

122 Euclid Circle: First Cemesto house sold in Oak Ridge

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on April 19, 2017)

Nathan Landay purchased the first cemesto house sold by the government to the residents of Oak Ridge. The sale of the house at 122 Euclid Circle closed on September 11, 1956. Landay paid \$5,275.41 after discounts on the appraised value of \$7,000.

Landay came to Oak Ridge during the Manhattan Project. He and his family lived in a number of homes before settling at 122 Euclid Circle as the family grew.

A September 21, 1992, article in The Oak Ridger celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Oak Ridge, noted this first transaction by stating, "The 1950s in Oak Ridge were all about the people of Oak Ridge taking charge of their community. The people of the city fought for incorporation, and by the end of the decade won it by a 14-to-1 margin at the polls. They also wanted to own their homes, and during the decade won that right, too, as the government transferred thousands of the original cemesto homes to private owners."

Rebecca Landay Charles, who contacted me about this story recalls the following:

Juanita Ewing (Dewey's mother) is still alive. She was a kindergarten teacher at Glenwood for over 40 years (maybe 50). Her daughter Susie (Ewing Schendel) and I were best friends. When I started school they wouldn't let me be in her class since I spent most of my time at their house anyway. Kindergarten at that time was only ½ day. I think you were either in the morning or afternoon session.

All of the kids used to walk to school together or at least in groups. We cut through on a gravel path at the end of Euclid place that lined up with Andover Circle in East Village. Probably like the rest of the country, girls had to wear dresses to school. If it was cold, we wore pants under our dresses for our walk to school and then took them off when we got to there. At some point they closed the path and walking to school became much harder.

There was a school bus, but you had to walk to East Drive to catch it. The buses were not free and we bought bus tickets to use for the bus ride. On the way home from school, we always stopped in a yard near Andover and swung on a rope swing.

When I was in second grade I fell off the rope and broke my arm. That was back in the days before suing was popular. I don't think the people with the swing ever knew it happened. I know we didn't tell them.

My mother didn't know how to drive a car. There were still Oak Ridge buses and she took them until they were discontinued. Most people only had one car, so even if the wife could drive, she didn't have a car at home during the day.

Anyway, my friends walked home to get my mother. I somehow thought she would save me. My arm was hurting so badly I just wanted to be home. I remember that I was lying on the sidewalk crying. My mom got there and told me to stand up and walk home with her. I was never so disappointed,

You only had to go to a house or two to find someone to play with you. Every house had a child my age. If you didn't have at least three children in your house, we wondered what had gone wrong. We had huge neighborhood games. Some of them were in the street.

Living on a circle there were not many cars during the day and we never thought there was a problem playing in the middle of the road. We had jump rope and four square games going most of the summer. At night, we played hide and seek using the yards of three houses for the boundaries.

The civil defense siren went off every day (I think at 5:00 pm) and that was usually the signal to head home for dinner. We all had bikes and rode them round and round the circle. The little ones rode their trikes down Euclid Place.

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I had a red tractor for a tricycle. Since tricycles have no brakes, I can remember ripping the end of my toes off more than once as I tried to slow down on the hill.

During the summer, Juanita Ewing would pile half the neighborhood in her car and take us to Oak Ridge Swimming pool. There were no seatbelt laws back then, so we would pile in two deep. I think we could get 8 or 9 kids in that Pontiac Catalina.

They were already collecting lightening bugs back then and we would collect them all summer. Once we collected enough to receive \$5 or \$6 and we thought it was a fortune. There was a concession stand at the swimming pool and we took the money to buy food. Someone stole our lightening bug money when we were at the swimming pool and we were devastated.

The boys built a tree house in the greenbelt behind our house. There was also "first and second ball field". The "ball fields" were areas in the greenbelt where they took soil for the Oak Ridge construction. They made great ball fields since they were fairly level with the cut away hill for the back stop. Girls weren't really allowed to play baseball, so I was always pretty jealous of my brothers. I did get to watch. My brothers let me practice with them in the front yard. They said my throwing was so bad it made good fielding practice.

We would leave the house in the morning and our parents just trusted we would be somewhere in the neighborhood. I remember both the hula hoop and pogo stick crazes as they passed through the neighborhood. We all could hula hoop for hours and they had hula hoop contests downtown.

There were so many peach trees in the neighborhood and they had the juiciest and tastiest peaches. The fruit would fall and the yellow jackets would come. Since none of us wore shoes in the summer, that was a bit of a problem. Later flip flops became popular and we would sometimes agree to wear them, especially if the street was burning hot.

There was also a huge pine tree in the front yard that we climbed on and sat under on hot summer days. My mother would spread a blanket and read to us there. There was no air conditioning, so we had fans in all the rooms.

The house was still heated with a coal furnace when we first moved in, but we later switched to gas. The coal furnace would sometimes "burp" and send coal soot into the house. Many of the Oak Ridge houses are placed backwards on their lots with the front doors facing the backyard. That was because the coal chutes were on the back of the houses. They needed the coal chutes to face the street for easy access, so the back of the house faced the street.

