

8. THE DESIGNED DISTRICT



Beaufort Road, north of Glen Manor Drive, looking south, April 2021

The Beaches is not a planned or designed neighbourhood. Most of its streets and building lots were laid out not by landscape architects or city planners seeking beauty and efficiency for the public good, but by private landowners seeking profit for their own personal gain. And most of its houses were designed not by architects but by the competent, if not especially innovative, builders who built them. This, for better or worse, is the character of the neighbourhood.

There is however one important exception - the Glen Manor district, or 'Stewart Manor' as it was initially called, a residential precinct built either side of the neighbourhood's central ravine in the 1920s and 30s. Just a casual stroll along its curving, sloping streets will reveal it to have been planned and designed throughout.

Its hilly, swampy terrain was of no use for agriculture, so the land remained in a natural state through the pioneer years, its ownership passing a time or two from one member of the colonial elite to another. But by the later decades of the nineteenth century, with the adjacent city expanding and the regional economy developing, this tract of unspoiled forest and streams began looking - to those of sufficient means - like an attractive semi-rural estate, and in 1872 it was acquired for that purpose by William Stewart Darling and his well-endowed family, who built a country house they named Stewart Manor on the northern brow of the ravine.

The estate was subsequently purchased, in 1900, by the even better endowed local financier Alfred Ernest Ames, who expanded the house and the property, enhancing the latter with carriageways and ponds.



Ames House, facing south [*Toronto Daily Star*, 10 May 1905]

The house still stands, converted to apartments, re-configured to face north on Glen Stewart Crescent.

But after just a decade of ownership, with the property becoming more and more an anomaly in an emerging suburban neighbourhood, Ames's influential father-in-law G.A. Cox, who had acquired most of the estate a few years earlier to save Ames from bankruptcy, opted to do what other local landowners had already done - turn it over to residential development.

Cox transferred ownership of the entire eastern portion (east of present-day Southwood Drive) to one of his finance firms, the Provident Investment

