

**THE ARBORS** - **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**  
**By Joel Mitchell**

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## **Comments on the History of the Area** **By Joel Mitchell**

William Wilson Cook, a noted corporation counsel, author, and a ninth generation descendant of Governor William Bradford of the Pilgrim colony at Plymouth, MA, lived on a 96-acre country estate extending from Ridge Street to King Street that comprised what is now Harkness Park, the Arbors, the Blind Brook HS/MS campus, the Ridge Street Nursery School and Hutchinson River Parkway property running along the Ridge street frontage from Sleepy Hollow Road almost up to King Street. Upon his death at his Ridge Street home on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1930, pursuant to his last will and testament, Mr. Cook's remains were cremated and his ashes were interred the next day "on the side of the hill overlooking the Sound" on his Town of Rye property. This is the large burial vault situated on Arbor Drive near the intersection of Ivy Hill Lane.

Over the years, Mr. Cook spent hundreds of thousands of dollars beautifying the grounds of his 96-acre property. (Some of his plantings are still standing in the Arbors Home Owners Association). He was personally involved in the planting of practically every tree on his property. The original Arbors homes for sale brochure, in fact, dwelled on the beautiful landscaping which had been done by Mr. Cook. Most of these trees are dead or were taken down for Arbors construction, but in this particular area, 45 of the grandest trees are located and thriving in the Harkness Park (location of the four town tennis courts) area. The threat (as of this writing) is that these trees will be taken down to accommodate a 210' by 360' soccer/football field on artificial turf at the 3.92-acre Harkness Park. Endorsement to proceed with the land razing and artificial turf field has yet to be officially approved.

Note: After the writing of this document the new field was indeed approved.

## **THE EARLY YEARS**

In the early part of the twentieth century, William Wilson Cook, who lived in a Victorian house in the Town of Rye, managed to assemble 80 acres of property around his home before he died in 1930. Cook was a well known lawyer in New York City, and was the author of the textbook, "Cook On Corporations". The late Mr. Cook was a tree fancier. He cultivated trees from around the world. While most of these plantings are gone, the following examples can still be seen today: in Greenway and Brush Hollow buffering the parkway (you can still see trees in a straight line), in the woods behind Ivy Hill Crescent, the area surrounding the tennis courts adjacent to Arbor Drive entrance, and the land between Blind Brook School and Arbor Drive . Another Cook legacy which can still be appreciated today is the curved road to his home through his property from King Street, which is preserved today as Arbor Drive.

In 1937 the Mary Rebecca Harkness Foundation leased part of the Cook property and built a convalescent home. This Georgian colonial building and property, called the Harkness Pavillion, was located on land that is now part of the parking lot behind Rye Brook Village Hall. The Harkness home was closed in 1971. The original Arbors homeowners remember this building, which remained vacant and standing until it was torn down in early 1980.

## **PUD – Planned Unit Development**

In 1971, 20 acres were purchased from the Cook estate for the construction of the Blind Brook School. The remaining 60 acres were purchased and rezoned by the Town of Rye in 1973 as a PUD (Planned Unit Development). For the purpose of calculating density, the total 60 acres was divided into a residential portion of 36 acres (which became the Arbors) and a commercial portion (which became the property on which was built the Atrium office building, now known as 900 King Street). After deductions for the area for Arbor Drive and the tennis court/town park site, the actual commercial building property equaled approximately 18 acres.

With 250 townhomes and a nearly 200,000 square foot office building zoned in a site such as ours, it is significant to note the rationale behind the PUD zoning by the Town of Rye in the early 1970's. In this instance, PUD means mixed use, part residential and part commercial. It is designed to alleviate the flow of traffic. During morning rush hour, Arbors residents would be leaving for work while the offices workers would be coming in. The traffic pattern would be reversed during the evening rush hour.

## **THE ARBORS IS DEVELOPED**

Following the creation by the Town of Rye for the PUD, a permit was issued in 1977 to Yonkers based BERCO, a partnership headed by brothers Burton and Richard Jacoby, to develop on the 36 acre residential portion, a community called the Arbors At Rye Town. Town supervisor, Anthony Posillipo, noted that the Arbors project was the largest subdivision in the community ever to be developed at one time.

The Arbors homes were built in four phases over a period of three years, 1978,1979 and1980. There were six different models; Maplewood, Buttonwood, Dogwood, Beechwood, Ashwood, and Oakwood. The architect was Michael Gismondi of the White Plains architectural firm, Gismondi & Associates. The homes varied in square footage. 48% (120) were sold with garages. All models were mixed in clusters of three, four, five or six. Earlier the Arbors had been established as a homeowners association, in which the homeowners own property around their homes where they were responsible for beautification, patio or deck development, and general maintenance on the outside of their homes. Although all of the individually owned lots and homes were not designed equal in size, ownership of the common property was divided equally among all 250 homes.

All Arbors units were sold out by early 1980. The Arbors Homeowners Association was formed, and the homeowners officially took over the jurisdiction of AHOA at the first homeowner's Board Meeting in April 1980.

## **THE ATRIUM (900 KING STREET) IS DEVELOPED**

During the early 1980's the other part of the PUD, the commercial part, was developed. After some questions about the building's size by some of the Arbors homeowners, Atrium Associates, built what we see today, the two story, white office building (now known as 900 King Street). In March of 1982, the World Wide Marketing Division of IBM moved into the Atrium as a rental tenant.

There was no change in this arrangement until 1991 when IBM vacated the building. Atrium Associates filed for Chapter 11 and the building title was turned over to Atrium's insurance company, CIGNA.

With no rental activity between 1991 and the beginning of 1995, the Arbors Homeowners (being co-existers in the PUD) were presented with a plan in July, 1995 by Avalon Properties (a R.E.I.T.) to tear down the building and build 192 luxury apartments in sixteen two-story townhouse style buildings on this commercial site of the PUD. The Arbors homeowners protested vigorously that the PUD should not be broken up, hired legal representation, and after a number of special meetings, Avalon withdrew the plan, and any idea of Rye Brook amending the PUD was shelved. In following years, there were a number of potential tenants for the building, but it was not until the end of 2003 when Cadbury Schweppes announced that they were leasing two-thirds of 900 King to merge their Mott's and Snapple beverage divisions into one building.

Over 400 Cadbury Schweppes employees moved into 900 King Street in April 2004. It is estimated that up to half of the building is still empty, available for for rental.

In 2006 Cadbury and Schweppes units broke up with many of the Cadbury (900 King) moving to Dallas. In 2006 employees in the Greenwich Hospital Accounting unit moved in, and, as of 2008, are occupying all the first floor. The second floor is vacant, as of this writing. As of 2014, everything with 900 King is status quo.