The D houses had the coal chute and front door on the same side of the house, so they were never "backwards" on the lot. I remember one year Ruby's husband John told her she could have a mink coat or air conditioning for a present and she picked the air conditioning. They were the first to have air conditioning on the street.

I only faintly remember moving to the house when I was four. I turned five that November. We had been living on Dewey Road off of Delaware, but there were now four children in the family and the house only had two bedrooms. I know my father was anxious to get a larger house, but you had to apply and wait until one was available.

I remember the rooms in the Euclid house were painted dark brown and the storage room was painted deep red. This room would have been the second bathroom in a D2 house, but ours was a D1 so we used the extra room for a storage closet. We painted the rest of the house, but never that room. We always called it the red room.

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Now it is the stairwell for the stairs to the basement. Dad grew up during the depression and saw his family lose their houses when they couldn't pay their mortgage. He never wanted to owe money so he paid cash for the house. I don't think he ever had a loan in his life. Funny to think that there is a mortgage on the house for the first time.

Dad slowly made changes to the house. He added stud walls on the interior of the house. The cemesto houses were post and beam construction with the sheets of cemesto in between. The walls were very cold with only the cemesto between you and the outdoors. Some people added studs to the inside of the exterior walls and then insulation and a layer of sheet rock.

Dad used 4 X 8 paneling over the studs. Dad did all his own carpentry when he added stud walls. He also took out the old wooden windows and added the new "trendy" aluminum Miami roll out windows with removable storm windows.

Every fall we washed those storm windows inside and out and put them over the Miami windows and every spring we removed them all and carried them to storage. Later he replaced those windows with vinyl insulated windows. The storm window ritual is one that no one misses.

Not sure about the order, but at some point in time he enclosed the coal porch and used that area plus the old furnace room to create a breakfast area, had the front of the house bricked, got central heat and air, had the sides of the house bricked, added built in mahogany bookcases in the living room and in the mid 1970s he had a half basement with another full bath added to the house.

They thought they could rent the down stairs space for the Knoxville World's Fair visitors and I think they did a few times. It would have been nice to have had two baths when all six of us were living there, but again dad had to wait until he could pay cash for the addition. He also improved and paved the off-street parking. I am sure my mom was in on all these changes, but it was my dad who carried them out.

Some other memories are of the ice cream truck that came by every day. We all bought popsicles and if we were big spenders we would get an ice cream bar. I always wanted one of the blue popsicles, but I didn't know what they were called, so I never got one.

We also had a milk delivery man. Originally, they delivered bottles, but later switched to cartons. The Ewing's bird dog (Queenie) would bite into our milk cartons and drink the milk. That was in the days before leash laws or at least enforced ones. There was also bread delivery. Bunny Bread I think.

I had ballet lessons at Roberta's school of dance which was located in the shopping center at the corner of Outer Drive and Delaware. I think a church uses the space now. I was also in the Brownies and Girl Scouts.

The Girl Scouts had a Camp (Camp Friendship) on the west end of Oak Ridge. There are houses there now, but it was undeveloped then. In middle school, one of our Girl Scout activities was to spend the night in one of the city Fallout Shelters as practice for an emergency.

Dad and Mom were very serious about a good education and they were proud of the Oak Ridge Schools. All four of their children graduated from college (one with a masters) and all their grandchildren (7) have masters degrees except the one still in college. My mom, Mildred, went to college for the first time in her 50s and graduated Summa Cum Laude from UT and was invited to join Phi Beta Kappa.

My sister Gail Moore added this:

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To this day I've hardly been any place as beautiful as Oak Ridge or as beautiful as our own neighborhood. I tell people about looking out from the Dining room and being able to see I think 60 miles across the valley to the Cumberland mountains. My sister and brothers would take me into the woods to pick black berries in the 'first' ball field and we'd go sledding down the hill in the woods. We didn't have enough snow to warrant real boots, so our mom put plastic bags over our shoes. As my mother said to us, children belong outside.

I also remember fondly how our parents looked out for all the children not just their own. To this day I am especially fond of Mrs. Ewing who lived across the street and Mrs. Ellis who lived next door.

My brother Alan added this:

One of the games we played on the street was touch football. Once I dove for a pass to score a touchdown and got a deep gouge just above my elbow. There is probably still a scar there. I also practiced field goals on the street. The kick was "good" if it went over the telephone wire that crossed the street.

On the sled run in the woods, I believe I crashed into a tree on more than one occasion. I think there was one time Mom and Dad took me to the hospital because they thought I had broken my finger or my toe (can't remember which).

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Now, does that bring back memories for those of you who grew up in one of these small communities resulting from the way Skidmore, Owens and Merrill laid out Oak Ridge...with many circles and dead end streets? I hope you enjoyed Rebecca's memories of the first house sold in Oak Ridge.



The family: Jay Landay, Mildred Landay, Rebecca Landay Charles, Nathan Landay with Gail Landay Moore on his lap, Alan Landay

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The house at 122 Euclid Circle today



Pictured at the closing are Jenna Skuza, Realty Executives Associates; Johanna Chandler (new owner); Jessica Long, Paramount Land Title Company, and Rebecca Charles