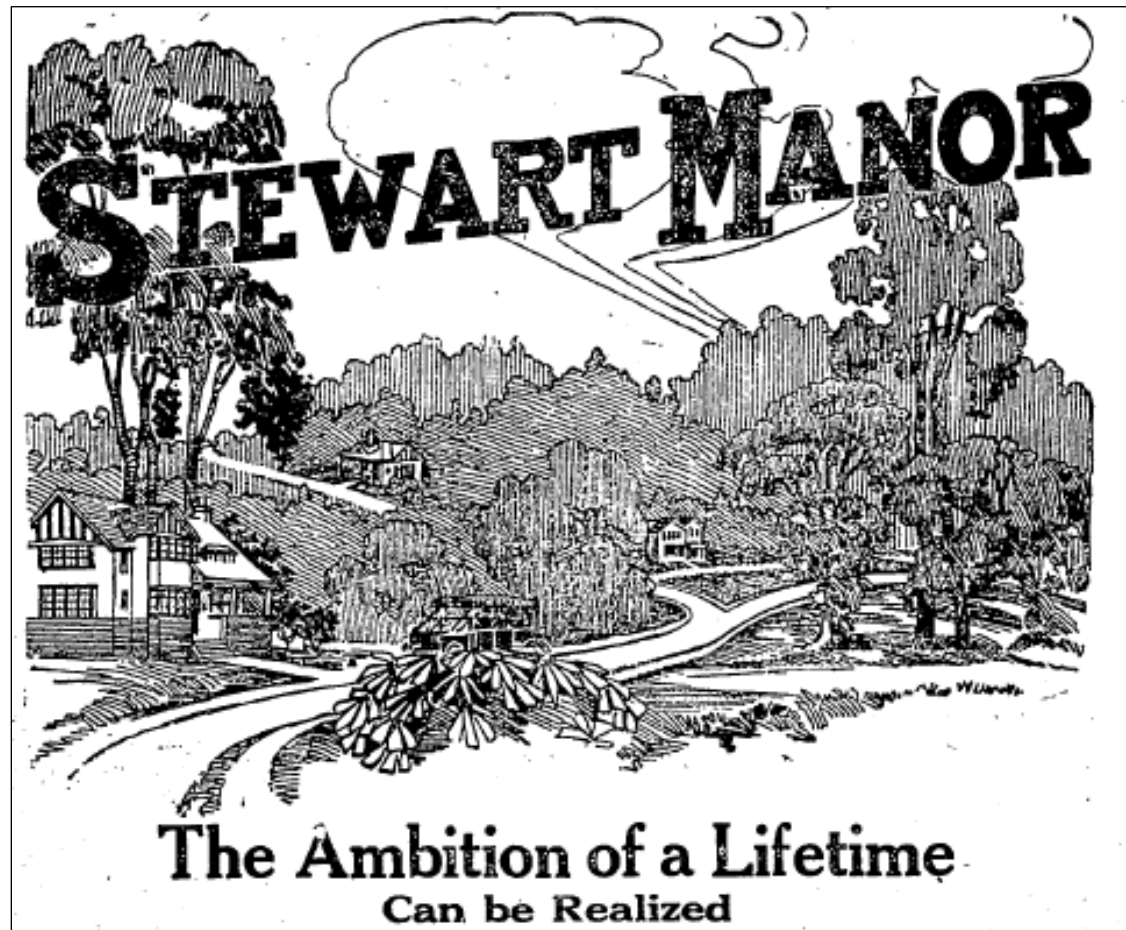


Company, which then took the unusual - for the Beaches neighbourhood - step of engaging landscape designers to lay out a residential subdivision. The designers, Dunington-Grubb & Harries, carried out their task with considerable panache - curving streets down and around the sloping land, carving out dozens of unique lots on the steep grades, and overall setting the mold for an elegant, compact residential district.

« Dunington-Grubb & Harries, Glen Stewart, 1912 [CTA, Series 724, Item 11]

‘Stewart Manor’ would be built over the next twenty-some years, deliberately shaped by Provident into an upper-middle-class residential enclave for the suit-and-tie wearing business or professional man of the interwar years - and his family. The company imposed several

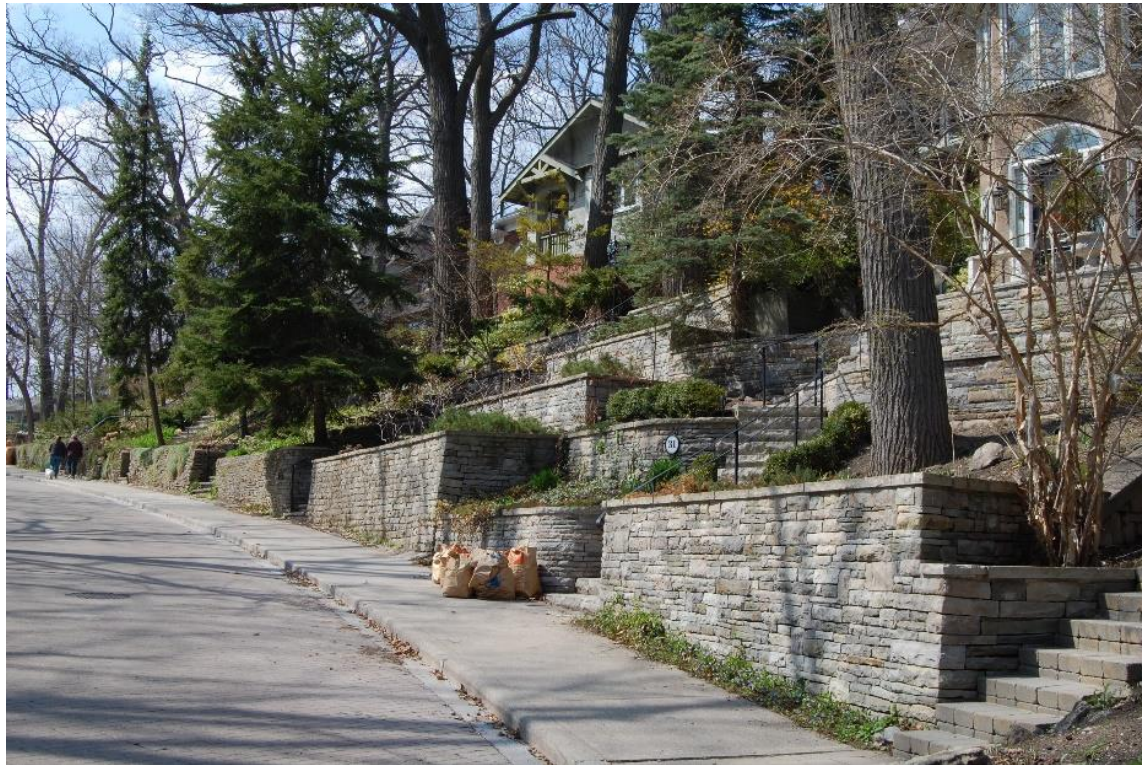
restrictions on landowners and builders: lots could not be further sub-divided, houses were to be architect-designed with exteriors of brick or stone, existing trees had to be left in place, and houses were to have a minimum value of \$3,500 (\$5,000 on the ravine-facing streets).



