



WOODCREST LAKES - A HISTORY

A proper starting point in tracing the history of the Woodcrest Lakes Residential Association is the initial land ownership and development by Walter O. Briggs. His locating of an attractive parcel of vacant land a few miles north of Detroit, Michigan, and the subsequent development of a prestigious summer estate marked the inception, and led to the development of the residential community.

The Briggs Corporation was a major supplier of body parts to the auto industry, with the Ford Motor Company as its leading customer. Four top executives within that organization were Briggs' main contacts, and in line with an appropriate customer-supplier relationship, he did a great deal of entertaining. His summer estate served as an excellent site for this purpose.

This chronology begins with Briggs' biography, his interest in sports, and his major involvement in professional baseball. It deals with development and use of the summer estate, and upon his death, the subsequent purchase by a corporation organized by the Ford officials. They were responsible for the creation and planning of the Woodcrest Lakes residential community, and later year events and changes are itemized and described.

As additional information is forthcoming, revisions will be made, and the author will be grateful for any corrections or additions.

Carl S. Wiedman

Walter Briggs was born in Ypsilanti, Michigan on Feb. 27, 1877. He was the son of Rodney D. Briggs, a locomotive engineer, and at the age of 11, Briggs went to work for the Michigan Central Railroad Company as a yard worker, earning \$20 per month. He advanced to the position of foreman of the car department before he left eleven years later, at age 22.

Later he worked for various concerns with positions of cement plant foreman, shipping clerk, and auto body trimmer. In 1904 he became vice president and general manager of the B. F. Everitt Company, makers of car bodies. He became president in 1906, and three years later organized the Briggs Manufacturing Company, which absorbed the Everitt Company.

The Briggs Company became a large source of supply of automotive bodies for the Ford Motor Company, and grew into a huge company which was the largest auto body producer in the United States and England.

Walter Briggs was a baseball enthusiast, and an avid fan of the Detroit Tigers. He became known in baseball as the fan who bought the baseball club and stadium. In 1907, Briggs had such difficulty in getting tickets to see his beloved Tigers in their first world series at Navin Field that he vowed he would buy the team and enlarge the stadium. As sole owner in 1935 he announced that he would never take a cent of profit from the investment.

Briggs once owned a racing stable and a 265 ft. million dollar yacht. In the early 1920's he invested in a 108 acre parcel of land north of Detroit, and built a hunting lodge and vacation estate.

His primary Detroit residence was on Boston Boulevard. He was confined to a wheelchair for his last twelve years, but did not let the infirmity prevent him from any of his business or other activities.

Walter Briggs passed away at his winter home in Miami Beach, Florida, on January 17, 1952. His funeral in Detroit was attended by G. Mennen Williams, Governor of Michigan, Albert Cobo, Mayor of Detroit, Henry Ford 2nd, President of the Ford Motor Company, K. T. Keller, chairman of the Chrysler Corporation, and Hugh Ferry, president of the Packard Motor Car Company. Baseball notables included Hank Greenberg, Charlie Gehringer, and Red Rolfe.

Surviving family members were his son Walter O. Jr., and four daughters...Mrs Charles T. Fisher (National Bank of Detroit), Mrs. Dean Robinson (Briggs Company), Mrs. E. E. Fisher (Detroit auto agency), Mrs. Philip Hart (attorney), and twenty-two grandchildren.

Briggs will long be remembered for his contributions to the auto industry in Detroit, Michigan, and perhaps even more so, to the sport of baseball.

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| B | Articles of Incorporation (30 Yr. Limit) | 10/16/53 |
| | Warranty Deed - Rules and Regulations | 1/16/54 |
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| | Legal Opinion Regarding Early Voting Rights | 1/30/70 |
| | Renewal - Articles of Incorporation | 10/11/83 |
| | By-Laws | 10/13/83 |
| | Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation | 3/25/92 |
| C | Property Owners | 8/31/04 |

Walter Briggs was an active sports enthusiast, with baseball as one of his leading interests. He played and loved sand-lot baseball as a child, and in his early 20's attended many professional games. The professional major league baseball stadium was located a few miles from downtown Detroit, with a history of several owners over the years, including Walter Briggs.

The stadium was constructed in 1895 by George Vanderbeck, and was named 'Bennett Park'. In 1911 it was purchased by Frank Navin, and renamed 'Navin Field'.

In 1920 Briggs bought 25 percent of the Tigers, and in 1935 purchased 50 percent of the stadium, renaming it 'Briggs Stadium'. In 1941 he purchased the balance. Briggs took no money out of the club, and reinvested several million dollars of profits and his own money to expand and improving the stadium.

Bennett Park had a capacity of approximately 5,500 fans, and Navin expanded it to seat 23,000. Finally, Briggs undertook the major expansion to seat a total of 53,000.

In 1961 the stadium was purchased by John Fetzer, and named 'Tiger Stadium'. It was used for all Detroit Tigers home ball games until the last game on September 27, 1999, and the subsequent move to Comerica Park.

In 1947, the famous player Jackie Robinson became the first black player in the all-white major league, and attained the 'Rookie-of-the-Year' award as he led Brooklyn to win the National League pennant.

While other major league teams signed Satchel Paige, Willie Mays, Hank Aaron and other black stars, Briggs did not hire any blacks. The Tigers were the next to last team to integrate (in 1958), and only did so after Briggs had died.

Before baseball integrated, Detroit was one of the top teams in the major leagues, having won the world series in 1935 and 1945. Mickey Cochran was a key player/manager, and Ty Cobb, Hank Greenberg, Buck Newsom, Sam Crawford and Herman Schaeffer were big names in the Tiger's victories. In 1948 the Tigers dropped from second to fifth place, and during the next ten years they would finish among the top three teams only once. In 1952, they wound up in last place.

In the 1960's, when Detroit changed its policy, the Tigers made a comeback. They signed Willie Horton and Earl Wilson, and along with white players Al Kaline and Denny McClain, ended a long drought. In 1968, the Tigers won the pennant and the World Series.

No government mandate was responsible for the entry of talented blacks into the baseball arena. Affirmative action was unnecessary - self interest was the key integrating force.

