdom upon taking over leadership of Taylor Woodrow.

Parsons' story began with a boy named Frank Taylor, who was born in 1905. Taylor lived in a flat over a small fruit shop run by his parents in Blackpool, England. When he was 16, Taylor, who had had no special training, decided that his parents deserved better than a flat in the same building as their fruit shop, so he was going to build a house for them. Parsons said that, for some reason, a local banker lent this teenager about £500, a member of his family also provided some capital, and Taylor was on his way to building a house for his parents. Taylor later learned that he was required to build two houses on the lot involved, so he constructed two semi-detached houses and later sold one of them at a 100% profit, Parsons added.

The banker who had lent Taylor the initial funds feared he would get in trouble if his superiors learned that he had lent a teenager so much

money, so he called Taylor into the bank and told him he would have to get an adult involved in his enterprise, perhaps a relative, Parsons said. As a result, Taylor asked his uncle, Jack Woodrow, to provide his surname for the company, creating Taylor Woodrow, although Woodrow later played no role in running the business, Parsons added. Taywood Meadows street in The Meadows later got its name from a contraction of the company name.

According to Parsons, Taylor Woodrow became one of the largest house-building and general construction companies in Britain. It became well known for projects in Europe, Africa and elsewhere, doing business in 26 countries.

Needing new worlds to conquer, Frank Taylor came to the United States, heading to New York City, where he met with various realtors, including Fred Trump, Parsons continued. One of the Realtors suggested to Taylor that a parcel of land in Sarasota would be excellent for building an apartment house or a hotel. Taylor came to Sarasota only to find that that piece of land had just been sold. However, someone else suggested he look at a 1,650-acre parcel in the northern part of Sarasota County. Taylor not only looked at it, he fell in love with the land. He asked Colin Parsons to come and take a look at it, too. Parsons at the time was a top official of Monarch Developments, one of Canada's biggest builders, and a company in which Taylor Woodward had a controlling financial stake. Frank Taylor wanted Monarch to invest in what later became The Meadows, Parsons said.

When Parsons — who had never before even heard of Florida — came to Sarasota, he recalled he was not as enamored of The Meadows' land as Frank Taylor had been. He saw many problems with the property, including the fact that it had no sewage system, the drainage was insufficient, electricity pylons populated the site, and alligators made themselves at home there. He was concerned about the scope of the project, what buying such a large piece of property would entail, as well as its location.



An ibis seeks lunch in one of the many lakes and ponds in the Meadows. Photo by Robert Hackney

Seventeenth Street at that time had a good bit of light industrial activity, so Parsons did not feel it was a good gateway for a large residential development. Furthermore, the property was located at the edge of the Sarasota community. But Parsons said he knew that once Frank Taylor made up his mind about something, that was it.

Parsons said Taylor Woodrow bought the land in 1973-74 and spent the next 20 years building residences at The Meadows: villas, condos, townhouses and single-family homes. The Meadows today also has 80 lakes and ponds, large preserves, golf courses, tennis courts, a country club, restaurants and a small shopping village, Parsons added.

Parsons said that builders in the United Kingdom put 10 houses on an acre of land, and that in Canada, the number routinely is five or six. In the United States, however, the density typically was two houses per acre. Accordingly, two houses were built on each acre at The Meadows. Eventually, Taylor Woodrow built 3,450 residences at The Meadows, according to Parsons.

Parsons mentioned Bunker Oaks at The Meadows, a one-bedroom development I lived in for a couple of years as a snowbird starting in 1996 when I first came to Sarasota. He said the apartments there were sometimes given to people rent-free to encourage them to come to The

Meadows and golf.

Frank Taylor and his second wife, Christine, who had been his secretary, also had a house at The Meadows, Parsons said.

Parsons added that Taylor Woodrow sought to, and did, attract British residents to The Meadows in the early years, but that that is no longer the case.

According to Parsons, the teenage boy who built that house for his parents ultimately was knighted in 1979, and in 1983 was made Baron

Taylor of Hadfield, becoming a member of the British House of Lords.

Taylor retired from the board of Taylor Woodrow in 1992, after 69 years of service, but his love for The Meadows never waned, Parsons said. When he was 90, he announced to his wife that he was going to visit The Meadows. She protested that he was too ill to do that, but he managed to go nonetheless. Shortly after his arrival, he became seriously ill and went to Sarasota Memorial Hospital, where he died, Parsons added.

"It's as he would have wanted," Parsons said.

Taylor's ashes were scattered in his rose garden in the United Kingdom, according to Parsons. His obituary of Feb. 25, 1995, in *The Independent*, a British online newspaper, can be found here.

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