The Toronto Daily Star, 29 May 1914, p.17

The housing that resulted has a preponderance of neo-Tudor style, but there is no evidence of this being prescribed so it probably just reflects the Anglophilia of Toronto's more affluent home buyers in the 1920s. This nostalgic

motif had been a defining feature of English garden suburbs for a generation. Provident's sales agent certainly played up the 'Olde-England' character: neo-Tudor elements, along with oak trees and acorns and rustic open spaces, appear in much of its print advertising. Yet despite this commonality of style the housing does not suffer from the excessive sameness that would plague later corporate suburbs; Provident sold its lots to individual builders, or to prospective homeowners who engaged their own architects and builders, and in doing so made every house essentially unique.



Upper Pine Crescent, north side, April 2021

The enclave might not stand out as it once did, for some of its design elements have crept into the adjacent housing. But if one finds and walks about

the original Stewart Manor subdivision, along the streets laid out by Dunington-Grubb & Harries, one cannot help but be struck by the efficient use of land, creatively graded lots, carefully sited houses, quality design and construction, well-preserved oak trees, and overall coherence. One is seeing, in other words, that unlike the rest of the Beaches this district was designed.

Neo-Tudor details are probably the most noticeable feature of the house designs, but many have another telling detail – built-in garages. Stewart Manor



Glen Manor Road East, April 2021

was built in the 1920s and 30s, when automobiles were entering the everyday life of affluent city dwellers, whereas areas east and west of it were built up

mostly pre-1914, before the car, and their lack of automobile accommodation is noticeable. Stewart Manor's designers would probably be surprised to learn that to us, a century later, the enclave's houses show not just nostalgia for the mythical, pre-modern English village - this they surely knew they were creating - but also clear evidence of the dawning automobile age.

SOURCES: *(in addition to those cited under the images):*

Barbara Myrvold and Mary Campbell, *The Beach in Pictures, 1793-1932* (Toronto Public Library Board, 1988); "East Toronto," *The Toronto Daily Star*, 27 Apr 1901, p.7; "Ames, Alfred Ernest," *DCB*, Vol. 16; "Cox, George Albertus," *DCB*, Vol. 14; Ontario Land Registry, Historical Books, Toronto Section 'S', Vol.1, Parcel 1 (folios 1-4) and 2 (folios 9-14) for Cox's ownership, and Vol.2, Parcel 365 (folios 749-51) for building restrictions; Registered Plan of Subdivision #M390, 27 Oct. 1913 [Ontario Land Registry]; contemporary photographs by author.

